German Public Diplomacy

The Dialogue of Cultures

Oliver Zöllner

Since 1990, the united Federal Republic of Germany has been grappling with the task of defining the country's new role in the world: is it still a giant in economic terms (the world's number three as per gross domestic product), but a dwarf in the political arena? What should Germany's currently carefully limited contributions to international military interventions (in Afghanistan and elsewhere) look like in the future? What will become of the country's recently failed aspirations towards a permanent seat on the UN Security Council? Will a united Europe be dominated by Germany, the European Union's most populous member state (82 million inhabitants), economic powerhouse, and cultural bridge between western and eastern Europe? And what is, or should be, Germany's modern identity, her image, and her message to the world?

It's a reminder of the country's grim past that Germany is often most associated with the Nazi dictatorship (1933–45), World War II, and the shoa genocide, as image surveys indicate. Other studies, undertaken in the context of nation-branding and marketing, point at the predominance of cars as the central item of association: "The extent to which Germany and automobiles are currently perceived as a single entity is really quite astonishing." These perceptions clearly are challenges for German public diplomacy which has officially been described as the "third pillar" of the country's foreign policy since the 1960s.4

Terminology and Concepts of German Public Diplomacy

The term "public diplomacy" is a relatively recent addition to political terminology in Germany and is gradually being implemented. It is used in the English original since previous German-language terms such as auswärtige Öffentlichkeitsarbeit (foreign-policy public relations) or auswärtige Kulturpolitik (foreign cultural policy) did not match the full meaning of "public diplomacy," while the straight translation öffentliche Diplomatie simply failed to catch on. To date, public diplomacy is a term that is basically confined to diplomatic and academic circles. The German Foreign Office still uses the term auswärtige Kulturpolitik alongside public diplomacy, with the latter gradually replacing the former. Published literature on the subject in the German language is rare and mainly covers US examples or draws on US theory development.5

The fuzzy terminology points at conceptions of German public diplomacy that are developing but are far from being clear-cut. The gist of the ongoing debate may be formulated as follows: presenting Germany as a modern European nation of culture and a "Land of Ideas," as the slogan of a public-private-partnership-sponsored marketing campaign asserts which seeks to promote Germany as a suitable location for business and industry:

The main message is "Germany—Land of Ideas." The wording expresses a wealth of positive arguments associated with Germany both within Germany and abroad: nation of science and culture—the land of poets and thinkers, innovative products "made in Germany."7

On top of these clearly self-congratulatory claims, engaging foreign target groups in "dialogues" is the fashionable current leitmotif of German public diplomacy and is employed by various actors:

Main Actors of German Public Diplomacy

Foreign Office

Not surprisingly, a major protagonist of German public diplomacy is the country's Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, AA) based in Berlin. The ministry's specialist department is the Directorate-General for Communication, Public Diplomacy and the Media (Abteilung für Kommunikation, Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und Medien, internally known as the "K" Department). According to their website copy, the K Department seeks to "stimulate interest in Germany, to explain German foreign and domestic policy, to provide information on and discuss developments in society, to promote understanding of our value system through dialogue and to build up lasting ties with Germany."8

The dialogue principle is given additional emphasis on a German-language web page of the AA which states that "modern public diplomacy goes beyond one-way transmission of information and stands for dialogue and discussion.... It is about reaching the hearts and minds of people." However, the "dialogue" conceptualized by the AA does not seem to be action of a discursive or communicative type as modeled by German theorist Jürgen Habermas; rather, it is seemingly strategic action "oriented to success."9 This is made obvious in a stated objective which is to promote Germany:

across the world as an economic partner, a land of culture and an attractive location for investment, education and research. "Promoting Germany" means communicating the modern, multifaceted identity of Germany. Not hiding flaws, but emphasizing strengths and advantages. Germany has many positive sides—but one has to know about them and become familiar with them.10

Target groups of this endeavor are the usual decision-makers in the political, business, and cultural spheres, journalists as key multipliers, "senior representatives of parties and civil society organizations, representatives of universities and scientists. The young elites are particularly important."11 Instruments include Internet resources, print media, tailor-made themed visits for specialist groups (e.g., journalists), and so-called media dialogue events: "The role of the media in a pluralistic, liberal society in a democratic state based on the rule of law is highlighted. Freedom of opinion and of the press are of particular importance."

The AA's central web site (http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de) has versions in five languages (German, English, French, Spanish, and Arabic). German embassies and consulates worldwide plus (as of 2007) five German Information Centers (in Brasilia, Cairo, Mexico City, Paris, and Washington, DC) offer additional locally relevant information through their websites in 43 languages. Other AA-sponsored web resources draw on topical attractive events such as a website in nine languages on football (soccer) in Germany or feature online editions of the Deutschland magazine and the Facts about Germany handbook in various major languages. The printed version
of Deutschland magazine is issued six times a year in 11 languages (total print run: ca. 400,000 copies), while the Facts about Germany handbook is published in 13 idioms and likewise has a circulation of 400,000 copies.

In 2006, a key topic in Germany's public diplomacy which saw intense coverage in all the above-mentioned channels was the country's hosting of the football World Cup (a massive media event); during the first half of 2007, special emphasis was given to Germany's presidency of the European Union.

Ever since 2001, a long-term focus of German public diplomacy has been a much-proclaimed "Dialogue with the Islamic World." Engaging in dialogues with Arabic-speaking nations has in fact been a critical feature of Germany's foreign policy approximately since the 1970s when, after several terrorism-related incidents (among them the massacre at the Munich Olympics in 1972), the country started to position itself as a credible mediator and unbiased broker between the West, Arab countries, and Israel. These efforts had been stepped up even before September 11, 2001: in April 1999 the Federal President's Office issued a declaration on the "Dialogue of Cultures" (with a high priority given to the Arab World) which some commentators view as a "new paradigm" of German public diplomacy. An important partner of the AA in this and other contexts is the quasi-public, Stuttgart-based Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, IfA) which is to a large extent funded by the AA itself and the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, the German government's public relations department.

The Foreign Office has developed a partnership with the media through its largely independent relationship with Deutsche Welle (DW), Germany's international broadcaster. Since 2001, this relationship has been intensified in the context of the "Dialogue with the Islamic World."

International Broadcasting

Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster, was founded in 1953 as a radio service to inform audiences abroad about the new, post-Nazi Germany. Today, DW offers radio, television, and online services in 30 languages (see http://www.dw-world.de). At the time of writing, focal broadcast languages are German, English, Spanish, Farsi, Russian, Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese, and Arabic. The station claims to have a total global weekly audience of some 65 million listeners and 28 million viewers. All programmes are produced at facilities in Bonn and Berlin and studios in Brussels, Moscow, and Washington, DC, with additional input from local stringers in various countries.

The German federal government fully funds DW which is an autonomous public-service corporation. The station's journalistic mission is a credible and serious one. In countries where media censorship is rampant and where unbiased reporting of domestic or international news is an exception, DW and other international broadcasters play an important role as a reliable news source. Reflecting its journalistic mission, DW is designed to remain editorially independent; a status which is ensured by an elaborate system of regular parliamentary accords.

The station's mission, as defined by the recently expanded and updated DW Act, is worth a closer look as it reflects Germany's preferred reading of the country's current role and self-identity. According to that legal norm, DW programmes "shall make Germany comprehensible as a culture nation rooted in Europe, and a liberal, democratic nation ruled by law. [Programmes] shall give a forum, both in Europe and on other continents, to German and other views on key topics mainly in the spheres of politics, culture and the economy, the objective being to promote understanding and exchange between cultures and nations."

Following this dialogue and exchange postulate, DW produces, to name but one telling example, a five-hour daily Arabic radio service, an extensive Arabic website (http://www.dw-world.de/arabic) which was considerably expanded and relaunched in 2004, and a total of eight hours daily of Arabic-language slots (alongside English, German, and Spanish segments) on the television service DW-TV that were introduced in 2002 and further expanded in 2005. From 2005 to 2007, DW-Radio co-produced Al-Iraq Al-Yawm ("Iraq Today"), a special format that targeted young Iraqi listeners and was broadcast via Baghdad-based talk radio Radio Dijla. The project, which was funded by the Foreign Office, ended abruptly when Radio Dijla's studios were bombed. Plans for a continuation of the service are underway. Since 2005, DW-TV has been co-producing Lip'at ha'opse ("Meet Europe"), a monthly Arab-Western discussion format broadcast on Abu Dhabi TV. Targeting audiences in Afghanistan, DW-TV produced news bulletins in Dari and Pashto which were broadcast by Afghan state television from 2002 to 2005. This special project, however, ended when funding by the Foreign Office ran out.

Cultural Institutes

"Germany turned to culture to help restore relationships after the Second World War" and in 1951 founded the Goethe Institut (GI) for this end. The Munich-based GI is organized as a private association in which the Federal Republic of Germany and, among others, political functionaries are part of the membership assembly, thereby making the GI a quasi-public service institution. Its budget is mainly allocated by the Foreign Office and the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government. The GI's core activities—German-language teaching, cultural cooperation, and promoting the image of Germany abroad through cultural events—are coordinated with the institute's financiers. Well in line with other actors of German public diplomacy, fostering dialogue and understanding between nations and cultures is the GI's main philosophy. There are Goethe Institutes of various sizes in 81 countries. Considerable budget cuts over the last couple of years have forced the GI to close branches or reduce services.

The organization collaborates with the Foreign Office and DW. One joint project is the multi-language website Campus Germany (http://www.campus-germany.de) which seeks to attract students to German universities. Another GI partnership—with AA, DW, and the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (IfA)—is the website Qantara (literally: "Bridge"; http://www.qantara.de; in Arabic, Turkish, English, and German), an Internet resource dedicated to the aforementioned dialogue with those world regions influenced by Islam. A "dialogue of cultures" by way of exhibitions, conferences, publications, and related events has also been the IfA's focus for decades. Since 2003, IfA and a private cultural organization, with funding from the Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) edit the online magazine Nafa (literally: "Breath") which focuses on art in the Muslim world and is available in Arabic, English, and German. Nafa, the editors' mission statement reads, "aims to contribute to a real dialogue among cultures, understood as communication between individuals from different cultural realms who grant each other self-determined and also changing identities, and who do not deduce these, as rigid constructs, from the mere origin of the other." Taking into account all these projects, one may guess that a "dialogue of cultures," especially one with the Muslim world, is a high priority of the official German cultural organizations.

Academic Exchange and Scholarships

Activities of the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD) partly overlap with those of other institutions of German public diplomacy. The focus of the DAAD, however, is on providing exchange scholarships for German and non-German students, teachers, researchers, and scientists, and the promotion of research cooperation between German and foreign universities. The aim is to recruit and win young elites abroad "as partners and friends of Germany" and to "strengthen German as a major international cultural language and lingua franca and to advance interest in, knowledge of and understanding for Germany."
The emphasis is on investing in minds and showcasing Germany as a “Land of Ideas,” as expressed in a recent marketing claim. Another goal of the DAAD is supporting economic and democratic reforms in developing countries through the promotion of academic and scientific advancement. The DAAD is mainly funded through the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. For these ends, some 200 programmes are in operation. As part of the general German objective to promote a Western-Muslim dialogue, the DAAD is one of the sponsors of the German University in Cairo (GUC) which was founded in 2003 as the first German university abroad. Another actor in the field of international scholarships for academics and scientists is the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, a civic, quasi-public foundation established by the Federal Republic of Germany. In line with other public diplomacy actors, this organization emphasizes “winning hearts and minds” which includes target groups in world regions dominated by Islam.24

Other Public Diplomacy Actors

The Federal Agency for Technical Relief (Technisches Hilfswerk, THW) is a little-known, but certainly noteworthy public diplomacy actor. It operates both nationally and internationally. For its missions abroad, the organization explicitly defines itself as a “humanitarian ambassador” of Germany.25 As part of an international network of similar institutions and in collaboration with United Nations agencies, it supplies relief assistance in the contexts of natural disasters, wars, violent conflicts, and other man-made disasters. The THW deploys its own expert personnel and trains local staff as well. Recent aid projects include work in Bolivia, Indonesia, Liberia, Lebanon, and Pakistan. One may see these activities as an overlap of public diplomacy and economic development aid. Other actors in this area are the German Society for Technical Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GTZ), a federally-owned, government-sponsored private company, and the German Development Service (Deutscher Entwicklungsdiens, DED), a non-profit public-private partnership which has various federal ministries as Board members overseeing the operations of the organization.

The German National Tourist Board (Deutsche Zentrale für Tourismus, DZT) promotes Germany abroad as a vacation destination. It has offices and agencies in 30 countries, and offers a bilingual website (http://www.Germany-tourism.de). As a quasi-public institution mainly funded by the German federal government, it may be seen as an institution of public diplomacy, or nation-branding, albeit one dedicated to straight marketing.

Other German government-sponsored activities that target foreign civilians contribute to a further blurring of the boundaries of public diplomacy and other areas. Alongside their military tasks, the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr), currently deployed in Afghanistan, in Bosnia-Hercegovina, and in Kosovo province, deliver political education programmes which address local civilians—activities that go beyond military operations as such. The Bundeswehr’s Psychological Operations Battalion 950 edits general interest/political message magazines for Bosnian and Kosovar civilians, produces the Kabul-based radio service Sada-e Azadi (“Voice of Freedom”) that aims to deliver the message of democracy and political dialogue, and uses kites (kite-flying used to be a popular sport in pre-Taliban Afghanistan) embroidered with peace logos and slogans to reach the “hearts and minds” of Afghans and show them a softer side of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).26 Such activities point to the fact that public diplomacy may come in many different forms, and that today military organizations such as NATO have a Public Diplomacy Division as well.

Conclusion

Germany’s public diplomacy is performed by a number of institutions on different levels, and not all in unison. In the past, it often was difficult to see a concerted effort or a unified approach. Lately, the “Dialogue of Cultures,” especially one with the Muslim world, has emerged as a common denominator of German public diplomacy activities. If Germany today positions itself as a broker of mediation and dialogues, this is in stark contrast to, and an ostentatious move away from, her dictatorial Nazi past and its cultural imperialist and propagandistic approach.27

All in all, this dialogic approach is well in line with concepts of other Western nations. “The new public diplomacy moves away from—to put it crudely—peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences.”28 Perhaps, then, we should also move away from the old concept of the “audience” as an entity that mainly listens, and conceptualize those target groups of public diplomacy as “stakeholders” (to borrow a term from economics) that may have interests other than one’s own organization but who have the capacity to talk back, and do so. Public diplomacy’s move towards proclamations of “dialogue” may reflect a general awareness of the need for a global culture of participation. This, in turn, may have to do with the changed nature, and the increasingly uncertain role, of the traditional nation-state under the conditions of globalization.

Realistically speaking, however, it’s probably still a long way to a truly symmetrical—and thereby potentially risky—dialogue of cultures and nations. Still awaiting further scrutiny and analysis are the following questions: is “dialogue” as one of the leitmotifs of German public diplomacy truly implemented or is it simply a catchy buzzword? What might be the overall impacts of such an endeavour or disposition—internally and externally? What kinds of (cultural) meaning are produced in the process? And how can possible impacts of dialogue-oriented public diplomacy be evaluated? Perhaps one should at least consider a position held by an institution of German public diplomacy that dialogues of a truly symmetrical nature are difficult to perform:

It must be accepted that “Western-Muslim dialogue” can essentially not be a dialogue (i.e., an exchange between two sides), but must on both sides integrate a large number of mutually contradictory actors and positions if it is to be meaningful.29

The German example also points to the fact that public diplomacy, despite all its glossy packaging and its benevolent emphasis on intercultural dialogue, is about “selling” a positive image of Germany and promoting the country’s economic, scientific, and cultural resources. It is easy to imagine that this kind of international relationship is not intended to be lopsided in favour of some other party: the logical objective is to make Germany benefit from her public diplomacy.30 If that is the case, it is not a communicative, discursive process in Habermasian terms. Rather, it is to be seen as strategic action oriented to success.31 All in all, Germany’s public diplomacy remains ambiguous in this context.

Notes


7 Germany—Land of Ideas, "Welcome to the Land of Ideas!," FC Deutschland GmbH, http://www.land-of-ideas.org / CIDA/the_initial390,0, en.html (accessed May 20, 2007). The campaign has been initiated by the Federal Government and the Federation of German Industries; partners include the Federal Foreign Office and Deutsche Welle.


9 Auswärtiges Amt, "Grundlagen und Ziele . . . ," trans.


11 Auswärtiges Amt, "Communication . . . .

12 Auswärtiges Amt, Communication . .

13 Auswärtiges Amt, Communication . .

14 Auswärtiges Amt, Communication . .

15 Auswärtiges Amt [German Foreign Office], Dialogue with the Islamic World; Dialog mit der islamischen Welt (Berlin: Federal Foreign Office/Öffentliche Diplomatie, n.d.).


20 For an analysis, see Antje Scholtz, Verständigung als Ziel interkultureller Kommunikation: Eine kommunikationswissenschaftliche Analyse als Beitrag des Goethe-Instituts [Understanding as an Objective of Communication: An Analysis of the Goethe Institute from a Communication Perspective], (Münster: Lit, 2000).

21 Zöllner, "A Quest . . . .", 174–175.


26 Psychological Operations Battalion 950, "Products: The Secret Is in the Media Mix," Bundeswehr [German Armed Forces], http://www opinio.bundeswehr.de/portal/a:/streitkraeftebasis/kcxml/04 SJ9Ykgakyo6UlPMhMx9fMDF8Q6YQ8K4H439Kd3SYGYy3m7B-pfwsaCUVH10_zCVHy_gD9


Origin and Development of Japan’s Public Diplomacy

Tadashi Ogawa

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe closed his inaugural policy speech to the Japanese Diet (Parliament) on September 29, 2006, with the following statement:

It is quintessential for Japan to present its “country identity” to the world so that many countries and many people will regard Japan as a good model to emulate. Moreover, I will place emphasis on creating an environment that will attract such people to come to Japan.

No other prime minister of Japan had ever expressed in such a clear manner his concern for public diplomacy. “Public diplomacy” is not a term that is heard often in Japan, and still it is not a concept that is shared as social consensus except among a small diplomatic community. However, it has been increasingly highlighted as a tool for strategies of diplomacy, cultural promotion, trade, tourism, and urban planning.

In 2004, structural reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) led to the integration of units for external public relations and cultural exchange into a newly established Public Diplomacy Department (PDD). This structural reform meant that MOFA, which had long maintained a policy of separation between public relations and culture, had decided to adopt a “public diplomacy” approach by dealing with culture more strategically as a diplomatic resource.

In the 1990s, the Japanese economy, which had garnered a significant global presence, lost impetus and began staggering. Seeking an alternative mechanism for maintaining its presence other than its economy, Japan became concerned about “Soft Power,” looking to Tony Blair’s “Cool Britannia Policy” as a model for Japan’s public diplomacy.

Nowadays, the Japanese mass media is abuzz with discussions of China’s emerging public diplomacy, which led the Chinese government to establish more than a hundred Confucius Institutes promoting Chinese language and culture all over the world and to organize large-scale cultural events. Some in the media warn that a rapid growth in China’s global cultural presence would cause the Japanese cultural presence overseas to erode. However, strong arguments have also been made that it is not appropriate to presume that China would be a rival for Japan in the field of culture, and that Japan should make efforts to engage China as a responsible member of the global community through communication.

In this chapter, after providing a sketch of the present structures of Japan’s public diplomacy, I describe how public diplomacy was implanted and developed in the process of Japanese modernization. I also show the commonalities and differences between the vision for and approach to Japan’s public diplomacy and those in the West.

Main Actors of Japan’s Public Diplomacy

In Japanese diplomatic history, the idea of promoting familiarity and intimacy with people from other countries and creating deeper perceptions about Japan as a coherent concept and coordinated policy through public relations and cultural exchange—in other words, public diplomacy—is a relatively new one. After World War II, the bitter memories of the state’s excessive intervention and censorship of culture during the war-time military regime prompted governmental organizations such as MOFA, the Japan Foundation, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (Nihon Hoso Kyokai: NHK), the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA), and others to operate a variety of activities while maintaining a certain level of autonomy.

In that sense, Japan’s post-war public diplomacy is similar to the British model, whose organizations are loosely coordinated. In the following sections, I wish to outline the main actors in Japanese public diplomacy, namely, MOFA and the Japan Foundation.

MOFA

MOFA is supposed to be a flagship of Japanese public diplomacy. It carries out public relations activities targeted at foreign citizens and overseas media, as well as cultural exchange programs through its own operations and 189 embassies and consular offices overseas. However, there is no inter-ministerial coordination system within the Japanese government to discuss overall public diplomacy strategies or advise on resource allocation, performance, management, and evaluation, such as the UK’s Public Diplomacy Board.

MOFA’s PDD deals with external public relations, introduces Japanese culture and society around the world, conducts people-to-people exchange, promotes Japanese language study and Japanese studies overseas, carries out artistic and intellectual exchange, and cooperates with international agencies such as UNESCO.

The PDD’s annual budget in 2005 was JPY27.5 billion (4 percent of MOFA’s total budget). However, because most of its budget consists of subsidies to the Japan Foundation and donations to UNESCO, its own disposable budget is limited to JPY6 billion. MOFA extends its public diplomacy through 189 embassies and consular offices all over the world. As many as 47 of these foreign missions operate cultural and information centers. Most of these missions create their own homepages to report on Japanese foreign policy and provide information on Japanese culture in local languages. This is in addition to MOFA’s homepage and Web-Japan, which was launched with the aim of helping people around the world get to know more about Japan and the Japanese people.

Embassies and consular offices have their own budgets for cultural programs. They hold various cultural events such as concerts, seminars, exhibitions, and films, and provide assistance to Japanese language educational institutions and other organizations. In 2005, the total number of these cultural events organized by Japanese foreign missions reached 1,609 projects, and they extended financial assistance to 1,374 other projects.
The Japan Foundation

The Japan Foundation was established in 1972 to undertake international cultural exchange. Its stated purpose is “to contribute to a better international environment, and to the maintenance and development of harmonious foreign relationships with Japan, through deepening other nations’ understanding of Japan, promoting better mutual understanding among nations, encouraging friendship and goodwill among the peoples of the world, and contributing to the world in culture and other fields through the efficient and comprehensive implementation of international cultural exchange activities” (Independent Administrative Institution Japan Foundation Law, Article 3).

The Japan Foundation carries out programs and activities in three major categories:

1. arts and cultural exchange;
2. Japanese language education overseas; and

The foundation’s head office is in Tokyo, and it has 19 overseas offices in 18 countries, mainly in Asia, the United States, and Europe. The Japan Foundation’s annual budget in 2004 was JPY16.8 billion. Of this, JPY13.7 billion comes from government subsidies, JPY1.8 billion from interest on the endowment, JPY900 million from donations, and JPY100 million from income-generating activities. When the Japan Foundation was established, the Japanese Diet (parliament) guaranteed a certain level of autonomy by allowing the Japan Foundation to maintain its own funds in order to stabilize its finance. Since its initial endowment of JPY5 billion, the Japanese government has made additional contributions, amounting to a total of JPY113 billion.

The Japan Foundation, as an organization carrying out the public diplomacy policy goals set by MOFA, plans and organizes its own programs and supports individuals and institutions with shared visions. Working in close coordination with MOFA, the foundation maintains a certain level of autonomy from the ministry in order to play an intermediary role between the government and the private and civil society sectors.

History of Japanese Public Diplomacy

It is possible to recognize some diplomatic operations as public diplomacy since the time that Japan began its process of modern nation building in the 1860s. This would include its participation in World Expositions and public relations activities appealing to the American public during the Russo-Japanese War. However, these were just temporary operations, neither institutional nor systematic. It was after World War I that the Japanese government fully committed to external public relations and cultural diplomacy. Previous to this move by Tokyo, during World War I, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information to make the world understand U.S. war aims. Diplomatic communities in Europe and the United States began to realize how important it was that they obtain support from the public in their appointed countries.

Noticing that the Western powers consolidated their propaganda efforts during World War I, Prime Minister Takashi Hara and his staff started to study the setup of machines for external public relations within the Japanese government. It was the eloquent Chinese delegation in the Paris Peace Conference charging Japanese expansionism in China that made the Japanese leaders feel it was necessary to consolidate external public relations. Ayamaro Kono, a young aide to the ambassador to the Paris Peace Conference—later Prime Minister of Japan—in his publication on the Paris Peace Conference, emphasized the indispensability of propaganda in post-World War diplomacy, saying that "it is urgent that we create and consolidate a new propaganda organization in our diplomacy with more chaotic-driven China to maintain our present honorable status and interests."

In 1920, MOFA established the Department of Information, which, although it experienced some structural changes several times, became the basis for the present Public Diplomacy Department in MOFA. In addition to this structural reform, MOFA adopted another important policy. It started new programs of cultural exchange with China. Since the 1910s, Japan had suffered from growing anti-Japanese sentiment among young Chinese intellectuals such as was seen in the May Fourth Movement. In order to improve Chinese sentiment toward Japan, MOFA, in 1923, founded a unit for promoting Japan-China cultural exchange supported by reparations for the Boxer Rebellion from the Chinese government. MOFA carefully avoided criticism of its activities as one-way pressure by Japan on China by making sure that the program was managed equally by both sides. For instance, in order to reflect upon opinions from Chinese intellectuals, an advisory council was set up, consisting of ten members each from Japan and China. A year later, the unit for promoting Japan-China cultural exchange was expanded into the Department of Cultural Affairs within MOFA.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the various world powers created structures to promote international cultural exchange as tools of diplomacy. It was in this era that prestigious public international cultural exchange organizations were founded. Germany established the Goethe Institute in 1932. The U.K. established the British Council in 1934. In order to confront cultural propaganda offensives from Nazi Germany, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1938, created the Interdepartmental Committee for Scientific Cooperation and the Division for Cultural Cooperation in the State Department and appointed cultural affairs officers to several Latin American countries.

In 1934, the same year as the creation of the British Council, Japan became the first and only non-Western nation to establish a modern international cultural exchange organization. The Japan Society for International Cultural Relations (Kokusai Bunka Shinko-Kai, or KBS) was established with donations from the private sector and subsidies from the government. KBS programs included dialogues among prominent cultural leaders, dispatch of cultural missions, and publications on Japan, among other activities.

The motivation for the establishment of the KBS in some ways resulted from Japan’s diplomatic isolation in the 1930s after it chose to drop out of the League of Nations, which had condemned Japan for the Mukden Incident. Because political and military channels were stymied, Tokyo felt it necessary to activate cultural channels to the world and to improve its damaged national image through the KBS.

Afterwards, the Sino-Japanese War and World War II made Japan’s public diplomacy more of a one-way track, with more wartime-natured national propaganda. As a result of merging of units on information, public relations, and international cultural exchange, the Cabinet Bureau of Information was established to take the place of MOFA’s departments of Information and Cultural Affairs, while the Japanese Navy and the Army maintained their own propaganda machines until the end of the war. The Cabinet Bureau of Information not only dealt with public relations, but it also gathered intelligence, analyzed information, and provided information controls for the wartime regime. Its administrative powers reached overseas to Japanese occupied territories.

In the 1930s, the KBS’s priority was on the United States and European nations. Once World War II broke out, under the guidance of the cabinet, the KBS’s priority shifted to China and Southeast Asia to win the hearts and minds of local residents in these areas that were suddenly occupied by Japan.
Looking for a New National Identity

Japan lost its sovereignty in its unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces and the occupation that followed. External public relations and cultural exchange activities were suspended. The Cabinet Bureau of Information was abolished in December 1945. MOFA reestablished the Department of Information, which was in charge of cultural exchange, when it underwent a restructuring in 1946. But it had too few staff and too little budget to resume its pre-war activities. At the same time, Japan was required to neglect its state-controlled cultural policies and abandon its self-image as a military-state by expressing a fresh vision for its own national identity. Prime Minister Tetsu Katayama, in a policy speech, advocated the "construction of a culture state" in order to restore national pride and international credibility.

As a first step toward restoring its sovereignty, Japan aimed to obtain membership of UNESCO and successfully became a full member in July 1951, two months before the San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed between Japan and the Allied Powers in September 1951.

In the 1950s, the Japanese government could not afford to promote external cultural exchange activities for financial reasons. The budget for cultural exchange was quite limited and most funds were continuously allocated for grants to the KBS, which, in the 1950s, only covered the United States by introducing traditional Japanese culture. In the 1960s, Japan entered a new period of high economic growth and started to become a world economic power. The 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and the 1970 EXPO in Osaka symbolized the emergence of Japan on the international scene as a nation with a strong economy and advanced science and technology capabilities. There were several important policy changes that took place during this period. In the post-war period, the Japanese government had restricted overseas travel by Japanese citizens because of the shortage of foreign currency reserves. In 1964, those restrictions were lifted. After that, in the 1970s and 1980s, grassroots-level international exchange began to boom for the first time in the long history of Japan. This boom fundamentally changed the Japanese general public's perceptions of the world as well as its own self-image.

With self-pride as a global economic power, the Japanese public increasingly argued that the Japanese government should make efforts to enhance its culture as a mature nation-state like France. Reflecting with self-criticism upon the excessive control of culture by the central government during the war, the Japanese government hesitated to play a strong role in cultural administration and cultural exchange. In 1968, the establishment of the Agency for Cultural Affairs was a sign that the government had gradually recovered from the wartime traumatic experiences, and it started to create new policies in the 1970s. MOFA also consolidated the Division of Culture, which had been established in 1958, into the Department of Culture in 1964.

Consolidating Cultural Diplomacy with Emerging Economic Power

Japan, which obtained international status as an economic superpower, experienced several changes in its international relations, illustrated by such crises as the Nixon Shock. The term “Nixon Shocks” refers to two unexpected policy changes taken by U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1971 and 1972. The first Nixon Shock was when he cancelled the Bretton Woods system and stopped the direct convertibility of the U.S. dollar to gold in 1971. The second Nixon Shock was his surprise visit to Beijing and the termination of the U.S. confrontation policy without consultation with Japan, following his secret negotiations with China in 1972. These shocking experiences reminded the Japanese leaders of their catastrophic isolation in the 1930s and 1940s.

Other challenges included the emergence of anti-Japanese sentiment, Japan’s rapid economic growth and success aroused worldwide concern about Japanese society and culture as resources of remarkable success. However, criticism and misunderstanding also grew during this period. Responding to these fundamental changes, the Japanese government began to take measures to consolidate cultural diplomacy and external public relations. In this period, the framework for Japan’s present public diplomacy was formed with the creation of the Japan Foundation, a central actor in public international cultural exchange. Suffering from a series of Japan-U.S. frictions over trade imbalances and the Nixon Shocks, the Japanese diplomatic community began to recognize combating misunderstanding about Japanese culture and behavior as an urgent diplomatic agenda.

The creation of the Japan Foundation became a crucial point in the history of Japanese cultural diplomacy. Then Foreign Minister Takeo Fukuda instructed MOFA to start feasibility studies for the establishment of a large-scale international cultural exchange organization mainly targeting relations with the United States. In 1972, the Japan Foundation Law was approved by the Diet. The Japan Foundation was funded by the government (JPY 5 billion) with a token contribution (JPY 6 million) from the business sector.

The Japan Foundation operates under the supervision of the Cultural Division of MOFA. According to the Japan Foundation Law, the foreign minister has the authority to appoint the president of the Japan Foundation and MOFA has some veto powers. The foundation started a variety of programs dealing with exchange among prominent academic and cultural leaders, promotion of Japanese language education and Japanese studies overseas, concerts, exhibitions, Japanese film and television showings, and publications.

The United States was initially a high priority target country, but Southeast Asia became another important area for the Japan Foundation soon after the anti-Japan riots broke out in Thailand and Indonesia during the official visit of Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka in January 1974. Japan realized how deeply embedded Southeast Asia’s negative emotions were regarding the bitter experiences during the Japanese occupation and post-war Japanese economic dominance. In response to the situation, the Japan Foundation shifted much of its human and financial resources into Southeast Asia.

During this era, the Japanese government realized that culture and education should be a priority area for aid programs to developing countries such as Southeast Asia. MOFA started its Cultural Grant Aid Program in 1975 and made contributions to the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage sites in Southeast Asia. MOFA gave special consideration to Southeast Asia by donating JPY 5 billion to the ASEAN Cultural Fund established in 1978 with the aim of promoting cultural exchange within ASEAN.

Mushrooming Main Actors

With its greater international status and responsibilities, Japan, in the 1980s, tried to reinvent itself as an "international state" to take global leadership in various fields besides the economy, while the United States insisted that Japan should fulfill its international responsibility commensurate with its economic power. Under these pressures, the Japanese government decided to consolidate its cultural diplomacy.

As written in this article, the Second Provisional Commission on Administrative Reform (PCAR) of 1983 made recommendations on diplomacy because Japanese cultural exchange lagged behind the major developed nations. Motivated by this recommendation, MOFA established the Department of Cultural Exchange in 1984. In the 1980s, MOFA and the Japan Foundation were required to respond to the rapid spread of interest in Japanese language education overseas. Support for Japanese language education overseas became a top priority for the Japan Foundation in the 1980s. The Japanese language boom still continues, although the growth rate has been slowing down. According to a survey by the foundation in 2003,
An absence of understanding of the conception structure and sense of value of a country which can influence the world trend may produce an international image of Japan as a “mysterious power.” Moreover, Japan’s economic image is feared to be stressed too much.

In response to the economic friction, the Japanese government was required to consolidate external public relations explaining trade policies and their background. MOFA took measures to restructure itself and established a new post of press secretary. Before this, there was no good coordination in public relations other than the director general of the Bureau of Information and Culture holding weekly press conferences for foreign correspondents while other ranking officials held casual meetings. By establishing the post of press secretary, the controls in public relations were unified and coordinated.

**Consolidating Global Partnership and Multilateral Approaches**

Japan-U.S. relations were put on trial in the early 1990s because the U.S. Congress, irritated by the huge trade imbalances, pressured its government to take tougher measures toward Japan. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, there had been an increasing sense of threat in the United States from Japan’s economic power instead of Russian military power. “Revisionist thinking” and “Japan bashing” were gaining attention. The revisionists argued that the United States should adopt different rules against Japan because Japan is entirely different from the rest of the world in all aspects of life, be it economy, society, or culture. They insisted that, because Japan was a closed society, American firms could not compete fairly with Japanese firms. Such an argument raised serious questions about the mutual understanding of both nations. The limited presence of Japan in international cooperative actions at the time of the Gulf Crisis in 1990–1991 exacerbated the American perceptions that Japan was avoiding its responsibility as a world power and, therefore, was a free rider on the world order.

In order to overcome these challenges, MOFA realized that Japan’s foreign policy had come to a point at which it should be showing a new face. The Japanese government promoted Takeshita’s “international cooperation initiative” with the three pillars of “cooperation for peace,” “enhancement of ODA,” and “strengthening international cultural exchange,” because this initiative fit Japan’s diplomacy requirements in the changing international community.

One of the intellectual reflections on this transformation of diplomacy was the establishment of the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP) in 1991 with an additional endowment of JPY50 billion to the Japan Foundation. Following a proposal made by former Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe, father of the 2006–2007 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, CGP’s mission is to promote collaboration between Japan and the United States with the goal of fulfilling shared global responsibilities and contributing to improvements in the world’s welfare, and to enhance dialogue and interchange between Japanese and U.S. citizens on a wide range of issues, thereby improving bilateral relations.

To carry out its mission, CGP operates grant programs as well as self-initiated projects and fellowships. CGP has supported an array of institutions and individuals, including nonprofit organizations, universities, policymakers, scholars, and educators. CGP’s mission and operations were innovative because it shifted from the conventional idea of introducing Japanese ideas and high culture overseas into a collaborative problem-solving approach.

In the 1990s, as East Asia achieved remarkable economic development, the idea of a new regionalism gained attention in Asia. The report of the second “Conference for the Promotion of International Cultural Exchange” in 1994 recommended “exchange that will build the future of the Asia-Pacific region” in order to foster a sense of community spirit in Asia. In order to create a new identity, “we, Asians,” advocated multilateral approaches rather than bilateral
approaches. The Japan Foundation Asia Center was a key player in promoting the new multilateral cultural exchange policy. In the late 1990s, the center promoted intellectual exchange and artistic collaboration on a multilateral basis.

Prime ministers in the 1990s provocatively adopted new cultural exchange approaches toward Asia. Prime Minister Toshihiro Mutoya’s Peace, Friendship and Exchange Initiative in 1995 aimed at overcoming unsettled disputes on Japanese colonization and military occupations from 1910 to 1945. His statement on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war (15 August 1995) included obvious words of apology. Based upon his statement, the Peace, Friendship and Exchange Initiative consisted of two parts promoting support for historical research in modern-era relations between Japan and its neighboring Asian countries and rapid expansion of exchange with those countries. The Japan Foundation Asia Center was created by an increase in the cultural exchange budget as a part of the Murayama Initiative.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, successor to Murayama, accelerated the “rapid expansion of exchange with the neighboring Asian countries through multilateral cultural exchange involving the private and civil society sectors.” In January 1997, she proposed the creation of Multilateral Cultural Missions composed of government and private-sector representatives from Japan and ASEAN countries. At the concluding meeting held in April 1998 in Japan, the action agenda for cultural exchange was proposed, aiming to create multilateral networks and build a sense of community between Japan and the ASEAN countries.

Keizo Obuchi was inaugurated prime minister after Hashimoto in 1998. His remarkable achievement in public diplomacy was the improvement of relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK). Obuchi and Korean President Kim Dae Jung’s most important decision was their agreement to designate 2002—the year of the FIFA World Cup co-hosted by the two countries—as the Year of Japan—ROK National Exchange and to promote exchange in fields such as culture, sports, youth, regional exchange, and tourism. The Japanese perception of Korea was dramatically improved by these epoch-making events and, since then, Japan—ROK relations have been relatively stable, based upon a huge number of people-to-people exchanges in spite of a series of later diplomatic turbulence.

Culture Attracts the World Instead of Economy

Following structural reform of MOFA in August 2004 the Public Diplomacy Department was created as a result of integration of external public relations and international cultural exchange units, which had been separated in the 1980s. The Public Diplomacy Department is in charge of implementing international agreements to promote cultural exchange, cooperating with international cultural organizations, and introducing Japanese culture abroad and promoting cultural exchange with foreign countries, as well as supervising the Japan Foundation. Concerning the division of labor between MOFA and the Japan Foundation after this structural reform, MOFA is responsible for strategy building and long-term policy planning while the Japan Foundation implements MOFA’s policies at the operational level. Considerable autonomy in its operations is given to the Japan Foundation.

In December 2004, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi launched the Council on the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy. The council pointed out that “understanding Japan by the public of a country may be the most influential factor for the government of that country in deciding policies and actions toward Japan.” Given that cultural exchange may seem to be a circumstantial approach to improving the image of Japan, the council admitted that “it is a very effective way to sow seeds for deepening understanding of Japan in the next generation.”

Thus, the council provided recommendations on the challenges and strategies of Japanese cultural diplomacy. The council recommended that “Japan should try to actively cultivate a "Japanese animation generation" across the globe, seizing interest in the Japanese language and pop culture as an opportunity to encourage further interest in other aspects of diverse Japanese culture.” In the accelerated globalized international community of the 21st century, Japan feels strongly that it should be proactive in conveying its message to the public overseas. In particular, the increasing presence of China in the Asia Pacific region makes the Japanese feel that public diplomacy is necessary to consolidate public relations and cultural exchange in order to balance its presence. In addition, the anti-Japanese demonstrations that took place in China and Korea in 2005 strengthened Japan’s motivation for public diplomacy toward Asia.

The terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 and the following wars in Afghanistan and Iraq also had tremendous impacts on Japanese public diplomacy. Strategic priorities on the Middle East, which had traditionally been given less priority in Japanese public diplomacy, were increased. While dispatching the Self Defense Forces to Iraq, it needed to maintain positive images of Japan and to win support from local communities in the area to which they were dispatched.

Japan’s Current Public Diplomacy Toward the Middle East

Public diplomacy strategies in the Middle East are most critical for the Western public diplomatic communities. Because of differences in historical backgrounds, Japan has adopted certain unique approaches on this matter, although the financial allocations to the region were relatively small in comparison with the Western countries. (The Japan Foundation’s 2005 budget for the Middle East and North Africa is JPY 510 million.)

Japan, in its long history of cultural exchange with China, Korea, Southeast Asia, India, and the West, has created its own traditions. In particular, since the beginning of modern times, facing the powerful Western civilization, Japan has been a front runner of modernization among non-Western countries, and it has kept a balance between tradition and modernity through processes of trial and error. The historical experiences can be assets for Japan’s public diplomacy.

The report of the Council on the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy, submitted to Prime Minister Koizumi in 2005, suggested the following:

Cultural exchange was an important factor in the process of Japan’s modernization. It is Japan’s experience in conciliating and mediating the irreconcilabilities and conflicts between different civilizations that enables it to understand the difficulties facing the current non-Western societies that are struggling to achieve modernization. By taking advantage of its position, Japan can promote mutual understanding between the East and the West, the North and the South, nations, regions, civilizations, or cultures without becoming entangled in clashes between civilizations, ideologies, or religions.

It may be difficult for Western modernists to imagine that modernization for non-Western countries involves traumatic experiences. Japan’s 19th-century decision to promote modernization was not a self-initiated choice, but the only solution to avoid colonization by a Western power and to maintain its sovereignty in the era of Imperialism. In order to achieve modernization, it was essential for Japan to dissolve the traditional local kindred communities into more industry-wise organizations. In that process, numerous small traditions were lost. Some suffered from an identity crisis. Because of such embedded spiritual identity crisis, modern Japan sometimes inclines toward a quest for self-assurance through nationalism. It was this trauma that caused the sudden upheaval of fundamentalist movements emphasizing Japan’s own traditions and values, such as the ultra-nationalist movements from the 1930s to 1945.

Therefore, Japan can understand the unproductiveness of one-way diplomacy imposing values
of militarily or economically dominant forces. The goals of public diplomacy in the Middle East should include recovery of traumatized self-pride in this region in the process of modernization through multi-dimensional dialogue based upon mutual respect for culture and traditions. In such a sense, the goals of Japan’s public diplomacy toward the Middle East should be to differentiate itself from Western public diplomacy.

Considering such perspectives on Japan’s position toward the Middle East, the Japan Foundation began consolidating its programs dealing with the Middle East in 2003, creating three pillars of activities: intellectual exchange; support for cultural promotion in the Middle East; and promotion of better understanding of the Middle East among the Japanese. Through these activities, the Japan Foundation is careful to respect the honor of the people of the Middle East.

The Japan Foundation’s initial measures were projects contributing to rehabilitative treatment for wounded pride in the war-damaged countries. In cooperation with MOFA, the Japan Foundation gave a grant to cover travel expenses for the Japan Football Association (JFA) to invite the Iraqi national soccer team to Japan. With this assistance, the JFA organized a match between Japan and Iraq in 2004. The game was broadcast worldwide, because this was the first international game for the Iraqi soccer team since the Iraq War began. MOFA worked with the Iraqi government to provide intensive training for the national athletes and coaches. The Iraqi people applauded their good performances in international games such as the Athena Olympics while healing their traumatized national pride.

In cultural exchange with Afghanistan, healing through culture has been a consistent agenda. In 2003, the Japan Foundation held an exhibition of paintings and crafts made by street children from Kabul at the Japan Foundation Forum in Tokyo. The exhibition offered opportunities for street children who were deprived of chances to express themselves because of the civil wars and the Taliban regime. The exhibition also had an educational function for the Japanese who were able to gain high respect for the Afghan children because of their artistic creativity and rich personalities instead of mere commiseration.

The Japan Foundation has paid much attention to the idea of mutuality, which means keeping a balance in flows of information and knowledge between Japan and the Middle East. Therefore, one of three pillars of the new Middle East programs is to promote better understanding of the Middle East among the Japanese. Reflecting on this idea, the Japan Foundation held a series of cultural events related to the Middle East in Japan, including film screenings, contemporary drama performances from the Middle East, and invitations for prominent Middle Eastern cultural leaders to Japan.

This approach, which fosters better understanding of foreign cultures among the Japanese, has already been utilized and expanded as a cultural exchange tool with Southeast Asia since the late 1980s. This can be interpreted as support to outward-looking activities of intellectuals and artists in Southeast Asia, which had suffered from an imbalance of culture and information with developed countries because their governments could not afford to promote external public relations or cultural exchange. By adopting this approach with large-scale ODA programs, Japan succeeded in extinguishing the anti-Japanese sentiments that existed in the 1970s.

According to a BBC World Service Poll, Japan is one of the most positively viewed countries worldwide. In particular, Southeast Asia has quite a positive view of Japan, including Indonesia (84 percent) and the Philippines (70 percent). Self-censoring of one-sided impositions of Japanese culture has contributed to improvements in these public diplomacy perceptions.

References