Poland·Japan Foundation

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A means to an end and an end in itself

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A comparison of identity construction on the websites of the Japan Foundation and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute

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The way in which social reality is constructed – in this case cultural and public diplomacy – has a bearing on which projects are funded, how success is measured, one's credibility in the eyes of partners and the self-image created in the eyes of other states. In the case of Japan, culture is treated as a foreign policy instrument, whereas Poland frames it more as an intrinsic good. This difference in framing has effects on what each state presents as politically possible.

There is a fundamental difference between the way in which the Japan Foundation (JF) and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute (AMI) present their core identities on their homepages. The latter uses a spatial frame of reference to represent itself as a site; more specifically, it is the place "where Polish culture meets the world". In contrast, and consistently with Japanese philosophical, social, political and economic writing, the JF uses an agricultural metaphor to proclaim that it is the ongoing practice of "cultivating friendship and ties between Japan and the world". Metaphors of place, in distinction to metaphors of movement, create a feeling of stability and safety, while metaphors of movement connote dynamism and change, although the agricultural character of the Japanese formulation adds a figurative layer associated with nature and peace. Read as branding, these two slogans hint at different roles: the AMI positions Polish culture as a stable meeting place, whereas the JF casts Japan as an active gardener of international relationships. Studies in marketing suggest that metaphorical framings can make brand communication more effective, so the choice between "site" and "cultivation" here is unlikely to be neutral.

Framing and the use of metaphors in political texts are not only a matter of aesthetics and are not value-free. Rather, these aspects of style highlight some aspects of a text and make them seem more salient, bringing with them policy implications and ramifications, while at the same time taking attention away from other ways in which problems and issues might be conceptualised or addressed. They "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate and prescribe". More significant than whether texts

published by the JF, the AMI or other political actors are true or real in any absolute sense is the fact that if such texts are indeed treated as *bona fide* by other political actors, they work to structure social reality and thus take on the status of truth.

As far as the work of the two actors is concerned in general terms, neither organisation uses the term 'cultural diplomacy' on their homepages in characterising their activities. Only the JF actually puts a name to what it does, by speaking of "carrying out comprehensive international *cultural exchange*". In contrast, the AMI simply tells the reader what it does directly, without labelling itself, thus leaving itself a measure of policy freedom which would be hindered if it had, like the JF, labelled its activities. Insofar as linguistic freedom is concerned, Poland has not tied itself to anglophone traditions by adopting labels such as "cultural diplomacy" or "public diplomacy", and has thereby kept the scope of its practises relatively open. Japan, however, has taken a different path to ensuring policy freedom – not by avoiding such labels, but by cultivating a degree of vagueness about its own role. Whilst in general the JF's website is peppered with the phrase "cultivating friendship and ties between Japan and the world", the homepage also states that – in congruence with its preference for behind-the-scenes diplomacy – the foundation only "creates *opportunities* to foster friendship, trust and mutual understanding", meaning that it can easily deny accountability or responsibility for failed policies or unexpected results, since it is acting only as a facilitator. Opportunities for anything only function if the parties involved perceive them as such and are able to avail themselves of those opportunities.

In general, the AMI does not highlight its association with cultural diplomacy on its website. Indeed, the concept is only mentioned four times; once in its Employment section and three times in press releases relating to exhibitions or events. In contrast, the JF refers to the concept on numerous occasions, including in a text written by the president of the organisation, which asserts that, "ever since its establishment in 1972, the Japan Foundation has played a key role in promoting cultural diplomacy".

The above-mentioned pattern of association can also be observed in relation to public diplomacy – a term initially adopted by the United States to allow it to practice propaganda without the negative Soviet Bloc associations of the term during the Cold War – with the AMI associating itself with the term just twice. In contrast, the term appears frequently on the website of the JF.

Besides presenting the two organisations as different kinds of subjects, their homepages give the visitor a hint at what their foci are, in terms of practices, as well as how they conceptualise their activities. The JF gives the impression that, irrespective of what the substantive content of its work might be, its overarching goals are international ties and friendship. Moreover, it aims to "[create] global opportunities to foster friendship, trust and mutual understanding". In other words, the cultural works with which it engages serve as vehicles for superordinate goals. One gets the impression that, for Japan, its practices regarding culture and art are a means to a greater end, similarly to the way that it sometimes frames other foreign policy initiatives, such as human security, in terms of goals like prosperity or well-being. In contrast, the AMI prioritises cultural works and artists. It does not tie its work to hard foreign-policy goals such as security or economic well-being, even though, in practice, it clearly serves Poland's interest in projecting a particular national identity. Instead, it frames its practices in terms of "[bringing] Polish culture to people

around the world" and "[creating] lasting interest in Polish culture and art". As such, for Warsaw, culture is presented as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end.

A closer examination of the organisations' websites reveals varying degrees of detail regarding what they do and why. One common point between them is the commitment to the idea that cultural exchange can lead to mutual understanding and that this is a worthy pursuit. For Japan, however, cultural exchange goes further than a general commitment to the belief that understanding other states can somehow alleviate war and conflict; it is explicitly linked to Nye's notion of soft power in a manner typical of the self-interested state.

> [The Japan Foundation is] concerned about the fact that states are apparently increasingly using hard power as part of their national security policies. [We] think that soft power is more effective in preventing conflict and promoting peace, as part of national security.

Soft power, like hard power, is a complex of resources used by states to achieve their national interests. The former is theorised to work indirectly, by creating positive images of the applying state in the citizens of the target state, who are then expected to – somehow – affect their own state's foreign policy in ways conducive to the goals of the applying state. Theoretical difficulties aside, this interest-driven logic is in tension with the foundation's repeated invocations of "mutual understanding" and "cultivating friendship", which suggest a more reciprocal rationale. Moreover, even if the pursuit of soft power does include the cultivation of mutual understanding or respect, neither of these is mutually exclusive with war and conflict; states can respect and understand one another and still prepare for, or engage in, armed confrontation.

The practices of both the AMI and the JF extend beyond culture into public diplomacy, whereby they contribute to branding and the promotion of national identity abroad. One difference between the two organisations is the visibility of their national identity constructions. Poland presents an image clearly and explicitly, while in the case of Japan, it is visible only implicitly, through statements about the objectives of its policies, and through non-verbal modes of transmission, such as a public relations film about the foundation. The implicit mode of Japan's national identity projection is a common theme in Japanese diplomacy, whereby it applies power indirectly, obfuscates its own role and de-emphasises its leadership aspirations, partly as a result of unresolved issues following its brutal policies across Asia during the Pacific War. The behind-the-scenes diplomacy which can be observed in the JF texts seems particularly apt from Tokyo's perspective, necessitating an unaggressive posture, in light of how ASEAN – a region with which Japan has mixed diplomatic relations – is a focus for the foundation.

Both the JF and the AMI evoke visions and dreams in justifying their activities. For Tokyo, the driving force is that of "shaping a brighter future that is richer than today". It thus invokes a feeling of optimism and an appeal to economic well-being. For Warsaw, it is "to help build a future full of dialogue, understanding, and beauty — through culture". There is an overlap between the two organisations in regard to their references to understanding and dialogue, which are hallmarks of cultural diplomacy, but they also differ, since economic measures figure in Japan's texts while Poland prioritises aesthetic sensibilities.

Another difference between the JF and the AMI is in reference to the values each institute purports to uphold. For Poland, these are innovation, integrity, inclusivity, quality, collaboration and flexibility. Japan, on the other hand, has not expressed any values explicitly, perhaps because of the resistance to the idea of universal values among Asian – particularly ASEAN – states. Japan supports the idea that Asian states should not be judged according to universal values, and its lack of an expression of values is in line with its policy.

In summary, for the JF, culture is presented as a means to an end in which national security and soft power are prioritised. While the website frequently refers to cultural and public diplomacy, Japan's role is constructed in a vague way, which diffuses its responsibility. Conversely, the AMI frames culture primarily as something to be shared and cultivated for its own sake, rather than in the pursuit of other goals. It avoids using terms such as cultural or public diplomacy, which provides policy freedom, but manages to highlight foreign policy goals – in the form of national identity projection.

The JF's talk of soft power and national security tends to undermine its focus on friendship and mutual understanding, while the idea that it only facilitates cultural exchange takes away from its credibility. The AMI's published strategic goals are framed in cultural-sector terms – audiences, partnerships, knowledge – even though its activities do support Poland's foreign-policy objective of projecting a particular national image. That gap in the way its goals are articulated makes the institute more exposed when foreign-policy budgets are debated or cut.

Taken together, the two websites point to two models of cultural diplomacy. The Japan Foundation treats culture as an instrumental resource, explicitly linked to soft power and national security and described in the language of cultural and public diplomacy. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute presents culture as an intrinsic good, framed in terms of sharing, dialogue and aesthetic value, avoiding strong policy labels but using it as a way in which to present an image of Poland abroad. The price of the first model is credibility; the price of the second is political vulnerability when budgets tighten.

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