

Nation Branding in Three Spaces of Wartime and Postwar Japan

Jessamyn R. Abel*

Pennsylvania State University

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Abstract

This article considers three examples of nation branding through cultural diplomacy by the wartime Japanese state in cooperation with non-state actors and connects them with similar postwar activities. After Japan's 1933 withdrawal from the League of Nations, a group of Japanese internationalists formed the semi-governmental Society for International Cultural Relations, aiming to use cultural exchange to foster global views of their nation as cultured and cooperative. Around the same time, the alliance of leaders from the diplomatic and sports worlds preparing Tokyo to host the 1940 Summer Olympics wanted to brand it as a capital city appropriate to a world power by making sure it appeared clean, modern, and populated by worldly residents. And in Japan's puppet state in Manchuria, the Japanese leaders of the South Manchurian Railway hoped that giving foreign visitors a ride on their new high-speed luxury train "Asia Express" would showcase Manchukuo as an exemplar of successful colonial development. Echoes of each of these examples in postwar Japan suggests that, in spite of stark differences in political context, there are significant similarities in the techniques of cultural diplomacy practiced by liberal and illiberal states.

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy, Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (KBS), Olympics, infrastructure, railways, colonialism

*Corresponding author: jua14@psu.edu

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Introduction

In the weeks before the 2021 Summer Olympic Games, planners in Tokyo were worried about the weather. The aging sewer system, built on the occasion of the previous Tokyo Olympiad in 1964, had developed a bad habit of overflowing during heavy rainfall, sending raw sewage into the bay where open-water swimming races would take place. The possibility of events being cancelled due to high levels of fecal coliform bacteria in the bay or athlete complaints about foul-smelling water would further undermine Japan's soft power goals, already more or less decimated by the global pandemic, which had forced a year-long postponement of the Games. The foul-water crisis was averted due to a combination of clean-up efforts and some kindness from Mother Nature. But the drumbeat of news stories about the polluted bay in the weeks before the opening ceremony detracted from the image of Japan's capital city that planners had hoped to present.

This example highlights a continuity in one aspect of Japanese foreign policy over the past century, across illiberal and liberal regimes, both of which fretted over what foreign visitors would think of the city's sewer system. It also points to some of the limitations and risks involved in using hard-to-control popular activities for the purpose of nation branding. In spite of such problems, efforts to "rebrand" the nation and its cities—replacing negative global perceptions with newly constructed images—have continued over the past century. Japan's nation branding efforts have been led and funded by a combination of government and private actors. In many cases, activities that were instigated by private (or semi-private) entities later gained government support or were even taken over completely when political or bureaucratic leaders saw potential benefits. The experiences of 1930s nation branding informed postwar endeavors; planners often referred specifically to the perceived successes or unattained goals of those earlier activities.

The early twentieth century saw the beginning of a global trend of mobilizing cultural activities and cultural products for diplomatic ends.¹⁾ Both governmental and private organizations in Japan participated in this trend and, in the 1930s and early 1940s, directed cultural diplomacy toward the goals of empire, especially the justification of Japanese leadership and control of Asia. This included the rebranding of three overlapping spaces: the Japanese empire as a whole; the "inner lands" of the empire, represented by the capital city of Tokyo; and Japan's colonial territories, including the formal colonies of Korea and Taiwan, as well as the places under informal control, such as the puppet state of Manchukuo. These branding efforts, aimed variously at European, American, or Asian audiences, depicted the empire of Japan as the equal of the Western powers and the legitimate leader of Asia. They

1) On this global trend, see Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

presented Tokyo as a capital city appropriate to a world power: modern, clean, and peopled by sophisticated and cosmopolitan Japanese subjects. And they portrayed the colonies as thriving under Japanese control.

In the context of American occupation after the nation's defeat in 1945, and having been stripped of its colonies and military power, Japan was rebuilt under the banner of democracy. Reforms demanded by the occupation General Headquarters and implemented through the existing government transformed every corner of governance, economy, and society. Japanese leaders framed a wide range of policies, projects, and plans as contributions to the construction of a "new Japan." As that ubiquitous phrase suggests, Japan was again being rebranded. The content of the new brand was malleable. A large portion of rebranding efforts were directed at changing perceptions created by wartime aggression and militarism: the new Japan was a peaceful, democratic, "cultural" nation. But rebranding also focused on global trade, touting Japan as an industrial powerhouse and potentially lucrative site for foreign investment. Echoes of wartime branding practices that reverberated through Japan after 1945 and persist even today suggest strong continuities and similarities between illiberal and liberal states across very different circumstances (and levels of success).

We can trace those continuities by considering three key methods that were used during the Asia Pacific War to rebrand the spaces of nation, capital city, and colony, then taken up again in postwar efforts to rebrand the nation after defeat and the dismantling of the Japanese empire: promoting familiarity with various aspects of Japanese culture, hosting sports megaevents, and building impressive infrastructure for the world to admire. Materials produced by three organizations engaged in nation branding through cultural diplomacy, along with public discourse about their activities, highlights the similar methods used in those periods. A semi-governmental organization for cultural exchange promoted Japanese hegemony in Asia first to a Western audience beginning in 1934, then to other Asians in the early 1940s. The organization broadened its focus and shifted its aims under American occupation and the liberal postwar Japanese state, but the nature of their activities remained constant. In 1952, the Japanese Olympic Organizing Committee took up the effort to host the Summer Games in Tokyo that had been abandoned in 1938, with nation-branding goals that looked remarkably similar to the previous effort. And Japan's government-run railway agency promoted high-speed trains as symbols of national strength in both 1930s Manchuria and 1960s Japan. Comparison of these wartime and postwar examples of cultural diplomacy and nation branding shows that, while they may have enjoyed different levels of success, the techniques established in an illiberal context were equally compelling to a liberal regime. These organizations are just a few among many entities that engaged in some kind of nation-branding activity; as such, they represent a significant trend in Japan's public diplomacy across the twentieth century.

Cultural Exchange to Brand the Japanese Empire

In the 1930s, both private and government actors took culture seriously as a diplomatic tool and sought to use the branding of nation, capital, and colony to gain global acceptance of the expanding Japanese empire both within and beyond Asia. Cultural diplomacy was becoming increasingly important due to growing tensions and a rift in the sphere of standard diplomacy. In September 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria in northeastern China and set up a puppet state, which they declared to be the independent nation of Manchukuo. In response to China's protest against this violation of its sovereignty, a League of Nations mission of inquiry found that Manchukuo was not a truly independent state and, recognizing Manchuria as Chinese territory, demanded the withdrawal of the Japanese military. When the General Assembly voted almost unanimously to adopt these conclusions, the Japanese delegation stood and walked out, a precursor to Japan's formal statement of withdrawal from the League. This action branded Japan as an international outlaw, having rejected a ruling by (and given up its membership in) the world's foremost body of international cooperation at the time.

But even as the Japanese government began the two-year process of severing most ties with the League, some Japanese internationalists worked to continue the kinds of activities that they had pursued there. One example of this can be found in the Society for International Cultural Exchange (*Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai*, generally referred to in English by the acronym "KBS").²⁾ The KBS was founded in 1934, soon after the announcement that Japan would withdraw from the world body, by former members of the League's Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, as an effort to continue some form of international engagement.³⁾ Though it was a semipublic organization, working under the oversight of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, private individuals ran the organization, making decisions about and carrying out its activities. These individuals hoped that the organization they founded would not only make sure that Japan continued to be a cooperative member of the international community, but also present to an international audience a different image of their nation than the one being displayed in news coverage of the Manchurian Incident and its aftermath.

For its first several years, the KBS focused its activities on the Western powers and depicted Japan as the representative to "the West" of what they called "Asian culture" (but which, in practice, included only examples of Japanese culture). Its broad and varied activities included facilitating intellectual exchange by supporting foreign researchers of Japanese culture in Japan and sending both Japanese lecturers and works of art abroad. It published books, pamphlets, lectures, translations, maps, and other materials in European languages

2) The KBS adopted the English-language name above, though a literal translation of the Japanese name would be "International Cultural Promotion Society," a name more fitting to the work of nation branding through culture.

3) On the KBS, see Jessamyn Abel, *The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933-1964* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), pp. 81-107.

about many aspects of Japanese culture. For instance, a few of the books published in 1934 included one in Spanish on Japanese pottery, another in French on Japanese dolls, and an English-language bibliography of books on Japan.⁴⁾ They continued in this vein for several years. Introducing such cultural elements as the art of the Japanese garden and traditional Japanese theater arts showed a softer side of a country that was, at the time, generally depicted in European and American newspapers as militaristic and aggressive.

KBS leaders hoped that developing what they called “international understanding” in this way would ease the tensions that had led to Japan’s split with the League of Nations. As stated by then chairman Kabayama Aisuke in a 1936 speech, “It is urgent that we make foreign peoples understand our national conditions and culture and plan for cultural cooperation with them in order to resolve our difficulties in the areas of foreign policy, diplomacy, and economics.”⁵⁾ From its inception, the KBS aimed essentially to use culture to rebrand Japan as internationalist at a time when its government was extricating itself from the world’s primary institution of international cooperation.

However, as times changed, both the aims of the organization and the intended audience of its activities shifted significantly. The outbreak of war in Europe hindered communication with the continent; around the same time, Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro issued the call to build a “New Order in East Asia.” In the face of such circumstances, the KBS necessarily turned its attention from Europe to Asia. Of course, this meant abandoning any pretense of representing “Asian culture.” In addition, the Society could not ignore government priorities. Though it had been the brainchild of a group of individuals, the KBS received significant public funding from the start. The government share of funding grew over the years, especially after 1938. In 1940, the organization officially came under the control of the Cabinet Information Bureau, the government branch in charge of propaganda and censorship.

All of this led to active participation in the promotion of empire, through the depiction of Japan to other Asian peoples as the leader of a purportedly (but not actually) mutually beneficial “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” and a benefactor and protector of Asian countries against the Western imperialist powers. For example, the KBS began in the late 1930s to produce Chinese versions of some of its films, as well as a new film in Cantonese called *Life Conditions of Overseas Chinese in Japan*. While the Society continued to produce materials about daily life and culture in Japan, it also expanded to a different kind of subject matter, such as a 1941 film showing Japanese naval power that was produced in eight languages and screened throughout Southeast Asia. KBS representatives made several visits

4) These three books published by Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai in 1934 were: Kikusaburo Fukui, *Los elementos humanos en la cerámica*; *Poupées Japonaises (Dolls of Japan)*; and *A Short Bibliography on Japan*.

5) Kabayama Aisuke, introduction to *Zaidan hōjin Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai Shōwa jū-nendo jigyō hōkokusho*, ed. Aoki Setsuichi (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1937), 7.

to northern China and the Japanese-controlled puppet state of Manchukuo. In 1943, the KBS was involved in the China-Japan Cultural Association general meeting in Nanjing, which had been occupied by Japanese forces since the end of 1937, and the Greater East Asia Writers Conference in Tokyo.⁶⁾ All of these activities aimed to change the image of the Japanese empire held by peoples of Asia. Some, such as hosting an international conference in Tokyo, might also help to rebrand the capital. A more focused branding of Tokyo took advantage of the ill-fated plan to host the Olympics.

Olympic Spectacle to Brand the Metropole

Efforts to brand Tokyo as a world-class capital and metropole of Greater East Asia included a bid to host the 1940 Summer Olympic Games, with the idea that a stay in Tokyo, combined with the spectacle of a well-organized Olympics, would so impress foreign visitors that they would accept and support Japanese leadership in (which is to say, domination of) Asia.⁷⁾ Planning for the 1940 Tokyo Olympics followed a similar pattern of public-private cooperation as seen in the KBS. The bid to host the Games began with a 1931 decision by the Tokyo city council, which was focused primarily on the local and domestic benefits to be gained, such as economic gain and improvement of health by inspiring people to engage in sports. But the mayor of Tokyo began to use the potential diplomatic utility of hosting in an attempt to get national government officials on board.⁸⁾ Having given up the nation's leadership role in the League, Japan's foreign policy leaders began to see the potential of hosting the international "festival of peace and amity" for building support among the world powers for the Japanese empire in Asia. With the idea that, if people visiting for the Olympics got to see a great capital city, watch sports events in a beautiful stadium, and interact with admirable people, then they would accept Japan as the natural leader in Asia and Tokyo as the region's metropole. Impressed by the success of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin in presenting the new face of Nazi Germany, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs took the reins of planning to host in Tokyo, calling it a form of "people's diplomacy"; career diplomat Nagai Matsuzō was made director of the Olympic Organizing Committee. (After the cancellation of the Games in 1938, Nagai became chairman of the KBS).

An essential part of branding Tokyo as a world-class capital city was making sure that the city itself, including its residents, buildings, and infrastructure, would be impressive, or in the worst cases, at least not embarrassing. Civic leaders worried that the city would not withstand

6) *Shōwa jū-go-nendo jigyō gaikyō* (Tokyo, Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1941); *Shōwa jū-roku-nendo jigyō gaikyō* (Tokyo, Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1942); *Shōwa jū-hachi-nendo jigyō gaikyō* (Tokyo, Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1944).

7) On planning for the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, see Abel, *International Minimum*, 108–139; and Sandra Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics: Japan, the Asian Olympics and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

8) Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games*, 34.

such close scrutiny. In response to a survey about the recently awarded hosting, many prominent Tokyoites expressed their worry that their city was too “shabby” to make a good impression. Their concerns included narrow roads, a dearth of cultural institutions, insufficient sewer systems, and (as a result) filthy canals and rampant mosquitoes and flies. Their complaints invariably concluded with a call to city leaders to make the necessary improvements to the city so that the Olympics could properly function as a means of branding it as a first-rate capital city.⁹⁾

Some of these survey respondents also fretted about how the residents of Tokyo would affect the opportunity the Olympics presented for nation branding and people’s diplomacy. Understanding that a city consists not only of its infrastructure but also its people, Olympic planners tried to bring Tokyo residents up to what they considered an “international” standard, calling on the public to welcome foreign visitors with sportsmanship, civility, and dignity, and imploring them to make visitors feel comfortable and provide them with high-quality products and services. The government implemented a campaign to raise “public morality” ahead of the Olympics by urging people to stop spitting in the street, littering, and similar behaviors that would reflect poorly on the city and nation on an individual level.¹⁰⁾ This campaign sought to ensure that hosting the Olympics would at the very least not damage Japan’s brand.

Of course, effective branding of the nation and its capital required that Tokyo appear to be not just clean, modern, and cosmopolitan but also identifiably “Japanese.” One English-language promotional pamphlet stated, “The plans of the Olympic Village take into consideration giving foreign sportsmen an impression of the life in Japan,” with wooden houses built in a “semi-Japanese style with Western comforts.”¹¹⁾ In other words, planners intended to use architecture to display traditional Japanese culture but strip it of any native elements that might seem backward or make Western athletes uncomfortable. Tokyo’s Olympic planners recognized that branding the city as a world capital required both specificity and broad accessibility—it had to be different but not uncomfortably so.

Japan’s Olympic planners never got to test their ideas about the diplomatic impact of hosting the Games in the nation’s capital. The prospect of people’s diplomacy at Tokyo Olympics could not withstand the pressures of an ongoing war, and the Cabinet decided to relinquish the Games in 1938, in order to devote all available resources to the war effort. If Tokyo had been able to go through with the Games, one cannot help but wonder whether all of these efforts at raising the level of cultivation among the local people, improving urban

9) “Dai jūni kai Orimupikku Tokyo kaisai ni kan suru kansō oyobi kakuhōmen e no kibō to chūmon,” *Kaizō* 18, no. 9 (September 1936): 296–306.

10) Nakano Shigeharu’s critique of these campaigns are in “Orinipikku to Nihon,” *Nakano Shigeharu zenshū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1979), 554–559.

11) *XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940: Olympic Preparations for the Celebration of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo 1940* (Tokyo: Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad 1940, 1938), 20.

infrastructure, and building Olympic facilities that were simultaneously modern, international, and characteristically Japanese would have had any effect on the countries that were struggling against or condemning Japanese aggression. It is hard to imagine that a Chinese athlete (for instance) would accept the image of Tokyo as the metropole of Asia, even if it did have some very fine sewers.

Fast Trains to Brand a Colony

Infrastructure was also a key element of nation branding in the puppet state of Manchukuo, where a new luxury high-speed train called the “Asia Express” became a well-publicized piece of evidence in arguments that Japanese control was beneficial to the colonies.¹²⁾ The Japanese government and other advocates of colonialism frequently used claims about successful development in many areas—economy, industry, infrastructure, agriculture, and all aspects of society and culture—as a justification for control of Manchuria. Transportation infrastructure, in particular, was a prominent feature of propaganda promoting Japanese colonialism to both foreign and domestic audiences.¹³⁾ By highlighting the modern, efficient, and stylish Asia Express, colonial boosters could argue that Japanese control was beneficial to the people who lived under it (regardless of what those people themselves thought about it).

The Asia Express was designed, built, and operated by the South Manchuria Railway Company, an agency of the Japanese government and one of the primary tools of its control of Manchukuo, but as is clear in reporting on the luxurious and high-speed railway line, there was plentiful private involvement in rebranding Japan through the media. Thus, as in the cases of the KBS and the Tokyo Olympics, this nation-branding work was a public-private collaboration. The notion of the train as a showcase item was present in the planning and design process, and then newspapers in Japan, Manchukuo, and elsewhere helped spread the message. However, that message was sometimes garbled in transmission, depending on the perspectives of the messenger. This again highlights one of the challenges of nation branding, which relies on unaffiliated people and entities to communicate the new image.

When the new line opened in 1934, it was the third fastest passenger train in the world, faster and more luxurious than any in Japan. Foreign visitors were regularly ushered into the train’s first-class observation car for a high-speed journey, so that they could experience the style and technology of this Japanese-built and operated train (and, their hosts hoped, share their impressions with audiences at home). Perhaps the most effective of these junkets, in terms of potential diplomatic impact, was a group of American reporters, whose ride on a test

12) On the “Asia Express,” see Jessamyn R. Abel, *Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World's First Bullet Train* (Redwood City, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2022), 139-179.

13) Kate McDonald, *Placing Empire: Travel and the Social Imagination in Imperial Japan* (University of California Press, 2017).

run of the Asia Express resulted in at least two articles in major U.S. newspapers and a newsreel, all of which extolled the comfort, precision, and speed of the train as representative of Japanese efficiency and skill.¹⁴⁾ While this excursion may have helped brand Manchuria as a fast-developing region, its usefulness as propaganda for the Japanese empire was hindered by the fact that Manchurian success was sometimes framed as strengthening an expansionist Japan.

A particularly telling example can be seen in an episode of Time magazine's *March of Time* newsreel, shown in movie theaters in the United States, which called the rail line a "modern and speedy" symbol of the progress Japan was bringing to Manchuria. But it also noted that the train's daily trips carried "swarms of Japanese officials and their families into the interior" and warned that such progress would make the puppet state a new base for Japanese expansion.¹⁵⁾ The word "swarms" echoes nineteenth-century "Yellow Peril" rhetoric and is an early example of the racist imagery that became common in wartime American propaganda, which often depicted the Japanese people as pests to be exterminated.¹⁶⁾ In this case, while the branding of Manchukuo as a modernizing, industrializing, and economically thriving new nation was, to some extent, taking hold, the reliance on unsympathetic reporters to communicate that image resulted in the insertion of a drastically discordant note that undermined the main message, which was meant to build support for Japanese empire.

The question of impact is clearly difficult to answer with any accuracy, but we can at least say with a fair amount of certainty that most people in both the Western powers and the so-called Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere remained unconvinced about the legitimacy or benefit of Japanese regional leadership. Cultural diplomacy can be a helpful addition to a well-stocked diplomatic toolbox, but only if those tools work in concert with one another. Nation branding is unlikely to be effective when it contrasts with other policies and actions. Thus, efforts to brand Japan in a positive light could not overcome the realities of violence, oppression, and the flouting of international norms. KBS efforts to cultivate admiration and respect for Japan in other Asian countries were undermined by the lived experience of people living within the context of a Japanese military presence. Even before the Tokyo Olympics were cancelled, they faced threats of boycott over Japan's invasion of China. Foreign reporting on the Asia Express did indeed show that Japanese-controlled Manchuria was experiencing industrial and agricultural development, but this did not improve relations with the United States or its allies.

14) "Pressmen Due In on Asia Express," *Manchuria Daily News*, October 10, 1934, 3. Published reports of the ride include: "Japanese Add to Manchukuo Railway Lines," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 3, 1934, 8; "Crack Trains Link Manchurian Cities," *New York Times*, December 23, 1934, E8; and "Japan-China," *March of Time*, vol. 1, ep. 9, December 13, 1935 (accessed via ProQuest, document ID 1822948578).

15) "Japan-China."

16) John W. Dower, "Graphic Others/Graphic Selves: Cartoons in War and Peace," in *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New Press, 1993), 287–300.

Some foreign visitors to Manchukuo were quite enthusiastic about Japanese control. A visiting Italian diplomat, for instance, used his experience riding the train to extoll the nature of the Manchukuo government and fascist leadership more generally.¹⁷⁾ However, foreign leaders who were not already inclined to view the puppet government so positively maintained their policies of opposition to Japanese imperialist expansion. In spite of these failures, the techniques of nation branding through cultural diplomacy developed by the illiberal wartime Japanese government were still compelling to the liberal democratic regime that replaced it.

Postwar Continuation of Failed Wartime Nation Branding

Postwar echoes of wartime nation-branding activities suggest that the difference between illiberal and liberal nation branding lies primarily in the details of the image being proffered and its connection to real policies and circumstances in Japan. Each of these three examples of wartime cultural diplomacy continued in some way after defeat and occupation. In the context of efforts to rebuild Japan as a democratic and peaceful nation, these efforts were probably more convincing, being implemented alongside the construction of a democratic government system and broad efforts to establish friendly relations with former enemies and victims of aggression.

The image of Japan that the KBS tried to depict during the Asia Pacific War—as militarily strong and the legitimate leader of Asia, but also a nation with admirable cultural traditions—only partially fit the postwar context. The Society ceased operations in the aftermath of war, then began operating again a few years later with strong continuities in personnel, activities, and stated purpose. However, the depiction of Japan found in its materials was drastically different, as the KBS changed with the times. In place of the wartime picture of a powerful nation that should be the leader of Asia due to its industrial and military strength, the KBS presented a democratic “cultural state” (*bunka kokka*), the aspirational identity that was being promoted by the postwar Japanese government, though the organization operated without government subsidies until 1953.¹⁸⁾ The Society folded in 1972, as the government determined that the organization, which had become deeply U.S.-focused, would not be appropriate for its goal of promoting cultural exchange with other Asian countries. But the Ministry of Foreign Affairs devoted substantial resources to a new organization established in the same year, the Japan Foundation, which had a very similar mission to that of the KBS and took up many of its activities.¹⁹⁾ Nation branding through promotion of Japanese culture, exchange programs, language programs, and many other efforts reminiscent of the earlier

17) “Italian Goodwill Mission Welcomed by Mukdenites; Leaves on Trip to Fushun,” *Manchuria Daily News*, May 3, 1938, 8.

18) “Zaidan hōjin Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai” (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1954), Japan Foundation Library, KBS Archives, Box A(1), File 3, 219.

19) Michael Auslin, *Pacific Cosmopolitans: A Cultural History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 223.

work of the KBS is now a regular part of the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²⁰⁾ In contrast to wartime efforts to justify Japanese hegemony, more recent government-sponsored activities are aimed at bolstering a general understanding and admiration for Japanese culture. In that sense, they have an easier assignment. Rather than trying to reverse a negative image, cultural outreach in recent decades has been designed to ride the wave of “Cool Japan” that arose in the late twentieth century.

The failed effort to host the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo finally reached fruition in 1964, accomplishing many of the goals set in the 1930s. In the run-up to the successful 1964 Games, people worried again about the appearance of the city and behaviors of its people. Concerns about insufficient sewers and foul-smelling waterways this time resulted in extensive improvements, which were again aging out of effectiveness by the time the Olympics returned to Tokyo in 2021. The 1964 Games succeeded in branding both Tokyo and Japan, bolstering images that the KBS and government agencies (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan External Trade Organization) were also promoting. Broadcast via a new satellite launched by the United States specifically for this purpose, the Olympic spectacle reached a wider audience more immediately than any previous Olympiad. The impressive architecture of newly constructed venues, the use of Seiko timekeeping devices in all timed events, and two newly opened railways all helped to make the Olympics an extended advertisement for Japan’s economic recovery and technological and industrial prowess. Voices of opposition, rare and mostly drowned out by ubiquitous celebration, did not generally make it into the foreign press. Positive foreign coverage of the Games suggests that cultural diplomacy showcasing actual circumstances in Japan, rather than trying to justify aggression, was more readily accepted. The 2020/21 Olympics provided another opportunity for rebranding. In its bid to host the Games, the committee presented Tokyo as a model city for the world’s “mature” societies and Japan as an innovator in technology and environmental sustainability and a source of global popular culture, though the effort was stymied by the global pandemic.²¹⁾

Just as the Olympics were drawing the eyes of the world to Japan, a new record-breaking high-speed rail line began operating between Tokyo and Osaka: the Tōkaidō Shinkansen. The South Manchurian Railway was dissolved in 1945, but the world’s first bullet train was the centerpiece of initiatives to brand Japan and its cities in the same way that the Asia Express had been used in Manchukuo thirty years earlier. Construction of the line was rushed to meet a hard deadline of the Olympic Games, so that it could perform its diplomatic function for the many foreigners visiting Japan for the international event. The railway sent promotional materials abroad, as well. For instance, at the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair, displays about the bullet train were part of the rebranding of Japan as a nation on the forefront of

20) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Public Diplomacy*, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/culture/public_diplomacy.html.

21) Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Bid Committee, *Tokyo 2020: Discover Tomorrow* (2013).

industry and technology.²²⁾ And the new line was used for branding by the cities it stopped in, too. In Kyoto, for instance, city leaders campaigned hard for JNR to change its plans so that the super-express would stop there as part of a broader effort to rebrand it as Japan's representative city, encompassing tradition and modernity as the home of the ancient capital and the site of the futuristic bullet train.²³⁾ The Japanese government still supports efforts to export Shinkansen technology, but the emphasis of technological diplomacy has shifted from heavy industry to high technology, such as computers and robots. Even so, there is excitement about the new maglev line under construction, as Japan's railroading world hopes that it will allow Japan to once again take the mantle of home to the world's fastest train.

These postwar and contemporary examples suggest that the methods and, to some extent, the goals of nation branding through cultural outreach remained very much the same under Japan's wartime militarist and postwar democratic governments. Aside from differences in content, another important difference is effectiveness. While there are dark undersides to the celebrated events and infrastructures of postwar Japan, for the most part, they remained in the shadows, rarely capturing global attention. Importantly, the general direction of the country and overall national policies have tended, since the end of the war, not to undermine nation-branding initiatives. This is the crux of the difference between the branding efforts of the illiberal wartime state as part of imperialist propaganda (a term that implies a distortion of the truth) and those implemented by the liberal postwar state (whose promotional efforts, if one-sided, tend not to stray quite as far from objective reality). The example of Japan, therefore, suggests that nation branding by liberal and illiberal regimes is fairly similar in technique and general aims; rather, it is the vastly different contexts and the level of congruence between specific goals and content that impact their effectiveness.

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22) Jessamyn R. Abel, "Technologies of Cold War Diplomacy: Transforming Japan," *Technology and Culture* (January 2021): 128-155.

23) Abel, *Dream Super-Express*, 20-63.

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■ Jessamyn R. Abel

Jessamyn R. Abel is Professor of Asian Studies and History and Affiliated Faculty of the School of International Affairs at Pennsylvania State University. She is a historian of modern Japan with interests in democratization, technology, infrastructure, sports, and diplomacy. Her most recent book, *Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World's First Bullet Train*, views the 1960s through the window of the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, showing how infrastructure operates beyond its intended use as a means of transportation to perform cultural, political, and sociological functions. Her first book, *The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933-1964*, examines the transwar development of Japanese internationalism. She has published articles on cultural diplomacy, sports mega-events, textbooks, the information society, the political economy of highspeed rail, and the history of whaling in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her current research focuses on postwar Japan to examine the role of large institutions of daily life in shaping democracy by propagating their own visions of democratic thought and practice.