



The new Japonisme: From international cultural exchange to cultural diplomacy — Evaluating the influence of cultural activities on diplomacy

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In my previous article¹ I discussed the Japonisme 2018 event, but how should we evaluate this from the perspective of diplomacy? Certainly, it is true that a large-scale showcase of Japanese culture and cultural exchange in France, one of the world's centers of culture, is a significant result among our cultural PR activities. More people will become interested in Japan through the series of events, and it will definitely be a chance for Japanese culture to permeate even deeper among French people than it has so far. But to what extent can such international cultural exchange activities as these contribute to diplomacy?



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We commonly speak of “cultural diplomacy,” but just how cultural activities and diplomacy are connected is not actually clear. Joseph Nye coined the phrase “soft power” following the end of the Cold War. He emphasized using attractive culture as a type of diplomatic policy, in which a country's policies rely on support that is received of its own accord, rather than through rational calculation or coercive force. Thanks to this, cultural diplomacy is widely talked about once more. Yet, while it is possible to see the success or failure of cultural activities on the spot by the number of attendees or how interested participants are, it is extremely difficult to evaluate the diplomatic influence effected through these activities.

The debate about “strategic culture” that thrived in the United States during the Cold War has still not been settled. How does the national character and psychological makeup of a nation's people, as well as their culture, influence the outbreak of war? In short, the causal relationship between defense or security guarantee policies and the distinct culture and political climate of a region or nation is not always clear. Likewise, to what extent does culture influence diplomacy? These last ten years or so, the debate about this evaluation has become an important issue for theories of cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy in the United States and Europe.

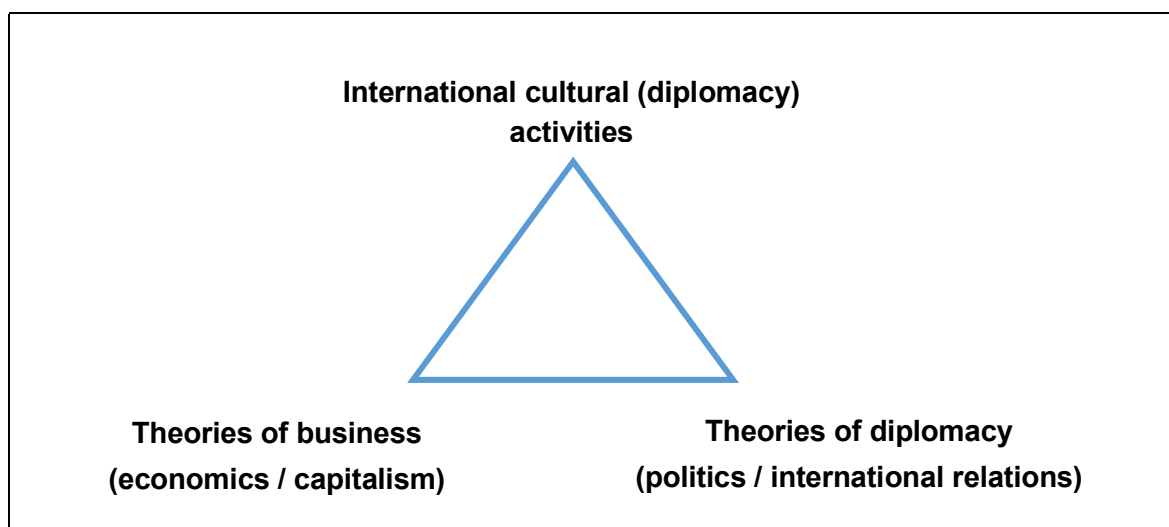
Therefore, I would like here to reconsider the communication of different nations' culture

¹ The 160th Anniversary of Franco-Japanese Diplomatic Relations: How France Discovered Japonisme
<https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/archives/diplomacy/pt20180926170338.html>

and international cultural exchange from the perspective of diplomacy. In the process, I would like to try to sort out various concepts that are often used in a confused way.

The triangular fixed-point observation model of cultural diplomacy: cultural exchange, business and diplomacy

External cultural communication or international cultural exchange are closely related to theories of capital and theories of diplomacy. So, what is the balance in this triangular relationship? I use the fixed-point observation model below to think about this issue.



This discussion starts from the premise that a country has a culture that is fundamentally worth communicating, or that it will be accepted overseas. This is closely related to a country's reputation and image. Also, in the case of countries that do not have sufficient trust and reputation around the world, efforts should start from "getting to know the country"; that is, promoting its distinct history and traditional culture. This is the education and culture PR that I will discuss later.

Of course, this may be used by business. As I explained in my previous article, Hayashi Tadamasa, who sold large numbers of ukiyo-e woodblock prints following the 1867 Paris International Exposition, was a pioneer in this. In other words, this is a theory of capitalism.

Nevertheless, cultural business is a special area even among the fields of economics. It is a field in which it is hard to judge cost performance. As I discussed in the previous article, a typical example of this is the way in which the value of ukiyo-e prints was recognized in France despite them being scraps of paper used as a packing material for ceramics in Japan. In the case of cultural business, the value of a project is greatly influenced by subjective values. From a perspective of international trade, it is not easy to put an appropriate or fitting value on cultural products and contents. This is different to industrial products whose value as products is fundamentally based on their utility.

It follows then that, since Japonisme sold itself on foreignness and exoticism, naturally at some point it would pass its best-before date; and when people tired of it, Japonisme came to an end. This was also closely tied to Japan’s national image. Japan did well to strengthen its profile in international society following World War One but, as it gradually deepened its competitive relationship with the United States as an imperial colonial power in Asia, that image got worse.

Yet, when Japan’s international image later took a turn for the better, of course its cultural and contents industries developed. Japan’s “national brand” developed favorably as a result of becoming an economic technological superpower and a technological industrial nation based on companies such as Sony, Honda and Toyota. Japan also developed its image as a nation of peace though increased awareness of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the fact that Japan is the only country where nuclear bombs have been used. Meanwhile, it is said that the ikebana (Japanese flower arrangement) calendars that Japan Foundation staff gave as greetings all over the world played a significant role in spreading the image of Japan as a nation of peace. The recent fashion for Japan and so-called Japan Cool, including subculture, is one more example of this. In other words, when it comes to culture, Japan has gone from being an undeveloped country to an advanced nation. Recognized now by the world, Japan has become a creator of global trends, and even a leader in terms of how its culture is admired.

The definition of cultural diplomacy

In which case, where within diplomatic activities should we place international cultural exchange and cultural activities? In the case of Japan, the PR activities conducted on the ground in diplomacy are conceptually separated into two types: policy PR and education and culture PR / general PR.

Public diplomacy	Policy PR	Government Policies
	Education and culture PR, general PR (narrow definition of cultural diplomacy)	Promoting the Japanese language, art and culture activities, intellectual exchange Communicating information related to Japan’s history and society today

Within political diplomacy, the principal role of policy PR is to disseminate information of government policies widely overseas, and also encourage understanding of these policies. Education and culture PR underpin this by spreading everyday understanding of Japan. For example, even if government policies and figures are conveyed to foreign governments and peoples via policy PR, how this information is understood is absolutely key. In short, is it being received positively, and will Japan’s policies be supported? It is difficult to easily represent this evaluation in numbers, but it is extremely important to heighten understanding of daily life in Japan and ensure that people feel positively about Japan.

Fortunately, a series of regular opinion polls, national brand indices, and other sources show that foreign countries have a positive image of Japan. But how do trends like this help support Japan's diplomatic policy? I consider the answer to be "cultural diplomacy." In other words, cultural diplomacy is the everyday use of education and culture PR from a long-term perspective and premised on the implementation of explicit or implicit government policy goals. Because we call this diplomacy, we need to distinguish it from simple international cultural exchange at the personal or group level, humanitarian exchange, or corporate international contact.

In this sense, we can apply a narrow definition of cultural diplomacy to external cultural activities motivated by government policy. It is inevitable, however, that there is a connection with politics; and this is the most controversial issue in cultural diplomacy. PR activities are no different to "propaganda" diplomacy, yet it is dangerous to go too far. They must not be used as a way to justify mistakes and anti-social or anti-democratic actions. Past examples are when the Nazis used the Berlin Olympics and movies as propaganda to justify Nazism, and during the cold war when the USSR exaggerated the superiority of socialism and disregarded objectivity in propaganda directed toward the world. In this sense, unsurprisingly, there are strong elements of propaganda in China's cultural diplomacy today. Policy PR (including lies and exaggerations) is strongly linked to an awareness of political priorities. As I will discuss below, there are issues of culture and politics.

The development of public cultural diplomacy: from treaty revision to assimilation policies

Considered from this perspective, the Japonisme that had its start during the late Edo and Meiji periods was not necessarily a cultural diplomacy prepared in advance by the Japanese government. As I have already discussed, its starting point was when value was created in France and Europe. This turned into a vogue for Japan, and we might say that as a result the government and capital took advantage of the situation.

In 1862, the shogunate sent a thirty-eight-strong delegation led by Takenouchi Shimotsukeno-kami Yasunori to the second International Exhibition in London. It is recorded, however, that the delegation was surprised at the lacquerware, ceramics, swords and other Japanese goods collected and put on display by Sir Rutherford Alcock, the British representative in Japan. This was the first time that Japanese people experienced an international exhibition. A delegation led by the younger brother of Tokugawa Yoshinobu, Tokugawa Akitake, was officially dispatched to the International Exposition of 1867 in Paris and exhibited special products from around Japan.

In 1873, the new Meiji government participated in the Vienna World's Fair. It exhibited *shachihoko* metal sculptures (an animal with the head of a tiger and the body of carp) from the roof of Nagoya castle, a papier-mâché giant Buddha statue based on the giant Buddha statue in Kamakura, a model of a five-story pagoda, and huge Japanese drums and lanterns. They also

sent carpenters who built a pavilion at the fair that combined a Shinto shrine and a Japanese-style garden. Japan also participated in the fourth Paris exposition of 1889, where it built a pavilion that even included a tea house, and which was hugely popular. This style of participating in expositions has essentially remained the same up to the present day.

Following this, the Meiji government also participated in expositions in Melbourne (1875), Philadelphia (1876), Paris (1878), Sydney (1879), Berlin (1880), Atlanta (1881), Trieste (1882), Amsterdam (1883), St. Petersburg (1884), Nuremberg (1885), Barcelona (1888), Hamburg (1889), Chicago (1893), Paris (1900), Glasgow (1901) and Hanoi in French Indochina (1902).

Participation in this series of expositions was part of the general and educational PR activities (known as overseas communications and exchange activities) of an “undeveloped cultural nation” that were used to boost its profile as a new participant in an international society centered on the United States and Europe. At the same time, the Meiji government had the goal of revising the “unequal treaties” that Japan had signed with the United States and European great powers. In other words, Japan needed to promote itself both at home and overseas not as a colony of the great powers, but as a modernized nation with a proper culture, and as worthy of forming an equal relationship with the United States and the European great powers. In that sense, Japan’s external cultural activities and its policy PR at this time were closely tied. We might say that this aim was more or less achieved following the Russo-Japanese War and through the process of diplomacy that led to the revision of the unequal treaties.

Incidentally, this policy PR itself made active use of the media. At the time, the most actively used method was having foreign newspapers write and publish articles related to Japan. Under the Meiji government (which was desperate to revise the unequal treaties), Minister for Foreign Affairs Terashima Munenori developed the use of what was called “cajolement diplomacy”; that is, lobby diplomacy. The extreme Europeanization policies at the time of Minister for Foreign Affairs Inoue Kaoru are well known, but Inoue also made allies of journalists and influential people and had them write pro-Japanese articles in English newspapers and other publications. At the time, these activities were called “manipulating the foreign newspapers.” Before the Russo-Japanese War there was an effort to have European and American newspapers and other media publish articles in support of Japan and foster understanding of the war’s legitimacy. This led to large numbers of government bonds to fund war procurement being sold in the city of London and has been discussed as an example of successful PR ever since.

Cultural diplomacy such as this cannot be separated from politics. In particular, after the First World War Japan’s cultural diplomacy became a way to support overseas expansion into the Asian regions. After the Great War, Japan became one of the five great nations that were permanent members of the Council of the League of Nations, then in 1934 Japan set up the KBS (Kokusai Bunka Shinko Kai), the forerunner of the postwar Japan Foundation. This was the same year that the British Council was established. Afterwards, Japanese external cultural policy transformed into colonial assimilation policy. A typical example of this is the international movies made by the famous Manchukuo Film Association. Incidentally, it is said that the first

person to officially use the term “cultural diplomacy” in Japan was the then ambassador to Italy, Yoshida Shiguru, who became Prime Minister shortly after World War Two.

A return to cultural diplomacy

Following the painful historical experience of defeat in World War Two, however, public cultural diplomacy connected with that war became a major cause of regret for Japanese diplomacy.

Consequently, Japan’s postwar diplomacy began by actively avoiding overseas communications. There was a feeling that avoiding overseas communications, in other words not clarifying Japan’s independent diplomatic stance, would assist the security guarantee in Asia. Even afterwards, when Japan started overseas communications, external cultural activities were kept separate from politics, and a strong view arose that international exchange activities should be considered non-governmental activities.

Yet, these overseas communications could not remain low-key forever. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Japanese economy had recovered, passed through the high-growth period, and was strengthening its competitive relationship with the developed nations of the United States and Europe. This rapid expansion of the Japanese economy echoed the image of a pre-war aggressive Japan advancing into Asia. In particular, economic friction between Japan and the United States due to Japan’s favorable balance of trade became a big problem. The Japan Foundation² was set up in 1972 to foster understanding of “the peace nation, Japan” overseas, and to overcome such criticism.

Consequently, there was a tacit understanding that the activities of the Japan Foundation would maintain a distance from political matters. The foundation made showcasing Japanese culture unconnected to political and ideological values the central area of its activity; and its ikebana calendar typifies this aim. For the same reason, the Japan Foundation was managed and run as an organization independent of the government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Since the end of the Cold War, however, the countries of the world have focused heavily on cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy as a way of learning about each other’s values. The shift in interest from military force to cultural communication is a global trend. South Korea took a negative view of J-Pop’s spreading popularity overseas but at the same time quickly made overseas export of K-Pop and its contents industries a national strategy. The UK promoted “Cool Britannia,” while the so-called cultural superpower of France restructured its ministries, set up the Institut France as comprehensive overseas international exchange facilities, and sought a general cultural diplomacy strategy.

What is “soft power diplomacy”?

While this happens, it is essential that Japan also energizes its cultural diplomacy in a form

² <https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/index.html>

linked to national strategy. As I explained in my previous article, after the end of the Cold War Joseph Nye coined the term soft power, linking together external cultural activities and diplomacy. I consider soft power to be “conveying a positive image as a message.” Ultimately, this is what not making use of rational calculation or coercive force means. In this respect, Japan has an advantageous position

From 2005 to 2014, and then again in 2017, the BBC World Service conducted a global poll that ranked nations by their positive worldwide influence. In a poll that took place from November 2006 to January 2007, and which covered the opinions of people from twenty-seven nations regarding thirteen specific nations (seventeen in 2010), Japan tied with Canada for the top spot with a 54% score. Meanwhile, France and the EU all had scores of over 50%. Japan has consistently received positive ratings: fifth place in 2008, second in 2009, third in 2010 (57%), fifth in 2014 (49%) and again third in 2017 (56%).

In an image-dominated post-modern society, a clearly differentiated national image is the root of influence. The image that the outside world has of a country, what is called its “national brand,” is equivalent to the brand image that consumers have of products (Dr. Peter van Ham).

The concept of National Brand was coined by Simon Anholt, a former PR advisor to the UK Foreign Office, who issues the annual survey called Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index.³

According to this survey, in 2008 Germany was number one, followed by France, the UK, Canada, and then Japan in fifth place. Japan was fifth place in the export index, seventeenth for governance, eighth for culture, people, and tourism, and tenth for immigration and investment. Members of the OECD (Europe, North America and Japan) were chosen as the top twenty countries, so it is hard to discount a connection between national brand strength and economic power. In 2011 Japan dropped to sixth place, while in 2016 Japan was in seventh place (first was the United States, then Germany, the UK, and Canada in fourth place.) In 2017 Japan was fourth. Since 2011 Japan has happily returned to the top five (with Germany top, France second, the UK third and Canada fourth). In particular, Japan has received top scores for export. It has also had excellent index scores for tourism and people, so we can say that Japan has a stable brand strength.

The Japanese government began prioritizing soft power based on cultural diplomacy around the time of a July 2005 report from the Council on the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy that had been set up by Prime Minister Koizumi. The report proposed a 21st Century Cool based on Japan’s culture and social model. It indicated a policy according to which diverse aspects of Japanese culture, both traditional and modern, would be communicated to the world. In 2013 too, the MOFA Advisory Council on Public Diplomacy held various meetings. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Cultural Affairs and Overseas Public Relations Division was set up, while

³ This is a survey that researches the image of fifty countries and numerically expresses their national brands according to the categories and fields (indices) of (1) export, (2) governance, (3) culture, (4) people, (5) tourism and (6) immigration and investment. Answers to questions related to each of these indices are given figures ranging from 1 (worst) to 7 (best,) totaled up, then averaged to provide a numerical representation of national brand. The survey covers thousands of people in each of the twenty countries where it takes place.

from 2010 overseas PR cultural activities were systematically prioritized. In 2017, Japan Houses (multi-purpose bases for communicating Japanese culture)⁴ were launched in Los Angeles, San Paulo, and London.

In March 2009, the “Contents and Japan Brand Specialist Research Group” of the Cabinet Office Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters released its Japan Brand Strategy. This identified anime, game contents, food, fashion and so on as “soft power industries” and clarified their strategic representation and communication as “Japan Brand” (strengthening creativity, strengthening the ability to disseminate information, and building structures).

In Japan’s case, efforts to develop Japan as a tourism nation came before its cultural PR activities. The December 2002 Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Global Tourism Strategy report and a January 2003 General Policy Speech to the 156th Session of the Diet by Prime Minister Koizumi set a target of 10 million for the annual number of foreign tourists visiting Japan. Following this, a number of other reports were compiled, such as from the Japan Tourism Advisory Council in April 2003, from the Council of Related Ministers for the Realization of Japan as A Country Built on Tourism in June 2003, and from the Japan Tourism Promotion Strategy Council in November 2004. In 2004, the Visit Japan Campaign Headquarters was established with the Yokoso Japan campaign as a main initiative.

Meanwhile, in terms of legal infrastructure, there was the December 2006 Tourism-based Country Promotion Basic Act, the June 2007 Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan, and in October 2008, the Japan Tourism Agency was set up as an external agency of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. Following this, in 2013 the number of tourists coming to Japan suddenly reached 10.36 million (after estimates of around 6 to 8 million), before rapidly accelerating to 13.41 million in 2014, 19.74 million in 2015, and 24.04 million in 2016. The 2020 target for the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan is 40 million.

Future directions for Japan’s cultural diplomacy

I believe that there are three important elements to a consideration of Japan’s future cultural diplomacy.

The first is conceptualization. Fundamental to cultural diplomacy is how we conceptualize and convey the aims and character of Japanese culture. This is the same as clarifying Japan’s image. To express this in a slightly casual way, it is a kind of approachable and impactful catch copy. By having impact, I mean appropriate expressions to tell the story of characteristics where Japan has a relative advantage over other nations and, in a positive sense, special characteristics that make it globally admired.

One can propose numerous Japanese virtues, such as beauty, cleanliness, a traditional and historic culture, as well as specific Japanese terms such as *wa* (harmony,) *junansa* (suppleness,) *takumi* (skillful technique,) *omoiyari* (consideration,) *okuyukashisa* (deep modesty,) and *omotenashi*

⁴ <https://www.japanhouse.jp/>

(hospitality.) Yet, even despite difference of degree and the way they are expressed, emotions such as these are present in any culture.

As time passes, foreign culture comes to seem ordinary and people tire of it. Most of the unique Japanese features that are admired now will become ordinary and ubiquitous one day. The issue is what happens next. The Japonisme of the past lost its spark not just because of Japan's international status, but because effort wasn't made to continue and develop it. Thus, we can be quite sure that Cool Japan and the rest of the vogue for Japan will one day reach its sell-by date. In that sense, the goal of Japan's cultural diplomacy is to rethink how to convey Japan's overseas image in accordance with diplomatic goals, as well as reconsider the prospects and direction of that development going forwards. A vague and emotional theory of admiring Japan will not be enough.

We need to create new cultural values. A February 2010 report published by the Cultural Exchange Research Committee of the Japan Foundation titled "New Cultural Exchange in the 21st Century" pointed to the importance of "culture as the structural principles of a new international society" and the need to create new culture as international public goods. It proposed that a concept of "kind Japanese society and culture" or "Warm Japan" should follow Cool Japan. This report pointed to a kind of "healing culture" of fishing village culture, daily life culture, philosophies of life, values, knowledge, consideration, dignity, attitudes toward nature, and attitudes towards life and death.

Personally, I think that it would be good to take the image of Japan in a direction that overlaps with the special characteristics of Japanese products as expressed by the term "made in Japan": very ingenious and functional, light yet durable. Japanese products with these characteristics and that come from fields where Japan has a relative advantage should be globally promoted and linked to conceptual terms. In the visual realm, I believe this could be concepts such as those of *mingei* (folk crafts), *you no bi* (the beauty of function), *shisso / kanso no bitoku* (the virtue in frugality and simplicity) or *anteikan* (stability).

The second element is context. Just because we have conceptualized our external cultural activities, and clarified both diplomatic goals and the ideas behind them, it is not simply the case that they will be automatically understood. When and in what situation they are communicated is key. I would like to call this "contextualization."

In short, this is the story-telling that explains how much important meaning cultural contents and activities have. Or to put it another way, it is building a basic foundation for them to be accepted. For example, *Doraemon* is extremely popular in Asia but not so in Europe. In Asia, it is a story about children growing up, but in Europe it becomes simply the story of a selfish and spoiled child. These are differences in that way education and children within the family are viewed.

On the other hand, *The Rose of Versailles* is fiction, but thanks to its iconoclastic heroine and appeal to a strong female desire to change one's appearance, it has pioneered a new genre of *shojo-manga* (comics for girls) in the United States and Europe. In its PR magazine *Omokage* and

other materials, the Cabinet Office Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters has drawn attention to the different attitude to life and death in a country that has many earthquakes, much damage from storms and floods, and other natural disasters; and is working hard to promote Japan using legends and ancient texts. Stories based on attitudes to nature have persuasive power, and this is an example of creating a story.

The third element is expanding networks. Networks refer not just to business, but in particular to stimulating personal and intellectual exchange. Part of the role of the Japan Foundation and of diplomats is to nurture technical experts with responsibility for international exchange and culture. To do this, we should increase opportunities for these technical experts to gain academic qualifications and extend the time they spend in the regions where they work. The most important thing is acquiring academic knowledge and personal connections within their specialist fields but, as I have already explained, cultural diplomacy in the form of the fundamental diplomatic activity of personal dialogue is extremely important, so it is vital that they put down deep roots in the societies where they are posted. In that sense, it is essential that postings are made longer.

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