

## **Comparing Japan's public diplomacy in Europe: The Japan Foundation in Bulgaria and France**

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**Abstract.** The study focuses on one of Japan's main public diplomacy actors - the Japan Foundation and its cultural activities for increasing Japan's cultural presence in Europe. The discussion puts emphasis on two European countries: France - a country where the Japan Foundation's office has been established, and Bulgaria - where an office of the Japan Foundation does not exist, but the Japanese Embassy has been facilitating programs of the Foundation.

The paper examines the Japan Foundation's initiatives in Bulgaria and France from the 1970s to 2018. It compares the Foundation's projects in the two countries, highlighting both the strong and the insufficient points in terms of its cultural promotion activity. On the basis of the findings, the study provides a framework of suggestions with regard to the future projects of the Japan Foundation for further increase of Japan's cultural presence in the areas.

**Keywords:** the Japan Foundation in Europe, Japanese public diplomacy, cultural promotion, cultural presence

### **1. Introduction**

In the international society, public diplomacy has been implemented as an essential instrument for projecting a positive national image and strengthening a country's cultural presence abroad. Such example is Japan, a country which puts great emphasis on its public diplomacy. It has been exercising it since the 1860s, the period when the country began its process of modernization (Ogawa 2009, 272). Some of the first public diplomacy initiatives of Japan include its participation in World Expositions as well as particular public relations activities conducted during the Russo-Japanese War. After World War II, public diplomacy was applied with the aim to transform the prewar image of Japan as a militaristic country into a harmonious and peaceful democracy. Afterwards, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, it was also exercised in order to present Japan to the world as a technologically and economically advanced nation. At

present, Japan's public diplomacy objectives evolved to include the establishment of prosperous international relations and a favourable environment for Japanese diplomacy.

Through the Public Diplomacy Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japan Foundation, the Cabinet Office, and other agencies, Japan implements public diplomacy strategies to increase its cultural presence and partnership with Europe. This study puts emphasis especially on the initiatives of the Japan Foundation as crucial public diplomacy actor collaborating with various institutions. The discussion focuses on two European countries: France - a country where the Japan Foundation's office has been established, and Bulgaria - where an office of the Japan Foundation does not exist, but the Japanese Embassy has been facilitating programs of the Foundation. In order to provide a more profound analysis and recommendations for Japan's further public diplomacy initiatives on the continent, it is essential to compare and examine Japan's cultural promotion in countries from both Western and Eastern Europe, especially those which differ in terms of the existence of the Foundation's office.

The reason for focusing on France as a case study from Western Europe is the fact that in France, Japanese culture has been promoted to a greater extent in comparison with other countries on the continent. As Masuda emphasizes, France is more familiar with Japan than any other nation in Europe (Agence France-Presse 2018). An example of Japan's great cultural promotion activity in France has been the Japonismes 2018 event, held in commemoration of the 160th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. According to Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Japonismes 2018 initiative has been "Japan's largest endeavor to share Japanese culture with the world" (Japonismes 2018).

The reason for focusing on Bulgaria as a case study from Eastern Europe is due to the author's language ability and contacts within the country, providing opportunities for a greater accessibility to a broad range of sources. This enables the author to implement a more in-depth study of Japan's public diplomacy in Bulgaria in comparison with such examination in other countries in Eastern Europe. Bulgaria is also a country demonstrating a strong interest in Japanese culture, but with limited opportunities for experiencing it, which provides much space for further Japanese cultural promotion initiatives (Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria 2019). In addition, the results stemming from the study on Bulgaria could serve as a basis for any future comparative research of Japan's public diplomacy in Eastern Europe.

Through the observation and the comparison of the Japan Foundation's projects in Bulgaria and France, the study clarifies what initiatives have been conducted so far in order to discover both the strong points and the space for improvement. On the basis of the findings, the study suggests what future projects could be conducted to further strengthen Japanese soft power in the two countries.

Due to the lack of any published sources on the topic, the discussion on the Japan Foundation's initiatives in Bulgaria and France was constructed on the basis of the full lists of activities implemented between 1973 and 2018 in those two countries. The lists are unpublished documents, kindly provided to

the author of the present study by the Foundation. They consist of 676 projects in Bulgaria and 4,618 in France, which were classified in three categories and translated from Japanese into English language for this study. The originality of this study makes it a good reference for any future research in this field. In addition, to further strengthen the arguments in the paper, some points emphasized during a personal interview with Bratislav Ivanov, an author of various books on linguistics and cultural studies and a teacher of Japanese language and studies in Bulgaria, and with Michel Wasserman, scholar and former director of the Institut français in Japan, were also included.

## **2. The concept of “public diplomacy”: Definitions and subsets**

Public diplomacy is closely linked to power. In the international society, it has been considered a crucial instrument for wielding soft power. The term “soft power” was first coined by the Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye. He defined it as “the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye 2011, 21). Soft power is also described as the use of culture as a form of diplomatic policy, also known as public diplomacy or cultural diplomacy. It represents the link between a country’s cultural activities and diplomacy abroad.

Public diplomacy has been exercised as an essential instrument for strengthening a country’s cultural presence abroad and international relations. It differs from the traditional diplomacy in various aspects. It is characterized as an unofficial, indirect and dialogic diplomacy. Public diplomacy is also implemented by mixed coalitions of governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental actors. As the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (n.d.) defines it, public diplomacy is “the public, interactive dimension of diplomacy which is not only global in nature, but also involves a multitude of actors and networks” and it is “a key mechanism through which nations foster mutual trust and productive relationships and has become crucial to building a secure global environment”.

Public diplomacy consists of particular subsets through which it has been exercised. Such include cultural diplomacy, listening, advocacy, international broadcasting, and exchanges (Cull 2009, 10). The terms public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy might look similar as they are both instruments of soft power. However, they should not be equated. Cultural diplomacy, as Leonard describes it, is “that part of public diplomacy that is concerned with the building of long-term relationships” (Mark 2009, 6). Public diplomacy also consists of a broader set of activities than cultural diplomacy, “primarily those government media and public relations activities aimed at a foreign public in order to explain a course of action, or present a case” (Mark 2009, 15).

### 3. Main actors of Japan's public diplomacy

There are two main actors in charge of Japan's public diplomacy - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Japan Foundation. MOFA's Public Diplomacy Department is engaged with external public relations, the promotion of Japanese language, studies, and culture abroad and the conduct of people-to-people exchange as well as artistic and intellectual exchange. The second main public diplomacy actor - the Japan Foundation, was established in October 1972 as a special legal entity supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later - in October 2003, recognized as an independent administrative institution (The Japan Foundation 2018a). It is considered the only Japanese "institution dedicated to carrying out comprehensive international cultural exchange programs throughout the world" (The Japan Foundation 2018a). The Japan Foundation functions with the objectives to "deepen understanding of Japan in foreign countries, promote mutual international understanding, contribute to the world in culture and other fields, create good international environment and contribute to the maintenance and development of harmonious foreign relations of Japan (Article 3, The Japan Foundation Independent Administrative Institution Law)" (The Japan Foundation 2003). It conducts various programs in three categories - art and cultural exchange, Japanese-language education overseas, and Japanese studies and intellectual exchange. Through its close cooperation with MOFA, the Foundation functions as a mediator between the government and the private and civil society sectors, while maintaining a certain level of autonomy from the ministry (Ogawa 2009, 272).

Together with its headquarters located in Tokyo, the Japan Foundation has a Kyoto Office and two Japanese-language institutes - the Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa and the Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute, Kansai. The Foundation has constructed a global network consisting of 25 overseas offices in 24 countries (including two Asia Center liaison offices) as well (The Japan Foundation 2018a). It also collaborates with various Japanese language institutions and cultural exchange organizations all over the world. In addition, the Foundation cooperates with Japanese embassies and consulates abroad to globally expand its activities (The Japan Foundation 2018b).

The Japan Foundation plays a crucial role in the nurturing of long-term interest towards Japanese culture abroad. Despite the current popularity of Japan worldwide, according to Watanabe (2018), "as time passes, foreign culture comes to seem ordinary and people tire of it" and "the vogue for Japan will one day reach its sell-by date". In order to maintain a continuous interest towards Japan, it would be necessary to establish new cultural values and reconsider the direction of its cultural promotion policies. Japan should work to introduce its daily life and customs, philosophies and attitudes towards life and nature. In facing this challenge, the Japan Foundation is highly contributory. First, through its cultural projects abroad the Foundation has been working to present a variety of Japanese values. Second, it promotes Japanese language, which "helps foster future leaders who will build a bridge between Japan and overseas, deepen understanding towards Japan, and lay a foundation for friendship with

other countries” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2017). Third, the Japan Foundation implements Japanese studies and intellectual exchange programs providing the participants with the opportunities to visit Japan, experience its culture, and develop new relationships. Through all these initiatives, the Foundation contributes to the maintenance and further deepening of foreign people’s interest about Japan in a long-term perspective. An essential feature of the Foundation is also the broad type of audience that it reaches ranging from the younger generation, the elite, the middle-aged and the senior generation.

#### **4. Exercising Japan’s public diplomacy: The Japan Foundation in Bulgaria and France**

##### **4.1. The Japan Foundation in Bulgaria**

The Japan Foundation has been highly significant for the promotion of Japanese culture in Bulgaria. The Foundation’s first initiatives in the country began in the 1970s, a period characterized with rich cultural exchange between the two countries. In addition, the Agreement on cooperation in science, art and culture between the Governments of Bulgaria and Japan of 1975, played an essential role in the creation of a favourable atmosphere for the Japan Foundation’s public diplomacy activity in Bulgaria. At the time, the President of the Foundation - Kon Hidemi actively participated during the debates for the agreement (Kandilarov 2016, 115). One month after finalizing the agreement, a Bulgarian delegation, led by Lyudmila Zhivkova, the Chair of the Committee for Art and Culture, visited Japan. The delegation negotiated with the Japan Foundation the organization of a variety of activities on the two countries’ territories such as exhibitions in the field of painting, folklore and applied arts, musical exchange, as well as reception of Bulgarian specialists in Japan through the assistance of the Foundation (Kandilarov 2016, 115). In 1976, following an invitation by the Committee for Art and Culture, two cultural delegations led by Kon Hidemi and Professor Egami Namio also arrived in Bulgaria to discuss various initiatives and mechanisms for further cooperation on cultural exchange between the two countries (Kandilarov 2016, 115-116). As a result, Bulgarian-Japanese cultural interactions increased and a broad range of projects of the Japan Foundation have been conducted in Bulgaria in the following three categories - art and cultural exchange, Japanese-language education, and Japanese studies and intellectual exchange<sup>1</sup>.

##### *Art and cultural exchange*

The Japan Foundation’s first public diplomacy projects in Bulgaria in the field of art and cultural exchange began with an *ikebana* flower arrangement demonstration in 1974, as part of its program for introducing Japanese culture

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<sup>1</sup> The Japan Foundation projects for Bulgaria in the period between 1973 and 2018. (Unpublished document). The document was kindly provided to the author of the present study by the Japan Foundation.

abroad (*Nipponbunka Shoukai Haken*). The program has been characterized with the provision of financial assistance for dispatching Japanese artists and cultural figures to conduct activities aimed at presenting various aspects of Japanese culture. At the same time, the Foundation has been implementing and co-sponsoring a variety of other Japanese cultural initiatives in Bulgaria both autonomously and in collaboration with Japanese and Bulgarian public diplomacy actors. Such example is the large-scale annual event “Days of Japanese Culture” (*Nihon Bunka Gekkan*). The event has been conducted in Bulgaria since 1991 by the Japanese Embassy with the support of the Japan Foundation and other actors including Nihon-tomono-kai, the Club of the Friends of Japan in Bulgaria, museums, galleries and academic institutions, business enterprises, clubs, associations and foundations related to Japanese cultural promotion, and others.

In the field of Japanese literature promotion in Bulgaria, the Japan Foundation has been playing a highly essential role. Since the 1980s, it has been providing financial assistance for the translation and publication of various works by classic and contemporary Japanese authors. There have been more than ten prominent authors including Sei Shōnagon, Junichirō Tanizaki, Arishima Takeo, Matsutani Miyoko, Tsutsui Yasutaka, Murakami Haruki, Mishima Yukio, Abe Kōbō, and others. Another initiative of the Foundation in Bulgaria has been the provision of films and materials on Japan to the Japanese Embassy and other Bulgarian institutions as part of its project “Overseas Japanese Film Festival” (*Kaigai Nihon Eigamatsuri*). The programs have been presenting aspects of Japanese traditional and contemporary culture as well as of Japan’s technological advancement.

#### *Japanese-language education*

The Japan Foundation has been actively contributing to the Japanese language promotion in Bulgaria. Since the 1980s, it has been implementing a program for dispatching short-term and long-term Japanese language and culture specialists to the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, consultation sessions and training programs for non-native Japanese language teachers of educational institutions in Bulgaria, and various symposiums and seminars on Japanese language studies. In addition, the Japan Foundation has been providing a training in Japan for Bulgarian students with excellent performance in their Japanese language studies, grant projects for Bulgarian university students who study Japanese language at their faculty, a specialized Japanese language training program for Bulgarian experts (*Senmon Nihongo Kenshū*) including civil servants, librarians, graduate students, and researchers, and a program for diplomats (*Gaikōkan Nihongo Kensū*).

In addition to the initiatives above, since the 2000s, the Japan Foundation has been conducting a grant program for supporting Japanese language education at Bulgarian institutions and organizations (*Nihongo Fukyū Katsudou Josei*). It has been also subsidizing the implementation of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test, held in cooperation with the Japanese Embassy and the St. Cyril and St. Methodius International Foundation, as well as supporting the organization of the annual Japanese Language Speech Contest in Bulgaria.

### *Japanese studies and intellectual exchange*

The Japan Foundation has been exercising a variety of public diplomacy initiatives to promote Japanese studies and intellectual exchange in Bulgaria. The grant program for supporting international collaborative research projects is a case in point. Since the 1990s, the Foundation has been providing subsidies for the conduct of seminars, symposiums, and conferences on various topics in collaboration with Japanese and Bulgarian institutions.

To develop specialists on Japan in Bulgaria and to strengthen the Japanese research network, since 1978 the Japan Foundation has been implementing the Japanese Studies Fellowship Program, offering research fellowships to Japanese studies scholars in diverse fields. Since the 1990s, the Foundation has been administering invitation programs for Bulgarian experts, scholars, teachers and special guests as well. It has been also donating a variety of books on Japan to Bulgarian institutions such as the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, the Central Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and others.

#### **4.2. The Japan Foundation in France**

In 1953, the Governments of Japan and France signed a Bilateral Cultural Agreement providing a favourable atmosphere for Japanese cultural promotion in France. Since 1973, a crucial actor introducing Japanese culture in France has been the Japan Foundation, implementing projects in the following three categories - art and cultural exchange, Japanese-language education, and Japanese studies and intellectual exchange<sup>2</sup>.

### *Art and cultural exchange*

In the art and cultural exchange field, the Japan Foundation has been exercising a variety of public diplomacy activities in France both autonomously and in collaboration with Japanese and French public and private actors. Such example is the program for introducing Japanese culture abroad (*Nipponbunka Shoukai Haken*), characterized by the provision of financial assistance for dispatching Japanese artists and cultural figures to implement activities aimed at presenting aspects of Japanese traditional and contemporary culture in France. Since 1982, as part of a program entitled “Overseas Japanese Film Festival”, the Foundation has been holding annual film festivals in France, providing Japanese feature films and animations to the Japanese Embassy and the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris. In addition, in the field of Japanese literature promotion in France, since the 1980s, the Japan Foundation has been offering financial assistance for the translation and publication of Japanese language textbooks and a variety of books introducing Japanese culture. Since the 2010s,

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<sup>2</sup> The Japan Foundation projects for France in the period between 1973 and 2018. (Unpublished document). The document was kindly provided to the author of the present study by the Japan Foundation.

it has been also conducting a special program for promoting the understanding of Japanese contemporary culture in France (*Gendainihon Rikai Tokubetsu Puroguramu*) in collaboration with various French institutions.

In May 1997, the Japan Foundation's Japan Cultural Institute in Paris (*Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris*) (MCJP) opened in France. Since then, the Japan Foundation has been providing grants for dispatching Japanese intellectuals to France to conduct lectures on Japanese culture both at the Institute and at French institutions. The Japan Cultural Institute in Paris has been also implementing and co-sponsoring a variety of other Japanese cultural initiatives in France both autonomously and in collaboration with Japanese and French public diplomacy actors like the Japanese Embassy, the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO), museums, galleries, and others. For example, there have been tea ceremony and calligraphy courses, performances of theatre and Japanese traditional and contemporary music, screenings of Japanese documentary and animation films, exhibitions, meetings of the French-Japanese Friendship associations, and others.

In 2018, the Japan Foundation played a great role in the implementation of the large-scale project introducing Japanese culture in France - Japonismes 2018. In charge of the general management was MOFA, while the planning and implementation of the project was exercised by the Japan Foundation, which acted as a Secretariat for Japonismes 2018. The Foundation and its Japan Cultural Institute in Paris coordinated the project's initiatives in cooperation with various public and private institutions, including Japanese and French ministries and agencies. The Foundation also supported the organization of stage performances, various exhibitions of Japanese arts, and other activities. In addition, the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris hosted some official programs and offered the Japonismes 2018 Information Centre.

### *Japanese-language education*

The Japan Foundation has been exercising various public diplomacy initiatives for Japanese language promotion in France. For instance, it has been implementing a program for dispatching short-term and long-term Japanese-language and culture specialists as well as visiting Japanese professors to educational institutions in France, and training programs for non-native Japanese language teachers. In addition, the Japan Foundation has been providing Japanese language training in Japan for French students with excellent performance in their Japanese language studies, grant projects for French university graduate students and researchers (*Daigakuinsei Nihongo Kenshū*), and training for French experts who need to acquire Japanese language skills for their research activities or professional career (*Senmon Nihongo Kenshū*).

In addition to the initiatives above, the Japan Foundation has been conducting a grant program for supporting Japanese language and culture education activities at French institutions and organizations. Since 1992, it has been subsidizing the implementation of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test in the country as well. The Foundation has been donating Japanese language

teaching materials to various institutions in the country such as INALCO, the Paris Diderot University, and others.

The Japan Cultural Institute in Paris has been also implementing various activities in the field of Japanese language promotion in France. It has been offering Japanese language courses in diverse levels, as well as hosting Japanese language education guidance and workshops.

### *Japanese studies and intellectual exchange*

The Japan Foundation has been exercising a variety of projects promoting Japanese studies and intellectual exchange in France. The grant program for supporting international collaborative research projects is a case in point. Since the 1970s, the Foundation has been providing subsidies for the conduct of seminars and symposiums on various global and Japanese culture-related subjects in collaboration with Japanese and French educational institutions. Many of these symposiums have been hosted by the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris. Other programs of the Foundation have been the provision of financial assistance to French institutions offering Japanese studies and conducting research activities on Japan, and the donation of books to the Japanese Culture and Information Centre at the Japanese Embassy and to French institutions. In addition, the Foundation has been carrying out the Japanese Studies Fellowship Program, offering research fellowships to Japanese studies scholars as well as invitation programs for French scholars, experts and special guests.

## **5. Comparing the Japan Foundation in Bulgaria and France: Conclusion**

### **5.1. Comparison**

As demonstrated above, the Japan Foundation has been greatly contributing to Japan's cultural promotion in Bulgaria and France. Crucial for the successful organization and implementation of those projects have been both its systematic efforts and the cooperation with various public and private actors.

Following the discussion above, it could be also emphasized that the Japan Foundation has been more active in its cultural promotion initiatives in France compared with those in Bulgaria. First, there is a big difference in the number of the Foundation's projects exercised in the two countries. According to the full list of activities provided by the Japan Foundation, the projects conducted in France in the period between April 1973 and April 2018 are 4,618, while in Bulgaria there were 676 projects, implemented between August 1974 and July 2018<sup>3</sup>. Second, the variety of projects in France has been much greater. For instance, in the field of art and cultural exchange, the Foundation's initiatives in Bulgaria have been presenting mostly aspects of Japanese traditional culture, while the activities demonstrating Japanese contemporary culture have been

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

considerably fewer. At the same time, there have been more projects presenting Japanese modern culture in France such as the special program for promoting the understanding of Japanese contemporary culture (*Gendainihon Rikai Tokubetsu Puroguramu*). In terms of the Japan Foundation's initiatives for introducing Japanese traditional culture, again, the projects in France have been more diverse compared to those in Bulgaria.

Crucial factor for the greater number and diversity of projects presenting both Japanese traditional and contemporary culture in France has been the Japan Foundation's Japan Cultural Institute in Paris. Since its establishment in 1997, the number of Japan's public diplomacy initiatives increased in France. It has been implementing and co-sponsoring a variety of Japanese cultural activities both autonomously and in collaboration with Japanese and French public diplomacy actors. In the sphere of Japanese-language education, the Institute has been also offering Japanese language courses and hosting Japanese language education guidance and workshops. Similarly, in the field of Japanese studies and intellectual exchange, with the contribution of the Institute the number of such activities in France has been bigger in comparison with Bulgaria.

## **5.2. Suggestions and concluding remarks**

As emphasized above, the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris has been offering broad opportunities to the French society to explore Japanese culture, either through organizing or serving as a venue for the conduct of various projects. However, in order to further strengthen Japan's soft power in France, the Japan Foundation should organize more activities in various French cities, rather than focusing mainly on Paris. As the scholar Michel Wasserman highlighted during his personal communication with the author of this study, it is necessary to "increase Japan's presence outside Paris" (2019, personal communication, 12 April). Wasserman also emphasized that "France has cultural institutes in many Japanese provincial cities, which is not the case of Japan in France" (2019, personal communication, 12 April). To achieve a higher cultural presence in the country, the Japan Foundation should establish additional branches of the Cultural Institute in various French cities as well as to cooperate with local institutions for the conduct of Japanese cultural initiatives.

In the case of Bulgaria, there is still space for improvement of the Japan Foundation's initiatives in the country. First, besides the two-day annual festival "Aniventure", there are not many opportunities for the Bulgarian society to experience Japanese contemporary culture. However, the Bulgarian people's interest in Japan's modern culture tends to be growing during the years. Such evidence is the increasing number of visitors at the "Aniventure" festival. For instance, in 2008 the number of the guests was 700, in 2009 it was 1,000, followed by 4,000 people in 2013 and 20,000 people in 2017 (Aniventure 2019). Therefore, in order to further increase Japan's cultural presence in Bulgaria, the Foundation should focus on the organization of a greater number of activities and events featuring aspects of Japanese contemporary culture. Second, apart from the "Days of Japanese Culture" held by the Japanese Embassy with the support of the Japan Foundation and other actors, the additional events

introducing Japanese culture in Bulgaria throughout the year have been relatively few. This is to some extent due to the lack of a particular institution like the case of the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris, which would regularly organize or host such activities. Third, the Japan Foundation does not offer Japanese language courses in Bulgaria or Japanese language workshops as it does at the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris. However, the Bulgarians' interest in studying Japanese language tends to be growing. According to the Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria, the number of Japanese language learners has considerably increased in the last three years, exceeding 1,400 people (Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria 2019). Therefore, it would be valuable if the Foundation establishes more opportunities for studying Japanese language in the country. Taking into account the issues above, in order to further strengthen Japan's public diplomacy initiatives in Bulgaria, the creation of the Foundation's Japan Cultural Institute or a similar institution in the country would be crucial. As the scholar Bratislav Ivanov also highlighted during his personal communication with the author of this study, to achieve a higher Japanese cultural presence in the country "the establishment of a Japanese Cultural Centre like China's Confucius Institute would be very good" (2019, personal communication, 17 February).

The creation of a Japanese Cultural Institute or Centre in Bulgaria would be much beneficial for the enhancement of the Japanese public diplomacy in Europe. First, the Japan Foundation has some offices and Cultural Institutes in Western or Central European countries, but none in Eastern Europe. In addition, as part of a global initiative of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Japan House presenting Japanese art, design, gastronomy, innovation, and technology opened in 2018 in London (Japan House 2019). In this way, Japan's cultural activities have been implemented mostly in Western or Central Europe. Therefore, the foundation of an Institute in Bulgaria could serve as a platform for promoting Japanese culture not only in the country, but also in Eastern Europe. This first Institute in the region would attract visitors from various countries to experience Japanese culture as well as it could serve as an example and a framework for the establishment of similar institutions in Eastern Europe. Second, it could be utilized by the Japan Foundation as a hub and a venue for the conduct of cultural initiatives both autonomously or in collaboration with other public and private actors. Third, the Institute would compensate for the insufficient or missing points of the Foundation's activities in Bulgaria and provide Bulgarians with a wide range of opportunities for extending their knowledge about Japan. For example, there could be regular courses, workshops, and demonstrations dedicated to both Japanese language and culture. In addition, the systematically organized initiatives of the Institute would provide the Bulgarian society with the chance to experience Japanese culture all over the year. Through the Institute, the Foundation would conduct and host various activities in the fields of visual and performing arts as well as conferences, seminars, and lectures, introducing aspects of both Japanese traditional and contemporary culture. At the same time, the invited guests from all backgrounds would further contribute to the intellectual exchange, creativity and mutual understanding between the Bulgarian and Japanese societies. As Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe emphasized at the summit meeting with the

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov during his visit in Bulgaria in 2018, Japan hopes “to promote further exchange with Bulgaria, including the expansion of people-to-people exchanges” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2018). In addition, the provision of books on Japan and the regular projection of Japanese feature films and animations at the Institute would be also highly essential. According to Bratislav Ivanov, “unfortunately, original Japanese books cannot be purchased in Bulgaria, and those accessible in the libraries are few and, in most cases, outdated” (2019, personal communication, 17 February).

Taking into account the case of France as well as other European countries with established Japanese Cultural Institutes, the Japan Foundation’s cultural promotion activity in Europe has been focused to a great extent on Western countries. This tendency has probably initiated as a result of the international situation and Japan’s foreign relations and priorities at the time when the Foundation was created. The Japan Foundation was established in 1971 with the aim of improving Japan’s relations with the United States and the promotion of cultural exchanges between the two countries (Kokusaikōryūkikin 30-nen hensan-shitsu 2006, 20-21). At the same time, in light of Japan’s economic growth and its increasing international role, cultural exchanges and cultural diplomacy have become a great priority for Japan. Europe was considered Japan’s essential economic partner and the cultural interactions exercised through the Japan Foundation were of much importance. However, during the Cold War there were more opportunities for Japanese cultural promotion in Western Europe in comparison with Eastern Europe. Japan and Western European countries were both members of the Western Bloc which provided a favourable environment for such cultural initiatives, while the regime in Eastern European countries led to certain limitations. As a result, although the Japan Foundation was exercising cultural project in both Western and Eastern Europe, it tended to put more emphasis on its public diplomacy in the West. Such evidence has been the establishment of its Cultural Institutes. After the Cold War ended, in 1993 the Japan Foundation increased its policies for cultural exchanges with Eastern Europe with the aim of promoting cooperation and supporting democratization and openness of the countries in the region (Kokusaikōryūkikin 30-nen hensan-shitsu 2006, 74-75). Since then, there have been a greater variety of activities introducing Japanese culture in Eastern Europe. However, as highlighted in this study, despite the past and currently implementing efforts, there is still space for improvement. In order to increase Japan’s soft power on the continent it would be crucial for Japan to put more emphasis on its public diplomacy in Eastern Europe. Taking the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) into account that entered into force on 1 February 2019 between Japan and the European Union, and which provides new trade and investment opportunities, Japanese public diplomacy would become even more significant and contributory to the increase of the positive image of Japan and relations with Europe. Therefore, similarly to the cases in Western Europe, the establishment of the Japan Foundation’s Cultural Institutes or similar institutions in Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries would be essential. This would compensate for the scarceness of Japanese cultural presence in the region and provide more opportunities for international cooperation. At the same time, to further expand the Foundation’s

activities and networks in France, the creation of more branches of the Japan Cultural Institute in various French cities would also be significant. Utilized as hubs for the conduct of Japanese cultural promotion initiatives in Europe, these institutes could regularly exercise various projects and facilitate the cooperation between the Japan Foundation and other Japanese and European public and private actors.

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