

**The Influence of Soft Power Strategy
on Education in Japan**

A Research Proposal Presented to
The Foreign Languages Department

by

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Abstract

The need to build strong connections with other countries and to prevent international conflicts has been addressed by politicians and experts in a sphere of education. In recent years, a number of scholars have focused on Japanese soft power strategy and its influence on education system in Japan. However, these studies have largely overlooked the need to examine the influence soft power initiatives have on curriculum planning in Japan and to explain how Japanese experience can be adopted by other countries. The purpose of this research is to measure the impact these initiatives have on Japanese students and foreigners who study in Japan. Furthermore, this paper focuses on analysing recent Japanese education reforms and the ways to utilize similar policies in different countries. For this purpose, we will employ a mixed-method research design including a comparative analysis based on data collected from a student survey and information provided by the Japanese government reports. The study such as this one may be of use to students and researchers who focus on education policies in Asia.

Keywords: Japanese education system, soft power, international relations

Introduction

In recent years, the need to build strong relations with other countries and to avoid conflicts has been internationally acknowledged by both scholars and politicians. In particular, Japanese soft power initiatives have attracted significant interest in such spheres as international relations, social sciences and education. Nye (2004) defines 'soft power' as an ability to induce others to do something without force. This term was first introduced to describe major changes that occurred in international relations after World War II. For many years Japan has been recognised as a country that has considerable soft power assets.

Many studies have been devoted to exploring how Japanese soft power strategy influences Japanese education policies, helps create a positive image of Japan in the world and build a strong network of people who are ready to work with Japanese colleagues in the future. In particular, these studies explore how the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program and Japan Foundation work as tools of soft power (Metzgar, 2016; Vyas, 2010). Unsriana and Ningrum (2018) also highlight the importance of spreading the ideas of pacifism and equality among domestic students. However, scholars identify several problems associated with the use of education as a means of avoiding international conflicts. For instance, Otmazgin (2012) mentions misunderstandings that occur due to the use of pop-culture references. Despite the fact that mentions of manga and anime are common in the Japanese education process, they are still considered violent and harmful in some regions. Similarly, Wojciuk, Michalek and Stormowska (2015) also explore how differences between political systems lead to the use of propaganda that promotes political ideas and influences people's values and beliefs. Furthermore, some studies also notice the recent changes in the world situation, such as the growing role of international

organizations, and explore how these changes affect soft power initiatives and education policies in Japan (Anisoara, 2014; Bokova, 2017).

Although there have been numerous studies on this topic, they have barely addressed the need to analyze how soft power initiatives influence curriculum planning in Japan, especially in higher education. It is also largely unknown how Japanese projects that promote diversity and peace can be adopted by education institutions in other countries. Therefore, there is a value in extending the present research to examine these topics. This study aims to measure the effect the soft power initiatives have on education system in Japan, to investigate how recent changes and education reforms have affected Japanese students' worldview and to analyze ways to utilize Japanese policies in different countries. We suggest that it is possible to adopt these projects and initiatives and use Japanese experience in both Asian and Western education systems.

Literature Review

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected as a result of economic and cultural exchange. In recent years, the need to find alternative ways to solve and prevent international conflicts has been addressed by both politicians and scholars. They often focus on the use of education as a diplomatic tool that allows countries to promote peace and international understanding. The Japanese initiative related to soft power as an alternative to 'hard power' has been one of the most effective peace policies in the world. Therefore, many studies have been devoted to analysing the connection between Japanese soft power strategy and Japanese education system.

Many scholars have focused their attention on analysing how international initiatives in the field of education can be used to strengthen relationships between countries that are involved. Metzgar (2016) examines the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program that created a strong bond

between Japan and the United States and helped Japan build the network of people that are not only directly exposed to the Japanese society, but also willing to participate in international projects in a sphere of education. According to Hashimoto (2017), there is a need to focus on the promotion of language as a way to gain foreigners' attention and manage human resources. However, the major conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that for a long time the Japanese government has been neglecting this area. Similarly, Watanabe and McConnell (2008) argue that in order to build connections between countries students need to visit foreign educational institutions throughout the process of higher education. Unsriana and Ningrum (2018) also analyse how domestic students can be taught values of the society inside the classroom. This is particularly important for creating a certain mindset that can help spread the ideas of diversity, equality and pacifism. However, the question of whether or not virtue can be taught through a textbook remains controversial. Vyas (2010) examines Japanese education policies and highlights the role of Japan Foundation in creating the positive image of Japan in the world. This research concludes that the Japanese government seeks to build strong connections with countries like China through educational programs for people who are interested in learning Japanese. Another goal the government has is to create the network of experts with exceptional knowledge in such fields as Japanese culture and history. According to Vyas (2010), knowing the language means being exposed to the news reported by the Japanese media and certain political ideas shared almost exclusively by Japanese people.

Furthermore, studies also explore other problems associated with the use of education for preventing conflicts. For instance, Otmazgin (2012) mentions that countries often have different goals when it comes to international cooperation. The study also explores misunderstandings that may occur when the country starts using pop-culture for educating about topics like peace and

human rights. Specifically, this research mentions how anime and manga, which are often used for the purpose of education, can be considered violent and harmful by many conservative countries in Asia. Wojciuk, Michalek and Stormowska (2015) also mention in their research that soft power strategies which are used in the fields of education and student exchange may be strongly influenced by the political system of the country and by the goals that the government is trying to achieve. This implies that education can be used not only to share ideas and experience with people from other countries, but also to influence their political beliefs and change their attitude towards their own government.

Moreover, the influence of globalization and integration on education has become a topic for debate among scholars. Anisoara (2014) notices that the changes started to be more noticeable after September 11 attacks and 2003 invasion of Iraq. Bokova (2017) also explores this topic and highlights the role of international organizations, such as UNESCO, in preventing wars. In this research the author argues that there is a direct connection between education, poverty and violent behaviour. Similarly, Romano (2018) supports the idea that it is crucial for the government to promote international understanding and educate people about tragedies and history of armed conflicts. Specifically, the study focuses on atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

However, previous studies have largely failed to examine how soft power strategy influences curriculum planning in Japanese schools and universities. Scholars often do not offer the precise explanation regarding how to avoid justification of war while discussing historical events. There is also a need to explain how projects with a goal to promote peace and diversity in Japan can be adopted by other countries. Therefore, exploration of these topics seems a worthwhile pursuit. The purpose of this research is not only to investigate the effect of soft

power strategy on education system, but also to measure the impact it has on students' worldview in Japan and analyze how similar policies can be utilized in different countries.

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of soft power strategy on education system in Japan and to measure the impact it has on students' worldview. With this aim in mind, we will employ a mixed-method research design including a comparative analysis based on data collected from a student survey and investigation of the Japanese government reports, education reforms and initiatives.

For this purpose, we will create a questionnaire for Russian students of Higher School of Economics who went to Japan on an exchange program. This will allow us to obtain quantitative data to test the effects of soft power strategy on Japanese universities' policies and courses. Based in part on a study by Unsriana and Ningrum (2018), we will also obtain data from Japanese government reports on such subjects as peace education and education for international understanding, including data provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. An online questionnaire will be developed in Russian and will use multiple choice items containing questions about different aspects of Japanese education programs. On obtaining the data, we will perform a comparative analysis which will allow us to investigate both the proposed benefits and actual impact education reforms and initiatives have had on students' worldview and overall experience of studying in Japan. Slightly adapted from Fukuzawa (2016), this approach will allow us to summarize students' responses by grouping them into categories. Therefore, the procedure seems suitable for the aforementioned purpose of the study.

The participants in the survey are limited to Asian Studies and International Relations students of second, third and fourth years. Although the scope of this paper does not permit detailed analysis of the new approach to education in Japan, the soft power strategy adopted by the Japanese government and the effect they have on students in different parts of the world, we will be able to draw important comparisons from the collected data.

Expected Outcomes

This study will add to the body of research on the use of soft power in Japanese education policies and provide a deeper understanding of how the Japanese government uses pacifist values to influence domestic students and foreigners who study in Japan. Moreover, our results may be of use to scholars and experts in the fields of education and international relations, especially those who focus on adapting Japanese policies and projects to the conditions in other countries. Our study suggests that there is a potential for these policies to be utilized effectively in the education process in both Asian and Western countries.

Moreover, the data obtained from a student survey may contribute to identifying the evidence for future research. We believe that our results will be consistent with findings from the government reports, including those from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Therefore, the results may be useful for researchers who are studying recent Japanese education reforms.

This research is timely for several reasons. Cultural exchange programs and education reforms are currently one of the most rapidly expanding fields in the ‘soft power’ policies promoted by the Japanese government. Furthermore, the influence of globalization in education has become more prominent than ever, which means that there is a need to understand how to

adapt to these changes and learn from the experience of other countries to prevent international conflicts.

The results will be presented by the author during the thesis defence presentation at the department of Asian Studies of Higher School of Economics. The data obtained in the course of this project and the full version of this research will be made available for viewing and downloading on the university website.

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