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## Strategies for Entry to International Markets: The Case of Japanese Companies \*

Raşit Altay İŞİNER <sup>1</sup> Kenan AYDIN <sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In this article, it has been tried to investigate the market entry strategies of Japanese companies. While the study is a qualitative, the data of the study were obtained from face-to-face interviews and secondary sources. Data on Japan's economic, socio-cultural, history and geography and ways of doing business were collected from secondary sources. In the literature part of the study, secondary data are given in detail. In order to provide data by face-to-face interviews, first of all, the universe and sample were determined. The main body of the study is Japanese companies operating in Turkey. The sample is; Honda, Öztiryakiler, Mazda, Toyota and Yazaki companies. Asking pre-prepared, structured questions to company authorities; was carried out through face-to-face and online interviews. The common aspects of the obtained data were evaluated together. Thus, the market entry strategies and policies of Japanese companies in Turkey were tried to be determined through the secondary data and pre-structured interview questions.

**Keywords:** International Markets, Japanese Culture, Entry Strategies, Japanese Companies, Japanese Partnership

**JEL Classification Codes:** M10, M16

## Uluslararası Pazarlara Giriş Stratejileri: Japon Şirketleri Örneği


### ÖZ


Bu makalede Japon şirketlerinin pazara giriş stratejileri araştırılmaya çalışılmıştır. Çalışma nitel bir çalışma olup; çalışmanın verileri yüz yüze görüşmelerden ve ikincil kaynaklardan sağlanmıştır. İkincil kaynaklardan Japonya'nın ekonomik, sosyo-kültürel, tarih ve coğrafyası ile iş yapma biçimleri hakkında veriler toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın literatür kısmında ise ikincil verilere ayrıntılı bir biçimde yer verilmiştir. Yüz yüze görüşme yapılarak veri sağlanması için ilk önce ana kütle ve örneklem belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın ana kütlesi Türkiye'de faaliyet gösteren Japon şirketleridir. Örneklem ise; Honda, Öztiryakiler, Mazda, Toyota ve Yazaki firmalarıdır. Firma yetkilerine önceden hazırlanmış; yapılandırılmış soruların sorulması yüz yüze ve online görüşme yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen verilerin ortak yönleri birlikte değerlendirilmiştir. Böylece Türkiye'deki Japon firmaların pazara giriş stratejileri ve izledikleri politikalar ikincil veriler ve önceden yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları ile sağlanan veriler üzerinden belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uluslararası Pazarlar, Japon Kültürü, Giriş Stratejileri, Japon Şirketleri, Japon Ortaklığı

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<sup>1</sup>  Master Student, Yildiz Technical University, Social Sciences Institute, Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Management, rasaltayisiner@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>  Prof. Dr., Istanbul Gelisim University, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, keaydin@gelisim.edu.tr

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a result of globalization, none of the firm's position is stable in the long run. There is great competition in the global arena. Companies are under the competition of companies in the domestic market as well as companies that may come from outside of the country. For this reason, companies turn to foreign markets in order to reduce their risks. Economic crises occur when the ratio of exports to imports falls and faced with huge foreign trade deficits. Export; it is getting more important for both countries and companies. For this reason, all companies want to enter foreign markets as well as domestic markets in order to minimize the risk. For the nations, having higher export than import and higher purchasing power for the citizens are a desired event. When we examine the past of Turkey, high deficits were found in the foreign trade of the country during the periods of important economic crises (Aydin, K., 2007, p.1-3). In this context, Japanese companies have been operating in foreign markets for a long time. In this study, Japanese companies who come to Turkey will be examined.

The value of global markets in Turkey and in the world is increasing day by day. When the 2021 figures of Turkey's exports are analyzed, it has increased by more than 30% compared to the previous year; on the other hand, a decrease of more than 7% was observed in the foreign trade deficit (Bloomberg, 2022).

In this study, it has been tried to be understood the strategies and methods of Japanese entry to foreign markets. The subject was approached on the basis of cultural characteristics.

## 2. LITERATURE RESEARCH

In this study, which includes information about the strategies of Japanese companies to enter foreign markets; it was thought that it would be correct to give some basic information about the Japanese in advance.

The capital city of Japan, which is consist of many islands, mountainous terrain, and volcanic terrain, is Tokyo. Due to this elevated structure of the land of the country, it has limited suitable area for agriculture and industry (Hasiloglu, et al., 2009, p.5-6).

When the history of the current geography of Japan is examined, it is seen that the first settlements date back to 100 thousand years ago. The Japanese people started with hunting and gathering in the first place and then developed their skills. The public started to develop the necessary materials for cooking and food preservation (Uluslararası Egitim Enformasyon Merkezi, 1989, p.4).

The early Japanese periods in history are divided into three: the Jomon period, the Yayoi period, and the Kofun period. The first of these periods have its name from the rope patterned pottery; the second is from the time when the archaeological artifacts were found, and the last is from the huge hill burials (Huffman, 2020, p.18).

By the 17th century, belief changes were seen under the influence of western traders who had settled in Japan before, as a result of this prohibitions that prevented Christianity and the arrival of foreigners in the country began. In the next two centuries, negative effects were seen in the development of the country, and with the effect of external pressures, the country was opened to the outside again. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Japanese experienced a rapid modernization in the period called the Meiji period, and western countries were taken as an example and analyzed (Uluslararası Egitim Enformasyon Merkezi, 1989, p.10-11). Faced with many disasters such as devastating earthquakes and atomic bombs during the first and second world wars, the Japanese were able to survive these events quickly despite everything (Hasiloglu, et al., 2009, p.6-7). Today, Japan, which has many important brands and advanced technology, has taken its place among the leading developed countries of the world (Huffman, 2020, p.143-144).

In the Japanese, there is the idea that their emperor has a spiritual influence on the people, that they must be obeyed for life and that even their lives can be given when necessary (Lee, 1989, p.12). Manned suicide bombers (Kamikaze) and torpedoes used during the Second World War can be given for this as examples (Apatay, 2002, p.80).

A Japanese person who falls into a situation to be ashamed and shameful can hang himself (Akkuzugil, 2001, p.3-6). In addition, trust has very big importance to them and takes priority over most written rules (Uludag Ihracatci Birlikleri, 2018, p.3). The Japanese, who do not interact much with other nations due to their geographical features; it is a society that attaches importance to discipline, has a sense of obedience and respect, and where social class distinctions are clearly noticed (Istanbul Kalkinma Ajansi, 2018).

The Japanese today have one of the most advanced economies in the world. The rapid recovery process that took place after the Second World War was described as the "Japanese Miracle". When it comes to the 1990s, it is entered to a term which is includes a period of recession and shrinkage of growth rates, which experienced many events such as the Asian crisis, uncontrolled loans given to companies, the bursting of the bubble in the real estate market, and the reduction of public expenditures (Ates, N.d.). In Japan where inflation is very low compared to other countries, per capita income is also higher than others (Hasiloglu, et al., 2009, p.8). In the 2008s, the Japanese were adversely affected by the decrease in their exports due to the crisis, and in 2011 and the following three years, they faced historical trade deficits (Uludag Ihracatci Birlikleri, 2018, p.3).

The Japanese, who are very deprived in terms of underground resources; tried to strengthen their economy by making serious exports; but as a result, they felt the need to make an important import. Acting with the slogan of "Export or perish", the Japanese have always experienced the fear of not being able to meet the imports, and in the 1960s, they continued on their way even stronger as exports exceeded imports. By 1977, the Japanese, which had reached the highest level of foreign exchange reserves in its history, had a foreign trade surplus of 17 billion US dollars (Rose, 1978, p.56-57). In some studies, it has been shown that the reason for this success of the Japanese is that the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is like that of the family (Guvenc, 1983, p.209).

One study examined why the Japanese were more successful in the UK market than local companies. Four hypotheses were included in this study. These are the Japanese focus on the market rather than profitability, making very good opportunity evaluations, it has been stated that they use distribution methods well; give priority to adapting to the market, and prefer aggressive marketing methods (International Management, 1985, p.53-61).

The first political relations between Turks and Japanese began with the arrival of the Japanese in 1871 to obtain information about capitulations (Kankal, N.d.). The Ertugrul Frigate, which Abdulhamid the Second sent in 1890 to consolidate his friendship with the country, sank on the way back to the Ottoman lands and many of the personnel died. As a result of this event, the aid mobilization carried out by the Japanese with many institutions also reflected positively on the relations between the two countries. Afterwards, Turkey's reaching out to Japanese citizens who were stranded in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war in 1985 strengthened the relations (T.C. Disisleri Bakanligi, N.d.).

Turkey and Japan basically carry out commercial relations in areas such as food, raw materials, machinery, electrical appliances (Uludag Ihracatcilar Birligi, 2018, p.10). Turkey is among the countries where the Japanese have serious investments; its imports in 2016 are almost ten times more than its exports (Hiranuma, N.d.).

There are many companies with Japanese partners in Turkey; this number is more than 250 in 2021. In addition, the two countries have realized many serious and important projects; some of them can be mentioned as Golden Horn and FSM Bridge, Marmaray Project (T.C. Disisleri Bakanligi, N.d.).

## **2.1. Japanese Companies in Turkey**

Today, many Japanese companies and Turkish companies operate in Turkey by establishing partnerships. It has been observed that the Japanese tend to expand their dominance in some of these companies with which they have partnered.

Toyota, which was founded in 1937 and started its activities in the field of textile weaving, later turned to the automotive field. Today, it operates actively in many countries of the world (Toyota, N.d.). In Turkey, the company, which started its activities in 1984, was established with the partnership of 50% Sabancı, 40% Toyota Motor Corporation and 10% Mitsui (Sabah Web, 2009); later, the partnership in production was terminated when Sabancı first transferred 25% and then all of its shares to Toyota (NTV

Web, N.d.). Sabancı completely terminated its partnership by transferring all of its 65% stake in ToyotaSA, where sales and marketing activities are carried out, to the Saudi ALJ Group company in the following years (Hurriyet Web, 2009).

The partnership between the Japanese company Honda and Anadolu Group (NTV Web, N.d.), which was established in 1992 as a half partnership, ended in 2018 with the transfer of all shares to the Honda Group. Thus, Honda gained 100% dominance (Internethaber, 2019).

Japanese Yamaha, which was founded in 1955; became a partner in Beldesan which company of Koc Group with a 20% share in 1997 in order to give Beldesan a global identity under its umbrella (Hurriyet Web, 2002). In 2010, Koc transferred all of its shares to a Japanese company (Is'te Gundem Web, 2009).

Japanese Mazda (Mazda, N.d.), which started its activities in 1920, started its activities in Turkey with the partnership of the Mermerler Group in the 1990s and reached serious sales figures. After 22 years of cooperation, Mazda stated that they would directly manage their activities in Turkey and ended their partnership with Mermerler (Hurriyet Web, 2007).

Yazaki, one of the well-established Japanese companies and holding 24% of the market, was founded in 1929 (Yazaki, N.d.); his arrival in Turkey was realized with the partnership it made with Sabancı in 1995 (Sabancı, N.d.). In the 2000s, with the takeover of all 24% of the shares held by Sabancı, the Japanese dominated all of the shares (Milliyet Web, 2000).

Temsa Construction Equipment, one of the Sabancı Group companies, was established in 1983; it works with many world brands such as Komatsu and Volvo Trucks (Temsa Is Makinalari, N.d.); in the years following its establishment, 49% of its shares were purchased by the Japanese Firm Marubeni (Sabancı, 2014). In 2019, the Japanese company increased its shares to 90% (Temsa Is Makinalari, N.d.). It is good to mentioned that, there aren't any interview conducted with Temsa employees for these study.

Apart from these examples, it is thought that many other Japanese companies would be partner to Turkish companies and that they may increase their shares over time.

### **3. RESEARCH**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

The research was carried out qualitatively; in-depth interview method was used during the study. The questions used during the interview were open-ended and pre-structured. During the interview, different questions were asked to the participant in order to obtain more detailed information according to the flow. In addition to the interview technique, the study was supported by data obtained from secondary sources.

##### **3.1.1. Population and Sample**

The research was carried out with five participants from different profiles. Four of these participants have a bachelor's degree and one has a master's degree. The work experience of the participants is between 6 and over 50 years. Four of the participants are men and one is a woman. Honda, Oztiryakiler, Mazda, Toyota and Yazaki are the companies that the participants have worked with or partnered with before and whose information we consulted, respectively. The ages of the participants are between 28 and 80 years. The last duties of the participants in the researched companies are respectively, Marketing Specialist, Internal Audit Manager, Chairman of the Board, New Projects and Production Planning Manager, and Production Excellence Center Coordinator.

##### **3.1.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

The study was carried out by analyzing the information obtained as a result of the interviews and secondary source research. In the study, it was aimed to draw conclusions by evaluating the similarities and differences by interpreting the data obtained individually from the participants with an inductive point of view.

### 3.2. Findings

Within the scope of the research, various findings were obtained by interviewing a total of five participants who worked with or still working in Honda, Oztiryakiler, Mazda, Toyota and Yazaki companies, which had various type of partnerships with the Japanese. Pre-prepared open-ended questions were asked to the participants and additional questions were added according to the flow of the interview. Accordingly, the findings will be explained below.

According to the participants, the Japanese are disciplined, well-timed and punctual. In addition, they are defined as a society that pays attention to planning. In addition, according to some of the participants, the Japanese control the work-life balance very well, they also observe this distinction in their relations with people. Business-oriented Japanese also pay attention to the obedience of business hours.

It was stated that the Japanese planned the work very well and then implemented it very good. In addition, it has been stated that they have a character that is patient, and they obey the rules. They also continue to do similar tasks patiently, even if they take a long time.

Another interviewee stated that the two communities have similar characteristics, and we are two nations that get along well. The Japanese are a nation that thinks not in detail and momentarily, but in the future. This situation enables them to be prepared in case similar situations arise in different companies. Although there are prolongations in the decision processes of the Japanese and this situation can create problems for the points that need to be progressed quickly; once the decision is made, it is very difficult to reverse it.

The Japanese act within the duties defined for them. The Japanese, who often have a shy attitude; some of the behaviors that are not found strange in the working environment and that can be seen as different from the Turks; taking off shoes at the meeting, short sleep breaks, etc. situations exist.

Japanese who may have difficulty understanding if spoken to quickly; at the same time, they may perceive this situation as being angry. Because of their culture called "Gemba", they more tend to understand by drawing.

While talking about the existence of the Japanese, who are in the traditional mentality as well as those in the contemporary mentality; the difficulty of changing some features from the past due to this traditional structure is also mentioned. The Japanese seek perfection by constantly improving, this reveals the logic of Kaizen.

The Japanese benefit from them in the form of consultancy in order to benefit from the knowledge of their employees who have given years to their company. In addition, while taking a decision in Japanese, it is essential to get approval from everyone from the lowest level to the top of the enterprise, this situation gives responsibility for the events to all employees, and individuality is not accepted. The Japanese, who are not angry with the mistake, do not want it to be hidden and are working hard to prevent it from happening again in the next processes. Problems seem to be opportunities for them. Employees at all levels in the company can come to any task in the Japanese, who are very careful about work accidents.

The Japanese cannot express their feelings easily, and they can act more courageously in written languages than in spoken languages. The Japanese, who have a naive character structure; it has been stated by the interviewees that they have their own unique greetings, that taking notes of what is spoken is a sign of respect, and that they use short expressions in their speeches without further explanations. Although teamwork is emphasized in theory, it was stated by one participant that Turks do this better among themselves.

The Japanese have a go-to-see and learning logic. One participant express that Japanese brought foreigners to the top management and made them do negative activities such as firing workers and closing the company; stated that they dismissed them after they were completed by putting this responsibility on them. Another participant stated that only the Japanese are kept in senior management with a racist approach.

Another characteristic of the Japanese is that instead of looking for talent or creativity in the work done; it was stated by the participants that they expect routine works to be managed with good follow-up and improvement.

The Japanese, who care about the suggestions of their employees, see them as a member of the family, and provide an advantage in operating expenses with smart management. They have increased the quality over time in their production, which they started with imitation and low quality.

When examining how the partnership of the participants with the Japanese started; it is seen that the Japanese can prefer companies that are reliable, have knowledge and connections in the country they will enter. An example of this is the partnership between Anadolu Group and Honda. Again, the basis of the relationship established between Oztiryakiler and Hoshizaki is also trust. Mermerler Group, the distributor of Mazda, stated that the Showroom they opened in Besiktas for Renault was important in ensuring this.

Stating that he did not know exactly how the cooperation between Toyota and Sabanci started, but the participant stated that this could be related to Ozdemir Sabanci's desire to bring a car model to Turkey and that Mitsui could be a bridge in this relationship. Again, for Yazaki, although the exact reason is not known, participant stated that it may have a similar story to Toyota and that it was established in places parallel to Toyota.

It has been stated that the Japanese maintain good relations with periodic meetings in Turkey and are in constant solidarity. It is stated that cooperation with the Japanese has both advantages and disadvantages for both parties.

The advantages for the Japanese include easy integration and penetration into the country with the connections of the local partner, financial, tax etc. advantages which provided by the cooperation with local company during the establishment of the factory, cheap manpower, meeting high quality at low costs, making the brand known in the country with the marketing activities provided by the local company, and the contributions of the Turks to the company at the upper levels with its trained workforce can be listed.

Among the disadvantages for the Japanese, it can be stated that it can be abused by the local company at the points where they do not know the job very well, and the companies are affected due to the economic crisis and political situation in the country.

According to the participants, the advantages of these partnerships for the Turks are that the profit share increases, the work is settled in a certain order and flow as a result of the Japanese introduction of their systems, the internal control system is provided, the company gains a corporate identity, the strong capital structure of the Japanese, the knowledge gained from the Japanese. Learning of cost reduction methods by Turks from Japanese is also included to the advantages of these partnership to Turks. Participants stated that in partnerships with the Japanese, these partnerships provide more advantages than disadvantages for the Turks.

It was stated by an interviewee that it may have been decided beforehand that the relationship between Honda and Anadolu Group would end at a certain point. According to Oztiryakiler, it has already been decided that the Japanese will increase their share of partnership in their own structure. Mazda, which first started its partnerships with the Mermerler group and became the bestselling brand in Turkey, then decided to leave Turkey first due to the problems experienced in Japan and was later bought by Ford. Mazda, which decided to carry out its operations in Turkey from Europe, with Ford's disposal of Mazda again, ended its current structure in Turkey.

Although the relevant participant did not have a clear information about the reason for the separation between Toyota and Anadolu group, it was stated that the reason for this could be Ozdemir Sabanci's exit from the sector with his death. In addition, it was stated that reasons such as Sabanci's sale of Mitsubishi vehicles while together with Toyota and Sabanci's desire to engage in export activities may have been influential.

In the partnership of Yazaki and Sabanci, on the other hand, according to the statement of the participant, Sabanci, which initially incurred the costs of establishment and acted with the goal of regional

development, became inactive thereafter Yazaki owned all of its shares after a five-year period, later the start of the sales.

Interviews were held with company employees about the strategy of starting partnerships with the Japanese at a certain rate, which is the main purpose of our research, and then enlarging this share and dominating all of the companies. According to these talks; while the participant interviewed for Honda confirmed this view; stated that similar examples were also encountered in different Japanese companies. It was stated by the participant that the Japanese acted as a group and they targeted a sector rather than the management of a company, and while doing this, they acted by following and helping each other.

For Oztiryakiler, on the other hand, the first target of the Japanese was to buy the entire company, but Oztiryakiler allowed this to a certain extent as per the agreement; it was emphasized that they agreed to stop the share increases at some point. The participant interviewed for Mazda admitted that the Japanese have such a strategy; although they did not say their intention to seize it step by step, they stated that Mermerler understood it in the process.

Former Toyota employee, in our interview; stated that he did not sense such an intention of the Japanese, and this was a point reached naturally in the relations between the two companies. As with Toyota, the interviewee for Yazaki did not perceive the existence of such a situation; but he stated that this could be a subject that was understood at the first stage.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Continuing their commercial activities at many points in the world, the Japanese; they are trying to develop these activities with many different strategies. In the strategies they determine, they consider various factors such as the natural conditions and structure of the market. Various inferences were obtained as a result of the interviews conducted in our research and the analysis of the data collected from secondary sources. According to this, it was stated by the participants that the Japanese have a structure that follows the timelines, keeps the work in the focus, pays attention to the details, and draws the work-life balance and boundaries well. Again, the Japanese are naive, do not like contact very much, and have similarities with Turkish culture, focusing on learning from mistakes and not getting angry with them.

Taking off shoes at work and taking short sleep breaks are among the daily behaviors of the Japanese; not seen as a problem. Job descriptions are important in Japanese, and they continue their duties within them.

In the Japanese, all decisions are made by the company. An idea and project is approved by everyone from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy pyramid and is processed if it is seen appropriate. Although the decision process takes a long time for the steps taken, once the decision is made, it is no longer a question of abandonment. The high voice of the other person can make the Japanese feel angry with them and they can be shy.

When there is a problem, they apply the methods of seeing and asking it on the spot and explaining the problem by drawing. The logic of Kaizen, which always progresses little by little in the organization or business they are in, is very important for them. There may be situations where Turks aren't included in the administration over a certain level.

During the Japanese entry into the market, it has emerged during our interviews and research that methods of partnering with a local company from the target market, purchasing company shares directly and giving distributorship to a local company are applied. It has been observed that the Japanese acted patiently and slowly in these business partnerships. In addition, Japanese companies keep each other in the markets they enter and act in coordination. It is important for the Japanese that local companies with whom partnerships are established are strong and reliable.

It has been observed that both sides benefit from the partnerships made by Japanese and Turkish companies in many ways. Some of these are the transfer of knowledge and skills, benefiting from local incentives, cheap labor.

The main subject of our research is the strategy of Japanese to open up to foreign markets; it is the investigation of the existence of strategies to completely take over the companies over time by starting with small share purchases and advancing their partnerships. Accordingly, majority of the participants' comment supports this view, while others stated that they did not feel it. It was also stated that the same situation is a Far East culture, which is also seen in countries such as Korea and China, and that it is an activity to seize not only the company but also the sector.

#### **DECLARATION OF THE AUTHORS**

**Declaration of Contribution Rate:** Authors produce an equal contribution to the work.

**Declaration of Support and Thanksgiving:** No support was received from any institution or organization in the study.

**Declaration of Conflict:** There is no potential conflict of interest in the study.



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