

Japan's New Public Diplomacy: *Coolness* in Foreign Policy Objectives

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Abstract

As the concept of *soft power* has gained greater currency worldwide, more countries have redefined their public diplomacy (PD) programs to take it into consideration. In line with this trend, Japan embarked on a new PD paradigm based on its popular culture in 2004. What does the new PD provide? How well has the program been serving Japan's diplomatic goals? To gain a better understanding of the answers to these questions, this paper examines official documents, speeches by political leaders and the results of separate interviews with relevant government officials. Although the program is likely to attract some degree of overseas attention, this study identifies a specific aspect related to Japan's soft power that is not currently being addressed; that is, its failure to deal with the residual historical issues involving its former adversaries. Furthermore, while it also briefly discusses the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster of March 2011, it argues that additional effort in this area is required for Japan to become "cool" in real terms, which will be necessary if Japan is to convince the international community that it is ready for an international leadership role.

In the 21st century, increasing numbers of countries have become interested in deploying soft power. The term, originally coined by Joseph S Nye (1990), has increasingly penetrated the consciousness of nations worldwide. Indeed, many powerful countries have begun to redefine their diplomacy explicitly using public diplomacy (PD), even though they have long been engaged in similar diplomatic activities before such activities were called PD. Japan is no exception to this trend. Japan explicitly refers to the concept of soft power in its Diplomatic Bluebook in 2004, and has embarked upon a new PD program known as "Cool Japan", with a focus on pop culture.

Government enthusiasm for enhancing soft power through pop-culture-centered PD has been manifest in Japan for some time. For instance, *Gaikō Fōramu* (Diplomatic Forum), the

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monthly magazine on diplomacy published by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), has featured articles on the topics of pop culture and cultural diplomacy in several issues (*Gaikō Fōramu* 1994; 2003). After the magazine was renamed *Gaikō* (Diplomacy), it published a special issue focusing on the theme of Japanese soft power and cultural diplomacy (*Gaikō* 2010). Additionally, the Japan Foundation, which works closely with MOFA, conducted a comprehensive survey on various cultural exchange organizations and programs in Western countries (Japan Foundation 2003), and the 2004 MOFA structural reforms included the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Department, aimed at raising Japan's international image by using prevailing Japanese popular cultural themes as soft power resources. These initial signs of policy evolution aimed at increased employment of PD to boost Japan's soft power have garnered the attention of numerous domestic and international observers, whether or not they agree with the idea (McGray 2002; Kitano 2003; Leheny 2006; Kaneko and Kitano 2007; Watanabe 2008).

Since PD is one method of increasing soft power, its usage posits certain foreign policy goals and diplomatic outcomes. But what policy outcomes does Japan want to achieve by strengthening its soft power through PD? Is Japan's current PD effective in reaching its stated outcomes? Can it create a "cool" Japan in the true sense of the word? These are the primary questions this study attempts to answer, primarily through the examination of numerous published policy documents and speeches by political leaders that address those topics. It also examines the establishment of one of the principal projects of this program, the Japan Creative Centre (JCC) in Singapore. More specifically, this paper identifies the priorities of Japan's foreign policy objectives by analyzing how its new PD directions are presented and justified, speeches by political leaders at various public events that reveal Japan's strategic aims, and through separate interviews with governmental officials that were conducted to obtain background information and clarify political contexts. The study also outlines the JCC project to illustrate the objectives of the "Cool Japan" program. It is believed that by comparing the stated diplomatic aims with the nature and effectiveness of the PD program created to achieve those purposes, the current deficiencies in the program can be identified. Furthermore, this study also looks into the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake/tsunami of March 11, 2011 and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accidents, as they can reasonably be expected to represent the first prominent challenge to Japan's new PD, and also because they are bound to have long-lasting impacts on Japan's image. Thus, this study outlines the PD activities relating the incidents and discusses their preliminary influence on Japan's image.

While the researcher is aware that non-government organizations (NGOs), Japanese companies operating worldwide (such as Toyota and Sony), and other PD players are

unquestionably important promoters of Japan's international image, the current study focuses primarily on *governmental* policies, institutions and PD practices; the actions of other actors will be left for separate studies.

Tokyo's New Pop Culture-Centered PD

Over the years, policymakers in numerous countries have worked hard to manage the perceptions held by people in other countries regarding their own. European countries, in particular, have a centuries-long tradition of promoting their values and culture. The *Alliance Française*, for example, was established in the late 19th century to promote French language and culture. During World War II, selling a nation's ideas and culture became a more systematic form of propaganda, and was extensively utilized by various governments, including Japan. After the war, the promotional activities of a nation that were geared towards enhancing its image and ideas became referred to as its "public diplomacy". This term, originally coined by Edmund Gullion in 1965, has been further defined as "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies" (Tuch 1990: 3).

Major governments have been deploying PD through various measures and organizations. For example, the Voice of America (VOA) was created by the US in 1942 to counter the effects of Nazi propaganda during the war, and continues to engage in PD even today (Manheim 1993: 5). The defeated powers in World War II, Japan and Germany, have also established specialized institutes for cultural promotion. For example, then-divided West Germany set up the Goethe Institute in 1951 to spread German culture and language, while postwar Japan established the Japan Foundation in 1972, under the supervision of MOFA, to promote cultural exchanges with other countries.

In this manner, various PD practices precede the current idea of "soft power," which was coined by Joseph S. Nye (Nye 1990). Unlike hard power, PD induces others to desire the same outcomes that you desire; it "co-opts people rather than coerces them" (Nye 2004: 5). The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 led the US and other countries to realize the significance of this soft dimension of power when applied to and by nations, thus stimulating them to restructure their PD programs while drawing on the soft power concept.

As the concept of soft power has grown to a focus of attention worldwide, and because the idea of PD is increasingly employed by nation states, Tokyo has also set out to adopt this approach. Although the nation has always been engaged in foreign public relations, Japan first adopted the term PD in 2004 (Diplomatic Bluebook 2005: 294). Subsequently, MOFA carried

out structural reforms, in which (along with some other organizational changes) the Public Diplomacy Department was established within the Minister's Secretariat in August 2004. With two divisions, namely, the Public Diplomacy Planning and Cultural Affairs Divisions, this department aims at combining "public relations and cultural exchange in a more systematic way, and provides a structure that enables cooperation between the public and private sectors" (Diplomatic Bluebook 2005: 207). Previously, the ministry had separate units for external public relations and cultural exchange, so the integration of these into the newly established PD Department signifies a new strategy towards enhancing Japan's soft power through the coordination of international public relations and cultural exchanges.

What has or has not changed in Japan's PD since the launch of the PD Department? Referring explicitly to Nye's idea of soft power, MOFA began to emphasize various subculture themes such as Japanese comic books (known as *manga*), as well as Japanese pop music, fashion, and animation (Diplomatic Bluebook 2005: 207). This shows a new direction as the Japan Foundation had previously focused more on traditional fare such as *Noh* drama, *Kabuki* opera, *Bunraku* puppetry, *chanoyu* tea ceremony, *ikebana* flower arrangement and other quintessential aspects of Japanese culture. Furthermore, the cultural organization, which had previously been administered directly by MOFA, has become more autonomous, even though it is still connected to the ministry. In its current form, it has been and is one of the major actors of cultural diplomacy, carrying out programs and activities in the areas of arts, cultural, and intellectual exchange. It also supports individuals and institutions in the fields of Japanese language education and Japanese studies (Ogawa 2009: 272). Furthermore, in the years since its establishment, it has assumed responsibility for carrying out the PD goals set by MOFA, while also planning, organizing and executing its own programs.

New PD Programs Focusing on "Manga" and "Anime"

The new PD direction employs a variety of programs. One of the primary examples of the active use of pop culture in PD is the establishment of the 'the International MANGA Award'. According to MOFA, the award was established "to honor MANGA artists who contribute to the promotion of MANGA overseas" (MOFA 2007). This award was the idea of then Foreign Minister Taro Aso, who is well known as an enthusiastic manga reader. Aso said, "I would like for Japan, as the originator of manga, to award to the standard-bearers appearing in the world of manga all around the globe, a prize which carries real authority - the equivalent of a Nobel Prize in manga. And I hope that by receiving that prize, they will have a feeling of association with Japan" (MOFA 2006). A strong expectation towards the influence of manga is manifest in Aso's words, and four awards have been presented to date.

Japan's utilization of pop culture as its primary source of PD was also highlighted by the appointment of *Doraemon*, the beloved cat robot in the popular cartoon series of the same name, as the country's 'Anime Ambassador'. Although the appointment can be seen as a public relations gimmick, at the inauguration ceremony in March 2008, then Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura asked the character to "travel around the world to introduce Japan" (MOFA 2008). *Doraemon*, as a popular character for young people throughout Asia, was given the task of letting people around the world "know more about the positive side of Japan through Japanese anime, which are universally popular" (MOFA 2008). Komura's words also demonstrated his belief in the potential of manga to enhance Japan's soft power. A further expectation was that this 'Anime Ambassador' would attract attention to other Japanese cultural fare, such as music or high technologies, and thus promote Japan's presence all over the world.

This idea is similar to the idea of the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) Goodwill Ambassadors, who are usually celebrities such as Harry Belafonte, an American superstar singer, and Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, a renowned Japanese actress. As UNICEF uses their talents and fame to fundraise and support its mission of ensuring every child's right to health, education, equality and protection, Japan utilizes *Doraemon's* popularity to advocate Japanese culture, improve its national image, and enhance its soft power.

Japan's Regime Change and the Japan Creative Centre

The 2009 regime change from the long-governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) challenged Japan's focus on pop culture in its PD. Taro Aso, the outgoing LDP prime minister, had proposed building a national pop-art center which he envisioned as, 'the National Center for Media Art', in which foreign visitors to Japan could enjoy manga, anime and other Japanese pop culture. The plan had been harshly criticized by the DPJ, then in opposition, as a colossal waste of money at a time when government spending should be cut to reduce the nation's growing deficit. Upon assuming power, the incoming DPJ Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, shelved the plan while disparagingly referring to it a "giant manga café".

Similar plans aimed at establishing popular art centers in overseas locations were also threatened with abolition as the result of the regime change. For example, construction of the *Japan Creative Centre* (JCC), an overseas project comparable to the aforementioned national center in Tokyo, was already in progress in Singapore when the national center in Tokyo was cancelled. However, the JCC plan survived thanks to the tactical maneuvers of MOFA. Because it feared the abolishment of the JCC, MOFA persuaded then Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to demonstrate gratitude towards the planned JCC project during his visit

to Japan.² After this occurred, the matter was incorporated into a bilateral agreement reached during the Japan-Singapore summit meetings held in March and November 2007, which meant that Hatoyama could not cancel it later.

Thus, in November 2009, the JCC was inaugurated in Singapore as a base for disseminating information on Japan's culture and technologies, and is a tangible result of this new PD direction focusing on popular subculture themes. According to MOFA, the JCC is the first of its kind outside Japan, and serves as a new type of culture and information center for showcasing Japan's "now". It is expected that it will serve as a model for others in the future.

It is also expected that the Centre, whose theme is "innovation and tradition", will contribute to enhancing Japan's soft power by introducing Japanese culture such as J-pop, traditional arts and comics not only to Singaporean youth, but also to people in other Southeast Asian countries. The Centre also highlights Japan's high technology, design, cuisine, fashion, movies and animated cartoons (known as *anime*). JCC facilities include (i) a multi-purpose Hall with an approximate capacity of 50 seats; (ii) an E-Library equipped with computers and audio-visual devices; and (iii) an exhibition Space dedicated to exhibits and displays (JCC 2011).

The former Japanese Ambassador to Singapore, Makoto Yamanaka, said in a speech in June 2011 that the Centre would provide excellent opportunities for Singaporeans and other people in Southeast Asian countries to become more familiar with Japan's modern technologies, traditional culture and the Japanese language³. The Ambassador referred to an opinion poll result as one of the factors that pushed him to advance the JCC project; he was very much surprised with the result of the opinion polls conducted by the MOFA that only four percent of Singaporeans thought Japan was an important partner, while 58 percent thought China was important (MOFA 2008a). Yamanaka believes that, even though economic relations between Japan and Southeast Asia are very strong, and despite the fact that J-pop, Japanese animated cartoons and J-art are very popular in the region, more effort is needed to ensure that people in the region can not only enjoy Japanese modern and traditional culture, but also can become more familiar with Japan's politics, business culture, new technologies and universities.

Why Subcultures?

Naturally, the question arises of why Japan now cares about popular culture as a diplomatic resource. The spread of Japan's popular culture in Asia had already begun to capture intellectual attention in Japan in the 1990s. Indeed, some studies depicted Japan's subculture as winning

² Interviews with MOFA officials on June 13, 2011.

³ Ambassador Makoto Yamanaka's speech "At the Frontline of Public Diplomacy: Singapore and Japan Creative Centre" presented at Nagoya University on June 24, 2011. Summary in *Media and Society* Vol. 4, 2012, Graduate School of Languages and Cultures at Nagoya University, pp. 75-91.

multitudes of fans among the middle class in Asia and influencing middle-class lifestyles (Honda 1994: 74). Pop culture was argued as becoming “a major asset for Japan’s international relations”, as the growing middle-class in Asia became more familiar with “Japan’s modern, liberated face” through Japanese comics, TV dramas, and J-pop.

In the early 2000s, Japan’s growing global cultural influence began capturing more attention from non-Japanese observers, and some have connected the trend with Japanese soft power, pointing out Japan’s potential to become a cultural ‘superpower’, in place of the economic preeminence it held during the 1980s (McGray 2002). Coining the term “Gross National Cool”, McGray argues that, “Japan has become one of a handful of perfect globalization nations (along with the United States)” in cultural terms, and that “Japan’s growing cultural presence has created a mighty engine of national cool (McGray 2002: 53)”. Although he admits that it is impossible to estimate “national cool” in relative amounts, he also argues that “commercial trends and products”, as well as skills to produce them, “can serve political and economic ends” (McGray 2002: 53). McGray strengthened his argument by referring to Nye: “There is an element of triviality and fad in popular behavior, but it is also true that a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and to affect the preferences of others” (Nye 1990).

Some observers point out that this McGray’s article is a major reason behind the excitement towards recent pop culture diplomacy in Japan. Leheny attributes Japanese excitement towards its popular culture as stemming from this article. As he sees it, Japan began to utilize pop culture as a soft power resource only after McGray’s article was published, even though the term “soft power” had been known in Japan long before it appeared (Leheny 2006). Approval from an “American” intellectual is argued to be “extraordinarily important to Japanese discussion of the role of Japanese popular culture” (Leheny 2006: 221). Although his claim was intentionally sarcastic and somewhat stereotypical, there may be a certain amount of truth to it.

Whether McGray’s article gave it fresh impetus or not, Japan’s enthusiasm for pop culture diplomacy has continued to grow. On one hand, the reasons behind this eagerness to utilize popular culture as a soft power resource are manifest in the language of Japanese leaders. During his tenure as Foreign Minister, Aso aptly described why Japan has deployed its popular culture as an additional resource to its PD when he said, “The reason for this is that the world has become increasingly democratized. That is, public opinion enjoys much greater influence on diplomacy than before. ... What we have now is an era in which diplomacy at the national level is affected dramatically by the climate of opinion arising from the average person. And that is exactly why we want pop culture, which is so effective in penetrating throughout the

general public, to be our ally in diplomacy” (MOFA 2006).

On the other hand, intellectual attention towards cultural diplomacy has expanded as well. Some see potential for increased cultural diplomacy as overseas youth increasingly learn the Japanese language and begin exploring traditional Japanese culture after being attracted to Japanese manga and anime (Watanabe 2010: 64) and argue that Japan could utilize pop culture to establish a “Japan Brand” as a “peace-creating nation” (Watanabe 2010: 63). In another line of discussion, the export of manga and anime is considered to be one way to pull Japan out of its long recession (Sakurai 2010; Nakamura and Ono 2006). In other words, manga and anime are now discussed seriously within the framework of economic policy, in addition to foreign policy.

Japan’s Desired Diplomatic Outcomes

PD is one tool that can be used to boost soft power, and efforts aimed at the enhancement of soft power posit certain diplomatic outcomes. What does Japan aim to achieve through its new PD? Clues to its intentions can be found in the speeches of Japanese leaders, the words of diplomats, and in governmental publications.

Political leaders often unequivocally disclose the images and ideas on Japan they wish to convey. Presenting his vision entitled, “A beautiful country, Japan” in a speech to the Diet, then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe elaborated on the concept of “a country that values culture, tradition, history, and nature”, and one “that is trusted, respected, and loved in the world, and which demonstrates leadership” (Cabinet Office: 2006). He also argued the relevance of strategic PD by saying “it is quintessential for Japan to present its new ‘country identity’ for the future to the world; that is, our country’s ideals, the direction in which we should aspire, and the way in which we convey our *Japaneseness* to the world. I will gather wisdom from across Japan to implement a strategy for overseas public relations” (Cabinet Office: 2006). During his tenure as Abe’s Foreign Minister, Aso explicitly elucidated the grounds for this new PD direction as follows, “What is the image that pops into someone’s mind when they hear the name ‘Japan’? Is it a bright and positive image? Warm? Cool? The more these kinds of positive images pop up in a person’s mind, the easier it becomes for Japan to get its views across over the long term” (MOFA 2006). In this way, the Abe administration explicitly demonstrated its interest and eagerness towards PD. In contrast, neither the successive Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda nor Aso himself (when he followed Fukuda as prime minister) mentioned PD in their speeches to the Diet.

Some PD Department diplomats are also voluble regarding the policy. For example, during his tenure as the department’s first director general, Seiichi Kondō, who serves as the

current Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, disclosed his belief that many people in developing countries “want to know the secret of how Japan, as a non-Western country, was able to modernize while preserving its own traditions” (Kondō 2004: 32). In his view, while Japan is trying to disseminate its culture, the international community is simultaneously “looking for a value system that will complement Western civilization” (Kondō 2004: 34). This contrasts with another diplomat’s skeptical view that there is no consensus within Japan on “what elements of the political ideas and the spirit gained through Japan’s own experience in modern times should be presented to other countries as worthy of their adoption” or as sources of soft power (Ogura 2004: 29). In contrast, Kenjirō Monji, who succeeded Kondō as the director General of the PD Department, regards pop culture as having great potential to serve as a starting point to introduce Japanese culture to others (Monji 2009: 44). Japanese culture, as he sees it, has the strength “to incorporate various new elements, including ideas from abroad, while [remaining] rooted in tradition” and is thus “exceptionally diverse” (Monji 2009: 45). According to his understanding, the spirit of harmony (*wa*), and the idea of coexistence (*kyōsei*) with nature, are two aspects of the Japanese value system, and he argues that it is important for Japan “to transmit [these] Japanese ideas and engage in international cultural exchange” (Monji 2009: 45). From these words, one can see that Japan’s PD aims to convey its culture and the value system through the attractiveness of its pop culture.

But precisely what are the diplomatic outcomes Japan hopes to attain? When the new direction of PD was started, its *Diplomatic Bluebook 2005* listed two points as future challenges for Japanese diplomacy: “Developing Japanese Ways to Make an International Contribution and gaining Permanent Membership on the UN Security Council” (Bluebook 2005: 6). By making timely international contributions in a distinctly Japanese way, Japan seeks to “demonstrate more leadership in its international contribution than it had in the past and maintain and enhance the international status it has earned thus far” (Bluebook 2005: 6). Those objectives remain unchanged.

To summarize, Japan intends to disseminate an image of a peaceful Japan along with Japanese cultural values that would be useful to other countries. By so doing, it aims to enhance its soft power in ways that would enable it to assume a greater leadership role in the international community.

Serving Its Foreign Policy Objectives?

With the policy objectives clear, this paper will now discuss how Tokyo could harness the soft power gained under its new PD, including the JCC and the dissemination of pop culture, to realize these objectives. This question, however, immediately encounters methodological

difficulties. First, when should one examine the effects of these policies? As soft-power resources are presumed to work indirectly, they could take years to produce the desired outcomes. As such, it would still be too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this newly employed direction on PD policy, which was first explicitly adopted in 2004. Moreover, no consensus has been reached in terms of how to measure the effects of cultural programs in Japan, even though positive attention from foreign media, as well as public opinion surveys, have long been employed to measure the impression of other countries towards Japan.

In regard to foreign media attention, one can measure the short-term effects quantitatively – the more favorable media coverage, the more successful the PD. In this sense, one can say that the new PD program has been successful to some extent because some US media, such as the *Washington Post* and *Christian Science Monitor*, have devoted coverage to the program (Faiola 2003; Newcomb 2008a, 2008b). However, this kind of short-term media attention does not necessarily bring about long-term enhancements to soft power.

In regards to public opinion surveys, these fluctuate largely, especially when the country in question has territorial or other disputes with Japan. This is particularly true in the cases of China and South Korea, according to several MOFA officials.⁴ In South Korea, for instance, officials suggest that public opinion survey results differ greatly when, for example, tensions flare over the territorial issue surrounding Takeshima Island (known as *Dokdo* in South Korea). The same is true with China in the case of the Senkaku Islands (known as Diaoyu Islands in China). Such territorial issues inflame antipathy towards Japan, so it is hard to obtain objective data from public opinion surveys taken at such times. Furthermore, public opinion surveys are useful for obtaining objective data in democratic states, but are less reliable in nations where governments might be tempted to manipulate the data or the answers of people responding to the survey. This problem applies to data obtained from China. Consequently, MOFA officials have still not found effective tools through which they can measure the effectiveness of PD programs, even though as Japan's closest neighbors, China and South Korea are the countries where most PD efforts are currently being directed.

Partly because of these problems, opinion poll surveys on Japan were conducted in only six ASEAN countries by MOFA in February and March 2008. To the relief of the government, Japan's image in these countries proved to be highly positive (MOFA 2008a). When combined, the survey results indicated that 93 percent of respondents in Southeast Asia have a positive image towards Japan, combining with 44 percent who believe Japan is "trustworthy", and a further 49 percent who believe it is "trustworthy with some reservations". The top five images of Japan are of "a technologically-advanced country (86 percent)", "an economically-advanced

⁴ Interviews with MOFA officials on June 13, 2011.

country (79 percent)", "a country with high standard-of-living (75 percent)", "a country with an interesting culture (69 percent)", and "a country with beautiful natural scenery (69 percent)". Additionally, 78 percent of the respondents who indicated their familiarity with the UN Security Council agreed with the idea that Japan should become a permanent member. However, as these surveys were conducted about four years after the establishment of the PD Department as part of MOFA's structural reforms, and as they did not provide a measurement for chronological comparisons, no empirical connection between the results and Japan's PD program can be made.

However, the abovementioned survey did produce some unsettling results in the eyes of MOFA officials.⁵ As mentioned above, when asked about important partners to their nations in current and future terms, China was regarded to be a more important partner than Japan in both. Thirty percent of respondents considered China as "an important partner for now", while 28 percent of respondents thought the same about Japan. Of even more concern to MOFA officials was the point that China was considered to be "an important partner for the future" by 33 percent of the respondents, whereas Japan was only considered important by 23 percent. When observed more closely, far more respondents in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand regard China as a more important partner than Japan, both now and in the future. More specifically, while only 25 percent of Thai respondents considered Japan "an important partner for now", 43 percent regarded China as an important partner. China attracted 57 percent of Thai respondents as a future partner, with Japan only seen as such by 19 percent. Even more worrying for MOFA officials was the case of Singapore, where Japan attracted only 5 percent interest as both a current and future partner, even though 58 percent of the Singaporeans surveyed considered China an important partner now and 48 percent believed it would be so in the future. These survey results can be seen as a warning. If Japan aspires to assume more leadership roles in Asia, additional PD efforts will be required to meet its policy objectives.

Removing the Limits to Japan's Soft Power Enhancement

In order to assume a leadership role and contribute to international society, Japan needs to ensure the citizens of foreign countries know that it has been a peaceful country under its Constitution, known as the Peace Constitution, throughout the postwar era. Can this new PD direction produce that desired policy outcome? The strategy of utilizing anime and manga as an entry point for further interest in Japan is effective, but it would be a mistake for Japan to regard the new PD policy as 'all powerful' and to expect the current overseas enthusiasm towards its pop culture to lead to unreserved support for Japan. Some observers have predicted that the

⁵ Interview with the author conducted on June 13, 2011.

popularity and enthusiasm towards Japanese popular culture would “erase the old, oppressive image” of Japan, which was created “under the influence of the negative memories Japan produced by its behavior during World War II” (Honda 1994: 78). Yet, while manga and anime are useful PD resources, it would be naive to believe that pop culture alone can erase such negative images regarding Japan’s past.

In fact, the current focus on pop culture has not seemed to help Japan directly in eradicating the limits set on its soft power. Popular culture simply does have the potential to familiarize Asia and the world with modern-day Japan, including its postwar anti-militaristic and democratic behavior. This means that the nation’s wartime conduct will not be easily overwritten.

Some intellectuals have pointed out this restriction set on Japan’s soft power. For example, Nye argues that “the Japanese government’s unwillingness to deal frankly with its record of foreign aggression in the 1930s” and “the residual suspicion that lingers in China and [South] Korea” is a limit on Japan’s soft power (Nye 2004: 87-88). Other observers are more critical – occasionally harshly so - towards Japan’s new approach. For example, Driete (1998: 167) asserts, “Although the weight of the legacy of the past will continue to ease with new Asian generations attaining leadership functions, or simply wanting to enjoy the material comfort accompanying Japan’s presence in the region, it will still cast a shadow on Japan’s political legitimacy and restrain its regional leadership”. In another line of argument, others predict outright failure of Japan’s PD. Starting with the assumption that Japan still has an image of “lacking in remorse for its past militarism”, or a “predatory and protectionist ‘economic animal’”, Lam (2007: 360) concludes, “The utility of *manga* and *anime* for Japanese foreign relations is likely to be quite limited. For every Asian enamored and entertained by these cultural products, there is probably another who finds such things to be rather infantile and frivolous, and therefore unappealing. Moreover, in a globalized world, the Asian consumer is also bombarded with multiple images and cultural products from China, South Korea, India and the West, and is unlikely to be attracted to only things Nippon”.

Discussions on Japanese attitudes toward its historical legacy and “apologies” to its former wartime adversaries are still regarded as unsettled and intellectual attention on those issues remain high (Yamazaki 2006; Breen 2007; Berger 2007; Lind 2008). Some quote the acknowledgement of the then Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhei on the issue of the so-called comfort women in 1993 as an evidence of Japan’s remorse. Additionally, the 1995 statement of the then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war - which included clear statements of apology - has often been cited as an official “apology”. Yet, countries such as China and South Korea have largely ignored these gestures

and continue to assert that Japan has not shown full remorse for its wartime actions.

While an examination of the correctness of assertions by both sides in this “apology” debate is beyond the scope of this study, such issues are relevant in studying Japan’s PD as its past actions – exaggerated or not – are utilized by other nations in order to impede Japan’s soft power growth. Although it is arguable as to whether or not Japan has been reluctant to confront its past aggressions, the fact that some influential overseas intellectuals seem to share similar sentiments with countries like China and South Korea definitely represents an issue that Japan must deal with if it seriously aims to increase its soft power. And, while Nye’s notion of soft power is widely appreciated in Japan, his statements regarding impediments to Japanese soft power enhancement that were cited earlier have mostly remained unexplored. This is significant because, while a separate discussion regarding the validity of the historical issues raised by Nye (and others) is certainly needed, any comments regarding weaknesses in its soft power by the creator of the concept deserve at least the same level of attention as the notion itself, especially if Japan is to draw on the concept of soft power, and refer explicitly to Nye in doing so.

Furthermore, both South Korea and China have found that focusing attention on Japan’s past legacy has served to increase their soft power in relative terms, even as it diminishes Japan’s – and Tokyo will eventually need to acknowledge that their strategies have been successful in damaging Japan’s national image globally. While China remains silent about its own military build-up, it has problematized the attitudes of Japan’s leaders toward history, and has repeatedly aired “concerns” and “fears” on “Japan’s possible militarism revival”.

Additionally, the political games surrounding Japanese politicians’ visits to *Yasukuni Shrine* have been repeated for some time, and have deprived Japan of soft power in the international community and the Japanese people of self-esteem. More specifically, those annual shrine visits have been successful turned into a contentious issue – and thus a negative factor to Japan’s soft power - by defining the shrine as a glorification of Japan’s past militarism, and of its failure to fully atone for it (Breen 2009). Every time a new Japanese new prime minister is elected, China and South Korea asked them not to visit the shrine. For example, after Yoshihiko Noda was elected as Japan’s new prime minister in September 2011, Xinhua, China’s official news agency, immediately warned that he should not ignore Beijing’s interests (Malcolm 2011). Its editorial demanded “Noda not to visit Yasukuni and said Tokyo must recognize China’s claim over the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea” (Malcolm 2011). Prime Minister Noda soon conceded by saying that he would not visit the shrine during his tenure. Although it is not clear whether Prime Minister Noda’s latest decision was influenced by that editorial, the chronological development of the matter can give it that appearance.

Thus, it appears that removing the confines that these residual historical issues place on

Japan's soft power through its current focus on pop culture does not appear to have been fully successful. Japan's former wartime adversaries continue to refer to past Japanese actions, and thus keep such negative images alive. Referring to Japanese experience with the US, Aso, again during his tenure as foreign minister, once argued that the former acquired a positive image towards the latter through comics and animation. He said, "Popeye and Blondie caught hold of the hearts of Japanese children and mothers in an era in which Japan was still under American occupation. Now, this means that the people of post-war Japan developed a strong infatuation with the United States, even though just a little while before Americans had been something akin to devils. I would argue that American comics had an influence that we simply cannot ignore" (MOFA 2006).

The Japanese people's drastic alteration of their perception towards America, however, happened under the American Occupation, during which the US controlled all Japanese media (as well as education). Thus, this experience cannot be directly utilized in regards to Japan's relationship with China, a nation that is not yet democratized. There, the one-party-dictatorship and media control by the government naturally set limits on the free development of the average person's preferences and public opinion. Consequently, Japan must undertake other efforts in addition to promoting the diffusion of Japanese animation in order to overcome its historical issues with such countries.

When discussing the issue of past aggression and reconciliation, observers frequently contrast the case of Germany and that of Japan. These observations tend to praise German leaders and governments for the country's reconciliation with former adversaries, while criticizing Japan for failing to come to terms with its past (Buruma 1994; Lind 2008). It is obviously not in Japan's interests to be referred to as a country that will not reconcile with its former enemies. Indeed, reconciliation undertakings similar to the ones conducted between Germany and France/Poland have recently begun between Japan and China/Korea. Such examples include joint research on controversial historical issues, and include the establishment of History Research Committees and commencement of bilateral discussions. For example, the Japan-China Joint History Research Committee met for the first time in December 2006 and a joint research report was also produced in March 2011 (Japan-China Joint History Research Report 2011). Similar efforts between Japan and South Korea began even earlier, with a report on Japanese-South Korean historical issues publicized in June 2005 (Nikkan Rekishi Kyodokenkyu Iinkai [Japan-Korea Joint History Research Committee] 2005). While such academic efforts aimed at promoting reconciliation are increasing, they are still not widely known. Additional efforts in this regard, and further global public relations strategies, appear to be necessary.

In addition to these kinds of steady and persistent endeavors, a distinct difference between German and Japanese in attempts towards reconciliation can be identified in their PD. This difference relates to the question of how Japan can show the overseas public that it is reconciling with its former adversaries (Nakamura T. 2009). The US magazine *Time*, for example, featured an article on the top 10 national apologies on the occasion of British Prime Minister David Cameron's June 2010 apology before the House of Commons for the 1972 "Bloody Sunday" killings of 14 unarmed protesters in Northern Ireland (Time 2010). Then German Chancellor Willy Brandt was ranked first for gesture of humility now known as the *Warschauer Kniefall* (Warsaw Genuflection): with the following appearing in the *Time* article: "There was perhaps no politician with a cleaner wartime record to make a public mea culpa than Willy Brandt. "...When a state visit to Poland in December 1970 coincided with a commemoration to the Jewish victims of the Warsaw Ghetto, Brandt joined in and spontaneously dropped to his knees. Brandt didn't utter a word during his *kniefall*."

In the same article, Japan was ranked the last and mentioned thus: "Postwar Japanese leaders have repeatedly gone out of their way to apologize for the crimes committed by Imperial Japan". This typical Japanese-German comparison in one of English mass media demonstrates the power that the German political leader's apology conveyed. In fact, the picture has been distributed through various kinds of mass media worldwide and has become an icon expressing German determination to deal with historical burdens in a positive way in the general public. Such images have power, making it difficult to argue against German reconciliation efforts. In other words, despite the above-mentioned slow but steady reconciliatory efforts to face historical facts, Japan lacks a powerful symbolic political gesture such as Brandt's *kniefall*. Surely, if the images created by manga and animation can be so easily spread worldwide, the obstacles that are limiting Japan's soft power would be diminished if Japan could create images of their reconciliation efforts that are similar to Brandt's, and if such images were successfully communicated to the outside world alongside its other efforts, by combining them with the current PD focused on pop culture.

The impact of Fukushima nuclear accidents on Japan's PD

Japan's PD was recently forced to face a significant challenge. On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the nation. With a magnitude 9.0, it was the most powerful known earthquake ever to have hit Japan, and one of the five most powerful earthquakes in the world since modern record keeping began in 1900. From its epicenter off the coast of Japan, the quake triggered powerful tsunamis that reached heights of up to 40.5 meters in the Tohoku region, as well as a number of nuclear accidents at three reactors of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power

Plant, resulting in evacuation zones affecting hundreds of thousands of residents. The accidents not only caused extensive damage to Japan's image as a high-tech nation, they also required Japan to communicate salient information relating the accidents skillfully to overseas publics. In that area, Japan's PD faced a serious challenge in terms of overseas information management.

Although there has been a widespread admiration for Japan's orderly response to these tragedies, and global sympathy for the thousands of victims, Japan's information management contributed to a negative perception, both domestically and internationally. The governmental communications related to the accident soon met criticism, even though the Japanese government put extra efforts in international communication related to the nuclear power plant accident issues by disseminating various direct messages to key politicians, such as then Prime Minister Naoto Kan, and by providing information in English to international media⁶. Furthermore, Japan's initial avoidance of using the word 'meltdown' and its subsequent acknowledgement of the event more than one month later, gave the unmistakable impression that the government was hiding crucial unpleasant information from the public. On top of the fact that the nuclear accidents have resulted in concerns for those expecting to travel to Japan, Japan's seemingly clumsy information management created further fears in persons making contact with its potentially contaminated products whose true natures might have been hidden or misrepresented by the government.

The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant crisis clearly showed the world that such disastrous accidents could happen even in Japan, a nation with a high-tech image. As indicated in the public opinion polls discussed earlier, prior to those accidents Japan had enjoyed a sterling reputation as a high-tech nation that was supported by a number of world-ranked manufacturers such as Toyota, Sony and others. The accidents not only created overall suspicions related to Japan's nuclear technology, they also called Japan's reputation as a high-tech nation into question.

The other side of the coin is the globally widespread admiration for Japan's resilience, perseverance and orderly response to the disasters, which resulted in neither riots nor civil disturbances. The high regard shown for these qualities was probably reflected in another national branding survey, the Country Brand Index (CBI), which was conducted after the disasters. The survey carried out by FutureBrand and BBC ranked Japan No. 4 in 2011, up two ranks from No. 6 in 2010. While visitor figures dropped significantly between March and August 2011, Japan jumped to number one in the "Tourism" dimension and moved up five places in "Quality of Life". The survey cited 'the paradox of bad news' as a potential reason for

⁶ Speech by Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Affairs, Director of Global Communications at Prime Minister's Office at the symposium on "Communication on Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Disaster" at Nagoya University in Nagoya, Japan, held on February 3, 2012.

the changes.⁷ This paradox postulates that negative news sometimes results in positive effects due to global media attention, regardless the nature of the news itself. Taken further, the survey results imply that the ongoing disaster response demonstrates that Japan could potentially develop as another PD aspect aimed at more effectively communicating information regarding the disaster to the world – and thus regain the world's trust in Japanese technology, which is one of the nation's most important soft power resources.

Conclusions

The examination of official documents, as well as speeches of Japanese leaders and interviews with diplomats, reveals that Japan has been following a long-term set of policies aimed at taking on a more leading role in the international community. Based on that objective, Japan, under the long-governing LDP, embarked on the new PD program that utilizes its pop culture such as manga and anime to showcase its attractive qualities. However, Japan's original plan to establish a national pop cultural center in Tokyo was shelved after the regime change from the LDP to the DPJ, even though a Japan Creative Centre was established in Singapore as a joint venture with the Singaporean government.

Japan also appointed the anime character *Doraemon* as the nation's cultural ambassador. This new pop-culture-focused PD effort has been successful in capturing a certain amount of foreign media attention. Indeed, Japan's subculture had already attracted attention from young people overseas before the government discovered it as a soft power resource. As such, if the government can skillfully harness such pop culture for the purpose of enhancing its soft power, it is reasonable to expect that such a strategy will serve Japan's other diplomatic objectives.

This paper argued that Japan's new PD programs alone would not be sufficient or appropriate for enhancing Japan's soft power to its full potentiality, especially if government officials believe overseas enthusiasm for Japan's pop culture is capable of overriding memories of the nation's past aggression. Japan still needs to address the residual historical issues that limit its soft power. This is particularly the case with China and South Korea, because those historical issues are effectively utilized by those countries as diplomatic cards to limit Japan's soft power while enhancing theirs⁸.

Japan's desired diplomatic outcomes include building a strong reputation as a constructive and peace-seeking nation and assuming a greater role in the international community. However

7 FutureBrand, *2011-2012 Country Brand Index*, http://www.futurebrand.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2011_2012_FB_CBI_ENG.pdf. Accessed on February 21, 2012.

8 For example, in relation to territorial issues on Takeshima Island and Senkaku Islands, South Korean foreign minister Kim Sung-hwan met Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi in New York, and said 'We agreed with the need to publicize history, I mean correct history, on the UN stage,' to South Korean reporters on 24 September 2012. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/09/25/52/0301000000AEN20120925000400315F.HTML>.

the current PD program does not seem to be providing sufficient impetus towards those goals and other strategies will be required when dealing with issues related to Japan's wartime past.

This paper also examined the impact and aftereffects of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disasters and found that even though extra efforts have been made by the government to more fully communicate information related to these incidents, the initial information management of the Japanese government failed to secure a level of overall trust and confidence, both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the PD activities related to this have not worked positively towards enhancing Japan's reputation in the region, even though some index items related to Japan's image abroad increased after the earthquakes and the related accidents. Thus, there is still a possibility that the factors related to the nation's initial unfavorable information management activities could be revised in the future.

As for the question of how "cool" Japan will be, one can argue the case for Japanese coolness in pop cultural terms. But what type or level of coolness does Japan require in order to achieve its diplomatic objective of playing a more significant role in the international community? The answer to this question lies in Japan's ability to cope with its historical issues in a strategic manner, so that the rest of the world will be convinced of the benefits of Japan in a leadership role.

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