

The Soft Power of Japanese Culture as a Means to Peace & Prosperity

Discussion by Robert Dujarric, Parissa Haghirian (Chair: Naoyuki Haraoka)

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Naoyuki Haraoka: We have invited Professor Robert Dujarric, director of the Institute of Contemporary Asian Studies at Temple University, and Professor Parissa Haghirian of Sophia University to look at how Japanese culture can serve as a means of “soft power” in achieving the ultimate foreign policy goal of global peace and prosperity. How would you describe the role of soft power as opposed to the traditional hard power?



Parissa Haghirian: “Soft power” has been a topic of concern for me and the concept has been around and looked at for some time, looking at the cultural perspective of arts and language of a country, and using it as a tool in shaping foreign policies. Japan has a distinct and interesting culture that it can take advantage of. But the elegance and beauty of Japanese culture is often overlooked or not visible from the outside world, and there seems to be a missing link between the cultural aspects of Japan, Japan’s soft power, and the hard power.

Robert Dujarric: It is important to first define the concept of “soft power”. Cultural aspects of Japan such as anime and manga may make no contributions to Japanese foreign policy, but education has a major role to play. The United States is attracting numerous foreign students from the entire planet. These foreign students may not end up liking the US, but they will, nevertheless, benefit from studying in the US. Japan, on the other hand, is not attracting enough foreigners to study in Japan, especially at the top universities. Popular culture may also be useful if it disseminates certain elements of political ideology. American pop culture such as Hollywood entertainment and Disney sends out a message of individualism, freedom, and democracy, but its impact on foreign policy is very difficult to quantify. The negative reactions and impact of the popular culture of a particular country on another should also always be considered, and therefore soft power, while important, is limited in terms of its influence.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Would programs like the ERASMUS (European

Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) be more effective than popular culture?

Parissa Haghirian: Education is certainly important. There were times when foreigners studied Japanese for karate or for business, but surprisingly, many students now come to Japan because of manga. It is worth noting that the interest in manga, a particular aspect of Japanese

culture, is motivating students to study in Japan and be the bridge in providing educational opportunities to foreign students. But connecting the value of Japanese culture, or the classical philosophy of Confucianism and Shintoism that guides Japanese culture, to politics may be a challenge as it is difficult for non-Japanese to understand. How these values of Japanese culture may be combined with a political message targeting foreigners is not clear.

Robert Dujarric: The goal of ERASMUS was to create a greater sense of European identity and to break down borders across Europe. It was not soft power to service a particular political agenda, but it was intended to connect students within the European Union. A similar development occurred during the Meiji period where public schools were established and young men were conscripted into the army to form a sense of “nationality” rather than the traditional *han* (domain) system. ERASMUS is a softer version of that which was aimed at creating a “Europeanness” through education.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Waseda University has a similar plan to ERASMUS that covers Asia. What is your view on this? Would in-depth communication between not only students but also academics be useful in achieving the goal of peace and prosperity?

Parissa Haghirian: Connecting universities is always a good idea, but it is essential to have the appropriate accreditations in place and the programs need to be competitive.

Robert Dujarric: An Asian ERASUMS would be good for Japanese

companies, allowing them to hire non-Japanese Asians in Japan, and Japanese in Asia, but it would not necessarily lead to peace and prosperity. As we have seen in Europe through history leading to World War I, Europeans were connected and trans-national in so many ways, but yet went to war.

Parissa Haghirian: The question is, to what extent can culture influence business or political processes. Japan can use better marketing tools and techniques to erase the many prejudices against Japanese management, which date back 20 years. Little is known about recent or current events in Japan, and the outside world in general should know that there is more to Japan than manga and Kabuki. Japanese entrepreneurship should be more visible from the outside, and it is the attitude of Japanese society that is of interest to non-Japanese.

Naoyuki Haraoka: There are two aspects to Japanese culture. One is a specific product of Japanese culture like anime or cuisine. The other is the attitude and philosophy that is inherent in the daily lives of the Japanese people, such as obedience to the law and hospitality. Can this attitude play a role in foreign policy, and also in achieving peace and prosperity?

Parissa Haghirian: There is a difference between the symbols and the philosophy behind it. Symbols like anime and cuisine will always be important and powerful, but it is difficult to control how these symbols affect people, and the philosophy behind the symbols is difficult to understand from the outside. Its role in foreign policies, therefore, seems unclear. But symbols can be useful tools in carrying images, and with the right targeting and communication methods, they can be designed to serve as a political tool.

Robert Dujarric: Food can be a useful tool in getting a country known, such as French cuisine and wine or Chinese food, and the same can be said about language. But you can be eating a foreign cuisine and speaking a foreign language, and still be at war with each other. Thus while the cultural aspect of food and language is important, it has limits in terms of achieving political objectives.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Should the ability of Japan to recover from disasters, as we saw after the Great East Japan Earthquake, be the core of its soft power, and does it provide a positive message about Japan?

Robert Dujarric: The recovery is noted outside Japan. But in terms of media coverage, stories about the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant and Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) have not been positive, and it seems the less this is talked about, the better for Japan.

Parissa Haghirian: Coverage in the German media centered on the nuclear power plant issue and was very critical of TEPCO, and non-

Japanese students are just starting to come back to Japan, quicker than had been anticipated. In fact, the focus outside Japan was not so much on the recovery aspect but more on orderly behavior in times of disaster, which was quite visible. Foreigners in general were impressed by the fact that there was no violence or riots although many cities and towns were destroyed, and this is an aspect that should be talked about more.



Naoyuki Haraoka, Editor-in-chief of Japan SPOTLIGHT, and Executive Managing Director at Japan Economic Foundation

Naoyuki Haraoka: What role would literature have as a soft power?

Robert Dujarric: Literature certainly is a form of soft power as it makes a country known. The key question is how literature can be used to achieve economic and foreign policy objectives. Culture, broadly speaking, can have economic implications, and Hollywood generates huge income and has a sizable economic impact on the US. It has been said that the Japanese anime and manga industry is not maximizing its revenue potential, and perhaps a media conglomerate equivalent to Walt Disney in Japan utilizing a character like Mickey Mouse may be useful economically. But whether it can have a political effect is unclear.

Parissa Haghirian: “Country branding” may be an interesting topic to pick up. Austria, where I am from, is a good example of country branding, having been successful in getting the country known for its music and tourism. But there are technology-based industries in Austria that are highly competitive and sometimes have a problem standing up against Austria’s “Sound of Music” image. A country brand should be designed carefully so that it is specific, but stay away from the classic clichés. Japan has many interesting aspects to sell, but it seems branding has never been considered. Moving away from clichés may be useful for Japan, but whether that can have a political impact seems unclear.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Is the “Cool Japan” initiative a useful tool to achieve foreign policy outcomes?

Parissa Haghirian: It is a good concept in bringing in young people and in creating a stylish image for Japan, but it only reaches out to a certain group of people.

Robert Dujarric: Japan fails in cultural diplomacy as there is little government or corporate funding for Japanese to study abroad. Germany, for example, has many institutions that provide public outreach like the Adenauer Foundation, Ebert Foundation, or the numerous German studies centers in US universities. Small investment by the Japanese government can only achieve small outcomes. Japanese universities are trying to get more foreign staff but the universities are not yet internationalized enough.

Parissa Haghirian: In terms of soft power, Japan and Germany have the highest ranking in surveys and both have positive images. Germany has created images such as “Young Berlin” specifically targeting the younger generation, thereby diversifying the traditional messages of Germany to a mix of generations. But Japan still has fragmented images that are neither unified nor controlled. The various images of Japan as “No. 1”, karate, “Cool Japan”, samurai, anime, etc. are all floating about, with no framework or overall arching concept to unify these images, and unified marketing is needed.

Naoyuki Haraoka: “Cool Japan” is a government initiative, but cultural activities should be led by the private sector, and perhaps this “Cool Japan” concept can serve as a catalyst to promote private-sector initiatives.

Parissa Haghirian: Many big Japanese companies have entrepreneurial competitions, which in other countries are done by the government. This indicates the trust placed by the Japanese government in the private sector to carry some of the government functions.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Tokyo will host the 2020 Olympics and it will be a good opportunity for Japan to increase its presence on the world

stage. The Japanese government is also keen to increase the number of foreign tourists to Japan, especially to various cities and towns across the country. What should Japan do?

Parissa Haghirian: Symbols like anime, manga, and cuisine need to be integrated into a bigger communication concept of Japanese soft power. But it is currently not done strategically and is only done operationally.

Naoyuki Haraoka: On an operational level, perhaps more English signs across Japan would be helpful for foreign tourists?

Robert Dujarric: Many foreign tourists are from East Asia, and while many of the Southeast Asian nationals understand English, the Chinese and the Koreans would be more comfortable with their own language. In this respect, staffing at Japanese hotels comes short of their needs as they are mostly Japanese, and for Japan to attract tourists the tourism sector needs to hire more foreign nationals.

Parissa Haghirian: Tourism is a good way to promote the “Japan” brand, and the focus should not be so much on language, as there is an exotic aspect to visiting a country where an entirely different language is spoken.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Japan should attract more foreign direct investment, and tourism plays an important role in attracting foreign investment. For example Niseko in Hokkaido attracts many Australian tourists, and brought many Australian businesses into the town. The Tokyo Olympics should provide a good opportunity to boost tourism, and this should lead to a dramatic increase in foreign direct investment in Japan.

Parissa Haghirian: Tourism certainly is the first step in attracting foreign direct investment, but Japan’s image should be carefully planned and created. If people still perceive Japan to be a samurai country, it would not be helpful to businesses. There is a need to integrate the diverse aspects of Japanese culture and to make sure that the message is communicated professionally and coherently.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Should Japan be more Westernized?

Parissa Haghirian: This would depend on what Japan wants to achieve through Westernization. One can never leave one’s national culture, and it is neither possible nor necessary. But if national culture becomes an obstacle to a society’s development, then it becomes a problem.

Robert Dujarric: Japan became partly Westernized during the Meiji era when it created a Western state with thoroughly Western management. The Japanese have internalized Western concepts which many now believe are inherent and traditional. For example, the emperor was a cultural symbol in traditional Japan, but the Meiji constitution made the emperor a European-style king. Conservative forces in Japan today are attached to the king-soldier image of the emperor, but this is a European concept, not a Japanese one. The recent ruling by the Supreme Court that children who are born out of wedlock should be treated equally on inheritance is another example. Japanese conservatives have condemned this ruling by saying it breaks the traditional family system, but in the Edo era the family system was more relaxed and divorce was more common in early



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Meiji. In Europe, however, the family system was more strict, and it was these Western ideas that were internalized by the Japanese during the Meiji era. Historically, many European countries have had a very conservative family system, and not until very recently did the Europeans decide that this was an unfair system. In this sense, Japan seems to be 20 years behind Europe. What the Japanese conservatives are claiming to defend as Japanese traditional values is in fact the traditional 19th century European family system and has nothing to do with Japanese culture or Japanese civilization.

Parissa Haghirian: The Japanese often try to become more Western, or be able to speak more English, but there is no need to become non-Japanese. Other countries do not try to Westernize or be different as it is not necessary to change. When cultural rules make it hard to achieve happiness, then perhaps it is a problem. Conservative European countries are starting to change on issues where conservative catholic values do not hold anymore, but this change has little connection with culture. In Japan, however, many discussions are strongly connected to whether Japan should Westernize, and the debate here should be a social issue, not a cultural issue. There are many beautiful things in Japan which the Japanese should be proud of, and these do not need to change. Internationalization or globalization is not Westernization.

Naoyuki Haraoka: What is your impression of the English skills of Japanese people?

Robert Dujarric: The ability to speak a foreign language reflects demand, and if you come from a small language group you have to be able to speak a foreign language, but if you come from an English-speaking country the incentives to speak another language are smaller. For Japan, the demand is also low: foreign trade accounts for a low proportion of Japanese GDP, not many Japanese live abroad, and there are few immigrants in Japan. Therefore the foreign language ability in Japan is fairly low, simply because the incentives are not there. Most Japanese do not need to be able to speak a foreign language, but the real issue is that those who must, and should, do not. In addition, language should not be the key in communicating with foreigners, but rather, the key should be in understanding the foreign culture and how it functions. In order to do business effectively in a foreign country, there is a need to both speak a common language and also be familiar with the local culture. It is often the case that the Japanese do speak perfect English, for example, but do not necessarily understand the world outside Japan, and this is in part due to the education system, the bureaucratic system, and the ways companies operate. This hinders both Japanese soft power and Japanese diplomacy. It is also a problem particularly for the Japanese service sector where adaptability to the local market is critical. Japan is relatively weak in the service sector internationally because the Japanese seem to fall short on understanding how things function outside of Japan.

Parissa Haghirian: There seems to be a constant self-bashing in Japan in terms of what Japan should do, but it is good to do things the Japanese way, unless it is blocking economic development or individual happiness.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Should young students be encouraged to study abroad?

Parissa Haghirian: If these students go abroad and just have a good time, that is great. If one's thinking and perspectives expand by going abroad and by experiencing another culture, then that experience of studying becomes all the more valuable. But it would be naive to believe that the experience can change the culture that is deeply rooted within each individual person. Culture is only a problem when it becomes a barrier to moving forward or to being happy.

Naoyuki Haraoka: Would concluding the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement before the Tokyo Olympics be useful in promoting Japan's openness?

Robert Dujarric: The TPP has been a big issue in Japan because it is linked to the relationship between the Liberal Democratic Party and the agriculture lobbyists. Although agriculture in Japan is only a small percentage of the Japanese economy, the agriculture lobbyists are powerful and have made the TPP and liberalization a big issue in Japanese politics, because the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA) is getting weaker with the aging farming population and is opposed to liberalization. But the big businesses have realized that free trade agreements are beneficial to the Japanese business community, and the agriculture lobbyists are fighting. The TPP is a complex process which involves many stakeholders including the state, industries, corporations, and national alliances, but the TPP and the Olympics should be separate issues. But the Olympics may be used as a tool by the Japanese government to move the TPP process forward by making the Olympics an artificial deadline for the negotiations. If the Japanese public can internalize the notion that the TPP must be concluded before the Olympics, it may be helpful.

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