

CNEAS ISSUE BRIEF

Japan's Soft Presence through Cooperation Agencies

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Introduction

Public and Cultural Diplomacy go hand-in-hand in modern day foreign policy. It helps in forming a connection at a local level where citizens of multiple nations come together and interact with each other to understand each other.

After the conclusion of World War 2, Japan sought to change its nation's image from its one of the "evil" members of the Axis Powers, to a more positive political role as a contributor to global economic development and cooperator in the stability and development of the developing world. As a member of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation Development (OECD)¹, Japan is an active participant of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Programme, where Japan provides financial and technical support to the developing nations in their developmental projects.

Another aspect of the image building was the utilization of Public Diplomacy through People-To-People Connect and Cultural Exchanges through Performing Arts Showcases, Language education, Study in Japan Programmes etc. By the start of 21st century, "Pop-Culture Diplomacy " started to emerge as a tenet of Japan's Foreign Policy due the rising popularity of Video Games, Anime and Manga Globally.

¹ OECD (2022)

These factors led to the rise of Japan's specialized organizations under its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, namely known as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CENTER (JICE) and Japan Foundation.

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

Japan International Cooperation Agency is a governmental agency that delivers the bulk of Official Development Assistance (ODA) on behalf of government of Japan. Professor Akihiko Tanaka assumed the presidency of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in April 2022. The organization has a wider network of offices in all continents where the organization is active through their programmes.²

The Official Development Assistance refers to the category of Foreign Aid or Soft Loans (Low-Interest Loans) by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In this category, a donor nation (Richer/Developed Economies) provides resources to poorer countries in order to boost the economic growth and the overall welfare of the nations' citizens.

JICA is part of Japan's official development assistance effort. Their role is focused on providing technical cooperation, capital grants and yen loans. According to the OECD, 2020 official development assistance from Japan increased 1.2% to USD 16.3 billion.

JICA's core development programs (aid modalities) are technical assistance programs/projects for capacity and institutional development, feasibility studies and master plans. The agency have collaborative projects in fields ranging from Education, Health, Energy to Public transportation. In India, Major projects like the Delhi Metro, Himachal Pradesh Crop Diversification Promotion Project are either funded through JICA loans or dispatch volunteers to provide technical support in these projects.³

² JICA (2022)

³ JICA (2021)

Another Core programme which is covered under JICA is the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers. It is a government system for dispatching young Japanese volunteers overseas operated by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

The program includes volunteers in wide range of fields such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, education, health, and more than 120 technical fields. The recruitment is held on April to May and October to November annually. Japanese citizens aged from 20 to 39 are eligible to apply. The prospective candidates go through a stringent selection process where they are tested for their health, linguistic and technological skills. Selected Candidates are then trained in their centres based in Japan ie Komagane City, Nagano Prefecture or Nihonmatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture. The volunteers prepare for their assignment by studying about the country, learning the local language etc. If any volunteer leaves their job after being selected, they are provided with unemployment benefits as well.⁴

These Volunteers are assigned for a period of 1-2 years to a local school, government office or any such institution where the candidates skills are utilised.

JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CENTER (JICE)

The Organisation was created in line with the policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and JICA on March 25, 1977. It's purpose was to support private sector roles and functions in the management of ODA projects under JICA.

The Organisation focuses on activities aimed at developing human resources across all regions and countries of the world such as managing scholarships for study at higher educational institutions in Japan, conducting international participant training, hosting youth exchange programs, Japanese language education to students and working adults, dispatching interpreters for conferences, client meetings etc.⁵

⁴ JICA (2020)

⁵ JICE (2023)

The Organization has offices majorly based in most of Japan's major islands barring Shikoku and international offices in Asia with a major focus on South-East, South and Central Asia.

One of the most well-known programmes under its student exchange is the Jenesys 2.0 where student delegations were invited on fully-funded cultural exchanges in Japan where people explore the country, take part in home-stays at a city in Japan. It was conducted from 2012 to 2018. Students are able to experience the local life in one of the regions of the country, explore monuments and go on field trips to museums, universities, temples etc to know more about the country.⁶



⁶ MOFA- Japan (2020)

⁷ JICE (2021)

⁸ Shagun Thapliyal (2017)

⁹ Shagun Thapliyal (2017)

Japan Foundation

Japan Foundation was formed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan in 1972. It was under the supervision of Prince Takamado, who served as the Administrator of the Organization until his death in 2002. It was reorganised as an incorporated administrative agency on October 2003, under the direct supervision of the Ministry.

It acts as a cultural agency which is dedicated of culture, language and organises events related to Language Exchange, Cultural Exchange and many more.

The Headquarters is based in Tokyo, which is supported by 3 regional offices in Kyoto, Urawa and Kansai, with the Urawa and Kansai Offices being Japanese-Language Institutes focused on training Japanese-Language teachers and providing support to language learners. They have established 25 overseas offices in 25 Countries.¹⁰



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¹⁰ Japan Foundation (n.d)

¹¹ Japan Foundation (2022)

A large majority of the offices in Asia as per the basis of the map are in Asia, majority being concentrated in South-East Asia (With Vietnam being the only country with 2 offices).

This is to the contrary to the Korean Cultural Centres established by South Korea since 2009, which possess more diverse locations as well as wide presence in South America, Africa and even having one in Central Asia (Kazakhstan).

Another common factor with the Korean Culture Centres (In conjunction with the King Sejong Institute) and Japan Foundation is that both agencies are responsible for Organising the Language Eligibility examinations ie JLPT (Japanese) and TOPIK (Korean). The difference being that Japan Foundation is the sole authority unlike their Korean Counterparts, which have a wide outreach if compared with the King Sejong Institutions (200+ centres in 81 countries).

Japan Foundation Offices host various events ranging from school visits, cultural activities and showcases. They even host big scale events like Cinema viewings, art exhibitions, global exchange programs etc.

The offices also have an in-house library where books ranging from test preparation materials to research journals and even manga cafes where visitors can relax and read their favorite series.

The model that Japan Foundation follows is called the “Three Fields”. They consist of :- ¹²

- Culture - Arts and Cultural Exchange

This aspect focuses on the cultural side of public diplomacy. This is done through In-House/Exclusive Exhibitions, Cultural Showcases at Educational Institutions, Student Visits at Japan Foundation Offices, Film Screenings, In-person exchange programs etc.

- Language - Japanese Language Education Overseas

¹² Japan Foundation (2023)

In this area, the Language eligibility examination (JLPT) is undertaken along with working on programs in providing Japanese Language education through in house projects like “JF Nihongo Program”, providing language education for Migrants, Skilled Workers, international students etc.

- Dialogue - Japanese Studies and Global Partnerships

Here, the organization aims at providing platforms for scholars, industry experts etc to discuss upon improving relationships between Japan and Participating nations. It also includes Grants, Fellowships and Youth Exchanges.

The organization also runs a e-magazine called “Wochi Kochi”, referring to an ancient Japanese Expression of “here and there”, which contains stories, activities as well as details related to behind the scenes on the workings of the agency.¹³

After the organization was brought into the direct purview of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Organization releases a report annually, providing details on the implementation of each programme, financial expenses incurred an indication of Transparency to the tax payers as well as a review on the performance of the Organization.

Conclusion

I think that these kinds of agencies are crucial for a nation's image building as well as to improve or establish relationships with other countries. India as one of the recipients is able to attain technical assistance from experts for the developmental projects as well as gain a cultural understanding of a nation by real time engagement through an active organization.

From my personal experience, these two organizations provided me with some of the best experiences in my life. One, a mentor in the form of a language teacher and second, to visit the country itself and get the opportunity to talk and live with the people, understand its culture and

¹³ Wochi Kochi (n.d)

indulge in certain experiences which can be only done in Japan itself and finally to represent India at a language learning cum skills development programme. These experiences helped me to grow as a person and as well as made me aware about the bigger world outside the country.

So, I think that with the existence of these organisations, it does not only help in simplifying the workflow of the Foreign Affairs Ministry when it comes implementation of Public Diplomacy and People-To-People Relation related activities and the results of the same can be seen in the form of a positive image of Japan as a cooperative nation as well as a “Cool Country” in the minds of youth who want to seek higher education or employment in the future.

JICA, JICE and Japan Foundation has a successful run in the current world as well as being an active participant in reducing the developmental gap between the developed and developing world. These kinds of organizations are a true mark of people to people connect and make the world a little more borderless. Other countries can also take these organizations as a case study for analyzing and creating any public diplomacy related frameworks in the future as well.

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