

# The Realms of Power in Cultural Diplomacy from France's Perspective

Interviewer: Naoyuki Haraoka Writing: Elena K. Johansson

The power of foreign cultural policy is increasing. As the world grows increasingly closer economically, it becomes more than ever crucial to establish mutual understanding between cultures. A complex net of vested interests, political actors, and institutions influence international political decisions. This global intertwining of interests will increase in the future. Regional multilateralism with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and growing numbers of Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) is advancing. If soft power policy manages to attract and co-opt other nations, even a smaller nation should be able to profit remarkably in such a multilateral system. By successfully promoting its culture, a nation can not only profit economically but also improve any negative image and amend international ties.

Still, as it is difficult to measure the actual outcome of cultural policy, there is uncertainty about how effective it is. Japan is currently stepping up investment in soft power in the form of a public-private partnership. The government and the private sector recently launched the Cool Japan Fund, which shows with its bulky budget of up to 60 billion yen a new sincerity in Japan's cultural ventures. Through a public-private initiative risk money can be provided and a mix of cultural, political and economic goals can be targeted. Japanese small and medium-sized companies in particular will be supported in expanding overseas in industries such as Japanese anime, entertainment, food, and fashion to promote Japanese culture and trigger positive effects on the entire Japanese economy. To better understand what cultural policy can and cannot achieve, *Japan SPOTLIGHT* spoke to French Cultural Counselor Bertrand Fort. France has a long history of foreign cultural policy and is one of the countries that has placed great importance on fostering its culture abroad.

**Haraoka:** I hear that a cultural counselor is considered one of the most important jobs among French diplomats, and that they spend much time solely on promoting French culture. Is that true?

**Fort:** Yes, it is. Just by looking at the budget size the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs assigns to cultural policy, you understand its importance: two-thirds are designated to culture, education and development aid, which includes promoting French arts and language, and also facilitating intellectual exchanges with foreign cultures.

Hundreds of thousands of students study French at French schools all over the world. A big part of the Foreign Affairs Ministry's budget is used to support this global network. We also have a global network of cultural institutions: 27

research institutes, like the *Maison Franco-Japonaise*, are involved in industry, architecture, etc. At this event, French and Japanese policy



Bertrand Fort, French Cultural Counselor, and Director of *l'Institut français du Japon* (the French Institute of Japan)

research and intellectual exchanges, around 500 of the 1,000 *Alliances françaises* are sponsored by the French government, and 150 *Institut français* are dedicated to promoting French arts and the French language. This dense network operated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs enables us to share French culture in partnership with the respective countries' cultural and educational institutions.

Culture represents the core of a three dimensional "diplomacy of influence", or soft power, with politics and economy being the other two dimensions. Along with this policy, French ambassadors supervise the promotion of French culture overseas. However, all projects must be implemented under an overall balanced approach in these three areas.

For example, our digital art festival "Digital Choc", held every February, is directly linked with the business sector, such as the video game industry, the film

makers also discuss the future of digital technologies, ranging from topics like digital books to the ethics of robots and artificial intelligence. This way, politics, economy and culture are linked within one project.

### **Haraoka: What is the historical origin of French cultural policy?**

**Fort:** French cultural policy began somehow during the Renaissance. But while France exported its culture to, for example Italy, Great Britain and Germany, it was also receiving foreign cultures from Italy, the Ottoman Empire, Africa, Spain, Great Britain, etc. Institutionally, the origin of French cultural policy goes back to the creation of the *Alliance française* in 1883 (probably partly inspired by the *Alliance Israélite universelle* of 1860). The *Alliance française* taught French and offered cultural activities to young and gifted youth all over the world. With time, the number of *Alliance française* grew all over the world (there are currently 1,040 in 136 countries), with many being established in North and South America. At the beginning of the 20th century, France also started to open French schools abroad to welcome young French and local students and step by step was funded an important number of research institutes and cultural centers directly managed by French Embassies (whereas the *Alliance française* are independent local institutions working in cooperation with them).

### **Haraoka: Was imperialism the motivation behind France's cultural policy?**

**Fort:** What later became the French international cultural policy was initially a genuine and benevolent approach by private individuals and institutions trying to bring culture and education to developing countries. French cultural policy was initiated during the Third Republic and the expansion of the French colonial empire but there was no direct link with them as its actions were implemented outside its borders.

## **French Cultural Policy in Today's World**

### **Haraoka: France is, like any other country, keen on attracting foreign direct investment. Can you then say that the aim in promoting culture in today's world is to attract FDI?**

**Fort:** Partially, because promoting culture also supports France's exports. If Japanese people develop a liking for France and its culture, they will most likely be fond of French luxury brands, fashion, design, technology, and gastronomy for instance, which will in turn have a positive impact on the French economy. There is no direct link between arts and consumption, but you create a positive environment by promoting culture, and that's what we try to support.

In global post-modern societies, to which Japan and France belong, governments and embassies are only one of many actors that act as a supporting pillar. We promote some artists, but most of the time exchanges and projects are carried out naturally by society itself.

Most of the time there is no need for the government to intervene, and that's of course a good thing.

### **Haraoka: But I have the impression that, despite France's active culture promotion, French youth don't seem to be particularly patriotic about their own culture. On the contrary, many of them appear to assimilate American culture and become quite Americanized. One of my friends was even concerned that young French people were more like Americans than French.**

**Fort:** It's a fact that American culture influences the whole world, even China. The Chinese government always claims it resists American global power, but the youth in the Chinese cities love American culture and have a kind of "American dream". Such is the globalized world we live in, and France partakes in it. However, it's an Americanization that is digested in a French way, just as it is in a Japanese way in Japan; the importation and incorporation of American culture, such as cinema and fashion, is only partial — it does not change the substance of Japanese culture. The bottom line is that despite some critics from time to time, the French love America, and *vice versa*.

### **Haraoka: Some time ago, I listened to a lecture by a French philosopher at the Institut français in Tokyo. He said that French President Charles de Gaulle admired French literature so much that he would show his books to anyone who came to his study, saying you cannot rule France without having read Balzac. But today's presidents, like Nicolas Sarkozy, don't seem to fit into that category as they are more capitalist oriented.**

**Fort:** This is a sign of the times. Nowadays the economy plays a much more important role in the life of a president. While the economy has always been significant for voters, they now favor even more leaders with economic skills. This is not to say that the position of culture has therefore weakened; global leaders today might just be less versed in classical culture than in contemporary culture. But despite this shift towards a focus on the economy, no French president can ignore culture since cultural industries — including books, film and entertainment — constitute an important part of the French economy. In 2011, they generated an income of 74.6 billion euros (i.e. more than the automobile industry at 60.4 billion euros and the luxury goods industry at 52.5 billion euro, and just after the telecommunications sector) and employed 1.2 million people.

### **Haraoka: Even though French youth seem to turn away from their own culture, outside of France the government has been very successful in promoting French culture. There are many Francophiles in other countries, including myself, and I think that, for example, the greatness of French literature enriches and stimulates the lives of many people. Take Robert**

## COVER STORY 1

**Kennedy, for example, who found comfort in Albert Camus' work after his brother John F. Kennedy was assassinated.**

**Fort:** Albert Camus is one of my favorite authors as well. To come back to the mood among French youngsters, it's better understood if you look at the context of the stagnating economy in Europe, which can lead to general pessimism about future employment opportunities, and the historical development of American culture, which is also itself strongly influenced by French culture. France and America have been having a mutual cultural impact on each other throughout history — as have France and Germany or France and Great Britain. Nevertheless, these countries still maintain their national uniqueness. Beyond this, I agree it's a question of cultural pride. Certainly, there is a lot in France to be proud of, and more young French people should take more pride in their own culture.

### Effectiveness of Cool Japan Fund

**Haraoka:** When looking at the effects of cultural policy on international relations, do you agree that you can in general expect the result of an investment to be shown long-term and not short-term?

**Fort:** Yes, I agree. And as you mentioned, you need to look at the budget for such a policy as an investment for the future and not only as a spending. Culture investment is a long-term one, with benefits to be expected after one or two generations. So it's nothing like an investment on the stock market where investors can get annual returns. When, for instance, you decide to support a young writer, it will take 20 years until he or she writes a bestseller and then another 20 years until the book is known worldwide. Only by that time it can result in students getting inspired by the author and deciding to study in your country. This is how long it can take to see the fruits of a cultural investment.

**Haraoka:** What are your thoughts on the Cool Japan Fund initiative?

**Fort:** I think it's a smart way to promote the creativity of Japan's youth. Before Cool Japan, people mostly knew about the traditional arts of Japan: martial arts, tea ceremony, ceramics, and traditional architecture. But since the concept Cool Japan was coined in 2002 and J-Pop culture started to boom, there is a new awareness on a global level about how creative Japanese people are. The approach in France differs though; we strive to support the “arts” and the “cultural industry” on an equal basis. While the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry in France sponsors industries like video games, cinema and French pop, the Ministry of Culture mainly focuses on the artists. The difference between the cultural policy in Japan and France is that we probably place a lot more importance on promoting artists abroad, whereas Japanese artists are first and foremost promoted in Japan.

**Haraoka:** What kind of artists were you thinking of in particular?

**Fort:** Film creators, choreographers, designers, and so forth. But it's really about facilitating creation. Japan has plenty of wonderful creators who have reached the top internationally in their art category. The next generation of Japanese artists need to receive more financial support to be more recognized.

**Haraoka:** So you expect the Cool Japan Fund to have a positive impact on Japanese foreign policy in the long term?

**Fort:** Yes, definitely. Japan creates a positive image with the help of this program — an image of a country which is about creation and is open to the world. You see, the creation of something rarely occurs when artists work alone, or in an isolated environment. Artists get inspired by the Internet, and sometimes they work in multinational groups with people from all over the world. That is how the world of arts works today. So by supporting Japanese artists, Japan can present to the world all the wonderful architecture, video games and pop culture it has to offer and introduce artists like Hiroshi Sugimoto, who is able to combine tradition and modernity.

### Vehicles to Successful Cultural Policy

**Haraoka:** In South Korea, public-private partnerships promote Korean culture extremely effectively. Do you think public-private partnerships are a desirable form of working organization to achieve success?

**Fort:** Absolutely. A government cannot and should not act alone, especially in the field of culture. In a democratic state, organized as an open economy and interwoven globally, the government is just one actor among many: local governments, the private sector, and NGOs, to just name a few. The role of the government could therefore be to create benevolent teams according to the “arm's length principle”, with parties that are independent and on an equal footing. So there is no direct intervention by the government; instead it establishes a conducive environment. Either way, it would be meaningless for the





government to attempt to give artists directions regarding their work. They are creators and don't want to be puppets. That's why public-private partnerships are most of the time more effective than direct governmental actions.

**Haraoka: Academic exchange programs, like the ones launched by the *Institut français*, are in my view crucial for successful culture promotion. What is your opinion of them?**

**Fort:** In general, academic and intellectual exchanges are probably one of the most efficient investment choices in culture. Our embassy in Japan spends more than 60 percent of its culture and scientific cooperation budget on scholarships, research, and academic and intellectual exchange programs. Actually, by looking at academic exchange programs, you can understand why it is difficult to foresee whether a scholarship for instance will really pay off in the long term, as students could end up working in the public sector, in private companies, in research centers or universities.

**Haraoka: Unfortunately, there are increasingly intensive political disputes between China, South Korea, and Japan. We just discussed cultural policy not having a short-term impact, but do you believe that academic and student exchange programs can be helpful in the long term to build harmonious, international relations?**

**Fort:** Yes, I believe so. But as a diplomat, it is delicate to comment on the regional situation in East Asia. This issue concerns first and foremost the countries involved and needs to be handled by them even if East Asia stability is a matter of concern for all world nations. However, I can tell you about how student exchange between France and Germany contributed to reconciliation between the two countries — after they had waged three wars in a period of 75 years. Charles De Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer established a German-French youth fund, the Franco-German Youth Office, after the Second World War to invest in youth and student exchanges. This was long before ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), and it became the starting point for thousands of German students from primary level up to university level to go to France to study, and *vice versa*. Based on this initiative and strong signals by political leaders, reconciliation became a reality. And today, it is just unthinkable that a war between France and Germany could happen again. Just the idea itself seems absurd and ludicrous.

**Haraoka: That's the power of cultural exchanges.**

**Fort:** Exactly. There might still be some bilateral tensions because you have two governments with two different cultures. The two nations always go through ups and downs and overtop each other in turns. For East Asia, this kind of student exchange program isn't necessarily 100 percent suitable, but while it may not serve as a model to follow, it could still be a point of reference to see what others have done in this regard. There is no doubt that more student exchanges can ease

the tensions between China, South Korea and Japan.

## **Upcoming French Culture Promotion in Japan**

**Haraoka: Do you have any plans for future Japanese-French cultural exchanges?**

**Fort:** Yes, we do. This year we are celebrating the 90th anniversary of the *Maison Franco-Japonaise*, through which the French-Japanese cultural partnership was established. All over Japan, we will hold a range of different events with more than 130 projects on intellectual exchange, in visual and performing arts, cinema, literature, fashion, design, and gastronomy. Our ambition is to address the young generation and to nurture and foster student exchanges at all levels between France and Japan, which naturally requires much investment and a consistent long-term management. We also need to have strong Japanese partners, because — unlike before — we do everything in partnership with Japanese institutions: museums, galleries, universities, think tanks, local governments, and NGOs. This means that a project is only considered valuable for implementation if it is appropriated by a Japanese partner. This is a crucial criterion for us; if there is no Japanese partner, there is no project.

**Haraoka: That's a good idea. What about the upcoming Tokyo Olympics in 2020? Do you have a particular strategy of promoting French culture linked to this event?**

**Fort:** As I mentioned before, we put priority on the young generation and their preferences. That's why we work notably in fields that appeal to them, like the gaming industry, digital arts, music, cinema, and also French manga. Together with all the francophone nations, we are also planning to promote the French language for the Olympic Games. Since their inception by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894, French has been one of the two official Olympic languages. A great number of visitors coming to Japan will be from Francophone countries like Senegal, Congo, Canada, Belgium, Algeria, and Switzerland, and many of them don't speak English. Everybody understands that the Japanese government puts a strong emphasis on English, but that does not reflect today's multipolar world and multilingualism. As with English, French is spoken globally on five continents and the number of speakers is growing very rapidly, thanks in particular to Africa and the Middle East. We will therefore try to help the Japanese authorities to welcome the world in French, too.

**Haraoka: I see. Thank you so much for taking time to see me today.**

**Fort:** *Merci! Arigato gozaimasu.*

(Please visit [www.institutfrancais.jp](http://www.institutfrancais.jp) to learn more about the program for the 90th anniversary of the French-Japanese cultural partnership.)

*Elena K. Johansson is a writer and journalist living in Tokyo.*



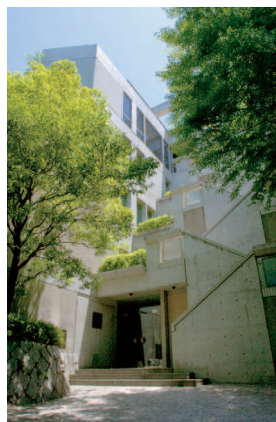
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## Cultural Summit: the future of Franco-Japanese relations

June 28-July 3 | Tokyo, Kyoto, Kyushu



This summit to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Franco-Japanese cultural partnership will be held on four panel discussion; to discuss issues France and Japan are facing in the geo-political, social demography, energetic and cultural fields. Important French and Japanese personalities will discuss the future of the exceptional partnership between the two countries.



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Villa Kujoyama



## Inauguration of the new Villa Kujoyama

October 4 | Kyoto

Inspired by the model of the Villa Medici in Rome, the Villa Kujoyama welcomes in Kyoto artists from all the areas of creation, since 1992. This is an original program, a creative place of meetings, which has hosted famous residents whose work was marked with the imprint of their Japanese experience. After renovation, The Villa will reopen in October 2014 and will welcome French and Japanese residents including Art Masters.

## France Month in Yokohama

June 1-July 16 | Yokohama

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The second largest city of Japan is known, in France and worldwide, for its openness and support of art. For six weeks, the city of Yokohama will promote the French culture with a unique festival in Japan; which is celebrating in 2014 its 10th edition. After a festive opening with a concert of French pop, more than fifty events will succeed, combining gastronomy, cinema, exhibitions, music, lectures, performances, etc...



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## Journées du goût 2014 / The Days of Taste 2014

September 19-October 10 | Tokyo, Sapporo, Sendai, Osaka, Kyoto, Yokohama, Nagoya, Fukuoka

Gastronomy is a universal language. Throughout September, the French cultural network in Japan is offering "Les Journées du Goût / The days of Taste", an annual meeting dedicated to the French art de vivre (art of living) in all its forms and flavors. This year, the festival will be celebrating the cultures of northern France's regions and its neighbors', a gastronomy still unknown in Japan.

For more informations: [www.institutfrancais.jp](http://www.institutfrancais.jp)