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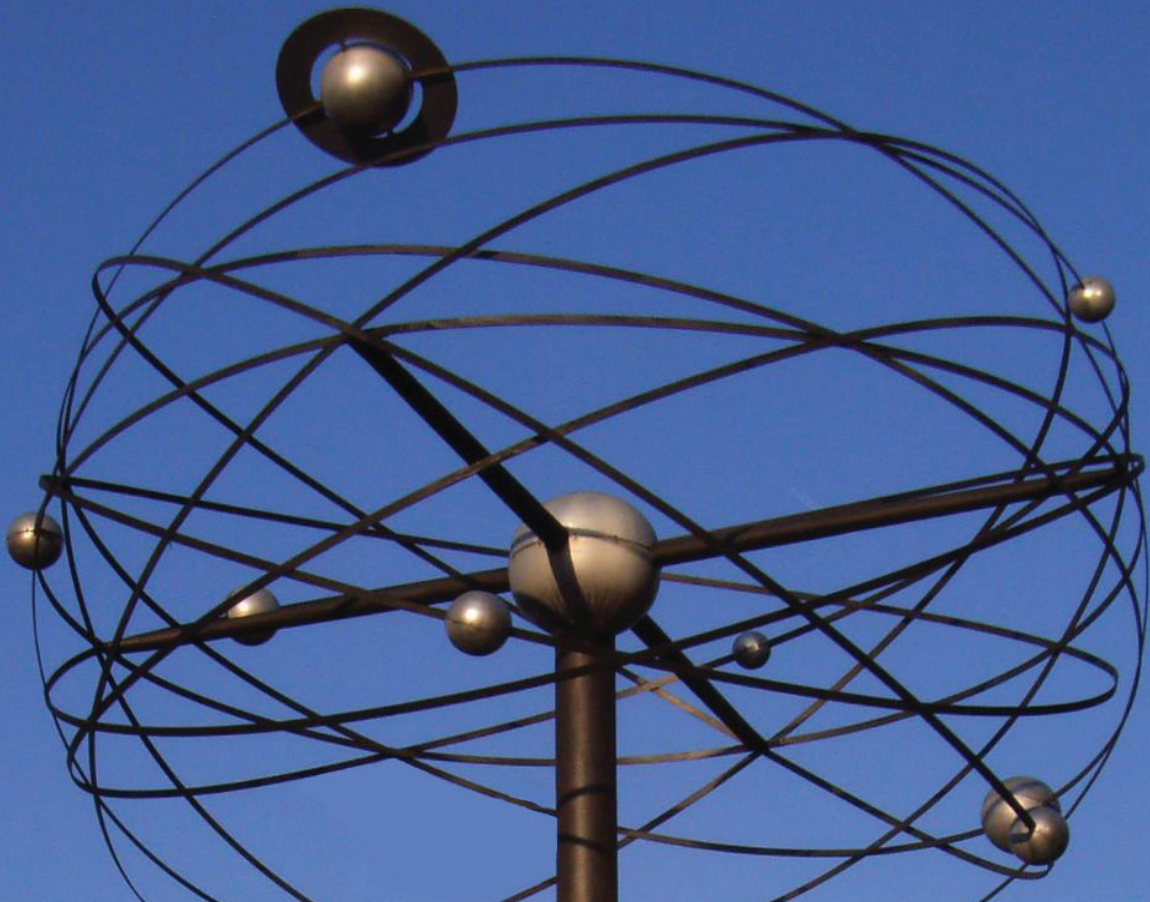


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Japan's Postwar Cultural Diplomacy

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## Japan's Postwar Cultural Diplomacy

Kazuo Ogoura

### Abstract

What kind of national image has Japan sought to project to the world through its cultural diplomacy? Japanese cultural diplomacy has undergone five very different stages of evolution in this regard, which are traced in this paper. The fifth and present stage is characterized by cultural exchange with the aim of achieving peace by preventing violent conflicts and having to cope subsequently with their psychological consequences. Several examples of such exchanges are given, e.g. of Japanese artists with those of regions devastated by violent conflicts. They all show that democracy building and economic reconstruction should be accompanied by restoring cultural traditions, thus restoring a people's pride in itself and their culture.

### Zusammenfassung

Welches nationale Bild wollte Japan durch seine kulturelle Diplomatie der Welt vermitteln? Die japanische Kultur-Diplomatie vollzog sich in dieser Hinsicht in fünf sehr unterschiedlichen Entwicklungsphasen, die in diesem Papier nachgezeichnet werden. Die fünfte und gegenwärtige Phase ist gekennzeichnet durch einen Kulturaustausch, der den Frieden befördern soll, indem er kriegerische Konflikte verhindern und deren psychologische Folgen bearbeiten hilft. Das Papier liefert mehrere Beispiele für einen solchen kulturellen Austausch, z.B. zwischen japanischen Künstlern und denen von Regionen, die durch kriegerische Auseinandersetzungen zerstört wurden. Diese Beispiele zeigen alle, dass der Aufbau von Demokratie und wirtschaftlichen Strukturen begleitet werden sollte durch die Wiederbelebung kultureller Traditionen, die auch den Stolz eines Volkes in diese Traditionen wieder herstellt.

### About the Author

Kazuo Ogoura studied Law at the University of Tokyo. He then worked in the Japanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs in different positions. 1994-1995 he was Japanese ambassador to Vietnam, after this he became Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. From 1997-1999 Kazuo Ogoura was ambassador to the Republic of Korea, 1999-2002 to France. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo and after 2002 became professor at the Faculty for International Relations and Economy at Aoyama Gakuin University. Since October 2003, Kazuo Ogoura is First President of the Japan Foundation ([www.jpff.go.jp](http://www.jpff.go.jp)).

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If cultural diplomacy's major thrust is to improve a nation's image and prestige through such aspects of culture as fine and performing arts, language education, and intellectual traditions, the first question we must ask ourselves in relation to Japan's cultural diplomacy is, "What kind of national image has Japan sought to project to the world through its cultural diplomacy?" Japanese cultural diplomacy has undergone several stages of evolution in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

**During the 1950ies and 1960ies**, the goal of Japanese cultural diplomacy was to transform the pre-war image of Japan as a militaristic country into a new image of Japan as a peace-loving nation. Japanese officials therefore emphasized such cultural activities as the tea ceremony and flower arrangement, in the hopes they would convey Japan's serene, peace-loving nature to the rest of the world. In fact, many of the pamphlets and brochures distributed during this period which sought to explain contemporary Japan featured photos of cherry blossoms and a snow-capped Mount Fuji, both of which conveyed a sense of tranquility and serenity.

Also during this period, the overseas promotion of certain elements of traditional Japanese culture, particularly those related to the samurai spirit or feudal traditions, was discouraged. One might recall that under the American occupation Kabuki performances were practically banned due to their associations with military and feudal traditions. Likewise, until the early 1970ies Japanese language education abroad was not actively encouraged because many Japanese intellectuals, recalling Japan's prewar efforts to propagate the Japanese language in Asia, still felt a connection between such an effort and Japanese imperial ambitions.

Japan's cultural diplomacy entered a second stage **in the late 1960ies and early 1970ies**. During this period, particularly after the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, emphasis shifted from projecting an image of "peaceful Japan" to painting a picture of an economically advanced Japan. This was partly in response to American and European reactions to Japanese economic development, which began attracting international attention in the late 1950ies. During this period Japanese products were still considered "cheap" imports in many countries, and Japanese exporters encountered various obstacles, such as allegations of market disruption, and other criticism. In order to counter such arguments, cultural diplomacy was mobilized to promote the idea that the Japanese economy was about to reach a new stage and to project the image of Japan as a technologically and economically advanced nation. In other words, during the 1970ies Japan started deploying a more positive cultural diplomacy.

This change was evidenced by the establishment of the Japan Foundation in 1972. Created with a ¥20 billion endowment (later increased to ¥50 billion), the foundation's major activities were (1) assistance for Japanese language education abroad; (2) cultural exchange, including exchanges among artists and musicians; and (3) the encouragement of Japanese studies abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a speech of the author at Freie Universität Berlin/Germany on November 7, 2007 in the Japan embassy, Berlin. It was part of a lecture series at Freie Universität titled „Lesbarkeit der Welt. Botschaften von Kulturen“ which took place in the context of the German „Year of the Humanities“.

This period also witnessed the enthusiastic introduction of Kabuki and Noh theater to the international community. In the light of Japan's economic development, the government's efforts in promoting Japanese studies abroad included a special focus on the study of the Japanese economy.

The **third stage** in the evolution of Japan's cultural diplomacy commenced **in the 1980ies**. As the Japanese economy matured and the country's importance on the international stage increased, expectations for Japan to make more contributions as a responsible partner in the international community began to grow. Cultural diplomacy was conceived as one of the three pillars of Japan's general diplomacy - the first being Japan's efforts for peacekeeping operations and similar activities, and the second being official developmental assistance and economic aid policies.

Another development during this period was the emphasis placed on the novel concept of cultural cooperation, in addition to cultural exchange. Cultural cooperation included such activities as helping developing countries with theatrical stage management, providing them with lighting or recording equipment, furnishing showcases for museums, and giving technical assistance in art management.

Meanwhile, another focus of Japan's cultural diplomacy in the 1980ies and early 1990ies was to counter the sense of threat that American and European businesses felt as Japan's investment and export activities started to give worldwide impact. American intellectuals, known as "revisionists", advocated measures to ward off what they viewed as the Japanese "threat" and characterized Japan as an alien society whose fundamental nature would never change. Their reaction was representative of those Americans and Europeans who felt threatened by Japanese economic inroads. In order to alleviate these concerns in the United States and Europe, the Japanese government employed public diplomacy to emphasize its desire and willingness to form partnerships in the international community, particularly with other developed nations.

This diplomatic campaign led to the establishment of the Center for Global Partnership or CGP, in 1992, with the goal of promoting new types of cultural and intellectual activities with the United States. Supported by a ¥50 billion endowment, the CGP was intended to promote various programs that could be broadly categorized as a "global agenda." Several programs were formed to promote intellectual dialogue between the United States and Japan on items on the common agenda, such as democratization in developing countries, environmental problems, and infectious diseases. The CGP also sought to promote new types of citizen-to-citizen exchanges, such as by encouraging contacts between NGOs in both countries.

Another objective of Japan's cultural diplomacy during this period related to Asian reactions to Japanese economic progress. From the mid-1970ies to the mid-1980ies there was an argument, particularly in Asia, that the "Japanese mind," in contrast to "Japanese goods," remained invisible to Asian eyes. Although Asian markets were flooded with Japanese automobiles, appliances, and other products, the thoughts and ideas of the Japanese people themselves had not been conveyed to Japan's Asian neighbors.



This resulted in the “face of Japan” being hidden by yen notes and economic interests, and individual Japanese people remained, despite the increasing presence of Japanese money and goods, conspicuously absent. Criticism of a “faceless Japan” was frequently voiced during this period, and Japanese cultural diplomacy was mobilized to dispel this image. In this instance, cultural diplomacy mainly focused on efforts to help the Japanese understand the mind and psychology of other Asians.

This was the impetus behind the creation in the 1980ies of the ASEAN-Japan Centre in Tokyo, which introduced Asian ideas and ways of thinking to the Japanese. Along similar lines, the Toyota Foundation initiated its Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program, referred to as SEASREP. Under this program, the foundation provided scholarships to Southeast Asian scholars to pursue research and increase understanding of each other within the ASEAN region.

Against this background, it appears that Japan **in the 1990ies** reached a new stage, one in which countries around the world began to experience the waves of globalization. At the same time, a decade of slow economic growth and difficulties with financial deficits has required Japan to find a new orientation for its cultural diplomacy.

First, Japan has been forced to redefine its own cultural identity in this globalized world. Having been more or less fully accepted as a responsible partner in the community of developed, democratic nations, Japan has to project an image of itself, not as a newcomer to the developed nations’ club, but as a truly responsible and mature partner. This means that instead of emphasizing exotic aspects of Japanese culture, Japan must project an image of itself as a pioneering, postmodern culture. Animé, manga, fashion, pop music, cuisine, and novels from young writers have all begun to occupy an important role in Japan’s international cultural activities. Most of these activities, however, are commercial in nature, and Japan’s cultural diplomacy has become closely associated with its trade policy, such as in the protection of intellectual property rights or participation in international film festivals and book fairs. These are symbolized by the so-called content industry, which refers to music, animé, film, fashion, and related service industries. Since the mid-1990s the promotion of the content industry has been emphasized in various quarters of Japan.

Globalization, however, has had another significant impact on the orientation of Japan’s public and cultural diplomacy. A noticeable aspect of globalization has been the rapid economic progress of China, South Korea, India, and certain Southeast Asian countries. Although, with the exception of South Korea, per capita incomes in these nations have not yet reached levels comparable to those seen in Japan, many Asian nations, as a result of their gigantic economic gains, can now afford to deploy their own cultural diplomacy around the world. Consequently, the image that Japan has projected to the rest of the world - which suggests that it is the only nation in Asia with an advanced economy, democratic institutions, and ancient cultural traditions - has become blurred in comparison with other Asian nations. Japan must now distinguish itself from China, South Korea, and other Asian nations; the areas in which Japan is different have suddenly become more important than they used to be. More emphasis on the ultra-modern aspect of Japanese society such as animations, “Otaku” culture, or Cosplay transformation, have begun to be emphasized.

As Asia has transformed its face, the significance of Japan as an economic model has also changed. Japan's traditional cultural diplomacy, through which it has sought to project an image of a model for other Asian nations to follow, must now be reconsidered.

Moreover, Japan's efforts in cultural cooperation, which began in the 1980ies and early 1990ies, have had to be adjusted in both degree and form due to Japan's financial difficulties. Today, more than ever before, Japanese policymakers need to take into consideration the benefits that would accrue to Japan directly from its own cultural activities abroad.

Another problem facing Japan in its public and cultural diplomacy in the twenty-first century is related to nationalism in Asia. Unlike Japan, Korea, and in a sense, China, are still divided nations, and in other parts of Asia there are still countries struggling with violent conflicts within their own national borders. Many countries in Asia still need nationalism, in the broadest sense of the word, in order to mobilize political forces for unity in their countries. This has had its backlash on the Japanese mind, particularly because the wave of globalization came at the same time with Japan's search for a new identity. Unfortunately other nations have tended to view this attitude as a symptom of a new Japanese assertiveness, or even nationalism and Japanese cultural diplomacy has had to deal with such trends.

These two currents in East Asia, namely, the rising nationalism of Asian nations trying to unite politically and this alleged new Japanese assertiveness, have crashed into each other and produced political frictions, as witnessed in the debates over the interpretation of past historical events. Under these circumstances, Japan's new cultural diplomacy has focused on explaining the country's thoughts and dispelling misunderstandings, in addition to creating a bridge for dialogue between Japan and its East Asian neighbors on various aspects of their national and social psychologies.

**The year 2000** and subsequent years have ushered in yet another new phase into the history of Japanese cultural diplomacy. This new phase is characterized by the policy of contributing to the building of peace through cultural exchange. It goes without saying that peace signifies the absence of war. The term cultural exchange for peace must, therefore, denote endeavors that contribute to eliminating conflict and building a world without war - endeavors, in other words, that help to achieve peace. This would encompass initiatives that aim to eliminate the root causes of war, such as mutual distrust, misconceptions, and lack of understanding, or to awaken those engaged in a conflict or dispute to some common ground that they share. It is mistaken, however, to assume, that peace is the mere absence of war. The process of healing the wounds of the conflicts, constitutes one aspect of peace in the broad sense. Cultural exchange aimed at healing the psychological suffering of those victimized or injured by war, can play an important role in building peace.

Let us examine some examples of cultural exchange aimed at achieving peace by preventing conflict. The Kashmir region on the India-Pakistan border is the scene of a fierce, long-running conflict between Muslim-dominated Pakistan and Hindu-dominated India over control of the territory.

In an effort to bridge this divide, the Japan Foundation invited authors of children's books from the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir to come together and write a picture book about their home region that could be enjoyed by children on both sides. Coming from different communities, each of the authors naturally had a different perspective. In this project, however, they cooperated to produce a single picture book that was read by children on both the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir. This initiative served to give the children on both sides something in common and to encourage in them an awareness of their common foundations.

Let us now turn to the part of peace building that involves psychological care after a conflict has come to an end militarily, the aims of which are to heal the victims' psychological wounds and at the same time inspire them to rebuild.

After the civil war in East Timor, for example, which was then a part of Indonesia, many children spent long periods living in refugee camps. Life in these camps was tough, and the children did not know when they would be able to return to their homes. This inevitably affected them psychologically. To provide comfort to the children, the Japan Foundation arranged for a Japanese children's theater company called Gekidan Kaze no Ko (Children of the Wind Theater) to visit a refugee camp.

As an example of the use of cultural exchange for the proactive ends of inspiring people to rebuild after a conflict, I would cite a project to restore the traditions of the renowned Istalif ceramics-producing district of Afghanistan as part of the reconstruction efforts in that country. Reviving the ceramics of Istalif - a proud part of Afghan heritage - was a symbol of the country's psychological recovery. Ceramic artists from Istalif were invited to Japan and given the opportunity to interact with Japanese potters. By creating a network for international interaction, the initiative inspired further hope among the people of Afghanistan, boosting their determination to build peace.

All these examples suggest that peace building in areas devastated by conflicts should be carried out, not only through efforts for democratic process and economic reconstruction, but also with attempts to heal the psychological wounds of those people, and to restore their pride in their cultural traditions.



## About the Center for Area Studies

The Center for Area Studies unites the competence that exists in different research networks in the humanities and social sciences at Freie Universität Berlin. Traditionally, a major focus at FU has been placed on North America, Latin America, Eastern Europe, East Asia and the Middle East. Today, also the other regions of the World like Western Europe or Afrika are taken into account.

CAS's scientific purpose is to analyze transcultural phenomena and processes with an interdisciplinary approach.

The foundation of a Center for Area Studies is an additional milestone in the development of Freie Universitaet Berlin as a center of disciplinary-based and interdisciplinary-connected research in various fields of area studies.

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