



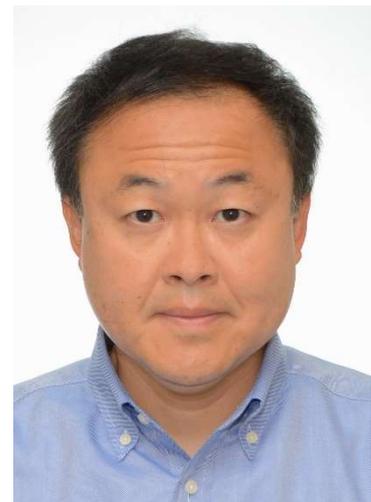
Can Japanese Diplomacy Talk about Universality?—Rebuilding public diplomacy strategy

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Amidst the flux of the liberal international order, Japan's public diplomacy, which relies solely on its cultural uniqueness, is inadequate. The author proposes new principles for an age where the diplomatic sphere is expanding from negotiation tactics to agenda setting and norm setting.

In the fall of 2017 when there was a succession of major events—the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and US President Donald Trump's visit to China—I visited Peking University and had an opportunity to exchange opinions with many experts and specialists.

What impressed me in particular was that the Chinese side emphasized the negative aspect of democracy and used it in justification of the Communist Party's monopoly on power. The Chinese experts and specialists said the following: Democracy could just consider short-term profits like companies operating under a capitalist system. The only interest of politicians and political parties is the next elections. They merely show an opportunistic attitude toward the electorate and cannot come out with mid- and long-term national strategies. As a result, the populism symbolized by the Trump phenomenon and Brexit has risen. The Chinese-style governance model is more versatile than democracy globally in terms of the multiplicity of uses. Now is the time for China to lead the international order.



Prof. Watanabe Yasushi

Western soft power jolted by globalization

Aside from this line of reasoning, it is almost certain that the democracy that led the liberal international order following World War II has been jolted in the West. The recent situation,

which is referred to as liberal fatigue, with a declining tolerance toward social diversity, growing distrust of journalists and specialists and the rise of political techniques that incite divisions and confrontations, seems to reveal the self-destruction of Western soft power (appeal).

Furthermore, this boils down to more deep-seated structural problems that cannot be reduced to the personal qualities of particular political leaders. That is, the problem is that the existing political and social systems are unable to respond to the transformation of the industrial structure, the expansion of social disparities, the shrinking of the middle class and the increase in immigrant workers. In addition, it also boils down to the fundamental question of whether global capitalism, national sovereignty and democracy can co-exist, the so-called global trilemma (Professor Dani Rodrik).

In the case of the United States, for example, even if the Trump administration comes to an end in up to six years, as long as these structural problems remain, the logics and dynamism of “America First” will continue to have an impact on American soft power. This is the reason why I cannot be as optimistic about the future of American soft power as Professor Joseph Nye (Harvard University), an advocate for soft power theory.

But I may not have to be excessively pessimistic. This is because discourses against liberal fatigue are also still animated in Western societies. This is clearly exemplified by the fact that more than 350 American newspapers argued against President Trump’s blasting domestic media that criticized him as “fake news” in chorus in their editorials in August 2018. Professor Nye referred to this ability to criticize and correct oneself as “meta soft power.” It is an ability that China still cannot have and will continue to be unable to acquire under the existing political system.

The range of sharp power theory

A great deal of attention is currently being paid to China and Russia, which are authoritarian states, because of their sharp power, not meta soft power; that is, information maneuvering aimed at manipulating the public opinion of target states. Western soft power focuses on the interaction of information, whereas sharp power is essentially mono-directional and takes advantage of the openness or vulnerability of target states’ systems.

As I wrote in *Culture and Diplomacy: The Age of Public Diplomacy* in 2011, I visited Vanuatu, a South Pacific country, in the fall of 2010. The purpose of my visit was to gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the English international television broadcasts that China ran in the country. To China, Vanuatu was a place of strategic importance located almost in the middle of its grandiose routes to South America and was also a risky country that came near to establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2004 (although within a very short period of time). China provided a range of support for

Vanuatu's parliament building and the roofs of vegetable and fruit markets in the city. China also provided satellite parabolic antennas enabling Vanuatu to gain access to Chinese international broadcasts free of charge. In addition, a Chinese system was introduced to the information infrastructures of the government of Vanuatu.

Today, eight years later, I often see or hear similar stories in Asia and Africa. There is skepticism that China launched a cyber-intervention in the Cambodian general election in July 2018. There are also strong voices of warning against possible Chinese interventions in the Indonesian presidential election and the mid-term election in the Philippines to be held next year.

You already know about Russia's intervention in the US presidential election in 2016. A US intelligence agency acknowledges this and is on alert against Russia's possible intervention in the mid-term election to be held this fall.

In April last year, the US Department of State established the Global Engagement Center (GEC) under the jurisdiction of the assistant secretary in charge of public diplomacy (PD). With the blurring of the boundary between PD and intelligence activities, the Center monitors information maneuvering by foreign countries and terrorist organizations.

But even if sharp power is a furious ogre in the digital age, such information maneuvering can also be detected more easily in this age. In fact, Russia's intervention in the US presidential election was often covered by the media in the summer of 2016. Focusing on the high level of private organizations' information analysis capabilities, GEC mainly provides money to those organizations without conducting its own independent investigations.

Of course, it is out of the question for democracies to stage similar information maneuvering because sharp power takes advantage of the unguarded spots of free and open democratic states. In addition, if democratic states shut a free and open national system by themselves out of their vigilance against sharp power, they will merely play into the hands of the opponent. What the opponent wants most is to drag down the target in terms of moral high ground to his position and to induce the target's soft power to self-destruct.

In this sense, President Trump, who is strangely tolerant to Russia's intervention but is putting stronger pressure on US intelligence agencies and news outlets, may be ideal for China and Russia. In the meantime, China and Russia should be more aware that the soft power strategies they are considering have already been watched with caution as sharp power and could further undermine their national appeal in the medium and long term.

A look at universality in PD

It would be self-evidently clear that the basics of value required for Japan are maintaining the liberal international order in considering these backgrounds and contexts. Although

Japan is a stable democracy with the world's third largest economic scale, advanced technological prowess and a population of more than 100 million, it does not embrace ambitions for global hegemony. Japan's assets include the good sentiment and trust of other countries, with the exception of China and South and North Korea. In addition, Japan contributes to expanding free trade through economic partnership agreements (EPA) with the European Union (EU) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP, so-called TPP11), which has been signed by eleven countries. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific design with the United States, Australia and Indonesia is important in terms of infrastructure and social developments in developing countries as well as security.

Japanese diplomacy is often criticized for its obedience to the United States. However, you will find that this way of thinking is inaccurate if you consider Japan's settlement of TPP11, its support for the Paris agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear agreement and its maintenance of the Japanese Embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel. Considering how tough the security environment surrounding Japan is, our country cannot confront the United States in the same way as European countries. Japan is required to have the wisdom and take action to secure the United States on the side of the liberal international order, maintaining a sense of balance.

When Japanese value and soft power were discussed up until now, Japan's distinctiveness tended to be emphasized. Japanese PD also focused on culture, art and language for many years. This is because this approach made it easier to highlight distinctiveness. The Cool Japan strategy and efforts to attract inbound tourists in recent years are also basically an extension of this approach.

This approach can be said to be a success. In the latest Soft Power 30 rankings (2017), which are released in summer every year by Portland Communications, a British public relations company, Japan ranked fifth (sixth in the previous year). This shows that Japanese culture and tradition are evaluated very highly.

Of course, this approach of highlighting distinctiveness is not wrong at all. The gateway to Japan for young generations abroad is culture, not economy. This approach is extremely effective for expanding the circle of people who understand Japan. On the other hand, however, the approach of highlighting universality appears to leave a great deal of room for growth.

As discussed in *Culture and Diplomacy*, Japanese PD came to emphasize international contribution and international cooperation in the 1990s, when checkbook diplomacy was criticized. In fact, activities related to human security in a broad sense, ranging from development support to humanitarian assistance to peace-building, also became more active and came to be regarded as an important constituent of PD. This can be said to be a huge paradigm shift.

Today Japan bears heavy responsibility for maintaining the liberal international order. From now on, Japanese value and soft power will be required to further heighten their appeal in the sphere of universality, utilizing the accumulation of past efforts. With the hurdle of exercising military might growing higher and deepening economic interdependence, countries are competing for appeal over existing provisions, setting issues and shaping standards and norms in international politics. It is quite insufficient to only highlight Japanese distinctiveness.

An age where diplomacy itself became PD

PD is not an end in itself, but a means for achieving policy goals. Accordingly, if you highlight Japanese universality, you need to start by designing individual policies so that national interests and international interests can overlap. It is difficult to attract customers (international public opinion) to bad products (policy), and if the gap with real things (reality) is large, your credibility will be lost. For example, in the case of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games as well, it is almost certain that programs and directions highlighting Japan's distinctiveness will attract attention and be evaluated highly.

On the other hand, how will universality look? In March 2018, I had an opportunity to attend a symposium on sports diplomacy that was held at the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) in Paris. It turned out that the most frequently asked questions by the audience related to the *raison d'être* of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Officially, the Games are intended for sustainability, including the environment and human rights in a broad sense, but the concept itself lacks novelty. It appears that further ingenuity that can prevent self-complacency and self-praise among the people concerned is needed.

At the symposium, one of the audience members commented, "Regarding the summer Olympics, the Games are scheduled to be held in succession in advanced countries for the first time in many years, in Tokyo, Paris (2024) and Los Angeles (2028). I hope that they will clearly highlight the differences from the Olympics in China and Russia." For example, it is conceivable to set a program based on a collaboration between the three cities. In addition, at the Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang in 2018, the rapprochement between South and North Korea attracted global attention. This was criticized by some as being the political use of the Olympics, but the modern Olympics originally began as part of peaceful movements. It would be possible to use the Tokyo 2020 Olympics as an opportunity to mediate and produce reconciliation and the relaxation of tension that people all over the world pay attention to, including an Olympic truce.

This has profound implications for thinking about PD today. When PD was discussed, we often tended to focus on its tools, such as language education, cultural and art projects, exchanges among people, intellectual dialogue, international broadcasts and international

aid. Of course, each of these tools will continue to be important.

But this is PD in a narrow sense, whereas diplomacy itself has become PD in recent years. As exemplified by the South and North Korean summit and the US-North Korea summit, each of the processes for their realizations was precisely the competition for the appeal over existing provisions, setting issues and shaping standards and norms; that is, PD itself. PD is no longer what is dealt with only by a particular section that is in charge of it. Of course, an official in charge of PD in a conventional narrow sense will continue to be indispensable. But the perspective of looking at diplomacy and policies themselves as “mega PD” will become increasingly important.

I stayed at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. from winter to spring this year. As diplomacy itself becomes PD, PD specialists held fervent discussions about where the niche unique to PD in a narrow sense is specifically wanted and what diplomacy is in the first place. Foreign specialists evaluate Japanese PD highly for its good tools, on the whole, although there are both minor and major issues. On the other hand, I cannot deny that Japanese PD is somewhat lacking in impact in terms of regarding diplomacy itself as mega PD.

Japan is no longer a country where the prime minister changes almost every year. Japan’s presence is certainly increasing as a member of the G7 and the G20. I expect that Japan will conduct mega PD with an appeal to universality that has a sufficient impact for the international community to accept that it has the edge.

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