
CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL MIGRATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JAPAN'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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This research examines Japan's cultural diplomacy at the international level in the context of global migration and at the domestic level from the perspective of social integration. Specifically, the research focuses on the relationship between the construction and "dispatch" of Japanese national identity through cultural diplomacy. This paper argues that cultural diplomacy at the domestic level could lead to social and political exclusion of cultures and communities when it only represents "national cultures," which only belong to particular groups in a society. Moreover, this research sheds light on the tension between de facto multiculturalism in Japan and the seemingly intolerant attitude of the Japanese society toward migrants, refugees, and foreigners. This paper ultimately aims to offer a critical perspective of the process, which could dictate which cultures should be considered "authentic Japanese" cultures and which ones should be excluded from such a notion of authenticity through the activities of cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, this paper shows how Japan's cultural diplomacy responds to the contemporary global political climate that is characterized by an influx of immigrants and refugees.

Important Connections between Cultural Diplomacy and Global Migration

The phenomenon of global migration and cultural diplomacy have been rarely discussed together. However, considering the present situation where many people are forced to live as migrants or refugees, it seems critical to reassess cultural diplomacy from the perspective of social integration. People who are forced to live as refugees or migrants may face several forms of discrimination in their host countries. In this context, the us-versus-them mentality that is unconsciously propagated through the activities of cultural diplomacy may cause great difficulties for refugees and migrants. In addition, foreign public perceptions of the "Japanese" and "Japanese culture" may also wrongly

influence the identities of people in Japan. Therefore, representations of national culture should be carefully considered. For instance, Martyna Tomiczek notes that stereotypes or misjudgments commonly promulgated in the society often lead to a migrant's disapproval in the host countries they settled in.¹ Yet, according to Michael Kunczik, it is not certain whether a thing such as "national character" even exists. Kunczik argues that "certain psychological traits or features, characteristics of the citizens of a given nation, modal personality, basic personality structure, and a system of attitudes, values, and beliefs are common to the members of a given society."² Furthermore, it is highly disputable whether there is anything such as "national character" in reality. Promoting more international exchange, which the activities of cultural diplomacy often do, may play a significant role in offering opportunities to better understand other cultures. Yet, it could also lead to political and cultural exclusion in the domestic context.

Relationship between Cultural Diplomacy and Japanese National Identity

Cultural diplomacy is one of the main activities of public diplomacy. The main purpose of cultural diplomacy is to enable a better understanding of one's own country by introducing cultural art works to create a friendly diplomatic environment.³ In recent years, many countries have recognized the importance of soft power.⁴ Certainly, countries are known to pursue soft power through the activities of public diplomacy. However, these issues are not sufficiently discussed from the perspective of social integration. For instance, Iwabuchi expresses concerns about the prioritization of brand nationalism and points out the danger inherent in the process of dispatching Japanese culture through cultural diplomacy, which entails the construction of identities such as "us" and "others."⁵ In other words, using cultural diplomacy has dangerous implication: it could define which cultures should be considered "authentic Japanese" cultures and which ones should be excluded from such a notion of authenticity. However, per Iwabuchi's account, many countries focus on soft power in order to strengthen the representation of their respective national cultures. Such messages of defining inclusion and exclusion may also create categories such as "proper" or "proofed Japanese" to differentiate between

1 Martyna Tomiczek, "Diaspora Diplomacy About a New Dimension of Diplomacy: The Example of a New Emigration Non-Governmental Organization," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* no. 2, (2011): 105-123.

2 Michael Kunczik, "Images of Nations and International Public Relations," (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1997), 32.

3 Nicholas Cull, "Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past," (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2012).

4 Joseph Nye, "Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics," (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

5 Koichi Iwabuchi, "Bunka no Chikara," (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbun Sya, 2007).

cultures that can be included and the ones that cannot. This may, in turn, endanger the cultures and communities excluded from Japanese culture especially such as: refugees, immigrants, and racial minorities.

Another critical issue is that cultural diplomacy in Japan may have been considered as a tool to characterize Japanese national identities. Vlahos points out that “Japan’s public diplomacy was never in a position to effectively persuade foreign publics because it needed above all to elevate Japanese identity in contrast to others.”⁶ These tendencies, however, are problematic in the context of contemporary global political climate in which migration and seeking political asylum are common phenomena especially as seen in contemporary Europe. Hun Yun and L. Toth discuss the ways in which public diplomacy and people’s capacity for global mobility could be accommodated. They state that “migrants have a direct and total experience with people, culture, ideas, and domestic governance in the destination country.”⁷ Further, they explain that a country’s soft power resources are nakedly exposed to a migrant’s living experiences, which make the quality of these resources more substantial in the conduct of public diplomacy. In discussions pertaining to public diplomacy in Japan, the roles of migrants and multicultural realities in the Japanese society have received very little attention. However, it seems necessary to reframe the discussion in order to focus more on these two factors, especially given that people’s capacity for global mobility has increased. It is critical to rethink about the influence of cultural diplomacy in this respect, because again, as it has the possibility to characterize which cultures should be considered “authentic or proper Japanese” cultures and which ones should not be included in such a notion of authenticity.

Multiculturalism and the Negative Attitude in Japanese Society

Cultural diplomacy generally represents one’s images of one’s country. However, representations of one’s own culture to international society are often biased in favor of one’s own society especially when it only represents “cultures,” which only belong to “particular” groups in the society. These tendencies may occur when the consciousness of “multiculturalism” is not considered well in the discussion. For instance, many researchers point out that terms such as “multicultural” are not new to Japan considering the mass migrations that have taken place in the past. Awareness of Japan as a “multicultural country” seems to be often ignored.⁸ The works of Murphy-

6 Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, “Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy,” (New York: Routledge, 2011).

7 Yun Seong-Hun and Elizabeth Toth, “Future Sociological Public Diplomacy and the Role of Public Relations: Evolution of Public Diplomacy.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no.4 (2009): 500.

8 Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, “The Invisible Man and Other Narratives of Living in the Borderlands of

Shigematsu and Lee are good examples which reveal the intolerant attitudes towards multiculturalism in Japan. Their discussions explore how the idea of “homogenous Japan” developed through *Nihonjinron* has affected the Japanese identities. For instance, Murphy-Shigematsu was born as a *hafu* (a term in Japanese often used to refer to those who were born between Japanese and international parents). He recalls his experience as a *hafu* in Japan and, as a citizen of Japan, identifies himself as a Japanese; however, given his foreign racial backgrounds, he is not considered or perceived as a “real” Japanese in Japanese society. If this legal certification of Japanese citizenship testifies that the person is a Japanese, they should be acknowledged as one. Moreover, Lee expresses further skepticism at the idea of “homogeneity in the Japanese society. She offers the example of people with Korean ethnicity—also known as *Zainchi-Korean* in Japan. Lee mentions that if racial or cultural backgrounds matter in defining “Japanese,” people with Korean background but who have been living in Japan and whose lives have been highly adapted to “Japanese culture,” should be equally considered Japanese. The definition of “Japanese” dispatched through official channels to the international society is not only vague but also made without any substantial discussion.

Such negative attitudes toward multiculturalism of the Japanese society would lead to situations where the social structure of exclusiveness would be widely accepted. One of the fundamental reasons why Japanese people are intolerant of multiculturalism may be related to the influence of the idea of Japanese cultural specificity, referred to as *Nihonjinron*. It is generally purported to be a theory of what specific characteristics define Japanese people. However, Sugimoto argues that *Nihonjinron* is actually a government strategy to reinforce the popular essentialist genre of the Japanese.⁹ According to Sugimoto, the concept of *Nihonjinron* plays a significant role in creating an imagined homogenous Japan. Sugimoto suggests that the concept of *Nihonjinron* forces people to exclude the “others,” such as Westerners, the Ainu, and the Okinawan people. He also notes that exclusion of these groups is based on the idea of the Yamato race. The Yamato race here can be understood as a biological metaphor, for example whether or not a person should be considered biologically Japanese. Moreover, *Nihonjinron* puts forth another criterion for qualifying as Japanese: the “genuine” Japanese should be defined by the correct or the expected cultural and ethnic backgrounds, in addition to the biological dimensions. Yet Sugimoto also cites contradictory instances, in which “Japanese” identity appears to be a fluid idea. On the contrary, these

Race and Nation,” (London: Routledge, 2008). Soo Lee, “Diversity of Zainichi Koreans and Their Ties to Japan and Korea,” *Working Paper Series Studies of Multicultural Studies* no. 8, (2012): 1-13.

9 Yoshio Sugimoto, “Making sense of *Nihonjinron*,” (London: SAGE Publications, 1999).

Nihonjinron concepts of “homogenous Japan” seem to have affected many people’s understanding of what it means to be “Japanese.” As a result, it has significantly contributed to the nationalistic idea of “us Japanese” versus non-Japanese others, and it has the potential to reinforce social structures that favor an allegedly authentic “Japanese” population at the expense of the actual multicultural one.

Conclusion

This research examined Japan’s cultural diplomacy at the international level in the context of global migration and at the domestic level from the perspective of social integration respectively. Most importantly, this paper shows the processes by which Japanese national identity is constructed and dispatched and how this identity in turn is appropriated for the activities of cultural diplomacy. While many countries have recognized the importance of cultural diplomacy to pursue “soft power,” its activities are not sufficiently discussed from the perspective of social integration. This is an important factor considering the vast influx of immigrants and refugees that has been a defining characteristic of contemporary political climates.

Moreover, this research focused on the relation between the construction and “dispatch” of Japanese national identity and cultural diplomacy. The research pointed out the representation of “authentic Japanese cultures,” which are often represented through the activities of cultural diplomacy, may create categories such as “proper” or “proven Japanese” to differentiate between cultures that can be included and the ones that cannot. This may, in turn, endanger the cultures and communities excluded from Japanese culture especially such as refugees, immigrants, and racial minorities. Furthermore, it argued that cultural diplomacy at the domestic level could lead to social and political exclusion of cultures and communities.

Lastly, this research focused on the relation between multiculturalism and the seemingly intolerant attitude of the Japanese society. It also further mentioned that the representations of one’s “own cultures” to international society may often be biased in favor of one’s own society especially when it only represents cultures which only belong to “particular” ethnic groups in the society. This research concludes that it is critical to combine the perspectives of social integration and global migration into the discussion of cultural diplomacy, as these tendencies may occur when the consciousness of multiculturalism is not considered well in the discussion.