

The Role of Public Diplomacy in Shaping International Relations: Lessons from Japan's Soft Power Strategy

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The word “public diplomacy” refers to an attempt made by a nation to forge alliances, influence public opinion overseas, and promote its values and culture. Joseph Nye came up with the term “soft power” to describe a nation’s capacity to influence others without using force (military or economic) by way of its ideals, culture, and foreign policy. Japan has been a leader in the use of public diplomacy and soft power to increase its global influence. After the Second World War, Japan adopted a foreign policy aimed at influencing the world through its cultural and economic resources. This approach, often referred to as “Cool Japan,” has several components.

The soft power strategy of Japan, a crucial part of the nation’s post-World War II foreign policy, is explained in detail by Katsumata. Because Japan has historically had weak military power, the country has looked to exert its influence on the world through other means.

One of the main components of Japan’s soft power strategy is its focus on cultural exports, which have created a global fan base for Japanese pop culture, including anime, manga, and video games. Japanese pop culture has become increasingly popular in Asia, Europe, and the United States, and has helped to enhance Japan’s international image as a modern and innovative country. The popularity of Japanese pop culture has also led to an increase in the number of people studying Japanese language and culture around the world.

Japan’s international aid programs have also been an important part of its soft power strategy. Japan is one of the largest donors of foreign aid in the world, providing funding for various development projects in countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Japan’s aid programs have helped to build schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure in developing countries, improving the lives of millions of people and enhancing Japan’s reputation as a responsible global citizen. In addition, Japan has established a network of cultural centers, known as the Japan Foundation, around the world to promote Japanese culture and language. The Japanese government has also launched public diplomacy campaigns, such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme was established in 1987 to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other countries. The program invites young people from around the world to live and work in Japan as assistant language teachers or coordinators for international relations.

Japan has implemented several successful public diplomacy campaigns that have contributed to the country’s soft power and international influence. These campaigns have been led by both the Japanese government and the private sector, and have utilized a

range of strategies to effectively promote Japan's image and interests abroad.

One example of a successful public diplomacy effort by the Japanese government is the "Cool Japan" campaign, which aims to promote Japan's pop culture and other cultural exports around the world. The campaign was launched in 2009 and has since become a key component of Japan's soft power strategy. Through the "Cool Japan" campaign, the Japanese government has sponsored events and activities that showcase Japanese pop cultures, such as anime and manga and has provided funding for cultural exchange programs with other countries. The campaign has been particularly successful in Asia, where Japanese pop culture has gained a strong following, and has helped to build a positive image of Japan.

The Manga Ambassador program is a prime example of how Japan has utilized popular culture as a tool for public diplomacy. The Japanese government appointed a manga artist as a cultural ambassador to leverage the global popularity of manga and anime to promote Japan's soft power and influence. The ambassador has participated in various public diplomacy events, including visits to schools and libraries worldwide and appearances at international anime and manga festivals.

By promoting manga and anime as cultural products that reflect Japan's unique identity and values, Japan has built a positive image of itself around the world. This unique approach has helped to strengthen Japan's reputation as a modern, innovative, and culturally rich nation, ultimately contributing to its soft power strategy. The Manga Ambassador program is a successful example of how a country can use its cultural assets to build relationships and influence other nations positively.

The "Toyota Way" management style, which places an emphasis on continuous development, cooperation, and respect for people, is one of the effective public diplomacy efforts run by the private sector in Japan. Through training efforts, collaborations with colleges, and other activities, Toyota has actively pushed this ideology around the world. "Toyota Way" has been acknowledged for its success in boosting organisational performance. This has improved Japan's standing as a pioneer in innovation and quality control.

In a number of ways, these public diplomacy initiatives have increased Japan's soft power and global impact. First and foremost, they have contributed to the good perception of Japan as a contemporary, creative, and culturally rich country. As a result, Japan's standing as an international leader and a responsible global citizen has improved. Second, these initiatives have promoted links with other countries, particularly in Asia, where support for Japanese culture and commercial practices is particularly strong. As a result, Japan's influence and economic presence have grown throughout the area.

Overall, Japan's effective public diplomacy operations, both directed by the government and the private sector, have considerably increased its soft power and worldwide influence. These initiatives have helped to promote a favourable picture of Japan and its

people by showcasing the nation's distinctive cultural history, robust economy, and managerial practices.

Finally, the promotion of Japan's culture, values, and policies through the use of soft power and public diplomacy is a convincing illustration of how a nation may influence international relations. Japan has been able to extend its influence beyond its national borders and enhance its reputation internationally through investing in cultural exports, foreign aid, and public diplomacy initiatives. Despite obstacles and critiques, Japan's strategy has been successful, and other nations seeking to build their soft power and influence how the world views their nation may learn a lot from it.

[Header image: Akihabara district of Tokyo, popular with anime and manga fans. Photo by ElHeineken, via Wikimedia Commons]

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