

# The Impact of Japan's Cultural Diplomacy on the Construction of Japan's Traditional Cultural Soft Power

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**Abstract.** After World War II, Japan improved its national image and soft power through a series of cultural diplomacy tools. Cultural diplomacy aims to enhance understanding and friendship among the peoples of different countries through culture-related means of external communication. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to the third aspect of a country's strength, in addition to economic and military power. Japan's cultural diplomacy has a profound impact on the construction of its traditional cultural soft power. This article adopts a longitudinal single-case study approach to sort out Japan's traditional culture, including cultural heritage, traditional skills, spiritual culture, and national character. The article finds that Japan has enhanced its goodwill towards Japan in Europe, America and Southeast Asia through its active participation in international co-operation, reform and strategic positioning of government institutions, development of tourism, cultural and artistic exchanges, and promotion of celebrity masterpieces. This suggests that the building of Japan's traditional cultural soft power can be translated into favorable feelings towards Japan among people in other countries. However, the inherent closedness of traditional culture and history-related traditional culture are the obstacles that need to be overcome in the construction of Japan's traditional cultural soft power.

**Keywords:** Japan; cultural diplomacy; traditional culture; soft power.

## 1. Introduction

After the end of the Second World War, Japan's national image was that of an "aggressor" and a "defeated country". In order to change its national image and enhance its national soft power, the Japanese government has taken a series of measures, the most important of which is the strategy of cultural diplomacy. Japan has adopted a unique way of building national cultural soft power in the international arena, transforming its few cultural resources into actual cultural soft power, and gradually becoming a cultural superpower second only to the United States and the European powers in its historical development. However, looking back at Japan's cultural diplomacy strategy, it is not like the United States or European countries adopting an organized cultural export and cultural penetration strategy. On the contrary, Japan adopts a more covert and subtle way to let the people of the receiving countries spontaneously identify with and accept the Japanese culture, to feel the charm of the Japanese culture, and then to trace the Japanese values behind the Japanese culture.

The concept of cultural diplomacy, like the word "culture" itself, is not widely recognized today. According to Kevin V. Mulcahy, cultural diplomacy is a diplomatic activity in which a sovereign state uses cultural means to achieve a specific purpose or foreign strategy [1]. Li Zhi, a scholar in China, also suggests that cultural diplomacy is the sum of foreign cultural relations engaged in by a government, or, in other words, it is the sovereign state as the main body of the official cultural relations in the exercise of foreign sovereignty [2]. This paper will use this similar concept to define cultural diplomacy as the Japanese government's efforts to increase the understanding and sympathy of the government and people of another country for Japan through cultural means that are not purely political actions or economic trade. Therefore, the analysis of Japan's cultural diplomacy is mainly explored in terms of the official actions and documents of the government.

In international relations, national soft power is a concept opposite to national hard power and is a non-coercive means by which a country's ability to draw in and attract people to achieve political ends as well as to expand its political influence by shaping the preferences of others. The American

scholar Joseph Nye has done a lot of research on national soft power. His 1990 book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* popularized the concept of soft power for the first time: "When a country lets other countries do what it wants, it can be called co-operation or soft power, rather than hard or command power, which orders other countries to do what it wants [3]." He subsequently developed this concept further in his 2004 book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, making it an important section in the field of international relations studies. Cultural soft power, as a kind of soft power, is ultimately aimed at influencing or even changing the perceptions of other Governments and populations, and the process of implementation emphasizes subtle influence and attraction. Therefore, cultural soft power is not a mere cultural resource, but an ability to change the perceptions and behaviors of other state actors and populations through attraction and emulation based on cultural resources. Traditional cultural soft power, on the other hand, fixes the cultural resources of cultural soft power in the domain of "traditional culture".

In terms of literature review, research on national soft power has received wide attention in Chinese academia in recent years. A 2000–2023 keyword search of "soft power" in China Knowledge Network (CNKI) included nearly 5,000 articles, while there were nearly 500 articles on cultural soft power. After combing the literature with "cultural soft power" as the keyword, 17 articles are related to Japan, which are basically analyses of Japan's cultural industry and the inspiration for China. Jiang Ying published an article titled *The Implementation Patterns, Difficulties, and Reasons for the "Cool Japan" Strategy in Modern Japanese Economy*, Issue No. 6, 2019, which focuses on the achievements and impacts of the "Cool Japan" strategy in building Japan's international image and boosting economic growth [4]. Since its introduction in June 2011, the "Cool Japan" strategy, as a major model of Japanese pop culture diplomacy, has achieved successes in building Japan's international image and boosting economic growth, as well as real dilemmas, including ambiguity in the setting of strategic goals and assessment benchmarks, the "lack of suitability" of its overseas promotional efforts, and negative news about the inexplicable evaporation of its huge investment, which have raised questions about the strategy [4]. The shortcomings of this strategy are analyzed for reference. Jin Chunmei and Ling Qiang, in their article *Japan's Tourism National Strategy from the Perspective of Cultural Soft Power*, analyzed the connotation, impact, and significance of Japan's Tourism National Strategy to illustrate the important role of cultural strategy in shaping the image of Japan's country and enhancing Japan's cultural soft power [5]. Wu Meng and Zhang Lijun, on the other hand, explore the process and policy outcomes of Japan's post-World War II national cultural soft power construction from the perspective of public diplomacy in the article *Public Diplomacy and the Construction of National Cultural Soft Power in Post-World War II Japan: Strategic Management and Tactical Choices published in Contemporary World and Socialism* [6]. However, the existing literature also shows that the research perspective of Japanese cultural soft power is more focused on Japanese popular culture, and there is a lack of analyses of Japanese traditional culture in the construction of cultural soft power. There is also a lack of articles analyzing Japan's cultural soft power and traditional cultural soft power specifically from the perspective of cultural diplomacy. Therefore, this paper chooses to analyze how Japanese cultural diplomacy affects the construction of Japanese traditional cultural soft power, which is feasible and realistic.

## 2. Design of Research

### 2.1. Choice of Method

This paper adopts a longitudinal, single-case study method. Firstly, this paper mainly studies the construction of Japanese cultural diplomacy on the soft power of Japanese traditional culture and focuses the perspective on Japanese diplomatic practice as well as Japanese traditional culture, so for the sake of research fit, a single-case study is more suitable than a multi-case study. Secondly, as a country with a long history, Japan has rich traditional cultural resources. These traditional cultural resources can be adapted to the needs of Japanese cultural diplomacy in modern Japanese diplomacy so as to serve the construction of Japan's national cultural soft power and the enhancement of national

self-confidence. Traditional culture, as mentioned in this article, refers to the things that have been accepted and chosen by the Japanese government and people in Japanese culture and passed down from one generation to the next, and is the precipitation of Japanese history. Therefore, in terms of form, there are both spiritual and material cultures, cultures unique to Japan and cultures that have been localized and transformed by foreign cultures, traditional customs that have been preserved in their original form, and those that have been modernized and adapted to modern Japanese people. The concept of Japanese traditional culture is diverse in form and rich in connotation, so it is more appropriate to study it vertically than horizontally. Finally, cultural diplomacy, as a type of diplomacy, does not occur simultaneously. The results of a diplomatic practice have to wait before their effectiveness can be seen. Therefore, a longitudinal, single-case study is more appropriate for exploring the role of cultural diplomacy.

## 2.2. Selection of Cases

The reasons for choosing Japan's cultural diplomacy and traditional culture to study how cultural diplomacy affects the construction of cultural soft power are as follows:

Firstly, Japan has rich traditional cultural resources, such as kimono, tea ceremonies, martial arts, etc., which reflect the uniqueness and diversity of Japan. At the same time, in modern Japan, the existence of traditional culture can be seen at any time, such as Japan's current "cute" culture, which can be found in the classical masterpiece "Pillow Weed," where the "everything small is cute" description of the source. Japan's modern consciousness and modernity are, to a large extent, based on the inheritance and development of its traditional culture, which provides rich spiritual resources for Japan's modern culture.

Secondly, Japan's cultural diplomacy promotes and introduces Japan's traditional culture to the rest of the world through a variety of channels and means, such as the International Exchange Fund, overseas Japanese cultural centers, international cooperation agencies, embassies, etc., increasing Japan's international influence and popularity. Japan's cultural diplomacy also focuses on cultural exchanges and cooperation with other countries and regions, respecting and drawing on the cultural achievements of other countries, and promoting mutual understanding and respect for cultures in order to enhance Japan's international image and reputation. Japan's cultural diplomacy has also made use of new media and network technologies, such as YouTube, Netflix, TikTok, etc., to combine Japan's traditional culture with modern elements to create new forms of expression and content, attracting more young people and global audiences. Therefore, there are abundant examples and a realistic basis for the research process.

Thirdly, Japan actively organizes or participates in various international activities and events, such as the Olympic Games, World Expositions, film festivals, etc., which demonstrate the fusion and innovation of Japan's traditional culture and modern society, and enhance Japan's international competitiveness and attractiveness. Moreover, Japan supports and encourages overseas students, visiting scholars, volunteers, and other people to come to Japan to study and experience Japanese traditional culture, and has fostered a group of friendly ambassadors who have a deep sense of affection and identification with Japan. The smooth implementation and continuous development of these measures characterize the success of Japan's cultural diplomacy in relying on Japanese traditional culture, and indicate the rationality and feasibility of using Japan as the object of this study.

## 2.3. Sources and Processing

In order to complete this research, information from different sources will be collected, and texts that can be analyzed will be processed. Sources include: relevant websites and databases on the Internet, such as the Asian History Resource Centre (AHRC), from which highlights are selected and summarized. Academic journals and monographs, such as *The Japan Journal*, *Japanese Diplomatic History*, and *Japanese Cultural Diplomacy*. These articles can be used to understand the history, theory, and practice of cultural diplomacy in Japan and to gather relevant scholarly perspectives and evaluations. Relevant data websites, such as the official website of the Japan National Tourism

Organization, the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan about Japan's public opinion polls, and the official website of the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, etc., to summarize and integrate the data therein for analysis.

### **3. Resources for Building the Soft Power of Traditional Japanese Culture**

Japan's traditional culture is all-encompassing, both in terms of material carriers and spiritual dimensions, and Japan is well endowed with the resources for building soft power through traditional culture. However, not all traditional cultures can become resources for soft power building. Broadly speaking, traditional cultures can only become resources for building soft power if they have the following characteristics: Firstly, in selecting resources for the construction of traditional cultural soft power, they should be in line with contemporary universal values, such as democracy, environmental protection, innovation, peace, humanity and tolerance. This is because the construction of cultural soft power is, in the final analysis, working on the cultural concepts of modern people. Moreover, a traditional culture that embodies contemporary universal values will, to a certain extent, erase the sense of history that traditional culture carries with it, and will not only be easier to spread, but will also be more likely to gain the goodwill and recognition of heterogeneous cultures. Secondly, it should be attractive. More precisely, it should be aesthetically attractive. The greater the cultural difference, the more mysterious and attractive it is to the target of communication [7]. It is not difficult to explain why Japanese culture is so popular in Europe and America. Finally, the country of origin of traditional culture should have strong hard power. Although there is a period of time, "cultural determinism" is very popular, but in the final analysis, the strength of cultural soft power is closely related to the hard power of the country. The construction of cultural soft power and the development of national hard power complement each other, and the development of hard power is also one of the keys to whether cultural resources can be transformed into cultural soft power.

After screening the traditional cultural resources for the construction of Japan's cultural soft power according to the above characteristics, they can be broadly classified into the following four categories:

#### **3.1. Cultural Heritage**

The cultural heritage here includes the World Heritage Sites in Japan, as well as historical sites and shrines and temples that are famous in Japan and the world. According to the data on the official website of the Japan National Tourism Organization, there are currently 11 World Heritage Sites in Japan, including the hap axial structural villages of Shirakawa-go and the five mountains, the shrines and temples of Nikko, the historical sites of the ancient capital of Nara, the Buddhist monuments in the area of Horyu-ji Temple, the historical sites of the ancient capital of Kyoto, the sacred sites and pilgrimage routes of the Kii Mountain Range and their surrounding cultural landscapes, the castle of Himeji, and the former Bombing Dome (the Hiroshima Peace Monument), Itsukushima Shrine, the remains of the Ryukyu Kingdom period, and Iwami Ginzan [8]. There are also three World Natural Heritage Sites. Therefore, it is easy to see that Japan's World Cultural Heritage is an excellent resource for building the soft power of traditional culture, which is both globally representative and has a distinct cultural identity. The Japanese government attaches great importance to its development and utilization. The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has specially developed a tourism roadmap for World Heritage Sites and highlighted it as one of the important features of Japan's tourism on its official website.

In addition, Japan has a large number of historical sites and shrines and temples, including 26 historical streetscapes, 11 traditional craft towns, 8 ancient sites, 27 shrines and 40 temples. These traditional cultural resources are not only an important part of Japan's tourism resources, but also an important resource for the construction of Japan's traditional cultural soft power.

### 3.2. Traditional Performing Arts

There are many traditional performing arts in Japan, among which those that meet the criteria mentioned earlier and are more representative include the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, Kabuki and Geisha performances, judo, karate, and kendo. The tea ceremony is a traditional art of Japan that enjoys international honors. Since its introduction to Japan from China, the tea ceremony has been combined with the local culture of the Japanese people and has become a cultural and artistic activity that combines religion, philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics. Flower arranging is also an art with a very Japanese aesthetic appeal and ideology, as well as an aesthetic appeal. Kabuki is a unique Japanese hybrid art with a history spanning 400 years. In 2009, Kabuki was selected as one of the first-world intangible cultural heritages, and in the minds of many foreigners, it is also one of Japan's representative cultures. Geisha's innate mystique and vaguely linked erotic symbols have enabled it to gather popularity and attract many foreign visitors. Judo, karate, and kendo are the three most famous Japanese martial arts; they all originated in ancient Japan, accompanied by Japan's modernization out of the country, which harvested a large number of enthusiasts around the world and formed a broad mass base.

### 3.3. Spiritual Culture

Here, the author mainly talks about the spiritual aspect of Japanese traditional cultural resources. The most famous of them are the spirit of "Bushido" and the aesthetic interests of "materialistic sadness, esotericism, and wabi-sabi". The Japanese word for samurai is "samurai," which literally means "guard". Originally, the samurai were a privileged class of guards, retainers, and professional soldiers who were formed during the feudal period of Japan. Through the propaganda of the upper-class elite, some of the morals and behaviors originally required of the samurai, such as loyalty, honor, and fear of death, gradually became the moral standards of Japanese society as a whole. Bushido was modernized after the war and appeared in all kinds of related films and culture in a new light. The traditional Japanese aesthetics of "Misaki, Ukyo, and Wabi-sabi" were formed under the influence of Japan's unique literature, religion, and philosophy. "Ikigai" is similar to the feeling of touching a scene, which is a feeling of sadness or joy as one empathizes with one's surroundings, men and women, and world affairs. The term "shiken" originated in medieval Japanese literature and is similar to the Chinese word for "beyond words." This aesthetic is often reflected in the interactions of modern Japanese people and has been incorporated into the language, life, and national character of the country. "Wabi-sabi, on the other hand, is a kind of aesthetic interest formed after Buddhism was introduced to Japan, which appeared the latest compared to the first two, and can be roughly interpreted as a love for "imperfection" and "flaws." It can be roughly understood as the love of "imperfection" and "defects," which in turn leads to a leisurely and quiet interest in the traditional Japanese aesthetics of leisure and quietness, simplicity, and nothingness.

### 3.4. Nationality

This refers mainly to the national character that has been cultivated by traditional culture. Thanks to the traditional ideas of loyalty, dedication, and repayment of debts in Confucianism and Bushido, after the Meiji Restoration, syndicalism was transformed into the national character of the Japanese people, who pursued the supremacy of the national interest, devoted themselves to enterprises, and promoted economic construction [7]. Under the influence of these dispositions, the personal character of self-discipline, diligence, and hard work was esteemed by society. Under the influence of these characters, Japan's post-war reconstruction and economic and social development have made full progress, which in turn has strengthened these characters, making them the answer to the question "Why Japanese are Japanese?" and becoming known around the world as the national character of modern Japanese people.

#### 4. Japanese Cultural Diplomacy and the Construction of Traditional Cultural Soft Power

In order to deeply explore and make full use of the resources for building cultural soft power in Japan's traditional culture, Japan has vigorously developed cultural diplomacy. This paper argues that the cultural diplomacy adopted by the Japanese government can be summarized as follows: active participation in international cooperation, reform of government institutions and strategic orientation, development of the tourism industry, artistic and cultural exchanges, and promotion of celebrity masterpieces.

First of all, Japan actively participates in international exchanges and cooperation in the protection of cultural heritage. In 1989, Japan invested in the Japanese Trust Fund for the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage at UNESCO. As of April 1992, Japan had contributed a total of US\$11 million, which has played a significant role in the protection of cultural relics in Asian countries, such as Angkor Wat and the Tang Dynasty Palace in Xi'an. Japan has also been actively promoting the formulation of an international treaty for the safeguarding of the world's intangible culture. Since then, Japan has been actively participating in the preservation and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage such as music, dance, and other traditional performances and traditional crafts in Asian and African countries by providing assistance, dispatching experts, and sharing technology. In June 2006, Japan enacted the Law for the Promotion of International Cooperation for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage Abroad, which stipulates that the Japanese government, educational institutions, and research institutions are obliged to promote international cooperation for the safeguarding of cultural heritage abroad. In December 2008, Japan also stipulated that the government, educational and research institutions, and the Nippon Foundation are required to take on the obligations of international cooperation for the safeguarding of cultural heritage. As can be seen from Table 1, Japan has participated in many international cultural heritage preservation programmes in recent years. This has enabled Japan to have more opportunities to demonstrate its skills in cultural heritage preservation overseas, and has had a positive effect on the building of Japan's cultural soft power.

**Table 1.** International cultural heritage preservation projects in which Japan has participated in recent years [9]

Implementation Year	Name of Consignment (Consignee)
2019~2021	Center Exchange Project for the Purpose of Technology Transfer for the Research, Recording, and Preservation of Archaeological Relics in Kazakhstan (Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)
2019~2021	Exchange Project for the Preservation and Utilization of Historical Buildings in the Kingdom of Bhutan (National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo)
2020~2021	Cultural Heritage International Cooperation Center Exchange Project in Iraqi Kurdistan Region (Chubu University)
2020~	Building International Cooperation for Cultural Heritage Education in 10 ASEAN Countries (Sophia University)
2020~	Human Resource Development Project for the Preservation and Repair of Sambo Prey Cook Archaeological Sites, Cambodia (University of Tsukuba)
2020~	Human Resource Development Center Exchange Project for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Republic of Armenia (Saga University)
2021	Exchange Program for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Teikyo University)
2021	Project for Three-Dimensional Measurement of Cultural Heritage in Tikal National Park, a Guatemalan World Heritage Site, and Local Human Resource Development Project on the Utilization of Acquired Data (Kanazawa University)

2021~	Human Resource Development Project for the Protection of Ain Dara Ruins in the Syrian Arab Republic (University of Tsukuba)
2022	Human Resource Development Project for Three-Dimensional Measurement of Mayan Cultural Heritage in Central America and Utilization of Acquired Data (Kanazawa University)
2022	Center Exchange Project for the Purpose of Technology Transfer for Scientific Investigation of Archaeological Heritage in Uzbekistan (Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)
2022	Center Exchange Program for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Georgia (Teikyo University)
2022	Project for sustainable protection of the Old City of Cairo / Community development with residents' participation (Japan Building Town Development Appropriate Support Organization)

Secondly, the Japanese government also adapted and carried out cultural diplomacy through institutional reforms and the formulation of diplomatic strategies, etc. Foreign Minister Ohira Masayoshi placed "cultural diplomacy" as one of the four main priorities of foreign policy in his Diet speech on 27 January 1973, stating, "In the past diplomacy was mainly focused on the political and economic fields, now we must broaden our horizons and actively carry out cultural exchanges with other countries, especially by expanding the field to a wide range of people [10]." Current Prime Minister of Japan firstly put forward the concept of "cultural greatness", stating that Japan's national strategic goal was to combine "a country of brilliant culture" and "an international nation", and that Japan should be "culturally and culturally strong". Japan should "contribute actively to the world culturally and politically" [11]. Under the guidance of the government's grand strategy, the Japan Foundation for International Exchange was established in 1972, and later became a quasi-government organisation under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. In the past few years, the Foundation has set up 22 overseas offices in 20 countries, and carries out various activities in the three fields of cultural research and knowledge exchange, overseas Japanese language education, and cultural and artistic exchanges [12]. In 1986, the International Centre for Japanese Cultural Studies was established. In 1988, the Takeshita cabinet established the International Exchange Council, and in 1989, the government established the International Conference for the Advancement of Culture, and in 2004, the Koizumi cabinet established the Recommended Cultural Diplomacy Council, a consultative body to serve the Prime Minister. In 2004, the Koizumi Cabinet set up a consultative organisation to serve the Prime Minister personally, the "Recommended Cultural Diplomacy Council". On the whole, Japan's various cultural exchange organisations belong directly to the relevant ministries, and are semi-official in nature, playing the role of a think tank.

Furthermore, Japan has made great efforts to develop its tourism industry. In addition to developing the tourism aspect of cultural heritage, the Japanese Government invites relevant government officials and private citizens from overseas to Japan for targeted visits and exchanges through cultural and diplomatic institutions. This includes cultural experts, artists, officials in charge of cultural affairs, and persons in charge of museums and other cultural venues from countries all over the world, as well as foreign experts in the field of cultural relics management and restoration technology. The aim is to facilitate purposeful and meaningful exchanges. The Government of Japan also attaches great importance to attracting more foreign experts in the field of cultural heritage management and restoration techniques to Japan for exchanges. The Japanese Government also attaches great importance to attracting more foreigners to travel to Japan. In 2003, the Koizumi Government put forward the strategy of "Tourism as a Nation" in an attempt to stimulate the economy, revitalise culture and promote international exchanges. In the relevant documents of the Japanese government, traditional culture has been mentioned many times, and it is believed that the use of traditional cultural resources is an important part of the strategy of "Tourism as a Nation" and the key to success or failure [13].

Government-led "Tourism as a nation" strategy to achieve the double superimposed effect of culture and tourism economy, which is conducive to foreigners in-depth understanding of Japanese culture, to promote civil exchanges and improve Japan's international image, the construction of Japan's traditional cultural soft power plays a positive role [7].

Again, Japan actively promote cultural and artistic exchanges. The Japanese government actively encourages art groups that display traditional culture to perform overseas, participate in overseas cultural festivals or international festivals, and exchange with art groups in other countries. Japan also actively participates in bilateral or multilateral exchange years and cultural festivals. For example, in 1951, Japan began to hold overseas exhibitions of classical art and, since then, has continued to promote the introduction of traditional culture overseas. After entering the 21st century, Japan has also paid attention to the development of the soft power of traditional culture, such as by organizing the "Year of Japan" in the United Kingdom in 2001, the "Year of Japan" in China in 2002, and the "Asian Art Festival" in 2007. Art Festival in 2007, and so on.

Finally, Japan has used celebrity masterpieces to expand the scope and improve the quality of cultural diplomacy. The current Russian President is one of the most well-known non-Japanese celebrities related to Japanese traditional culture. Putin is a sixth-degree black belt in judo and the first head-level figure in the world to achieve the highest rank in judo. Traditional Japanese elements are also a regular feature in Hollywood films, such as *Memoirs of a Geisha*, released in 2005, where the production team enlisted renowned director Steven Spielberg as a producer. The film was nominated for six Oscars at the 78th Academy Awards. Akira Kurosawa, a native Japanese director, is credited with bringing Japanese and Asian cinema to the world and was hailed by *Asiaweek* in December 1999 as one of the most significant contributors to the advancement of Asia in the 20th century in terms of culture and the arts. Among his films, those based on the samurai are the most numerous and have the most far-reaching impact, such as *The Seven Samurai* and *Rashomon*, all of which are world-renowned. In literature, Japan has Yasunari Kawabata to write about the beauty of Japan's classical traditions, Inari Shindo Toda to express the spirit and soul of the Japanese nation with a book called "Bushido," and even more modern Japanese writers, such as Soseki Natsume and Yukio Mishima, who have used beautiful words combined with Japan's traditional culture to show Japan to the world.

## 5. Analysis

Through a series of cultural diplomacy means, the Japanese government has cooperated with domestic institutional reforms and the promotion of relevant legislation to fully develop domestic traditional cultural resources in order to carry out the construction of traditional cultural soft power. The results of public opinion surveys are the most common and graphic feedback on how cultural diplomacy affects the construction of Japan's traditional cultural soft power.

In a survey conducted in 2009 on foreign tourists' attractions to Japan, 65.9% of foreign tourists appreciated Japan's historical buildings and neighbourhoods such as shrines and Buddhist temples, 52.5% appreciated Japan's traditional performing arts and festivals and traditional trades, and 30.7% appreciated Japan's traditional sports such as grand sumo wrestling and kendo. It can be seen that a lot of foreign tourists are interested in Japanese traditional culture, indicating that the Japanese government's cultural diplomacy strategy has played a certain positive role in the construction of Japan's traditional cultural soft power. This is also due to the profound relationship between traditional culture and national identity, which makes foreign tourists pay attention to Japan's traditional culture when they wish to learn about Japan.

Every year, the Japanese government commissions public opinion polling firms to conduct surveys on the image of Japan and Japanese people among the people of specific countries, which serve as policy references for the government's public diplomacy. The data from the public opinion surveys conducted by the Japanese government in the 4th year of the Order (2022), the 3rd year of the Order (2021), and the 28th year of the Heisei (2016) are as follows:



**Table 2.** Selected national opinion polls, 2022, 2021 and 2016 [14]

Figure Year	Countries with rich traditions and cultures	Countries with strong economic and technological power	Countries with beautiful natural environments	Countries with a high standard of living	Countries that have consistently maintained peace after the war
2022	U <sup>a</sup> :56% E <sup>b</sup> :60%	U <sup>a</sup> :48% E <sup>b</sup> :52%	U <sup>a</sup> :45% E <sup>b</sup> :35%	U <sup>a</sup> :37% E <sup>b</sup> :33%	U <sup>a</sup> :24% E <sup>b</sup> :24%
2021	A <sup>c</sup> :62%	A <sup>c</sup> :68%	A <sup>c</sup> :49%	A <sup>c</sup> :54%	A <sup>c</sup> :33%
2016	U:95% E:64% A:56%	U:84% E:58% A:61%	U:87% E:35% A:51%	U:75% E:33% A:48%	U:82% E:21% A:32%

<sup>a</sup> Acronym of United States of America

<sup>b</sup> Acronym of five European countries (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Hungary)

<sup>c</sup> Acronym of ASEAN countries

As can be seen from Table 2, major Western countries—both the United States and countries in Eastern and Western Europe, as well as countries in Southeast Asia—are more inclined to perceive Japan as a country with rich traditions and culture, which suggests that Japan's cultural diplomacy has had some effect. Although the proportion of people identifying with each image in the 2022 and 2021 polls has declined compared to 2016, more than half of Americans, five European countries, and ten ASEAN countries still hold the image of "a country with rich traditions and culture," suggesting that Japan's cultural diplomacy is working and that its traditional cultural soft power is still effective. This shows that Japan's cultural diplomacy is feasible and that there is much room for growth in building traditional cultural soft power. At the same time, it can be seen that, basically, when the impression of Japan as a "country rich in tradition and culture" rises, the impression of other images of Japan also rises, which shows that Japan's traditional cultural soft power can be transformed into other positive impressions of Japan by people in other countries.

At the same time, however, it should be noted that Americans' overall opinion of Japan is declining, and only a relatively small percentage of people in the five European countries and the ten ASEAN countries think that Japan is a country that has remained peaceful after the war. Although they acknowledge that Japan is rich in traditional cultural resources, their distrust of Japan cannot be dispelled, and these data reveal a number of problems with Japan's desire to use cultural diplomacy to build traditional cultural soft power. The first is the inherent closedness of traditional culture. The collectivism of traditional Japanese culture makes Japanese people accustomed to the idea that whoever makes a mistake, apologises, and that if no one, in particular, makes a mistake or can't be found to have made a mistake, then there is no need for any apology. Therefore, after an incident like the nuclear sewage discharge, although the Japanese people are dissatisfied, most of them choose to get over it, while Japanese politicians choose to try their best to wash their hands of the responsibility. However, for foreigners who are not influenced by Japanese traditional culture, what the Japanese government is doing is evading responsibility, and therefore their favourable impression of Japan has declined, which is not conducive to the spread of Japanese traditional culture. Secondly, there is the traditional culture related to history, which includes the "culture of apology" mentioned above, as well as the spirit of Bushido and the militarism associated with it during the war. If Japan does not think outside the box of its own traditional culture and actively takes up its historical responsibility, the spread of Japanese traditional culture will meet with resistance. It may be that although it spreads smoothly for a while, it will be fragile once a crisis arrives, and people in other countries will have an impression of Japan that fluctuates.

## 6. Conclusion

It can be seen that the Japanese government has effectively constructed Japan's cultural soft power and increased its favourable impression in the hearts of people in other countries by means of cultural diplomacy, such as active participation in international cooperation, reform of government institutions and strategic orientation, development of tourism, exchange of art and culture, and promotion of masterpieces by celebrities and other artists. Similarly, since traditional culture is naturally closely related to the history of the nation, some unfavourable factors in it will be an obstacle to the construction of Japan's cultural soft power, which may be something that the Japanese government needs to pay attention to in its future cultural diplomacy in the area of traditional culture.

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