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Localization of Walt Disney's Parks and Resorts

Walt Disney Company is an entertainment and media enterprise with five business segments including Media Networks, Disney Interactive Media Group, Studio Entertainment, Disney Consumer Products, and Parks and Resorts (Life at Disney, Disney Online International). The Walt Disney Company was founded as a cartoon studio at the beginning in United States in 1920s, then became the global multination based mass media company that represents the unique characters from different races and shares the common human core values to the world (Company History, Disney Online International). The Parks and Resorts, as one of the five major business segments of Walt Disney Company, has gone to the world famous family travel and leisure experience provider. The Walt Disney's Park and Resorts has five overseas vacation destinations in North America, Europe and Asia and it is building its sixth destination in Shanghai (Parks and Resorts, The Walt Disney Company).

This research paper is to analyze and evaluate how have the Walt Disney's Parks and Resorts been localized in different regions of the world and how do the Walt Disney Company's multicultural characters influence the localization of overseas' Disneyland.

“Walt Disney International (WDI) provides oversight of the Company's activities outside the United States. WDI's responsibilities range from providing administrative support and coordination for Disney's global offices to

increasing the globalization of the Disney brand to ensure that it is locally relevant to consumers around the world.”
-Walt Disney International (2009)

The localization is a term that refers to the adapting local culture and inhabits into the globalized culture to a local contents (What is Localization, Globalization and Localization Association). The Walt Disney’s theme parks as a combination of products and service were separated and promoted to the overseas’ market. I will mainly analyze Tokyo Disneyland and Hong Kong Disneyland because these two theme parks were settled in a totally different culture than United States. They are emerging the localized cultures to the original contents that can attract audiences and visitors from all over the world. Tokyo Disneyland was first opened in 1983 and located in Urayasu, Chiba, which is near Tokyo. It was the first Disney theme part outside United States (Development of Tokyo Disneyland, Oriental Land Co). Hong Kong Disneyland was first opened in 2005, and the park is expanding at this time and is expected to handle 7.92 million to 8.92 million visitors annually (History, The Hong Kong DSLSource).

Tokyo Disneyland as Walt Disney Company’s first oversea theme park is very similar to the original design to the Disneyland in California. However, Tokyo Disneyland achieves its goal of emerging local Japanese culture and American style entertainments localizing and consisting with the American style attractions. According to Anthony Y.H.Fung who edited the book “Asian Popular Culture: The Global (Dis) continuity”, the localization efforts appears as the following elements: language, localized contents, food, and behaviors. According to the survey, the international visitors to Tokyo Disneyland only counts six percent, so that the main

language in Tokyo Disneyland is Japanese.(Fuang, 2013) The signs and theme park brochures are also translated in English, but the employees only fluent in Japanese. However, the employees who are hired from other countries speak English only. According to the analyzing on Tokyo Disneyland's official websites, the lists of restaurants are not only categorized by different areas like: World Bazaar, Adventureland, Westernland, Critter Country, Fantasyland, Toontown, and Tomorrowland; but also categorized by English Menu Available, Children's Menus, Meet the Disney Characters, Buffet, and Enjoy a Show While Dining. The differences in categorizing restaurants show that Japanese language is the main dialog in the theme park.

In addition, another evidence of localization in Tokyo Disneyland is the media and entertainment contents. Walt Disney Company creates unique localized shows and TV programs and contents to celebrate local cultures and build its own networks. The combination of rooted culture and Disney style productions contribute to stronger growth in foreign countries. The Walt Disney produced shows such as "The Golden Mickeys"" which is only featured in Japan at first, but also illustrated in Hong Kong Disneyland later. During 2013, Tokyo Disneyland replaced the game "Captain EO" with "Stitch Encounter"(Niles, 2013). The contents of those shows and games were specially designed for Asian area.

Another featured item in Tokyo Disneyland is that there are a lot of limited editions of Disney related products. Japanese product market has a nature of producing limited edition and "lucky secret bags" which means combining several products into one bag to sell as one. The modern Japanese also always associates

with "cute". The special featured products and production of limited editions also reflects the localization of Tokyo Disneyland. Tokyo Disneyland's gift shops offers secret gift bags that combining several different products to consumers. The character related products are sold as one secret gift bag. This marketing method in Tokyo Disneyland is tied firmly with Japanese local marketing method that contributes assisting Japanese consumers' shopping habits.

There are 49 food spots in Tokyo Disneyland; the most popular one is "Great American Waffle Company" but only carries Japanese version menu. Popcorns as one of the most popular snacks has its own featured flavor as "Miso" flavor. The culture differences in food result to different marketing solutions in Tokyo Disneyland's restaurants.

Tokyo Disneyland attracts visitors who are mainly from Japan. The cultural differences also distinguish the behaviors of Japanese people and people from other countries. For instance, employees in Tokyo theme park go by their first name and last name. It is more of a culture thing that American employees in Disneyland will prefer visitors use their first names, rather than the last names. Another example is that Japanese people have the tradition of picnic out side the house and sit on the ground. It is common for Japanese people to sit on the ground and eat. During the Disney Parades Show, Japanese people even circled up a small place for themselves by the curbside and sit on the ground to eat and enjoy the show. However, in Hong Kong Disneyland, it does not allow visitors to sit on the floor because of the culture and tradition of Mainland China that it will be considered uncivilized if sitting on the ground and eating with hand on the ground. The differences in culture and behavior

affect the rules and strategies in managing the Disneyland theme park in different regions.

Hong Kong Disneyland was built and managed in a very similar way to the original Disneyland California in 2005, because Hong Kong shares a very common modernity as California does. However, the rooted Chinese traditional culture, Cantonese traditional culture and the cultures of visitors from different background lead to changing strategies in managing the parks. Hong Kong Disneyland first assumed that each customer would only take 20 minutes finishing a meal. This data is based on the average time of visitors in California Disneyland (Fung, 2013). The underestimate in time resulted in the shortage of dining space. The Hong Kong Disney neglected the tradition that Cantonese people and Chinese people put a very special value in eating and dieting.

Another sign of the localization of Hong Kong Disneyland is that the employees are required to speak three languages: Cantonese, Chinese and English. The attractions like Jungle Cruise, which need to interact with tourists guide, and the shows are scheduled in different times for different languages. The reason is that the main dialog in Hong Kong area is Cantonese, but Hong Kong is firmly tied to Mainland China, where the main dialog is Mandarin Chinese. Hong Kong was governed as a colony by Britain, so that English is also one of Hong Kong's official languages.

The Greater China region that includes: Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, share the very similar cultures. For instance, people celebrate same traditional festivals like Chinese Lunar New Year, which is the most important

festival to the people who come from the Greater China region. Hong Kong Disneyland as Walt Disney Company's first Greater China region theme park not only celebrates western festivals, but also featured in celebrating Chinese Lunar New Year. The color red is considered as the sign that represents fortune and happiness, people in Greater China region likes to dress in red to celebrate the New Year. The Disney characters would dress up in red traditional Chinese costumes.

"As the Chinese Spring Festival is coming, Hong Kong Disneyland has dressed its Mickey and Minnie in Tang suits again to boost its appeal to tourists from all over the world. Some people said that the two iconic Disney characters' Tang suits show the localization of the all-pervasive American culture, and can contribute greatly to a successful promotion. Other people have realized that the Spring Festival is no longer limited to China, and has naturally interacted with other cultures. Just like Hong Kong Disneyland, Hong Kong has shown enough cultural inclusiveness."

- People's Daily Online (2013)

Walt Disney Company as a multiculturalism based mass media company is expanding its market to the different countries. Disney has created a lot of characters based on the different race and regions. Mulan is one of the examples. The story of Hua-Mulan is an old Chinese legend story that every children and adults have heard. Disney produced Mulan in 1998 and featured this character with typical Chinese looks and tradition (Miao, Women, Race & Culture in Disney's movies). Although Mulan is one of the characters in Disney, but she rarely features in North American Disneyland theme parks. However, in Hong Kong, Mulan is considered as one of the princess image on their products line. The localization of

Hong Kong Disneyland appears in behaviors, languages and featured traditional culture related contents (Dong, 2011).

Walt Disney Company expanded its market to the overseas regions. The company is very globalized when delivering American animations and entertainment to the world. However, Walt Disney Company's theme parks and resorts are localized in different regions to associate with local culture. The Tokyo Disneyland and Hong Kong Disneyland are the two successful examples of localization of The Walt Disney Company's Theme Parks and Resorts. The diversity and different culture backgrounds and habits of audiences, visitors and consumers are the two major reasons for the localization of Walt Disney's Parks and Resorts.

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