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**Wartime Japan's Cultural Diplomacy and the Establishment of Culture Bureaus**

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## **Wartime Japan's Cultural Diplomacy and the Establishment of Culture Bureaus<sup>1</sup>**

### Abstract

The paper discusses wartime Japan's goal of cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the West. I trace the historical process that career officers in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (the Society for International Cultural Relations) for management of the export of Japanese cultural products. These cultural bureaus of Japan launched policies, to diffuse an alternative image of the militaristic state in the United States and Europe during the late 1930s. I examine the way in which the wartime Japanese government tried to shape the external world to compensate for a restricted foreign policy by boosting overseas cultural affairs with the West. Organizational and budgetary comparison of the KBS with cultural bureaus in the Western countries will feature the story.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, modernity.

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## Introduction

Conventional wisdom on wartime Japan suggests that the state focused its efforts on anti-Westernism, arguing that the Japanese government cut its relationship with the West after the Manchurian Incident in 1931, and isolated itself from international society until its defeat in the Pacific War in 1945. The Japanese government emphasized its national uniqueness, centering on the worship of emperor, and insisted on Japan's superiority to other Asian countries. Moreover, historians and specialists on Japan's international relations often contrast the wartime era with the vibrant "Taishō culture" of the 1920s. They describe the fifteen years' war period (1931-1945) as a "dark valley" separating the prewar and the postwar periods, or an "aberration" from the correct historical path. These interpretations suggest that Western products, including baseball, cafés, and Hollywood movies, were widespread before the war, but Japanese were unable to enjoy cosmopolitan Western culture again until defeat in the war.<sup>2</sup>

However, examining wartime Japan's cultural diplomacy directed at the West reveals a complicated account of these same years. In fact, the Japanese government did not cut off international relations, and the extreme use of racism was not the only method for justifying the war.<sup>3</sup> Few works discuss the historical background of the alternative strategies employed by the Japanese government to deal with its relationships with the Western powers as a link to its expansionist foreign policy. There was a subtle movement by the Japanese to promote their presence in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Thomas Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War II* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986); Ben-ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

This essay examines the way in which the Japanese state projected its cultural image. The term *bunka gaikō* (cultural diplomacy) began to be used often in the 1930s just as the Japanese bureaucrats and military expanded their war efforts. Japan wanted to be known as a possessor of advanced culture that was able to compete with the Western powers. Overseas cultural promotion became a tool of aggressive foreign policy to persuade the West to acknowledge Japan's self-appointed position as a leader in Asia.

### **The Idea of Cultural Diplomacy in Wartime Japan**

The idea of cultural diplomacy emerged from the international trends of the interwar period. Embracing the idealism of Wilsonian internationalism after World War I, Western countries upheld cultural affairs in their foreign policy for the betterment of their international relations. From the 1920s, all of the major powers, democratic or authoritarian, mounted international public relations campaigns. European countries and America facilitated the exchange of scholars and books and sponsored overseas exhibitions. They established Bureaus of International Culture within their own Foreign Ministries and set up overseas branches. These efforts were not based simply on idealistic pacifism, but rather were part of new diplomatic behaviors initiated by the powers to secure advantage for themselves in international politics. Cultural diplomacy therefore became a sophisticated strategy to realize national interests by mitigating unfavorable images of the state.<sup>4</sup>

Japan was not unique in proposing cultural diplomacy. Learning from Western

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<sup>4</sup> Volker Berghahn, *American and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); KBS, *KBS 30 nen no ayumi* (Tokyo: KBS, 1964), 12-14.

models, Japanese foreign policy makers expected that the expression of culture could help the state's militaristic and political goals. Using culture in foreign policy was persuasive for Japanese strategists because they understood the nationalistic purpose in the very nature of cultural diplomacy. In July 1931, Saegusa Shigetomo, a secretary (*shokikan*) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, researched cultural policies in the Western powers such as France, Germany, Spain, Russia, and the United States and compared the powers' involvement in cultural affairs. Saegusa's research shows that there were differences in the practices among the powers: the state took charge of cultural affairs in European countries, while the private sector did so in the United States. This did not mean that the American government cared less about cultural policies, only that the Western powers had different ideas about where the responsibility for these policies lay and practiced them in a different way. But in all of these countries, according to Saegusa, cultural relations were basically maintained alongside nationalism (*kokusuishugi*) in order to render the international environment favorable to their own nation states.<sup>5</sup>

In the Japanese context, cultural diplomacy became a means for the state to deal with its volatile relations with the external world. Japanese foreign policy makers did not appreciate the role that culture could play in international politics until the Manchurian Incident in 1931 and the withdrawal from the League of Nations on March 27, 1933. The militaristic expansion into East Asia and the extreme measure of breaking alliances with Western liberal states damaged the image of Japan not only in its colonies but also among the Western powers. In order to change this condition, some solution had to be

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<sup>5</sup> Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Taigai bunka seisaku ni tsuite* (Tokyo: Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, 1931).

sought out. Japanese propagandists proposed cultural affairs as a defensive strategy to forestall anti-Japanese sentiment and to facilitate its international politics. Minowa Saburō, an administrative official (*jimukan*) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserted that cultural diplomacy should be a new principle in Japan's foreign policy at a time of crisis.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Yanagisawa Ken, the Japanese internationalist, proposed cultural affairs as a prerequisite to justifying Japan's dominance of neighboring countries. To boast of militaristic technology or the manufacture of warships was not the only way to propagate the notion of Japanese power.<sup>7</sup> In his opinion, the state should take positive action to let the powers acknowledge Japan's presence in East Asia by creating respect (*sonkei*) for Japanese culture. The state should thus demonstrate overseas the idea that Japan's leading position in the region was legitimate because of its great culture.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, it was expected that "each country in the world would understand Japanese affairs and not discriminate against the Japanese state" (*sekai no kakkoku ga wareware wo rikai shite kurete, wareware wo sabetsu taigū wo senai*). Wartime Japan, argued Japanese diplomats, should not be the subject of "white discrimination" (*'hakujin' kara no sabetsu*) again, which had been symbolized by situations like the exclusion of Japanese immigration to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Around the 1930s, the Japanese government began to launch the project for overseas

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<sup>6</sup> Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Kokusai bunka jigyo ni kansuru dai 67 kai teikoku gikai giji sokkiroku shōroku* (Tokyo: Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, 1935), 1-14; Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Gaikō no atarashiki shihyō: bunka kyōtei no hanashi* (Tokyo: Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, 1938), 14-33.

<sup>7</sup> Yanagisawa Ken, "Waga kuni kokusai bunka jigyo no tenbō," *Chūō kōron*, May 1936, 171.

<sup>8</sup> Yanagisawa Ken, "Kokusai bunka jigyo to wa nanizoya (zoku)," *Gaikō jihō* 706 (1934): 29-52.

<sup>9</sup> Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Kokusai bunka jigyo ni kansuru dai 67 kai teikoku gikai giji sokkiroku shōroku*, 6.

propaganda of Japanese culture. It promoted comprehensive cultural activities, including the exchange of books, films, sports, and scholars. It allowed the establishment and participation of many organizations for cultural affairs, at both the public and private levels.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Establishment of the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai**

Understanding the nature of Japan's claim to cultural power to the internal and external world requires a comparative analysis in a transnational context. Modern nation states possess a distinctive culture that is dissimilar to any other. Britain produced a collective image of "Britishness" through pastoral landscape, modern sports like soccer, tennis, golf, and riding, the making of national heroes like King Arthur, Elizabeth I, and Churchill, and elites system represented by "Oxbridge."<sup>11</sup> Germany and France express their pride in language, literature, philosophy, and historical heritage. The United States symbolized itself as the state that realized the modern ideology of democracy and capitalism. In that sense, all the world powers made efforts to manipulate the notion of the state's identity as a means necessary for the survival of a modern polity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The following works introduce lists of many cultural organizations established in Japan since the mid-1930s. This included the Kokusai Gakuyūkai for student exchanges, and the Japan Pen Club (Nihon pen kurabu) in which Shimazaki Tōson, a leading writer of Japan, was affiliated as a president and worked for exchanges among writers and intellectuals. Den Makoto, *Kokusai kankō jigyōron* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1940); KBS, *Honpō kokusai bunka dantai benran* (Tokyo: KBS, 1936); Shibasaki Atsushi, *Kindai Nihon to kokusai bunka kōryū* (Tokyo: Yūshindō Kōbunsha, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Park, Ji-hyang, *Yeonggukjeokin neomuna Yonggukjeokin* (Seoul: Giparang, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> To understand the discussion about the relationship between nationalism and cultural politics, see Prasenjit Duara, "Provincial Narratives of the Nation: Centralism and Federalism in Republican China," in *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia:*

However, each state of the Western countries recognized differences among themselves. Since the 1920s, the United States uniquely had private organizations like the Ford Foundation to lead cultural activities independent of the state. In democratic states in Europe, such as Britain and France, public broadcasting such as the BBC as well as public organizations like the British Council and Alliance Française were heavily involved in cultural policy.<sup>13</sup> Nazis Germany promoted state-initiated cultural policies during the European War and World War II, and the Soviet Union assigned a large role to cultural policy especially during the Cold War.

Japan's use of culture as social management to unify the people and induce them to serve central objectives, in scale and form, has much in common with every power. Japan partly looked to Western models. Similar to the European countries, key officials and intellectuals in Japan joined cultural organizations, and began to diffuse Japan's image as an Asian cultural hegemon since the war period. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Gaimushō), the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (the Society for International Cultural Relations; the predecessor of the present Japan Foundation; hereafter, the KBS; 1934-1971), and the Ministry of Education (Monbushō) have led cultural policy.

The KBS was the most representative government-run institution in this initiative. Future Prime Minister Konoe Fumimārō, a central figure in directing wartime Japanese cultural politics, stressed that all of the "civilized countries" were competing to propagate the culture of their own nation states. Konoe, therefore, called for the establishment of a

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*Representation and Identity*, 9-35; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> The JCIE submitted its research series to an international symposium to discuss the role of foundations in developed countries. See *Yōroppa no zaidan; Beikoku no zaidan, kigyō kifu*; and *Nihon no zaidan, kigyō kifu* (Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Kōryū Sentaa, 1975).



comprehensive formal institution for international cultural affairs within the government so that Japan would not be “left behind” (*tachiokure*). On April 11, 1934 the government established the KBS with financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The most influential figures both in official and non-official fields in Japan participated in the process of the establishment of the KBS. Konoe became the first president (*shodai kaichō*) of the KBS, and Takamatsunomiya Nobuhito, a younger brother of the Showa Emperor, was its governor (*sōsai*). The most prominent intellectuals and internationalists of the time, as well as top bureaucrats and politicians, also affiliated themselves as the main members of the KBS. They included Kawabata Yasunari, Kabayama Aisuke (the managing director; *rijichō*), Okabe Nagakage (directors; *riji*), Saitō Makoto, and Hirota Kōki (counselors; *komon*). The KBS became a large public institution that had 153 trustees (*hyōgiin*), and six honorary members (*meiyo kaiin*).<sup>14</sup>

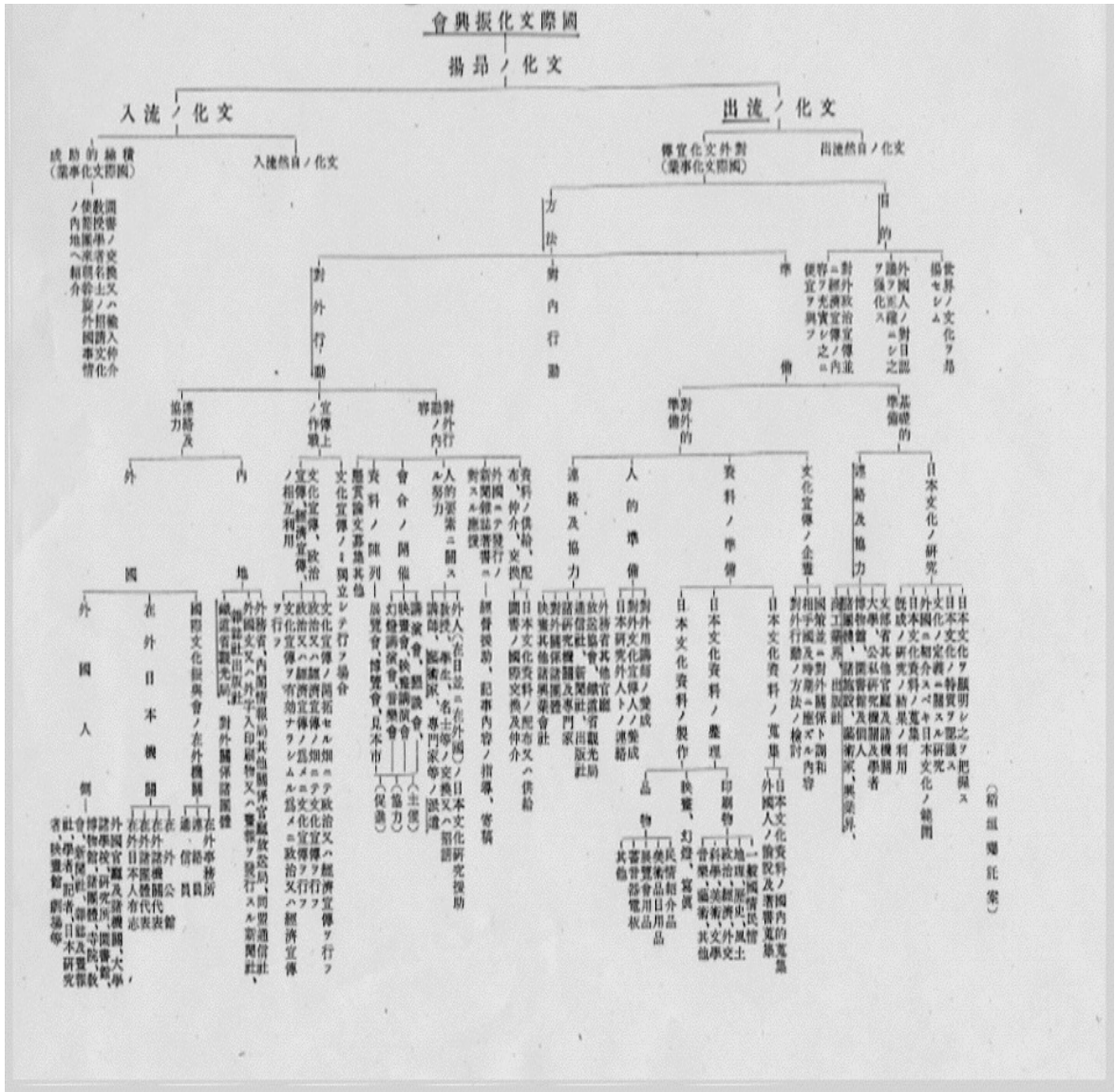
As the most prestigious institution for the promotion of international cultural affairs in Japan, the KBS initiated a comprehensive program in such diverse dimensions as 1) translations and publications; 2) dispatching lecturers abroad and scholar exchanges; 3) holding lecture meetings, exhibits, and recitals; 4) donating and exchanging documents; 5) inviting foreign figures; 6) facilitating Asian Studies (Oriental Studies) in foreign countries; 7) coordinating student exchanges; 8) maintaining contact with groups and individuals abroad concerned with cultural activities; 9) supporting film production; and 10) managing institutes, libraries, and research facilities.<sup>15</sup> (Figure 1).

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<sup>14</sup> KBS, *KBS 30 nen no ayumi*, 12-14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-14.

Figure 1. Cultural Programs of the KBS



Source: KBS (1940).

The government provided the KBS with funds for those activities, and increased its support even though Japan endured economic restrictions due to the war during the late 1930s. The government’s subsidy for the KBS steadily increased from 200,000 yen in

1934 to 340,000 yen in 1937; 500,000 yen in 1939; and 700,000 yen in 1940.<sup>16</sup>

This expansion differentiates the KBS from previous organizations in the 1920s. Japanese intellectuals had participated in the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, which was established in 1922, and also set up its branch in Japan in 1926. Yet, this committee was no more than a gathering of educators and scholars.<sup>17</sup> The KBS was the outcome of a Japanese state initiative with an undisguised nationalistic purpose. Some postwar Japanese researchers assumed that certain “conscientious” (*ryōshinteki*) Japanese internationalists had involved themselves in the cultural activities at the KBS as a form of “passive” resistance to totalitarianism during the era of the “dark valley.”<sup>18</sup> However, the members and structure of the KBS, and the historical background of its establishment show that it was not simply a gathering made up of only liberal internationalists. The main members of the board of directors (*riji*) in the KBS were Japan’s top officials, some of whom were from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Career officials actively involved cultural activists, writers, and intellectuals at the non-official level in the state’s goal of international betterment.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Cultural Agreement with the “Civilized” Nations**

The establishment of the KBS signified the deliberate expansion of Japan’s overseas

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>17</sup> The Japan Foundation, *Kokusai Kōryū Kikin 15 nen no ayumi* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1990), 6-7; Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Kokusai bunka kōryū no genjō to tenbō* (Tokyo: Ōkurashō Insatsukyoku, 1973), 197; Okabe Nagakage, “Kokusai bunka jigyō no kaiko (sono ni),” *Kokusai bunka* 96 (1962): 9; KBS, *KBS 30 nen no ayumi*, 12-14.

<sup>18</sup> Fujimoto Shūichi, “‘Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai’ ni yoru senzen no 3 jigyō ni kansuru kenkyū nōto,” *Osaka keidai ronshū* 45 (1994): 526.

<sup>19</sup> See KBS, *Showa 9-12 nendo KBS rijikai narabi ni hyōgiinkai gijiroku*, or *KBS 30 nen no ayumi*.

cultural policy. In the 1920s, the Japanese government focused on colonial cultural policies in East Asia. The General Governor of Korea underwent a general shift in strategy from coercive military rule (*budan seiji*) to cooptation under cultural rule (*bunka seiji*) after the March First Movement in 1919. This was a skillful “divide and rule” strategy to co-opt the colonized Koreans through the milder articulation of Korean culture. The Japanese authorities partially allowed Koreans’ voices in mass media and publication, and permitted Korean language education at school. Japan implemented these cultural rules for the efficient control of colonial subjects.<sup>20</sup> Around this time, the Japanese government also made cultural relations with China, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up the Office of Cultural Affairs for China (*taishi bunka jimukyoku*) in 1923. But this was merely a temporary measure to avoid refunding the compensation that the Chinese government had paid to Japan for the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, and which the Japanese government had now promised as a reward for China’s participation in World War One. Rather than directly paying back the money, the Japanese government intended instead to funnel the refund toward education. Emulating American cultural policy, the Japanese government used the money to support Chinese studies in Japan and to encourage exchanges between Chinese and Japanese students. It was only after the Okada cabinet set up the Third Department within the Division of Cultural Affairs (Bunka Jigyōbu) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on August 1, 1935, that the government increased its efforts of cultural propaganda toward the world.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Michael Robinson, “Colonial Publication Policy and the Korean Nationalist Movement,” in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 312-343.

<sup>21</sup> The Japan Foundation, *Kokusai Kōryū Kikin 15 nen no ayumi*, 6-7; Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Kokusai bunka kōryū no genjō to tenbō*, 197; Okabe Nagakage, “Kokusai

However, the Japanese government had a different approach for cultural diplomacy with the Western powers than for its colonial cultural policy with East Asia. As I described above, when wartime Japan encountered a crisis in international politics, it employed an alternative foreign policy of promoting cultural relations with the powers. The fact that the government began to work for the establishment of the KBS right after Japan withdrew from the League of Nations suggests that Japanese leaders did not cut all diplomatic relationships. They did not want to be isolated in international politics. On the contrary, they wanted to secure foreign relations with the great powers alone. To gain equal treatment with the powers was Japan's strongest aspiration, and Japanese political leaders wanted to participate in diplomacy among the powers. In order to support this aspiration, the Japanese government emphasized that only civilized countries (*bunmeikoku*) in the West could be partners in Japan's cultural diplomacy while colonies had no right to make cultural agreements (*bunka kyōtei*) with Japan. While the government conducted colonial cultural policies in Korea and Taiwan, and made cultural relations with China, those behaviors were not regarded as diplomacy because there was an imbalance between Japan and East Asia in the level of modernization. East Asian cultural policy proposed to extend Japan's presence into "backward" countries, and was part of a broader notion of colonial policy to educate and police the colonized. On the other hand, the Japanese government limited the definition of cultural diplomacy to behavior among similar "civilized" states. Japanese foreign policy makers clearly expressed their differing approaches for cultural policies toward the "civilized" West and the "barbarian" states of East Asia, saying that

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bunka jigyō no kaiko (sono ni)," 9; KBS, *KBS 30 nen no ayumi*, 12-14.

A cultural agreement (*bunka kyōtei*) means... a treaty joined...among European countries and the United States since the Great War in Europe, ... and it is natural that the states which join the cultural agreement should be so-called cultural states (*bunkakoku*) and that both sides should have almost an equal level of culture...Thus, it would be difficult to have a cultural agreement...between a civilized cultural state and a barbarian one.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the intended audience of Japan's cultural diplomacy was the Western powers. Collaborating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the KBS launched a campaign to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the other powers. First, it set up branches in Paris, Berlin, New York, and Rome, and extended those networks to facilitate Japan's overseas contacts. Aided by these branches, key figures in the KBS, including Konoe and Kabayama, visited the United States and Europe. They demonstrated that Japan was competing with the powers in cultural affairs and was energetically involved in the betterment of international politics.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Budgetary Comment on the KBS**

Even though the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and KBS shared ideas about the importance of cultural affairs, however, other ministries and government offices did not always agree with them. This led to a critical problem for Japan in facilitating its cultural diplomacy: the difficulty in securing an adequate budget from the Ministry of Finance (*Ōkurashō*). On December 8, 1933, Foreign Minister Hirota Kōki held a preparatory meeting for the KBS and discussed its membership and organizational structure. The government decided to support the KBS with the paltry sum of 200,000

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<sup>22</sup> Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Gaikō no atarashiki shihyō*, 14-33.

<sup>23</sup> KBS, *KBS 30 nen no ayumi*, 14-15.

yen during the year of 1934. This amount was trivial compared to allocations by other powers: according to the Foreign Ministry, at that time, the budget of Germany for its cultural diplomacy was equivalent to 7,600,000 yen, that of Italy was 8,300,000 yen, and that of France was 8,420,000 yen. Each of those countries had a budget for similar activities about forty times that of Japan's.<sup>24</sup> The powers' continuous support even during the Great Depression impressed some of the Japanese cultural policy makers, and they emphasized cultural affairs as a tool in the war of ideologies (*shisōsen*).<sup>25</sup> In the following year, the Japanese government submitted to the Ministry of Finance 2,400,000 yen as the expected budget for cultural affairs during the year of 1935. But the Ministry of Finance rejected this proposed amount, citing financial duress (*keizai kyūhaku*). It finally decided on 1,000,000 yen for international cultural affairs: 300,000 yen for support of the KBS; 200,000 yen for support of academic facilities; and 39,824 yen in support of making movies.<sup>26</sup>

It is surprising that the Japanese government lacked financial investment in matters of cultural development in light of its ever expanding economic power and influence. This lack of an adequate budget shows the exact nature of Japan's cultural diplomacy. The government took a dual attitude in conducting overseas cultural affairs. It was clear that the KBS was a state-led project and that the elite bureaucrats led wartime Japan's cultural diplomacy. They derived the methodology of cultural diplomacy mostly from the European models, and concluded that the practice in authoritarian states (*ikkoku*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 13; Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Kokusai bunka jigyo ni kansuru dai 67 kai teikoku gikai giji sokkiroku shōroku*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Dai 68 kai teikoku gikai setsumeikan sankō shiryō* (Tokyo: Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, 1935), 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

*ittōshugi no kokka*) like Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union would be the answer for Japan. What Japanese bureaucrats wanted was a form in which the state and society would conduct cooperative efforts (*chōya itchi*) in proclaiming Japan as a cultural nation.<sup>27</sup> In that sense, cultural diplomacy was not necessarily a mission to be undertaken only by official diplomats; the people in the empire and overseas Japanese emigrants should work on the “cultural front line” (*jūgo no bunka sensei*).<sup>28</sup> The critical condition of the time was even interpreted as luck endowed from heaven (*ten no ataeta kōun*) and the perfect opportunity (*zekkō no chansu*) because the state and society would raise their own intellectual and financial resources for advancing the destiny of their country (*kokuun*).<sup>29</sup>

### **The Cultural Promotion in the United States**

Japanese officials’ effort in cultural propaganda intensified in the late 1930s when the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the Nanjing Massacre in 1937 escalated international antagonism toward Japan. In particular, public opinion in the United States manifested harsh criticism against Japanese militarism, and the image of the Japanese presence in Asia worsened substantially. An easier way to shape the external world to compensate for Japan’s restricted international environment was to solidify the relationship with its allies. Japanese officials planned to participate in a gathering to celebrate the first anniversary of the Anti-Communist Agreement among Japan, Nazi Germany, and Italy, which was concluded in November 1937. This form of cultural

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 7-11; Kondō Haruō, “Kokusai bunka jigyo no kadai to hōkō: toku ni kokunaiteki kanren ni tsuite,” *Gaikō jihō* 717 (1934): 71-85.

<sup>28</sup> Gaimushō Bunka Jigyōbu, *Gaikō no atarashiki shihyō*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Yanagisawa, “Kokusai bunka jigyo to wa nanizoya (zoku),” 51.



interaction was expected to help create a consensus among the allies about Japan's powerful presence in Manchuria.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, the U.S. promotion was particularly critical for political reasons. Japanese foreign policy makers felt the importance of bettering Japan's image among the American government and people as its continental engagement bogged down in the late 1930s. Japanese officials attempted to deal with the strong anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States through peaceful cultural relations. To them, New York was just the place to display what Japan looked like. Japanese officials understood that Germany, Italy, France, England, and the Soviet Union had already set up their own information centers in New York as their foothold (*ashiba*) of cultural diplomacy to the world. Expanding information networks into New York had become an established trend among the powers, and Japan was also required to participate in this competition (*kakkoku no irimidareru bunka sensen ni goshite*) of cultural propaganda for their national interests. In November 1938, the KBS set up the Japan Culture Center (Nihon Bunka Kaikan) in Rockefeller Center in New York, and Maeda Tamon, a bureaucrat in the Home Ministry, became director of the center. The Center promoted information activities; it opened a library, introduced general affairs of Japan through radio, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, films, and photos, and made contacts with cultural institutions in the United States. Japanese officials attempted to persuade Americans to be favorable toward the Japanese through this network.<sup>31</sup>

The problem then would be what kinds of culture should be projected, and how to

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<sup>30</sup> Kobayashi Ichizō, "Doku-I geijutsu shisetsu to shite toō suru ni sai shite," *Kageki*, October 1938, 44-46.

<sup>31</sup> KBS, *KBS 30 nen no ayumi*, 20-21; Sakabe Shigeyoshi, "Amerika ni okeru shogaikoku no senden," *Kokusai bunka* 15 (1941): 39-43.

define the content of Japanese culture exported to the West (*bunka no ryūshutsu*).<sup>32</sup> First of all, it was decided that the country should be depicted as a charming place. The International Tour Bureau (*Kokusai Kankōkyoku*) of the Ministry of Railways (*Tetsudōshō*) and the KBS sponsored multilingual publications such as the quarterly *NIPPON* (1934-1944) and *Travel in Japan*. Those publications publicized a kaleidoscopic image of the Japanese land, people, and historical monuments by using photographs, and enticed Western readers and tourists to this attractive place as if to a museum. But, this project did demand a display of Japanese traditional or folkish aspects of itself.<sup>33</sup>

The presentation of Japan as an antique nation was not the goal of Japanese propagandists. They did not adopt literary masterpieces like the Tale of Genji (*Genji-monogatari*) and the Essays in Idleness (*Tsurezuregusa*) or well-known traditional arts such as *kabuki*, *nō*, and *chanoyu* (tea ceremony) as the only works to represent Japanese culture. On the contrary, because those classics require linguistic ability and specialized knowledge, they might appeal only to a specific group of Westerners without reaching the masses (*chō taishūteki*). Indeed, when the International Tour Bureau and the *American Boy* held a collaborative essay contest among the young Americans in 1934 about the reasons why they would like to visit Japan, most of the answers were 1) to see aspects of modern Japan, 2) to have interactions with the young generation of Japan, and 3) to view Japan's natural scenery. The presentation of modernity shared among the masses (*taishūteki kindaisei*) was regarded as the best way of allowing Westerners in a

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<sup>32</sup> KBS, *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai jigyō hōkoku: kokusai bunka jigyō no 7 ka nen* (Tokyo: KBS, 1940).

<sup>33</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Touring Japan-as-Museum: *NIPPON* and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues," *Positions* 8, 3 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

different cultural sphere to develop familiar and intimate feelings toward the Japanese. Only through the mediation of modern forms were Western audiences believed to be able to understand the deep and profound (*shinō yūgen*) culture of Oriental Japan.<sup>34</sup> The participants of this cultural promotion attempted to present the Japanese interpretation of modernity (*Nihon teki kindai*) that encompasses the limitations of Western materialism and suggests enduring forms of value and beauty.

### **Concluding Remark and Future Research**

The essay has discussed wartime Japan's cultural diplomacy with the West in a moment of international crisis. The Japanese state attempted to demonstrate its cultural prowess and values in the competition with the West. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KBS promoted cultural programs to enfold Western art forms into its traditional heritage and to showcase its modernity. In a broader context, however, wartime Japan's proposal of friendship activities in the United States did not ultimately change Americans' anti-Japanese sentiment in the late 1930s. The Japanese government's promotion of culture overseas was not enough to improve the American perception of the Japanese state, and cultural diplomacy failed to stop Japan's march to war.

Research on the Japanese government's affiliation with private commerce would further illuminate the story of the wartime cultural politics. I will discuss in the future that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KBS mobilized producers of film, art, TV shows, songs, advertisements and theater to participate in the state-initiated public relations with the Western powers.

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<sup>34</sup> Keida Shigeru, "Bunka gaikō no taishū ka," *Kaizō*, July 1936, 52-58.

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