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The Ambivalent Relationship of Japan's Soft Power Diplomacy and *Princess Mononoke*: Tosaka Jun's philosophy of culture as moral reflection

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Abstract

Culture is a demanding word, particularly when it is used in the context of the contemporary academic discipline of international relations (IR). It is often employed in order to distinguish one identity from another, allegedly illuminating idiosyncrasies embedded in a particular society or group of people. The essentialized understanding of culture is also detectable in the case of the current debate on the non-Western international relations theories (IRT). Non-Western politicians and scholars often employ the term culture in order to distinguish their values from alleged Western values. However, culture has another important function mainly advanced by a left-wing Kyoto School philosopher Tosaka Jun, that is, culture as a mirror for critical reflection for morality (Tosaka, 1966). This article is based on Tosaka's argument that culture has an important function for moral reflection beyond that of a mere means to identify one's distinctiveness from the West, and it criticizes Japan's soft power diplomacy or the total absence of it from that point of view. It also argues that this absence is the result of the soft power discourse's over-simplified interpretation of culture that results in confrontation between the West and the rest, particularly when it is employed in non-Western IRT discourses. Towards the end, I examine Miyazaki Hayao's films, *Princes Mononoke* in particular, as examples of cultural works facilitating a moment of critical reflection, and I extract embedded messages of relevance to critical reflection on contemporary IR literature, particularly non-Western literature.

Introduction

Culture is a demanding word, particularly when it is used in the context of the contemporary academic discipline of international relations (IR). It is often

employed in order to distinguish one identity from another, allegedly illuminating idiosyncrasies embedded in a particular society or group of people. Despite the warnings of anthropologists and cultural studies specialists that culture is unfixed and transforming, thus relative, it is often narrated in an essentialized and fixed way to reproduce cultural hegemony domestically and internationally. Thus, the concept of culture is often used and abused by the powerful in order to legitimize their dominance (Gramsci, 1971). The essentialized understanding of culture is also detectable in the case of the current debate on the non-Western international relations theories (IRT). Non-Western politicians and scholars often employ the term culture in order to distinguish their values from alleged Western values.

Culture is discussed mostly in terms of 'soft power' in contemporary IR. Joseph Nye Jr. initiated the expansion of this idea in IR. Soft power relates to a state's ability to achieve its goals through cultural attraction as opposed to physical, economic, or psychological coercion; it is now widely known to IR scholars as a concept of power of the new millennium (Nye, 1990, 2004). Interestingly, the terms soft power and cultural diplomacy now seem to be attracting more attention from non-Western IR scholars and practitioners than those in the English-speaking world (e.g. Acharya and Buzan, 2010). This is particularly true of Japan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan has promoted it extensively in recent years. There have also been numerous books and articles published either supporting or criticizing the efficacy of soft power in the real world, and the debate is now attracting an audience beyond the IR academic community. Indeed, a considerable number of books dealing with soft power politics and associated foreign relations issues – such as the Japan–US alliance, foreign policies, international society, globalization, and Japan/West relations in general – have been written not merely by Japanese IR scholars but also by anthropologists, historians, and economists (Takenaka, 1999; Neki, 2001, 2010; Matsumura, 2002; Aoki, 2003; Hirano, 2005; Iwabuchi, 2007; Kondo, 2008; Otmazgin, 2008; Heng, 2010; Katsumata, 2012).

However, culture has another important function, advanced primarily by the left-wing Kyoto School philosopher Tosaka Jun, as a mirror for critical reflection on morality (Tosaka, 1966). His interpretation of culture is sophisticated and informative, but other Japanese intellectuals have long ignored this aspect of culture. In fact, most authors of soft power politics mentioned earlier have failed to advance critical conceptualizations of contemporary world affairs using the concept of culture. They argue, rather simply, that Japan's soft power is distinctive in its cultural background and originality of form, comparable only with the West, the only reference point for non-Western narratives.

This article is based on Tosaka's argument that culture has an important function for moral reflection beyond that of a mere means to identify one's distinctiveness from the West, and it criticizes Japan's soft power diplomacy, or the total absence of it, from that perspective. It also argues that this absence is the result of the soft power discourse's over-simplified interpretation of culture, which results in confrontation between the

West and the rest, particularly when it is employed in non-Western IRT discourses. In order to achieve these goals, the first section gives an overview of Japan's contemporary soft power politics and diplomacy. The second section focuses on the lack of moral principles in this policy and explains its causes by comparing it with the conservative Kyoto School philosophers' cultural politics in the interwar period. The third section explains the cultural theory of Tosaka Jun, a left-wing Kyoto School philosopher, and applies it to the context of soft power politics. Lastly, I examine Miyazaki Hayao's films, *Princess Mononoke* in particular, as examples of cultural works facilitating a moment of critical reflection, and I extract embedded messages of relevance to critical reflection on contemporary IR literature, particularly non-Western literature.

Culture as power in the interpretation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

As noted earlier, Japan has maintained a sense of cultural distinctiveness. This distinctiveness allegedly derives from historical circumstances; Japan developed certain idiosyncrasies during its 250 years as an isolated and independent nation in the Tokugawa Era. One residual effect apparent today is the continuation of the Emperor System, which dates back to the inception of the nation and became the cornerstone of Japanese culture (Nishida, 1950). The formal originality of Japan's pop-culture, such as the *manga* (cartoons) and *anime* (animation films) artistic genres, is profoundly influenced by traditional styles of art in Japan, such as *emakimono* (Kondo and Takemura, 2010: 76; Miyazaki, 1996: 129). Japan's purported distinctive traditional and popular cultures represent a great opportunity for scholars and the government to increase their presence in the world, and they have attempted to incorporate the concept into Japanese foreign policy – soft power. Soft power has therefore been inextricably linked with the promotion of national self-identity, which Iwabuchi calls 'brand nationalism', in which culture is employed to enhance the political and economic 'brand image' of the country (Iwabuchi, 2007: 22).

Brand nationalism has grown to dominate the contemporary political landscape in Japan. It not only promotes and reinforces Japan's presence internationally, but also fosters the domestic ideal of a 'good Japanese' person – namely, one who is nature-loving and eco-conscious – on the alleged basis of a Japanese heritage that values nature and peace. Brand nationalism has also been used to configure Japan's political economy; for example, the Japanese auto industry's hybrid car production and the electronic industry's efficient electric appliances are now perceived as products of the inherent Japanese national character. A 'good Japanese' is also portrayed as a peace-loving figure who follows traditional wisdom and conventions and who knows what is right and what is wrong. This wisdom allegedly comes not from the rationalist universalism espoused by the Western tradition but from knowledge rooted in the traditional and particularly non-rational ways of life inherited from Japan's past (Iwabuchi, 2007).

Japan has turned its eyes towards soft power because of its lack of self-confidence in international politics. Japanese reactions to the Western mass media's judgement of

Japan's contribution to the first Gulf War illustrate this lack of confidence. When the Gulf War broke out in 1991, Japan decided to support the US-led coalition force through an 'international contribution' of US\$13 billion, despite criticism from politicians, intellectuals, media pundits, and ordinary citizens. However, because of its reluctance to send personnel in addition to funds, Japan was dubbed a 'loser of the war' by Western mass media in the post-war years, which traumatized Japanese right-wing politicians and intellectuals. Since then, one of the main goals of the Japanese government and conservative scholars has been to achieve an 'honourable status' in the international community and thereby expunge some of the country's painful memories (Shimizu, 2006: 5). Indeed, numerous books and articles were published in the following period in the fields of IR and Japanese foreign policy that were characterized by an extreme nationalist tone (Ishihara, 1994; Nakanishi, 1992; Ozawa, 1993). MOFA's publications were no exception. The term 'soft power' conveniently came to appear in IR discourse as part of this phenomenon, and MOFA has devoted itself to the application of the concept in Japanese diplomacy ever since.

As previously noted, the concept of soft power was initially introduced by Joseph Nye Jr. of Harvard University in 1990 (Nye, 1990). It is widely understood that his argument relates more to the cultural dimensions and possibilities of IR than to traditional diplomacy, military power, or political economy. In fact, the concept's appearance coincided with those of other culturalist interpretations of international politics, notably Samuel Huntington's (1993) 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis, which casts the post-Cold War world order in terms of conflict, and Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' scenario, which foresees a future of convergence in world affairs (O'Hagan, 2002: 198–203). These works were forerunners of mainstream culturalist approaches to world affairs, marking a new phase of international relations in the post-ideological age of globalization.

The term 'culture' is problematic here. Sometimes it is understood as a body of work specific to a particular region or society, and sometimes as the way people interact with each other. In some cases, it refers more broadly to the way of living in a given area. Nye defines culture as a 'set of values and practices that create meaning for society' manifesting itself in the form of high culture, such as literature, art, and education, and pop culture, which focuses on mass entertainment (Nye, 2004: 11). What he was concerned with was the power granted in culture. Nye pays particular attention to the power of culture, rather than culture *per se*, because of the widely acknowledged conviction that IR is an academic discipline concentrated solely on power. Thus, it is not surprising that he would begin his focus on soft power rather than culture itself in searching for a new dimension that would purportedly explain contemporary world affairs sufficiently. Then what is power? Nye states that 'power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants' (Nye, 2004: 2). The power Nye was concerned with here is neither military nor economic. It is not coercive either. Rather, it 'rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others' (Nye, 2004: 5) and is a sort of 'attractive power' (Nye, 2004: 6). Because of this attractiveness, it

can persuade others to change their behaviour towards what one perceives as the ideal goal.

Co-optive power – the ability to shape what others want – can rest on the attractiveness of one's culture and values or the ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices in a manner that makes others fail to express some preferences because they seem to be too unrealistic. (Nye, 2004: 7)

But what are the sources of this attraction? Nye says they include 'shared values and the justness' and the sense of 'duty of contributing to the achievement of those values' (Nye, 2004: 7).

In sum, the concept of soft power puts more emphasis on 'power' than values by using the latter as a means to achieve the former. In other words, 'soft', which refers to culture as a representation of values and justness, is merely an adjective to modify the noun 'power' which is his main goal.

Then, how could Japan be attractive to others? It is culture. However, the culture in this context is exclusively materialistic, not about values or justness. In fact, MOFA's use of the word 'culture' relies on its material associations – electric appliances, fashion, furniture, architecture, food culture, art, music, design, Noh, Kabuki, and pop-culture products, including *manga* and *anime* (MOFA, 2007).

According to the official discourse surrounding Japan's cultural diplomacy, the main purpose of these promotional programmes is to cultivate international understanding of and appreciation for Japan. This leads to a more general question. The *Gaiko Seisho* (Diplomacy Blue Book) of 2010 explicitly states that MOFA's goal in such endeavours is to 'maintain a good relationship' with foreign countries (MOFA, 2010: 177). Of course, such is the official patois of diplomatic writing, and similar statements can be found everywhere in the documents and reports of the foreign ministries and state agencies of other countries; the real purpose has been more candidly expressed in interviews with individual officials through their roles in domestic media campaigns seeking broader citizen acceptance of Japan's diplomacy. For example, in an interview with a university student, one MOFA official revealed that the underlying purpose of Japan's contemporary foreign diplomacy is 'to make others wish what we wish'. Following Nye's definition of soft power, which focuses more on the concept of 'power', the official maintained that the intent is 'not to make them follow us by the power of military or economy', but rather through 'values and culture' (MOFA, 2007). It becomes clear here that the implicit goal of MOFA's cultural politics is not the maintenance of 'a good relationship' with foreign countries. On the contrary, it is the achievement of the goal set by MOFA through the promotion of alleged Japanese values and culture for political economic power.

Iwabuchi contends in this context that the main purpose of the Japanese government's promotion of soft power and calm diplomacy is the maximization of Japan's political economic interests. While it ostensibly comes across as peaceful in the name of cultural diplomacy, the Japanese government's main concern lies in material gains (Iwabuchi, 2007: 87). In fact, Aso Taro, foreign minister, then prime minister,

and now deputy prime minister, gave a talk at the newly established Digital Hollywood University in Tokyo on cultural diplomacy in 2006, and stressed the importance of culture in diplomacy.

> I would even say that Astro Boy deserves to receive the People's Honor Award. The word 'robot' is said to have come to us from the Czech word robota, which means 'labour' or sometimes even 'drudgery', and thus is a word that originally carried a negative connotation. But through Japan's Astro Boy or the cat-like robot Doraemon, the meaning of the word 'robot' shifted, instead becoming a benevolent friend who helps human beings. In Asia and elsewhere around the globe, robots came to be understood as the 'white hats' — the good guys. The impact of this situation is that countries with an affinity for Doraemon do not have workers who reject industrial robots, and thus in those countries industrial productivity rises. In addition, *you find that Japanese-made industrial robots sell well.* (Aso, 2006)

The case of Ichiya Nakamura appears even more direct. He contends that the promotion of a positive image of Japan through cultural products would help other industries, such as electronic appliances and the automobile industry, to expand their market abroad. He argues that what he calls the 'contents industry', of which *manga* and *anime* make up a large portion, constitutes only 3% of Japan's GDP, but it has significant external effects. According to Nakamura, branding and permeation of the contents of the Japanese cultural industry into societies overseas would enhance local consumers' desire for Japanese products and this would consequently stimulate exports (Nakamura, 2013, loc. 805/2461). This is precisely what Iwabuchi calls 'brand nationalism'. The Japanese government perceives soft power in its relation to political economy, and the above argument of Aso and Nakamura clearly made the case.

Alleged values in Japan's soft power diplomacy and similarities to the right-wing Kyoto school philosophers' cultural politics

The results of cultural politics are not strictly limited to power configurations in foreign relations. The system functions domestically in that it shapes citizens' perceived national identity. For instance, in describing the national identity of non-Western Europeans before World War II, Hannah Arendt argued that what non-Western European nations, Germany among them, could rely on in competing with the Western countries, such as Britain and France, was not technological or civilizational advantage. Instead, Arendt said that non-Western Europeans could best rely on irrational or non-rational elements, such as the value of racial and spiritual purity in claiming their superiority to the more civilized Western nations. In other words, there was no way to compete with the West in terms of quantifiable factors, such as economic scale or efficiency, but it was possible to do so through perceived qualitative dimensions, such as history, spiritual supremacy, and cultural sophistication (Arendt, 1968: 231–2).

One can argue that Japan conformed to Arendt's description of the non-Western nations during the pre-war period. Being a latecomer to the world economy of massive industrial development and colonial expansion, just like Germany, Japanese intellectuals and officials made similarly propagandist statements referring to Japan's proud history and spiritual supremacy (Kosaka *et al.*, 1943). The tradition of inclining policy justifications towards cultural and qualitative values did not cease after World War II. Throughout the Cold War era and into the age of globalization, Japanese leaders have continually emphasized the mystical *Yamato Damashi* (Japanese Soul) and *Samurai Damashi* (Samurai Soul). The latter is often used even now in reference to national sports teams.

Having these characteristics as a background, Japanese conservative intellectuals and officials have adopted the concept of soft power to further construct the notion of 'Japanese-ness'. As culture has often been employed to distinguish Japan from the West – and is somehow familiar to ordinary Japanese people as a part of their identity – the idea of the government's use of soft power is easily accepted by society at large. It utilizes the model of the 'good Japanese' person who self-identifies as distinctly non-Western. The model places special emphasis on having a non-individualistic relationship with one's surroundings, a love of nature and the environment in general, a desire to conserve traditional values, and a special sensitivity to the world that transcends empirical reasoning (Nishida, 1950; Marukusu, 1991; Kondo, 2004, 2013). In fact, in order to hide the underlying political economic concern for power, promoters of Japanese culture often put exclusive emphasis on Japanese culture's responsive relationship with the environment. The Japanese perception of nature is now used ubiquitously in the discourse of cultural politics, and it is claimed to constitute the main body of Japanese values.

The right-wing Kyoto School philosophers, such as Kosaka Masaaki, Nishitani Keiji, Suzuki Shigetaka, and Koyama Takao, who became enthusiastic apologists for the military government in the interwar period, employed the term culture precisely in this context. They claimed that Western civilization was facing a political and economic crisis, and no longer held the key to human development. Japan, which is characterized by its receptive attitude to the environment, therefore, would appear as a messiah and accordingly be assigned a mission to save the world (Kosaka *et al.*, 1943). What characterizes their discourse is the comprehension of the obedient cultural approach of the Japanese to the environment as existing in opposition to the West. Consequently, they ended up with the idea of confrontation between the West and Japan and enthusiastically supported Japan's involvement in World War II. Although not as enthusiastic or messianic as the conservative Kyoto School philosophers, MOFA's interpretation of culture and soft power appears to follow this traditional line of reasoning.

In the minds of government officials, Japanese culture by its very definition opposes rationalism, modernism, and Westernization. For instance, Kondo Seiichi, the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs, places the distinction between Japan and the West

in their approaches to nature. According to Kondo, the Western tradition heavily relies on the human capacity for instrumental reason, and this reason-dependent attitude is the main cause of the dualism of the subject and object on which contemporary science is constructed. Kondo maintains that this scientific attitude is characterized by a mechanistic perception of nature. However, this Western perception is now facing an obvious danger. Kondo continues:

> The Western approach to nature has generated overconfidence in science and led to human conceit, and this in turn has resulted in a risk to human existence. There is no guarantee that control over weapons of mass-destruction and climate change would exceed human capability . . . The dichotomy of good and evil directs us to the endless chain of resentment between ethnic groups. (Kondo, 2013)

On the other hand, Kondo contends, the Japanese have always thought that human beings are inherently a part of nature and are not entitled to attempt to conquer it. This allegedly Japanese attitude towards nature constitutes Japanese morality imbedded in the form of culture. However, cultural morality in this interpretation misses another important function of culture in relation to morality, which presumably gives us a wider perspective towards contemporary world affairs.

If it is true that the receptive Japanese attitude towards nature is the main body of alleged Japanese values, what sort of morality and ethics could we derive from Japanese traditional values? The right-wing Kyoto School philosophers' arguments in the interwar period were indicative in this context. They interpreted Western civilization as the main cause of the crises for all of humanity, and they argued that, in order to transcend this state of affairs, Japan must replace the prevailing order of international relations, established on the basis of Western civilization, with an alternative morality (Kosaka *et al.*, 1943).

What permeates discourses of this sort regarding Japanese cultural distinctiveness and moral supremacy over Western modernity is the total absence of a strict definition of morality. While advocates of Japanese cultural diplomacy often mention the term morality, and presume that Japan has a different set of norms and principles of human behaviour, they usually lack a detailed explanation of what precisely Japanese morality denotes apart from the alleged nature-loving characteristic of Japanese nationals. As a result, Japan's cultural diplomacy has become characterized by the total failure to attract the trust of other countries in the Asia-Pacific because of, according to them, the lack of coherent values or a sincere attitude (Aoki, 2003: 145–6).

Culture and self-reflection in the Tosaka Jun's theory of morality

Tosaka Jun, a prominent left-wing Kyoto School philosopher in interwar Japan, insisted on another interpretation of culture. He argued that moral judgement becomes possible only when the subject is self-critical. This self-critical reflection can be seen through the mirror of culture, as culture is a representation of people's everyday lives and *joshiki*, common sense. This everydayness is imperative in understanding

contemporary social construction, Tosaka maintained, as it provides the researchers with a concrete context for ordinary citizens' lives and their *joshiki*. Therefore, he contended that culture is indispensable for critical reflection in constructing scientific and philosophical theories (Tosaka, 1966).

The reason why Tosaka exclusively focused on the issue of morality was the widely held perception among intellectuals that Japan had been invaded and dominated by the Western traditions of capitalism and consumerism. This perception was also held by the right-wing Kyoto School philosophers, and in fact they argued that morality was completely absent from contemporary capitalism and consumer society. Japan's war against the United States and Britain was, according to their interpretation, therefore, a typical representation of the conflict between different social orders, one on the basis of economic efficiency and the growth of production for the West and one of ethics and morality for Japan (Kosaka *et al.*, 1943). However, as noted earlier, while conservative Kyoto School philosophers contended that Japan must maintain moral superiority to the West, they never clearly stated what morality really meant in the context of contemporary world affairs.

To Tosaka, morality was not an ambiguous concept. It was synonymous with critical reflection, and this overlaps with Hannah Arendt's concept of 'thinking'. Moral judgement is possible, according to Tosaka like Arendt, only when critical reflection is guaranteed. A truth claim without critical reflection does not deserve the name of the truth, Tosaka contended. Rather, it is a mere one-sided belief. In this sense, Tosaka's argument of morality was exclusively directed at the intellectuals who believed they were entitled to narrate the truth (Tosaka, 1966).

How could one be morally right in intellectual lives then? Tosaka argued that there was a sharp confrontation between 'academia' and 'journalism', and this could be interpreted as an opposition between 'science', by which Tosaka actually meant philosophy and social science, and 'literature', as the humanities (Tosaka, 1966: 145). As 'journal' sometimes denotes diary, journalism is specifically based on everydayness and the *joshiki*, common sense, of ordinary citizens, whose lives start by entering into social relations and end by moving away from them. Thus, everydayness is social and relational. Journalism is also established upon this relationality. This also means that social relations have never been, or never will be, fixed or institutionalized and are thus continuously transforming themselves into new relationships. As a result, journalism could only focus on specific and concrete spatiality and temporality, which is continuously subject to changes and transformations. Tosaka focused on this continuous transformation from one form to another and was concerned with the practice of everyday lives and *joshiki*. According to Tosaka, this practical facet clearly indicates that journalism is always political (Tosaka, 1966: 148).

This political nature of everydayness should not be standardized. Obviously, the everyday life of one person is different and has distinct characteristics of its own. If this particular everydayness was understood in contrast to universality, thus characterized by its difference from the latter, the particularity of the former would disappear into

the universalized particularity. It is the same in the case of culture. If one distinct culture is constructed and articulated in comparison with universality, the distinctive nature of a culture will vanish. A culture formulated in this way would lose its function in the process of self-reflection and become abstract storage for fixed cultural products.

However, intellectuals of science and philosophy claim that their mission is to discover the universal truth, and they are not concerned with the concrete lives of ordinary citizens. Thus, their arguments become inevitably abstract because of the detachment of their perception from everydayness, and they easily end up with the simple dichotomy between the West and the rest. If we are to understand contemporary cultural life, a concrete context is not something dispensable, and this focus on the diversity within or between non-Western cultures distinguishes Tosaka from the conservative Kyoto School philosophers.

The current discourses of soft power often define culture in an essentialist manner and, accordingly, presume that culture is *a priori* and fixed. They never see culture's hybrid and ever-changing nature or the practices of everyday lives. This is also true in IR. Contemporary Japanese intellectuals' devotion to the cultural dimension of world affairs, whether intentionally or unintentionally, reinforces the political economic position of Japan in the world, and this will merely result in reinforcing the prevailing international (or Western, if we provincialize IR) order of confrontation.

It is important here, however, to understand that culture can be a mirror for our self-reflection if we are to comprehend the world. As culture is hybrid and ever-changing, cultural products also change. Thus, there is no such thing as a fixed culture. In this sense, culture is always anti-universal. Therefore, there is no legitimized national-culture or regional-culture by definition. This interpretation of culture reveals the powerful influence of the universalized international or Western order, which forces us to perceive the concept of culture only in terms of the pre-established framework of the nation-state. As a result, we often end up standardizing, and thus universalizing, 'different' and 'diverse' cultures in contrast to Western civilization. Consequently, we often fail to comprehend the distinctiveness of a non-Western culture in comparison with other non-Western cultures and only see a non-Western culture in contrast to the Western one.

Miyazaki Hayao's animation films and moral reflection

The Japanese government is, as noted earlier, eagerly pursuing the goals of obtaining influence over other Asian nations and reinforcing Japan's presence in contemporary world affairs through the use of soft power. One of the main components of this alleged cultural power is Japanese popular culture, animation films in particular. MOFA describes these films and the style in general as the most popular in the world among young people and notably dominant in other Asian countries. Government officials frequently state that Japan produces cutting-edge cultural content, both in terms of storytelling and presentation techniques. Miyazaki Hayao is a figure

mentioned regularly in the context of nationalist brand politics. Government officials also find a typical example of the Japanese approach to nature in Miyazaki Hayao's animation films (Kondo, 2013). He is a renowned director of animation films; he won an Academy Award in 2003 and has garnered fame as an illustrator of Japanese popular culture. He has been a major player in the production of Japanese *anime* for more than 20 years, and is probably the best-known Japanese animator outside Japan. However, although Miyazaki's animation films have been well-received by conservative government officials and intellectuals in Japan, a thorough examination of his films and interviews reveals that his works, including animation films and *manga*, implicitly criticize the recent economy-centred policies of Japanese politics. Soft power diplomacy on the basis of brand nationalism is an integral part of Japanese politics dialogical and reciprocal relations with others. In fact, soft power discourse uses culture solely to promote a monological approach to power politics and attempts to strengthen its political position in world politics. Thus, it totally lacks the idea of relationality among different subjectivities.

Specific representative works often cited include Miyazaki's films such as *My Neighbour Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*. In fact, there are a number of official reports and articles about Miyazaki and his contribution to cultural diplomacy. For instance, MOFA reports that the *New York Times* sympathetically reviewed Miyazaki's film, *Kokurikozaka kara*, describing it as a typical example of Japanese animation films' recent inclination towards realism (MOFA, 2013a). It is also noticeable that MOFA is eager to promote Japan's pop-culture through its diplomatic channels (MOFA, 2013b), and Miyazaki's animation films are some of the most played animation films. It is worth mentioning that government officials touch upon Miyazaki's films in their diplomatic speeches. Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka, delivering a speech in New York commemorating 60 years of post-war Japan–US diplomatic relations in 2005, said:

> The fusion of the Japanese and American cultures has created a new global culture; the phenomenon is particularly visible in recent years, Miyazaki's animations including 'Spirited Away' represent a new creation combining Japanese sensitivity with Walt Disney's American film making traditions (Machimura, 2005).

They also encourage youth to actively engage in the promotion of Japanese pop-culture for Japan's diplomacy. Aso states:

> What is the image that pops into someone's mind when they hear the name 'Japan'? Is it a bright and positive image? Warm? Cool? The more these kinds of positive images pop up in a person's mind, the easier it becomes for Japan to get its views across over the long term. In other words, Japanese diplomacy is able to keep edging forward, bit by bit, and bring about better and better outcomes as a result (Aso, 2006).

In these animation films, argues MOFA, the traditional values of Japan are concisely and coherently presented, which is the reason why Miyazaki's films are so popular and

widely received by other nations, particularly by the younger generations. Some MOFA officials see Japan's traditional values in the new era transcending Western values. Kondo Seiichi, for instance, apparently believes in the relationship between Japan's traditional values and Japanese animation films and states that the popularity of the Japanese animation films is based on the superiority of Japan's traditional values, which purportedly transcend the Western values that have led to supposedly dead-end political and economic dilemmas (Kondo, 2004). According to MOFA, Japan is now in position to spread its traditional values and thereby resolve the world's problems as wrought by Western modernity.

Miyazaki has been the most famous figure in this context. Born in Tokyo in 1941, Miyazaki is a world-famous animator and film producer. His animation films are distributed all over the world, and his 2001 film *Spirited Away* received an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. MOFA's promotion of soft power would not be possible without Miyazaki's broad base of popularity among young people abroad. However, the artist has never explicitly supported the dominant political ideas and institutions, let alone MOFA's conception or use of soft power. He does not appear to have ever been politically active except at his first job at Toei Film Studio, where he became the chair of the trade union and an active union organizer.

Similarly, his films' political messages are not overt, aside from a widely inferred environmentalist slant. His films are often set in forests and mountains, and it seems at a glance that the only political message his characters convey is the importance of conserving the natural environment (most vividly presented in *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*). However, his political message is, in reality, far more profound and closely related to the concept of culture. Moreover, in one interview he explicitly declared that he is reluctant to call himself an environmentalist (Miyazaki, 2008: 28–9). Instead, his films implicitly express his objection to the prevailing modernized 'Japanese-ness' as the basis of nation-statehood and Japanese culture, and communicate instead his preference for the pre-modern, indigenous culture of Japan, *Jomon bunka* (Miyazaki, 1996: 260) – a cultural style predating the concept of private property and other political institutions that were mainly imported from the Asian continent.

Jomon was a hunter-gatherer culture that arose around 14,500 BC and was replaced by the *Yayoi* culture around 1,000 BC. As *Jomon bunka* was not constructed on the idea of private property or civilization, its populations did not possess the concept of institutionalized communities such as nation-states. This early indigenous culture is idealized as innocent in Miyazaki's films, while *Yayoi bunka* is heavily associated with themes of law and enforcement. *Yayoi* society provided the beginnings of the institutionalization of political power, helping to develop Japan into a civilized nation. As the primitive, initial form of the Japanese nation-state, Miyazaki nevertheless sees *Yayoi* culture as the root of contemporary problems – violence, human isolation, corruption, etc. – present in modern capitalist society. Indeed, he once stated that

people living during the period of *Jomon bunka* were probably the happiest people in Japanese history (Miyazaki, 1996: 260).

It is widely recognized that Miyazaki's films are anti-consumerist, *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away* in particular. It is also commonly known that some of his films derive from anti-war sentiment, including *Porco Rosso* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. Throughout his oeuvre, one can more generally describe the artist's outlook as anti-institutional and anti-civilizational, and that outlook is very much expressed in his representations of *Jomon bunka*. Miyazaki deliberately chooses non-institutionalized communities as settings for plot development and then employs nomads, exiles, and pilgrims as main characters to introduce cultural contrast.

In this way, Miyazaki uses cultural representation as a means of resistance to the institutionalized nation-state. He describes institutional political arrangements in highly negative tones, and grants his main characters powers of critical thought to examine the prevailing social order.

The idyllic forest and mountain settings of Miyazaki's films express a rather obvious sentimentality towards *Jomon* culture that has been interpreted as a preference for that culture over civilization. For example, the main character Ashitaka in *Princess Mononoke* is from the north of Japan and initially lives in a mountainous area. In one scene at the beginning of the film, in which Ashitaka fights with samurais and shoots at them with arrows, one of the samurai clearly calls him '*Oni*'. This is a clear reference to folklore and folklore-influenced culture, in which indigenous peoples living in mountain areas are often described as *Oni* (evil).

On the contrary, those of *Yayoi* culture living in *sato* (villages) were historically settlers in flat lands cultivating rice and other crops. They are frequently depicted in Miyazaki's films as institutionalized and profit-oriented. A character appears in *Princess Mononoke* named *Jogo-bo*, who is a Buddhist monk serving the emperor and a typical representation of Miyazaki's perception of contemporary, ordinary citizens who lack critical thinking skills and simply follow orders. Indeed, Miyazaki publicly described this character as reflecting figures of present-day society, describing him as 'a company man' who is agreeable and personable and functions well in his organization, but who follows the commands of that organization without thinking (Miyazaki, 2008: 36–37).

The lack of thinking personified by *Jigo-bo* is likewise present in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in which Arendt explains how the lack of critical thought of one SS soldier who appeared to be an ordinary citizen, Adolf Eichmann, resulted in the most unprecedented practice of evil in human history (Arendt, 1963). Miyazaki uses the same kind of example to question the nature of living in the age of civilization. Although Miyazaki himself cannot answer for his audience, he surely intends to provoke thought and questioning.

While Miyazaki's intention is to question and critically assess the prevailing order of nation-state and consumer capitalism, in which human beings are destined to lose their capacity for critical reflection and morality, Japan's soft power politics has developed in such a way as to confirm Miyazaki's critique. In other words, Japanese

soft power diplomacy is trying to retail cultural products of totally opposite values. This contradiction springs from the total lack of critical reflection and moral thinking evidently reified in Japan's cultural politics. Because of this lack of critical reflection, the Japanese government ends up essentializing culture, and only finds culturally distinctive feature of themselves in the form of cultural products on the basis of consumerism. Cultural products being representations of culture means that the concept of culture is assigned a position in the abstract picture of power politics as simply a device to maximize profits. This ignores Miyazaki's depiction of different cultures within Japan, and forcibly unifies the cultural diversity under the name of Japanese culture and soft power diplomacy. This will never give the subjects of cultural political discourse a chance to reflect on themselves and establish morality in the way Tosaka called for despite the Miyazaki's intention. As in the story of the conservative Kyoto School philosophers, which clearly depicts the danger of abstract political discourses of West/East cultural confrontation, an essentialized and standardized culture without critical reflection can easily lead to violent nationalism.

Conclusion

In this paper, I strive to clarify Japan's soft power diplomacy's relationship to critical thinking and morality. As I contend, the current soft power foreign policy of Japan very much resembles the cultural politics of the interwar period. This is because it essentializes culture and disregards the nature of culture, which is intermingled with other cultures. The interconnectedness of culture inevitably results in its ever-changing dispositions. As a culture is connected with others, its subjects must encounter others with different cultural backgrounds. This encounter, in turn, brings the subject an opportunity for self-reflection and critical engagement in cultural politics. However, when culture is essentialized and fixed, particularly in the East/West and international/regional dichotomies, we lose the opportunity for self-reflection and are destined to plunge into the discourses of cultural confrontation and violent nationalism. This is the moment in which we have to return to the Kyoto School's phenomenology of 'pure experience'.

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