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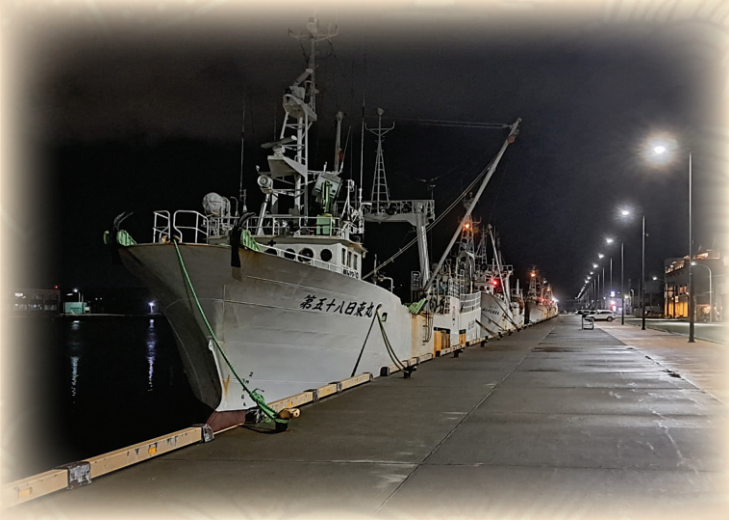

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CONTENTS

Research Articles

Book review

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The Symbolism of Fish and Fishing in Japanese Culture. Whales, Dolphins, and Fantastic Creatures in Legends and Ideas

E. M. Dyakonova

Abstract

In Japan, there are many regional legends and traditions associated with water, fish, and fantastic creatures inhabiting the sea. These legends go back many centuries; the first mentions of large fish are found already in the first Japanese poetic anthology *Man'yōshū* (8th century) and in the mythological and chronicle text *Nihon Shoki* (720). In different provinces, legends and traditions vary, some motifs are interpreted differently by folklorists, however. Evidently, we can talk about a single body of related texts, united not only by plots where the main characters are whales, dolphins, etc., but also by accompanying actions: *matsuri* festivals in honor of fish and fishing, ritual performance of magical texts, dancing, songs, cooking, making amulets, etc. The symbolism that unites the theme of fish and fishing in Chinese and Japanese culture is also obvious: wealth and prosperity, which is reflected not only in written monuments, but also in works of art. Whales, for example, are associated with numerous legends, traditions, and mythological motifs of local significance, ideas about these mammals as deities of the sea, to whom Shinto shrines are dedicated. Images of fish were part of offerings to the bride's family due to the auspicious meaning of the item. It is noteworthy that the legends about the sea included famous literary and legendary characters and episodes from famous works of Japanese history and literature, such as *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, *Man'yōshū*, *Heike Monogatari*.

Keywords: Japanese legends and traditions, *Man'yōshū*, *Heike Monogatari*, symbolism of the fish and fishing, Yamato Takeru, Miyamoto Musashi, Ebisu.

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Fish and fishing in China and Japan are a symbolic sphere full of diverse meanings that have developed over many centuries. In Japan, fish in its emblematic sense stands for wealth, prosperity; catching a big fish means attaining happiness. In Chinese, the characters 魚 *yui*, "fish," and 余 *yui*, "abundance," are read the same way; thus, a transfer of meanings took place when the word "fish" was loaded with the concepts of "abundance," "multitude," "excess."

China and Japan have significant fish resources; the main food was rice and fish. Fish spawn abundantly, and therefore it became a symbol of harmony, marital happiness, and childbirth. *Netsuke* 根付, ivory figurines depicting fish, which the Japanese tied to their belts, had a favorable meaning and were presented as gifts with wishes for happiness, wealth, and childbirth (*Fig. 1*). Fish often swim in pairs; so they are also seen as symbols of union, especially sexual. "Double fish" is also a talisman against evil spells.

According to Buddhist beliefs, virtue can be gained by releasing living beings, such as birds, fish, turtles, etc., during temple festivals. Buddhist temples often have ponds with carp and goldfish of extraordinary beauty – the result of many years of very skillful breeding. They were

often depicted on Chinese and Japanese porcelain, which began to be imported to Europe, and there appeared their own manufactories of *chinoiserie* (French for "imitation of Chinese"), on which images of fish are often found. These fish came to Europe in the 17th century and became widely known.

Since both birds and fish are oviparous, in ancient times, it was believed that they were related creatures; they can transform from one species to another and easily adapt to different elements. Many species of fish were described in ancient Far Eastern texts as hypostases of birds.

The carp, thanks to its bright scales and the extraordinary strength with which it moves upstream during spawning, was considered an emblem of martial arts. According to the American scientist C.A.S. Williams, there is a legend in China that when carps in the third moon of each year go against the stream of the Yellow River (*Huang He*), at the rapids of the Dragon Gate (*Lunmeng*) they turn into dragons [Williams 1976, p. 183]. That is why images of carp are given to Japanese boys on the day of the year when the *yang* element is especially strong, i.e., the 5th day of the fifth moon. In China, the carp is a symbol of literary knowledge and successful passing of exams for the rank of an official; they know how to go upstream, which means they can pass difficult exams. Fish are emblems of the epistolary art, which is also associated with their abundant spawning. In old books, fish are compared to the subjects of the sovereign, and the art of fishing – to ruling: a hapless fisherman will catch nothing, and a helpless ruler will not cope with his people [Williams 1976, p. 184]. The legendary Chinese emperor Fu Xi 伏羲 (traditional dates 2953–2838 BC) earned his name "Hiding Prey" because he wove different types of nets and taught his subjects to catch fish and sea creatures for subsistence [Ibid.].

Whales (鯨, *kujira*, Lat. *cetacea*), mammals that live in Japanese waters, have always attracted the Japanese because of their size; they have been hunted in Japan since the ancient Jōmon period (13,000 BC – 300 BC). In Japan, whales are called fish. Numerous legends, stories and mythological motifs are associated with whales (Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6). For Shinto, the indigenous polytheistic religion of the Japanese, which had

existed long before the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the 7th and 8th centuries, the objects of worship are countless *kami* deities and the souls of ancestors. Many objects of living and dead nature (trees, brooks, lakes, stones, and others) can be *kami*. In Japan, there are thousands of Shinto shrines; it is a whole system united by rituals.

Whales are mentioned ten times in the first Japanese poetry anthology "Collection of Myriads of Leaves" (万葉集, *Man'yōshū*, 8th century), which became the title of the entire Japanese lyric tradition [Masaharu 1990, p. 3–4]. Many of the poems in it are associated with ancient rituals and ideas. Let us give an example of a poem of the ancient poetic form *sedōka*, or a six-line verse without rhyme and with alternating lines counting 5-7-7-5-7-7 syllables. Some Japanese scholars believe that this form is dialogic and may have been composed by two people (a question – 5-7-7 and an answer – 5-7-7), since their utterances are often opposite in meaning.

Anonymous Poem No. 3852.

> Will the whale monsters be exterminated?
> Will the sea dry up and become shallow?
> Will the mountain ranges crumble?
> No, the whales will not perish,
> Even though the waters run short of tides…
> But the mountains will crumble into dust.[1]

Whales are mentioned in various genres of Japanese classical literature: descriptions of customs and lands 風土記 *fudoki*, diaries 日記 *nikki*, travel writings 紀行 *kikō*. In Japan, there are many regional legends, tales, and anecdotes related to whales: stories associated with toponyms, with historical figures, for example, with the famous warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune 源義経 and with the literary monument "The Tale of the Heike" (平家物語 *Heike monogatari*, 14th century), which describes the war between two clans, Taira and Minamoto (12th century),

[1] Rendered from the Russian translation by E. M. Dyakonova.

with the victory over a huge whale by the ancient hero Yamato Takeru 倭武, described in the mythological and historical collection Records of Ancient Matters (古事記 *Kojiki*, 8th century). Whales are associated with the god of fishing, Ebisu, who brings wealth and good fortune and who turns into a large fish, *isana* (whale, dolphin, or shark). There are stories of whales making pilgrimages to shrines, of whale schools, whale festivals, and Whale Rocks, where the animals turn into huge stones, of whales as messengers of the gods and of whale priests.

Also popular are legends of the were-whale 化物 *bakemono*, or bone whale 骨者 *honemono* (*Fig. 6*). In ancient times, the part of the Sea of Japan that borders Izumo Province (now northeastern Shimane Prefecture) was called the Whale Sea because many whales lived there. One day, there appeared a whale consisting only of white bones; it had neither skin nor flesh. It was accompanied by schools of strange fish and birds. Fishermen went to the whale in boats, but no matter how many times they threw harpoons, they did not cause any harm to the animal. When they got closer, they found only a huge white skeleton and fled in fear. The fishermen later told the people in the coastal villages that it was a dead whale that had appeared in the form of a vengeful spirit.

There are many legends in the Shimane area about whales and their magical properties. One day in 1897, several large whales stranded themselves on the shore of Chibu Oki Bay in Shimane, causing fires and earthquakes. Locals believed that this was a curse from the dead whales, and performed rituals to appease their spirits.

In the coastal villages of Shikoku Island, the following story was told. Long ago, in the Seto Naikai Inland Sea off the island of Shikoku, there lived a huge evil fish (*Fig. 6*) the size of an island. It sank ships and ate people. Fishermen could not sail on boats, catch fish, and transport people and cargo. The sovereign sent warriors to exterminate the fish, but the ship was sunk, and all the warriors died. Then the sovereign became worried and ordered the hero Yamato Takeru to go to sea and defeat the evil fish. Yamato Takeru pursued it in various places where it appeared, off the coast of the provinces of Tosa and Awa. One day, he saw the scary fish in the depths of the waters, but a storm broke out at sea and

high waves did not allow the ship to approach the evil fish. The next year, the fish appeared near Tsuchinoto in Sanuki Province. Yamato Takeru chased the fish for a long time across the stormy sea, but finally managed to defeat it. He gathered his men, attacked the fish, and, piercing it with his sword, got inside. The belly of the evil fish was hot as fire, and the warriors who followed the hero died one after another. Yamato Takeru managed to strike the fish from the inside, then cut himself out of its belly and escaped. There is a version of the legend where the fish is killed by Yamato Takeru's son, fifteen-year-old Reiko.

The deity Ebisu no mikoto is one of the seven Japanese gods of happiness, the patron of fishing, success, and commerce; he is depicted in a hunting dress, with a fishing rod in his right hand and a sea bream or golden carp under his arm (*Fig. 7*). He is the only one of the seven gods of happiness of Japanese origin; the others are Chinese or Indian. He is called the "God who came from overseas" and is depicted on large fish catch flags in fishing villages. In addition to Ebisu, these flags also feature whales, dolphins, and whale sharks, i.e., *isana*. All these fish are revered in coastal villages throughout Japan, as it is believed that the appearance of these sea creatures brings a bountiful catch; whales and dolphins are usually accompanied by large schools of sardines, herring, and mackerel. Floats for nets, *abato*, are called *Ebisu aba*, "floats of the fishing god." Ebisu is also called *Yori gami* – Moving god, or *Yori kujira* – Moving whale; there is a variant *Nagare kujira* – Drifting whale, which mainly refers to whales washed up alive on the shore or in shallow waters.

The whale-related god Ebisu is not found in the major ancient mythological and historical records, the Records of Ancient Matters and the Annals of Japan (日本書紀, *Nihon shoki*, 8th century); so, attempts have been made since ancient times to find a related deity in these influential works.

In Hyogo Prefecture, there is Nishinomiya Shrine (*Fig. 8*); it is a shrine to the god Ebisu and the head temple of all Ebisu shrines in Japan. Legends say that Ebisu no mikoto was washed ashore, and as he resembled the god of the sea, he became worshipped as a deity of waters. Ebisu was syncretized with the deity Kotoshiro no mikoto (or Kotoshiro-

nushi gami), who was considered a deity of oracles but loved fishing. His father, Okuninushi no mikoto, was the grandson of one of the main heavenly gods, the furious Susanoo no mikoto, ruled the country, taught medicine, and later, having ceded control to the Great Goddess of the Sun, Amaterasu omi kami, became the ruler of the underworld – the Country of Roots (*Ne no kuni*). Thus, Ebisu and Kotoshiro were associated with the god of the sea, and the idea of relationship between these deities arose quite late, during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). The image of Ebisu with a fishing rod and a sea bream under his arm is, according to some surmises, based on the image of Okuninushi no mikoto's son. Before the emergence of the belief in Ebisu, shrines to Kotoshiro no mikoto were built, and later, images of Ebisu were also placed in them. The most typical "double" shrine is Miho, an important cultural property in Shimane Prefecture, which is the main sanctuary of Kotoshiro no mikoto. From the Tokugawa period to the Meiji era (1868–1912), the name of the deity venerated at many shrines changed from Ebisu to Kotoshiro no mikoto and vice versa. Both of these Shinto deities are worshiped as gods of fishing and shipping, as well as deities that repel insects in rice fields.

The *Kojiki* contains world-creating and world-organizing myths. The chief demiurges – the gods Izanami and Izanagi – created the Japanese islands by ascending a high bridge over the abyss, striking a precious spear into the sea, and from the drops flowing from the spear, the islands emerged. They performed wedding rituals and conceived a child, but the rituals were performed incorrectly; so they gave birth to a "bad child" that had no arms or legs. "And the child they bore was a leech child. They put the child in a reed boat and set it afloat" [Kojiki 1994, p. 40]. The child was washed out into the sea and later, in popular belief, turned into the deity Ebisu no mikoto, who could not walk even at the age of three. The text of the "Records of Ancient Matters" or the "Annals of Japan" makes no mention of the transformation; these are undoubtedly later interpretations. Commentators believe that the Leech Child (*hirugo*) was called so because it resembled a leech, had a soft body, and lacked arms and legs. The "Annals of Japan" describe the child's

body as weak and limp, but with arms and legs. Later interpretations from the Tokugawa era say that the Leech Child resembled a newborn whale, which was associated with Ebisu no mikoto.

Many coastal villages and towns across Japan debate where Ebisu no mikoto was washed ashore. In Wakayama Prefecture, there's the Kujira Ebisu Shrine, dedicated to the whale god, *kujira gami*, where the tall *torii* gate and stairway railings are made of whale bones (*Fig. 9*).

Whales are not only the heroes of folk legends, the saviors of fishermen, pointing out schools of fish in the sea, but also an important, albeit intermittent, source of food for coastal villagers, for which people are grateful. Residents of coastal villages and towns hold annual whale festivals, *kujira matsuri*, where they offer thanks to the whales. The Kujira Ebisu Shrine also holds a similar festival. The festival (祭 *matsuri*) should be understood in a broader sense here: it is a way of communicating with Shinto *kami*. First, they are called to the earth, since they reside in other spheres (in the heavens, in the sea, in the mountains, in the rocks, groves, and even in the gravel in the courtyard of Shinto shrines, etc.), then they are worshiped, with participants performing ritual actions, playing theatrical performances of *kagura* (神楽, "joy of the gods"), accompanying the dances with the playing of flutes, lutes, and drums. Later, the gods are seen off to their place of residence, since staying close to the *kami* for a long time is dangerous for humans.

The patronal festival of the deity Ebisu matsuri, "in charge of" a bountiful harvest, a good catch, and prosperity for business and family, is held regularly, for example, in the city of Hiroshima at Koshi Shrine. Japan has many shrines dedicated to Ebisu, one of them being the influential Imamiya Ebisu (*Fig. 11*) in Osaka, which draws crowds of visitors for its whale festivals, held annually on January 9–11. The Ebisu ko (or Toka Ebisu) Festival at Imamiya Shrine is listed as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property (*Fig. 12*). The popular name for the festival is Ebissan. The sea bream, the symbol of Ebisu, is the shrine's symbol and talisman. Fishermen's homes also hold rituals of thanksgiving to Ebisu at that time, during which skillfully prepared fish dishes are served (*Fig. 13*), and, at the shrine, they distribute whale-tail-shaped amulets

for good luck in fishing and commerce, as well as bamboo leaves for good fortune. Throughout Japan, whales, dolphins, and whale sharks are often called Ebisu.

Knowledge about fishing and the wisdom of fishing villages are captured in proverbs, nursery rhymes, metaphors, fairy tales, legends, and traditions. Below are some folk legends and traditions from various coastal settlements and fishing villages in many prefectures of Japan. These legends were recorded by folklorists and published in local editions: folk culture bulletins, regional cultural studies, coastal travel guides, etc.[2] These legends are not included in the main monuments of Japanese Shinto myths, the Records of Ancient Matters and the Annals of Japan, although whales are mentioned five times in the Annals of Japan.

In Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, where winters can be harsh and snowdrifts can pile up, there is a popular local legend linked to the toponym Bakkai, or Whale Rock. Legend has it that when a devastating tsunami wave once hit the coast, the parent whale Porofunbe and its calf Ponfunbe tried to protect the cape and the entire area around it with their bodies from the onslaught of the wave. The whales turned into a rock; people said the rock was shaped like a huge whale carrying a calf on its back. People worshiped the rock as the whale god Funbekamui. The Ainu called this place Pakaipe-po-kai-pe ("Thing that carries a child"). The name of Cape Bakkai is written with the characters 抜海, which mean "Lost by the sea."

In many Japanese villages, there is an ancient custom: not to abandon disabled children to the mercy of fate; if there are no people willing to adopt them, the entire village takes care of the children, feeds, clothes, and raises them as best they can. If a child remains incapable, the villagers look after them until their death, providing them with shelter and food. This legend is told in Ishikawa Prefecture, where there still exists the custom of the entire village taking care of such "sunny children." When

[2] *Nihon no kujira ni kakawaru densetsu* [Legends of Japanese Whales] https://www.catv296.ne.jp/~whale/kujira-densetu.html

they die, they turn into whales and wander far out to sea, but later return and beach themselves to thank the villagers for taking care of them throughout their lives. The fishermen accept this gratitude and butcher the whale, keeping the meat for themselves and selling the baleen.

A legend existing in the same area claims that, during the Tokugawa era, a married couple rescued a beached whale and its calf and managed to push them back into the sea. A short time later, the couple gave birth to a long-awaited child, named Kujiranami (Whale Wave).

The Itoshima Collection of Legends contains a colourful tale about a whale burrow in Fukuoka Prefecture, on Japan's southernmost island of Kyushu, beneath Mirror Rock (Kagami iwa). One beautiful spring day, celestial maidens wearing dresses made of bird feathers descended from the High Heavenly Plain and began to sing in sweet, bell-like voices and dance. Fragrances drifted through the air, and the maidens sang and sang with abandon. Then one of the girls began to sing a forbidden song from the nether world, and all the other girls fled in fear. The celestial maiden, having finished her song, instantly lost all her divine power, and her feather dress turned to stone. The celestial maiden prayed to the heavenly *kami* gods for forgiveness, but received no answer. In her grief, she threw herself into the raging sea and drowned. She fell into the whale burrow where she perished along with the whale that lived at the back of the cave. Thousands of years later, traces of the celestial maiden and her fossilized feather dress are found at the top of Mirror Rock. On the northern island of Hokkaido, there are legends based on episodes from the "The Tale of the Heike". This is a remarkable example of "literary legends." Minamoto no Yoshitsune, a warrior, a hero, an ideal samurai, who was later treacherously killed by his own brother, while wandering around Japan in search of refuge, one day began to compete with his faithful servant Benkei in archery at Cape Chimohito. Benkei sent the arrow far, but Yoshitsune sent it even further, to the coast of Shiranuki. A whale swimming nearby laughed and said, "Don't scare me, you won't." Yoshitsune got angry and shot the whale with another arrow. Then, having discovered the wounded whale on the seashore, beached by a wave, he began to cut off pieces from it and roast them on a spit.

Since the main and decisive battle at Dannoura (1185) between the Taira and Minamoto clans took place at sea with the participation of numerous ships and boats on both sides, there arose local legends associated with the sea, fish, dolphins, and whales. "The Tale of the Heike" tells about a large shoal of 200 dolphins that appeared in the Gulf of Dan in the Inland Sea during the battle. A fortune teller from the Taira clan predicted that if dolphins passed under the Taira ships and returned, then this clan would win; if under the Minamoto ships, they would win. The dolphins chose the Minamoto ships, and they won the battle, and the Taira clan was completely exterminated. One of the Taira warriors, sinking to the bottom, saw the remains of a whale on the seabed and said, "Waves and winds rage on the sea. My body sinks easily into the water. The whale's gills hang in the water close to the bottom." So says "The Tale of the Heike".

Whaling was banned in Japan from time to time. In 1680, Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi 徳川 綱吉 (1646–1709), nicknamed "dog shogun" for his concern for stray dogs and other domestic animals, issued a series of laws known collectively as the "Edict on Compassion for Living Beings." The laws protected not only cows and horses, but also dogs and fish. Fishing was prohibited, with the exception of fishermen who earned their living by casting nets into the sea.

Whaling was also banned in Japan several times. For a long time, whale fishing was tabooed, with only small catches permitted. Currently, only seasonal and limited whaling is permitted. The Japanese consider whale meat and blubber delicacies and prepare many unique dishes from them. Whalebone was used to make strings and ornaments for musical instruments, and sinew was used to make bowstrings. Whale bones were used to decorate shrines. In coastal villages where whaling is prohibited, they say that people who have caused damage to the village turn into whales and swim far out to sea to get rid of their grievances and take revenge on those who offended them. Those villagers who want to thank the village for good deeds or rescues also turn into whales and perform a good deed by washing themselves ashore so that the villagers could share the whale meat among themselves. In Ishikawa Prefecture, there

is a legend about an old woman whose house burned down because of her fault, and she, feeling guilty about her neighbours who suffered from the fire, said she wanted to turn into a whale after her death and make an apology from the sea, accompanied by a good deed. After her death, the aggrieved neighbours filed a lawsuit and were awarded a large repayment. The following year, the family managed to entice a large whale onto the beach, kill it, and sell it. The whole village and other residents of the area said that it was the old woman in the form of a whale who came to apologize and pay off her debt to her neighbours.

On the coast of western Japan, there's a legend about two villages that had been arguing for years over the border between their settlements. One day, a storm raged at sea, and a huge whale was washed ashore. A fierce quarrel broke out between the two villages over the spoils, which lasted well into the night. Suddenly, there came a terrible roar, the ground beneath their feet and the monstrous whale broke in two, and a shower of foam and blood began to pour. The villagers realized this was the will of the gods, and from then on, the crack in the earth became the boundary between the villages, and the people ceased to feud. The cape has since been called Kamiwarisaki, "Split by God" (*Fig. 14*).

A legend from Hateruma Island tells the story of the origin of whales. Once upon a time, there lived a hopelessly lazy man on the island who did not want to work in the rice fields. He had cows, and they plowed and planted rice for him. The lazy man reveled and drove his cows to the fields. A huge tsunami wave arose in the nearby sea, but the lazybones did not notice it right away; so the sea swallowed him up and he sank to the bottom. The cows were not lazy; they kept swimming without stopping, even though Hateruma Island had disappeared from sight. Over time, their front legs turned into pectoral fins, their hind legs into tail fins, and they gradually evolved into whales and became sea creatures. In autumn, whales come to their native coast, cut through the waves, and moo like cows, yearning for the island. And all because whales were originally cows! Similar stories are told on the island of Okinawa.

In Mie Prefecture, there is a legend about a family of pious whales living in the sea near Kumano: a father, a mother, and their calf. One day,

they were planning to visit the most famous shrine of the sun goddess, Amaterasu, in Ise. In the bay, they encountered a fisherman who had not caught a single fish since morning. Seeing the family of whales, he pulled out a harpoon and prepared to launch it at the whale. The whale mother pleaded, "We were heading to the Great Shrine of Ise to offer our prayers to the Sun Goddess. Please let us pass." But the fisherman didn't listen and killed the father and son. From then on, the fishermen from the village of Tomita were never able to catch a single fish, and the seaside village became deserted. Then the villagers held a memorial service for the whale family and stopped whaling forever. Since then, during the season when whales with calves go to Ise Shrine for worship, killing whales has been prohibited.

In Tokyo, there existed the following legend. One day, a whale encountered a ship at sea that was heading to Mount Fuji. The whale, too, was planning a pilgrimage to the mountain and asked the fishermen to take him along. But the fishermen refused his request and began throwing harpoons at him. Then the whale got enraged and swallowed all the fishermen.

There are also many legends about whales turning into huge black stones. Such a stone is located, for example, at Nishinomiya Shrine. Once it was a wounded whale searching for its way back to its native shore. People come to this stone to remember the lost whales and ask for their mercy.

A legend from the town of Marushima in Kumamoto Prefecture states that, in the 1880s, strong winds and high waves brought a large whale from the sea, and the next morning, people found a huge black stone on the sandy shore. The proceeds from the sale of the whale were used to build an elementary school in Marushima. There are seven *kujira gakko* elementary schools in Japan: in the prefectures of Niigata, Akita, Mie, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Iwate, and Chiba, which were built by local residents thanks to whales, with whom close connections are maintained through offerings, *matsuri* festivals, prayers, and amulets. On March 10, 1887, a dozen whales washed ashore in the port of Funagawa, Akita Prefecture. Half of them were sold by local residents, and the proceeds

were used to rebuild a school, which was named Whale School. This is a true story.

There are also numerous legends about whale stones, known collectively as "The Journey to the Whale Stone," and they are also gathered in the collection of legends "The Whale Stone and Legends of Hachinohe Taro" [Masaharu 1990, p. 3]. In the Nishinomiya forest in Hachi nohe (in Aomori Prefecture), there is a legend about Sameura Taro, who was thrown from the sea onto the shore and turned into stone at Nishinomiya Shrine. Once upon a time, in a coastal village, a constant drought made fishing impossible, and the villagers suffered badly. So, Sameura Taro decided to swim far out to sea and search for fish in the deep. But the waves became rough, and he nearly drowned, but a whale rescued him, held him afloat, and carried him ashore. The villagers were grateful to the whale, named him after the youth, Sameura Taro, and made him the village's guardian deity. Sameura Taro was faithful to his shrine and the village, bringing schools of sardines to the shore each year, and the fishermen prospered. This continued for thirty-three years, and then the whale disappeared. Attacked by whalers from the Kishu Islands, he was wounded, washed ashore on the Samura River, and turned into a stone. The villagers began to worship it. Residents of Misato Town in Shimane Prefecture believe that the Whale Rock is inhabited by spirits and that it moves a little bit across the sand every year. They also say that if you cut the stone, living blood will flow out of it. Once upon a time, a man tried to cut open the stone, but blood gushed over the edge, and the scars have never healed. Large stones and rocks shaped like whales or whale heads and tails are important to coastal dwellers and serve as landmarks when they venture out to sea.

In his article "On Whale Graves in Shiragi Town," folk culture scholar Masaharu Yoshi describes the burial customs associated with dead whales in Aichi Prefecture. They are buried in the ground with prayers, as they are considered guardian deities of villages and local shrines, messengers of the gods, and gifts from the sea. Bones of other whales and coins are placed in the graves.

In the Aburatsu region, in the neighboring village of Nanaura, a major storm lasted for several days, and coastal villagers were unable to fish because of the huge waves coming from the raging sea, according to the legend "Sea, Light, and Wind in Aburatsu."[3] The village was facing starvation when a whale, as huge as a mountain, was washed ashore. Without waiting for the village headman's permission to butcher the dead whale, the villagers brought ladders, surrounded the animal, and, without asking for the whale's forgiveness, divided the meat among all the fishermen and their families. Starving people from the neighbouring villages also came running, and they, too, were given whale meat. From then on, the dead animal became known in the area as the Savior Whale and the Great Whale. Grateful coastal villagers buried the remains of the huge whale – bones, eyeball – with great honors and held a memorial service. The whale turned out to be a female with a calf in her womb. It is said that, from then on, the fishermen of the village of Nanaura always had a good catch and never starved, because they paid their last respects to the whale that saved them. Aburatsu villagers still come to worship the spirits of large fish, and every year in May they prepare a dish called *kujira mochi* ("whale rice balls") from rice donated by residents of coastal villages, grind it, saying *kujira-kujira* ("whale-whale"), *kami-kami* ("spirit-spirit"), so that the catch will always be abundant. This custom has been passed down from generation to generation in the Aburatsu region. Whale mochi is made by rolling ground rice flour into a cylinder about 15 cm long and 3 cm wide, then filling it with red bean paste and drawing yellow lines with beetle juice, creating a whale-like shape on the cross-section. These rice balls are made in the prefectures of Aomori and Yamagata in Tohoku.

[3] *Nihon no kujira ni kakawaru densetsu* [Legends of Japanese Whales]. https://www.catv296.ne.jp/~whale/kujira-densetu.html

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Comparison of Historical Memory Narratives in Japan and the FRG after the Second World War

I. P. Fokin

Abstract

The article is devoted to identification of similarities and differences in the historical memory of Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II. These issues are a relevant topic for research in the face of the enduring influence of historical grievances on Japan's relations with its former victims, in contrast to similar relations of Germany. As a theoretical framework, the paper uses O. Malinova's approach, which interprets historical memory as a product of social construction and a variation of symbolic politics. In addition, the author uses the classification of historical memory proposed by Matteo Dian. In the scope of the study, the author examines the impact of occupation policies on the further development of historical memory in the two countries. The paper compares the original content of the main narratives of historical memory in each country, the main mnemonic actors promoting them, and the evolution of these narratives from the end of the war to the present day. The author also highlights the reasons for the differences in the content and evolution of the narratives in Japan and the FRG.

The author concludes that, despite a certain similarity of the occupation policy in the two countries, as well as the formation of two traditions (conservative and left-progressive) in each country's historical memory, its content and evolution are substantially different. In the FRG, the conservative tradition initially included the narratives of self-victimhood and amnesia, while the progressive tradition included the narrative of contrition; over the years,

however, the traditions have evolved from polarization to a consensus around contrition and elements of self-victimhood. In Japan, the conservative tradition initially included glorification of the past in addition to self-victimhood, i.e., it was more revisionist, while the progressive tradition focused on self-victimhood rather than contrition. Over time, the traditions in Japan shifted from a consensus around self-victimhood to a sharp polarization: progressives moved to a contrition narrative, while revisionists gained ground among conservatives.

Keywords: historical narratives, traumatic past, politics of memory, Japan, Federal Republic of Germany, World War II.

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Introduction

The issues of historical memory are becoming increasingly relevant, as many countries' official discourses have been marked by rhetoric concerning historical grievances and the rewriting of history. These questions acquire particular significance in the context of international

relations. In East Asia, tensions related to historical memory are especially acute: memories of Japan's aggressive policies remain a crucial factor in its relations with China, North Korea, and South Korea.

At the same time, there is an example of a country whose comparable legacy of past crimes does not exert such a negative influence on its international position, which is Germany. It may be assumed that an important factor underlying the divergence in the international stance of Japan and Germany is the difference in the historical memory of the two countries.

The purpose of this article is to identify both the similarities and the differences in Japanese and German historical memory: the influence of occupation policies on it, and the content and evolution of the main memory narratives within each society. It should be noted that this study does not examine the historical memory of the German Democratic Republic, insofar as it adopted, to a certain extent, the memory narrative of the Federal Republic of Germany after 1990, and due to the limitations of the article's scope.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Olga Malinova's approach, which conceptualizes memory politics as a form of symbolic politics. The latter is defined as "public activity related to the production of various modes of interpreting social reality and the struggle for their dominance," which implies a plurality of actors producing narratives and the influence of pre-existing systems of representations [Malinova 2018, pp. 30–31]. A memory narrative is understood as a "plot-structured account offering a coherent picture of a sequence of historical events" [Malinova 2018, p. 37]. For the typology of memory narratives, the article employs the classification developed by Matteo Dian, who identified five ideal-typical models of war memory:

– *Glorification*: violence is represented as heroic deeds justified by national interests and values; figures of the military past are glorified, while the suffering of other nations is silenced.

– *Self-victimhood*: the "ordinary people" are depicted as victims unable to influence high politics, with responsibility for their suffering attributed either to the political elite or to other states.

– *Amnesia*: traumatic past events are ignored or excluded from collective memory.

– *Acknowledgement*: responsibility for violence is recognized (though the scale and motivations of the actors remain contested), yet active repentance for the crimes committed is not implied.

– *Contrition*: beyond acknowledging guilt for crimes that cannot be justified, deep remorse is expressed toward the victims [Dian 2017, pp. 24–25].

Occupation Policy in Japan and Germany

Among the most decisive factors shaping postwar memory in the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan were the occupation policies of the victorious powers. Their primary task was to prevent a repetition of aggression, for which purpose they pursued a course of demilitarization, democratization, decentralization, and, in the case of Germany, denazification in the defeated countries. One of the main instruments of this policy was the prosecution of those guilty of war crimes, crimes against peace, and crimes against humanity. As part of the Nuremberg Trials, more than 5,000 German war criminals were convicted, including 18 Class A war criminals, and more than 800 death sentences were handed down [Herf 1997, p. 206]. Under the Japanese tribunals, more than 5,000 people and 28 Class A war criminals were convicted, and nearly 1,000 people were sentenced to death [Dower 1999, p. 447]. Designed to lay the symbolic foundations for the "re-education" of Germans and Japanese, the tribunals indeed became a starting point for their postwar identity.

At the same time, the positive nature of the Trials had certain limitations, which continue to provoke debate in the societies of both countries. Controversial issues included the failure to consider alleged crimes committed by the Allies (carpet bombing, the use of nuclear weapons, looting and violence against civilians), as well as a number of crimes committed by Japan and Germany. For instance, the Holocaust

was not sufficiently addressed since the Tribunal's jurisdiction covered only international crimes. Such issues as the use of forced labor and "comfort women" were also not given adequate consideration. Another problem was the retroactive application of legal norms, as "crimes against peace" and "crimes against humanity" were, from this position, defined only after they had been committed. This point was raised, among others, by Radhabinod Pal, a judge at the Tokyo Tribunal, who argued for the acquittal of the defendants [Olick 2005, p. 106].

An important consequence of prosecuting specific individuals was the de facto exoneration of those who were not brought to trial, which divided the nation into a guilty minority and an innocent majority. The tribunals became an alternative to the idea of collective responsibility, elements of which were applied in Germany in the first months of the occupation but were soon abandoned due to their low effectiveness and the need to establish cooperation with the people [Olick 2005, pp. 98–99]. In Japan, however, the occupation administration immediately set out to separate the "militarist clique" from the people, refusing to penalize ordinary Japanese and attempting to use the militarists as scapegoats [Orr 2001, p. 16].

However, as the Cold War intensified, the focus of the U.S. shifted from efforts to demilitarize and "re-educate" aggressors to turning them into allies. Consolidating pro-American forces in power and rearmament became urgent tasks, requiring the rehabilitation of some of those previously convicted or deprived of their rights. With Washington's approval, a number of German officers were rehabilitated and trials were halted. In 1949 and 1954, the Bundestag passed amnesty laws that exempted more than 1 million former officials and functionaries of the NSDAP, SS, and SA from punishment. In 1951, a law was passed that restored the right of persons who had undergone denazification to hold public office. As a result, by 1953, about 30 percent of all posts in ministries were held by former members of Nazi organizations [Frei 2002, p. 23, 54], and Konrad Adenauer's military advisers included Heinz Guderian and Albert Kesselring. At the same time, pressure on the far-left opposition increased: in 1956, the German Constitutional

Court ruled to ban the Communist Party of Germany, and thousands of communists were subsequently persecuted.

A similar "reverse course" was pursued in Japan. In the 1950s, at Washington's insistence, processes of rehabilitation were initiated. Soon thereafter, approximately 200,000 figures of the former regime were rehabilitated, the majority of whom returned to politics and public administration [Harries, Harries 1987 p. 196–197]. Following the 1952 elections, approximately 42 percent of Diet members were rehabilitated persons [Finn 1992, p. 296]. Among them were Kishi Nobusuke, who held a ministerial post in 1941–1944 and became Prime Minister in 1957, and Shigemitsu Mamoru, foreign minister in a number of both wartime and postwar Cabinets. The United States also contributed to the "red purges" of 1949–1951, the forced dismissal of communists and those suspected of supporting them from government service and private corporations. About 27,000 trade unionists, journalists, and intellectuals were persecuted [Hirata, Dower 2006, p. 3].

There were, however, significant differences in the occupation policies towards Germany and Japan: in the latter case, it was more lenient. In addition to dividing the country into several occupation zones, Germany was subject to a policy of denazification aimed at eradicating Nazi ideology. The entire adult population had to complete a survey on their level of involvement in the regime, on the basis of which special courts (*Spruchkammern*) divided Germans into five categories of guilt. In total, more than 3 million people were examined, of whom about 23,600 were found to be "responsible" or "most responsible" [Berger 2012, p. 48]. This process, however, encountered serious problems. Due to a lack of time and personnel, decisions were made on the basis of guarantees from trustworthy individuals. As a result, those found guilty were often not the real criminals, many of whom had enough connections and resources to find a guarantor, but people less connected to the regime. Denazification soon became extremely unpopular. By the late 1940s, it was criticized even by some of the Nazi victims and gradually ceased.

Although restrictions were also imposed in Japan on ideas and organizations considered to be drivers of chauvinism and expansionism, they included less severe measures and had a limited scope. Thus, the United States decided to preserve the institution of the Emperor and exempt Hirohito from responsibility in order to stabilize the country and prevent public resistance. The occupation administration persuaded the people that the military command had betrayed their Emperor and deceitfully drawn the Japanese into the war.

Nonetheless, the U.S. made serious efforts to demilitarize the country and separate Shinto from the state, considering it to be the main driving force of expansionism and chauvinism. The Emperor had to issue the Humanity Declaration (*Ningen sengen*), in which he debunked "false conception that the Emperor is divine, and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to rule the world".[1] Under the new Constitution of 1947, the Emperor was given an exclusively symbolic status, stripped of real power; religion was separated from the state, and the Emperor's functions as head of Shinto were limited to ceremonial duties. Article 9 postulated the renunciation of "war as a sovereign right of the nation" and the prohibition of maintaining armed forces, while Article 66 barred military personnel from holding the positions of Prime Minister and Cabinet members.[2] Concepts of Japanese exceptionalism, duty to the Emperor, and glorification of militarism were removed from school curricula. More than 120,000 teachers were forced to resign from educational institutions due to their nationalist views [Finn 1992, p. 60].

At the same time, the extent of demilitarization became a factor of difference: in Japan, it proved to be more profound and enduring. Although the aforementioned "reverse course" led to a retreat from

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[1] 官報號外 昭和21年1月1日 詔書 [人間宣言]. 国立国会図書館: https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/shiryo/03/056/056tx.html

[2] The Constitution of Japan. *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*. https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

strict compliance with the prohibition of armed forces, some results of demilitarization persisted. Unlike in West Germany, former Japanese imperial officers were largely excluded both from the restoration of military institutions and participation in postwar politics.

Historical Memory in Japan and the FRG During the Cold War

World War II became a central element of postwar collective memories in German and Japanese societies, forming a prism through which they viewed their history and shaped their identities. In both Germany and Japan, two main traditions of historical memory emerged: a conservative tradition associated with big business, certain religious organizations, and the prewar elite who had escaped lustration, and a progressive (left-wing) tradition associated with left-wing forces, trade unions, part of the intelligentsia, and leftist youth. In both countries, efforts of the occupation administrations to consolidate power in the hands of the pro-Western elite resulted in conservatives dominating politics in the first postwar decades. However, the nature and evolution of the two traditions, the specifics of their rivalry, and its outcome turned out to be distinct in the two countries.

In Germany, the key mnemonic actor seeking to promote a conservative narrative about the past was the Christian Democratic coalition (CDU/CSU). Between 1949 and 1969, it managed to control the majority of seats in each cabinet and appoint the chancellors. This force, equally hostile to Nazism and Communism, sought to rebuild the country as a free, market-oriented democratic state and to secure its place within the Western alliance. Electorally, the block relied on large business, the Catholic community, and, due to its active promotion of rehabilitation, former members of the NSDAP and the military. Other important conservative mnemonic actors were various organizations of “expellees,” that is, German repatriates who were forced to leave the territories that no longer belonged to Germany. Their interests were

represented, among others, by the GB/BHE political party, which was a long-standing parliamentary partner of the CDU/CSU. The "expellees," whose number reached 9 million in the first postwar decades (about 17 percent of the total population of the FRG), formed a significant electorate [Ahonen 1998].

In the early decades, the conservative tradition in Germany centered on a handful of key beliefs. First, it postulated the need to restore national dignity and self-confidence based on positive self-esteem, which was de facto synonymous with minimizing attention to Germany's past crimes. Second, it divided Germans into a guilty minority and an innocent majority. Responsibility for the crimes was placed solely on the group of regime leaders. Although conservatives unequivocally condemned this group, they rejected any concept of collective responsibility and saw the majority of Germans as innocent people whose good name had been tarnished [Herf 1997, p. 212]. Thus, the conservatives sought to shield Wehrmacht soldiers from responsibility to preserve the honor and legitimacy of the military, as well as leading industrialists in view of the country's reconstruction needs [He 2008, p. 59]. Conservatives defended continuity with pre-Nazi Germany, viewing the Third Reich as a historical anomaly.

Third, conservatives championed the self-victimization of the German people, i.e., portraying them as victims of both Nazi repression and the actions of the Allied forces, including carpet bombing, violence against civilians, expulsion from eastern territories, occupation and division of the country. Thus, in 1952, the Adenauer government supported reinstating a National Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*) to honor the memory of German victims of the war, while no commemorative practices were associated neither with the Holocaust or other crimes, nor with the Surrender.

Among the major mnemonic actors within the progressive (left-wing) narrative was the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In terms of electoral support, the SPD relied on influential German trade unions. The Social Democrats saw the Nazis' rise to power as a result of Germany's socio-economic development: accelerated modernization was not

accompanied by a bourgeois revolution, which made the bourgeoisie dependent on the state and hostile to democracy. They believed that, in order to consolidate democracy and prevent the resurgence of ultra-nationalism, it was necessary to nationalize large enterprises and take broad measures to re-educate the people: removing those who sympathized with Nazism from politics, recognizing the responsibility of all Germans for crimes, and repenting actively before the victims [Berger 2012, p. 50].

Other important actors within the progressive tradition were various writers and scholars. For instance, the renowned writer Thomas Mann, who supported the idea of collective German responsibility for Nazism, stated that "it is quite impossible for one born there simply to renounce the wicked, guilty Germany" and declare innocence [Mann 1945, p. 18]. In his famous 1947 work "The Question of German Guilt," philosopher Karl Jaspers emphasized political responsibility, the responsibility of a state's citizens for the consequences of its actions, and noted that, although Nuremberg was a "national disgrace" for the Germans, it was "due to the fact that we did not free ourselves from the criminal regime but were liberated by the Allies" [Jaspers 2000, p. 49].

Thus, it can be seen that, in the initial period, the conservative narrative in Germany corresponded to Matteo Dian's model of self-victimhood and amnesia, while the progressive narrative corresponded to the model of contrition. Apart from their rejection of Nazism, the two traditions had little to agree on. Consequently, in the first postwar decades, there was no public consensus on historical memory. As a result of the 1949 elections, a coalition of the CDU/CSU and FDP came to power and embarked on a conservative line in the field of memory politics, including the enactment of the above-mentioned rehabilitation laws and the alignment of school history textbooks with the conservative narrative.

At the same time, the government did not shy away from attempts to reconcile with the victims of Nazism. The FRG normalized relations with France, the Netherlands, Greece, and Israel. In 1953, 1956, and 1965, compensation laws were passed providing for payments to German citizens and those who emigrated from the country before 1937 for the

loss of relatives, damage to health, deprivation of liberty, loss of property, and forced dismissals.[3] However, the influence of conservative positions was manifested in the fact that payments were directed not least toward Germans, and normalization was limited to the Western allies. Overall, in the first decades after the war, the absence of societal consensus and the intensity of collective trauma led to attempts to bracket out the most painful questions. This period would later be called "an era of active suppression of the past" [Berger 2012, p. 58].

However, gradually, due to various factors, the situation began to change. On the one hand, the ongoing prosecutions of those responsible for the Holocaust helped to keep questions of German guilt at the forefront of public discussions. The trials of a high-ranking police officer in Ulm in 1958 and Albert Eichmann in 1961 caused a significant public resonance. The latter intensified the debate on the role of German conformism in the Holocaust. The 1960s also saw trials of personnel from the Auschwitz, Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor concentration camps. On the other hand, the growth of the left-wing student movement and the SPD's transition from opposition to participation in government contributed to the breakdown of the policy of silence. The involvement in politics of the younger generation, which condemned their elders for complicity in Nazis' crimes, stimulated the re-actualization of war memory. At the same time, the SPD's adoption of more moderate positions and growth in support allowed it to enter government in 1964 alongside the CDU/CSU. In 1965, the Social Democrats succeeded in extending the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes. It was extended again in 1969 and completely abolished in 1979 [Herf 1997, pp. 337–342].

The SPD's victory in the 1969 elections provided an opportunity to foster a progressive narrative. The key element of Chancellor Willy

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[3] Bundesgesetz zur Entschädigung für Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung. *Bundesanzeiger Verlag:* https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl&jumpTo=bgbl153s1387.pdf#__bgbl__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl153s1387.pdf%27%5D__1715565081852

Brandt's course was his Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*), aimed at reconciling with Germany's Eastern European neighbors. In the early 1970s, he reached agreements with the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. His famous kneeling during the visit to Warsaw in 1970 had a positive impact on West Germany's image in Eastern European countries, as well as symbolized the incorporation of a narrative of contrition into the official discourse. However, German society was far from reaching consensus: the conservatives vigorously resisted the reforms. The ratification of Brandt's treaties led to fierce opposition; in 1974, the Chancellor resigned. The year before, a German court had once again rejected claims for compensation from former forced laborers. Yet the foundation had been laid. In the 1970s, educational reforms were carried out: coverage of Nazis' crimes increased and anti-fascist commemorative ceremonies were organized. Besides, a four-part TV series Holocaust sparked widespread public discussions of the issue of German guilt [He 2008, pp. 73–75].

The 1980s marked the gradual emergence of a consensus in society around the narrative of contrition. With the collapse of the Union-SPD coalition and the arrival of Helmut Kohl as Chancellor, the conservatives attempted to take revenge in the realm of memory politics, returning to the idea of "drawing a line" under the Nazi past and restoring the "spirit of healthy patriotism." This conservative impulse was met with resistance, which manifested itself in two scandals. In 1985, the public reacted with fierce criticism to the initiative of Kohl and U.S. President Ronald Reagan to jointly visit the American-German military cemetery in Bitburg, where, among others, members of the Waffen-SS were buried. Although Kohl persuaded Reagan not to cancel the event, the leaders were forced to supplement it with a visit to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp [He 2008, p. 88]. In 1986, the "historians' dispute" erupted. A number of conservative scholars, including Michael Stürmer and Ernst Nolte, argued that the topic of Nazism should not dominate the historical memory of Germans and that it was the justified fears of the middle classes about the threat of communism that led them to support the NSDAP. In response, Jürgen Habermas

and other left-wing thinkers accused them of relativizing Nazis' crimes and seeking to renationalize German historical consciousness. The leftists are generally considered to have prevailed in the dispute [Berger 2012, p. 67].

Ultimately, the narrative of contrition became established within society. The 1985 address by German President Richard von Weizsäcker became symbolic. Weizsäcker, a CDU member, stated that repentance did not contradict healthy patriotism but was a source of national pride and the duty of every German.[4] The speech, highly praised by both conservatives and leftists, marked the acceptance of the narrative of contrition by the conservative tradition and the establishment of a national consensus around it.

In postwar Japan, both conservative and progressive (left-wing) memory traditions also took shape. Among conservatives, the major actors were the Liberal Democratic Party and the state bureaucracy. A notable part of the elite retained prewar continuity, as many escaped lustration or were rehabilitated. The conservative narrative was also promoted by a number of influential non-governmental organizations. One of them was the Association of Shinto Shrines (*Jinja honchō*), which was established after the separation of religion from the state and brought together most Shinto shrines. Dissatisfied with the diminished status of Shintoism, it sought to revise the postwar order and restore traditions, including the cultivation of the "unique spiritual values" of the Japanese people associated with Shinto, the centrality of the Emperor, and the cult of war heroes (*eirei*), who sacrificed their lives for him [Seraphim 2006, p. 53].

Another influential organization, The Japan Association of War-bereaved Families (*Nippon izokukai*), campaigned for the restoration of pensions and public recognition for veterans and war bereaved families, and for the preservation of the cult of war heroes. Thus, it promoted the

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4 Richard von Weizsäcker, "der 8 Mai 1945: 40 Jahre danach, Weizsacker, Von Deustchland aus: Reden des Bundesprasidenten. – Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987.

enshrinement of the spirits of fallen soldiers, including those who were recognized as war criminals [Dian 2017, p. 42].

At the heart of the Japanese conservatives' ideology was their rejection of the "Tokyo Trials view of history." Often referring to the dissenting opinion of Judge Radhabinod Pal, they criticized the tribunals as victors' justice, which regards all of Japan's actions since 1931 as aggressive, while considering any decisions of the Allies to be justified. Conservatives, in turn, did not consider the war to be exclusively aggressive. They argued that Japan was dragged into it, emphasizing the factors of economic crisis, the U.S. oil embargo, and Western colonialism setting the standards for great power politics [Gluck 1990, p. 12]. The most ardent revisionists insisted on the messianic goal of the war – the liberation of the peoples of Asia from "white colonialism." The annexation of Korea, the establishment of Manchukuo and Wang Jingwei's government in Nanjing were claimed to reflect the will of the people, while war crimes were presented as exaggerations or propaganda lies. An essential part of the conservative narrative was the idea of continuity between prewar and postwar Japan, symbolized by the institution of the Emperor and Shintoism [Dian 2017, pp. 43–45].

Conservatives sought to bolster the high status of Japanese war dead. They idealized the "Japanese spirit" of the wartime generation, which sacrificed itself for the nation and its future prosperity, and believed that recognizing the war as aggressive implies dishonor for the heroes [Orr 2001, p. 21]. The Yasukuni Shrine became the central location for commemorating fallen soldiers. Finally, conservatives saw Japan's restoration of the "first-tier power" status as the core objective, but disagreed on how to achieve it. Kishi Nobusuke, Shigemitsu Mamoru, and Hatoyama Ichirō sought full rearmament and viewed the alliance with the United States as a temporary evil. Yoshida Shigeru, Ikeda Hayato, Satō Eisaku – a more moderate group – put a premium on active economic development, less involvement in international affairs, and relying on U.S. security guarantees [Samuels 2007].

Within the progressive (left-wing) tradition of memory, the major actors were the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Japan Communist

Party (JCP). Although they did not participate in any government until 1993, these parties wielded considerable influence, serving as a powerful check on hardline conservatives. Various non-governmental organizations also played an important role. One of them was the Japan Teachers' Union (*Nykkyōso*). Since most of the teachers who remained in education after the purges held left-wing views, *Nykkyōso* enjoyed considerable support. The core of its ideology was remorse for participation in the militaristic education system. The organization blamed the war on the "feudal-fascist characteristics" of the prewar system and declared the need for decentralization of education [Duke 1973]. Another vocal organization, the Memorial Society for Students Killed in the War (*Nihon senbotsu gakusei kinen-kai*), sought to honor the memory of students who were called to war in the final years of the conflict, including kamikaze pilots, and to ensure that such senseless deaths would not be repeated. Various groups of atomic bomb victims (*hibakusha*) aimed to achieve public recognition and compensation for victims and to promote nuclear disarmament.

At the core of the progressive tradition was the idea of the "double victimization" of the ordinary people, i.e., the Japanese were seen as victims of both the militarist regime and the war, that caused considerable suffering, including carpet bombing and atomic attacks [Dian 2017, pp. 51–52]. The *hibakusha* became an important symbol of the Japanese people's suffering and the struggle for nuclear disarmament. Another key idea was a radical break with the past. Progressives linked militarism and war with incomplete modernization and traditionalism, advocating complete democratization, the achievement of civil subjectivity and political freedom [Kersten 1996, p. 181]. Finally, progressives shared an extreme rejection of militarism in both domestic and foreign policy. Their doctrine was unarmed neutrality: a complete renunciation of armed forces and non-alignment with military blocks.

Thus, it can be seen that, unlike in Germany, the conservative narrative in Japan included not only a model of self-victimhood but also glorification of the past, i.e., it was more revisionist. The progressive narrative, on the other hand, focused on the model of self-victimhood

and barely included any contrition. In addition to the differences in occupation policy described above, this divergence between Germany and Japan can be explained by historical circumstances. Firstly, in Japan, it was impossible to clearly identify a specific group responsible for wartime crimes. Japan's imperial expansion, which culminated in World War II, spanned the entire half of the century and involved several Cabinets and Emperors. In addition, the peculiarities of the decision-making system, including the dispersion of responsibility, competition between centers of influence, and the absence of an autocratic leader and a single party, further complicated the identification of the group of perpetrators [Berger 2012, pp. 130–131]. Furthermore, the use of the term "militarists" to designate those responsible was complicated by the vagueness of its definition and by the reluctance to regard the military as criminals (as in the case of the Wehrmacht in Germany).

Secondly, Japanese conservatives were able to take a more revisionist stance due to the differences in the crimes committed by the two countries, namely the factor of Holocaust. Although ideas of racial supremacy served as the basis for many of Japan's crimes, it did not pursue a systematic policy of complete extermination of a group on racial grounds. The Holocaust became both a factor in the complete delegitimization of the Nazi regime and a powerful symbol of its crimes, as it was the discussion of the genocide that prevented German society from drawing a line under the Nazi past [Berger 2012, pp. 128–129].

Unlike Germany in the first postwar decades, Japan saw a certain convergence between conservative and progressive narratives. Taking advantage of this, the moderate conservatives were able to build a consensus between the two traditions in the areas of commemoration and foreign policy. The first element of this consensus was the portrayal of the Japanese as the main victims. Conservatives thus avoided the issue of guilt and elicited sympathy for the victims of the war generation, while progressives justified their rejection of militarism, which they blamed for the war. The consensus led to the commonality of commemorative symbols (Hiroshima and *hibakusha*) and, most importantly, the ignoring of the victims of Japan's aggression. Thus, in his address at the San

Francisco Conference, Prime Minister Yoshida justified Japan's "desire to live in peace" solely by "the suffering of his people".[5] The National Memorial Service for the War Dead, organized since the 1950s, also ignored the victims among the non-Japanese [Buruma 1995, p. 117].

The second element of the consensus was minimizing Japan's military role, as moderate conservatives viewed the pacifism championed by the leftist movement as a practical excuse for rejecting U.S. requests to increase military commitments. Attempts by revisionists led by Prime Minister Kishi in the late 1950s to revise defense policy toward a greater military role met with widespread public resistance, resulting in the largest protests in the country's history (*Anpo tōsō*). Although the updated security treaty with Washington – Kishi's main brainchild – was ultimately concluded, the protests led to his resignation, the coming to power of moderate conservatives, and the consolidation of a pacifist consensus [Dian 2017, p. 63].

The consensus endured several crises. Against the backdrop of U.S. demands to engage in the Vietnam War, the Cabinet of Satō Eisaku, partly under the pressure from the protest movement, reinforced the doctrine of military non-involvement, establishing the three non-nuclear principles and prohibiting arms exports. Meanwhile, the victimhood of those who had suffered from Japan's aggression was acknowledged only in exceptional cases. Although, in 1972, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, under the pressure from Beijing, stated that Japan accepted the responsibility for the damage caused and "deeply reproached itself,"[6] by 1973, he told the Diet that historians had yet to determine whether the deployment of troops in China constituted an act of aggression [Dian 2017, p. 68].

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5 Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's Speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference. *Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo*. https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPUS/19510907.S1E.html

6 Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. September 29, 1972. https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint72.html

At the same time, there was a slight shift in the progressive narrative. The Vietnam War and normalizing relations with China led to a growing focus on the narrative of contrition. Thus, a vast body of literature devoted to Japan's war crimes has been published, including works by Honda Katsuichi, Morimura Seiichi, and Senda Kakō. Public debate was sparked by lawsuits filed by historian Ienaga Saburō against the Ministry of Education, as his 1965 textbook, which extensively covered Japan's war crimes, was not approved. The litigation lasting until 1982 reinforced the belief that Tokyo deliberately conceals the unsavory aspects of history.

In response, the conservative camp consolidated its position. In 1980, the LDP launched a campaign to correct "biased textbooks" promoting a "masochistic view of history." In 1982, the party proclaimed the "cultivation of Japanese spirit and national pride" as the basis of its political program [Conrad 2010]. At the same time, revisionist historians became more active, disputing the use of the term "Nanking Massacre," the number of victims, and the evidence of other war crimes. In 1982, the premiership was taken by Nakasone Yasuhiro, a hardline conservative. His visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, 1985, sparked heated debate. Being the first visit to this shrine by a Prime Minister in an official capacity following the enshrinement of Class A war criminals in 1978, it provoked a diplomatic scandal and further destabilized the historical memory consensus.

In sum, by the end of the 1980s, Japan found itself on the verge of a collapse of the postwar historical memory consensus based on a narrative of self-victimhood. In contrast, in the FRG at this point, for the first time in the entire postwar period, a consensus based on a narrative of contrition had formed.

Historical Memory in Contemporary Japan and the FRG

In Germany, from the 1990s to the present day, the consensus around the narrative of contrition has largely remained intact. German reunification, however, posed a challenge due to the need to integrate the historical memory of West and East Germans and fears that the patriotic fervor of reunification would revive ultranationalism. In the 1990s, there was indeed an upsurge of the New Right movement, which sought to overcome the "guilt mythology," establish Germany as a "normal" and "self-confident" country, and oppose immigration [He 2008, p. 99–100]. At the same time, the early 1990s saw a spike in crimes against immigrants. However, the efforts of moderate forces pushed the New Right out of mainstream politics.

Despite concerns, the need to integrate the historical memory of the GDR did not lead to a breakdown in the consensus around contrition as well. On the one hand, the FRG has made efforts to bring East German historical memory into line with its own. The education system was restructured: thousands of school and university teachers found to have collaborated with the Stasi were dismissed, history departments were reorganized, and curricula were revised [Lyozina 2015, pp. 61–62]. Youth educational activities were also organized, including trips to concentration camps, to inform about the multifaceted nature of the Resistance movements and the dangers of xenophobia and racism. On the other hand, the new East German elites themselves sought to adopt the historical narrative of the FRG. In 1990, after the first free elections, a parliamentary declaration recognized the "responsibility of the Germans in the GDR" for "genocide, particularly affecting Jews ..., the people of the Soviet Union, the Polish people, as well as the Sinti and Roma" [Jander 1990]. As a result, the historical memory of East Germany was, to a certain extent, assimilated into the narrative of the FRG.

The narrative of contrition was reflected in the official events marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. The Bundestag declared January 27, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, a Day of Remembrance for

the Victims of National Socialism. On the anniversary, German President Roman Herzog noted that responsibility for the Holocaust lay with Germans as a whole [Herf 1997, p. 369]. A tradition of issuing official apologies became established, with statements to this effect made by Roman Herzog, Gerhard Schröder, and other leaders. A similar trend was observed in the museum sphere. In 1995, an exhibition dedicated to the Wehrmacht's atrocities against the civilian population sparked debate, undermining the myth of the innocence of regular soldiers. In 2001, construction of the Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust began in Berlin, and Europe's largest Jewish Museum opened.

At the same time, by the early 2000s, following the consensus on contrition, a gradual convergence on the issue of expelled Germans emerged due to the adoption of elements of self-victimhood by the Left. Researcher Thomas Berger traces this trend back to 1999, when the left-wing government of Gerhard Schröder, seeking to justify Germany's participation in the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, stated that, given their experience of Nazism, the Germans had a moral obligation to respond to human rights violations [Berger 2012, p. 76]. This rhetoric created a framework for the Left to condemn violations of Germans' rights. As a result, in May 1999, the Bundestag passed a resolution calling for the settlement of "still open questions of history," referring to the expulsion of Germans [Berger 2012, p. 77]. In 2008, as part of the CDU/CSU and SPD coalition agreement, the Bundestag established the Center Against Expulsion and the Foundation Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation. The trend continues to this day. In 2018, on World Refugee Day, Angela Merkel noted that there was no justification for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.[7]

Unlike Germany, which observed a growing consensus between traditions based on contrition and elements of self-victimhood, Japan's politics of memory was characterized by increasing polarization. At the

[7] Merkel calls Sudeten German expulsion "immoral", drawing Czech ire. *Czech Radio*. https://english.radio.cz/merkel-calls-sudeten-german-expulsion-immoral-drawing-czech-ire-8157867

turn of the 1990s, the postwar consensus finally collapsed. The death of Hirohito in 1989, which ended the unspoken taboo on discussing his guilt, once again divided conservative and progressive traditions. A statement by Nagasaki Mayor Motoshima Hitoshi stating the Emperor's responsibility for the war sparked debate, and the progressive-oriented newspaper Asahi Shimbun published a series of articles on the subject. Conservatives, meanwhile, enthusiastically embraced the extensive enthronement rituals conducted under Meiji-era regulations, which were intended to reaffirm the relevance of centuries-old traditions.

Concurrently, amid the globalization of memory and increased cultural exchange with East Asia, the progressive tradition began to move away from the self-victimhood narrative toward embracing the "German model" of repentance and reconciliation with former victims. As early as 1986, the *Nihon senbotsu gakusei kinen-kai* spearheaded establishing the Japan-Germany Peace Forum, which brought together activists from the two countries. New mnemonic actors emerged from among human rights organizations. One of the most important was the Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW NET), founded by renowned journalist Matsui Yayori. In cooperation with South Korean groups, the Network brought to the forefront the issue of "comfort women."

Thus, in 2001, they organized the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal, examining Japan's military sexual slavery during the war. The tribunal found 10 wartime leaders guilty, including Emperor Hirohito as Commander-in-Chief.[8] VAWW NET also supported protests against U.S. bases in Okinawa, linking them to violence against women. In addition, Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21 was established in 1998. Following in the footsteps of activists who supported lawsuits of Ienaga Saburō, it opposed attempts by historians and politicians to alter history textbooks toward justifying the actions of militaristic Japan.

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[8] Women's International War Crimes Tribunal Archives. https://archives.wam-peace.org/wt/en/judgement

The advocacy of human rights and left-wing groups, the historic defeat of the LDP in the 1993 elections, pressure from international civil society and Western countries, as well as interest in cooperation with China and South Korea led to attempts first by moderate LDP conservatives and then by coalition cabinets to reform official rhetoric. Over several years, repeated apologies for past crimes were made on behalf of Emperor Akihito, prime ministers, and other officials. The most apologetic statements are considered to be those made by Kōno Yōhei in 1993 and Murayama Tomiichi on August 15, 1995. The former acknowledged the responsibility for establishing and managing comfort stations, and the recruitment of comfort women against their will, extending "sincere apologies and remorse" to them.[9] In the latter statement, Murayama, the Prime Minister from the JSP, expressed "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" for colonial rule and aggression.[10] Progressives also made advances in the field of education, as the provisions of Murayama's statement were included in school curricula, and leading textbook publishers *Tōkyō Shoseki* and *Kyōiku Shuppan* increased the coverage of war crimes.

However, a number of political trade-offs with conservatives limited the ability of left-wing parties to influence memory politics, and, by the end of the 1990s, the JSP (reorganized as Social Democratic Party) had lost its former popular appeal. Eventually, not only was there no consensus on contrition, but a sharp backlash from conservatives followed. Although subsequent Cabinets did not revoke the statements by Murayama and Kōno for concerns of damaging foreign relations, many conservatives did not accept them. Thus, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō believed that recognizing the war as an act of aggression was disrespectful to the fallen soldiers. This position was manifested, in particular, in his visit to

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9 Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary. August 4, 1993. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page25e_000343.html

10 「戦後*50*周年の終戦記念日にあたって」いわゆる村山談話. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/07/dmu_0815.html

the Yasukuni Shrine. Koizumi Jun'ichirō, Abe Shinzō, and some other leaders acted similarly.

In 1997, the Japan Conference (*Nippon kaigi*) was founded, associated with many LDP leaders and promoting ideas of constitutional revision, the non-legitimacy of the Tokyo Trial, the denial of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre and military sexual slavery, and the reinterpretation of Japan's wartime objectives as the liberation of Asia [Japan-U.S... 2023: 44]. In 1996, conservative historians established the Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru-kai*) and proposed a textbook that repeated the provisions of the revisionist narrative. Although this textbook eventually accounted for only about 1 percent of the history textbooks adopted nationwide, its formal approval in 2001 sparked protests in Japan and abroad. Revisionism also influenced more neutral publishers: since the 2000s, textbooks have begun to place less emphasis on topics that remain contested.

At the same time, by the 2000s, there was a growing sense of "apology fatigue" in Japan, as full reconciliation with its neighbors had never been achieved [Streltsov 2020, p. 54]. One reason for this failure was the lack of consensus in Japanese society on the issue of guilt, causing the apologies to seem insincere. Behind the vagueness of the wording and the failure of the Diet's attempts to adopt a resolution offering unequivocal apology was fierce resistance from conservatives. This very same resistance explained the combination of apologies with revisionist actions, particularly visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Another reason was, however, the politics of memory in the victim countries themselves, including the use of the image of Japan as an enemy for political purposes.

The 2009 electoral victory of the opposition, led by Hatoyama Yukio, marked the last attempt to reverse the conservative trend: the Cabinet attempted to deepen official apologies and create a non-religious memorial to the war dead as an alternative to the Yasukuni Shrine. However, Washington's dissatisfaction with the new leadership, the acute crisis in relations with China in 2012, and the rise to power of Abe Shinzō ensured the prevalence of the conservative narrative [Dian 2017, pp. 121, 125]. Abe laid the groundwork for the current trajectory aimed

at moving beyond the issue of wartime apologies, overcoming the pacifist constraints of the Constitution, and fostering patriotism. He undertook efforts to exclude the contested history issues from school curricula and to reform state museums in a similar vein. An example of the latter trend is the complete removal of discussions on Japan's aggression from the Osaka Peace Museum, previously known for its focus on war crimes [Seaton 2015, p. 1].

It should be noted that memory politics in Japan remain polarized: attempts to reinforce the conservative narrative are met with public opposition. An example of this is the large-scale protests of 2015 against changing the interpretation of the Constitution, which brought more than 120,000 people onto the streets.[11] They were supported by the Constitutional Democratic Party, which largely took on the role of the major progressive party. In addition, the Komeito party, which is associated with the Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai and has been a coalition partner of the LDP since 1999, also promotes a moderate historical narrative, constraining the aspirations of conservatives [Nelidov 2022, p. 47].

Conclusion

After 1945, Japan and Germany found themselves in similar circumstances. Both countries were occupied, and their politics, economies, and societies underwent forced restructuring. The war crimes tribunals resulted in similar numbers of people being convicted. The trials themselves shared the common problems of failing to take into account a number of crimes and applying legal norms retroactively. Similarities also included the de facto division of society into a guilty minority and an innocent majority, and the "reverse course," that is, the return of a number of previously convicted individuals to government positions

[11] Huge protest in Tokyo rails against PM Abe's security bills. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0QZ0C2/

and the suppression of the left-wing opposition. At the same time, there were some differences between the occupation regimes, which partly influenced the formation and evolution of historical memory. Among them were the division of Germany; the preservation of the institution of the Emperor in Japan, which affirmed a certain ideological and state continuity, but was accompanied by a more far-reaching demilitarization and secularization; and the broader political purge in Germany.

Eventually, despite certain similarities in the historical memory of the two countries, including the centrality of the memory of World War II, and the distinction between conservative and progressive traditions, content and evolution of narratives proved to be largely different. Among the reasons were, in the case of Japan, the greater continuity of the elites; difficulties in clearly identifying a group that could be held responsible for crimes and the differences in the crimes themselves, including the absence of an analogue to the Holocaust (which, in Germany's case, kept the issue of the Nazis' crimes timely); as well as the more dominant position of conservatives in Japan's political system.

As a result, in the FRG, the conservative narrative initially coincided with the models of self-victimhood and amnesia according to Dian's classification, and the progressive narrative coincided with the model of contrition. In Japan, however, the conservative tradition included the glorification of the past (i.e., it was more revisionist) in addition to self-victimhood, while the progressive tradition focused on self-victimhood, with virtually no contrition. Moreover, in the FRG, the evolution of narratives involved a shift from polarization in the early decades to a consensus of traditions by the 1990s, due to the adoption of a narrative of contrition by conservatives, and a consolidation of this consensus in the 2000s due to the adoption by progressives of elements of self-victimhood. In Japan, by contrast, it was the early postwar decades that were marked by a consensus of traditions established around self-victimhood. This consensus gave way to polarization by the 1990s, which was initially sparked by progressives' embrace of contrition, and later deepened by the 2010s due to apology fatigue and the strengthening of revisionism among conservatives.

These differences contributed to the enduring relevance of historical grievances in Japan's relations with its neighbors, as the lack of domestic consensus created the perception that Tokyo's apology efforts were insincere.

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Education as the Main Factor of Social Mobility in Japan

I. P. Lebedeva

Abstract

In the modern world, primarily in developed countries, education has become the main factor of intergenerational social mobility. Sociologists judge the degree of openness or rigidity of the social structure by whether the influence of "birth circumstances" on access to education increases or, conversely, softens. Although higher education has become widespread in Japan by now, this does not mean that the degree of social inequality in this area has decreased. Structuring children's chances of access to higher education along the lines dividing society into different social strata begins here at the stage of schooling – first, in lower secondary school, and then in upper secondary school.

The inequality of chances that forms at the stage of school education affects the choice of university rank and directions of specialization by children and their parents, employment opportunities in the future, determining, in fact, the entire life path of a person. Based on the works of famous Japanese sociologists and the data of Japanese statistics, the author shows that the Japanese education system plays a dual role. On the one hand, it provides a chance to break away from one's social roots and move up the social ladder to an increasing number of young people. On the other hand, it preserves and reproduces social inequality.

According to calculations by Japanese sociologists, indicators of relative social mobility, reflecting the ratio of chances to access higher education for people from different backgrounds, were remarkably stable throughout the post-war period. On the one hand, this does not confirm the widely accepted

thesis about the growing inequality in education in the last two or three decades. On the other hand, it allows us to assert that both before and now Japanese society is a *kakusa shakai*, or a gap society. However, the increase of the share of second-generation university degree holders in the structure of Japanese university graduates suggests that the scale of the influence of the factor of social inequality in education will gradually decrease.

Keywords: social structure, social inequality, education, intergenerational mobility, *kakusa shakai*.

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Introduction

Under the influence of notable changes in Japan's economy and society in the last two decades, academics, experts, and the public have focused their attention on the character of Japanese society, i.e., how open its social structure is and how great the influence of social roots on an individual's life experience is; whether the degree of social inequality grows or, conversely, goes down in the course of socio-economic development, etc. As education is the major factor forming and transforming the social landscape today, especially in highly developed countries, discussions about the character of Japanese society mainly focus on the following questions: how fair the existing system of education is and whether it helps to mitigate social inequality. In addition, as full secondary (12 years) education

is received by nearly all young Japanese, the focus is chiefly on the system of higher education. This article considers some aspects of the above-mentioned problem.

Education and Social Mobility

It should be mentioned first of all that specific features of Japan's demographic situation result in the continuous reduction of the number of graduates from upper secondary schools, i.e., potential students of Japan's universities. Their number went down from 1.778 million in 1990 to 1.329 million in 2000, 1.069 million in 2010 and 1.037 million in 2020. In the 2022 financial year (i.e., as of March 31, 2023), 990,200 Japanese graduated from upper secondary schools. Some 146,000 of them (14.7 percent) found jobs, 559,200 (59.4 percent) entered universities, and the remaining 166,000 (16.8 percent) entered *senmon gakko*, or vocational colleges, which have become especially popular as they provide training in occupations (mainly technical) that are in great demand in the labor market.[1]

Young people who have received full secondary education and decided to start their working life find jobs easily, as their numbers are falling rapidly. Thus, while 1990 saw 736,000 upper secondary school graduates entering the market (41.4 percent of their total number), in 2000, there were 239,000 (18 percent) of them, in 2010 – 169,000 (15.8 percent), and in 2022 – 146,000 (14 percent).[2] It is unsurprising, therefore, that the coefficient of effective demand for labor (showing the ratio between the number of vacancies and the number of individuals

[1] Mombu kagaku tōkei yōran Reiwa 5 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2023]. Table 10: https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/ toukei/002/002b/1417059_00008.htm

[2] Mombu kagaku tōkei yōran Reiwa 5 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2023]. Table 10: https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/ toukei/002/002b/1417059_00008.htm

looking for a job) in this category is especially high: in 2015, it was 1.85, in 2018 – 2.53, in 2020 – 2.90, and in 2020 – 2.89.[3]

The share of upper secondary school graduates entering universities indicates an opposite trend. While, in 1990, it was 30.5 percent, in 2000 – 45.1 percent, in 2010 – 54.3 percent, in recent years, it has approached 60 percent. The number of students newly enrolled into universities in absolute terms grew from 540,000 in 1990 to 599,000 in 2000; then it stabilized at about 590,000 a year.[4]

The last three decades in Japan have witnessed a rapid expansion of a network of private universities: their number increased from 372 in 1990 to 620 in 2022, partly through the transformation of three-year *tanki daigaku* into full-fledged four-year universities. There also emerged new prefectural and municipal universities; their total number grew from 39 to 101. As a result, the total number of institutions of higher education in Japan had reached 807 by 2022, exceeding the figure of 1990 by 300.

Evidently, this significant expansion of the network of universities vastly exceeded real demand for their educational services, which resulted in raising accessibility of higher education by lowering admission requirements. It certainly does not refer to the leading national universities, where, as before, there is still fierce competition and a rigorous selection process in place. Yet, as a whole, the situation has definitely become more favorable for applicants. This can be seen, for example, in the ratio of applications to students admitted: in 1990, it was 1.93, in 2000 – 1.29, in 2010 – 1.16, in 2020 – 1.12, and in 2022 – 1.02. It seems that such a typical consequence of the "examination hell" as *ronins* (failing applicants trying to enter again the following year)

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[3] Rōdō tōkei yōran Reiwa 4 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2022]. Table C-15: https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/youran/indexyr_c_2.html 2022 c-15.

[4] Mombu kagaku tōkei yōran Reiwa 5 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2023]. Table 10: https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/ toukei/002/002b/1417059_00008.htm

becomes a thing of the past. The number of *ronins* fell from 278,000 in 1990 to 145,000 in 2000, 84,000 in 2010, and 69,000 in 2020; in 2022, their number was only 766.[5]

Objective conditions for the rapid expansion of higher education in Japan create a demand for a more skilled and educated labor force from Japan's high-tech economy. This is particularly evident in the differences in starting wages of graduates with different levels of education (Table 1).

Table 1. Starting Wages of Graduates
(thousand yen a month, 2022)

Levels of Education							
Upper secondary school		**Technological college, *tanki daigaku***		**University**		**Postgraduate course**	
men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women
183.4	177.6	204.1	201.8	229.7	227.2	271.9	256.9

Source: Nihon tōkei nenkan 2024 [Japan Statistical Yearbook]. Table 19–11. https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/73nenkan/1431-19.html

This is how the market evaluates graduates with different levels of education; these differences also serve as an incentive to receive higher education. In addition, chances of being hired as a permanent employee are higher for individuals with higher education, which, in Japanese conditions, where there is a considerable gap between full- and part-timers in labor remuneration, amount of benefits, and possibilities for career growth, is of special importance. Thus, for example, in 2018, permanent employment was found by 11.7 percent

[5] Mombu kagaku tōkei yōran Reiwa 5 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2023]. Table 11: https:// www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/ toukei/002/002b/1417059_00008.htm

of those graduating from lower secondary schools (9 years of education), 61.9 percent of graduates from upper secondary schools, 74.7 percent of graduates from technological colleges and *tanki daigaku*, and 79.1 percent of university graduates.[6]

However, perhaps the most important factor of rapid expansion of higher education is the perception that good education is a major condition for achieving success and moving up the social ladder, which emerged in the postwar period and became rooted in the public mind. Experts characterize Japanese society as *gakureki shakai*, which can be translated as "society focused on receiving degree certificates." And this characteristic is fully justified.

Surveys prove that a significant portion of Japanese schoolchildren's parents would like to give their children the highest possible education, although there are still evident differences between opinions held by members of different social groups. For example, 87 percent of families where both parents have higher education set this goal, the number is 74 percent for families with one parent having higher education, and only 50 percent for families with both parents having no higher education. These differences impact the motivation of the students themselves. Thus, by the end of the 3rd year in lower secondary school (i.e., just before the entrance into upper secondary school), three fourths of students whose both parents have higher education intend to go to university in the future, 55 percent of those with one parent having higher education, and only one third of students from families where none of the parents has higher education [Genjō de tsutaeru kyōiku shakaigaku 2021, p. 49].

As Professor Matsuoka notes, Japan's system of education is more just and equitable than that in many other countries. Introducing the system of universal compulsory 9-year education based on government funding enables children from the most remote areas of the country to receive

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6 Yakunen koyō jittai-ni tsuite Heisei 30 nen [About the Situation With the Employment of Young People 2018]. https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/dl/4-21c-jyakunenkoyou-h30_08.pdf

education of the scope and level defined by government standards. These standards also cover the level of qualification of teachers, requirements for whom are equal in all schools [Genjō de tsutaeru kyōiku shakaigaku 2021, p. 50–51].

However, equal chances for receiving standard secondary education do not imply any equality in the access to educational institutions of a higher level, especially to university education. It is noteworthy that unequal chances for receiving higher education are noted by the Japanese belonging to different social groups, although the support for this statement generally goes down as the respondents' educational level increases. Thus, 73.9 percent of families where both parents have lower or upper secondary education agree that chances for receiving higher education are unequal; among families where both one parent having *tanki daigaku* or *senmon gakko* diplomas, this opinion is shared by 64.3 percent; if one of the parents has higher education, the above statement is supported by 69 percent; and when both parents have higher education – by 66.1 percent [Kyōiku to shakai kaisō 2018, p. 127].

The entire postwar history of Japan shows that opportunities for receiving higher education depend on the combination of a whole number of factors, the major ones being the family's economic position, social status of the family head (the father's profession), and the parents' level of education. That is not to say, however, that these factors directly influence opportunities of children from different social strata to receive higher education because the meritocratic character of Japan's school education system, i.e., its focus mainly on the appraisal of students' personal achievements, also gives opportunities to enter universities to children from the lower levels of the social structure. The plain evidence is the above-mentioned data showing a rapid increase of upper secondary school graduates going to universities.

Nevertheless, the data in Table 2 testify to a very high correlation between the socio-economic position of families and chances of children to receive higher education.

Table 2. Proportion of Children Entering Universities Depending on Their Family's Socio-Economic Position (percent)*

Family income (million yen a year)	**Parents' education level**			
	Both parents with higher education	**One of the parents with higher education**	**One of the parents with secondary technical education or *tanki daigaku***	**Both parents with either lower secondary or upper secondary education**
Up to 3.75	-	43.2	29.4	24.7
From 4 to 6.75	-	66.7	37.3	18.9
From 7 to 9.25	75.0	73.7	44.2	34.0
Over 11.25	86.4	71.7	44.0	43.5

Source: [Kyōiku to shakai kaisō, 2018 p. 118].

*Calculations have been made by Professor K. Hirasawa based on SSM 2015 data. The most typical families by income level have been chosen. The family social status in this case is associated with parents' level of education.

As the data from the table show, given all the differences in the accessibility of education for children from different social strata, even families at the bottom of the social structure strive to send their children to universities whenever possible. Therefore, the composition of the Japanese student body is gradually changing and becoming more and more democratic, although this process cannot be called quite linear.

Using the data of the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey (SSM), a large-scale social investigation conducted in Japan once in ten years since 1955, Professor T. Kikkawa of the Osaka University analyzed changes in the structure of education received by the Japanese born in the periods of 1935–1944, 1945–1954, 1955–1964, 1965–1974, 1975–1984, and 1985–1994, identifying the following four groups: second generation of university graduates; first generation of university graduates; those

who received education below the level of their fathers (having higher education), and those without higher education.

Table 3. Changes in the Japanese Population by Level of Education (by age cohorts, percent)

	Age cohorts by year of birth					
	1985–1994	**1975–1984**	**1965–1974**	**1955–1964**	**1945–1954**	**1935–1944**
Second generation of university graduates	28.6	21.6	12.6	10.5	6.2	4.2
First generation of university graduates	22.5	24.4	27.5	28.0	17.6	11.1
Those with education below that of their fathers (having higher education)	9.0	8.7	4.4	4.2	3.7	5.2
Those without higher education	39.9	45.3	55.4	57.3	72.5	79.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: [Social Stratification in an Aging Society with low Fertility 2022, p. 124].

Table 3 provides results of calculations made by Professor T. Kikkawa. While the spread of higher education resulted in the increased number of people with higher education among Japanese family heads, the

proportion of second-generation university diploma holders in the total number of university graduates also grew [Social Stratification in an Aging Society with low Fertility 2022, p. 124]:

Share of Second-Generation University Graduates in the Total Number (by year of birth, percent)

1935–1944	1945–1954	1955–1964	1965–1974	1975–1984	1985–1994
27.5	26.1	31.3	41.9	47.0	56.0

At the same time, the increasing proportion of first-generation university graduates, i.e., those from lower social strata, means that, in the postwar period, millions of young Japanese were able to break away from their class roots thanks to higher education and rise higher than their fathers in the social structure. This process reflects the scale of absolute mobility in terms of education, which was especially active among the generations born in the period of 1955–1974, i.e., in the period of rapid economic growth, when the country was going through sweeping industrialization and urbanization, with incomes of people (i.e., their fathers) skyrocketing. These generations' growing up also coincided with a very favorable period from the economic viewpoint.

Along with absolute mobility, experts also use the term "relative mobility" to analyze shifts in the social organization. In regard to education, it measures the degree of differences in opportunities for receiving higher education between children from different social groups, showing the degree to which these opportunities are impacted by their social roots. As Professor H. Ishida of the University of Tokyo notes, education is, on the one hand, an instrument helping people from unprivileged strata move to a higher status, and, on the other, a function of reproducing class positions in future generations, since the advantages of privileged classes in terms of providing education for their children give the latter the opportunity to maintain their class positions [Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 1 2021, p. 10].

Leading Japanese experts agree that, contrary to the recently widespread notions about growing inequality in education, the entire postwar period did not witness any significant strengthening or weakening of the influence of social roots on opportunities to receive education by people belonging to different social strata. According to Professor T. Kikkawa's calculations, the ratio of chances for receiving higher education of the second- and first-generation university graduates changed as follows (by cohorts of birth): 1935–1944 – 3.39; 1945–1954 – 4.15; 1955–1964 – 3.389; 1965–1974 – 3.876; 1975–1984 – 3.448; 1985–1994 – 4.391 [Social Stratification in an Aging Society with low Fertility 2022, p. 124]. Thus, T. Kikkawa concludes, the model of relative stability did not undergo any significant changes: opportunities for receiving higher education in Japan are still unequal and chances of the second generation of graduates in the youngest cohort are four times higher than those of the first generation.

The same opinion is shared by Professor H. Ishida: he points out that the spread of higher education in postwar Japan was not accompanied by any noticeable reduction in differences between classes in its accessibility and that the role of education as a mediator between inherited class positions and intergenerational mobility did not weaken over time but did not increase either [Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 1. 2021, p. 30].

While supporting this view, Professor T. Nakamura from the University of Tokyo notes, nevertheless, that stabilization of the relative social mobility pattern does not mean that no changes are happening. In particular, comparing SSM data for 2005 and 2015, he concludes that correlation between the level of education (measured by the number of learning years) and social roots (father's income and profession) in the youngest generations weakened through all levels of education (except for the stratum of 20–29-year-old young people whose fathers occupy the highest positions in the hierarchy of professions) [Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 1, 2021, p. 45, 48].

Thus, calculations and relevant conclusions made by Japanese scientists do not, at the very least, confirm the thesis that inequality in the access to higher education has grown in the last two to three

decades. At the same time, with all the changes that occurred in Japanese society during the postwar period, starting from democratization of the education system in the course of the postwar reforms and ending with a considerable expansion of the universities network and reduction in the number of young Japanese, chances for receiving higher education now, as before, are structured along horizontal lines dividing society into classes and strata. Japanese society in this regard has always been *kakusa shakai* or a "gap society."

A family's socioeconomic status influences not only their children's ability to obtain higher education, but also the choice of university by students and their parents. In Japan, universities range widely by their level. There are elite state and private universities, the graduates of which enter central government agencies and major companies and banks. At the same time, there are universities the graduates of which cannot aspire to such employment; moreover, they receive salaries on par with those who graduated from *senmon gakko* or *tanki daigaku*. Moreover, as Professor K. Furuta notes, these differences do not disappear over time [Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 2, 2021, p. 96].

One of the main purposes for providing higher education is to raise young people's chances for successful and advantageous employment. Based on the analysis of SSM materials from 1965 to 2015, K. Furuta attempted to determine the extent to which university rank influences opportunities of career as managers (*kanrishoku*) and specialists (*senmonshoku*), which are considered the most prestigious career tracks. For this, he divided universities into two groups: most prestigious and famous (rank I) and all others (rank II). Men aged 25 to 64 years were the object of analysis. Women were excluded from the analysis as they often quit jobs because of marriage and childbirth; thus, it is more difficult to trace their career track.

The general conclusions reached by the Japanese scientist can be summarized as follows. The situation with employment of university graduates was different over the five decades considered, which was to a great extent influenced by the economic environment. Therefore, the structure of their employment and career growth differs greatly

across birth and age cohorts. As the framework of the article does not allow lingering on this issue, let us see what the situation was in two age groups, 25–34 and 35–44 years, and three birth cohorts, 1961–1970, 1971–1980, and 1981–1990. As to the generation of 25–34-year-old men, i.e., the age of early career growth, differences between graduates of the first and second-rank universities are quite significant. While 50–60 percent among the former were recruited as managers and specialists, among the latter, this figure was about one third. Both groups showed a tendency towards reducing opportunities for career growth as managers; as to specialists, this career track was much more accessible to first-rank university graduates. Thus, in the youngest cohort (years of birth 1981–1990), about a half of first-rank university graduates and below one fourth of second-rank university graduates filled vacancies of specialists.

As to men of 35–44 years, i.e., the age when career tracks are already well defined, the following tendencies may be observed in the last two cohorts (years of birth 1961–1970 and 1971–1980). First, differences between the two groups of graduates in respect to access to career as managers and specialists remain unchanged. While, in the cohort of those born in 1961–1970, these differences are insignificant (about 60 percent of graduates occupied these positions with nearly similar ratio between managers and specialists), the situation noticeably changes in the cohort of those born in 1971–1980. Career opportunities for the first group are expanding, including those in managerial positions, while they are reducing in the second group. While two thirds of graduates occupied these positions in the first group, this proportion in the second group was below 40 percent [The figures are approximate and were calculated by the author using the following scheme: Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 2, 2021, p. 100]. It would also be necessary to bear in mind that the position of *bucho* (Department Manager) is to a greater extent accessible to graduates of first-rank universities than to those of second-rank ones. The peak of career growth for the latter, in the capacity of a manager, is the position of *kacho* (Section Manager).

Professor K. Furuta explains the worsening of the situation for second-rank university graduates by their oversupply due to the

expansion of the network of private universities in recent decades. For this reason, part of them has to occupy blue-collar positions, or enter *senmon gakko* to obtain professions demanded by the market.

The socio-economic position of a family exerts an influence on the choice not only of the university rank, but of the future profession as well. This is the conclusion made by Professor I. Mori in her research. She uses SSM materials for 2005 and 2015 in her analysis. Based on the socio-economic position of the family (defined by the size of income, father's profession, and level of parents' education), I. Mori identified eight groups differing in the criterion of "degree of easiness" to enter university (the object of analysis is men and women born after 1960). Further, she analyzed what probability exists in each of the groups to be employed as specialists and to what degree they differ from each other by area of specialization. Obviously, the highest degree of 'easy entrance' is typical of those from families occupying a prestigious position in the social structure; those having "difficulties with entrance" include mainly children from unprivileged strata, particularly, members of the first generation of university graduates.

I. Mori made the following conclusions. The probability of occupying the position of a specialist after getting a university diploma for men and women tends to increase as their families' economic status rises. Thus, in the first two groups (with the lowest social status) the share of men employed as specialists was 36 percent and 17 percent, and the share of women – 28 percent and 27 percent, whereas in groups 7 and 8 (with the highest social status) it made 41 percent and 46 percent, 31 percent and 35 percent, respectively [Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 1, 2021, p. 141]. I. Mori explains these differences by the fact that representatives of these groups graduate from universities different in prestige and prominence.

As to areas of specialization, those whose entrance into university was easier due to their families' high socio-economic position are more likely to focus on acquiring "broad knowledge" and choose such professions as doctor, dentist, auditor, financier, or university teacher. Those for whom it was difficult to enter show a clear orientation

towards receiving professional knowledge and skills in the fields highly sought by real economy. Men choose technical or scientific-technical professions in such areas as general engineering, electric machine building, construction industry, land management, and information technologies. Most popular among women are such professions as school teacher, nursery teacher, as well as professions highly sought in the social welfare and healthcare fields [Shōshi kōrei shakai no kaisō kōzō 2, 2021, p. 143–144].

In other words, social roots influence both the distribution of young Japanese by universities of different rank and their career tracks as well as by sectors and spheres of economy they will be working in.

Mechanism of Reproducing Inequality in the System of Education

As noted above, Japan has free compulsory 9-year education; yet it does not mean that families of Japanese schoolchildren do not bear any expenses at this stage of education, be it a private school (which goes without saying) or a state one. The data in Table 4 show the level of these expenses.

Table 4. Family Expenses for Education of Students in Lower and Upper Secondary Schools (2021, thousand yen a year)

Expenses	Lower secondary school		Upper secondary school	
	state	private	state	private
School education	132.3	1061.4	309.3	750.4
Extracurricular education	368.8	367.8	203.7	304.1

Source: Kodomo no gakushūhi chōsa 2021 [Survey of Expenditures on Children Education] https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20221220-mxt_chousa01-000026656_1a.pdf

As the data from the table show, parents' expenses on school education in private schools by far exceed expenses in state schools: they are eight times higher in lower secondary school and 2.5 times higher at the next stage. It is due to differences not only and not so much in the scope and quality of educational services as in general conditions of children's stay at school. However, as most children go to municipal schools, and only a very insignificant percentage – below 8 percent – to private ones,[7] the effect of these differences on the situation in the sphere of education is limited.

The main role in the reproduction of social inequality in the sphere of education at this stage is played by the system of additional, extracurricular education. It includes three forms: *juku*, tutoring, and correspondence courses, with the lion's share of educational services provided by *juku*.

Juku started from small private schools set up by directors and/or teachers of local educational institutions to conduct extra activities with some part of students. However, their network grew and branched, and now *juku* is a large industry comprising various types of organizations. Over 80 large companies are now dominating the market of *juku* services; some of these have more than a hundred branches and operate nationwide. Over half of students in the system of extra education attend these institutions. They apply similar standards of education, use their own guidance materials and guarantee provision of high-quality educational services. Along with large *juku*, there are hundreds of small and middle-sized firms as well as individual enterprises (owned by directors or leading teachers of local schools) functioning on the market [Enrich 2018, p. 60].

There is a belief that *juku* primarily deal in the preparation of students for entrance exams to educational institutions of the next level

[7] Mombu kagaku tōkei yōran Reiwa 5 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2023]. Table 1: https://www.mext.go.jp/bmenu/toukei/002/002b/1417059_00008.htm Data for 2022. Below 1 percent of children go to private primary schools.

(first – to upper secondary schools, then – to universities). In reality, however, their functions are much wider. Starting from primary school, parents turn to *juku* services to help children make home assignments, master and deepen the knowledge obtained at school. According to a survey performed by the Ministry of Education, some 10–12 percent of primary school students and 17–20 percent of those from secondary schools go to *juku* to raise their grades, and another 40 percent – to make home assignments, revise and extend the school curriculum. The role of *juku* in preparation to entrance exams is strongly enhanced in the third year of lower secondary school, i.e., before entrance to upper secondary school. At this stage, about two thirds of students attending *juku* concentrate on the preparation for entrance exams [Enrich 2018, p. 58]. This preparation provides not only the deepening of academic knowledge but the mastering of the exam-passing technique as well. Moreover, the rehearsal of exams with the use of prior year examination tests helps children and their parents assess their chances for choosing this or that higher-level school.

Technically, *juku* is a framework within which education is accessible to students from very different social strata. It is possible due to a flexible system of class organization: children and their parents may choose the most suitable time for classes as well as the subjects to study and the size of the group (starting from individual activities and ending with classes of various size). Clearly, this cannot but be influenced by the families' socio-economic position because *juku* attendance is fee-based. Yet, partly for advertising purposes, partly due to the genuine desire to support capable children from low-income families, some large *juku* have recently begun to reduce fees for their education, and, in some cases, even to pay them a scholarship [Enrich 2018, p. 267]. Yet the scope of such practice is very limited.

As the data in Table 4 show, average expenses for *juku* borne by families of schoolchildren going to state schools are not at all lower than those of privileged families whose children go to private schools, because all those who want to provide to their children "a level of education as high as possible" use education in *juku* as a tool to increase

chances of entering the most famous upper secondary schools. The proof is, particularly, the significant rise of children going to private upper secondary schools, which are increasingly competing with state schools both in terms of the general level of education and such an important criterion as the share of graduates entering universities. While, in 2010, private schools accounted for 29.7 percent of upper secondary school students, in 2022, the figure was already 34.3 percent.[8]

The data of Table 5 allow one to judge how possibilities of using extracurricular activities depend on families' financial position.

Table 5. Expenses on Extracurricular Activities Depending on the Family's Annual Income (Municipal lower Secondary Schools)

Family income, million yen annually	**below 4**	**4–5.99**	**6–7.99**	**8–9.99**	**10–11.99**	**over 12**
Expenses on extracurricular education, thousand yen annually	215	253	283	273	398	502

Source: Kodomo no gakushūhi chōsa 2021 [Survey of Expenditures on Children Education] https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20221220-mxt_chousa01-000026656_1a.pdf

Differences of the same range are observed with respect to families' expenses on *juku* at the final stage of school education, i.e., in the period when children attend upper secondary school (Table 6).

[8] Mombu kagaku tōkei yōran Reiwa 5 nen [Statistical Overview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2023]. Table 1: https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/ toukei/002/002b/1417059_00008.htm

Table 6. Expenses on Extracurricular Education Depending on the Family's Annual Income (municipal and private schools)

Family income, million yen a year	**below 4**	**4–5.99**	**6–7.99**	**8–9.99**	**10–11.99**	**over 12**
Expenses on extracurricular education, thousand yen a year, municipal schools	99	124	156	211	246	361
Expenses on extracurricular education, thousand yen a year, private schools	147	150	163	226	297	494

Source: Kodomo no gakushūhi chōsa 2021 [Survey of Expenditures on Children Education] https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20221220-mxt_chousa01-000026656_1a.pdf

As we noted in one of the articles published earlier, "which upper secondary schools students enter has a special importance in Japan because of consistent patterns that developed over long decades: graduates of the most prestigious schools enter the most famous universities; from schools of a lower rank, they enter less famous universities; and most graduates of ordinary schools enter the labor market. That is to say, the life paths of young Japanese to a great extent depend on what upper secondary school they are able to enter" [Lebedeva 2020, p. 109].

As shown in Table 6, regardless of the school type and rank, parents turn to *juku* education to raise their children's chances to enter universities; interestingly, the influence of the family's financial position on the amount of expenses for these purposes becomes even

stronger at this stage. To our mind, it is explained by the fact that, by then, the parents and students themselves have already decided the destiny of the latter. Low-income families try to optimize their expenses on education and not to set unreachable goals. On the contrary, well-off families try to use all opportunities to ensure their children enter the most prestigious universities so that the children could inherit their high socio-economic position. Thus, different life tracks are shaped for children from different social strata at this stage. Some enter prestigious universities, others – less famous ones, and some choose *tanki daigaku* or *senmon gakko*, while a part of them enters the labor market.

Understandably, these are not only academic achievements of schoolchildren which affect the choice of university of this or that rank, but also the amount of tuition fees. Tuition fees are equal and quite sparing in all state, prefectural, and municipal universities (535 thousand yen a year in 2020), which results in fierce competition and rigorous selection at the leading state universities. As for private universities, the range of prices is extremely wide – they depend not only on the university's prestige, but also on the department chosen (especially expensive is education in medical departments, where the annual fee reaches 6.5 million yen a year). The effect of the tuition-based character of education on its accessibility is intensified by the fact that, unlike other Western countries, Japan has a very poorly developed system of grants for education and does not pay scholarships to students from low-income families. It is most likely due to a deeply rooted belief that paying for children's education is almost a sacred duty of their parents.

The family's financial position impacts not only the choice of the university rank; as shown in the first part of the article, it also influences the very decision whether the child enters university at all (Table 2). The magnitude of this factor even increases when taking a decision about education for the second child, which is proven by the data below (Table 7).

Table 7. Proportions of Families Providing Education to One and Two Children (depending on their socio-economic status), percent*

Annual income, million yen	**Level of parents' education**							
	Both parents with higher education		**One of the parents with higher education**		**One of the parents with *tanki daigaku* or *senmon gakko* education**		**Both parents with lower or upper secondary education**	
	I	**II**	**I**	**II**	**I**	**II**	**I**	**II**
below 3.75	-	-	55.0	31.3	50.0	14.3	37,5	11.0
4–6.75	-	-	88.4	50.0	55.0	23.5	32,7	6.7
7–9.25	86.8	75.0	86.8	60.4	62.5	25.8	54,3	19.5
over 11.25	100.0	75.0	90.9	56.8	66.7	26.1	68,2	30.0

Compiled based on: [Kyōiku to shakai kaisō 2018, p. 119].

*I – proportions of families providing higher education for one child; II – proportions of families where both children receive higher education.

Evidently, apart from the family's economic position and social status, the decision about higher education for the second child is influenced by other factors, for example, the child's gender. As a whole, the data from the Table indicate that the level of income plays a decisive role in taking this decision. A considerable portion of Japanese families face this problem sooner or later, because, despite the notable reduction of the average number of children in recent decades, many families still have two children or more. Thus, the 2021 data indicate that a half of families (50.8 percent) have two children, and one family in five has three or more.[9] Japanese sociologists believe that difficulties

[9] Dai jurokkai shussei dōkō kihon chōsa. Kekka no gaiyū [Sixteen Japanese National Fertility Survey. Summary of Results], p. 43. *National Institute*

experienced by Japanese families willing to provide their children with decent education are one of the major factors of the declining birthrates in the country.

Conclusion

Thus, Japan's system of higher education, being a major factor of social mobility, plays a dual role. On the one hand, due to the rapid spread of higher education, with it turning, in recent years, into a mass phenomenon, the number of "migrants" breaking away from their social roots and rising to higher levels of the social structure (to the white-collar class) increases. That is to say, higher education acts as a powerful factor of absolute social mobility.

As for relative social mobility, i.e., the ratio of chances to receive higher education by children from different social strata, calculations of Japanese scientists show that no significant changes are underway in this respect. Like before, the access to higher education and chances for entering a famous university today greatly depends on the family's socio-economic position, primarily on its financial capability. Social differences begin structuring these chances early in lower secondary school, and then in upper secondary school, while the main tool of social inequality conservation at this stage is the system of extracurricular education (*juku*). The inequality of chances developed at the stage of school education impacts the choice of the university rank and the future profession, and afterwards – employment opportunities, predefining, in fact, an individual's entire life path. As a result, while providing opportunities for more and more young people to move up the social ladder, the Japanese education system at the same time preserves and reproduces social inequality, because their life path and the place they may occupy in the social hierarchy greatly depend on their social roots and the social stratum their family belongs to. However, the

of Population and Social Security Research.: https://www.ipss.go.jp/ps-doukou/j/doukou16/JNFS16gaiyo.pdf

increasing proportion of second-generation university diploma holders in the structure of Japanese university graduates suggests that the scale of influence of social inequality in education will gradually decrease.

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Sake as Cultural Diplomacy: A Soft Power Approach to Japan's Nation Branding in Europe

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Abstract

This study examines the strategic role of *sake* as an instrument of cultural diplomacy within the framework of trade relations between Japan and Europe, using a theoretical approach that combines the concepts of soft power, gastrodiplomacy, and nation branding. *Sake*, as a traditional Japanese fermented beverage rooted in the spiritual and social practices of society, has undergone a reorientation of its function from domestic consumption to a symbol of national cultural identity promoted internationally. Through the Cool Japan policy, the Japanese government actively positions *sake* as a key element in public diplomacy, linking cultural heritage with export trade strategies.

The implementation of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) since 2018, which includes geographical indication (GI) protection, provides additional legitimacy for the authenticity of *sake* in the European market. Promotional strategies involving culinary festivals, cross-industry collaborations, and product narratives emphasizing aesthetic value, origins, and traditional production techniques have successfully enhanced European public perception of *sake* and, more broadly, of Japan. Export data shows significant growth, with France, the United Kingdom, and Germany contributing the most, indicating the success of this approach in expanding market penetration. However, this dynamic is not without criticism, including the commodification of cultural values, exclusion of small producers, and the risk of reducing the spiritual meaning of *sake* in a commercialized context.

Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of cultural diplomacy that not only highlights visual appeal and market narratives but also commits to preserving values and the participation of local cultural communities. In conclusion, *sake* diplomacy offers an intriguing model for the integration of culture and economy in international relations, demonstrating that cultural products can serve as an effective means to build cross-national relations rooted in empathy, experience, and appreciation for the uniqueness of traditions.

Keywords: *Sake* diplomacy, soft power, Japan–Europe trade relations, nation branding, Cool Japan, Japan–EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, the dynamics of international relations have undergone significant shifts, where diplomatic instruments are no longer dominated by military power or heavy industry trade alone, but also rely on culture-based soft power. [Nye 2004]. One rapidly growing form of cultural diplomacy is gastrodiplomacy, which involves introducing national cuisine to the international stage as part of public

diplomacy strategies [Rockower 2012]. This phenomenon has gained momentum with the rise of global mobility, international tourism, and cross-border cultural exchange, enabling cuisine to serve as a means of building positive perceptions of its country of origin. East Asian countries, including Japan, have been pioneers in leveraging the power of cuisine as a diplomatic tool to expand cultural influence while opening up trade opportunities [Strugar 2015].

In the context of Japan-Europe relations, this approach gained new relevance following the signing of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) in 2018, which not only eliminated trade tariffs but also facilitated cultural promotion through culinary festivals, exhibitions, and exchange programs [Farina 2018]. Gastrodiplomacy offers strategic advantages as it can transcend language and political ideology barriers; shared culinary experiences and flavors can foster cross-cultural familiarity, ultimately influencing public perception of the country of origin of the products [Pokarier 2018]. Japan, through its "Cool Japan" program, actively promotes culinary heritage such as *washoku* (traditional Japanese cuisine) to Europe, leveraging culinary diplomacy to strengthen its national brand and enhance the competitiveness of its products in the global market [Assmann 2017]. This strategy is not merely about promoting gastronomy but is also part of economic diplomacy aimed at boosting exports and building a positive image of Japan in the eyes of European trading partners.

One of the strongest representations of this strategy is *sake*, or *nihonshu*, which has a long history and deep symbolic value. The earliest records of *sake* production date back to the Nara period (710–794 CE), when the beverage was used in Shinto religious rituals and imperial court ceremonies [Sato & Kohsaka 2017]. During the Heian period (794–1185), production techniques evolved and consumption expanded to the nobility and general public, though it remained an integral part of celebrations and significant events. This tradition has persisted into the modern era, where *sake* has become an essential element in seasonal celebrations, festivals, and formal banquets. The recognition of *washoku* as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in

2013 further solidified *sake*'s position as an integral part of Japan's national culinary heritage with global appeal [UNESCO 2013].

In contemporary developments, *sake* has transcended its domestic role to become a cultural ambassador for Japan in international markets. The growing global interest in Japanese cuisine, particularly in Europe, which has a long tradition of appreciating fermented beverages like wine and beer, presents significant opportunities for *sake* market penetration [Bargain 2024]. The similarity in approach to the European wine industry makes *sake* more easily accepted by the market.

Economically, this success is reflected in the latest export data. According to the Japan *Sake* and *Shochu* Makers Association (JSS), the value of *sake* exports in 2023 reached 47.49 billion yen, an increase of 21.6 percent from the previous year, with Europe contributing approximately 15 percent of the total value. The main markets include the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, driven by the growing number of Japanese restaurants, international food festivals, and the shifting perception of *sake* from an exotic drink to a premium product on par with high-end wine [Association 2024]. The implementation of the EPA since 2019 has further strengthened this trend through the protection of geographical indications (GI), ensuring the authenticity of products in the European market [Walravens & Padrón-Hernández 2024].

The success of *sake* in the European market is closely tied to promotional strategies that combine commercial approaches with cultural diplomacy. Producers, both large and small, tell the story behind each bottle: from the water source originating from specific springs, the history of the family behind the production that has spanned centuries, to the Japanese aesthetic philosophy reflected in the packaging design [Ishizuka et al. 2024]. *Sake* festivals in Paris, London, and Berlin not only introduce flavors but also foster cultural interactions that enrich consumers' understanding of Japan.

From a cultural diplomacy perspective, *sake* is not merely an export commodity, but a representation of Japan's national identity on the international stage. Through trade exhibitions, culinary festivals, and diplomatic events, Japan positions *sake* as a premium product that

reflects craftsmanship, raw material quality, and the philosophy of harmony with nature [Pokarier 2018]. Trade momentum has increased following the implementation of the EPA, which eliminated import tariffs on *sake* and provided GI protection in the European market, thereby enhancing its competitiveness [Suzuki 2020]. Events such as the *Sake* Fair in Paris and the London *Sake* Challenge serve as platforms for direct interaction that foster positive perceptions of Japan [Okano-Heijmans 2014]. Narratives about history, production processes, precision, quality, and sustainability serve as an effective "diplomatic language" bridging cultural differences [Akagawa 2014; Suzuki 2020].

Although there are many studies on Japan-Europe trade diplomacy, research integrating cultural diplomacy analysis with *sake* trade is still limited. Previous studies have primarily focused on the promotion of *washoku* in general [Pokarier 2018] or Japan's soft power strategies in the popular culture sector [Iwabuchi 2018], while empirical analyses of *sake* as an instrument of economic diplomacy are rare. The lack of studies examining the spillover effects of *sake* promotion on related sectors such as tourism and cross-cultural cuisine indicates a research gap. Similarly, the role of non-state actors such as European producer and importer associations in strengthening "*Sake* Diplomacy" has not been extensively discussed, despite the fact that this aspect could determine the effectiveness of the strategy in practice [Okano-Heijmans 2014].

Based on these gaps, the objective of this study is to comprehensively examine the role of the *sake* industry as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and a driver of Japan–Europe trade relations. This study is designed to integrate the perspectives of soft power, cultural marketing, and free trade policy within the framework of bilateral relations. Drawing on Nye's [2004] concept of soft power as the ability to influence through cultural appeal, *sake* is positioned as a cultural product that carries diplomatic messages while opening up market expansion opportunities. This study will analyze Japan's cultural diplomacy strategies, identify the impacts of trade policies such as the EPA, measure the spillover effects of *sake* promotion on related sectors, and explore European consumers'

perceptions of *sake* as a symbol of Japanese culture and economy (J. S. Nye, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

Soft Power Theory

The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr. in 1990 in his book Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power. Nye defines soft power as the ability of an actor, usually a state, to influence others through attraction and persuasion, rather than through coercion or payment [Nye 1990]. In other words, soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment" [Nye 2004]. The primary sources of soft power come from culture, political values, and foreign policies that are considered legitimate and have legitimacy by the international community [Nye 2011].

Nye emphasizes that culture becomes an important element when it is seen as attractive by outsiders. The political values of a country become a source of soft power when they are consistent with internal and external practices, while foreign policy has a soft power impact when it is considered legitimate and has moral authority [Froehlich 2021]. In the context of international relations, soft power enables a country to achieve political goals without relying solely on military force (hard power) or economic instruments. For example, the United States utilizes its entertainment industry, higher education, and democratic foreign policy as instruments of soft power [Rugh 2009].

The concept of soft power introduced by Joseph S. Nye explains that a country's power is not only measured by its ability to coerce or reward, but also by its attractiveness, which influences the preferences of others. This attraction arises when a country has a fascinating culture, trusted political values, and foreign policies that are considered legitimate. These three elements are not merely theoretical elements but can be operationalized as indicators showing the level of a country's soft power [Nye 2004].

The first indicator is culture. Culture has great potential to shape a positive image at the international level, both through traditional cultural heritage such as art, literature, and cuisine, as well as popular culture such as music, film, and other creative products. Culture becomes an attractive resource when it transcends geographical boundaries and captivates people across nations. Cultural appeal is not always uniform; it heavily depends on the alignment of values and the preferences of the global audience. Japan, for example, leverages animation, manga, and traditional cuisine like *sushi* and *sake* as tools of cultural diplomacy to build a positive image of the country abroad [Otmazgin 2012].

The second indicator is political values and domestic institutions. Political values include principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and transparent governance. A country gains political appeal when these values are consistently upheld domestically and projected through foreign policy. Credibility is an important factor; a country that promotes democracy but does not respect it domestically will find it difficult to maintain soft power [Nye 2011]. In this context, indicators include the level of civil liberties, the independence of legal institutions, public participation in decision-making, and the government's reputation in the eyes of the world.

The third indicator is foreign policy. A country's appeal can increase if its foreign policy is seen as legitimate, fair, and contributing positively to the international community. Cooperative diplomacy, involvement in international organizations, participation in conflict resolution, and humanitarian aid are examples of activities that strengthen soft power. On the other hand, aggressive or exploitative foreign policy can damage a country's image and reduce the appeal it has built up [Hall 2010]. Therefore, foreign policy indicators include diplomatic reputation, the level of multilateral cooperation, and contributions to global issues such as climate change or public health.

In addition to these three primary sources, Nye [2017] emphasizes that international public perception of a country is an important cross-dimensional indicator. Nation brand, international media presence,

and digital presence are instruments that strengthen or weaken soft power [Seilkhan 2023].

Thus, soft power indicators can be summarized into four major categories: attractive cultural assets, credible political values and governance, legitimate and constructive foreign policy, and positive international public perception. These four elements interact and form a comprehensive force that distinguishes soft power from other forms of power. Understanding these indicators is not only useful for academic analysis but also relevant in practice for countries seeking to design effective diplomatic strategies in the era of globalization [Nye 2004].

The relevant indicator for this study is culture. In Joseph Nye's soft power theory, culture is one of the primary resources that can shape a positive image and influence others without coercion. Culture here encompasses traditional heritage, art, language, cuisine, and values inherent to a nation. *Sake*, as a traditional Japanese beverage, is a tangible manifestation of Japan's rich cultural heritage and can serve as a diplomatic tool in Japan–Europe relations [Nye & Power 2004].

Sake is not merely viewed as a consumer product but also as a symbol of Japanese identity. Its production process combines traditional expertise, high-quality local ingredients, and a philosophy reflecting harmony (*wa*), sacredness in celebrations, and respect in social interactions. These aspects make *sake* a cultural representation that can attract European attention, especially in an era when consumers increasingly value authentic products with strong cultural narratives [Otmazgin 2012].

Thus, cultural indicators in Soft Power Theory are not merely supporting elements but the core of *sake* diplomacy strategy. By leveraging the cultural narratives, historical values, and emotional experiences associated with *sake*, Japan can expand its influence in Europe peacefully, strengthen trade relations, and build a positive national image in the eyes of the world [Nye 2004].

Public Diplomacy & Nation Branding Theory

Simon Anholt views a country's international reputation as a strategic asset that can significantly influence political, economic, and cultural relations. According to him, nation branding is not merely about building an image through promotional campaigns, but a long-term effort to shape a country's competitive identity through tangible, consistent, and verifiable actions. This identity is reflected in policies, behavior, as well as the products and services produced by the country, thereby forming a positive perception in the eyes of the global community [Anholt 2007].

To guide this strategy, Anholt developed the Nation Brands Index (NBI), which measures international public perceptions of countries through six dimensions: exports, government, culture and heritage, society, tourism, and investment and immigration. This index serves as an analytical tool to understand the strengths and weaknesses of a country's image, as well as a guide in designing effective public diplomacy policies and activities. Through systematic measurement, countries can assess the impact of their policies and activities on their reputation in the eyes of the world [Dinnie 2015].

The alignment between public diplomacy and nation branding is key to the success of this theory. In Nicholas Cull's view, integrated public diplomacy involves strategic communication, cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and media relations management. All these elements support each other to ensure that the image of the country projected abroad is consistent with the reality experienced by the international audience [Cull 2009].

This principle of alignment is further emphasized by Wally Olins, who stresses the importance of consistency between the messages conveyed and the actual behavior of the state. Inconsistency between the two can undermine credibility and even damage the reputation that has been built. Therefore, nation branding requires integration between public policy, diplomatic behavior, and the quality of products or services that reflect the values of the country [Olins 2014].

In a cultural context, this theory can be applied through national product diplomacy that holds high symbolic value. For example, Japan's promotion of *sake* in the European market is not only aimed at increasing exports but also at introducing the richness of its cultural heritage and lifestyle. Such strategies demonstrate how cultural products can function as a medium of public diplomacy that strengthens the nation brand, creates appeal, and builds stronger trade relations at the international level [Van Ham 2008]Simon Anholt explains that a country's global reputation is not formed solely by marketing campaigns, but rather by the real-world experiences of the international public toward that country. He developed a model known as the Nation Brand Hexagon, which consists of six key indicators: exports, government, culture and heritage, society, tourism, and investment and immigration [Anholt 2007].

The first indicator is exports. According to Anholt, the quality, innovation, and competitiveness of a country's products significantly influence international perceptions of that country. Products with a good reputation can serve as effective brand ambassadors, as they carry the country's image of quality to global markets [Fan 2010]. The second indicator is governance. This aspect measures international public perception of a country's domestic and foreign policies. Political stability, the rule of law, protection of human rights, and the integrity of foreign diplomacy determine the image of a government [Dinnie 2015]. The third indicator is culture and heritage. This dimension encompasses art, music, cuisine, traditions, sports, and historical heritage that shape a nation's identity. Culture often serves as an effective channel for public diplomacy because it can create emotional connections with foreign audiences [Cull 2009]. The fourth indicator is society. The reputation of citizens, in terms of friendliness, openness, professional expertise, and global contributions, can influence a country's overall image [Melissen 2005]. The fifth indicator is tourism. A country's natural, cultural, and tourism infrastructure attractions can create a positive and lasting image. Foreign tourist visits serve as an important gateway for introducing a country's cultural and social values

[Olins 2014]. The final indicator is investment and immigration. This dimension relates to a country's appeal as a place to invest, work, study, or settle. Factors such as a stable business climate, job opportunities, quality education, and a high standard of living are key considerations [Van Ham 2008].

The indicators relevant to this study are Culture and Heritage indicators. In Simon Anholt's theory of Public Diplomacy & Nation Branding, Culture and Heritage indicators have strategic power because they can build a country's image through emotional appeal and symbolic value. Culture is not only seen as an aesthetic asset but also as a diplomatic instrument that can influence the perceptions and behavior of the international public. Anholt emphasizes that countries that successfully leverage their cultural strength can create differentiation in the global arena, making historical heritage and traditional practices a distinguishing identity from other countries. In this context, culture functions as a non-verbal language that communicates the values, skills, and worldview of a nation [Anholt 2007].

Discussion
Sake as an Instrument of Japan's Soft Power

Cultural power has the capacity to influence international relations through non-coercive channels, creating positive images and shaping public preferences. In the past two decades, Japan has increasingly highlighted *sake* as one of its primary soft power instruments, alongside anime, manga, cuisine, and traditional arts. The concept of soft power proposed by Nye [2004] emphasizes that cultural appeal can create more enduring relationships than political or economic pressure. Within this framework, *sake* serves as a strategic tool to project Japan's identity rooted in tradition yet relevant in modern markets, particularly Europe, which has a strong culinary tradition and a culture of alcohol consumption [Nye 2004].

The uniqueness of *sake* as a tool for cultural diplomacy lies not only in its distinctive taste or technical quality but also in the narrative that accompanies it. It carries a story about humanity's relationship with nature, the cycles of the seasons, and the philosophy of *wa* (harmony), which forms the foundation of social relationships in Japan. In Europe, where consumers are increasingly drawn to authentic experiences, *sake* offers a cultural journey in every sip. Japanese restaurants in Paris, fusion bars in London, and culinary festivals in Rome now position *sake* not merely as a complementary beverage but as the core of a gastronomic experience. This sensory and emotional experience is the key to soft power, as it creates a personal connection between consumers and Japanese culture [Iwabuchi 2018].

Sake promotion in Europe is carried out through public diplomacy strategies that emphasize direct interaction with the audience. Events like the Salon du Saké in Paris have become a meeting point for Japanese producers, European distributors, and international food enthusiasts. Visitors not only taste *sake* but also participate in workshops, learn to distinguish between categories like *junmai daiginjo* and *honjozo*, and understand the role of water and rice in creating distinctive flavor profiles. According to Cull [2009], effective public diplomacy relies on two-way interaction that builds mutual understanding; *sake* tasting events and cultural festivals fulfill this function by creating a space for conversation between producers and consumers [Bukh 2014].

The Japanese government plays an active role in supporting *sake* promotion through the Cool Japan policy, which aims to enhance the nation's image abroad. The Japan *Sake* and *Shochu* Makers Association (JSS) and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) have initiated various promotional programs in Europe, ranging from participation in international exhibitions to collaborations with Michelin-starred restaurants. This approach is designed to present *sake* as a symbol of Japanese quality and aesthetics, in line with the nation branding strategy that emphasizes consistency of image at every point of interaction with foreign audiences [Ma 2023].

The success of *sake* in Europe is closely tied to its ability to adapt to local market preferences through the principle of glocalization. Adaptation is achieved without compromising its core cultural identity, but rather by adjusting presentation methods, marketing narratives, and consumption contexts. For example, in France, *sake* is often paired with seafood or cheese during pairing dinners, allowing consumers to understand it within a gastronomic framework they are familiar with. This strategy enables *sake* to enter the European culinary culture without losing its Japanese characteristics [Iwabuchi 2018; Otmazgin 2012].

Competition in the European premium alcoholic beverage market is fierce, with French wine, Scotch whisky, and Belgian beer dominating. Rather than competing on quantity, *sake* has adopted a differentiation approach through gastrodiplomacy. Its selling point is not just the taste, but the experience and story that accompany each bottle. Narratives about the producing village, the family history of the makers, and annual rice harvesting rituals serve as emotional elements that give *sake* a unique position in the market. Rockower [2012] emphasizes that gastrodiplomacy is effective when a product carries a strong cultural identity and builds emotional connections with consumers—a strategy consistently implemented by Japan [Rockower 2012].

Case studies in several European countries highlight the diversity of promotional strategies. In France, *sake* is positioned as a natural pairing for high-end gastronomy, supported by renowned sommeliers and chefs. In the UK, the focus is on cultural events and pop-up events that combine *sake* tastings with Japanese music and art. In Italy, promotion is carried out through collaborations with culinary schools to introduce *sake* in the context of fusion cuisine. This country-specific approach demonstrates Japan's understanding of the importance of local context in the success of cultural diplomacy [Ma 2023; Otmazgin 2012].

Data from MAFF (2022) shows that *sake* exports to Europe have increased by an average of 10–15 percent annually over the past decade, with France, the UK, and Germany as the largest markets. This surge coincides with intensified event-based promotions and positive media

coverage. Formal achievements such as the recognition of *nihonshu* as a geographical indication in the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (2019) provide additional legitimacy, equivalent to the protection enjoyed by iconic European products such as Champagne and Prosciutto in international markets [Otmazgin 2012].

The impact of *sake* diplomacy extends beyond economic aspects. Country image surveys conducted in several European countries show an increase in positive associations with Japan, where *sake* emerges as one of the most recognized cultural icons after sushi and anime. This effect reinforces the argument that promoting cultural products can have a dual impact: boosting trade while shaping favorable public opinion [Iwabuchi 2018].

Looking ahead, the success of *sake* diplomacy will largely depend on its ability to maintain a balance between tradition and innovation. The European market continues to evolve, and younger consumers have different preferences from previous generations. Innovation in packaging, presentation formats, or technology integration can be key to maintaining relevance, provided that the cultural values that form its core strength are not compromised. If this balance can be maintained, *sake* has the potential to become a global model for cultural diplomacy based on traditional products [Nye & Power 2004; Rockower 2012].

By combining cultural narratives, adaptive promotional strategies, and national policy support, Japan has demonstrated how a traditional product can evolve into an effective soft power instrument. *Sake* not only connects Japan and Europe through trade but also through deeper cultural experiences and understanding. In the context of international relations, this demonstrates that cultural power can be a strategic asset equal to, or even surpassing, economic or military power when managed consistently and authentically [Iwabuchi 2018].

Sake in Japan's Nation Branding Strategy through the "Cool Japan" Framework

Japan is one of the most systematic countries in building its national image through a culture-based nation branding approach. This strategy is a manifestation of Japan's soft power, where culture is mobilized as a non-coercive influence that reaches a global audience through appealing products and narratives. The Cool Japan policy is a concrete form of this effort: a program initiated by the Japanese government in the early 2000s to present Japan as a creative, unique, and culturally rich country. While Cool Japan was previously known for promoting anime, manga, and J-pop, the strategy now encompasses traditional culture such as tea ceremonies, handicrafts, and signature beverages like *sake*. *Sake* is no longer merely viewed as a domestic product but as a strategically chosen symbol of national culture to represent Japan on the international stage of cultural diplomacy [Iwabuchi 2020].

Sake has a deep and complex cultural dimension. It is not merely an alcoholic beverage consumed at banquets but an integral part of rituals, spirituality, and aesthetic expression in Japanese society. In Shinto ceremonies, harvest celebrations, weddings, and New Year's celebrations, *sake* serves as a medium connecting humans and the sacred. Therefore, promoting *sake* overseas is not just about selling its taste, but also marketing its narrative – a legacy that embodies the philosophy of Japanese life. The Japanese government, through institutions such as JETRO and MAFF, actively integrates *sake* into cultural and trade promotion abroad, whether in diplomatic forums, international culinary exhibitions, or Japanese cultural festivals overseas. With this approach, *sake* becomes a tool of public diplomacy that operates not through political negotiations but through sensory and symbolic experiences that build emotional connections with the international public [Snow 2016].

Furthermore, *sake* has also undergone a process of reframing through an aesthetic and symbolic approach within the framework of Cool Japan. In the highly visual world of global marketing, design and narrative

have become integral parts of how a product is communicated. In this case, *sake* is packaged with distinctive Japanese visual elements: bottles labeled with Japanese calligraphy, images of Mount Fuji, cherry blossom motifs, or geometric designs based on the wabi-sabi principle. These elements not only reinforce national identity but also provide consumers with a cultural experience. *Sake* is not sold merely as a beverage but as a consumable symbol of Japan. This aligns with the global trend among upper-middle-class consumers in Europe and America who are increasingly drawn to products with cultural value and authentic stories behind them. Such narratives reinforce *sake*'s position as part of "heritage luxury," which refers to luxury goods whose value stems from heritage and authenticity, not artificial opulence [Ma 2023].

The acceptance of *sake* in the European market reflects the success of this strategy. In France, Japan launched a large-scale cultural project called Japonismes 2018 to celebrate 160 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During the festival, *sake* was introduced not only through tastings and promotional booths, but also through collaborations with Michelin-starred chefs, local sommeliers, and haute cuisine restaurants. This demonstrates that Japan's cultural diplomacy targets not only the general public, but also cultural elites and the local gastronomy industry. Meanwhile, in Italy, collaborations between Japanese *sake* producers and Italian wine entrepreneurs have produced an intriguing blend of two cultures that both value fermentation and flavor. This cross-cultural approach strengthens Japan's image not only as a cultural exporter but also as an open cultural partner willing to engage in dialogue and symbiosis [Tamaki 2019].

However, the success of *sake* diplomacy is not without challenges and criticism. Some academics have pointed out that when cultural products like *sake* are promoted in global markets, there is a tendency for their original cultural values to be overshadowed by market logic. The commodification of culture turns *sake* into an exotic and aesthetic commodity, detached from its spiritual and social roots in Japanese culture. This is where the dilemma between cultural preservation

and global expansion arises. While promotional strategies require adaptation to global market preferences, there is a risk that the original meaning and context of the product may be marginalized. This commodification also carries the potential for inequality, where only large businesses can adapt to global standards, while small local producers are left behind and lose access to their own cultural heritage [Iwabuchi 2021].

Another criticism concerns cultural bias in Japan's public diplomacy. Not all types of *sake* or *sake*-producing regions are promoted equally. Regions with strong promotional infrastructure, such as Kyoto, Niigata, and Akita, receive more exposure than lesser-known rural areas. This results in a narrow representation of Japanese culture in the eyes of the international community, as only a small portion of cultural diversity is highlighted in promotions. Promotional strategies that emphasize certain aspects of Japanese culture can also reinforce stereotypes or create unrealistic expectations about Japanese society. Therefore, a more inclusive and democratic approach is needed in managing national cultural promotion, so that public diplomacy truly reflects the complexity and diversity of Japan [Boan 2022].

On the other hand, *sake* diplomacy also opens up new opportunities for more subtle yet profound non-verbal diplomacy. As a consumable medium, *sake* does not require language to establish connections: its aroma, taste, presentation, and the social experience that accompanies it are sufficient to convey symbolic messages. In modern public diplomacy theory, communication based on emotions and personal experiences is often more effective than verbal narratives or direct propaganda. This kind of fluid diplomacy works through closeness, engagement, and immersion. When someone enjoys *sake* at a Japanese restaurant in Paris or Rome, they are not just tasting a beverage but also experiencing Japan symbolically. This is the power of culture working silently: creating positive associations, shaping perceptions, and indirectly fostering affection for the country of origin [Pokarier 2018].

Conclusion

Japan's strategy in promoting *sake* as part of its Cool Japan cultural policy has demonstrated the power of cultural diplomacy in expanding national influence on the international stage. *Sake*, which was originally a local product with spiritual and communal significance, has undergone a transformation into a cultural ambassador symbolically representing Japanese values. This success is not solely due to product quality but also to the systematic narrative and aesthetic strategies designed by the Japanese government and creative industry players [Iwabuchi 2020].

In the realm of soft power, *sake* serves as a non-coercive cultural communication tool, capable of shaping positive perceptions of Japan through sensory, visual, and symbolic experiences. By relying on affective and participatory diplomacy, Japan has been able to build emotional connections with the global public without directly relying on military or economic power [Valaskivi 2013].

However, this strategy also raises debates about the authenticity and validity of the cultural representations constructed by the state. *Sake* promoted globally is no longer merely a cultural product but a branded product that has undergone curation, aestheticization, and commercialization. This raises the potential for cultural simplification and the removal of the complex social context from the original culture [Daliot-Bul 2009].

Another equally important issue is the distribution of benefits from product-based cultural diplomacy, such as *sake*. In many cases, only large producers with the capacity to adapt to the global market can do so, while small and traditional producers are left behind. This disparity highlights that cultural diplomacy can also create forms of economic and symbolic exclusion against the original cultural communities themselves [Ishizuka et al. 2024].

The commodification of culture also raises ethical dilemmas, especially when sacred elements of a culture are positioned as objects of global consumption. *Sake*, as an important element in Shinto rituals and the spiritual life of Japanese society, when promoted as a commercial

product, risks losing its transcendental meaning. This highlights that cultural diplomacy, despite its aim to build bridges between cultures, must still have moral boundaries and be sensitive to local values [Assmann 2017].

Nevertheless, *sake* promotion strategies still provide room for innovation in more empathetic and experience-based public diplomacy. In various cultural festivals in Europe and America, *sake* is positioned not only as a commercial product but as a medium for cultural exchange that touches the senses, memories, and identity. Such interactions open opportunities for the creation of more organic and two-way diplomacy [Pokarier 2018].

Beyond its role as a diplomatic tool, *sake* also plays a strategic role in strengthening Japan's image as a country that seamlessly blends tradition with modernity. *Sake* is promoted alongside advanced storage technology, futuristic bottle designs, and sustainability narratives, showcasing Japan's innovative yet culturally rooted identity. This integration demonstrates Japan's sophistication in building a balanced nation branding that harmonizes heritage and progress [Sato & Kohsaka 2017].

However, to sustain the sustainability of cultural diplomacy through *sake*, greater active involvement of local cultural communities is required. The state cannot be the sole actor in defining cultural representation. Ideal cultural diplomacy is participatory, inclusive, and provides space for minority voices and small producers so that cultural diversity is not merely celebrated symbolically but also empowered structurally [Yano 2013].

Looking ahead, Japan can expand this *sake*-centric diplomacy strategy by engaging in international collaboration based on shared values, such as environmental sustainability, ethical consumption, and cultural economic justice. In this way, promoting *sake* not only expands markets but also deepens the meaning of more human and reflective diplomacy between nations [Mazzaraco 2024].

In conclusion, Japanese *sake* diplomacy is a powerful example of how cultural products can be an effective soft power tool in building

national identity, expanding international influence, and strengthening intercultural relations. However, the long-term success of this strategy will depend heavily on the country's willingness to maintain a balance between promotion and preservation, between commercialization and respect for the original cultural meaning. Responsible cultural diplomacy demands more than just marketing strategies; it requires empathy, ethics, and openness to cultural complexity [Assmann 2017].

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The Russian Far East's Relations With Japan and South Korea Post-2022

A. L. Lukin, V. I. Voloshchak, S. V. Sevastianov

Abstract

The article presents a comparative study of the sanctions policy of Japan and the Republic of Korea towards Russia after February 2022 and the assessment of the impact of their sanctions on the development of Russian-Japanese and Russian-South Korean cooperation in the Russian Far East. Based on the results of the study of the economic ties of Russia, Japan, and South Korea (in the areas of trade, investment, finance, tourism, and transport) and their interaction in the educational and cultural-humanitarian spheres under sanctions restrictions, the authors come to the conclusion that the sanctions policy of Japan and South Korea towards Russia has a common basis due to their belonging to the "collective West," and the anti-Russian measures they take are aimed at weakening the industrial and technological potential of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, like most of their Western partners, Japan and South Korea are not ready to impose such sanctions that could cause significant damage to their own economic and strategic interests. There are important differences in the sanctions approaches of Japan and South Korea – Japan pursues a much tougher policy towards Russia, not only limiting exports to Russia, but also imposing a ban on imports of a number of goods from Russia. South Korea is much more willing to maintain ties with Russia and its Far Eastern territories, despite the unfavorable political situation, which is expressed, in particular, in the ongoing official contacts between Primorsky Krai and Vladivostok and a number of provinces and municipalities of the

Republic of Korea. The authors suggest that ties between the Russian Far East and South Korea can be quickly restored once the situation around Ukraine is resolved, while the prospects for restoring relations with Japan look much less certain.

Keywords: sanctions, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Russia-Japan relations, Russia-Korea relations, Russian Far East.

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Introduction

Ties with Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), along with China, have long been Russia's most important bilateral relations in Asia, particularly for its Far Eastern territories. These three Northeast Asian (NEA) countries are in close proximity to Russia's Far East. In addition, China, Japan, and the ROK are the first, second, and fourth largest economies in Asia, respectively, and are among the most technologically advanced nations in the world.

While Russia's bilateral relations with China continue to expand and deepen, the situation with Japan and the ROK has become problematic in recent years, primarily due to their participation in the sanctions regime imposed on Russia after the start of the special military operation in February 2022. Both Japan and the ROK are now officially seen by Moscow as states unfriendly to Russia.

The authors of this article analyze how the sanctions imposed by Japan and the ROK have affected their ties with the Russian Far East, which they understand as the territories that are part of the Far Eastern Federal District. First, we will briefly describe the political relations developing between Moscow and Tokyo, as well as Moscow and Seoul, in the new international political situation. Then, the sanctions policy of Japan and South Korea towards the Russian Federation (RF) will be considered. The main part of the article is devoted to the analysis of how anti-Russian sanctions affect these two countries' relations with Russia's Far East. We focus primarily on economic ties (trade, investment, finance, tourism, transport), and also study the impact of new circumstances on bilateral contacts in the educational and cultural-humanitarian spheres. In the final part, we draw some conclusions and identify similarities and differences in the character of Russian ties with Japan and the ROK under the new political and economic conditions.

This research can be attributed to international political economy, since it examines the issues at the intersection of international relations, geopolitics, and economics. The authors do not claim

to make theoretical generalizations, mostly focusing on the empirical assessment of the sanctions policy of Japan and the ROK against the RF and its impact on their bilateral relations with Russia, and especially its Far East, from February 2022 to September 2025. Methodologically, the work is based on the analysis of media publications and materials of official bodies of Russia, Japan, and the ROK. In addition, the authors used information from conversations with representatives of Primorsky Krai businesses, as well as Japanese and South Korean diplomats and experts.

The Political Context of Russia's Relations With Japan and South Korea

Relations between Russia and Japan are at their lowest point since the end of World War II. Even during the most difficult periods of the Cold War, Japan and the USSR maintained direct passenger service (they currently do not), while Japanese businesses were investing money and technology in resource development and infrastructure in the Soviet Far East (the current Japanese government prohibits new investment in Russia).

It should be noted that the degradation of Russian-Japanese relations did not begin in February 2022, but earlier, with the resignation of Abe Shinzo as Prime Minister in 2020. His successor, Suga Yoshihide, did not continue his predecessor's course of improving relations with Russia. But, whereas the Suga administration was generally indifferent to Russia, the next Prime Minister, Kishida Fumio (2021–2024), could be characterized as an anti-Russian politician even by the standards of Japan, where sympathy towards Russia has never been strong among the ruling elite. One explanation for Kishida's Russophobia may lie in his pro-American and generally pro-Western orientation. Ishiba Shigeru, who succeeded Kishida in October 2024, may be less Russophobic, but, so far, it didn't lead to noticeable changes in Tokyo's relations with Moscow.

After February 2022, Japan acted as one of the main and active participants in the U.S.-led anti-Russian coalition. In addition to the sanctions war against Russia, Tokyo provides large-scale political, diplomatic, material, and financial support to the Zelensky government. In particular, Kishida visited Kiev in March 2023, and, in June 2024, Japan became the first non-NATO country to sign a bilateral agreement with Ukraine on "support and cooperation," in which "security and defense" issues take priority.[1]

In addition to growing military and political integration with the United States, Tokyo has stepped up policy of strengthening strategic cooperation with NATO and its leading European members. The Japanese prime minister participated in three annual NATO summits (in 2022, 2023, and 2024), and Japan, together with the ROK, Australia, and New Zealand, formed the so-called "Indo-Pacific Quartet" of NATO partner countries. The main foreign policy slogan of the Kishida administration became "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow."

Moscow predictably responded to Tokyo's position by ceasing dialogue on the peace treaty, including on the "territorial issue." As one of the countermeasures, Russia unilaterally terminated visa-free humanitarian exchanges between the Southern Kuril Islands and Japan, that had been in place since 1992. Russian officials, including the country's president, clarify that Japan's policy makes it impossible to continue the negotiation process that began in the late 1980s under M. Gorbachev.[2] Russian diplomats are using very harsh rhetoric toward Japan, in particular, warning that Moscow will respond to the Japanese government's anti-Russian

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1 Accord on Support for Ukraine and Cooperation between the Government of Japan and Ukraine. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. 13.06.2024. https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100684186.pdf

2 Meeting of V. Putin with heads of international news agencies. *Kremlin. Ru*. 05.06.2024. http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74223 (In Russian).

steps with "the most severe and hurting countermeasures for Tokyo."[3]

The trajectory of modern Russian-South Korean relations is partly reminiscent of the processes between Moscow and Tokyo. Until the early 2020s, relations between the RF and the ROK developed in a positive direction. The administrations of Presidents Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013), Park Geun-hye (2013–2017), and Moon Jae-in (2017–2022) sought to maintain friendly relations with Moscow, which was especially evident during the presidency of Moon, who viewed cooperation with Russia as an important factor in achieving his main priority – the normalization of inter-Korean relations [Sevastyanov 2020]. Moon's successor, President Yoon Seok-yeol (May 2022 – April 2025), a representative of the right-wing camp, had a much cooler attitude towards Russia, which can be explained, firstly, by his tough line on North Korea, and, secondly, by his obvious tilt towards Washington and Tokyo. On Yoon's initiative, an unprecedented rapprochement between Seoul and Tokyo began, which allowed American diplomacy to realize the long-standing goal of putting together a trilateral bloc in Northeast Asia consisting of the U.S., Japan, and the ROK, directed primarily against the PRC, as well as the DPRK and the RF.

Like Kishida, Yoon visited Kiev (in July 2023), but Seoul's support for Kiev and rhetoric towards Moscow have been more restrained. Unlike Tokyo, which enthusiastically joined the anti-Russian coalition, Seoul imposed sanctions against Russia and provided assistance to the Zelensky government not so much at the call of the heart as under pressure from its senior American ally. This gave Russian diplomats grounds to describe South Korea as "one of the friendliest among the

[3] On the meeting of the Director of the Third Asian Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry L.G. Vorobieva with the Director of the European Department of the Japanese Foreign Ministry M. Nakagome. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. 21.06.2024. https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1958611/ (In Russian).

unfriendly countries." In turn, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROK called Russia a potential "strategic partner," expressing Seoul's hope that, after the end of the military conflict in Ukraine, South Korean-Russian ties would be restored.[4]

Moscow hoped that the departure of Yoon as a result of his failed martial law gambit would lead to a thaw in the bilateral relations. It was expected that a new president from the progressive camp, represented by the Democratic "Toburo" Party, would be somewhat less enthusiastic about ties with the West and Japan while becoming more accommodating toward China and Russia. However, despite the victory of Toburo's Lee Jae-myung in the presidential election in June 2025, such a re-orientation has not happened. So far, Lee Jae-myung's foreign and security policies have been essentially the same as under Yoon.

Japan's Sanctions Policy Towards Russia

Japan introduced its first sanctions against Russia in 2014, in response to the reincorporation of Crimea. Compared to the anti-Russian sanctions introduced by other G7 members, Japanese restrictive measures were adopted with a delay and were rather soft and symbolic in nature.[5] This was largely due to the desire of then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to improve relations with Moscow [Panov 2024]. In 2022, Japan's position changed dramatically when the Kishida cabinet immediately signaled its readiness to act in solidarity and with maximum coordination with Western partners in the G7 (the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the EU) in exerting sanctions pressure on Russia.

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4 Park, Min-hee. Seoul's top diplomat says closer North Korea-Russia ties run 'counter' to Chinese interests. *Hankyoreh*. 15.07.2024. https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1149178.html

5 Japan approved sanctions against Russia. *RIA Novosti*. 05.08.2014. https://ria.ru/20140805/1018818105.html (In Russian).

In response to Moscow's recognition of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People's Republic (LPR), Japan, along with other G7 members, adopted the first round of restrictive measures against Russia on February 23, 2022. On February 25, the day after Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine, Tokyo announced new large-scale sanctions. The Japanese government, in close coordination with the U.S. and other G7 members, then continued to impose additional sanctions. As of January 2025, the Japanese government adopted over thirty sanctions packages against Russia.[6] The Japanese sanctions are, in general, similar to those imposed by the U.S., the EU, Great Britain, and other members of the Western camp.

The Japanese sanctions lists feature more than 1,000 Russian individuals, including the military-political leadership of Russia, headed by V. Putin, as well as more than 700 Russian organizations and companies. The restrictive measures involve freezing the property of blacklisted individuals and organizations if it is found on Japanese territory. Those on the list cannot enter Japan and are prohibited from conducting banking and credit operations in the country. About 1,000 product items are prohibited from export to Russia. The list of goods and technologies prohibited from export includes, in particular, semiconductors, "luxury goods," equipment for ensuring maritime and aviation security, communications equipment, military products, software, oil refining equipment, trucks, railway locomotives, machine tools and other electrical equipment, cars with hybrid and electric engines, cars with an engine capacity of over 1.9 liter, as well as dual-use goods and other goods "contributing to strengthening the industrial base of the RF."[7] Tokyo imposed sanctions on key Russian financial institutions, including the

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6 Russia Sanctions Tracker – Japan. *Ashurst*. 17.01.2025. https://www.ashurst.com/en/insights/russia-sanctions-tracker/japan-sanctions/

7 What sanctions Japan imposed on Russia. *TASS*. 01.03.2024. https://tass.ru/info/20126445 (In Russian).

Central Bank, banning transactions with them and freezing their assets in Japan.

Japan deprived Russia of its most favored nation status in trade, which led to an increase in customs duties on a number of Russian goods, and also introduced a ban on the import of certain goods from it, including gold, non-technical diamonds, and a number of types of wood products (chips, logs, and veneer). Tokyo imposed a ban on new investments in Russia, as well as on the provision of certain services, in particular, accounting and auditing, consulting, transportation, construction, and engineering. In addition, Japan banned direct flights to Russia. The goal of Japan's current sanctions policy towards Russia is completely consistent with the goals of the U.S. and other Western countries, aiming to inflict maximum damage on Russia's military-industrial potential and the Russian economy as a whole. At the same time, Tokyo openly admits that Russia's importance as a supplier of energy and raw materials for the global economy and for Japan in particular makes a complete trade and financial blockade impossible and requires a nuanced approach to the application of sanctions.

The Japanese leadership wants to inflict maximum damage on the industrial, technological, and financial condition of Russia, but it should be done without creating significant negative effects for the Japanese economy. An important issue in this regard is the degree of dependence on trade with Russia. For the U.S., foreign trade dependence on the RF in 2021 (before the introduction of massive sanctions), was minimal: 0.4 percent for exports and 1 percent for imports. The dependence of the EU countries on Russia in the same year was much higher: 4.1 percent for exports and 6.8 percent for imports. As for Japan, in 2021, only 1 percent of its total exports went to Russia, while 1.8 percent of Japanese imports were sourced from the RF. Thus, Japan's trade dependence on Russia is slightly higher than that of the U.S., but significantly lower than that of continental European countries. However, a number of resources imported from Russia occupy a significant share in Japan's imports. These include natural gas (in 2021,

the RF accounted for 7.4 percent of Japanese gas imports), non-ferrous metals (10.3 percent), coal (9.8 percent), fish and seafood (9.1 percent), and timber (13.1 percent). As for exports, 53.1 percent of Japanese supplies to Russia in 2021 were cars and their components, although Russia's market share for Japanese auto exporters was a non-critical 3.3 percent.[8]

Thus, reducing or even completely stopping Japanese exports to Russia will not cause significant damage to the Japanese economy. As for imports from the RF, Tokyo has less freedom of maneuver, and this primarily applies to supply of Russian hydrocarbons (gas, oil, and coal). Together with other G7 members, in 2022 Tokyo committed to gradually abandoning the imports of Russian coal and oil, and by 2024, Japan had completely stopped purchasing oil from the RF (in 2021, the share of Russian oil and oil products made up 3.3 percent of Japanese oil imports). Also, by 2024, imports of Russian coal (Russia had previously been the second most important supplier to Japan) fell to minimum values.

At the same time, Tokyo has not committed to stopping the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Russia, and has refused to withdraw from the Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 oil and gas projects, in which Japanese companies hold large shares. This decision contrasts with the behavior of the American Exxon Mobil and British Shell, which completely withdrew from the Sakhalin projects after the start of the special military operation. Explaining this difference, Prime Minister Kishida noted that the Sakhalin hydrocarbon projects are extremely important for Japan's long-term energy security.[9]

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[8] Yoshida Shigekazu. The Economic Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine on Japan and Kansai from a Trade Perspective. *Asia-Pacific Institute of Research*. 2023. https://www.apir.or.jp/files/whitepaper/2023/part02_chap02_clmA.pdf

[9] Japan to slowly phase out Russian oil, keep interests in projects. *Kyodo News*. 09.05.2023. https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/05/3936be564dfb-breaking-news-japan-to-maintain-interests-in-russian-oil-projects-kishida.html

Tokyo's decision to continue importing Russian LNG and remain involved in the Sakhalin projects is dictated by several reasons. Firstly, unlike oil and coal, it is much more difficult for Japanese energy companies to find alternative LNG suppliers. Secondly, Sakhalin LNG, 60 percent of which is exported to Japan under long-term contracts, is the most profitable gas for Japanese consumers due to its geographic proximity. Thirdly, Japanese companies were at the origins of the Sakhalin oil and gas projects, having invested significant financial and human resources in them. Fourthly, unlike the Americans and Europeans, the Japanese may have a historically conditioned emotional attachment to Sakhalin, which makes them more reluctant to leave. Fifthly, Tokyo fears that if they leave, their place on the island, which is strategically important for Japan, could be taken by "third countries," primarily China.

Seafood is another area where Japan is not prepared to impose significant restrictions on the RF. Unlike the U.S., which has imposed a ban on imports of Russian fish and seafood, Japan continues to buy them. According to a spokesman for Japan's fisheries agency, a ban "would have a major impact on Japan's seafood processing industry."[10] Unlike oil, coal, and timber, it is almost impossible to find adequate replacement for crabs, sea urchins, and other delicacies from Russia's Far Eastern seas.

Along with other G7 members, Japan began to strengthen measures to combat "sanctions evasion" in the second half of 2023, actively using the "secondary sanctions" mechanism. A number of third-country companies were blacklisted, including those from India, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, China, and the UAE, being accused of cooperating with Russia. In July 2024, Japan made its first arrest on charges of violating export restrictions against the RF: a Russian citizen was detained in Osaka on suspicion of supplying sanctioned jet skis, boat motors, and used motorcycles to Russia.[11]

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[10] Nikkei: Crab price in Japan falls thanks to imports from Russia. *TASS*. 03.12.2023. https://tass.ru/ekonomika/19441691 (In Russian).

[11] Russian detained in Japan on suspicion of evading sanctions. *Kommersant*. 10.07.2024. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6821475 (In Russian).

Russian-Japanese Interaction in the Russian Far East Under the Sanctions Restrictions

In 2021, the volume of Russian-Japanese trade amounted to $19.9 billion. By 2023, it had halved, amounting to $9.6 billion.[12] In the 2024 financial year (April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025), trade turnover between Japan and Russia further fell by 9.41 percent to $8.2 billion.[13] Data on the export and import flows of the Far Eastern Federal District after March 2022 are not available, but it can be assumed that the volume of trade between the Russian Far East and Japan decreased in approximately same proportion as Russian-Japanese trade as a whole, that is, by half.

The sanctions inevitably affected enterprises with Japanese investments located in Russia. The largest Japanese assets in Russia were concentrated in the oil and gas, automobile, tobacco, and forestry industries. However, the complete exit of Japanese owners took place only in the automotive industry. In 2022, the operation of Toyota and Nissan plants in Saint Petersburg was stopped. In Primorsky Krai, Mazda Sollers Manufacturing Rus (a joint venture of Russian Sollers and Japanese Mazda), which assembled Mazda cars at a plant in Vladivostok, as well as Mazda engines at a plant in the suburbs of Vladivostok, ceased operations.

In other industries, the Japanese chose to maintain their presence in Russia. Japan Tobacco, with 33 percent of its shares owned by the Japanese government, decided to keep its business in Russia. This decision was largely influenced by the fact that the Russian market accounts for about 20 percent of the company's total profits.[14]

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12 Trade turnover between Russia and Japan fell by 45.3 percent in 2023. *TASS*. 01.24.2024. https://tass.ru/ekonomika/19800797 (In Russian).

13 Trade turnover between Japan, Russia down 9.4 percent to $8.2 bln in 2024 financial year. TASS. 17.04.2025. https://tass.com/economy/1944855

14 Japan Tobacco to maintain business in Russia to avoid problems with investors. *Kommersant*. 01.05.2024. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6679695 (In Russian).

Japanese companies also maintain their presence in the forestry industry. Unlike the automotive and tobacco industries, Japanese forestry assets are concentrated in the eastern part of Russia, which is explained by the presence of extensive timber reserves and proximity to the Japanese market, a major consumer of timber. The oldest and largest project of Russian-Japanese partnership in the forestry sector is Terneyles in Primorsky Krai, 45 percent of authorized capital of which belongs to Sumitomo Corporation. In May 2023, a new board of directors of Terneyles was formed, in which three of the seven seats are occupied by representatives of Sumitomo. A large Japanese house-building company Iida Group Holdings also continues operations in Russia. In 2022 it completed the purchase of 75 percent of the shares of the largest Far Eastern timber producer RFP (its main assets are located in Khabarovsk Krai). RFP's management includes a Japanese citizen heading the shareholder relations department.[15]

The bulk of direct Japanese investment in Russia is in the oil and gas sector, namely the Sakhalin-1, Sakhalin-2, and Arctic LNG-2 projects. The Japanese consortium SODECO (50 percent of which is owned by the Japanese government, and the rest by Itochu, Inpex, Japan Petroleum Exploration, and Marubeni corporations) owns a 30 percent stake in the Sakhalin-1 project. In the Sakhalin-2 project, the Japanese own 22.5 percent (Mitsui – 12.5 percent, Mitsubishi – 10 percent). The Japanese shareholders of these projects agreed to transfer their shares to new legal entities, which, under a Russian presidential decree, were appointed to act as the operators of Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 in October 2022. The Japanese Foreign Ministry's annual Blue Book published in April 2024 stated that, "in light of ensuring stable supplies in the medium and long term," Japan continues to view Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 as "important energy security projects and intends to maintain stakes in them."[16]

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[15] Website of the RFP holding. https://www.rfpgroup.ru/leaderships (In Russian).

[16] 外交青書外務省 2024 [Diplomacy Blue Book. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2024]. 16.04.2024. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100653233.pdf

The situation with the newer hydrocarbon project, Arctic LNG-2, which Japan joined in 2019, is different. The Japanese consortium Japan Arctic LNG, consisting of Mitsui and JOGMEC, owns 10 percent of the project. In late 2023, the U.S. imposed blocking sanctions on Arctic LNG-2 and its associated logistics infrastructure, including the transshipment terminal in Kamchatka, through which a significant portion of the LNG was to be delivered to Japanese and other Asian consumers. After that, the Japanese shareholders of the project, Mitsui and JOGMEC, suspended participation in the project, although they retain their shares in the authorized capital. Other foreign co-owners of Arctic LNG-2 (French Total, Chinese CNOOC and CNPC) did the same. The freezing of participation in the project means that Japanese and other foreign shareholders refused to receive the project's products and stopped its financing.

Except for projects in the energy and raw materials sector, the few remaining enterprises with Japanese investment in the Russian Far East had been modest in size. These include the JGC Evergreen greenhouse complexes in Khabarovsk and the Sayuri greenhouse complex in Yakutsk, built in the second half of the 2010s using Japanese agricultural technologies. The greenhouses continue to operate, and the Japanese investors have not announced withdrawal from these projects. According to a Japanese source, the Japanese government does not put pressure on companies that have decided to stay in Russia. They can work with Russia on the condition that they comply with the current sanctions regime. At the same time, there are said to be debates within the management of some Japanese companies still operating in Russia between those who are in favor of continuing presence in the country and those who want their companies to leave.[17]

Since the early 1990s, one of the pillars of Russian-Japanese economic cooperation in the Far East has been the import of Japanese used cars. Japan's ban on the export of cars with gasoline and diesel

[17] Interview with a Japanese official. July 2024.

engines over 1.9 liters, hybrid cars, and electric cars to Russia from August 2023 (in December of the same year, South Korea banned the export of cars with an engine capacity of 2 liters to Russia) dealt a blow to this business. However, it managed to adapt, to a large extent, and, after the initial sharp decline, the volume of car imports from Japan and South Korea began to grow again. According to Vladivostok Customs, in mid-2024, the import of Japanese and South Korean cars by individuals approached pre-sanction volumes. Moreover, cars of sanctioned categories continue to enter the Russian market using bypassing schemes, with deliveries through third countries such as Malaysia, China, or Mongolia. Private car dealers in Vladivostok offer to buy "sanctioned cars from both South Korea and Japan," promising delivery within 20 days.[18] There have been no significant disruptions in the supply of spare parts for Japanese cars too. As one car owner notes, "prices for Japanese auto parts in Vladivostok have remained stable and there are no problems with their delivery to the city."[19]

Although Japan has blocked transactions with major Russian financial institutions, some smaller and regional banks remain an option for Russian-Japanese commercial transactions. One example is Vladivostok-based Solid Bank, which is co-owned by Japan's HS Holdings Co. Ltd, holding a 46 percent stake.[20]

Critical infrastructure in the Russian Far East relies little on Japanese technology. The only exception is the thermal power plant on Russky Island in Vladivostok, which was built in the early 2010s and is equipped with seven Kawasaki gas turbines. Since the introduction of sanctions, their maintenance has become problematic,

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[18] "ChesAuto – custom-delivered autos". 29.02.2024. https://t.me/chesauto/3151 (In Russian).

[19] Interview with a Vladivostok owner of a Japanese car. July 2024.

[20] Bank with Japanese capital is growing in the Russian Federation. *Kommersant*. 11.04.2024. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6636989 (In Russian).

and RusHydro, which operates the Far Eastern energy grid, plans to replace them with indigenous ones.[21]

The introduction of sanctions blocked plans for Japanese shippers to use transport and transit corridors passing through Russia and its Far East. In 2020, Japanese businesses, with the support of the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, tested transit routes via the Trans-Siberian Railway as part of the Trans-Siberian LandBridge service organized by Russian Railways and the shipping company FESCO.[22] However, after February 2022, Japan completely abandoned the Trans-Siberian Railway as a transit artery and stopped considering the NSR as a potential alternative to the Suez Canal route.[23]

For several years prior to the coronavirus pandemic, tourism was perhaps the fastest growing sector of Russian-Japanese cooperation in the Far East. Many Far Easterners went on vacation or even long weekends to Japan, where Russian airlines flew direct flights, while the flow of travelers from Japan to the Far East, primarily to Vladivostok, was growing (in terms of the foreign tourists' number, the Japanese ranked third after the Chinese and South Koreans). Counting primarily on the growing tourist flows, the largest Japanese air carriers, JAL and ANA, planned to launch regular flights to Vladivostok in 2020, but these plans were crossed out first by the pandemic and then by the sanctions.

There is currently no direct passenger connection between the Russian Far East and Japan. The best alternative route is China, such as Harbin or Beijing. An attempt to organize direct passenger service by sea was unsuccessful. In October 2023, the Russian shipping company Vostok Tour announced the launch of regular sea passenger services between Vladivostok and the Japanese port of Nanao in Ishikawa Prefecture.

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[21] Gigawatts are being connected to the Far East. *Kommersant*. 06.05.2024. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6687420 (In Russian).

[22] Russian Railways sent the first container train with Japanese cargo to Europe via the Trans-Siberian Railway. *Russian Railways*. 18.11.2020. https://cargo.rzd.ru/ru/9433/page/2452802?id=256996 (In Russian).

[23] Interview with a Japanese expert. April 2024.

However, after only four voyages, the company was forced to cease the project, faced with the unfriendly attitude of Japanese authorities, who subjected the ship to extremely rigorous inspections.[24] Tourism between the Russian Far East (and Russia as a whole) and Japan is also almost non-existent at the moment. Tourist trips, in principle, remain possible, but are associated with a number of difficulties. For Russians, this is primarily the lack of direct flights and the inability to use international payment systems, while, for the Japanese citizens, this is exacerbated by the Japanese government's "recommendation" not to visit Russia.

One of the few areas that has so far been relatively unaffected by the deterioration of bilateral relations is consular ties. All three Japanese Consulates General in the Far East (in Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk) continue to operate, while Russia and Japan have also managed to avoid mutual expulsion of consular personnel. The only exception was the incident in the fall of 2022, when Russian authorities declared the consul of the Japanese Consulate General in Vladivostok persona non grata, and Tokyo responded by expelling an officer of the Russian Consulate General in Sapporo.

While actively discouraging their citizens from coming to Russia, the Japanese authorities do not prevent Russian citizens from entering Japan. Unlike many of its Western partners, Tokyo has not significantly limited the issuance of visas to Russians. Thus, the Consulate General of Japan in Vladivostok issues visas to almost everyone wishing to visit the country. Every month, the consulate issues Russians 400–500 visas, of which about 70 percent are visas for tourist trips. For comparison: before 2020, the number of visas issued reached 2,000 per month.[25]

Bilateral educational contacts have been significantly reduced, though Russian students studying Japanese still have the opportunity

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[24] Sea voyages from Vladivostok to Japan were cancelled after an intensive inspection at a foreign port – a commission from Tokyo examined the Russian vessel. *VL. RU*. 11.22.2023. https://www.newsvl.ru/vlad/2023/11/22/220681 (In Russian).

[25] Interview with a Japanese official. July 2024.

to go to this country. A number of Japanese educational and scholarship programs continue to operate for Russians. At the same time, the number of young Japanese coming to study at universities in the Russian Far East is extremely small. As of May 2024, only two Japanese citizens were studying at the largest university in the Far Eastern Federal District, the Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) in Vladivostok. In fairness, it should be noted that, even before the sanctions and COVID-19, the number of Japanese students was quite small. In 2019, there were only three Japanese students at FEFU.[26] Partly as a result of sanctions, partly due to the long-term trend of decreasing interest in Russia among the Japanese, the only branch of a Russian university in Japan (FEFU's branch in Hakodate, which had been operating since 1994) came on the verge of closing and ceased enrolling new students in 2024. Ultimately, the Russian and Japanese sides decided against a formal shutdown, even though it still remains unclear how the branch will operate.[27]

Cultural and humanitarian contacts between Japan and the Russian Far East have decreased, but not ceased. For example, in March 2024, Japanese conductor and producer Ken'ichi Shimura toured Vladivostok as part of the Anime Symphony project.[28]

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[26] The largest number of Japanese students in Vladivostok was observed in the 1990s, when Japanese constituted the overwhelming majority of foreigners studying the Russian language in the city. Moreover, as noted by university teachers of Russian, almost all Japanese students were highly motivated. Since the late 1990s, the number of Japanese students has steadily decreased (interview with Associate Professor of the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language at the FEFU Institute of Asian Studies Yu. A. Gunko. July 2024).

[27] FEFU's branch in Japan intends to operate in a new format. *TASS*. 03.01.2025. https://tass.ru/obschestvo/22816357 (In Russian).

[28] "Anime Symphony". Kenichi Shimura (Japan) in Vladivostok on March 17, 2024. *VL.RU*. https://www.vl.ru/afisha/vladivostok/event/194273 (In Russian).

South Korea's Sanctions Against Russia

On February 24, 2022, the government of the Republic of Korea joined the sanctions against Russia and introduced export restrictions at a level comparable to the measures imposed by the Western countries. On February 28, the ROK announced the suspension of transactions with the largest Russian banks, including Sberbank, VEB, VTB. Seoul began consultations with the U.S. Treasury Department to coordinate sanctions policy. The ROK was also affected by the U.S. foreign direct product rule (FDPR), according to which foreign companies which produce goods using American technologies must obtain a license from the U.S. government to export such goods to third countries. During consultations with the U.S. Department of Commerce, it was decided that smartphones, washing machines, cars, and similar non-military goods could be exempted from the FDPR restrictions by the U.S. government.[29] Still, South Korean companies exporting such goods to Russia must obtain permission from their own government [Timofeev et al., 2023, p. 260].

In March 2022, the ROK government announced an embargo on the supply of goods to 49 Russian departments, organizations, and companies. The list of goods subject to export control included 57 items such as electronic devices and software for their development, telecommunications equipment, optical devices, components and technologies, gas turbine and diesel engines for tractors and aircraft, navigation equipment, etc. Seoul also suspended the most favored nation treatment for Russia under the WTO. On April 28, 2023, the second edition of the list of goods restricted for export to Russia came into force, with 741 new items added to it. The new goods subject to export control

[29] Information on export control measures against Russia, including the U.S. Foreign Direct Product Rules (FDPR). *Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea*. 03.03.2022. https://www.motie.go.kr/attach/viewer/095a2dda9c864e1d90d751f7668a1117/5b18ed72c204397c60c8a74455bd3423/778bdbf5db9ced7c8fd52756c00bf0cd

included industrial equipment, oil and gas processing equipment, cars worth over $50 thousand and their spare parts, transistors and other electronic components.[30]

On December 26, 2023, the ROK Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy announced new export restrictions against Russia and Belarus. Part of the new list included dual-use items including heavy construction equipment, steel structures, batteries, transport and loading equipment, machine tools and spare parts for aircraft, though these items in the new version of the list are subject to situational permission for export from the ROK government.[31] Another expansion of the list of goods restricted for export was announced by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy on June 28, 2024. The list includes 243 items, including metal cutting machines, parts of optical devices and sensors.32 Thus, as of the end of June 2024, the total number of items restricted for export to Russia stood at 1402.

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[30] Guidelines for the Implementation of Export Control Measures against Russia Following the Revision of the 31st Notification on the Export and Import of Strategic Materials, 2023. *Yestrade Strategic Materials Management System Portal*. 15.03.2023. https://www.yestrade.go.kr/common/common.do?jPath=/im/imBm010D&BD_NO=1&BBS_NO=34710&TOP_MENU_CODE=MENU0006&CURRENT_MENU_CODE=MENU0097&CURRENT_MENU_CODE=MENU0097 (In Korean).

[31] Implementation of the 33rd Notice on the Export and Import of Strategic. Materials *Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea*. 20.02.2024. https://www.motie.go.kr/attach/viewer/095a2dda9c864e1d90d751f7668a1117/66ab579c28cb8665f5194a05962bccb4/9a9db098b587ee18b321c826f3707a49

[32] 대 (對) 러시아, 벨라루스 상황허가 대상품목 243 개 추가. 산업통상자원부 [243 new items subject to special approval in trade with Russia and Belarus. *Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea*]. 28.06.2024. https://www.motie.go.kr/kor/article/ATCL3f49a5a8c/169257/view# (In Korean).

In line with the anti-North Korean stance of the Yoon Seok-yeol administration and as a reaction to the Russian-North Korean rapprochement, Seoul stepped up its sanctions activity against Russian individuals and legal entities accused of collaborating with the DPRK. One example was the inclusion of Vladivostok-registered Alis LLC in the U.S. and South Korean sanctions lists. The company, which engaged in software development, was suspected of having ties with North Korean companies.[33]

Russian-South Korean Interaction in the Russian Far East Under the New Conditions

The volume of RF-ROK trade in 2024 amounted to $11.4 billion (Russian exports to South Korea – $6.9 billion, imports from South Korea – $4.5 billion). The volume of bilateral trade in 2024 fell by more than 58 percent compared to 2021, when trade turnover was recorded at $27.3 billion.[34] The latest available data on trade between the territories of the Far Eastern Federal District and South Korea is for 2021, when trade turnover amounted to $10.3 billion (exports from the Far Eastern Federal District to the ROK stood at $8.9 billion, while its imports from the ROK were $1.3 billion).[35]

Due to sanctions pressure from Western countries and South Korean export restrictions, many bilateral cooperation projects have been seriously affected or stopped altogether. Since the second half

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33 Another company from Vladivostok has fallen under U.S. and South Korean sanctions. *PrimaMedia*. 28.03.2024. https://primamedia.ru/news/1712940/ (In Russian).

34 Comp. from: *Korea International Trade Association*. https://www.kita.org/kStatistics/overview/balanceOfTrade/balanceOfTradeList.do

35 Comp. from: Statistical information on foreign trade based on the results of the 4th quarter of 2021. *Far Eastern Customs Administration*. 11.03.2022. https://dvtu.customs.gov.ru/statistic/2021-god/Itogovaya_informaciya/document/329535 (In Russian).

of the 2010s, the largest and most high-tech Russian-South Korean project was the participation of Korean leading shipbuilding companies in the construction of oil and LNG tankers at the Zvezda shipbuilding complex in Bolshoy Kamen (Primorsky Krai). The main South Korean partner (Samsung Heavy Industries, SHI) terminated the production of shipbuilding blocks and equipment for 10 out of 15 ice-class LNG tankers being built at Zvezda.[36] Currently, SHI does not directly implement joint projects with the Zvezda complex, while, as of 2024, work on the five remaining tankers was being carried out by Bolshoy KHAN,[37] a branch of the South Korean shipbuilder KHAN in Bolshoy Kamen, which provides agency services for DSME, SHI, and other shipbuilding companies in the ROK.

Unlike Tokyo, Seoul has not officially banned new investments in Russia, but, after February 2022, almost all previously planned South Korean investment projects were halted. These include the construction of an industrial complex in Primorye, which was announced as one of the "bridges of cooperation" under the "Nine Bridges" initiative to develop economic cooperation with Russia announced by President Moon Jae-in in 2017. A similar fate befell Lotte's plan to build a livestock complex and a dairy plant in Primorsky Krai. At the same time, Lotte-controlled agricultural enterprises continue to operate, growing soybeans, corn, and oats. Lotte also retains control over the hotel of the same name in the center of Vladivostok, one of the largest in the city.[38]

The sanctions disrupted transport and logistics schemes, primarily affecting passenger flights between Russia, including cities

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[36] Buzlaev, P. Samsung Heavy has stopped producing equipment for 10 Zvezda LNG vessels. *Kommersant*. 26.12.2023. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6426798 (In Russian).

[37] LLC "Bolshoy KHAN". *RBC Companies*. 07.03.2023. https://companies.rbc.ru/id/1212500012427-obschestvo-s-ogranichennoj-otvetstvennostyu-bolshoj-khan (In Russian).

[38] Unlike Japan, South Korea has never had direct investments in the Russian Far East comparable in size to the Sakhalin projects.

in the Russian Far East, and South Korea. All flights were suspended indefinitely by the South Korean side. Partial compensation for the interrupted flights was the launch, at the initiative of the South Koreans, of the Vladivostok-Donghae cargo and passenger ferry line in the summer of 2022, which is still operating today. In August 2025, the automobile and passenger ferry service linking Vladivostok and the South Korean port of Sokcho was resumed. As for cargo traffic, two South Korean container carriers (HMM and KMTC) left the Far East, but a large shipping company Sinokor continued to operate. The inclusion of the Eastern Stevedoring Company, which operates the terminal in the port of Vostochny, in the U.S. sanctions list in February 2024 forced Sinokor to stop working with this terminal in the Vostochny port, but the shipping company still maintains its presence in Vladivostok.[39]

Until 2020, tourism was one of the most successful areas of interaction between the Russian Far East and the Republic of Korea. In 2019, the number of Korean tourists visiting Vladivostok reached 300,000. The visa-free regime introduced in 2015 continues to operate between the two countries, but the absence of direct flights and Russia's disconnection from international payment systems have ruled out mass tourism. However, the Korea National Tourism Organization continues to operate in Vladivostok, offering tours and holding promotional events in cooperation with Russian organizations.

In the new circumstances, contacts between the Far East and the ROK have partly shifted to the subnational level. In December 2023, a seminar between representatives of Primorsky Krai and North Jeolla Province was held, during which prospects for cooperation in the fishing industry and trade in fish products were discussed. Official and business contacts between Primorsky Krai and the Gangwon

[39] The largest sea carrier in the Far East refused to call at the port of Vostochny due to sanctions. *VPost-media*. 04.03.2024. https://vpost-media.ru/texts/krupneyshiy-morskoy-perevozchik-na-dalnem-vostoke-iz-za-sankciy-otkazalsya-zakhodit-v-port (In Russian).

province remain. At the meeting of the Association of Northeast Asian Regional Governments (NEAR) in May 2024 in Gyeongju, Action Plan for Cooperation between Primorsky Krai and Gangwon Province was signed.[40] In July 2023, with the support of the Gangwon administration, a container line linking Vladivostok, Donghae, and Busan was opened.[41] Marketing events are also arranged, such as two K-Market festivals in Vladivostok in 2023 and the Russian crab festivals in Donghae in 2023 and 2024. The emphasis on the subnational contacts can be explained by the desire of both sides to depoliticize economic and humanitarian cooperation. In addition, special interest of the Japan Sea provinces of the ROK in maintaining economic ties with the Russian Far East should be taken into account.

Even in unfavorable political conditions, a significant number of cultural, humanitarian, and educational contacts between the Russian Far East and the ROK are maintained. For example, Korean culture festivals are held in Vladivostok with the support of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea. As of May 2024, 35 students from South Korea were studying at FEFU (in 2019, there were 41), while students of FEFU and other Russian universities still have the opportunity to go to South Korean universities under exchange programs.

Conclusion

The sanctions policies of Japan and the ROK towards Russia have a common basis, primarily because both of these states are junior allies of America and part of the "collective West." Their anti-Russian measures

[40] International organizations are an effective tool for developing international cooperation. *Telegram channel of the Agency for International Cooperation of Primorsky Krai*. 05.24.2024. https://t.me/ams_primorsky/741 (In Russian).

[41] A container line will be opened between South Korea and Vladivostok this month. *Telegram channel "Gorod V"*. 06.07.2023. https://t.me/gorod_vl/13171 (In Russian).

are aimed at weakening the industrial and technological potential of the RF as much as possible. At the same time, Tokyo and Seoul are not ready to impose on Russia the kinds of sanctions that could cause significant damage to their own economic and strategic interests.

One vivid example of such pragmatism is the Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 projects, which Tokyo exempted from sanctions. Japan and, to a lesser extent, South Korea, would like to maintain access to Russian natural resources, given the proximity of the resource-rich Far Eastern territories. As for manufacturing and high-tech sectors, Tokyo and Seoul easily sacrificed cooperation with Moscow, since Russia's market share in these areas is not significant for them. Specifically, in the Russian Far East, Japan's participation in the non-resource sector of the region's economy had been limited to Mazda (two car assembly plants in Primorye), while South Korea's only significant industrial project was a technological partnership with the Zvezda shipbuilding complex.

However, there are also important differences in the sanctions approaches of Japan and South Korea. In general, Tokyo pursues a much tougher policy towards Moscow. For example, Japan, unlike the ROK, not only limits exports to Russia, but also banned imports of a number of goods from it. Compared to the Japanese, the South Korean side is more eager to preserve ties with Russia and its Far Eastern territories. This is expressed, in particular, in ongoing official contacts between Primorsky Krai and Vladivostok with South Korea's provinces and municipalities.

Japan's higher degree of confrontation with Russia is explained by both political and economic reasons. Unlike the ROK, Japan is a member of the Group of Seven, which obliges it to comply with the most stringent "standards" of the West's anti-Russian policy. The Japanese political elite is more pro-American and more Russophobic, compared to the South Korean establishment, which includes an influential progressive-nationalist camp, which is more critical of America and counts on Russia's help in the matters of inter-Korean dialogue.

In the economic dimension, the decoupling between Russia and Japan had begun long before 2022, as the two countries needed each other less and less. A country with a shrinking population and stagnating

GDP, Japan's demand for Russian energy and raw materials has long been on the wane. This largely determined the modest results of former Prime Minister Abe's "eight-point cooperation plan" in the second half of the 2010s [Streltsov, Lukin 2017, pp. 55–56]. On the other hand, the era when Japan was a world leader in key areas of scientific and technological progress is gone, which reduces Japan's attractiveness for Russia as a technological and investment partner. South Korea, on the contrary, being at the peak of its economic form, is looking for new markets, while its industrial and technological achievements are of significant interest to Moscow.

There are also some geopolitical and historical nuances. While Japan has a special attachment to Sakhalin, the ROK prioritizes Primorsky Krai that has a common border with the DPRK. One should not discount the emotional and historical connection of the Koreans with the southern territories of the Russian Far East, some areas of which were part of proto-Korean states in the distant past.

Given all this, it can be assumed that the ties between the Russian Far East and the ROK will be quickly reactivated after the situation around Ukraine is resolved. The prospects for restoring relations with Japan look far less certain.

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Japan as a Civilizational State: Rethinking Abe Shinzō's Global Vision

G. D. Paksiutov

Abstract

The article revisits the policies of Abe Shinzō, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, and places them in the context of the current trend of civilizations advancing as a major factor in international affairs. We briefly examine the development of the influential concept of a "civilizational state," today most often exemplified by China, and suggest that this concept can be used to elucidate Abe's vision of Japanese polity and its position on the global arena. Based on the review of the relevant scholarly literature, we argue that Japan's traditional self-identification as a mediator between Asia and the West also conforms to the idea of a civilizational state.

We highlight that the key factor influencing the international situation over Abe's second administration (2012–2020) was the rise of China in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 financial crisis, which exposed the West's relative economic decline. In these circumstances, Japan attempted to assume a position of a mediator between the two poles of power, a position that we relate to Abe's political aspirations such as his quest for Japan's greater political autonomy and his appeal both to Asian identity and universal values. In certain respects, this tendency continues after Abe's resignation in 2020 as well, though whether current and future leaders of Japan will continue with his general approach is a complicated question.

We conclude by arguing for urgency of the discussion of the political ideas that mediate between the universal and the local values and identities – a task for which Abe's legacy appears to us to be particularly relevant.

Keywords: Abe Shinzō; civilizational state; foreign policy; civilizations; Japanese identity; Japan's security policy; Asian values; universal values.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares the absence of the conflict of interests.

Introduction

The policies of Abe Shinzō have been discussed thoroughly in both media and the academic literature, which is only natural considering his immense impact, as the longest-serving prime minister in the post-Meiji restoration history, on the contemporary Japanese polity and economy. The discussion of his political ideas and principles, on the other hand, has often been insufficiently sophisticated, with numerous observers resorting to simplified clichés of "nationalism" and "right-wing conservatism" to describe his vision. This tendency, of course, is not without significant exceptions:[1] e.g., Michael Green's book *Line of Advantage* presents Abe's global strategy as guided by the geopolitical logic of "the maritime framework" [Green 2022, p. 42], at the core of which lays the alliance with the U.S. to protect the liberal order from

[1] It is worth noting that Tobias Harris, drawing from various sources, lists José Ortega y Gasset, Japanese public intellectual Nishibe Susumu and, above all, Max Weber as Abe's proclaimed philosophical influences [Harris 2020, pp. 47, 49].

potential threats (first and foremost, China).[2] Green traces the line of development of Abe's strategic thinking from Meiji era's statesmen such as Sakamoto Ryōma [Green 2022, p. 11].

The aim of the following article is to present a different conceptual framework to approach Abe's global vision: the notion of a civilizational state. This notion has gained prominence since the publication of Martin Jacques' *When China Rules the World* [Jacques 2009]. In fact, Jacques himself used the term "civilization-state"[3] to describe China, a "continental-sized" nation that is "not just a nation-state" but also "a civilization" [Jacques 2009, pp. 196, 424]. In Jacques' understanding, "the civilization-state generates… a very different kind of politics from that of a conventional nation-state, with unity, rooted in the idea of civilization rather than nation, the overriding priority" [Jacques 2009, p. 201]. Jacques's idea was further developed in Zhang Weiwei's book *The China Wave*, which presents contemporary China as "the only country in the world which has amalgamated the world's longest continuous civilization with a huge modern state" [Zhang 2012, p. 2] – that is, as the "civilizational state." Zhang contrasts "civilizational state" with "civilization-state," suggesting that the latter term "reflects the tension

[2] In Green's own summary, Abe's global strategy was a strategy "focused on alignment with other maritime powers aimed at reinforcing global standards for commerce and protection of the sea lane" [Green 2022, p. 12]. There are several major objections that can be made against such characterization, such as Abe's supposed pursuit of "strategic independence" from Washington [Harris 2020, p. 301] and his attempts of "maintaining normal relations with Beijing" [Panov 2024, p. 16]. However, Green's point on the centrality of the U.S. and China for Japan's strategy [Green 2022, p. 14] is hardly debatable.

[3] Today, the terms "civilizational state" and "civilization-state" (or "civilization state") are typically used as interchangeable, with "civilizational state" being used perhaps more often. In this article, we use the term "civilizational state" without necessarily implying any meaningful difference between this usage and the wording "civilization-state" (as Zhang Weiwei does in the case considered further).

between" the concepts of civilization and nation-state, rather than their "amalgamation" [Zhang 2012, pp. 2, 53].

Nowadays, the concept of a civilizational state is increasingly popular in China, Russia, India, Turkey and other countries [Lukin 2023, p. 85]. Japan is very rarely invoked in this list, perhaps on the ground of its persistent association with the "Western" liberal camp in global politics.[4] There are, however, important reasons to consider Japan in connection to this concept, and particularly with respect to the political trajectory envisioned by Abe. Doing so, we could hopefully both contribute to the more profound understanding of the political philosophy of one of the twenty-first century's most remarkable statesmen and help better elucidate the concept itself.[5]

Japan: A Civilizational State?

One of the rare yet nonetheless important instances of Japan considered as a civilizational state is found in the article by an influential sociologist Göran Therborn, who asserts that "civilization(al)-states have recently and suddenly become a central phenomenon of international politics" [Therborn 2021, p. 226].[6] Therborn calls Japan

[4] It is very telling that Jacques in his book dedicates significant attention to Japan, comparing Japan and China's trajectories of modernization, while making a (somewhat over-generalizing) statement that Japan, in its post-World War II history, "always sought to assert its Western credentials and play down its political and cultural distinctiveness" [Jacques 2009, p. 10].

[5] The second task is particularly urgent for Russian scholarly community, as the concept of civilizational state now appears prominently in Russian strategic documents.

[6] Therborn's article provides a useful discussion of what a "nation-state" is and how exactly it relates to a "civilizational state." Importantly, though centrality of a cultural tradition is usually emphasized in connection to the

"the best example of political understanding being illuminated by the concept of civilization state," arguing that the country's successful modernization occurred through the employment of "a political system topped by something well captured by the concept of a civilizational state" [Therborn 2021, p. 238]. He specifically refers to the notion of "a unique Japanese polity (*kokutai*), centred on an emperor… in whom sovereignty resided due to his belonging to 'a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal'"[7] [Therborn 2021, p. 238].

Samuel Huntington, whose thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations" has popularized civilizational problems among observers and practitioners of international politics, also included "Japanese" civilization in his list of civilizations existing in the contemporary world (in addition, the list includes "Sinic," "Hindu," "Islamic," "Western," and "Latin American" civilizations) [Huntington 1996, pp. 45–47]. In fact, Huntington emphasizes that Japan is distinct in that it is "a civilization that is a state," while, for instance, "Sinic" civilization "transcends China as a political entity" [Huntington 1996, pp. 44–45].

In his book *Civilization, Nation and Modernity in East Asia*, Chin-yu Shih explicitly refers to Japan as a "civilization"; though he never uses the term "civilizational state" (which had not been as popular when the book came out in 2012), he invokes a similar term "civilizational nation" [Shih 2012, p. 1]. Shih suggests that the identity of modern Japan has been historically defined in reference to the West and Asia, principally represented by China, with Japan supposedly being able to mediate between these two opposing poles

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concept of civilizational state, Therborn highlights that "nation-state" is itself a culturally charged concept [Therborn 2021, p. 226].

[7] Such conception of the (post-Meiji restoration, pre-American occupation) Japanese polity is strikingly similar to the way Zhang presents China as the "longest continuous civilization" that "has a strong capability to draw on the strengths of other nations while maintaining its own identity" [Zhang 2012, pp. 2–3].

[Shih 2012, p. 2].[8] Arguing that the underlying assumptions of the Western international relations theories are insufficient to account for the complexity of today's world,[9] Shih refers to Japanese (first of all, Nishida Kitarō) and Chinese theoreticians to present an alternative vision.

In sum, there are significant reasons to consider Japan in connection to the concept of a civilizational state. Today, China has overtaken Japan as a paradigmatic example of such a state, though the reasons why China is considered in such a way – the long and distinct cultural-political tradition, the ability to accommodate modern technology and institutions while maintaining the distinct identity and modes of governance – are the same reasons why Japan was or could be considered a civilizational state on its own right. One is free to ask, of course, whether it makes sense to set Japan or China (or India, Russia, etc.) aside from a larger list of nations with rich cultural and political traditions and peculiar trajectories of modernization. Possible answers to this question would

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[8] See also [Iwabuchi 2002, pp. 53–59] for a literature survey and an argument on the ability to assimilate foreign technology and cultural elements as a persistent feature of Japan's self-identification.

[9] As Shih puts it elegantly, "mainstream international relations (IR) scholarship does not deal with human death, not to mention civilizational death, as human death is not about analysis at the state or systemic level" [Shih 2012, p. 4]. Here, he points not just to the phenomenon of death in the everyday sense of this word, but rather to the assumed disadvantages of the modern Western (e.g., Cartesian) conception of subjectivity, which risks overemphasizing one's self-sufficiency and, correspondingly, downplays the dimension of alterity related to death. As Shih phrases it elsewhere: "death of human beings" is "ontological death… to appreciate lives of seemingly no significance [in the light of death] is to respect an 'Other'" [Shih 2012, p. 100]. On the problem of subjectivity, alterity, and death, see also [Han 2021, pp. 1–14]. Finding the political subjectivity that is more fundamental than one's immediate decision-making is arguably at the core of the civilizational state discourse.

include the cultural and intellectual tradition of self-identification vis-à-vis other civilizational centers (the West and China or Asia, in Japan's case), and, importantly, size. In addition to the perceived lack of political autonomy[10] and leadership in international rules-making[11] in its post-World War II history, it is Japan's relative decline in international influence – perhaps most evidently, in terms of its share of the global economy – which accounts for Japan being less readily considered a "civilizational state" today then even in 1996, when Huntington listed it among the world's major civilizations.

It is also important to highlight that the intellectual legacy (particularly, in the field of political ideas) associated with Japan's civilizational self-identification is not merely a relic of the "imperialistic" past to be disposed of. On the contrary, this legacy grows in value and relevance, as civilizational matters come to the increasingly prominent place in global politics. For one example, the thought on civilizations of Nishida Kitarō[12] is compared favorably to Huntington's by Christopher

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[10] For an argument that seeks to make sense of the destruction of the sovereign Japanese polity in World War II (and to see it, in a way, as an event that opened up possibilities for moral and social progress) while retaining the importance of the distinctly Japanese collective identity, see [Tanabe 1986]. In our assessment, Tanabe's emphasis on Pure Land Buddhism-inspired concept of *tariki*, "Other-power" (which strongly differs from the ideas of sovereignty discussed by the proponents of the civilizational state discourse) offers rich conceptual resources to avoid the inevitability of the "clash of civilizations." This is, of course, a topic that warrants a detailed separate discussion.

[11] Cf. Zhang's claim that "one of the major characteristics of a civilizational state is its innate ability to create… international political standards" [Zhang 2012, p. 110].

[12] Although Nishida was a "pure" philosopher, IR scholar Inoguchi Takashi lists him among the three foundational thinkers in Japanese IR theory [Inoguchi 2007]. Inoguchi particularly emphasizes the importance and contemporary applicability of the ideas of Nishida as a "precursor

Goto-Jones, who argues that Nishida captures the strengths of the concept of civilization as a source of meaning and identity while minimizing the danger of political competition among civilizations accentuated by Huntington [Goto-Jones 2002].

Abe's "Civilizational State" Strategy

In the literature on Abe's leadership and public image, it is a common thread that his political approach was significantly different in his second government (2012–2020) from the first (2006–2007) one. In the words of one observer, "Abe's first term as prime minister… focused on fulfilling his conservative and revisionist political goals of 'restoring national pride,'" whereas, during the second term, "Abe embraced Abenomics and later womenomics, as branding exercises… aimed at softening his hawkish image and showing concern about the public's welfare" [Nakahara 2021, pp. 3, 11]. In the words of another scholar, Abe had lost the public approval over his first term because, while he was "focused on his revisionist agenda, the public was largely concerned with economic and social issues"; however, "as Abe returned to power… he immediately redirected his focus to reforming Japan's ailing economy," thus winning the public support [Maslow 2015, pp. 746, 748]. According to these observers, the increased prominence of economic objectives for Abe's second government was a pragmatic measure, aimed at preserving his position in power. In our view, the divorce of Abe's pursuit of revitalization of the Japanese economy (so-called "Abenomics") from his ideological goals in such analyses simplifies the situation.

The key difference in the international environment between Abe's two governments is the unfolding of the global financial crisis since 2008. The crisis had shaken the stability of the U.S.-led global (neo-)liberal

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to [constructivist] identity analysis" [Inoguchi 2007, p. 380]. Again, it is noted that, in Nishida's view, "Japanese identity emerges through a coexistence of opposites, Eastern and Western" [Inoguchi 2007, p. 379].

order and revealed the rise of the alternative poles of power (first of all, China), while also making it increasingly obvious that the resilient and dynamic economy is an indispensable pillar of international influence. The increasing tension between the U.S. and China, with the latter becoming the economic heart of the region,[13] determined the complexity of the situation which Abe navigated during his second term.

The rhetoric of "national pride," as Abe's biographer Tobias Harris explains, connects him to his grandfather, Japan's prime minister (1957–1960) Kishi Nobusuke. In Harris's words, Kishi, who aspired "to uproot the institutions that he believed had reduced Japan to a humiliating dependence on the US," was "a living symbol of the culture war" [Harris 2020, p. 19]. Giulio Pugliese also admits that Kishi's "desire to recover full autonomy for Japan as a Great Power" made him "Abe's role model" [Pugliese 2015, p. 46]. In Harris's assessment, Abe's ideological "inheritance from Kishi" includes what he calls a "vision of a 'deep Japan'" or "essential Japan," and, to illustrate this view, he quotes Abe writing: "my grandfather firmly believed that Japan, as an Asian nation, should exist as a country in which a tradition centered on the imperial household is maintained" [Harris 2020, p. 52].

Abe's main fronts of action during his second tenure included revitalizing Japan's economy, strengthening its defense capabilities, and advancing its position in the international political arena, particularly through enhancing the existing and making new alliances [Harris 2020, p. 229]. Abenomics is usually considered a moderate success, at least in its initial phase [Patalano 2020, p. 10; Harris 2020, p. 215]. When it comes to Abe's unrealized goals, the prime minister himself, as quoted by Tōgō Kazuhiko, listed the North Korea abduction issue, the revision of the constitution, and the unconcluded peace treaty with Russia – out of which, in Tōgō's assessment, the third point is the really important one, since, in the abduction issue, there was a severe "limit of what he could have done," and, in regard to the constitution, Abe "has actually made

[13] As noted in [Bu & Wu 2022, pp. 3, 5], China is the most important trading partner for every single country in East and Southeast Asia.

a fundamental change by changing the interpretation of Article 9"[14] [Tōgō 2024, pp. 34–35]. Tobias Harris calls Abe's pursuit of the peace treaty with Russia an attempt "to overcome the legacy of the Second World War" [Harris 2020, p. 302], and it can be said that these words apply to all three of Abe's self-proclaimed unfulfilled goals (if one sees the tense security situation on the Korean Peninsula ultimately as the outcome of the war).

The key features of Abe's strategy – references to the Japanese cultural-political ("imperial") tradition,[15] his quest for greater political autonomy of Japan,[16] and strengthening of the country's defensive capabilities (something of a reversal of its post-World War II trajectory) and economy – appear to us to be reasonably summed up by the concept of a civilizational state. In this connection, it should also be noted that, as Alessio Patalano observes, "Abe established a more direct link between economic policy and foreign and security policies," and Abenomics, to gain popular support, "drew in fact upon an ideological resonance with the Meiji era slogan 'rich country, strong army'" [Patalano 2020, p. 10].

Through a detailed analysis of Abe's speeches and his administration's official documents, Dmitry Streltsov uncovered

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[14] Article 9 of the constitution renounces Japan's right to wage war or maintain war potential. Its reinterpretation, proposed by Abe's administration and formally approved on the 1st of July, 2014, broadens Japan's rights for self-defense, including its capacities to aid allies. On the reinterpretation of Article 9, see [Green 2022, pp. 92–95].

[15] The views of the strand of Japanese conservatism associated with Abe have been described as a "seeming flirtation with a revival of the state Shinto" [Harris 2020, p. 53]. Again, it should be highlighted that, at the forefront of civilizational politics, is decision-making influenced by the distinct cultural traditions, typically associated with religion [Huntington 1996, p. 47; Therborn 2021, p. 230].

[16] Even in cases when his actions were not welcomed in Washington, such as his May 2016 trip to Sochi, motivated by his pursuit of peace treaty with Russia [Tōgō 2024, p. 38].

a tension between the prime minister's self-stated allegiance to "Asian values" and "universal values" [Streltsov 2019, pp. 46–47]. However, this apparent duality of thinking need not necessarily be considered a strategic weakness. On the contrary, it may indicate the conscious intention both to obtain benefits from the economic rise of Asia, driven first of all by China, and to play a role in the construction of the renewed system of global governance in a way that would not alienate Japan's Western allies. The rise of China as an economic juggernaut and a politically assertive power has re-actualized the situation familiar for the Japanese strategic thought, with its proclivity to balance between "Asia" and the "West." On the one hand, Abe pursued a "[democratic] value-based diplomacy" which corresponded to strengthening Japan's defensive capacities, supposedly to counter the nations opposed to "democratic values," and thus effectively achieved the same objectives as desired by those whom Junghwan Lee calls Japanese "historical revisionists" [Lee 2024, p. 189]. On the other, he carefully balanced between the U.S. and China, defying certain politicians' "appetite for a new Cold War" and exploring "new forms of political, economic, and financial cooperation" with Beijing, as signified, for instance, by negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership [Harris 2020, p. 300].

Such mediation between Asia, which emerges today as not only an economic but also a political powerhouse, and the "West" – a traditional aspect of Japan's civilizational self-identification – need not necessarily express itself in pre-World War II formulas like "Japanese spirit, Western technology" (*wakon yosai*). It is expressed, for instance, in the way Japan handles its investment and development aid in Asian countries. As Kanti Bajpai and Evan Laksmana put it, "Japan refuses to endorse liberal democracy as an exclusionary principle in order-building": when "Tokyo provides developmental aid and capacity-building," "it does not seek to condemn and punish" (for the supposed deviations from liberal democracy and related socio-cultural values) [Bajpai & Laksmana 2023, p. 1375]. This approach makes Japan a particularly reliable partner for Southeast Asian countries, where it

is seen as a "vital hedge against rival powers."[17] Abe's lasting role in Japan's positioning as a mediator between Southeast Asia and the global institutions is vividly exemplified by him launching the Southeast Asia Regional Program (SEARP) in 2014, aimed at "support of Southeast Asia's national priorities, policy reforms, and regional integration" and "strengthening relations between the OECD and ASEAN through policy dialogue, where Japan has acted as a bridge."[18]

Japan's Civilizational Course After Abe

Whether Japan would continue with what we called Abe's "civilizational state" strategy, characterized by the quest for greater autonomy and assertiveness on the global arena and a complicated mediation between the global and the regional identities, is difficult to access, as the nation's political future is today decided through a heated domestic competition[19] and in turbulent international circumstances. However, here we intend to make several remarks on the ways Tokyo's recent and possible future steps relate to the global vision laid out by Abe.

First, Abe consolidated the prime minister's executive and legislative power, leaving for his successors "powerful instruments" [Green 2022, p. 217] to control bureaucracy and policy-making. Among other measures, he established National Security Council "that would enable the prime

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17 Japan is a cuddlier friend to South-East Asia than America or China. *The Economist*, 14.12.2023. https://www.economist.com/asia/2023/12/14/japan-is-a-cuddlier-friend-to-south-east-asia-than-america-or-china.

18 Sukegawa, S. Japan as a Bridge Between ASEAN and the OECD. *The Diplomat*, 20.06.2024. https://www.thediplomat.com/2024/06/japan-as-a-bridge-between-asean-and-the-oecd.

19 That the public approval rate of the ruling LDP declined to the record-low levels in early 2024, eventually leading Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to resign, indicates that today's Japan is far from the degree of political stability characteristic for Abe's second tenure.

minister to command foreign policymaking" [Harris 2020, p. 212], made the Prime Minister's Office (*Kantei*) "the command centre for… foreign and security policy" and created the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs to oversee the appointment of top bureaucrats [Patalano 2020, pp. 9–10]. In this regard, Abe's legacy will continue to define Tokyo's future actions, though the way this relates to the "civilizational" aspect of politics is highly ambiguous: the centralized power he acquired under the banners of revitalizing Japan and making it more independent and conscious of local traditions could just as well be used to advance the agenda of the global neoliberal institutions and interest groups.[20]

Second, the Abe era's pursuit of economic revitalization and military capacity-building has evolved and reached a new quality with the development of the new economic security strategy, formally adopted in 2022 through the Economic Security Promotion Act and the updated National Security Strategy, which dedicates significant attention to the economic matters. This trend means that Abe's strategy of balancing between the political alliance with the U.S. and the beneficial economic relations with China is becoming less viable, as the economy is increasingly approached through the lens of military and geopolitical competition,[21]

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[20] On the seemingly paradoxical possibility of symbiosis between liberal internationalism and statism or nationalism, see [Deneen 2018, pp. 43–90]. Deneen's communitarian perspective unites what is usually thought of today as political left and right under one umbrella term "liberalism," though a term "capitalism" (with either private owners or state leadership as the primary capitalists) could be used just as well. Note in this connection Therborn's observation that many of today's conflicts supposedly engendered by cultural or "civilizational" factors are in fact motivated by geopolitical or economic reasons [Therborn 2021, pp. 238, 240].

[21] Consider, for instance, an argument by the government of Japan's adviser on economic security Suzuki Kazuto: today, civil commercial activities generate data that can be used to train artificial intelligence with possible military applications, which is why civil technology (particularly, information technology) must be considered a security factor [Suzuki 2021, p. 5].

and, at the same time, that the state apparatus expands its control over the economy, and thus its own power.

Last but not the least, Abe's active diplomacy and efforts to advance Japan's international presence (particularly, in Asia) also enhance the possibilities of his successors, who would likely maintain the positioning of Japan as a mediator or a bridge between Asia and the "West," between the developing and the developed world. For one example, in May 2024, Prime Minister Kishida, building upon SEARP, initiated by Abe, initiated the Japan OECD-ASEAN Partnership Program (JOAPP), aimed at promoting OECD's economic standards in Southeast Asia.[22]

After all, the future will decide whether Abe's legacy (including the increased capacities for Japan's military forces and defense industry) will be used to expand Japan's strategic options and its impact as a mediator between the various political and civilizational poles or to fuel the tension between the "liberal" and the "revisionist" camps. In any case, Japan has to respond to the increasingly complicated and conflict-ridden international environment, with pressures and difficult choices it presents.

Conclusion

Culture and civilization are nowadays increasingly understood as a decisive factor in international affairs. In this connection, it is useful to consider the case of Japan – in some assessments, historically the paradigmatic "civilizational state" – and to examine its relevance for today's advance of civilizational politics. As we attempted to demonstrate, the policies of Abe Shinzō can be reasonably related to this global trend.

As virtually any economic transaction generates such behavioral data, it is possible to expand security considerations limitlessly, to any sector of the economy of an "unfriendly" country.

[22] Sukegawa, S. Japan as a Bridge Between ASEAN and the OECD. *The Diplomat*, 20.06.2024. https://www.thediplomat.com/2024/06/japan-as-a-bridge-between-asean-and-the-oecd.

Samuel Huntington's influential book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* suggests that the rise of civilizations as a factor of global politics will be marked by "often… antagonistic" "relations between states and groups from different civilizations," with "the dominant division" laying "between 'the West and the rest'" [Huntington 1996, p. 183]. This vision of a sort of a new Cold War between the formerly dominant Western civilization and the emerging challengers is based on the assumption that the "values of democracy, free markets, limited government, human rights, individualism, the rule of law" are characteristically Western,[23] and any attempt to promote them as universal shall provoke "in non-Western cultures" reactions ranging "from widespread skepticism to intense opposition" [Huntington 1996, pp. 183–184]. However, the idea that the values of civility and rule of law, and capacity for universal thinking belong exclusively to the "West" is highly dubious. In particular, Japan has traditionally defined itself as a mediator between the Western modernity and the Asian societies – a truly universal vision, one that is particularly relevant today, as the activity of such mediators is necessary for the world not to plunge into the division between the two antagonistic camps. To uncover the ways of thinking that responsibly address the global challenges while accommodating the local and traditional sources of meaning and community is the task that, in our view, is urgent in Japan and elsewhere.[24]

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[23] It is easy to notice that this list in fact contains values that hardly define the contemporary West. In the era of neo-protectionism, "free markets" and "limited government" appear particularly irrelevant.

[24] As Thorsten Botz-Bornstein notes in his comparative study of the thought of Nishida Kitarō and Russian philosopher Semyon Frank (who both, in his assessment, cut through the "dichotomy of reasoning against feeling, of the rational against the familiar, of the modern against the archaic"): "it is… more important to think about… the formation of human communities dependent on the contact with the 'outer' world… than to define 'civilizations' as self-sufficient and egocentric entities" [Botz-Bornstein 2013, p. 1567–1568].

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The Evolution of Cultural Transfer: The Dialectic of "Self" and "Other". Review of the Collective Monograph "*Japanese Culture in the West*" ed. by Katasonova, E.L. and Dolin, A.A

N. N. Izotova

Abstract

The article presents an overview of the collective monograph "Japanese Culture in the West" ed. by Katasonova, E. L. and Dolin, A. A (Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of RAS, 2024. 544 p. ISBN: 978-5-907846-81-4). The monograph, for the first time in the history of Russian Oriental studies, presents a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the spread and influence of Japanese culture on the countries of Europe and America in the 19th – 21st centuries. The reviewer notes that analyzing the experience of "exporting Japanese culture" makes it possible to develop a methodology for transcultural processes, broaden the concepts of cultural authenticity and identity, and propose an alternative to binary models of cultural interaction.

Keywords: Japan, influence, culture, West, *japonisme,* spread.

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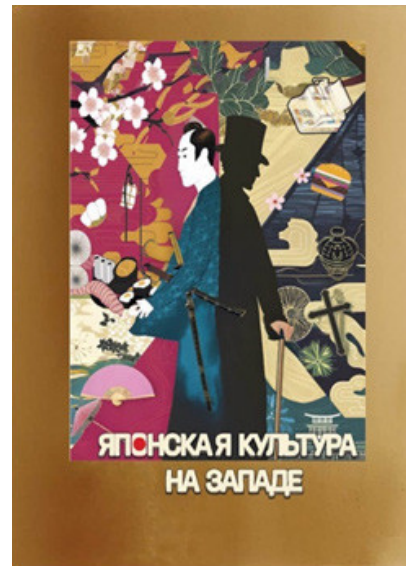
Conflict of interests
The author declares the absence of the conflict of interests.



The phenomenon of cultural otherness and the mutual reflections that arise from it constitute the semantic core of any intercultural dialogue. The classical East-West dichotomy has for centuries been one of the key paradigms in understanding global cultural processes. Perceptions associated with East and West, often reduced to a set of binary oppositions: progress vs. tradition, collective vs. individual, spiritual vs. material, rationalism vs. mysticism, etc., form established cultural stereotypes. Ideas about the complete incommensurability of the values of the West and the East, as well as the illusions of creating a Western-Eastern synthesis based on the notion of the universality of the Western socio-cultural model, cannot provide the basis for a full-fledged inter-civilizational dialogue. The experience of cultural interaction between Japan and Western countries, which has a long and rich history, represents one of the most representative models for studying the mechanisms of intercultural communication.

The collective monograph “Japanese Culture in the West” edited by leading Russian Japanologists, Elena Leonidovna Katasonova, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Head of the Center for Japanese

Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Aleksandr Arkadyevich Dolin, writer, poet, translator of classical and modern Japanese poetry and prose, professor at the School of Oriental Studies at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, is a fundamental study that, for the first time in the history of Russian Oriental studies, offers a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the spread and influence of Japanese culture on the countries of Europe and America in the 19th – 21st centuries.

The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that the era of globalization, characterized by an unprecedented speed and scale of communications, migration, and information exchange, has turned the world into a complex interconnected system. In this context, the mutual influence of cultures, which is a complex, dynamic, and contradictory process, has reached a fundamentally qualitative level. The world is moving not towards the creation of a single "global culture," but towards the formation of a complex mosaic in which the global and the local continually interact. The work was published at a time when the phenomenon of cultural globalization requires not just a statement of the facts of reception, transformation, and adaptation, but their deep, systemic understanding.

The authors pursue an ambitious goal: to analyze the "three waves" of cultural export from Japan to Europe and the United States; to examine the influence of the "Japanese style" on fine arts, architecture, literature, theatre, cinema, fashion, martial arts, sports, landscape architecture, and popular culture; to identify the historical stages, dynamics, and diversity of forms of cultural transfer. "For over a century and a half, the fashion for Japanese art has been one of the most important trends in Western culture. Its emblematic image is the famous engraving *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai. But how could it happen that this image, created by a Japanese artist for his compatriots many years ago, sank so deeply into the hearts of Europeans? The explanation may lie in the waves of influence of Japanese culture that have swept across the world more than once over the past century and a half," E. L. Katasonova and A. A. Dolin note in the preface of the monograph (p. 7).

It should be noted that the Japanese experience demonstrates unique strategies for preserving national identity while simultaneously actively participating in the formation of a global cultural code. At the same time, E. L. Katasonova and A. A. Dolin raise a question that is significant not only for Oriental studies but also for the contemporary humanities discourse – a unified space for reflection on human experience in all its complexity and multifacetedness: has Japan become truly understandable to the West?

In our opinion, the collective monograph under consideration goes beyond narrow professional boundaries and addresses fundamental problems of intercultural communication, which are necessary for understanding cultural dynamics in a globalizing world. The authors convincingly demonstrate that Japan's cultural dialogue with Western countries is a model case of transculturation – a process in which cultural elements are not simply borrowed but creatively reinterpreted, generating new hybrid forms and aesthetic systems that are not reducible to the original cultures. An analysis of Japan's experience of cultural interaction allows us to develop a methodology for transcultural processes, expand the concepts of cultural authenticity and identity, and offer an alternative to binary models of cultural interaction. "Export of Japanese culture" demonstrates that transculturation is not a fusion of cultures, but a process of giving birth to new cultural configurations that retain the memory of their origins but acquire their own logic of development.

The uniqueness of the monograph "Japanese Culture in the West" is largely determined by the thoughtful composition of the authors' team, which brought together masters of Russian Japanese studies and promising young researchers. This approach creates a multi-layered analysis, with each topic examined from a historical perspective through the lens of modern research methods. The monograph's literary merits are highly commendable. The choice of a lively language and of the format of popular science essays, accompanied by colorful illustrations, creates a dialogue with the reader. Each chapter represents a complete intellectual journey into a specific topic. The reader can begin their acquaintance with the monograph with any essay that corresponds

to their interests. The combination of analysis and narrative – cultural processes are presented as fascinating stories – not only expands the potential audience, but also becomes a substantive element of the research.

The structure of the monograph represents a well-thought-out system that combines chronological, thematic, and problematic principles of organizing the material. This approach makes it possible to examine the phenomenon of cultural interaction in its historical dynamics, without losing sight of the specifics of individual areas and cross-cutting theoretical problems. The book consists of four extensive sections, comprising fifteen chapters. The preface to the collective monograph, written by E. L. Katasonova and A. A. Dolin, plays a key role in shaping the conceptual framework of the entire study. This is not a formal introduction, but a methodological statement, setting the tone and frame of reference for the subsequent research.

The "East and West" section recounts the first Great Wave of "Japanese cultural export" to the West in the 19th century, when Europe was gripped by a veritable Japanese boom. The widespread and profound influence of Japanese art and aesthetics on Western culture gave rise to a powerful aesthetic movement known by the French term *japonisme*. *Japonisme* had a significant influence on the development of Western art and culture in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the first chapter, V.E. Molodyakov, drawing on a wide range of sources and scientific research literature, presents a deep, detailed analysis of the content and evolution of the main approaches to the interpretation and study of this concept in Europe, America, and Japan. Initially, *japonisme* meant a passion and fashion for Japan; then it encompassed Japanese motifs in European and American literature and art, and the study and assimilation of the artistic practice of Japanese masters (p. 22). V. E. Molodyakov rightly points out the need for a "synthetic description of *japonisme* as an original, albeit particular, phenomenon of artistic culture, aesthetics, and literature of European and American modernism, which has long since transcended national boundaries" (p. 34).

In the second chapter, E.S. Shteiner explores the phenomenon of Orientalism as a mechanism of constructing the "Other" in Western consciousness. The author presents a philosophical and cultural analysis of the aesthetic and ideological paradoxicality of perception of Japanese art, which balanced between the categories of ugliness, beauty, and exoticism. E.S. Shteiner views Orientalism as "the process of turning the West into a less Western world," "successive and increasingly accelerating stages of expansion (destruction and at the same time nourishment) of the European cultural paradigm" (p. 56).

The third chapter (by A. V. Gudkova) contains a biographical overview of the activities of famous Japanologists of the 19th and 20th centuries who "discovered Japan" for the Old World. The emphasis in this chapter is on the study of the influence of Western Japanologists, who shaped the mass perception of Japan in Europe and the United States, on Japanese studies in modern times from the point of view of modern historiography. The second section of the monograph, "All Shades of Japonisme," consists of four essays. In the first chapter, A. A. Dolin traces the main stages of the reception and adaptation of *haiku* in the West in the first decades of the 20th century. Japanese three-line *haiku* poems have long held a special place, being, in fact, the only poetic genre that unites lovers of suggestive lyricism on all continents. A. A. Dolin notes that "*haiku* has evolved from an endogenous Japanese genre of Zen poetry into a unique transnational genre, only indirectly connected to Japanese soil and forming a vast audience that unites hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts, thereby undoubtedly facilitating the convergence of Eastern and Western cultures" (p. 171).

The second chapter (by A. V. Bakina) deals with the influence of Japanese style and aesthetics on European fashion. The author reveals the mechanisms of adaptation of Eastern forms in Western design, analyzes the factors that influenced the growing demand for Japanese goods (literature and theater), and explores the phases of reception of Eastern motifs in fashion. While in the 1860s, traditional Japanese clothing was perceived as a symbol of geisha and samurai, by the 1890s, leading fashion houses and major designers began to actively work

with Japanese symbols in the Art Nouveau style. In the early 20th century, the influence of Japanese costume on fashion begins to be expressed not so much as a set of established symbols and motifs, but as a new constructive form (p. 189).

The third chapter (by N. F. Klobukova (Golubinskaya)) attempts to analyze Japanese influence on Western European musical culture. The author demonstrates that the fashion for Japanese musical aesthetics reached Europe relatively late and was initially limited to Japanese plots in operettas and operas. However, "...with the gradual penetration into the hidden depths of the Japanese musical tradition, a whole world opened up to composers and listeners...in which the West and Japan together create beautiful works of musical art" (p. 208).

The fourth chapter (by T. N. Matrusova) examines the spread and adaptation of Japanese garden art beyond Japan from the mid-19th century to the present day. The origins of this phenomenon are linked to the growing interest in Japanese culture and aesthetics, particularly Zen Buddhism. The author examines the factors of the spread, the evolution of the Japanese garden's image, and the current state of this phenomenon. T. N. Matrusova characterizes "non-Japanese Japanese gardens" not as unsuccessful copies, but as an independent cultural phenomenon "not so much of Japanese as of global culture," "a form of a dialogue of cultures" (p. 250).

The second section of the monograph, "The Post-War Boom," analyzes the second Great Wave of "Japanese cultural export" to the West after World War II in the 1950s and 1960s. E. L. Katasonova's article is devoted to the history and development of Japanese cinema. The author notes that the West's acquaintance with Japanese cinema began in the 1950s, when Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon* won the Golden Lion prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, marking a significant milestone in the recognition of Japanese cinema worldwide. On the cusp of the 20th and 21st centuries, the world learned the names of Takeshi Kitano, Naomi Kawase, Hirokazu Koreeda, and other masters who are now considered representatives of the new Japanese cinema. E. L. Katasonova identifies the influence of Japanese film festivals

on the formation of Japan's image in world culture and their significance for the promotion of contemporary Japanese cinema, emphasizing the importance of new directorial voices and their contribution to the development of world cinema.

The second chapter is also written by E. L. Katasonova. The essay describes how the Japanese became familiar with European clothing and highlights the most important moments in the biography and work of the outstanding Japanese fashion designers Hanae Mori, Kenzo Takada, Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto, and Kawakubo Rei, analyzing their influence on the development of Western fashion. This was not just a new trend, but a paradigm shift: rejection of traditional cuts, silhouettes, and concepts of luxury in favour of new forms based on Japanese aesthetics. "...it is the Japanese, with their particularly subtle vision of the world, their caring attitude towards the environment, their amazing ability to combine traditions and modernity, the national and the borrowed from other cultures, and their sense of the subtle connection between the past, present, and future, who will continue to actively influence the development of world fashion in the 21st century," notes E. L. Katasonova (p. 335).

The third chapter (by A. A. Shangin) presents a review of Japanese literature from the mid-1960s to the present. The author analyzes the works of literary classics Yukio Mishima, Kobo Abe, Yasunari Kawabata, Kenzaburo Oe, and others. Special emphasis is placed on the "new wave" branch of postmodernism, represented by the works of Haruki Murakami, Banana Yoshimoto, Yoko Tawada, and others; the work of detective writers – Edogawa Rampo, Yokomizo Seishi, Akimitsu Takaji, Shimada Soji, and others – is studied.

The fourth chapter, written by A. G. Shekhter, talks about the spread and peculiarities of perception and institutionalization of Zen Buddhism in the USA in the first half of the 20th century.

The fifth chapter (by A. A. Dolin and N. E. Rudakov) is devoted to the West's introduction to Oriental martial arts. It examines the history of the spread of *budo* martial arts to the West and analyzes the reasons for their popularity in literature, cinema, and television. The authors

emphasize that "on the path to big-time sports, traditional martial arts undergo transformation, are modified, and most often lose their original spiritual component" (p. 424). The emergence and development of full-contact martial arts, such as MMA, kudo, kickboxing, etc., raises the question of the balance between the effectiveness of sport combat and the preservation of the ethical traditions of Oriental martial arts.

The fourth and final section of the monograph, "Pop Culture in Virtual Worlds," talks about the third Great Wave of Japanese culture. According to the researchers, the third wave of Japanese cultural exports is no longer a spontaneous fad that arose by chance, but a product of the country's clearly planned cultural policy, a new, primarily pop-cultural concept that began to be developed and implemented in the early 21st century (p. 18). This wave is covered in the essays by L. Sh. Kulieva, A. T. Ratnichkin, and G. B. Dutkina.

L. Sh. Kulieva examines the influence of Japanese video games on American popular culture. She describes the key stages of the Japanese video game industry's development from the mid-1960s to the present day, the spread of video games in the United States, and analyzes the interaction between video games and cinema, animation, and the reflection of video games in fan art. All these processes are part of the global convergence of cultures.

The chapter written by A. T. Ratnichkin analyzes Japan's successful "cultural export," which has shaped a certain image of the country in the minds of millions of people around the world. Anime is not just a subculture, but a transmedia phenomenon, a full-fledged and influential part of the 21st-century global mainstream – pop culture. The author explores the history of anime's introduction, the transformation of the perception of anime in the United States, and its influence on various fields of culture, media, and the IT industry.

In the final essay, G. B. Dutkina discusses Japanese *yokai* demons – "the treasured key to the nation's cultural code, helping the Japanese understand their cultural identity" (p. 506). G.B. Dutkina traces the migration routes of *yokai* to the West, identifying the origins, content, and characteristics of the *kaidan* genre in the era of globalization.

Focus is made on the expansion of Japanese horror films (J-horror) into the global market.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the phenomenon of Japanese culture's popularity in the West is not just another cultural trend, but a multifaceted dialogue that goes beyond simple borrowing. As the reviewed work convincingly demonstrates, the West not only consumes cultural phenomena but also "recodes" them to suit its own needs, creating unique hybrid forms. This process is undoubtedly accompanied by commercialization, which reduces the richness of traditions to a set of stereotypical brands. The key merit of this work is its departure from simplistic interpretations: the authors avoid idealizing or devaluing the phenomenon of "Japanese cultural export." The interpenetration of cultures is proving fruitful: the West is discovering new forms of creativity and self-expression, while Japan is strengthening its status as a global "soft power." Thus, the dialogue continues, and its results will shape the cultural landscape of the post-industrial world for many years to come.

References

Katasonova E. L., Dolin A. A. (eds.). (2024). *Yaponskaya kul'tura na Zapade* [Japanese Culture in the West]. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of RAS. (In Russian). ISBN: 978-5-907846-81-4.

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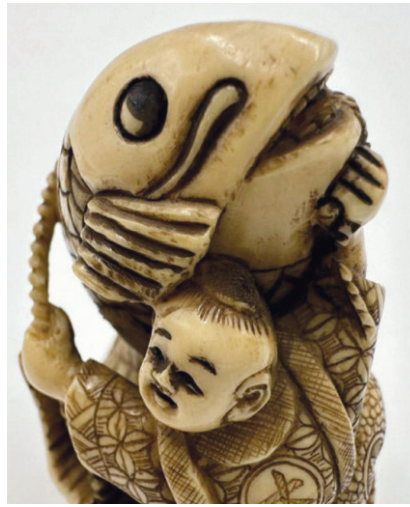

Figure 1. Netsuke. Ivory. A boy with a huge fish. Japan

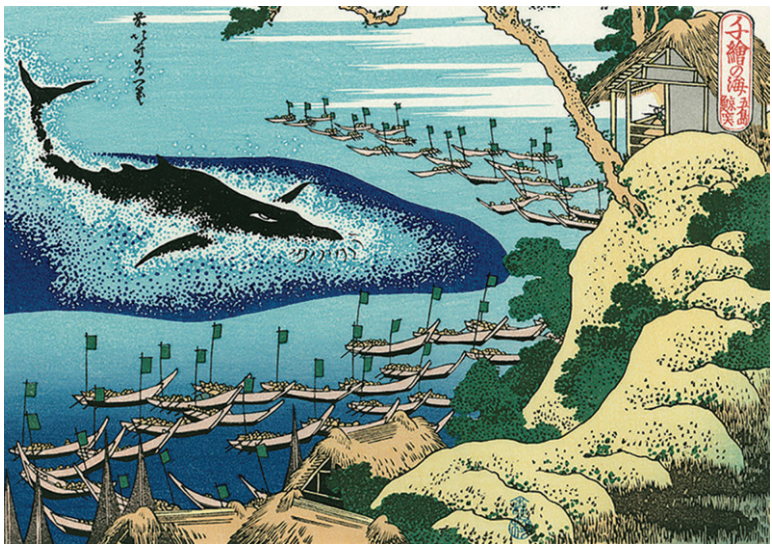

Figure 2. Katsushika Hokusai. Whaling in the Goto Islands.
Woodblock print. 1831–1833

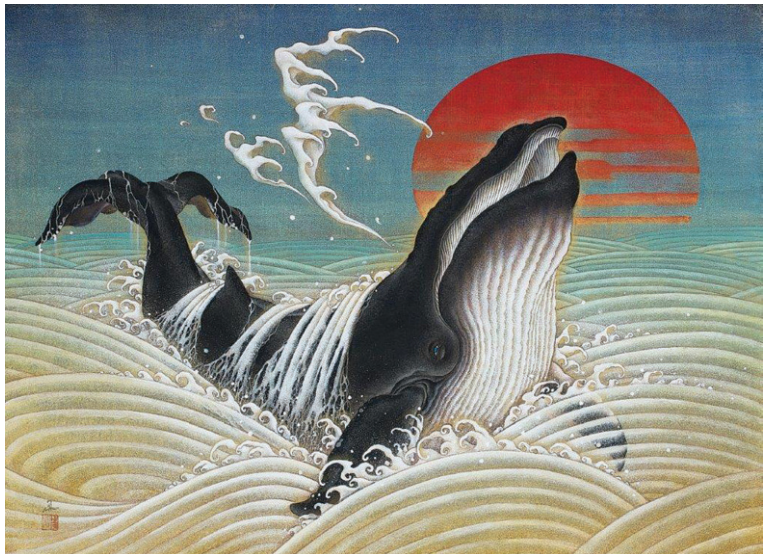

Figure 3. Shiozaki Ken. A Whale and the Sun. Modern print

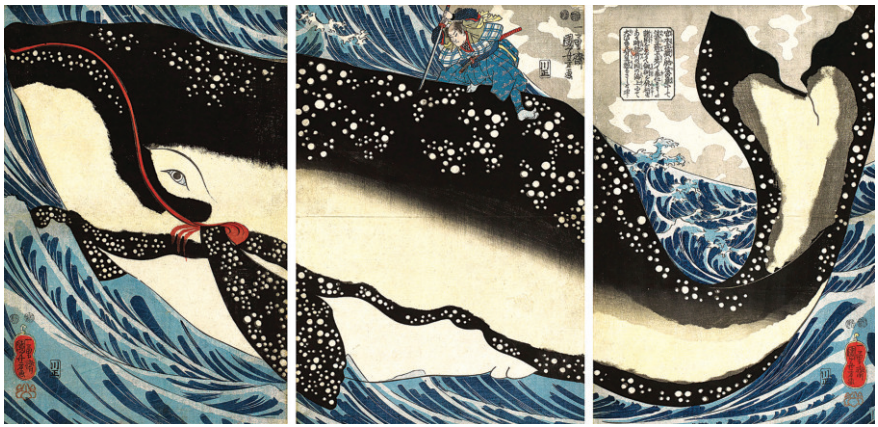

Figure 4. Utagawa Kuniyoshi. Legendary Warrior Miyamoto Musashi Is Fighting a Huge Whale. Three-part woodblock print. 1847–1850

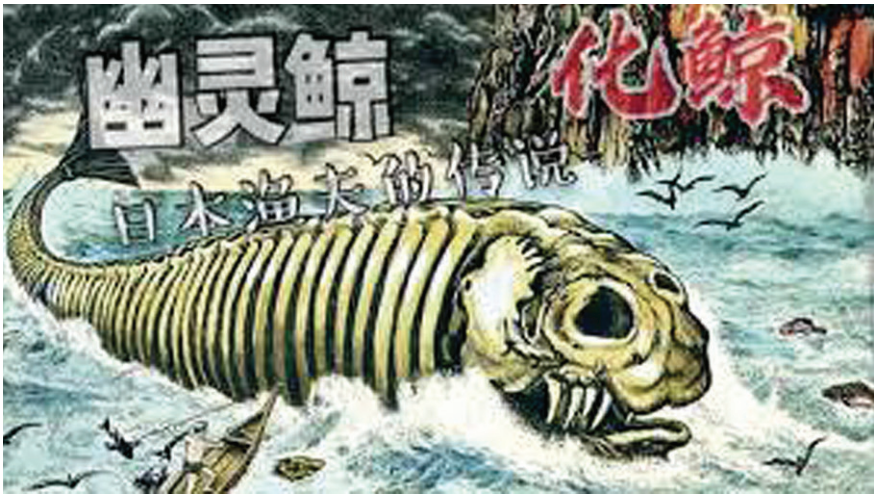

Figure 5. Were-whale, or Bone Whale. Modern print.

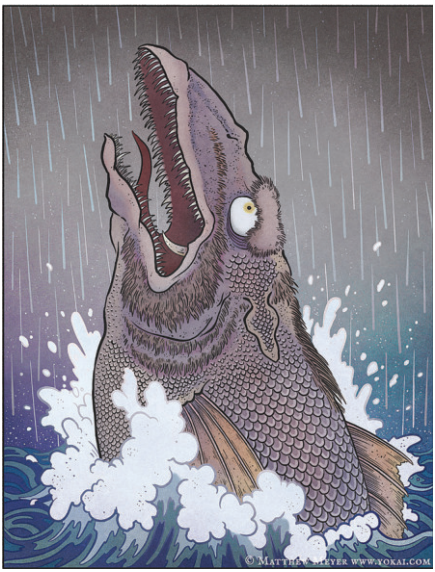

Figure 6. Evil Fish Akuru, or Akugyo. Woodblock print.
Tokugawa period

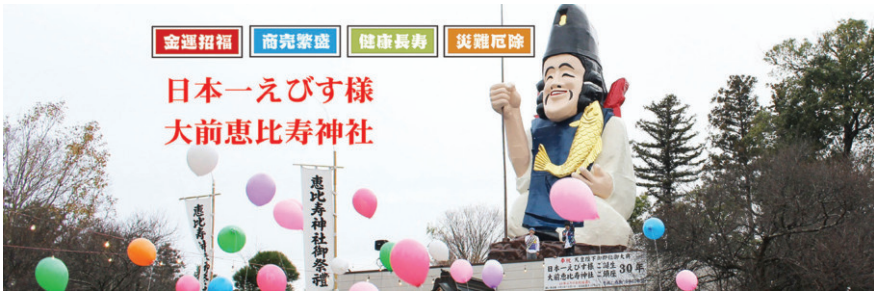

Figure 7. God Ebisu at Nishinomiya Shrine. Modern sculpture

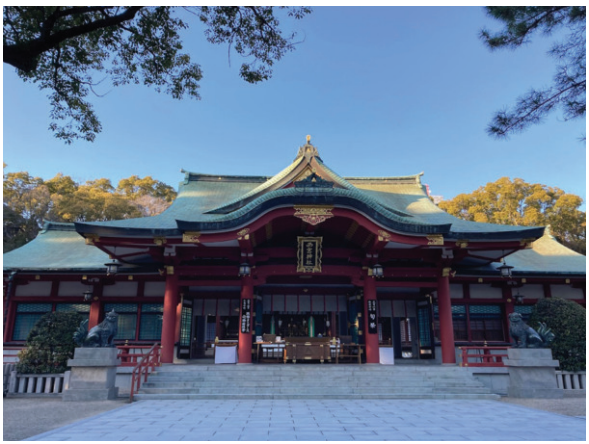

Figure 8. Nishinomiya Shrine in Hyogo Prefecture. Built in 1663. Head shrine of god Ebisu

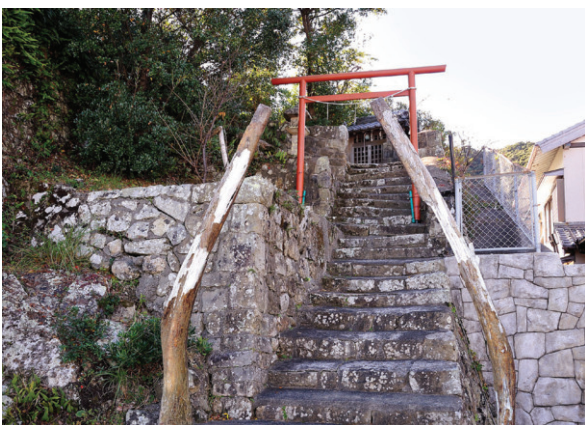

Figure 9. Ebisu shrine. The stairway railings and the red gate are made from whale bones

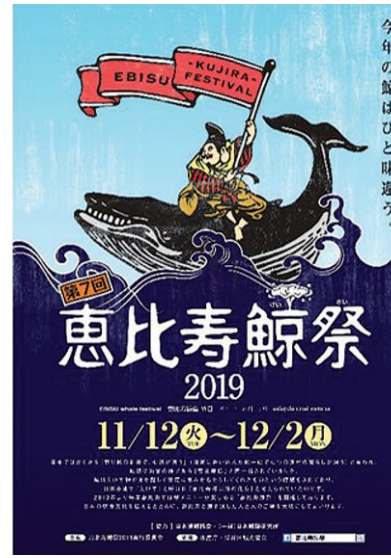

Figure 10. Modern poster for Whale Festival – Kujira Matsuri

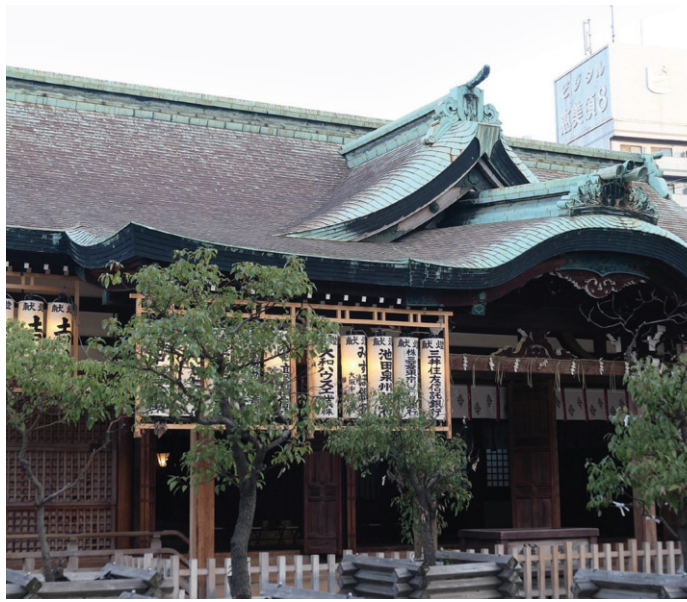

Figure 11. Imamiya Ebisu Shrine in Osaka City. Contemporary photo

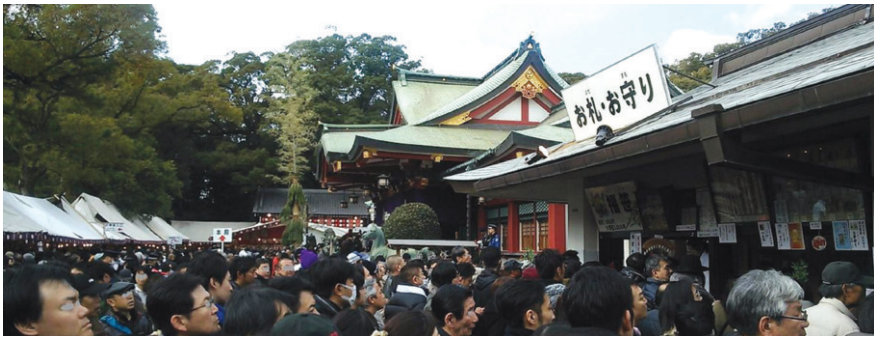

Figure 12. Ebisu Festival at Imamiya Shrine. Contemporary photo

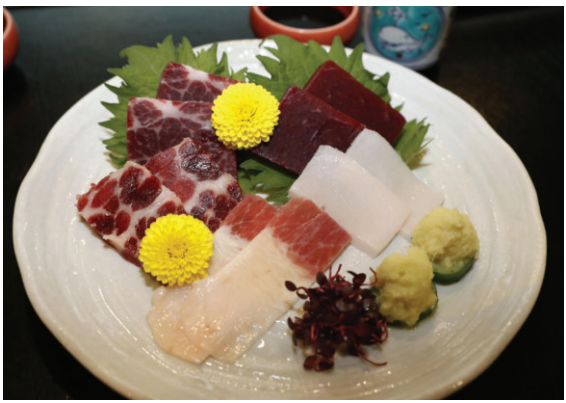

Figure 13.
A dish from whale meat

Figure 14.
Cape Split by God.
Landscape
from the legend.
Contemporary photo

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