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**Cultural Diplomacy and Political Reciprocity:
The Impact of Culture in the Establishment of the
Japan-Italy Relationship**

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To my Father, Alessandro and my Mother, Cecilia.

“Brillate per come siete”

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Please note that this thesis makes use of terminology belonging to the Japanese vocabulary in order to properly analyse and explain elements and concepts defining the Japanese cultural, socio-political, and historical context. The Japanese terminology contained within this study is expressed in Hiragana, Katakana, Kanji characters, and Rōmaji, which comprise the entirety of the Japanese writing system.

Both Hiragana and Katakana are syllabaries that represent the same phonetic sound. However, Hiragana primarily transcribes adverbs and words with grammatical functions, whereas Katakana is utilized for foreign language words, onomatopoeia, and occasionally scientific terminology.

Kanji are instead ideograms originating from China which are mostly used to depict nouns and stems of adjectives and verbs.

Conversely, Rōmaji is utilized to transliterate Japanese words into the Western alphabet, essentially serving as the romanization of Japanese words.

Thus, this dissertation employs the Japanese writing system to effectively elucidate and explore Japanese concepts.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the most ancient times culture, in its multifaced nature, as a fundamental element of the structure of every human society, has played a major role in the development of a country national identity and its establishment on the international arena.

Indeed, Cultural diplomacy, even though it is a newly coined term, has always been an essential part of a country public diplomacy, serving as an instrument to reach its foreign policy goals and promote its own culture while establishing a positive image of itself in the international framework.

In the modern age, Italy and Japan are a perfect example of cultural superpowers, as both countries are patterned by a strong cultural identity.

The purpose of these thesis is to analyses the impact of cultural diplomacy in the development and the establishment of bilateral relationship between Italy and Japan, in order to be able to reply to the research question: “To what extent has cultural diplomacy influenced the establishment of the relationship between Italy and Japan?”.

To be able to reply to such question this work will be articulated in three main chapters.

Nevertheless, the first chapter will focus on the concept of Cultural diplomacy. Divided into five sections it aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of cultural diplomacy, examining its definition, implementation, its key actors, and instrumental methodologies. Furthermore, it will also analyze its use in the domestic framework while also underscoring its conflictual sides.

Differently, the subsequent chapters are going to focus on the case study: the development and further establishment of relationship between Italy and Japan, and of their cultural diplomacy.

Respectively, the second chapter will analyze the history of cultural exchanges between Italy and Japan, starting from the first ever interactions in the XVII century until the contemporary era, and the major actors that contributed to such.

The third chapter will instead focus on the development of each country cultural diplomacy through the 20th century until the current era, focusing on Japan pop-culture diplomacy and on Italy position as a cultural superpower. Additionally, the chapter will also analyze the current bilateral relations between the two countries.

Finally, in the conclusion, drawing upon the findings elucidated in the preceding chapters, I will furnish a response to the research question.

The methodology used for the unfolding of this research involves the use of both primary and secondary sources. To be able to conduct a qualitative analysis, this thesis contains a wide range of secondary sources, including articles, papers, research, conferences proceedings, speeches, and official websites such as UNESCO. Of Particular relevance were the official websites of the Italian diplomatic missions to Japan and vice versa, in addition to that of that of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and of the Japan foundation.

For what concern the primary sources, in order to give to provide a further introspection in the matter of cultural diplomacy, this dissertation will feature three different interviews. Respectively, one with the director of the Italian Cultural Institute of Tokyo, one with the director of the Japanese Cultural Institute of Rome, Junichi Shimizu and further one with the estimated yamatologist professor Teresa Ciapparoni La Rocca.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: DEFINING ITS DIMENSION

1.1. Defining Cultural Diplomacy

It is fairly acknowledged that Culture, as a shaping element of every primordial society has always been, since the most ancient time, a very undefined and chameleonic factor that played a significant role in the building any of diplomatic and economic relationships, most generally in the sector of international relations (Kamali-Chirani, 2021).

It is indeed very complicated to find a universal definition of such concept since its means may vary according to each county costumes and uses of it. Nevertheless, as Mark underlines, in its traditional and historical definition it refers to a more restricted and almost exclusive area that mainly includes performing activities such as arts, music, literature and therefore a more refined concept, defined by Mark as “High Culture” (Mark, 2009).

However, it appears that modern culture has moved past these limitations and has expanded to reach a far wider a more global audience, resulting in what is today readily referred to as “popular culture.” (Mark, 2009). However, despite all its complexity, culture has always played a significant role in shaping human civilization and interactions, reaching every sphere of an individual life.

Nevertheless, culture should not be viewed as an exclusive concept. While it is true that it defines national and individual identities, it is also true that, according to the accounts of the earliest civilizations, cultural exchanges have always played a significant role in the establishments of political negotiations and exchanges between different communities around the world.

In this regard, culture had a significant role in many domains and fairly contributed to the growth of institutions like the market and the creation of beneficial links based on trust and political and economic cooperation between

countries and more specifically populations with different backgrounds and values (Karma, 2008).

In a similar way cultural diplomacy, although now considered a newly coined term, has been around for a very long time, but its semantic complexity is still discussed today. In the same way as the term culture is hard to circumscribe to one single notion, cultural diplomacy has still not found a final and universal definition. According to Fox (Fox 1999, cited in Mark, 2009, p 4) cause of such derives from the complexity surroundings both terms diplomacy and culture. On the other hand, according to Lending (2000, cited in Mark, 2009, p 4) it depends on the changing semantics resulting from the adoption of such concept from different countries.

Although, as for today, there are many possible notions clarifying what does cultural diplomacy exactly mean as a practice, one thing is sure, that culture is not only a social construction, but it is a fundamental part of human vitality and cultural diplomacy's core value. Communities, whether they are as big and homogenous as the Japanese Population or a more ancestral one like the Māori, share traditions that are then transmitted from generation to generation. As Varna (2008, p.69) underlines, the respect and attraction we, as individuals, feel towards our own culture, alongside the curiosity for other ones, created a continuous flow of information and interactions between different communities. In these days and age, thanks to the technological progress made so far, this continuous flow is favored by the use of social networks and internet and streaming platform like Netflix or national TV channels such as NHK.

Thus, in this global context we can all feel closer, and we can invest ourselves as much as we want in other community peculiarity just by clicking a button on our keyboard.

When we talk about culture often, we also talk about cultural diplomacy and in this regard, we can therefore most accurately define such concept according to different school of thoughts, whereas Cummings (2003, quoted in Mark, 2009, p. 6) defines it as:

“The exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding’ which ‘can also be more of a one-way street than a two- way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or ‘telling its story to the rest of the world’ ”.

Lenczowski (2009, cited in Kamali-Chirani, 2021, p.4) describes it as the use of different cultural aspects as a tool to influence various factors such as *“foreign publics, opinion makers, and even foreign leaders”*. Finally, a more simplistic definition that should be considered is given by Mark (2009, p.7) who most describes it as the:

“The deployment of a state’s culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy”.

As a matter of fact, cultural diplomacy has been often associated with public diplomacy, and is nowadays considered to be a subset of it. Even though public diplomacy does not have a single and universal definition either, according to Leonard (2002, cited in Mark, 2009, p. 13) it can be defined as

“a way to advance national interests in the new global environment of more democracies, new communication technologies, global media, and international networks”.

Still, two elements need to be considered when trying to find a definition to such notion and its functions: the targeted audience, whether it should only include a foreigner one or if it should also include diplomats or official political figures, and the message to be conveyed. As a matter of fact, Tuch’s definition (2002, quoted in Mark, 2009, p.14) sees it as a communicative process, whose audience mainly interests the foreigner public and not specifically and necessarily involving the other country governments officials, and which aim is to

“Bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies”.

Nonetheless, public diplomacy is a multidimensional and wide ranged activity whose uttermost aim is to build, through a wide network of functions and actors, mutual trusts, and project a positive image to the other to create a secure and productive relationship that would last in the future.

Indeed, the new public diplomacy approach introduces a very important and innovative practice, which moves from the archaic concept of a state-centralized activity and uses dialogue as a key tool to enhance its functions. In fact, the modern diplomate does not unilaterally engage in its tasks but instead now is part of a reciprocal and active dialogue with its counterparts (Van Doeveren, 2011). As previously mentioned, cultural diplomacy is predominantly delineated as a subdivision of public diplomacy and, according to Leonard (2002, quoted in Gadjeva, 2018, p. 185) it is:

“That part of public diplomacy that is concerned with the building of long-term relationships”,

although to confine its functions as a serving tool of public diplomacy would be greatly reductive.

If it is true that it is a batch of Public Diplomacy, it is also true that its nature deeply different in the range of actions and objectives it aims to achieve and in the ratio behind it. As Gadjeva (2018 p. 182) analyzes, public diplomacy, other than having a precise targeted audience, it also covers a much broader and detailed set of functions, while cultural diplomacy doesn’t always have a pre-determinate target and a specific political aim. The first is in fact mostly defined by a clear political action and objective (Ogoura, 2009).

Regardless, both belongs to the new power classification concept developed and introduced by Joseph Nye, that of Soft Power. According to Nye (2004), if with the term “Hard Power” we indicate those kinds of powers that through coercive action manage to convince the other part to behave according to their own

preferences and plans, on the other, this new analytical concept refers to the ability to obtain a certain outcome and achieve goals through the power of attraction rather than a coercive one.

However, the one doesn't exclude the other, and very often objectives of foreign policy and public diplomacy may be achieved through the implementation of notions and functions belonging to the cultural diplomacy sphere.

Nevertheless, other significant distinctions need to be made to clarify the autonomous nature of cultural diplomacy as a notion. Notwithstanding the continuous discussion about cultural diplomacy correct definition and considering it as a branch of public diplomacy, part of the doctrine believes it to be just a synonym of propaganda, as it happens for public diplomacy itself (Gadjeva, 2018).

On the other hand, others assume it to be part of the international cultural relations realm. Regarding the first, even though the line between the two notions is very thin, what really differentiate the two is the fact that cultural diplomacy does not have any coercive or persuasive intent while propaganda does (Melissen, 2006, cited in Mark 2009).

As Melissen (2006, cited in Mark 2009) underlines the crucial differences does not reside in the objectives to be achieved but in the way the communication pattern is presented and perpetrated. In its naturalistic essence propaganda is implemented as a mean to persuade the counterpart to behave and think in a certain way, and therefore there is no dialogue nor reciprocity. Thus, propaganda aims to indoctrinate and spread a precise message, being it political or not to portray a specific image to serve its own scopes. In this sense cultural diplomacy couldn't be more distant since its truthful nature does not have such aim. In supporting its country foreigner policy, it, its dialogue, that wishes to establish a relationship of mutual trust and that does not seek persuasion of the other in any ill sense.

Similarly, there's who believe that cultural diplomacy is just another way to say international cultural relations.

In this sense the border between the two should be traced in relation to the fact that international cultural relations are not actively looking to support any form of government or diplomatic function or foreigner policy goal. According to Robert Higham (2001, cited in Mark, 2009, p.17) while certainly international cultural relations are supported by the national government, they do not seek to aid any foreigner policy goal specifically.

Instead, when referring to it, the crucial difference with cultural diplomacy is the fact that international cultural relation main goal is cultural development, which means to develop and deeply promote its cultural sector and expand its international exposure (Higham, cited in Mark 2001). By supporting its local artists, cultural activities and exchanges international cultural relations contribute greatly to widen the range of exposure a country has, therefore promoting its values, traditions, and culture abroad without interfering in the political and diplomatic realm.

Thus, despite the very wide set of definitions and arguments surrounding the notion of cultural diplomacy, it can be defined as an autonomous batch of public diplomacy, which as a diplomatic tool aims to foster reciprocal and long-lasting relationship within the parties involved trough reciprocal cultural dialogue and exchanges.

Nonetheless, the increasing importance cultural diplomacy has gained over the last few decades can be identified in the diffused presence of cultural institutions and cultural associations all over the world, and the increasing importance governments and head of states and giving to culture and cultural dialogue.

As a matter of fact, cultural institutions, cultural centers, and associations are very important instruments and actors of cultural diplomacy.

Lately it is not rare to find cultural exposition not only in cultural institutions but also in more common spaces like malls or parks. For example, Chinese New

Year is now celebrated all around the world as a cultural event of great relevance, during this period even the famous Burj Khalifa tower in Dubai projects on its screen scenes celebrating such event.

Indeed, culture has always been a fundamental link between people before nations. Through cultural exchanges archaic societies have advanced in technologies and spread its innovations, and very often those exchanges were part of diplomatic transactions that lead to increasing interaction and progressive relationships. As Kim Hwajung (2011 pp.1-18) highlights cultural diplomacy means to build connections across national and cultural divides while fostering international understanding is the essence of cultural diplomacy.

1.2 How is Cultural Diplomacy Implemented? Different approaches

As an interdisciplinary activity the landscape of cultural diplomacy is populated by a very wide range of actors between public institutions, government officials, sub-national organizations and in various cases the private sector. As previously mentioned, core elements and main goals of it are the negotiation, the development and finally the promulgation of cultural agreements, being those directed and aimed to stipulate and increase economic cooperation or simply just in support of its government foreigner policy goals or diplomatic ones. Even though traditionally it was mainly a state-driven activity in the course of time it began to expand its horizons and it now includes a rather wide range of non-governmental actors. Indeed, this does not mean that it is now an activity outside of the governmental jurisdiction, as a matter-of-fact diplomacy as a discipline is an official public function, but it means that its functions can currently be implemented by a bigger variety of actors, and not only by public officials (Vickery, 2017).

In such sense the government involvement is not always direct, but it can also be delegated to the subnational level, as Simon Mark (2009) suggests, to the ministry of international relations or to other smaller agencies. The models used to put into practice cultural diplomacy differ depending on whether the government is directly involved, whether the activity is administrated by a non-government agency or in some cases if there is a mixture of the two (Ada, 2017) Thus, according to this division, three categories of practice exist.

As Serhan Ada (2017, p.52) explains, the first model involves the directed participation of the government either as a supervisor or as an active official, in this sense cultural centers are directly connected to the ministry of foreigner affairs, which appoints, through its branches, the cultural adepts and directors of its country cultural centers. Examples of this model are the Italian one and the French one.

For what concern the first, Italian cultural diplomacy is managed directly by the Minister of Foreign affair and cultural centers' directors are elected through a national concourse that is published and exanimated by the Minister of Foreigner Affairs itself (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2024). Concerning the latter, in the French case the activity is managed by ana agency directed by the Ministry of foreigner affairs, named Culturesfrance. Nevertheless, in this framework, considering the direct supervision of the government, the role and the ambitions of the cultural adepts are quite restricted by the Ministry of foreign affairs necessity and goals, leaving very small space for personal preferences and initiatives (Ada, 2017).

Another possible model of execution is when cultural diplomacy is implemented through non-governmental agencies and organization. An example of this model is the Japanese one, which rely for its cultural diplomacy on a non-governmental body, the Japan foundation. The Japanese foundation was established in the 1972 as a government-connected special corporation² and it is the only institution which is entirely dedicated to the accomplishment of cultural exchanges programs with other countries, to support foreigner policies and to spread the Japanese culture around the world.

Nevertheless, those two are not the only approaches through which cultural diplomacy can be implemented. As a matter of fact, the one does not completely exclude the other and in fact there are cases where the model applied is a mixture of the two or other cases where a peculiar model is implemented, either at the supra-national level and at the sub-national level, in terms of communitarian action as in the case of Quebec (Mark, 2009).

The latter since 1985 has established its own independent diplomatic system, completely detached by the Canadian one. The Quebec diplomatic system has its own diplomatic missions and representative. Obviously, it is not an isolated case, but similar realities can be found in other provinces of Germany, in Australia and in the United States (Mark, 2009).

² <https://www.jpff.go.jp/e/>

Similarly, Berna Berkman Köseleli (2017, p.115) also categorizes three different approaches of cultural diplomacy according to which the three models' division given by Sehran Ada are respectively names: "the public diplomacy approach", "The strategic communications approach" and finally the "cultural relations approach". According to Berna Berkman Köseleli (2017), the first, which was instituted by the European Union Commission in 2016, contemplates the government exclusive control over diplomatic cultural practices, analogously to Sehran Ada (2017, p.53) categorization, while the second only foresees the tactical engagement of the government, but not as a fixated condition. The third approach, which Sehran Ada (2017) defines as a mixture of the previous two, is instead described by many scholars as a cooperative discussion devoid of any soft power nuances (Bound et al. 2007).

Currently the landscape of cultural diplomacy is filled with a multitude of actors through which it can be implemented, being it an agency, a governmental organization, a supra-national body like the EUNIC³, a minister, or a combination of these. Regardless of the model applied, diplomacy in its essence remains a public function and therefore even though it is conducted through an affiliated entity and not directly by it, it is still in a way or another supported, economically, or supervised by either the government itself or delegated to the competent minister (Ada, 2017).

For a long period of time, the only factor taken into consideration by the "giving" party was how to spread its own influence and how to project its own image in a positive way. In such sense the "receiving" country preferences and more generally, the receiving country itself was taken much into consideration, therefore falling into a unidirectional cultural flow.

As Chaubet (2022, p.25) underlines, this model of cultural diffusion was shaped mostly on the missionary approach adopted by religious groups as the Jesuits for example and was applied at least throughout all the 19th and the 20th century by most European countries. Between those in Europe who adopted this diffused method, there are those that were also open to engage in a bilateral cultural

³ European Union National Institutes for Culture

exchange, therefore also eager to create a dialogue with the local community. France for example, even though it is considered as the precursor of modern cultural diplomacy (Chaubet, 2022, p. 22), and having it established many cultural sites around the world, until very recently has engaged in a unilateral cultural flow with its counterparts through the Alliance Françaises, favoring high-cultural and traditional diplomatic exchanges like language and artistic exchanges (Chaubet, 2022).

However, presently it is rather significant to underline the fact that cultural diplomacy and most generally the “New” public diplomacy doctrine focus is about mutual dialogue, it is not a soliloquy. Therefore, when implementing it a country aims not only to project a positive image to the other party and spread its own culture in a unilateral way. Instead, when setting the basis to achieve its goals, it should also consider the targeted audience and its preferences.

As Iriye Akira (2001, cited in Saeki, 2001) indicates, the nationalist pattern undertaken by Western countries between the 19th and the 20th century, left little space for bilateral exchanges to evolve as such, especially with countries there were not considered as developed as them, that at that time were not only those of the Global South but also countries that are currently hegemonic powers like China and Japan. According to Iriye (2001, cited in Saeki, 2001), in a moment when human interactions became less constricted by national borders, and when the society became internationalized in its every sphere, multiculturalism should be a priority.

In this sense he suggests that a useful approach to overcome this narrow internationalism would be to integrate the presence of non-governmental agencies and non-governmental actors that would therefore improve the possibility and the willingness of individuals to give up the nationalist feeling to be able to embrace a more internationalistic methodology (Saeki, 2001).

Concerning the latter, a suitable resolution would be to offer a correct and open recognition of human diversity and its multiculturalism in the current international framework (Iriye, cited in Saeki, 2001).

It does not only mean to engage in bilateral relations but when doing so, a representation and education about cultural diversity would be needed, both from an academic point of view and from a political one.

Nonetheless, as Chaubet (2022, p. 25) underlines, cultural diplomacy has a rather complex nature and it does not necessarily fall into one realm only, instead it is both nationalist and international at the same time. Whereas it is nationalist by nature because it is about the projection of itself, of one-party own culture and values to the other one, it is also international because for this projection to happen an exchange is required, even if minimal (Chaubet, 2022).

Nevertheless, in the second part of the 90s the increasing importance of the concept of Civil Society and its major relevance in the diplomatic practice, brought a significant change in the way cultural diplomacy was implemented, especially on the side of Western countries. *civil society* evidenced the importance of issues like inequality, human rights, and minorities' rights (Ada, 2017).

As Ada (2017, p. 57) underlines Gramsci's interpretation of civil society through its *Quaderni del Carcere*⁴ suggests why *civil society* is a relevant element for the international and diplomatic framework.

In fact, according to Gramsci civil society is based on culture whereas Hegemonic powers are based on cultural influences (Ada, 2017).

Thus, the rising importance of human values in the second half of the 90's, greatly influenced the diffused methodology, adopted by most Western countries up until that moment, and led to a gradual shift towards more open and equal cultural exchanges. From that moment onward, bilateral relations were characterized by mutual interests of the parties involved, and therefore it

⁴ *Prison Notebook*, 1948-51

was no more only a matter of cultural projection cultural projection and nation branding⁵ but of equal cooperation among the parties involved.

As Sennet (2017, cited in Hampel, 2022, p. 89) clarifies, cooperation must be intended in terms of its voluntary basis, as the two parts voluntarily decide to work together to be able to take the basis of shared progress in work and build something new. As a matter of fact, parties involved in the cooperation process freely agree to involve resources in comparable measure for the complete duration of the partnership (Hampel, 2017). In contrast with the past, equality became a fundamental dimension of bilateral cultural relationship and, especially in western countries it is often addressed by political and diplomatic figures as a fundamental element.

Currently cultural diplomacy is also implemented as a mean to also expand the economic sphere in the international framework, therefore including other interests, different that traditional diplomacy ones, in its aims. As an interdisciplinary activity its goals now involves a variety of sectors and actors that shift from the public sector to the private one.

From being an activity mainly directed to spread a country influence over one considered at a lower level it now became a fundamental practice that entails a relationship based on equality and cooperation among countries that actively engage in mutual exchanges.

⁵ With this term it's indicated a country method adopted to project a positive image to achieve beneficial goals. Example of Nation branding is the “クールジャパン,” Cool Japan policy implemented in the 2000s by the Japanese government to advertise itself to the world.

1.3 Actors and Tools

As previously mentioned, traditionally cultural diplomacy, and most generally diplomacy, is a public activity which involves different objectives and practices. As a matter of fact, as an interdisciplinary activity it is adopted for multiple purposes, from supporting its foreign policy goals, to establishing prosperous and stable relationship, to improving economic cooperation.

Nevertheless, it is implemented through a multitude of actors and instruments belonging both to the public sectors, as for the Cultural Centers or to the private and non-governmental one, like the artistic sector.

UNESCO, an acronym for "United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization," was founded in 1945 and its constitution went into effect the following year. It was born and is still today global platform which main intent is to promote diversity of mankind and bring together people through a mutual dialogue throughout:

“The free exchange of ideas and knowledge⁶”

Indeed, through its normative framework and its multiple activities and projects UNESCO helped creating a fertile soil for cultural diplomacy to develop its ambitions and it is now a fundamental actor engaged in the promotion of cultural diversity as stated in the 2005 UNESCO convention (Hampel, 2017).

However, John Lenczowski offers a quite significant classification with respect to this matter. In actuality, the latter claims that cultural diplomacy is carried out using tools from a variety of fields, including the arts, academia, religious organizations, radio, and government agencies (The Tracker, culture, and public policy, 2022).

⁶ The Tracker, culture, and public policy, 2022, issue 16 pg 7

The involvement of non-governmental actors in the cultural promotion and in the diplomatic activity allowed cultural diplomacy to be effective not only at the international level, but also in the domestic arena, other than contributing to the achievement of a more homogenous system. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the variety of instruments and actors noted by John Lenczowsky (n.d. cited in *The Tracker, culture, and public policy*, 2022, p.7) which more precisely are figures such as curators, teachers, lectures, artists, and students underlines the different dimension and level toward which cultural diplomacy action is implemented.

As a multilayered activity cultural diplomacy is carried out throughout a variety of fields.

For what concerns the academic domain, university and educational institution exchanges not only facilitate the ongoing influx of visiting professors and exchange students, but they also strengthen international partnerships and enhance the flow of cultural information in support of the promotion of cultural diplomacy through beneficial programs like the European Union Erasmus⁷ one, the Fulbright Student⁸ program supplied by the United States or the MEXT one promoted by Japan.

If on one hand the first is mainly directed to increase the collaboration between educational institutions, therefore mainly involving students and academic figures. On the other hand, the Fulbright Student program, in addition to academics also concerns artists and generally, as stated on the Fulbright official digital platform “*Young Professionals from all backgrounds*”.

The program was started in 1946 to fulfil Senator Fulbright's vision, encouraging the idea and the dream of a society in which individuals from

⁷ The “European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students” is an initiative by the European Union to promote collaboration between colleges and institutions throughout Europe through student mobility.

⁸ The Fulbright U.S Student Program

vastly different cultural backgrounds could come together to understand one another⁹.

In Addition, for what concern the academic realm, literature has always been a crucial component of cultural diplomacy and international cohesion. Writers and together with other artistic figures have created and established multiple international correspondences through translations, festivals, conversations, theatrical and melodramatic performances. For example, every year during Summer, the city of Rome holds an international literature festival, which involves writers and readers from all over the world, called: *Letterature, Festival Internazionale di Roma*.

Therefore, establishing a wide and ramified network of connections between diplomatic representations and members of the arts while fostering cultural activity.

Nevertheless, the exchange of artistic works and artists themselves has long been a valuable tool for fostering long-lasting relationships between other countries and local contexts as well as promoting cultural diversity worldwide.

Concerning this matter the establishment of UNESCO between 1945 and 1946 generated a conceptual division between countries belonging to the United Nations regarding what type of content should be included in cultural exchanges (Chaubet, 2022).

Whereas some countries believed that it should be mainly directed at fine arts, other nations such as the United States believed that it was necessary to integrate more contemporary forms of art which should therefore include audio-visual culture elements like music and film.

⁹ Pepperdine: School of Public Policy Blog, “The power of Cultural diplomacy: Building Bridges”, 2023.
Available at :<https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/blog/posts/the-power-of-cultural-diplomacy-building-bridges.htm>.

As a matter of fact, it wasn't until the 1920s that these elements were included and considered as tools suitable to implement cultural promotion abroad and to aid foreigner policy goals (The Tracker, culture, and public policy, 2022). With regard to the latter, the Cold War era marked the highest point of US cultural diplomacy, with the installation of many cultural centers around the world, and even in the Middle East countries (Schneider, 2006). Its cinematographic industry became a propagandist instrument alongside music, especially Jazz, to promote the country's goodness and to promote and export the "American dream¹⁰" ideal abroad.

However, as Joseph Nye (2008, cited in C. Gonzalez Chiaramonte, 2007, pp. 19-42) clarifies when defining the concept of soft power and its asset, culture, both "high" and "low" is an actual representation of a society's values and meaning. Thus, given that culture itself is made of many different aspects and values, when referring to cultural diplomacy it should be considered its every facet.

Art in its various dimensions and styles became a very important vehicle of cultural diplomacy as an instrument used to link countries through institutions, venues and the circulation of professionals and artifacts.

In fact, museums, together with other entities like cultural centers, libraries and universities, as cultural ambassador institutions greatly contribute to many different factors such as the economy and the cultural representation of a country, influencing not only local communities but often international ones. As Muscat (2020) underlines, following classical diplomacy schemes, exhibitions structures and information display programs adopted by museums are organized to reflect the ability of cultural institutions to deliver certain values and messages as instruments of soft power. Indeed, alongside art venues, galleries, international exhibition, and festivals create the appropriate environment for an international community to develop a

common ground between different cultures based on mutual understanding and dialogue.

Currently, subsequently to the globalization process and of the continuous technological progress, art and artists are able to reach a wider audience throughout the use of social medias and social network, giving birth to new categories of art such as Digital Art.

The internalization of artistic venues became a worldwide trend that gave birth to the “brandization” of few among the most famous museums such as the Louvre (Muscat, 2020) through franchising strategies and strategic collaborations (Mariano, and Vårheim, 2022)

Even so, cultural cooperation is a very significant prerogative practice that museums and art galleries share, as they frequently host exhibitions or display pieces that have been loaned them by other institutions. Although this doesn't always result in a peaceful and constructive process, international disputes involving art "theft" may arise from this activity.

Other important institutions used as cultural diplomacy and foreigner policy platform and tool are Cultural Centers. Throughout the 90s until the end of the first decade of the new century, cultural centers established themselves across the whole world, representing and promoting cultural diplomacy. As Gutierrez and Segado underlines, currently, there are around 3,745 cultural centers scattered all around the globe (Mariano, and Vårheim, 2022). Cultural Centers together with cultural affairs officials are a point of reference not only for those who want to connect and approach a different culture but especially for the communities living abroad. As a vehicle for cultural promotion, cultural centers dispose of different facilities to host exhibitions and a wide variety of events while aiming to build human connections based on cultural understanding. Nevertheless, many of the initiatives taken by cultural center are promoted by the government itself, the minister of foreign affairs or satellites agencies to promote the sharing of concepts, ideas, and traditions.

Among the international festivals and events, one could recall the World Expos. The first World Expo was held in London in 1851 and due to its great success, it became a regulated occurrence after the creation of the Bureau international des exposition in 1928.

Presently World Expos are the most famous and unique events in the international framework, being one of the greatest attractions ever, able to gather tourists from every corner of the world. Every World Expo sees the various countries engaging in new challenges concerning educational matters and technological progress (Bie, 2024). World Expos are a direct form of cultural diplomacy as they directly involve the government of both the country hosting the event and those that will be part of it.

In the same way as culture is made of many different sides and facets, so is cultural diplomacy. One of its key subjects relies on the attachments people feel to their own roots and cultural traditions, among which food is a very important factor, in fact its techniques and recipes are an essential part of a society cultural identity.

As Fabio Parasecoli (2022)¹¹ analyses more and more governments are directing their attention towards what he defines as “Gastrodiplomacy”, which consists of the practice of using food as vehicle to share and spread a country own culinary heritage. Indeed, food has always been a relevant element in the economic and diplomatic sphere, as something that can either unite or divide communities.

Thanks to the globalization process it is now rather easy to use ingredients, products and techniques coming from all over the world.

¹¹ Fabio Parasecoli, 2022, “How Countries Use Food to Win Friends and Influence People: Gastrodiplomacy has gone mainstream”.

Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/20/food-diplomacy-countries-identity-culture-marketing-gastrodiplomacy-gastronativism/>

According to Parasecoli¹² (2022)

“today’s gastrodiploamacy is particularly geared toward cosmopolitan foodies who share common values and predictable taste categories across borders, have the financial means and the interest to buy imported products, and can travel abroad. Gastrodiploamacy can also contribute to creating a sense of unity and national pride around food inside the countries that engage in it. It can even ideologically leverage nostalgia to smooth out domestic tensions, harking back to the good old times before modernity and globalization”.

¹²Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/20/food-diplomacy-countries-identity-culture-marketing-gastrodiploamacy-gastronativism/>

1.4 The Domestic Dimension

Cultural diplomacy, in the same way as public diplomacy, is mainly implemented towards the creation of external links and therefore mainly directed towards the international relations and foreign policy arena. It is a key instrument to foster cultural understanding and fruitful negotiations as it goes beyond simply sharing a language and instead involves grasping the nuances, the unsaid meanings, and the cultural sensitivities that lie beneath the surface (Pepperdine, 2023).

For what concerns the area of domestic policy, which is that branch of the choices and measures a government makes to deal with problems inside its own borders, cultural diplomacy can be used to achieve domestic policy goals because of the impact its activity has on the public opinion since the latter can be changed and influenced through the appropriate use of cultural dialogue as a political tool. As Varna (2008, p. 74) analyses culture, and cultural diplomacy, as a source of power has the ability to establish a common ground between different communities through mutual understanding.

Cultural diplomacy, as a soft power, has a great potential not only at the international level but also at the local one, both in strengthening the nation-building process, and in achieving a wide range of domestic policies goals. In the home sphere, cultural influences play a major role in creating a strong sense of community within a particular place or over specific topics.

In actuality, culture has a big influence on how a community is formed, how its members view themselves, and how that community develops and behaves. Governments have placed a growing emphasis on incorporating cultural factors within the political agenda all throughout the years, not only for the sake of achieving foreign policy objectives but also to promote the development of identity awareness within the population as a whole.

According to Robert Higham (2001, cited in Mark, 2009, p.29), through the “conditioning stereotype” phenomena, cultural diplomacy is able to compel

the internal population of a community to comply with the way their image is perceived by external communities.

It is important to clarify that here for stereotype we intend a common belief concerning a specific group or community. In fact, stereotyping can deeply affect, from an educational point of view, the public opinion in both a negative and a positive way (Egner; and Obelsky, 1975). Thus, cultural diplomacy through conditioning stereotype has the ability to exert influence over its domestic policies goals, improving social cohesion and the local sense of belonging.

As Simon Mark (2009, p.30) highlights, while analyzing the impact that the “Tē Maori” movement and its exhibitions abroad had on the New Zealand population itself, together with cinematic production featuring New Zealand’s landscapes like the “Lord of the Rigs”, cultural promotion abroad and its international success enhances the perception of the domestic population towards national resources and national policies, therefore increasing the state confidence and favoring the nation-building process. This process is described by Mark (2009, p. 31) as the Feel-Good effect which consists in a psychological phenomenon belonging to the positive psychology branch, according to which people who are happy tend to perform better (D.G Myers; C.N. De Wall). In this sense, when one’s culture and resources are deeply promoted and then appreciated abroad, it also instigates a positive reaction in the local communities.

However, for the “Feel-Good, Do-Good” to actually contribute to increment social cohesion and cultural diplomacy goals in the domestic arena it has to have a great media coverage to be able to reach and cover any social sphere.

In fact, the greater is the media coverage dedicated to cultural promotion the higher it contributes to domestic policy goals. Medias do not only serve as a tool to influence individuals’ attitudes through propagandistic methods

but in the cultural diplomacy arena it also provides different social groups and communities, part of minorities with the right means to establish a cultural dialogue to educate others about their own costumes and traditions.

Presently, those racial, religious and gender related minorities are element often debated in the political agenda and thanks to social media amplified coverage exponents of minorities groups can now reach a wider audience both at the local and at the international level.

The same applies to cultural diplomacy and cultural matters within dedicated organizations, social media modified the way politics and diplomacy is now implemented and the way it approaches its audience. Social platforms allow to reach every corner of the international framework and giving the right coverage for small communities to share their experiences and to governments to use their country history and heritage as a social factor and as a diplomatic tool.

Nevertheless, at the national level cultural diplomacy is not only implemented to increase the state profile and for the nation branding policies but, it can be also used to counterbalance negative propaganda, to raise more awareness towards the importance of cultural preservation and cultural values and to give more attention to minorities (Simon Mark, 2009).

Cultural preservation does not strictly refer to cultural heritage as monuments and UNESCO's patrimony classification, but it is also and especially about, when defining cultural diplomacy, what shapes local communities' identities, and therefore national identities.

Languages, folklore, history, and traditions are all defining elements that shape each culture in different ways, and as cultural heritage elements those can be used as a soft power resource by governments to become more appealing on the international arena and therefore strengthen the Feel-Good effect. (Tötshchel-Daniels, 2017)

1.5 The Conflictual Side of Cultural Diplomacy

Although cultural diplomacy has many positive effects both in the international framework and in the domestic arena, it is not bereaved of flaws, and it can sometimes create international tensions instead of bridging countries and creating dialogue.

As a matter of fact, oftentimes cultural, religious, and ethnographic differences become motive of dispute among countries, that therefore end up entering cultural wars (Ferrara e El Khoudary 2014).

As an instrument of soft power, cultural promotion abroad might be wrongly perceived as imposing its influence and culture on others trough what can be defined as “*Cultural imperialism*” (Cull, 2014).

This is especially truth in the case when both cultural and religious differences are rather dividing, cultural promotion adopted by one country’s cultural diplomacy activity might be perceived by its counterpart as imposing and imperialistic. The United States' situation in the Middle East is a prime example of this as its democratic ideals, which deeply differ from the values shared in the Muslim countries, have been often interpreted by those as deceitful and imperialist, resulting in the United States’ standing rapid erosion in those nations (Gershman e Zaharna, 2005).

In the same way, cultural diplomacy, as any political and diplomatic activity, does not always end up having positive effects and great results but instead it and can sometimes damage the government image abroad, thus deteriorating international cooperation and partnerships based on equal respect and mutual trust. An unstudied and poor choice of cultural ambassadors or poor communication can lead to infelicitous situation between parties, and to unsteady political relations (Cull, 2014).

In addition, it can also create difficulties in the national framework for example by damaging the nation-branding process and negatively influencing the public opinion.

In relation to the latter, public opinion is very important shaping element of the nation branding and nation-building¹³ process, but when it is connotated by a negative affection it can deeply damage domestic policies goals and shift the public opinion preferences towards different goals and different political candidates as it happened in The United States during the Vietnam war when the backlash of the war gave birth to pacifist movements protesting against it.

In addition to that, as previously mentioned¹⁴, if on one hand it is true that in the domestic reality cultural diplomacy is also used as an instrument by minorities to share their costumes, language, and traditions, on the other hand it is also true that cultural propaganda can be used in a negative sense by the government to repress those communities. An example of the latter can be found in the Chinese government campaign against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims populations. Although China has historically suppressed the Turkic Muslim ethnic community, in recent times it has escalated its persecution to unprecedented levels.

In 2014, the Chinese government initiated the “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism¹⁵” targeting the Xinjiang region, which is placed in the Country’s northwest part and is majorly inhabited by Turkic Muslims populations such as the Uyghurs one. Even in this case social media became a rather useful instrument for the government to promote the ethnic repression, therefore promoting a negative cultural propaganda.

In fact, in 2017, the Chinese religious affairs official used the Chinese social network platform Weibo to spread the repressive propaganda through the “Break their lineage, break their roots, break their connection, and break their origins” motto (Human rights watch, 2021). Currently, in the

¹³ The process of construction or start-over of a nation-state and its institutions and community.

¹⁴ Pg. 25

¹⁵ Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>

international framework, this repressive regime has been severely condemned as a great violation of human rights.

Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy in its negative affliction goes beyond cultural promotion and its imperialistic connotation, it instead involves disputes and sometimes even confrontation between the parties over pieces considered to be owned by one of the two countries involved. Oftentimes, it has happened, and still happens today, that more than creating a cultural bridge between countries, cultural diplomacy ends up harboring crises over artifacts, as Ferrara and El Khoudary (2014, p.1) clarify:

“It regards a dispute, if not a confrontation, between one or more countries implying the possession or preservation of an artistic object or artefact of symbolic value in term of sovereignty, search for recognition, national identity and dignity.”

Additionally, artefacts that were created or originally belonged to one nation but were later bought or wrongfully removed by a person or institution belonging to another are another common subject of "cultural disputes."

A prior example of the latter is the ongoing controversy between Italy and Germany over the Lancelotti Discobolus statue, regarded as the most valuable Roman reproduction of the original Greek bronze sculpture by Myron. The dispute started when Stéphan Verger, the director of the National Roman Museum in Munich, addressed a letter to Florio S. Knauß, the curator of Munich's Glyptoteca, which is home to Louis I of Bavaria's 1815 marble collection, where he requests the restitution of the Discobolus. Whereas on one side Knauß claims that the statue was legally bought by Adolf Hitler in 1938 and its transfer to Germany was approved by Italian authorities¹⁶ therefore considering rightful its restitution to Germany, on

¹⁶ Archeology Newsroom, “Germany requested the return of the Lancelotti Discobolus”, 2023.

Available at:<https://www.archaeology.wiki/blog/2023/12/05/germany-requested-the-return-of-the-lancelotti-discobolus/>.

the other hand the Italian government claims that it was forcefully sold, and the current Minister of Culture Saggiuliano firmly opposed to the German request.

Furthermore, the Italian minister Rodolfo Siviero already after having included in 1948 the Discobolus in the list of artefacts that were stolen by Nazis' regime, it managed to have it back as it is currently a property exhibited in the Museo Nazionale Romano¹⁷ located in Rome.

Another example of a still ongoing controversy involving cultural diplomacy is that of the Parthenon marbles, also known as the Elgin marbles, a collection of a variety of marbles made between the 447BC and 432BC that used to be part of Parthenon's decoration (British Museum, 2024). The collection was forcefully removed from the Athens' Acropolis in 1801 to then be sold in 1816 to the British government by Lord Elgin, which in the first years of the 19th century was assigned as the British ambassador to the Ottoman empire (Ferrara e El Khoudary 2014). Presently, the tension between the British government and the Greek one over the restitution of the marbles, is still very strong but as Ferrara and El Khoudary (2014, p.1) analyze here the question of the restitution mainly revolves around the fact of where those should be displayed. If on one hand Greece pretends the restitutions of the marbles as originally belonging to them, on the other the British government used the stability- lacking economic situation of the country to deny the restitution (Ferrara e El Khoudary 2014).

At the recent Cop28, which was held in Dubai, the newly crowned King Charles reanimated the debate after he presented himself wearing a necktie with a pattern composed of many Greek flag. By many this was interpreted to be a sign of his siding with the Greek over the Parthenon marbles disputes, considering his late father birthplace.

Nevertheless, cultural dispute are very delicate matters that requires the consideration of many different factor, but that most of the times do not

¹⁷ National Roman Museum

only involve the parties directly linked to the dispute but also other famous institutions and personalities, like UNESCO.

Cultural diplomacy, as any diplomatic practice is therefore not free of conflicts but instead requires great attention to cultural diversity, especially when different language and different interpretation of the same concepts are involved as cross-cultural communication can lead to international misunderstandings.

CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY, ITALY, AND JAPAN: AN HISTORY OF CULTURAL EXCHANGES

2.1 Historical Overview: the beginning of diplomatic relationships and the opening of the borders

In 2016 Italy and Japan celebrated 150 years of friendship and political relationship (Sara, 2018), thus 150 years since the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed. However, that was not the very first diplomatic approach between Japan and European countries, in particular Italy and Japan. In fact, in the years the 1584-85, the Jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano created the *Tenshō shōnen shisetsu*¹⁸, the very first Japanese delegation to Europe, (M. Fujikawa, 2023).

The delegation visited different countries in Europe, Rome being the peak of the mission, where they meet European monarchs, politicians, and ecclesiasts figures such as pope Gregory XIII and pope Sixtus V. In conceiving the mission, the Jesuit visitor Valignano aimed to introduce the Japanese youth to the magnificence of Christianity and the richness of European capitals (Massarella, 2013)

Furthermore, as Fujikawa (2023) analyses through the *Tenshō* embassy, which was composed of four students with ties with the most prominent households in the country such as Mancio Itō, Valignano sought to preserve the Jesuits' exclusive control over the Japanese territory against the possible settlement of other religious orders such as the Franciscan.

Nevertheless, the advent of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and finally the outcome of the Sekigahara battle in 1600 utterly destroyed Valignano hopes as this ultimately resulted, not only in the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, but it also resulted in the development of a completely different attitude towards diplomatic relations and foreign policy in general (Kawai, 2023).

The Tokugawa shogunate was established in 1603 when Tokugawa Ieyasu was given the *shogun* title by the then emperor Go-Yozēi, and it lasted for more than

¹⁸ The *Tenshō* period boys' embassy

200¹⁹ years, until the advent of the Meiji Restoration and the promulgation of the first ever Japanese written constitution in 1868 (Squires, 2022).

The period characterized by the shogunate rule is defined, according to the Japanese timeline division²⁰ as the Edo²¹ era.

Starting from 1641 until 1958, Japan experienced an extreme and long-lasting seclusion from the rest of the world, its borders were closed and the very few foreigners' communities that had settled in the country prior to the shogunate establishment, mostly Dutch belonging to the Dutch East-India Company and Christians belonging to the Jesuits order, were restricted in the Nagasaki Bay, and allowed to continue a very restricted trading through an official act issued in 1634 .

As aforementioned, before the *Bakufu*²² it had been possible for the Japanese government to establish and maintain an effective trading system with Europe, especially with countries like the Netherlands, exchanging essential goods as well as technological and structural paradigms, which helped Japanese civilization progress both militarily and technologically.

In addition to that, during the final decades preceding the Tokugawa settlement, a significant number of Jesuit missionaries started entering the most exclusive Japanese communities and standing by the strongholds of the ruling lords in order to spread the Christian message and win the hearts of the island's populace. However, upon Ieyasu's arrival, a number of laws (1614) were issued with the intention of forcing out any foreign missionaries who were living within the country, initiating the violent persecution of Christians and Christians communities living in the Japanese territories.

Nevertheless, in the first half of the 19th century a song referring to Black vessels²³ began to be chanted by the Japanese people, anticipating the arrival of the American commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry and the events characterizing 1853-54 (Clements, 2017).

²⁰ The Japanese timeline division system is commonly defined as Japanese era system, in which each era corresponds to an emperor's mandate.

²¹ 1603-1868

²² The term Bakufu is used in Japan to refer to the shogun and its rule.

²³ Western ships arriving in Japan were defined as "Black Ships."

Commodore Perry, representing the American government, had already in 1853 tried, unsuccessfully, to force the reopening of the Japanese borders. Yet, in 1854 he successfully led an expedition, with the support not only of the American administration but together with that of the most prominent European countries, that were interested in the establishment of a commercial network that would also involve Japan. As a result of the successful expedition the “Tokugawa Pax” was disrupted, and in the 1860s the shogunate declared the end of their political mandate, with the forceful acceptance by the Japanese political class of the Treaty ports²⁴.

Therefore, between 1854 and 1869 Japan was compelled to sign different agreements with most of the major European nations as well as the United States. Those agreements provided the opening of selected cities and ports such that of Shimoda and Hakodate in the Japanese land that would welcome foreigners and that were also outside of the Japanese jurisdiction (James Edward Hoare, 1970). The *Bakumatsu*²⁵ arrived after a period of social, political, and, to some extent, military tension with the Western powers in 1868, when Emperor Mutsuhito, who had ascended the year before, invited the Tokugawa shogunate to sign his resignation and cede authority and leadership of the command to the emperor through a political act (Clements, 2017).

A turning point in Japanese history that drew the end of Edo and the start of the Meiji age. The latter was an historical period characterized by the strong need of the ruling class to transform every aspect of the Japanese society, both ideologically and politically, in terms of its structure, in order to elevate its status to that of Western powers, a process of modernization defined as *Kindaika*.

The emperor recovered its ancient prestige and powers, even in the public sphere, and the caste system was formally abolished in 1870s.

Finally on the 11th of February 1889, the emperor introduced to the Nation the first ever written and documented Japanese constitution, the “*Dai-Nippon Teikoku Kenpō*”²⁶” also defined as Meiji Constitution, thus officially

²⁴ Treaty ports are also defined as “unequal treaties” due to their forceful nature.

²⁵This term mis used to refer to the end of the Bakufu

²⁶ “Constitution of the Japanese empire”

transforming Japan in a modern Nation-State²⁷. The constitution was born by the necessity to install a feeling of national unity in the population, as it had happened before in the United States and in France with the French revolution. In the last decade of the 19th century Yamagata Aritomo, a prominent oligarchy member, made explicit the necessity to abolish the Treaty Ports in order to obtain the full independence. In Addition to that, he also theorized the existence of two distinct sphere of interest, if on one hand there was that of national sovereignty, meant to indicate the territorial sphere within which the concept of imperial sovereignty fell. On the other hand, the second topic dealt with the possibilities of expanding one's own sphere of influence and power over other nations, along with the unavoidable implications of expansionism.

Thus, within a worldwide political structure that saw the world split between powers and colonies, the *Nippon-koku*²⁸ saw military force as a means of both securing a larger flow of resources in the aftermath of that their colonial endeavor was successful and of conveying their political will on an international level. As a result, a new stage of political expansionism—known as imperialism—was inaugurated.

As a matter of fact, Japanese diplomatic and political relationships with western countries resulted as a consequence of the imposition of the Treaty Ports and of the *Bakumastu*²⁹.

The Meiji Restauration completely changed the perspective of the Japanese ruling class which was now filled with the desire to enter the international framework as a as a powerful global actor between, a desire that drove the country through the late 19th century and later on through the whole 20th one to explore other nations not only to establish their own colonies but also to learn as much as they could from those. With the re-opening of the borders, and the imposition of the Treaty ports, the Japanese elites understand that it was

²⁷ Around 1890s the process of modernization can be considered completed. However, even though Japan is now a Nation-State, it was not autonomous enough, because of the restrictions implemented through the Treaty Ports, for it to be recognized as equal, and legitimized as such new global power by the Western countries.

²⁸ Japan

²⁹ Op.cit

necessary to learn as much as they could from the Western powers, in order to be able to become their equals.

Thus, a number of Japanese envoys were dispatched to the West to research every aspect of Western political, economic, and industrial structures, so that upon their return, they could bring these systems back to Japan as to create equally successful systems that could be implemented domestically.

At the end of the 19th century Japan started to establish the first diplomatic delegations and consulates abroad, and in 1870 it inaugurates in San Francisco the first ever Japanese consulate.

The first industries, both heavy and light, developed as a result of this, and the domestic production system greatly benefited from the discoveries, considering the two industrial revolutions that had taken place in Europe.

The Japanese also became great silk exporters and masters of the heavy industry, which they already possessed extensive knowledge of, and the production of weapons, thus finally entering the international arena and markets.

2.2 Italy and Japan through the 19th century: the Iwakura Mission, Fe D'Ostiani and the first Japanese schools in Italy

As aforementioned, the *Tenshō shōnen shisetsu*³⁰ conceived by the Jesuit Alessandro Valignano, one of the most prominent figures in the history of Italian, and European, relations with Japan, was one of the earliest examples of diplomatic interactions and cultural exchange between Italy and Japan.

Valignano, which was assigned visitor to Japan in 1553, sought to introduce to the Japanese youth the magnificence of Christianity, the richness of European countries and as Derek Massarella (2013, p. 1) underlines the:

“The honor and authority that the Christian religion enjoyed throughout Europe”.

According to Valignano's idea through the embassy, and their travel through Europe, Japanese people would understand the goodness of Christian law and embrace it.

In fact, the Jesuit was careful to only show the good aspects of the country. The itinerary included the visit to different churches and gardens, including Jesuits facilities (Fujikawa, 2023).

The mission included different stops in Italy among which, Siena, Florence, Pisa, Bologna, Venice, and Rome, to introduce the four young Japanese men to the beauty of Italian cities and to give them a positive feeling in regard to the Catholicism.

However, Valignano expedition didn't have any specific diplomatic aim, outside of the religious ones, as Mayu Fujikawa (2022, p. 95) analyses:

“In interactions between travelers and locals, language and communication, as well as diplomacy and food culture, often played significant roles.”

Another significant historical moment is the *Keichō* mission. Departing from Sendai in 1613 and reaching Civitavecchia's port in Rome in 1615, the mission led by Hasekura Tsunenaga aimed to establish commercial relationships and

³⁰ Op.cit

foster cultural exchange between European countries and Japan. Traces of this mission are evident in numerous stamps preserved at Rome's Vatican Museums, various frescoes in the "Sala dei Corazzieri" at the Quirinale building, and in a book written by Endo Shusaku (1923-1996). The lasting legacy of the *Keichō* mission is reflected in the sister-city relationship between the Italian city of Civitavecchia and the Japanese Ishinomaki (Ciapparoni La Rocca, 2015).

Even though the *Nanban*³¹ trade period in the 16th century together with the *Tenshō* embassy and the *Keichō* one are considered the earliest form of diplomatic interactions between Europe and Japan, for what concern Italy diplomatic relationships between the two formally begin on the 25th of August 1866, when Commander Vittorio Arminjon of the Italian corvette "Magenta", on behalf of the then Prime Minister Alfonso La Marmora, signed the "The treaty of friendship, commerce and Navigation" in Yokohama (Vattani, 2015).

The treaty was not only mean to guarantee major freedom of trade, but also to develop a prosperous and peaceful relationship between the two countries, that would last throughout in the centuries.

When the treaty was signed in the second half of the 19th century, both countries were undergoing a moment of deep social and political transformation.

On one side Japan was going through a period of turmoil as the shogunate had lost its power, and as it was about to enter a process of modernization with the inauguration of the Meiji era and the reopening of the borders. On the other side, Italy, which had just been unified in 1861, was in the middle of its *Risorgimento*. Nevertheless, the year after the treaty was signed, in 1867, the plenipotentiary minister Vittorio Sallier De La Tour was appointed as a special envoy to Japan where in the same year, he installed the first Italian delegation in the open port of Yokohama. From that moment on numerous Italian contractors and businessmen started traveling to Japan in order to buy silkworm eggs, to boost the silk production in their homeland, since it had rapidly decreased due to the devastating silkworm pandemic that affected the European sericulture sector between 1840s and 1870s (Zappa, 2023).

³¹ Translated as "Southern Barbarian Trade"

As a matter of fact, in 1869, Vittorio Sallier De la Tour, was the very first Italian representative to be allowed to visit the Japanese hinterlands, as until that moment, foreigners were allowed only in certain cities and ports, commonly defined as “open”.

The year 1873 marks a pivotal juncture in the cultural exchanges and diplomatic ties between Italy and Japan. Particularly noteworthy are the events happening in-between May 9th and June 3rd: the Iwakura Mission.

The mission, which takes its name after the Japanese ambassador Iwakura Tomomi, was an 18-months long expedition across the world that lasted from 1871 until 1873, furthermore, it was composed of approximately 100 members among which were students, public officials, member of the political elites and academics (Izumi, 2019).

In addition to introduce the newly formed Japanese government to twelve Western countries³², its goal was to study and to acquire as much knowledge as possible about Western societies.

For the members of the mission, it was important and necessary to see and analyses every single facet of western societies, in order to export as much information as they could to Japan, as Izumi Saburō³³ (2019) highlights:

“The mission’s members visited 120 cities and settlements in 12 countries, where they observed and sincerely strove to learn about every aspect of Western civilization from politics and administration to the military, diplomacy, economics, industry, education, religion, transportation, communications, culture, and recreation.”

This diplomatic initiative, which was escorted to Italy by the distinguished Earl Alessandro Fè D'Ostiani, witnessed the delegation's exploration of key Italian cities, including Florence, Naples, Venice, and Rome.

³² USA; Great Britain, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Denmark, and Sweden

³³Izumi Saburō, “The Iwakura Mission: Japan’s 1871 Voyage to Discover the Western World”, 2019.

Available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g00680/the-iwakura-mission-japan%E2%80%99s-1871-voyage-to-discover-the-western-world.html>.

Venice³⁴ in particular is very relevant as, under D'ostiani advice, it will be the first city in the entire Mediterranean area to welcome the Japanese consulate and the Japanese consul Nakajima Joji.

According to the cultural affairs official at the Italian cultural institute in Tokyo (Personal communication, February 22nd, 2023) the Iwakura mission was a key event for the vehiculation and circulation of Italian culture in Japan, as laid the foundation for durable diplomatic relations while also promoting a deeper understanding of each other's cultural nuances.

As a matter of fact, this interaction became a cornerstone of Italy and Japan political relationship as, serving as the basis for later partnerships, these exchanges helped to establish continuous intellectual, cultural, and scientific contacts between Italy and Japan.

Furthermore, during their sojourn, the distinguished delegates were graciously and positively received by King Vittorio Emanuele II.

This diplomatic encounter not only fostered mutual understanding but also underscored the significance of international engagement in shaping the socio-cultural landscape of both nations (Ishii, 2002).

As noted by Professor Teresa Ciapparoni La Rocca (Personal Communication, January 4th, 2024), together with the plenipotentiary ministry Vittorio Sallier De La tour, earl Alessandro Fè D'Ostiani played a significant role in the establishment of prosperous and long-lasting political and diplomatic correspondence between the two countries.

In 1873 Fè D'Ostiani, in addition to the Iwakura mission, he also escorted a Bacological Commission, led by Sasaki Nagakoto, through Northern Italy, before reaching their final destination in Padua.

Fè D'Ostiani was very close with the Meiji emperor, and warmly welcomed in Japan, deeply influenced Japan with his liberal ideas, to the extent that he was

³⁴ Venice historically served as a pivotal waypoint for a multitude of Japanese travelers, representing a significant juncture in their journeys. Moreover, the city stood as a prominent reference and anchor for the established Japanese community residing in Italy. The cultural, historical, and commercial significance of Venice made it not only a geographical landmark but also a symbolic and communal touchstone for the Japanese population within the Italian context.

chosen to represent the country in the International Exposition that was going to be held in Vienna³⁵ (Ishii, 2002).

This engagement exemplified the ongoing efforts to foster scientific and cultural cooperation between Italy and Japan, underlining the multifaceted nature of diplomatic relations during this period.

As a result of the mutual interest and respect between the two, the end of the 19th century saw a rapid increase in cultural exchanges between Italy and Japan.

As a matter of fact, in 1876 Japan established in Tokyo, under its ministry of Engineering, the *Kobu Bijutsu Gakkō*³⁶, school of Fine Arts and Architecture, first of its kind.

As Professor Ciapparoni-La Rocca underlined (Personal Communication, January 4th, 2024) for several years the school ensured a constant flow of students and artists coming from Italy, encompassing accomplished sculptors, painters, and architects, within the cultural sphere of Japan.

Many esteemed Italian artists visited the academia and even participated in the making of projects that are still present in Japan, few examples are on one hand, Edoardo Chiossone³⁷, who defined and coined the Yen visual identity, and the architect Giovanni Cappelletti, who on the other hand designed the military museum located in the Yasukuni temple ground (Vattani, 2015).

Fè D'Ostiani, who had met the future prime minister Itō Hirobumi while escorting the Iwakura mission, greatly influenced the establishment of *Kobu Bijutsu Gakkō*.

Nevertheless, at the same in Italy the exotic idea of Japan began to spread among intellectuals like Gabriele D'Annunzio and the bourgeoisie.

D'Annunzio was in fact very fascinated by Japanese culture and deeply influenced by the *Japonism* trend, so much that in his work *Il Piacere*, which was published in 1889, he describes one of his characters as a Japanese man named Sakumi (Mauri, 2020).

³⁵ The Universal Expo was held in Vienna in 1873, and it was the first time in history that Japan participated to it.

³⁶ Fine art and Architecture school

³⁷ Chiossone arrived in Japan in 1875 and stayed until his death in 1889.

Since the Expo, Japanese objects and artifacts became very popular in Italy and most generally in Europe, where many intellectual, in the same way as D'Annunzio, fascinated by Japanese culture began to produce themselves artifacts inspired and influenced by it.

Venice was the emblem of this Japanese influence and of the mutual cultural interest between the two countries, not only because as afore mentioned it hosted the consulate, but also because it inaugurated the first Japanese language course.

In fact, Yoshida Yōsaku³⁸, who was Fè D'Ostiani official interpret, later on was appointed, by Fè D'Ostiani himself, as head of the Japanese language class held at Venice's Scuola Superiore di Commercio (Ishii, 2002).

Upon his departure from Venice in 1875, Yoshida Yōsaku assumed the role of the official interpreter for the "*Regia Legazione Italiana*" in Tokyo, alongside Fè D'Ostiani.

Between the years 1879 and 1888, the emergence of two consequential Italian Japanese associations played a pivotal role. The initiation of the *Ryūchikai* in 1879, which later evolved into the *Nihon Bijutsu Kyōdai*, represented a significant and transformative milestone. The principal aim of this association was the meticulous preservation and oversight of Japanese artifacts. This encompassed not only the custodial responsibilities but also the strategic management of import and export activities associated with these culturally significant treasures (Boscaro, 2008).

Furthermore, in 1888, the inaugural Italian Japanese association came into existence, owing its establishment to the endeavors of Alessandro Paternostro, who Serving as a legal advisor in Japan from 1888 to 1892 played a pivotal role in the inception of this historic association.

The association, born out of Paternostro's dedicated efforts, contributed to the deepening of cultural and diplomatic ties between the two nations during his tenure in Japan.

³⁸ Yoshida Yōsaku stayed in Venice from 1873 until 1875

2.3 Italy and Japan through the 20th century: between global conflicts and cultural exchanges developments

The 20th century witnessed a multifaceted evolution in the diplomatic relations between Italy and Japan, characterized by distinct phases and influenced by shifting geopolitical landscapes and shared interests.

The two countries faced a shared predicament throughout the 20th century, as both struggled with the challenge of not being accorded recognition by other global powers on equal footing. Instead, they found themselves relegated to the status of second-class powers in the international arena.

This commonality in their grapple for acknowledgment and parity marked a noteworthy aspect of their historical trajectories during the examined timeframe. As a matter of fact, the aftermath of the First World War, coupled with the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, engendered a shared sense of dissatisfaction and perceived defeat for both Italy and Japan, notwithstanding their nominal alignment with the victorious Allied powers.

Italy's discontent stemmed from its perceived failure to secure all anticipated territorial gains; a sentiment exacerbated by what was perceived as a dilution of its wartime aspirations. Meanwhile, Japan found itself struggling with the rejection of its proposal for racial equality at the Versailles Conference³⁹, signaling a significant diplomatic setback (Sara, 2018).

The common thread linking these experiences was a palpable frustration with unmet expectations and a sense of disillusionment, underscoring the complex and multifaceted consequences the post First World War geopolitical landscape for nations whose aspirations were not entirely realized.

³⁹ As Josh Axelrod analyses (2018), following its triumph in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and subsequent participation as an Allied power in World War I, Japan ascended to a prominent position on the world stage. In a bid to solidify its newfound global standing, the Japanese delegation at the Versailles negotiations endeavored to insert language addressing racial equality into the proposed treaty's preamble. The immediate objectives encompassed the enhancement of Japan's diplomatic prestige and the attainment of an equitable seat at the international table. This diplomatic maneuver reflected Japan's proactive engagement in shaping the evolving dynamics of global governance, emphasizing the nation's earnest pursuit of acknowledgment and equality in the aftermath of important geopolitical events.

The early 1920s and 1930s denoted a period of substantial transformation in both nations, ultimately resulting in the consolidation of a profound sense of nationalism and, subsequently, the establishment of totalitarian regimes.

The subsequent development and establishment of the Fascist regime in Italy and of a ferocious imperialistic⁴⁰ regime in Japan, played a key role in aligning the two nations and significantly contributed to the enhancement of diplomatic ties.

Nonetheless, despite Italy already being a crucial supplier of naval and military technology to Japan, the rise of fascism and Japan's imperialistic expansion into northeastern China further solidified diplomatic ties.

The collaboration between Italy and Japan deepened significantly in 1932, particularly on the economic front. In fact, with the escalation of Japan's expansionist policies, the collaboration took a notable turn when Japan commissioned Fiat⁴¹ for the production of 72 bombers and thousands of trucks destined for export to Manchukuo (Zappa, 2023).

The latter marked a significant shift in their partnership, reflecting the alignment of their interests and the mutual support in pursuit of their respective geopolitical goals.

⁴⁰ It is necessary to make a distinction between the development of these authoritarian regime first in Italy and later in Japan, as their trajectories followed divergent patterns due to unique historical and socio-political circumstances.

In Italy, Fascism emerged as a reaction to widespread social upheaval and unrest precipitated by economic challenges and the unsatisfactory outcomes of the Versailles Treaty. The economic difficulties generated a pervasive crisis, providing a fertile ground for Benito Mussolini to ascend to the leadership of the state. His rise can be comprehended within the context of a nation grappling with the repercussions of economic turmoil and the disillusionment stemming from the international diplomatic landscape.

Contrary to the case of Italian Fascism, as Hedinger underlines (2013) the debate regarding whether Japan's totalitarian regime can be accurately characterized as fascism remains open among scholars. The imperialistic tendencies in Japan are intricately tied to a longstanding tradition of nationalism and militarism, with its peak occurring during the Shōwa period (1926-1989). In the Japanese context, the establishment of a totalitarian regime is intricately linked to socio-political factors on both the international and domestic fronts. In addition to that a crucial element is the fact that the paramount driving force behind such a regime is shaped by intricate geopolitical and domestic considerations, together with the aspiration to construct a formidable Grand Japanese Empire.

⁴¹ Fiat stood as Italy's foremost industrial vehicle and aircraft manufacturer.

As Japan and Italy found themselves aligned not only on the military front but also intellectually, information related to Japan experienced exponential growth under Mussolini's rule.

The mass press and newspapers played a pivotal role in this regard as between 1938 and 1942, a multitude of influential newspapers undertook regular publications, occurring at least bi-monthly. These publications featured dedicated articles that delved into a broad spectrum of domains. Far from being limited to emblematic figures and rituals of Japanese culture, the coverage extended to diverse areas including sports, arts, and politics (Mauri, 2020).

This multifaceted exploration contributed significantly to fostering a comprehensive understanding of various facets of Japanese society and its engagement with the world during that period.

In 1941, in the wake of the establishment of the Tripartite Pact⁴², formalizing military collaboration between Italy, Japan, and Germany, the inaugural edition of the first dedicated monthly newspaper, "Yamato," was launched. This initiative, founded by Pompeo Aloisi⁴³, Giuseppe Tucci, Giacinto Auriti⁴⁴ and Pietro Silvio Rivetta⁴⁵, sought to introduce Japanese culture, language, and history to the that part of the Italian population that was eager to learn more about Japan and its culture (Tamburello, nd).

The creation of "Yamato" marked a significant cultural exchange endeavor, reflecting the deepening ties and shared interests among the Axis powers during that period. (Mauri, 2020).

In the 1930s, a significant development unfolded with the establishment of various associations dedicated to fostering Italian Japanese cultural

⁴² The Tripartite Pact was signed by the Axis powers on September 27, 1940. This agreement formally acknowledged military collaboration among Germany, Italy, and Japan, pledging mutual assistance in the event that any of them were attacked by another global power.

⁴³ Pompeo Aloisi, who worked as an Italian diplomat was also vested as president of the Association "Amici del Giappone" (Friends of Japan)

⁴⁴ Between 1933 and 1940, he served as a diplomat in Japan. Upon his return, he embarked on a career as a professor in Japanese literature and linguistics at the University of Oriental studies in Rome.

⁴⁵ Between 1910 and 1913, he served as a diplomat at the Italian Embassy in Tokyo. Upon his return to Italy, after 1913, he became a professor in Japanese and Chinese Language in Naples.

collaboration, and the creation of “*Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente*⁴⁶”.

The latter was instituted in 1933 when Giuseppe Tucci proposed to the Italian government the establishment of an institute entirely dedicated to cultural relations between Italy and Asian countries, garnering support from the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who subsequently assumed the role of its president (ISMEO,2024).

ISMEO was primarily devoted to the instruction of Asian languages, offering language courses, facilitating teaching exchanges, and providing scholarships. Additionally, the institute published scholarly periodicals to contribute to the academic discourse on Asian cultures like the aforementioned periodical *Yamato*. Nevertheless, access to the resources of this institute was not exclusively restricted to a specialized audience; instead, it aimed to engage a broader and less specialized audience (ISMEO, 2024).

Following the eruption of the Second World War, ISMEO faced closure in 1944. Nevertheless, the institute was subsequently reinstated in 1947, with Giuseppe Tucci assuming the presidency (ISMEO, 2024).

On the other hand, between 1937 and 1938, the inauguration of the Italian-Japan association, “*Amici del Giappone*⁴⁷”, took place within the auspices of ISMEO, under the initiative of Minister of Popular Culture Alfieri. The primary objective of this association was to cultivate enduring relationships between Italy and Japan, with the overarching goal of fostering a profound mutual comprehension of their respective cultural heritages.

On the opposite side of the globe, in 1940, the *Nichii Kyōkai* (Italo-Japanese Association) was established in Tokyo with the explicit purpose of promoting the Italian language and culture in Japan. This association emerged through the amalgamation of the previously mentioned *Igaku Kyōkai* (Association for Italian Studies) and the *Nichii Gakkai* (Japanese Association for Italian Studies), both inaugurated in 1937.

While it experienced closure in the post-war era, the association reemerged in 1950 and remains actively engaged in pursuit of its objective to cultivate mutual

⁴⁶ ISMEO: “Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East”

⁴⁷ “Friends of Japan”

understanding and friendship between the two nations, the association endeavors to facilitate a productive interchange of scientific and human endeavors across various domains, encompassing culture, arts, economy, industry, and education (Associazione Italo-Giapponese, 2021).

The association's multifaceted functions included not only the promotion of the Italian language but also its active advancement through various means such as language courses, speech contests, and the coordination of educational trips to Italy, facilitated by collaborative agreements with 20 language schools across the entire Italian territory.

On a parallel front, the association contributed significantly to the promotion of cultural exchanges between Italy and Japan. This was achieved through the organization of conferences, seminars, and the provision of an accessible library, further enriching the depth and breadth of intellectual engagement between the two nations.

Nevertheless, the first decades of the 20th century were not only characterized by a convergence of ideas on the strategic and political level but instead even in other spheres cultural exchanges deeply influenced the birth of new artistic movements and flows that are still nowadays visible in the country.

Italy assumed a crucial role in this dynamic, serving as a conduit for the introduction of Western trends and ideas.

Notable figures, such as the architect Antonio Mezzanotte, whose substantial contributions extended to various construction projects in Japan, and the painter Antonio Fontanesi, together with sculptor Vincenzo Ragusa, exerted a profound influence on the establishment and evolution of modern Japanese art (Akasaka Azabu, 2024).

These cultural interchanges epitomize a cross-fertilization transcending national confines, thereby elucidating the interconnected nature of global artistic developments during this transformative epoch.

Serving as an example, is the Italian Futurist movement which emphasized dynamism, technology, and the contemporary urban landscape (Tripodi, 2014). Even though there are no strict correlations between the two artistic movements, its profound influence reverberated across the seas, notably shaping the trajectory of Japanese modern art, and laying the groundwork for the blossoming of Japanese modernism (Tripodi, 2014).

In addition to that the impact of Italian creativity, coupled with a genuine affinity for Italian opera, played an essential role in nurturing diverse facets of Japanese fine arts.

Nonetheless the onset of the Second World War brought about significant changes in the relationship between Italy and Japan as in the initial years of the war, there was a notable upswing in initiatives aimed at fostering ties between these nations, propelled by a shared set of values and interests, particularly as they both aligned themselves with the Axis powers.

However, as the war progressed, a seismic shift occurred, reshaping the equilibrium of their relationship.

Italy, facing internal turmoil and military setbacks, signed an armistice with the Allies in 1943. This decision marked a crucial turning point, as Italy went from being an Axis power to aligning itself with the Allied forces.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific theater, the closing years of the war witnessed the devastating events of the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945. These tragic incidents not only had a profound impact on Japan but also altered the geopolitical landscape and the dynamics of international relations.

The post-war period was in fact a crucial moment for both nations as it laid the groundwork for rejuvenated sense of identity and direction for both Italy and Japan. As a matter of fact, during the latter it became to reconstruct not just physically in terms of restoration of buildings and infrastructure but also to undergo a comprehensive societal and economic metamorphosis, thus entailing a profound transformation that touched upon the very structure of their societies.

In 1951, due to the entry in force of the San Francisco treaty⁴⁸, Italy and Japan formally restored their diplomatic ties and eventually proceeded to sign a cultural cooperation agreement in 1954. The latter aimed to foster mutual knowledge and understanding and promoting cultural exchanges through various means which included the translation of literary works, the

⁴⁸ The treaty officially terminated Japan's imperial ambitions, provided compensation to Allied nations and former prisoners of war who endured Japanese war crimes in World War II, and brought an end to the Allied post-war occupation of Japan. Crucially, the treaty restored full sovereignty to Japan, signifying its re-emergence as an independent and self-governing nation on the global stage.

establishment of dedicated cultural institutions, and the facilitation of exchanges and research cooperation between universities (Zappa, 2018).

Thus, in 1959, the Italian Institute of Culture opened in Tokyo's Kudanminami district, followed by the establishment of the Japanese Institute of Culture in Rome, 1962.

Already in 1950, the Italian Institute for Middle and Far East established a dedicated center for Italian Japanese studies.

In 1956, under the direction of Mario Tetti, the center initiated the publication of a bi-monthly magazine named "*Chipangu*", featuring works by eminent modern Japanese authors, including Akagawa Ryunosuke and Tanizaki Junichiro, along with various *Haiku* poems⁴⁹.

However, in 1958, the magazine was replaced by a quarterly publication named "Giappone," which concluded in 1959 due to the sudden death of its director, Giuseppe Morichini.

Finally, in 1961, a new magazine named "Il Giappone" began publication under the direction of Adolfo Tamburello.

This magazine continued the tradition of featuring renowned Japanese writers, including the likes of Yukio Mishima (Beviglia, 1967).

Nonetheless, the second half of the 20th century witnessed an enhancement in diplomatic relations and economic collaborations between Italy and Japan. Numerous agreements were signed, encompassing trade regulations, double taxation, and air transportation, as Italy played a key role in Japan economic development.

Thus, with the enhancement of diplomatic ties and the consolidation of bilateral relations, in 1962, Prime Minister Ikeda made a historic visit to Italy and the Vatican, marking the first such visit by a Japanese leader since the end of the war. Subsequently, Italian political leaders, starting with Giulio Andreotti in 1973 and later Sandro Pertini during his tenure as head of state in 1982, reciprocated with visits to Japan (Zappa, 2018).

⁴⁹ Short Japanese poems composed by seventeen syllables, divided in three lines of five, seven and five, scheme.

In 1970, a milestone in cultural exchange was achieved with the establishment of the first intercontinental television link between the Italian broadcast channel Rai and the Japanese NHK.

Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s in Japan witnessed the emergence of the "Italy-Boom" phenomenon—a profound appreciation for the cultures and traditions of Italy (Tripodi, 2014). This Italian-mania trends are not only evident in the growing volume of cultural exchanges through literary works, facilitated by enhanced accessibility to translations in both Italian and Japanese languages within Italy and Japan. Instead, this phenomenon extends beyond literature and encompasses various artistic domains, including the fashion industry with the iconic concept of "Italian Style."

Moreover, it is noteworthy in contemporary art forms like the film industry.

As a matter of fact, with the blossoming of the Japanese animation and game industry and the emergence of talents like Hayao Miyazaki and Yoshitaka Amano, creator of the "Final Fantasy" video game, a distinct Italian influence in the realm of art became apparent. Miyazaki's works, including notable films like "The Wind Rises," "Porco Rosso," and "Laputa: Castle in the Sky," showcase a pronounced admiration for Italian artistic giants like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci.

Moreover, the Italian landscapes serve as a captivating backdrop in Miyazaki's creations, in particular, "Laputa: Castle in the Sky" draws explicit visual inspiration from the enchanting Italian city of Civit  di Bagnoregio.

This interplay of Japanese animation with Italian art and scenery highlights a cross-cultural exchange that has not only captivated audiences but also deepened the artistic connections between Italy and Japan in the realm of animated storytelling.

2.4. Italy and Japan through the beginning of a new century

The advent of the new century witnessed a notable strengthening of the relationship between Italy and Japan, encompassing cultural diplomacy, political ties, and economic relationships.

Indeed, currently the two nations can proudly assert an excellent and dynamic relationship which, over the years, has been supported by many and diverse initiatives promoted by both public institutions such as the Italian Cultural Institutes in Tokyo and Osaka, the Japanese Cultural institute in Rome and, the *Fondazione Italia-Giappone*.

As well as universities, among which private and public universities like Ca 'Foscari in Venice, La Sapienza in Rome, and L'Orientale university located in Naples, and its Japanese counterparts like the Waseda University, the Keio University, and the Tōdai Imperial University, located in Tokyo.

Additionally, initiatives to promote Italian culture in Japan and vice versa have also been taken by private associations such as the aforementioned *Nichii-Kyokai*.

Nevertheless, cultural exchanges have been improving over the last two decades, and every year in both countries many events celebrating each other's culture and traditions, are held.

The appreciation of Italian culture has been notably fostered by the increasing dissemination of Italian cultural productions in Japan, particularly in cinema, music, and literature.

Regarding the latter, since the early 20th century, there has been a steady rise in the translation of Italian literary works, which have been widely embraced by the Japanese public, which has been deeply appreciated authors such as Pirandello (*Ambasciata d' Italia a Tokyo*, 2024).

In the realms of music and cinema, both Italian productions hold significant popularity in Japan, contributing to cultural exchange between the two nations. Opera, in particular, has seen noteworthy collaborations between Italian and Japanese associations aimed at promoting opera in Japan.

For instance, the collaboration between the Sawakami Opera Foundation and the Orchestra Filarmonica di Bologna has been highly acclaimed (*Ambasciata d'Italia a Tokyo*, 2024).

In fact, since the beginning of the new century diverse celebration concerning the relationship between the two nations have occurred.

In 2013 the Italian foreign embassy launched the “Italy in Japan 2013” program in order to celebrate the 400th anniversary since the arrival of the first Japanese envoy to both Italy and Europe, the aforementioned *Keichō* embassy (Tripodi, 2014).

In addition to that, as previously mentioned, the year 2016 celebrates 150 years of formal bilateral relations between the two countries, precisely 150 years since the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed in 1866.

Furthermore in 2023, the “Collezione Farnesina”, managed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, made its debut in Japan for the first time ever.

Displayed at the Italian Cultural Institute of Tokyo and consisting of 60 works, the Collection offered a captivating journey through the history of Italian art in the 1900s (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2023)

As for today, Japan and Italy are close partners, cooperating in a variety of projects involving different domains such as the economic ones, the research and academic one.

In particular, for what concerns the academic realm, their partnership extends to encompass more than 100 universities across Italy, facilitating exchange agreements with counterparts in Japan.

Indeed, both the Italian Cultural Institute and its Japanese counterpart, along with diplomatic missions, allocate specific sections to foster and promote opportunities for citizens of both countries to study and work abroad.

In the Italian context, the MAECI manages the "Study in Italy" event, which primarily sponsored by the Italian Cultural Institute, in collaboration with the Italian Embassy of Tokyo and the Italian Japanese Association (StudyinItaly, 2024). The annual event serves as a platform to introduce all the programs and opportunities dedicated to Japanese individuals interested in studying or working in Italy.

Additionally, it provides essential information for those intending to travel to the country, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of available resources and pathways for engagement between Italy and Japan (StudyinItaly, 2024).

These collaborations serve as conduits for scholarly discourse, research initiatives, and educational programs, enriching the academic landscape and promoting cross-cultural understanding between the two nations.

Cultural exchanges are promptly supported by both the Italian and Japanese governments, that in collaboration with their respective Ministries of Culture and Education, annually endorse numerous scholarships.

These opportunities are designed for students aspiring to pursue studies in Japan, exemplified by programs like MEXT⁵⁰, as well as for Japanese individuals desiring to undertake academic pursuits in Italy.

Moreover, the Japanese government annually sponsors numerous scholarships, like the Vulcanus⁵¹ scholarship, facilitating Italian students' engagement in research projects and study programs in Japan.

Currently, the collaboration between Italy and Japan in the research field and academic exchanges, especially within the scientific and technological domains, is flourishing. This flourishing partnership is evidenced by the significant number of projects and initiatives undertaken by universities, research institutions, and companies from both nations.

Notably, the number of agreements governing collaboration between Italian universities, research institutions, and their Japanese counterparts is estimated to be around 200, underscoring the depth and breadth of their partnership (Ambasciata d'Italia a Tokyo, 2024).

The agreements also encompass lower grade schools, exemplified by the collaboration between the Italian high school of Sant 'Anna and the Japanese Waseda counterparts, which began in 2016 for research in the field of robotics. Furthermore, a significant development occurred in 2019 with the inauguration of the Association of Italian Researchers in Japan, as this initiative not only bolsters cultural exchanges but also serves as a testament to the close partnership between the two nations (Ambasciata d'Italia a Tokyo, 2024).

⁵⁰ Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

⁵¹ Initiated in 1997, the program is open to EU nationals and citizens of SMP associated countries, as it offers industrial placements for students enrolled in scientific fields, aiming to introduce them to Japanese language and culture, foster significant interaction within the Japanese working environment, and provide opportunities to study advanced technologies. Available at: <https://www.eu-japan.eu/events/vulcanus-japan>

Nonetheless in the 21st century the two nations have continued to deepen and strengthen their bilateral relations and in 2023, a crucial moment unfolded as Italy and Japan elevated their relationship to the status of a "strategic partnership."

This significant step, as articulated by Dario Cristiani (2013), entails "strengthening contacts at every level and opening new perspectives for citizens and companies".

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY: ITALY AND JAPAN, BETWEEN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL RECIPROCITY

3.1 The evolution of Japan's Cultural Diplomacy

Japanese cultural diplomacy, as a subset of public diplomacy, currently stands out among global powers ones by virtue of its specialized use of soft power in its pursuit of promoting cultural values and traditions while achieving its foreign policy agenda.

As Gadjeva highlights, (2022, p.170) through the use of specific soft power peculiarities it has cultivated what is today defined as 'Kind Diplomacy' and, through the promotion of traditional concepts such as that of *wa*⁵², *omotenashi*⁵³ and *omoiyari*⁵⁴, respectively harmony, hospitality, and consideration of an individual's emotional sphere, Japan has successfully managed to present a positive image of itself to the international arena.

Nevertheless, since the end of the Second World War and the restoration of its cultural activities, Japanese cultural diplomacy has been continuously evolving over time traversing distinct phases.

Indeed, from the latter half of the 20th century to the contemporary era, the focal point and objectives of Japan's cultural diplomacy paradigm have frequently shifted in response to the prevailing trends and challenges of the times.

⁵² Written in Kanji as 和, and pronounced as “WA”, it literally translates as Harmony. This concept has to be intended as the principle to avoid conflict and discord at all costs. This concept is part of the very essence of being Japanese as it is part of every single sphere of society.

Available at: <https://www.japan-experience.com/plan-your-trip/to-know/understanding-japan/the-wa>

⁵³ Written as お持て成し and literally translates as Hospitality, it is the concept of giving and proving the best hospitality and service without expecting anything in return.

Available at: <https://heartlandjapan.com/what-is-omotenashi/>

⁵⁴ As Lebra (1976, quoted in Hara, 2006, p. 27) it can be defined as “the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, to vicariously experience the pleasure or pain that they are undergoing, and to help them satisfy their wishes...without being told verbally”?

If on one side the advent of the Second World War brought a comprehensive disruption to all public endeavors associated with cultural diplomacy and cultural promotion, on the other one the post-war period marked the genesis of a multifaceted process, wherein the nation sought to redefine its global cultural presence and project a renewed image.

The year 1951 stands as a turning point for the nation as it reclaimed its standing as a significant international actor with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and its subsequent accession to UNESCO, Japan also restored its cultural diplomacy activities.

Starting from the 1950s and early 1960s, Japanese cultural diplomacy focus was primarily oriented towards the reshaping of its national image, to do so depictions associated with figures like Samurai or those evoking the feudal system, such as the *Kabuki*⁵⁵ theater practice, were actively suppressed (Ogoura, 2009).

At the same time, major efforts were undertaken to curtail the dissemination of the Japanese language, as Ogoura underlined (2009, p. 46), during this era, the encouragement of Japanese language instruction abroad was notably dispirited as numerous academics, together with inhabitants of the former Japanese colonies remarked the potential association with Japan's wartime imperialistic ambitions and propaganda.

Conversely, Japanese cultural promotion on the international stage predominantly pivoted towards the presentation of peaceful traditional activities. Indeed, through the promotion of peaceful notions like serenity and mutual respect, the aim of this new diplomatic dimension was to transform the international perception of the country, as Japan aimed to amend its pre-war image of a militaristic and imperialist country to that of a harmonious and peace-loving democracy (Gadjeva, 2022).

Emblematic symbols of this transformative campaign became images and landscapes evoking an inner sense of peace, such as Mount Fuji and blossoming

⁵⁵ *Kabuki* is a traditional theatrical form renowned for the intricate design of its costumes, make-up, wigs, and the exaggerated actions performed by actors, all intended to convey profound meaning to the audience.
Available at: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2090.html>

*sakura*⁵⁶ trees. As a matter of fact, during this period, the majority of Japanese-related calendars, pamphlets, and brochures were presented with these elements. Traditional activities such as *Ikebana*, the art of flower arrangement, and the tea ceremony took center stage, serving as symbolical expressions to emphasize Japan's gentle, harmonious, and peaceful nature (Ogoura, 2009).

The promotion of these ancient and traditional practices eventually led to the organization of numerous events all around the world, including practical demonstrations and exhibition, introducing the art of *Sadō*⁵⁷ (Gadjeva,2022).

Nevertheless, the considerable efforts aimed at re-establishing Japan's presence in the international arena and at reshaping its external perception were not only evident in its accession to UNESCO in 1951 but, instead manifested prominently also through the hosting of two major events during this epoch: the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the Universal Exposition in 1970 in Osaka (Gadjeva, 2018).

These events marked an additional shift in the Japanese cultural diplomacy paradigm.

Nonetheless, as Japan's prominence in the international community grew, consolidating its role as an established democratic economic leader, it was challenged by adverse reactions promptly emanated from other global powers who accused the country of causing “economic disruption” (Ogoura, 2009, p. 46).

Thus, to contrast any possible misunderstanding, between the late 1960s and early 1970s Japan's cultural diplomacy enters a new phase as the imperative to portray the nation as a peaceful democracy evolves into the compelling necessity to represent the country as a technologically and economically advanced power.

This eventually manifested through the enhancement of cultural promotions and the establishment of numerous cultural institutions and information centers, often affiliated and co-located within Japanese embassy buildings.

⁵⁶ Cherry Blossom Trees

⁵⁷ The Japanese tea ceremony is defined as *sadō* or *chadō* in Japanese. The kanji composing the word, 茶道, literally translates as 'The Way of Tea.

In 1962 the Japanese Language Society for Foreigners was established, paralleled by the culmination of a series of cultural agreements with numerous communist countries spanning the period from 1962 to 1969 (Ogoura 2009).

At the same time, the very practices that were suppressed in the preceding decade, to avert potential imperialistic allegations, were now strategically employed as instruments to promote cultural activities. This shift led to the reconsideration and ultimately to the re-establishment of *Nōh*⁵⁸ and *Kabuki* theater's practices as these art forms were now introduced to the international audience as fundamental components of Japanese traditional forms of artistic expression (Ogoura, 2009).

Nevertheless, a significant stride in the realm of this positive diplomacy adopted by Japan in the second half of the 20th century, and more broadly in the history of Japanese diplomacy, is underscored by the establishment of the Japan Foundation in 1972. The latter, which was under the direct supervision of MOFA's⁵⁹ Cultural affair division, was created with a 20-billion-yen endowment, with the finality to serve multiple purposes (Ogoura, 2009).

The Japan Foundation was established to facilitate cultural exchanges and cooperation through three primary functions: supporting the dissemination of the Japanese language abroad, promoting intellectual exchanges involving not only academics and political figures but also artists and musicians as cultural ambassadors, and fostering Japanese studies through various initiatives (Ogoura, 2009, p. 47).

In addition to that, the Japan foundation was also strategically adopted as a countermeasure to address and mitigate the anti-Japanese sentiments dissipating across countries in South-East Asia (Gadjeva, 2022).

Indeed, in response to the rising anti-Japan sentiment, efforts were made by intensifying cultural promotion activities which had a specific emphasis on other Asian countries. This initiative was accompanied by the establishment of several Japan Foundation offices across Asia and eventually culminated with the inauguration of the Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center in 1990.

⁵⁸ *Noh*, also denoted as 'Mask Drama,' stands as one of the world's oldest theatrical art forms, encompassing drama, music, and dance elements, notable for its distinctive simplicity.

Accessed: <https://www.the-noh.com/en/world/what.html>

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The latter served a precise purpose: to introduce the cultures of ASEAN countries to Japan, thereby fostering increased Japanese interest and knowledge in the South-East Asia region (Ogoura, 2009).

Nevertheless, the 1980s and 1990s brought once again a change into the direction of Japanese cultural diplomacy action. As Gadjeva analyses (2018, p. 187), Japan, having consolidated its position as a powerful global player, both economically and diplomatically, experienced an increased demand for a more significant role in terms of obligations and collaboration within the international arena.

This era marked a crucial juncture where other countries began to actively seek Japan's substantial contribution to the global community, and as a consequence its cultural diplomacy became a solid pillar of its foreign policy. As highlighted by Ogoura (2009, p. 48), during this period, cultural diplomacy assumed a prominent role as it was formally acknowledged as the third pillar of Japan's foreign policy, while the first pillar denoted Japan's active engagement in peacekeeping operations and the second entailed the formal development of targeted aid policies and developmental assistance.

At the same time a new role emerged as a prominent instrument and actor of Japanese cultural diplomacy: Cultural Cooperation.

Cultural cooperation in this sense, became an instrument used to aid countries to develop their own cultural tradition and founded application across diverse domains, encompassing a spectrum of activities, as noted by Ogoura (2009, p. 48):

“Helping developing countries to stage theatrical performances, providing them with lighting or recording equipment, furnishing showcases for museums, and giving them technical assistance in art management”.

Moreover, the facet of cultural cooperation is notably manifested in the arena of heritage preservation policies, where Japan takes an active role in not only providing substantial financial aid but also furnishing comprehensive technical support for a diverse array of projects dedicated to the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Heritage became a key element in Japanese

cultural cooperation policies in order to develop better relationships with its global counterparts (Akagawa, 2016).

These cultural diplomacy initiatives reached their apex in the early 1989, with Japan's formal establishment of a specialized⁶⁰ within the framework of UNESCO (Ogoura, 2009).

Nonetheless, cultural cooperation also called for the formulation of major policies involving cultural exchanges and in 1984, responding to this imperative, the Department of Cultural Exchange was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This milestone was subsequently complemented by the inception of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, facilitating the annual invitation of foreign language teachers and international exchange coordinators to Japan.

Indeed, the growing emphasis on cultural exchanges was reflected in increased monetary budget allocated to the Japan Foundation, and as a result, this surge in financial support ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Conference for the Promotion of International Cultural Exchange in 1989 and that of the Center for Global Partnership⁶¹ in 1992 (Gadjeva, 2018).

However, the 1990s witnessed a paradigm shift in Japanese cultural diplomacy, compelled by the emerging challenges that prompted the country to reassess its strategies.

Confronted with both a deceleration in its economy and subsequent financial deficits on one hand, and the transformative force of globalization shaping global identities on the other, Japan had to re-adjust the focus of its cultural diplomacy (Ogoura, 2009).

As a matter of fact, the advent of globalization, coupled with the increasing prominence of other Asian nations like South Korea and China, compelled Japan to devise a novel strategy aimed at positioning itself as a distinctly unique country, one that stood at the forefront in various dimensions of advancement and could therefore settle the example for the other (Ogoura, 2009).

⁶⁰ "Trust fund for the Preservation of the World Cultural Heritage"

⁶¹ As Ogoura (2009, pp.48-49) underlines the Cultural Grant Program (CGP) was designed with the explicit aim of cultivating mutual cooperation and advancing programs aligned with a global agenda. This encompassed not only support for the democratization process in developing countries but also targeted policies addressing issues such as infectious diseases and environmental challenges.

Therefore, between the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the aim to emphasize its distinguished “personality”, a new model of Cultural Diplomacy was implemented. The latter was born from the union of both elements belonging solely to the Japanese cultural traditions, and others belonging instead to the post-modern context such as pop music, anime, fashion, novels, and manga.

With this in consideration, in 1988, the Takeshita government made a significant stride by launching a discussion panel on international cultural exchange primarily centered on the exportation and promotion of Japanese TV programs to other Asian countries, thus marking a major turning point in cultural diplomacy efforts (Iwabuchi, 2015).

Nevertheless, this hybrid model (Gadjeva, 2018 p. 188) eventually culminated with the establishment of Japanese- pop culture diplomacy and the implementation of targeted policy and strategies like the “Cool Japan”, and a numerous amount of event dedicated to the so called “content industry” (Ogoura, 2009).

3.2 Contemporary Japanese Cultural Diplomacy and the Cool Japan Strategy.

The end of the 20th century and the advent of the 21st one brought once again new challenges for Japan to face, paralleled with new necessities to fulfill through its cultural diplomacy.

As a matter of fact, Japan faced many different struggles as its position as the only fully developed economic Asian power was now menaced not only by its economic recession and the collapse of its “Bubble Economy⁶²”, but also by the rising economies and status of other Asian countries such as South Korea and China (Matsui,2014).

Nevertheless, as the economy grew in these latter countries, so did their common cultural perception and awareness (Ogoura, 2009 p. 51), and consequently the promotion of their own culture abroad.

Indeed, greatly inspired by the j-wave, their content industry evolved in a similar direction, like for example the South Korea one, as its Music and drama industry gained popularity overseas eventually leading to the birth of the so called “Hallyu⁶³” trend, a phenomenon that nowadays has diffused worldwide thanks to the K-pop and k-drama industry.

As a consequence, as cultural awareness increased, a new sentiment of nationalism emerged in those countries, particularly evident in those nations that were historically subjected to Japan’s imperial rule.

Thus, in response to these dynamics, Japan undertook various strategic initiatives within the realm of cultural diplomacy (Ogoura, 2009).

In South Korea, collaborative efforts were made by the Japan Foundation in partnership with the government, and voluntary associations, to organize *Matsuri*⁶⁴ festival events, in order to foster an experience that would cultivate

⁶² The term "バブル景気" (baburu keiki), commonly known as the "Bubble Economy," denotes a period of economic bubble experienced in Japan between 1986 and 1991. During this time, easy credit availability coupled with unrestrained speculation resulted in dramatic increases in both market and real estate prices. Nevertheless, the aftermath of this bubble, particularly evident in 1992-1993, led to a substantial economic downturn characterized by plummeting market and real estate values.

Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Japan/International-relations#ref319789>

⁶³ It is a neologism used to indicate the increasing global popularity of Korean culture.

⁶⁴ Matsuri are typical Japanese festivals often celebrated to commemorate special occasions such as the changing season, an historical event or just simply as a traditional occurrence belonging to a precise town or neighborhood.

both a common sense of belonging and the positive image of Japan in the country and among young generations (Ogoura, 2009, p. 51).

Concurrently, in China, with the aim of disseminating more comprehensive knowledge about Japan to the Chinese youth through an interpersonal approach, the Japan Foundation established numerous information centers (Gadjeva, 2022). As aforementioned, the last decades posed a quest for Japan to showcase its distinctiveness compared to other Asian countries, given that it is no longer the sole economic power in the region. In fact, with the increasing status of other nations on the international stage, both economically and politically, Japan cultural diplomacy had to be redefined according to newfound hybrid model characterized by a fusion of cultural elements from its millennia-old tradition with those belonging to the post-modernity context, such as anime, music, manga, and fashion (Gadjeva, 2018).

However, while traditional cultural activities like *Ikebana* and *Sadō* (tea ceremony), as well as established language education and cultural exchange programs, remain fundamental to Japan's cultural diplomacy, the emergence of media and broadcasting platforms has significantly augmented its outreach and influence (Iwabuchi, 2015).

As the significance of the pop-culture industry surged at the onset of the 21st century, Japan's cultural influence experienced a parallel rise.

With the global establishment of video game giants such as Nintendo and PlayStation, and the mainstream success of anime series like Pokémon, Digimon, and Sailor Moon, Japanese pop culture influence exponentially expanded across the world (Matsui, 2014).

Moreover, as Matsui highlights (2014, p. 83), Hayao Miyazaki and his Studio Ghibli production, played a crucial role in breaking the conviction that anime was only meant for children.

Indeed, the Oscar win for the movie "Spirited Away" in the "Best Animated Movie" category was a turning point in the Japanese anime industry as it was the first time an anime had ever won in this prestigious category, thus showcasing its multifaceted dimension to the world.

Available at: <https://www.gotokyo.org/en/story/guide/the-best-festivals-in-tokyo-and-japan/index.html#:~:text=Japan%20is%20a%20country%20of,hundreds%20of%20years%20or%20more.>

Thus, as the j-wave gained worldwide prominence, in 2002, a new term was coined by the American journalist Douglas McGray the: “Gross National Cool” (2002, quoted in Iwabuchi, 2015, p.422).

The Cool Japan concept described Japan’s cultural influence and its ability to convey a compelling national message through its cultural exports serving as a soft power instrument, while also describing its rising status as a cultural superpower.

In the realm of Japanese cultural diplomacy, the concept was formally introduced for the first time in 2003 through a report issued by the Research Society of International Exchange⁶⁵.

As noted by Matsui (2014, p. 89), whereas the report emphasized the necessity for Japan to develop a new national image, it also recommended the adoption of a strategic approach centered around the usage of "Cool Japan's cultural products" to achieve this goal.

Indeed, as Iwabuchi underlines (2015, p. 423) it was under the Koizumi government (2001-2006), that the “Cool Japan” (クールジャパン) strategy begin to be implemented, as numerous policies and committees concerning the use and promotion of media culture elements were instituted in order to strengthen Japan’s attractiveness through the promotion and advancement of its content industry. In fact, throughout its mandate as a prime minister, various committees specialized on the promotion of Japanese media culture, and on the protection of those as elements belonging to the Intellectual Property⁶⁶ realm were instituted, among which, particularly relevant was the Head Office for Intellectual Property Strategy, which was created in 2002 (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 423).

Consequently, the Fundamental Law on Intellectual Property was enacted in March 2003, with the subsequent establishment of the Intellectual Property Headquarters, occurring a few months later, in July of the same year (Matsui, 2014).

⁶⁵ Organized under the Japan Foundation

⁶⁶ The concept of “Intellectual Property” encompasses creations originating from the mind and creativity, including ideas, inventions, artistic works, names, and more.

Available at: <https://www.wipo.int/about-ip/en/>

Starting from 2003, the year which marks the formal beginning of the implementation of the Cool Japan policy across every facet of the Japanese public sphere, many initiatives were taken by MOFA.

One of the first plan launched and strongly supported by MOFA, was the establishment of the World Cosplay⁶⁷ Summit in 2003.

The Summit, which is annually held in the city of Nagoya and is publicly hosted by TV Aichi, awards the winner with the title of "Foreign Affairs Minister" (Matsui, 2014, p. 89).

Certainly, the year 2006 marked a significant milestone with the official adoption of a pop-culture diplomacy policy by MOFA (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 424). Since then, pop culture has consolidated its key role and emerged as a cornerstone of Japanese cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the Cool Japan policy was reiterated by Taro Aso, who held the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2005 to 2007, and later served as Prime Minister from 2008 until 2009 (Matsui, 2014, p. 90).

As a matter of fact, it was under his leadership, influenced by his fervent passion for manga, that the International Manga Award was established in 2007. The latter initiative, aimed to honor the contributions of the international manga creator community, who also played a significant role in promoting the spread of manga overseas (Matsui, 2014).

In 2008, a further step was taken by MOFA with the establishment of the "Anime Ambassador Project", which saw as its first ambassador the famous robotic blue cat Doraemon (Marchukov, 2016).

Indeed, for what concerns the Fashion realm, in 2009, MOFA appointed three new national ambassadors : The "Kawaii⁶⁸ (カワイイ) Ambassadors" .

⁶⁷ Translated in Japanese as "Kosupure" (コスプレ), the word Cosplay denotes the practice of meticulously dressing up and emulating the appearance and demeanor of a particular pop-culture character.

Available at: <https://daily.jstor.org/history-cosplay-and-comic-con/>

⁶⁸ Written in Romaji as Kawaii, the term is translated in English as Cute

The three selected girls were each representing an iconic cute Japanese fashion style, respectively Lolita⁶⁹, Harajuku⁷⁰ and the schoolgirl (Matsui, 2014, p. 90). Moreover, as analyzed by Iwabuchi (2015, p. 423), the "Cool Japan" strategy expanded across various domains, particularly within the economic one, as METI ⁷¹ pioneered its implementation by establishing the "Cool Japan Promotion Office" in 2010.

Subsequently, in 2013, the "Council for the Promotion of Cool Japan" was established to disseminate the cultural allure globally, as the economic benefits and contributions of the creative industries experienced significant growth (Iwabuchi, 2015).

Nevertheless, as the importance of cultural diplomacy grew over the last decades and as its functions expanded through multiple dimensions, new plans were launched, and structural reforms were made.

As a matter of fact, in 2004 the Public Diplomacy Department was established, with the aim to allocate functions between MOFA and the Japan Foundation, key actors in Japanese cultural diplomacy (Gadjeva, 2018).

As noted by Ogawa (2009, quoted in Gadjeva, 2018, p 188), its main functions are:

“Implementing international agreements to promote cultural exchange, cooperating with international cultural organizations, and introducing Japanese culture abroad and promoting cultural exchange with foreign countries, as well as supervising the Japan Foundation”.

⁶⁹ The Lolita fashion (ロリータ・ファッション) is a distinctive Japanese fashion trend influenced by Victorian and Rococo-era aesthetics, featuring elaborate lacy frills, ruffles, and elaborated accessories. As time has passed, it has diversified into several sub-categories, including gothic, punk, and sweet styles, each with its own unique characteristics and aesthetic elements.

Available at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/lolita-fashion-japanese-street-style#slideshow=63778258&slide=0>.

⁷⁰ Named after Tokyo's Harajuku district, Harajuku fashion represents a fusion of diverse subcultures, serving as a concrete manifestation of the wearer's individuality and self-expression.

Available at: <https://www.strikemagazines.com/blog-2-1/a-brief-history-of-harajuku-culture>

⁷¹ The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry

Thus, while on one hand MOFA has the responsibility to create long-term policies and to plan new strategies, on the other hand the Japan Foundation has the duty to implement those at the operational level (Gadjeva, 2018. p.188).

As a matter of fact, currently the Japan foundation is no longer under MOFA's supervision and is instead an independent agency. Among its core functions are the management of arts and cultural exchanges, which includes the organization of international exhibitions and exchange programs for figures belonging to the artistic field, in order to introduce Japanese traditional and contemporary art forms.

Additionally, the foundation provides support for Japanese language education programs abroad, such as the JPLT⁷², and assistance to Japanese studies institutions worldwide (Marchukov, 2016).

Thus, currently, cultural diplomacy is implemented through many different entities, as noted by the Director of the Japanese cultural institute in Rome, Junichi Shimizu (Personal Communication, January 2024), MOFA, under the Director-General, has specific departments dedicated to public and cultural diplomacy, such as the Cultural Affairs and Overseas Public Relations division, the Friendship ties division, and the Exchange Programs ones.

Nevertheless, if on one hand Japanese cultural diplomacy's primary objective remains fostering cultural exchanges and promoting Japanese language and culture abroad, it achieves this through a diverse array of projects relevant to various domains while employing numerous instruments, as for example the "Japan Brand Program" which aims to fulfill such premises through seminars and workshops (Marchukov, 2016, p.46).

On the other hand, in the contemporary context, it has also evolved across multiple dimensions to fulfill a variety of purposes, as Ogoura (2009, p.52) analyses among these are:

"Stimulating the renaissance of local communities and helping ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds to achieve peaceful coexistence are among the diverse goals now pursued through Japan's international cultural exchange."

⁷² Japanese language proficiency test

Certainly, over the last few years, Japan has further developed its cultural diplomacy as an instrument to be adopted in a peace-building mission.

In a much broader sense, using cultural diplomacy as a mean to achieve peace also involves the use cultural exchange as a way to alleviate both the physical and psychological pain caused by the conflict (Ogoura, 2009).

A further advancement in Japanese cultural diplomacy, shaped by the forces of globalization, entails the establishment of various policies recognizing that in an interconnected world, culture, as part of humanity's heritage, should be shared and does not solely belong to any single nation, as it is vital for preserving the world's cultural diversity (Ogoura, 2009).

3.3 The evolution of Italian Cultural Diplomacy

In the contemporary period it is widely recognized that Italian culture remains one of the most prominent and appreciated across the globe.

The nation proudly hosts the highest number of UNESCO cultural and natural sites (UNESCO, 2024) reflecting its millennia-long history and heritage, as across the country, monumental landmarks such as the Colosseum and the Pantheon in Rome bear witness to Italy's rich historical legacy.

Additionally, Italy's vibrant traditions, which capture the very spirit of "Italianità" (Rutelli, 2018, p. 67), are fundamental to the development of the country's cultural identity.

As underlined by the Italian minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Antonio Tajani (2023, quoted in Biagini Selvaggi,) during his speech held in occasion of the "State's General of Cultural Diplomacy" event held in Florence in October 2023:

"Italy is a major cultural power, perhaps the greatest cultural power in the world."

As a matter of fact, culture has always been an essential element of the Italian diplomatic system as a crucial determinant of the country's identity both, in its domestic projection, and in its cultural promotion abroad through its cultural diplomacy. Indeed, for what concern the latter, as a component of soft power, culture has been and continues to be a significant instrument of Italian foreign policy, particularly through the strategic deployment of cultural diplomacy and its ensuing projections (Medici, 2019).

Certainly, Italian cultural identity is rather vast and very diverse in its nature as it involves an ample range of cultural production which extends across many domains, being it its rich culinary traditions, or literature, architectures, and art (Baldoli et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, since the unification of the kingdom of Italy in 1861 until the contemporary era, Italian cultural diplomacy has undergone continuous

evolution, according to the adaptability to diverse political contexts and ideologies.

From 1861 until the establishment of the fascist regime in the first half of the 20th century, cultural diplomacy was primarily focused on the promotion of Italian culture through the establishment of Italian language courses and Italian culture lectures (Medici, 2019).

As Medici further analyses (2019, p. 28), during this period cultural diplomacy goals were achieved through a variety of tools and actors. Concerning the latter, a major role was played by the National Society “Dante Alighieri”.

Established in 1889 by a group of intellectuals guided by the Italian writer Giosue Carducci, the society was articulated in numerous committees, already in 1890, the number of committees was 23, and it formally became a non-profit organization in 1893 (Società Dante Alighieri, 2024).

In a first moment, the society assumed a key role in promoting the dissemination of the Italian language abroad through the establishment of Italian language classes and lectures primarily aiming to cultivate a sense of patriotism and affection for the homeland among Italian communities living overseas.

Nonetheless, under the new presidency of Luigi Rava in 1903, the Books Commission was established by the Central Committee. This initiative culminated in the inauguration of libraries, both public and private, which enabled Italians residing abroad to access and read books written in Italian (Società Dante Alighieri, 2024).

Furthermore, Italian culture was advanced through the establishment of academic chairs, often supported by individual academic institutions or private initiatives, led by native Italian teachers (Medici, 2019).

As cultural diplomacy activities and their importance increased, they culminated in the inauguration of the first Italian cultural center in the Czechoslovakia capital on March 2nd, 1923.

Located in Prague, the institute was dedicated to advancing the dissemination of the Italian language and fostering a deeper understanding of Italian culture within the country. Additionally, it served as a platform for fostering intellectual and artistic exchanges between Italy and Czechoslovakia (Maurizio, 2022).

However, the rise of the fascist ideology in the 1920s and the subsequent establishment of the fascist regime, deeply altered the role that cultural diplomacy had up until that moment.

As highlighted by Medici (2019, p. 29), the advent of the fascist government prompted a comprehensive reassessment of the actors and tools employed in cultural diplomacy as the new government aimed to propagate the fascist model through its cultural institutions and diplomatic strategies.

As a matter of fact, the first entities subjected to reorganization according to the fascist model were cultural institutions. Thus, in 1926 a law was approved to mandate direct state control over these institutions, repurposing them not only for cultural diplomatic endeavors but also as instruments of propaganda (Medici, 2019).

Indeed, soon thereafter, all private cultural and educational institutions, including the "Dante Alighieri" society, were converted into state-sponsored cultural institutions (Medici, 2019).

This restructuring aimed to align cultural endeavors with the broader societal objectives envisioned by the regime, thereby reinforcing its influence and control over cultural expression and dissemination.

The regime promptly repurposed all previously utilized tools, which were initially dedicated solely to promoting Italian culture abroad through cultural diplomacy, to now also serve the agenda of fascist propaganda, further propelled by the signing of numerous cultural agreements, especially with aligned countries, such as Japan.

Nevertheless, during this period, cultural diplomacy was predominantly focused on promoting historical traditions and themes, particularly those reminiscent of the Roman Empire, while also emphasizing the promotion of the Italian language (Medici, 2019).

Subsequently, in a concerted effort to reach a broader audience both domestically and internationally, various communication channels, ranging from radio broadcasting (Marzano cited in Medici, 2019, p. 29) to cinematic production (Garzarelli, cited in Medici, 2019, p. 29), were co-opted for the dissemination of fascist propaganda.

This strategic shift marked a significant transformation in the utilization of cultural instruments, as they became instrumental in advancing the ideological

agenda of the fascist regime across different spheres of society, in fact during this period cultural diplomacy became instrumental to achieve the fascist propaganda.

Nonetheless, Galeazzo Ciano played a significant role in implementing Italian cultural diplomacy during those years, serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1936 until 1943. Ciano actively promoted the activities of cultural institutions by signing numerous bilateral agreements with aligned countries. Through the principle of reciprocity, these agreements facilitated the promotion of Italian values and culture on the international stage (Medici, 2009).

In 1938, a notable progression in the utilization of cultural diplomacy as a tool of fascism unfolded with the establishment of IRCE⁷³. The latter institution was devised to supplant organizations involved in intellectual cooperation, a strategic response to Italy's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1937 (Medici, 2019).

Nevertheless, the outbreak of the Second World War and the subsequent downfall of the fascist regime prompted another shift in cultural diplomacy strategy.

Indeed, the new government in the post-war period faced the task of reinstating numerous cultural activities and institutions that had been shuttered during the conflict. As highlighted by Varsori (1998, cited in Medici, 2019, p.35), the post-war period was characterized by a notably ineffective foreign policy.

This ineffectiveness stemmed from a deficiency in both economic and political resources necessary for its pursuit, which resulted from the aftermath of its military defeat.

However, the new ruling class, in devising its cultural diplomacy approach, opted to distance itself from both the previous strategy adopted by the Fascist regime, while at the same time using the same instruments, and from those of the other Western Powers, who instead shared different responsibilities in the international framework. (Medici,2019)

This marked a deliberate departure aimed at reshaping Italy's cultural presence on the global stage through a very timid approach towards the concept of National interest (Rutelli, 2018).

⁷³ “Istituto Nazionale per le Relazioni Culturali con l’Estero”

Certainly, under the De Gaspari government, there was a pronounced emphasis on harnessing Italy's rich historical and cultural heritage not only to advance national interests but also to foster peace (Medici, 2009).

In fact, in regards with the latter according to the Prime Minister's ideals, the strategic implementation of cultural diplomacy could enable Italy to reclaim a respected position as an international actor and global power as it involved leveraging cultural diplomacy as a tool to cultivate profound mutual understanding and foster long-term dialogue with other major global powers (Medici, 2019).

As Rutelli analyzed (2018, p. 66), the preference for a universalistic and multilateral approach in Italian cultural diplomacy was largely influenced by the socio-political context of the time. Despite the appreciation of Italian cultural production abroad, the lingering impact of the fascist experience tarnished the country's image as a modern nation, making it challenging to erase the traces of fascist propaganda in the post Second World War period.

However, a key moment for Italian cultural diplomacy was its admission to UNESCO in 1947, as it further confirmed the country interest in fostering cultural cooperation and peace, and in 1950 with the establishment of the Commissione Nazionale Italiana per l'UNESCO, which replaced IRCE, (Medici, 2019).

Furthermore, the years from the 1950s until 1970s, were marked by the development of a stronger network of Italian language centers programs (Floriani, cited in Medici, 2019, p. 37), together with the establishment of cultural institutes and around the world.

The cultural institutes actively promoted Italian culture and language through a diverse array of activities. These initiatives included organizing conferences and classes conducted in Italian, hosting art exhibitions, and offering scholarships to foreign students interested in studying in Italy.

Such multifaceted efforts aimed not only to disseminate Italian cultural values but also to facilitate international exchange and collaboration in various fields of study and artistic expression, as many bilateral agreements were signed by the new government to foster major cultural cooperation in the cultural and scientific field (Medici, 2019).

During the 1970s, the establishment of the Ministero dei Beni Culturali e dell'Ambiente marked a significant milestone, evolving into the Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali by the late 1990s, signifying a dedicated focus on cultural endeavors (Rutelli, 2018).

Throughout the latter decades of the 20th century, cultural diplomacy primarily revolved around promoting archaeological missions, especially within the Mediterranean region, fostering artistic collaborations, organizing exhibitions, and enhancing academic cooperation. These efforts were bolstered by the initiatives of organizations like the Dante Alighieri Society and the Italian Cultural Institutes (Rutelli, 2018).

Concurrently, emerging cultural industries, notably the film industry epitomized by Cinecittà, and renowned figures such as the actress Sophia Loren, and movie directors such as Federico Fellini, Sergio Leone, and Roberto Benigni, garnered significant international attention and acclaim, contributing to Italy's cultural prominence on the global stage.

Furthermore, Italy's national prestige experienced a significant boost with the emergence of the "Italian Style" and the "Dolce Vita" lifestyle, attributed to the remarkable growth of the fashion industry and the global recognition of brands like Ferragamo, Armani, and Valentino. Furthermore, the widespread dissemination of Italian products and style in the international market further solidified Italy's cultural influence and allure.

3.4 Contemporary Italian Cultural Diplomacy

In recent decades, Italy has emerged as a cultural superpower, evident not only in its rich historical heritage, as demonstrated by its status as home to the highest number of UNESCO heritage sites, but also in its prolific cultural production and its creative nature.

Certainly, this cultural output has experienced exponential growth, due to a major development and consolidation of its cultural production on the international framework, which over the last years, has captivated the foreign audiences with the allure of the "Dolce Vita" (Rutelli, 2018, p. 72) lifestyle and the "Dolce Far Niente" philosophy.

As noted by the Italian diplomat Giulio Terzi Di Sant 'Agata (2019, p. 390), Italy's cultural production excels across numerous fields, from its culinary and wine traditions, until its artistic domains as Italy hosts beautiful art exhibitions and masterpieces such as the Uffizi Museums and the Sistine Chapel, Italian culture is deeply appreciated worldwide.

Furthermore, Italy's artistic landscape has evolved and diversified into a multitude of forms, transcending traditional arts such as painting and sculpture, and encompassing intricate architectural achievements and innovative fashion styles, thus reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage and contemporary creativity.

In terms of modern arts, in fact, in the movie industry, Italy stands as the second-largest recipient of Oscars prizes (Rutelli, 2018).

However, cultural diplomacy is not only fundamental in shaping Italian identity abroad, but it is also a crucial component of the nation's foreign policy, serving non only as a precious instrument for promoting the country's image and values around the world (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2024), but also as a vehicle to foster peace and prosperity (Foradori, Giusti e Lamonica 2018).

Cultural diplomacy is indeed a significant instrument for achieving foreign policy goals, as culture plays a crucial role in the development of socio-political relationships on the international stage. Thus, serving as a tool to foster enduring dialogues between diverse cultures, thereby easing the development of bilateral relationships among nations (Tirioni, 2016).

Currently, Italian cultural diplomacy has evolved along various trajectories, spanning a diverse array of activities including art, cinema, literature, entertainment, gastronomy, and design, considered essential for the successful promotion of the country image abroad.

As a matter of fact, this multifaceted approach, complemented by economic diplomacy, has not only invigorated the tourism and sports sectors but has also fostered substantial cooperation and research in education, science, and technology fields (Italiana, 2024).

Indeed, the touristic flow has also been deeply influenced by Italy's propagation of the Italian language through opera serves as a magnet for students worldwide, drawing them to study at Italian conservatories and academies (Rutelli, 2018).

Italian cultural diplomacy is managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), which oversees operations through entities such as the Italian Cultural institutes, and the Directorate General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy (DGPCD) which was established in 2022, coinciding with the centenary of the inaugural IIC in Prague a century prior.

While on one hand the latter, structured into six offices and three units, is primarily tasked with enhancing Italian soft power and promoting international relations as its main functions include managing the IIC network, facilitating the international mobility of students and researchers globally, and organizing archaeological, anthropological, and ethnological missions (Biasini Selvaggi, 2023).

On the other hand, Italian cultural institutes play a fundamental role in the implementation of cultural diplomacy and the promotion of Italian culture abroad, serving as spaces for fostering mutual dialogue among artists and intellectuals and as points of reference for Italian communities residing abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2024).

Furthermore, Cultural Institutes serve as a bridge between the host country and Italy, fostering mutual dialogue and understanding among diverse cultures, and facilitating interactions among cultural operators as well as engagement for individuals interested in Italian culture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2024).

Presently, the Italian cultural institutes network comprises 86 cultural institutes spread across 5 continents (Italiana, 2024).

Among its core functions the Italian cultural institutes prioritize the promotion of the Italian language through language classes and courses, while also disseminating scientific culture and organizing a wide array of events, including art exhibitions and music festivals (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2024).

Additionally, Italian cultural promotion is also managed by the Central Directorate for Integrated Promotion and Innovation, which, established in 2010, coordinates all activities related to the promotion of Italian culture abroad serving as an insight into every single aspect of Italian lifestyle and culture (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2024).

However, cultural diplomacy is not only promoted by public entities, but instead it is implemented by non-profit associations such as the “Società Dante Alighieri”.

As a matter of fact, since its establishment in 1889, the association has been a vehicle for the proliferation of Italian language and culture around the world.

Extending across 80 nations, the network comprises language schools, literary centers, libraries, and an online platform, as it offers language courses, training, and certification exams to assess linguistic proficiency in Italian, all while driving diverse cultural initiatives (Società Dante Alighieri, 2024).

3.5 Cultural Bonds and Bilateral Relations: the case of Italy and Japan

Ever since the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was formally acknowledged in 1866, Italy and Japan have nurtured a strong and long-lasting bilateral relationship which has developed through various spheres, including politics, society, economy, and the cultural one (Ambasciata d'Italia a Tokyo, 2024).

As a matter of fact, the two nations share an extensive heritage of political partnership and cultural exchange (Akasaka Azabu, 2024).

Over the years, this enduring partnership has deepened, resulting in the establishment of interdisciplinary connections and the cultivation of mutual understanding and political reciprocity between Italy and Japan.

Indeed, in the contemporary era, Italy and Japan collaborate on multiple levels, and projects ranging from bilateral relations and economic partnership to shared membership in international forums such as the United Nations and the OECD, as well as the G7 and the G20 (Italian Insider, 2016).

In particular, the two countries share a similar vision for the coordination of the G7 and the G20 forum as well as all the topics of the international agenda (Venturi, 2023).

Furthermore, the two nations have upgraded their status to that of strategic partners in 2023, thus amplifying their bilateral cooperation.

As stated by the Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio (2024), who on the 5th of February 2024 met the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in occasion of her official agenda in Tokyo:

“Japan and Italy are valuable strategic partners that share values and principles such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”

As aforementioned, Italy and Japan currently collaborate on a wide range of projects across diverse areas and spheres.

Certainly, intellectual, and artistic exchanges have historically been central to their relationship, facilitated by academic institutions such as schools and universities.

However, over the last decades, this cooperation has extended significantly to sectors such as security, the defense sector and economy, reflecting a deepening and broadening of their partnership, through numerous bilateral agreements mainly promoting people-to-people diplomacy.

During her visit to Japan in February 2024, the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, emphasized the importance of enhancing political and strategic collaboration with Japan, as she announced the initiation of a new bilateral consultation mechanism focused on security and defense, scheduled to commence in March. Additionally, the latter plan will also involve joint military exercises⁷⁴, highlighting the commitment of both nations to strengthen their cooperation in these critical areas (Decode39, 2024).

In December 2023, the economic sector witnessed a significant development as Italy and Japan agreed on a deal to enhance cooperation in economic, industrial, and technological spheres, as the latter agreement aims to foster investments from both sides, particularly in key areas such as communications and aerospace, thereby deepening economic ties between the two nations (Decode39, 2024).

Nevertheless, a major role in the establishment and enhancement of the strong relationship between Italy and Japan, was played by cultural diplomacy.

As a matter of fact, throughout history, Italy and Japan have maintained a rich tradition of cultural exchange, dating back to their earliest interactions in the 16th century and continuing to the present day.

Indeed, these exchanges, among which academic ones, have been instrumental in cultivating mutual understanding and deepening the connections between the peoples of both countries.

Currently, bilateral cultural relations between Italy and Japan are actively fostered through a diverse array of initiatives facilitated by their respective

⁷⁴ As analyzed by Venturi (2023), an agreement was signed as early as 2021 between the Italian Aeronautica Militare and the Japanese Self Defense Air Forces. The latter agreement, in fact, aimed to incorporate Japanese pilots into training courses provided by the International Flight Training School in Decimomannu, situated in Cagliari.
Accessible on: <https://www.agi.it/estero/news/2023-01-10/italia-giappone-partner-storici-uniti-in-g7-e-g20-19563465/>

diplomatic missions, including embassies, consulates, and cultural institutions. As highlighted by Shimizu Junichi, the director of the Japanese Cultural Institute of Rome (Personal communication, January 2024) the Istituto di Cultura Giapponese located in Rome, which is directly managed by the Japan Foundation, serves as a crucial entity in implementing and coordinating Japan Foundation programs across the entire Italian territory.

While it is Primarily focused on the artistic and cultural exchanges, the institute also promotes language education and provides support for Japanese studies.

However, as Shimizu (Personal Communication, January 2024) further analyses the Japanese Cultural institute activity is strengthened by that of the Japanese diplomatic missions in Italy, respectively the Japanese Embassy in Rome, and the General Consulate of Japan in Milano. In fact, both entities have their own offices dedicates to the implementation of cultural diplomacy and to the promotion of Japanese culture in Italy, and often organize and host cultural events themselves.

Additionally, since 1999, cultural exchanges and relations between Italy and Japan have been further supported by the Fondazione Italia-Giappone.

Established by the Ministry of Foreign affair, the foundation, working in partnership with the IIC and diplomatic missions, serves as a platform for organizing diverse initiatives across cultural, scientific, and economic domains, the foundation plays a pivotal role in reinforcing the bond between the two countries (Fondazione Italia-Giappone, 2024).

In Japan, cultural diplomacy and the promotion of Italian culture is formally implemented by the Italian Cultural Institutes, and by the diplomatic missions, respectively the Italian Embassy in Tokyo and the Italian Consulate in Osaka.

Every year, this institution organizes numerous events such as concerts, exhibitions⁷⁵ and festivals, in order to introduce the Italian spirit and culture to the Japanese population (Ambasciata d'Italia a Tokyo, 2024).

⁷⁵ For instance, from December 11, 2022, to March 12, 2023, the Italian Cultural Institute of Tokyo hosted an exhibition dedicated to the renowned architect Gae Aulenti, designer of the building itself. The exhibition, titled "Gae Aulenti: Uno Sguardo sul Mondo," showcased over 100 works, including photographs, designs, and projects. Available at: <https://www.aise.it/anno/uno-sguardo-sul-giappone-e-sul-mondo-liic-di-tokyo-celebra-larchitetto-gae-aulenti/184109/1>

Certainly, since the beginning of the interactions between the two countries, culture has played a crucial role in influencing the positive image of Italy in Japan and of Japan in Italy.

According to Shimizu Junichi (personal communication, January 2024), Japanese people are deeply fascinated by Italian culture, due to its rich heritage and variegated traditions. As he further analyses, most Japanese people have a high consideration of Italy due to it possessing a rich history of fine art, particularly from the Renaissance era, and admire its breathtaking architecture in picturesque cities.

Furthermore, to the Japanese, Italy represents a pioneer of modern fashion and boasts a vibrant food culture renowned for its excellence.

As a matter of fact, Italian fashion brands like Ferragamo, Gucci, Bulgari, Armani, and others are very appreciated by the Japanese population, as well as Italian food, considered to be full among the richest cuisine in the world.

Nevertheless, the fascination for Italian culture is not only visible on spheres like architecture and design, but also on pop-culture ones, like Anime, drama, and Movies, as those not rarely contain references to Italian culture. Examples of such are revisable in famous anime, among many, *Thermae Romae*⁷⁶ and *Lupine III*⁷⁷, and movies like the aforementioned “Porco Rosso” and “Laputa: Castle in the sky”⁷⁸ by Studio Ghibli.

In 2016, in occasion of the celebration of 150 years of bilateral relations between the two countries many initiatives involving the display of Italian arts in Japan were undertaken.

On one hand the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum hosted an exhibition titled “Botticelli e il suo tempo”, which displayed works borrowed by multiple Italian museums.

On the other hand, the Edo Tokyo Museum hosted a monographic exhibition named “Leonardo Da Vinci, Beyond the visible” (Ambasciata d’Italia a Tokyo, 2024).

⁷⁶ “テルマエ・ロマエ” The anime is set in Ancient Rome during the reign of Emperor Hadrian and follows the adventures of Lucius, whose profession involves the design and construction of the Roman hot baths.
Available at [://www.animeclick.it/manga/11009/thermae-romae](http://www.animeclick.it/manga/11009/thermae-romae)

⁷⁷ The anime is set in Italy and Spain

⁷⁸ The city of Laputa is inspired by the Italian city of Civit  di Bagnoregio

However, Japanese culture is also very much appreciated in Italy.

As noted by Shimizu Junichi (Personal communication, January 2024)

among the Italian public, there is a profound appreciation for Japanese traditional art and culture as many aspects of Japanese culture, including disciplines such as karate, judo, and traditional foods, have become increasingly popular in Italy.

Moreover, a major contribution of the increasing popularity of Japanese culture was also given by pop-culture elements, such as anime, manga, music, video games and movies.

In particular, the diffusion of anime has been supported by the diffusion on national broadcast channels in the tv who displayed series like One Piece, Naruto, Pokémon etc.

Every year, in Rome and Lucca, two important festivals celebrating those elements are held, respectively the Romics and Lucca Comics festival, where famous Japanese manga artist are often invited.

As Shimizu further elaborates (Personal communication, January 2024), Italy has cultivated a distinguished tradition in the study of Japan, exhibiting a top-tier academic proficiency in Japanese studies outside of Japan, as evidenced in the rigorous exploration of traditional arts, literature, philosophy, and history within Italian academic circles.

Undeniably, cultural diplomacy has played a major role in the establishment of prosperous and stable bilateral relations between the two nations.

CONCLUSION

As analyzed in the first chapter Cultural diplomacy, as a subset of public diplomacy, has long proved to be a successful instrument not only in projecting a nation's identity on the international stage and supporting its foreign policy objectives but also in fostering the establishment and maintenance of stable diplomatic relations between countries.

While not devoid of negative consequences, as evidenced by the emergence of "cultural wars" highlighted in Section 1.5, culture and cultural diplomacy remain fundamental elements underlying human interactions and international relations.

Especially in the case of Italy and Japan bilateral relations, as further analyzed throughout the second and third chapter, cultural exchanges have played a crucial role for the establishment of long and prosper relationship between the two nations. As a matter of fact, even though the first interactions among the nations date back to the *Nanban* period, in the 17th century, the official beginning of the relationship between the two nations in 1866 with the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, inaugurated a long history of cultural exchanges, mutual fasciation and multiple layered cooperation between the two nations. As further delineated in the second chapter, cultural exchanges between Italy and Japan have culminated in the establishment of numerous associations and partnerships, such as the *Fondazione Italia-Giappone* and, previously, the *Nichii-Kyokai* association. Indeed, these exchanges have fostered multidisciplinary cooperation spanning various domains including academia, science, politics, and economics.

In the final chapter, by delineating the evolution of cultural diplomacy in Japan and Italy, the study reveals the profound impact that cultural elements have on the projection of a nation's image abroad and on the trajectory of its foreign policy.

Certainly, the historical narrative of international relations between Italy and Japan has been profoundly shaped by a mutual admiration for each other's rich cultural traditions and heritage.

This enduring fascination, heightened in contemporary times by the infusion of pop-culture elements including movies and music, mixed with classing arts elements, has served as a significant catalyst in strengthening the bonds between Italy and Japan, who in 2023 have upgraded their statues as strategic partners.

Thus, in conclusion, as the founding of this dissertation have demonstrated, cultural diplomacy has indeed greatly contributed to the establishment of a strong and durable bilateral relationship between Italy and Japan.

Serving as a vehicle for the establishment of a prosperous bilateral relationship, cultural exchanges played a pivotal role in fostering political reciprocity and mutual cooperation.

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