

Traditional and popular cultural discourses within the post-war development of Japan's cultural diplomacy

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Abstract. This paper analyses the development of post-war Japan's cultural diplomacy since 1945, dividing it into four stages. It raises questions about what government institutions have been conducting cultural diplomacy, what the main international challenges have been, what communication tools have been used, and what kind of cultural discourses were prevalent during a particular stage. Special emphasis is put on the division of traditional versus popular cultural discourses within the cultural diplomacy of Japan, mainly concentrating on the important shift in this aspect that occurred at the beginning of the 21st century. This shift was marked by the government's increasing shift towards popular culture discourse and the deliberate exploitation of that to promote Japan in the world.

Traditional and popular cultural discourses in cultural diplomacy

There are many definitions of both *public* and *cultural diplomacy*. In Japanese scholarship and practice, they are usually mixed, and even the term for public diplomacy (広報文化外交 *kōhō bunka gaikō*) combines both notions, *kōhō* being for public relations and *bunka* for culture. In this paper, the term *cultural diplomacy* is used in the sense of the already classical definition proposed by a cluster of US scholars in the 1970s, defining public diplomacy as a triple structure consisting of cultural diplomacy (or exchange), information sending (or narrowcasting), and international broadcasting (Gregory 2008, 275; Kitano 2007, 30–2). Therefore, cultural diplomacy, despite being a considerable part of public diplomacy (especially important in the case of Japan), is not equal to public diplomacy. It differs from international broadcasting and information sending (usually combined under the term information policy) in that it is exploiting not plain information about the country dispersed by international media, but the country's culture itself, transmitted by cultural (arts, intellectual, sports, youth, etc.) exchange mechanisms.

A country's culture, being extremely multifaceted, multi-layered and diverse (in the aspects of its history and the geography of the country), can in any case be exploited only partially, favouring particular aspects and diminishing others. According to cultural

diplomacy specialists, promoting the biggest possible variety and diversity of a country's culture could be a type of ideal task for cultural diplomacy, and this is emphasised officially by some informants during interviews (Int. no. 4; Int. no. 12). The experts raise the idea that Japan must be promoted in the world as primarily a country of extremely diverse (多様 *tayō*) culture. This diversity helps to avoid stereotypes and to show the country 'as it is', or even the 'true Japan' (正しい日本 *tadashii Nihon*).

This idea of promoting the greatest possible cultural diversity, or the country *as it is*, could be treated with suspicion from country-branding specialists because in this case the image of the country becomes extremely chaotic, and the clear (core) idea of the country is lost if the country is not clearly differentiated from other countries. Moreover, this idea, indeed, is impossible in reality. In any case, different countries base their cultural diplomacy on different cultural segments, deliberately or not, selecting them during the process of encapsulation (Dinie 2008, 142–43).

In the case of Japan, this selection is symbolised by the binary opposition of traditional and popular culture, clearly expressed in the strategic documents of the last decade and reflected by the representatives of Japanese government institutions during interviews (Zykas 2011). Though not defined clearly, 'culture, coming from the past'—for example traditional theatre (Kabuki, Noh, Bunraku), the tea ceremony, the kimono, traditional arts, etc.—are generally included in the notion of traditional. Popular culture, on the other hand, is usually understood as consisting of manga, anime, fashion, cinema, daily life, and other Westernised aspects of Japanese culture. The term pop(ular) culture in interviews and documents is usually interchangeable with the terms modern culture, contemporary culture, and even new culture, disregarding the exact scientific definitions and their mutual differences. In this paper, the term popular culture is used in this broader sense.

Therefore, in some documents, Japanese culture is treated as if it consists of two separate cultural sets. In some cases they are both treated as contradicting each other. Therefore, strategically presenting both different types could help to achieve balanced communication and the ideal task of cultural diplomacy, i.e. promoting the idea of diversity (Int. no. 12; Int. no. 4). In some other documents, the idea of contradiction is substituted by the idea that these two cultures are merged, or mutually evolving. This means that traditional culture is simply recreated in modern contexts (KANTEI1), and thus popular culture is simply a new expression of the traditional (KANTEI2, 9). For example, Japanese car industries (new) are affected by traditional Japanese skills, and 'tradition is alive in the accurateness of manga, anime and computer games' (*ibid.*, 9).

As previous research (Zykas 2011) indicated, both aspects of Japanese culture are strategically exploited within Japan's cultural diplomacy of the 2000s. However, in

this paper I would like to show how the selection of Japanese culture was represented in Japan's cultural diplomacy during earlier phases, and how finally the binary opposition of traditional versus new appeared.

Several authors have researched the history of Japan's public diplomacy. Here I would like to mention the three most remarkable books on this topic, which focus on different periods. First, the very comprehensive book by Matsumura (2002) researches a long time span starting from the late Edo period. The author's focus is mainly on the pre-war and war periods of Japan's international exchange. Very little attention is concentrated on post-war international exchange, however. Another book, a selection of articles edited by Hirano (2005), mainly concentrates on post-war Japan's cultural exchange, researching different forms and layers of the phenomenon. Finally, the selection of articles edited by Kaneko (2007), mainly reflects the post-Cold War situation, presenting the case of Japan's public diplomacy within the global context.

Several authors have made attempts to propose stages of development for post-war Japan's cultural diplomacy. For instance, Kaneko (2007) divides it by decade, distinguishing six periods after the end of the Second World War. However, this kind of periodisation is slightly artificial. Proposed here are four main stages in the history of post-war Japan's public diplomacy, divided by specific turning points that affected not only public diplomacy itself, but also Japanese society overall, Japan's policies, and the international community. Basically, there were two waves of development in which the government's efforts were clearly concentrated towards its tasks and cultural diplomacy became a priority policy. These waves were separated by two comparatively silent periods, when attention towards public diplomacy diminished (Fig. 1).

VACUUM			FIRST WAVE		LOST DECADE	SECOND WAVE
1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s

Fig. 1. Stages in Japan's cultural diplomacy since 1945

The first stage of development: the vacuum of 1945–1972

For almost three decades after the Second World War, Japan's public diplomacy could be symbolically described as a vacuum, because the government's strategic efforts to manage Japan's worldwide image and to fight negative perceptions abroad using its culture decreased.

This decrease was extremely sharp compared to the previous period. Before and during the war, Japan had been especially active in cultural diplomacy activities, then openly called propaganda diplomacy (宣伝外交 *senden gaikō*) or cultural diplomacy

(文化外交 *bunka gaikō*). For this purpose, Japan established the Information Department (情報部 *Jōhō-bu*) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Matsumura 2002, 238) in 1920, and beginning in 1934 the Society for International Cultural Relations (国際文化振興会 *Kokusai Bunka Shinkō-kai*, or KBS) was the main institution dealing with its cultural diplomacy. Japan was therefore the only country in Asia with institutionalised cultural diplomacy before the Second World War, copying German, US and British experiences to deal with its international image.

Initially, the KBS was concerned about the declining image of Japan in the USA and Europe, which was related to the increasing threat and military expansion. Books on Japanese art, gardens, and other aspects of traditional culture and history were therefore published and famous poets and philosophers were dispatched to lecture in these countries (Matsumura 2002, 275). During the war, the activities of the KBS and Japanese propaganda were mainly directed towards East Asian nations, i.e. within the Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (大東亜共栄圏 *daitōa kyōei-ken*) with the aim of turning them into ‘citizens loyal to the Emperor’ (皇民化 *kōminka*) in the case of the parts of the Japanese Empire or convincing them of the mighty power of Japan in the case of the nations to be conquered.

Just after the war, the functions of the KBS were cut and its staff and budget decreased by two-thirds (Vyas 2008); it was hardly enough for existence. This cultural diplomacy vacuum was absolutely understandable in the context of the occupation forces’ overall policy in 1945–52, which was one of trying to eradicate the nationalistic and imperialistic past. Even the very term culture (or *bunka*) was considered somehow dangerous. Moreover, the country’s economy was destroyed during the war, and it was much more important to accumulate the resources for survival and rebuilding infrastructure than for costly and shiny cultural exchange.

This was a period, however, when Japan faced one of the most important image crises in its history, when anti-Japanese sentiments were prevalent in all strategically important regions. At the end of the war, Japan was treated as a coloniser or the main enemy in the USA, Australia, China, Korea, and Southeast Asian nations. Despite this, Japan’s efforts to deal with this crisis were limited. Its possibility to exploit cultural diplomacy was almost zero, and its information policy was radically restricted as well. Japan therefore had to find other, indirect, ways to deal with the crisis, which it successfully managed by increasing its international contribution.

In fact, during the post-occupation period that started in 1953 when the Cold War began and when the ‘reverse course’ was being implemented in Japanese politics, Japanese cultural diplomacy experienced a slight revival. The budget of the KBS increased again and Japan started to participate in some international cultural exchange activities (Hirano 2005, 12), joining various international structures that

allowed it to intensify its international exchange. For example, in 1955 (after an 11-year gap), the Takarazuka's overseas performances were re-started and targeted the USA, Canada, and Western Europe (Kitamura 2011, 46–7). Remarkably, the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 was a very important tool that helped to improve Japan's image.

Even after 1953 however, cultural diplomacy was still not clearly emphasised or openly declared. The promotion of Japanese culture abroad still faced controversial attitudes and critics, which handicapped its implementation. Moreover, after signing the controversial US–Japan security treaties of 1951 and 1960, Japan was quite confident in its partner, developing a virtual myth of security. This, indeed, did not increase its self-dependence in international affairs or inspire any activities to help develop or manage its image (Bedeski 1990). Thus, even after its economic problems were solved and Japan again had enough resources for cultural diplomacy and even after formal restrictions became much looser, Japan's cultural diplomacy did not experience any remarkable upturn, which was delayed until the 1970s.

The second stage of development: the first wave of 1972–1989

The elimination of the aforementioned reasons restricting the development of Japan's cultural diplomacy in 1945–72 can explain why Japan suddenly started to pay much more attention to these practices in the 1970s. First, the Nixon scandal of 1971–72 and the oil crisis of 1973 ruined the myth of virtual safety. The historical visit of President Nixon to the People's Republic of China, unexpected for Japan, disrupted the established order of the Cold War and caused reasonable doubts regarding the USA as a stable and reliable partner. In other words, after these shocks, Japan was forced to become much more self-reliant on the international stage and to take care of itself.

In addition, the challenges for Japan in the international community were drastically increasing. Japan's economic success and even expansionism (mainly towards Southeast Asian countries in the 1960s) started the re-appearance of anti-Japanese sentiments in countries where it had been temporarily drowned out by their domestic problems. Consequently, during the 1960s, the first diplomatic clashes between Japan and Southeast Asian countries began. One of the biggest among them was during Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka's visit to Indonesia and Thailand. Moreover, since the 1970s, trade friction between Japan and the USA and Western European countries started increasing as well, negatively affecting Japan's image in the West. Japan was competing with the USA (notably in the car market), which inspired the re-emergence of the discourses of 'yellow peril' and aggressive Japanese in Western countries (Koma 2009). These frictions even accelerated in the 1980s during the emerging bubble economy phenomenon. After the famous Plaza Accord of

1985, the Japanese yen's value in relation to the US dollar doubled almost overnight, and Japan suddenly became the most expensive country in the world. Society was caught by the arrogant spirit of *kaneamari* (金余り), the feeling that Japan could purchase anything: paintings by Van Gogh, or even the Rockefeller Center in the centre of New York.

In addition, one more discourse about Japan appeared during these decades. Japan started to be represented (and perceived) not only as an aggressive competitor or expansionist, but also as a 'one-dimensional economic power' (Nye 2008, 10) or even a faceless country without culture. These images were inspired by the fast consolidation, uniformity, and egalitarian nature of society and the overall direction towards mass production and economic growth. The Japanese were represented as workaholic robots living in small spaces (*usagi-goya*) and not having quality of life (Katzenstein 2002).

The aforementioned challenges created the context within which Japanese cultural diplomacy developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s. They inspired the strategic rebirth and the first wave of Japan's cultural diplomacy. The symbolic date came in 1972, when a new institution, the Japan Foundation, was created. Its establishment was officially treated as an absolutely new step in Japan's cultural diplomacy, but its relationships with the aforementioned KBS cannot be denied. In the same year, the KBS was abolished, and the Japan Foundation inherited the majority of its staff and overseas missions in Rome, Cologne, New York and London (Vyas 2008). Before establishment, the Japanese government comprehensively researched the activities of existing cultural diplomacy institutions, such as the British Council and Alliance Française. Correspondingly, it later became a model from which other similar institutions in South Korea (the Korea Foundation) and the Republic of China (the Chiang Ching Kuo Foundation) were established.

Mechanisms of cultural diplomacy during this stage were strategically oriented towards the most important objects: the Western countries and Southeast Asia (Matsumura 2002). Solving the increasing international challenges, or to be more precise, to create favourable conditions for Japanese companies to conduct international expansion, was the main goal. It was expected to diminish friction with foreign companies and countries occurring during this process. Thus, beginning in the 1970s, cultural diplomacy became, in the words of Katzenstein, a 'lubricant' in international relations, especially from the economic point of view (2002).

Traditional aspects of Japanese culture constituted the absolute majority within Japan's cultural diplomacy during this stage, and there were no government attempts to exploit or support the modern aspects of Japanese culture (although manga, anime, and other genres were of considerable importance in the everyday lives of the Japanese people). The

government mainly concentrated on exporting traditional aspects of Japanese culture, embodied in Japanese theatre, the tea ceremony, calligraphy, and the visual arts.

This choice was directly related to the aforementioned function of lubrication: ‘exotic’, ‘non-Western’, ‘absolutely different’ or even ‘abnormal’ Japanese traditional culture was considered an effective tool. On one hand, the nice and colourful culture showed that Japan was not only an odourless and faceless ‘economic animal’. Moreover, beneath the veneer there were some unpleasant issues relating to Japan that were occurring in the international community. On the other hand, emphasis on the otherness of the Japanese people could explain and justify the controversial actions of Japan or avoid some international pressure, for example increase imports to Japan. These were the decades when *Nihonjinron* was developing quickly (Aoki 1990), proposing discourses such as ‘Japanese intestines are different’ (therefore Japanese people cannot eat or import Western food), ‘Japanese soil is different’ (therefore, construction materials should be produced in Japan), etc.

The peak of the cultural diplomacy wave occurred in the 1980s, coinciding with the *kokusaika* (国際化) strategy officially announced by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1984. Expressing concern that Japan was still lagging behind in the field of cultural exchange in comparison with other economically developed countries, governmental efforts were concentrated to improve the situation. This trend was quantitatively reflected in the budget: during the short period of 1986–91, the budget of the Japan Foundation almost tripled, reaching 20 billion JPY annually (Fig. 2). This golden age of Japan’s cultural diplomacy is described as follows by one informant who was responsible during that time for MOFA’s finances: ‘during that time international cultural exchange was one of three pillars of foreign policy ... at that time we had a bigger budget... At that time we could afford a lot because it was really the end of the bubble economy’ (Int. no. 12).

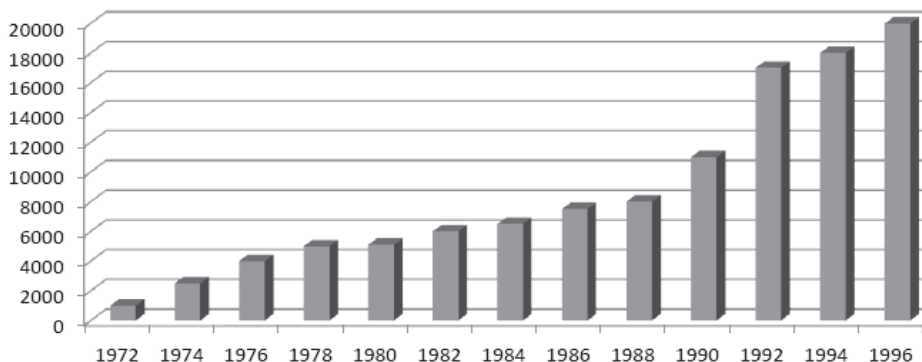


Fig. 2. Increase in the Japan Foundation budget in 1972–94

The importance of *kokusaika* cannot be overestimated in the history of Japan's cultural diplomacy. Throughout this period, financial, organisational, human, and other resources were strategically concentrated and directed towards particular aims (Kaneko 2007, 194). At this time, Southeast Asian and Western countries were strongly affected by Japan's cultural diplomacy activities. It was the period when among Western and Southeast Asian societies Japan finally established a positive image as a country with rich cultural traditions. In spite of frictions occurring in the government and business levels, and in spite of emerging negative discourses in the mass media, the overall positive perception of Japan even increased, as shown by the case of the USA. For instance, US opinion polls show that in the 1970s Japan was considered a reliable partner by 45.8% of the population, while in the 1980s and 1990s this proportion increased to 51.8% (MOFA2, appendix no. 6).

The third stage of development: the lost decade of 1989–2001

The turmoil of 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and in Japan coincided with the ascension to the throne of the present emperor and hence the start of the new, Heisei, era. Moreover, it coincided with the burst of the economic bubble, leading the country to overall crisis in the areas of the economy, internal politics, and international relations. The fall in prices, mass redundancies, and the unsuccessful efforts of many in the younger generation to find a job shaped the entire decade of the 1990s, giving it the name of the lost decade.

During this stage Japan's cultural diplomacy underwent ambivalent transitional processes that led to the second wave of cultural diplomacy in the 2000s. On one hand, processes started in the 1980s continued by inertia. For example, the JF's budget continued to grow until 1996, when it started to decrease. This decrease is still felt now, since even after stabilisation, the budget has not yet again reached the level of 1996, fluctuating at around 16 billion JPY per year.

At the strategic level, the decade was marked by diminished government attention to cultural diplomacy. Paradoxically, it was in the 1990s that Japanese culture became more and more popular around the world. The increasing popularity of the traditional aspects of Japanese culture is completely explainable by the retarded effect of the public diplomacy of the 1980s: it is quite usual in communication practices that the effect comes slightly after the practices are implemented. The interesting fact is however that this popularity was mainly expressed by the modern aspects of Japanese culture (or even sub-culture) that had not been promoted by the government in the earlier phase.

In spite of this, the popularity of modern Japanese culture, such as the content industry (manga, anime, computer games, cinema, J-pop, etc.) and so-called ‘life culture’ (生活文化 *seikatsu bunka*) embodied in fashion, food, and other aspects of daily life, sharply increased both in East Asia (Nakano 2002) and in the West (Hoshibe 2009). In just 10 years, Japan evolved into an important global cultural actor (Nye 2007), in some fields even able to compete with the USA, the world’s major global actor in popular culture. This phenomenon became known as Japan Cool or Cool Japan, imitating the existing phrase Cool Britannia. One strategic document even draws parallels to the Japonaiserie of the 19th century, stating: ‘the situation, when this Japan-origin modern culture attracts worldwide attention, could be called the rebirth of Japonism. However, its influence is not confined within the notion of high culture, but expands towards the other levels of human life, like food culture, design, fashion, popular music’ (MEXT2, 1).

It is hard to answer clearly why this phenomenon emerged and more thorough research still needs to be done for clarification of the exact reasons. However, it must be emphasised that throughout this decade the Japanese government strategically kept the earlier line of promoting traditional culture, disregarding the successful cases of the new culture. The result was that during this decade, the hidden ‘soft power’ of Japan’s cultural industries (*kontentsu*) was still not understood (KANTEI1, 2) and the products of the cultural industries were mainly oriented towards the domestic market, i.e. there was no intention to export this culture (ibid., 4).

The fourth stage of development: the second wave since 2001

The rebirth, or the second wave, of Japan’s cultural diplomacy began c. 2001 with Junichiro Koizumi coming to power. After this year, a clear intensification in activities and newly increasing tasks for Japan’s cultural diplomacy are noticeable. Especially starting in 2003, cultural diplomacy notably became one of the highest priority activities, gradually moving from the periphery towards the centre of Japan’s foreign policy. During the short period of 2003–9, many new institutions (temporary or permanent) were established to deal with cultural diplomacy tasks, and many new strategic documents were issued (Fig. 3).

One tendency that can be observed from this set of new institutions and strategic documents is the gradual expansion of the activities of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (part of MEXT) into the field of cultural diplomacy. Before this stage, the activities of the agency had mainly been concentrated on preservation of Japanese cultural heritage and promotion of the understanding of Japanese culture within Japanese society, i.e. mainly domestic audiences (interview no. 7). Starting in the

INSTITUTION AND PERIOD OF ACTIVITY	DOCUMENT AND YEAR OF ISSUE
MOFA: Council on the Movement of People Across Borders (2006–8)	Five Proposals to Strengthen Japan's Communication 日本の発信力強化のための5つの提言 (2007)
	The Means and System by which to Strengthen the Information Distribution of Our Country 我が国の発信力強化のための施策と体制 ～「日本」の理解者とファンを増やすために～ (2008)
MEXT (ACA): Office for International Cultural Exchange (since 2001)	-
MEXT (ACA): Advisory Group on International Cultural Exchange (2002–3)	About the Future Promotion of International Cultural Exchange (2003)
MEXT (ACA): Council for Cultural Promotion Strategy (2003–9)	About Means for the Distribution of Culture with the Aim of Increasing the Understanding of and Interest in Japanese Culture 日本文化への理解と関心を高めるための文化発信の取組について (2009)
PMC: Council for the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy (2004–5)	Creating Japan, the Peaceful Country of Cultural Exchange 「文化交流の平和国家」 日本の創造を (2005)

Fig. 3. New institutions of cultural diplomacy and strategic documents in 2001–9

1980s, under the wave of *kokusaika*, the agency gradually started programmes in the field of international cultural cooperation and cultural exchange. Strategically coordinated and institutionalised cultural diplomacy was started only in 2001 with the establishment of the Office for International Cultural Exchange, however. This development of the ACA made it an important competitor with the Japan Foundation and seriously started questioning the hegemony of the latter. Japan's current cultural diplomacy is therefore mainly conducted by both MEXT (ACA) and MOFA (JF) affiliated institutions. This model of division of cultural diplomacy by several governmental actors can be observed in other countries as well. For instance, the cultural diplomacy of the People's Republic of China is mainly conducted by the Confucius Institute, which is under the supervision of the Department of Education¹ (教育部 *Jiàoyùbù*); in addition there is the very active Department of Culture (文化部 *Wenhuabù*), which promotes different cultural exchange programmes (Yoo, 2008).

The increasing number of institutions and strategic documents, sometimes even contradicting each other, makes Japan's 21st century cultural diplomacy slightly

¹ In the PRC, department is equal to ministry.

chaotic. It however reflects the tendency that both cultural and public diplomacy are becoming more and more intensive and are gradually moving from the periphery of foreign policy towards the centre. This trend is reflected in the documents emphasising the importance of public diplomacy (KANTEI2, 3), and it is declared as one of the most important preconditions for the successful development of Japan: 'It is an essential and vitally important task for our country to strengthen the spread [of information] towards foreign countries' (MOFA2, 3). Public diplomacy is understood as an important means for Japan to develop stable economic activities, increase its presence in international politics, and create stable international conditions favourable to Japan (KANTEI2, 6). Moreover, cultural exchange is treated as an important factor for Japan's international security (*ibid.*, 5). Particular inspiration for Japan is the increasing competition with China, and the PRC's very aggressive public and cultural diplomacy, which threatens Japan's already established positions in the international community. The MOFA's strategic document, issued in 2008, expresses dismay that the positive image created by Japan through its international contribution to world peace and the Asian economy could be diminished. Thus, in the context of increasing globalisation, Japanese diplomacy has had to adapt itself to the changes in the world order (MOFA2, 3).

The increasing importance of public diplomacy reflects worldwide trends. As, according to Nye, co-opting as a means of solving problems in the international community is becoming more and more important, the importance of public diplomacy is increasing as well. Melissen (2007, xviii) argues that public diplomacy is notably moving towards the centre of foreign policy, and this is reflected in the changing attitude towards these practices. Until the end of the Cold War, public diplomacy was usually understood as quasi-secret affair, not discussed openly and related to the notion of propaganda (in a negative connotation) and even intelligence. Statements that the country was taking care of cultivating its image or was considering its situation in the world were usually treated in a negative way. Both public diplomacy and country branding, even if surrounded by particular criticism, are however treated more positively today. There is growing understanding that countries should promote themselves in the increasingly competitive world and improve the ways they are perceived. Moreover, especially in the case of small or new countries, public diplomacy is understood as a kind of panacea to develop the country's economy, culture, and tourism industry; to solve international problems; and even to strengthen national identity (*ibid.*, 8). In some cases, countries are even blamed for being too passive in public diplomacy and the sphere of country branding. In the 21st century, public diplomacy tasks and activities are more open to society and much more widely discussed.

During this phase, a clear emphasis on the modern aspects of Japanese culture and the need to rationally exploit them was finally recognised at the strategic level. The symbolic turning point in this regard was an article by McGray in *Foreign Policy*, 'Japan's Gross National Cool' (McGray 2002), which attracted the attention of the world and of the Japanese government. In 2003 the Task Force on Content was established in order to concentrate on the issues surrounding the exploitation of the content industry as an important tool of Japan's cultural diplomacy (KANTEI1). This task force was included in a wider policy of creating an intellectual property-based nation (知財立国 *chizai rikkoku*), as announced by Koizumi in 2002 (Dinie 2008, 211–19). Later, in 2006, Abe, in his first speech to the Japanese Diet as prime minister, called for a Japanese cultural industry strategy promoting everything from film to cuisine, constituting a sort of massive global re-branding campaign (Bremner 2007).

This change in the content of cultural diplomacy was caused by several factors. First, the content industry had by that time become very profitable, making at least 20 billion USD profit for the country (Bremner 2007). The government therefore had to pay attention to this industry's benefits for the country's economy. Second, the main leaders (prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs) at that point in time, including Koizumi, Aso, and Abe, were personally fans of Japan's popular culture (especially of manga), having grown up after World War II, when manga gradually emerged as an important part of Japanese daily life. As one respondent states, 'manga and anime are really part of our life. I mean, for people less than 55 or 50 years old, we have grown up with manga and anime' (interview no. 12). And finally, Japan was facing harsh international competition in this field. Over this period, the South Korean *Hallyu* (韓流) phenomenon, related to Korean popular culture (TV dramas, cinema, K-pop, etc.), became hugely successful in East Asia and later worldwide (Choi 2005). Korean creative industries, highly subsidised by the government, were known under the name 'strategic industry of a 21st century type country' (KANTEI3, 2). These governmental efforts had a very positive impact on improving the worldwide image of Korea and eventually increased Korea's exports and the number of tourists to Korea (ibid., 2). In a very similar way, the governments of Great Britain (Cool Britain), France (Digital France 2012), and other countries were also strategically exploiting popular (modern) culture (ibid., 2) to improve their images abroad.

Conclusion

Until the end of the 20th century, and especially during the first wave of the 1970s–80s, Japanese cultural diplomacy mainly concentrated on exploitation of the so-called traditional aspects of Japanese culture, represented by traditional arts and philosophy, because they helped to effectively emphasise the *otherness* of Japan and

to achieve the effect of direct lubrication of international relations. Although during the last decade of the 20th century the modern aspects of Japanese culture (or popular culture of manga, anime, J-pop, cinema, and contemporary ‘life culture’) became more and more popular worldwide, the government did not understand the hidden power of this culture and made no effort to exploit it. The first decade of the 21st century however saw the official and strategic inclusion of modern cultural aspects into Japan’s public diplomacy agenda. Since then, Japan has been intentionally and strategically introducing itself as the country of manga, anime, otaku, cosplay, and fashion subcultures. These new popular culture discourses complement, if not surpass, the traditional ones.

Abbreviations

- ACA — Agency for Cultural Affairs (文化庁 *Bunka-chō*)
 JF — Japan Foundation (国際交流基金 *Kokusai Kōryū Kikin*)
 KBS — Society for International Cultural Relations (国際文化振興会 *Kokusai Bunka Shinkō-kai*)
 MEXT — Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (文部科学省 *Monbu Kagaku-shō*)
 MOFA — Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外務省 *Gaimu-shō*)
 PMC — Cabinet Secretariat (内閣官房 *Naikaku Kanbō*, alternative name 首相官邸 *Shushō Kantei*)

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