

Considering Pre-War Cultural Diplomacy: Japan's Policy Toward China during the 1920s

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In this presentation, I consider whether a government should be involved in international cultural exchanges and, if yes, to what extent it should get involved. I will analyze Japan's cultural diplomacy toward China in the 1920s from a diplomatic point of view to find out the possibility and limitation of cultural diplomacy. I would like to emphasize that my argument will not be an ideological matter, but I will focus more on how to enhance the effect of cultural diplomacy as a diplomatic tool.

Cultural diplomacy usually contains political purpose. After WWI, the anti-Japanese movement in China became one of the most challenging problems in Japan's diplomacy. Japanese politicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals started to discuss the solution to this problem. Among all choices, cultural projects started to garner attention. After WWI, a cultural project was considered as the new diplomacy; a tool to build a friendly relationship between countries. However, the cultural project also contained another political aspect: great powers had started to compete with each other to win the hearts of Chinese people by using cultural diplomacy since the 1900s. They had built educational institutions, religious facilities, medical institutions, and so on in China.

However, cultural diplomacy does not always lead to an ideal result. In 1923, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set forth the TaiShi Bunkajigyo ("Cultural Policy toward China"), which was Japan's first comprehensive foreign cultural policy in its modern history. Under this policy, the government set up some research centers, supported exchanges of students and scholars between two countries, and facilitated private cultural activities in China. One of this policy's objectives was to deal with the Chinese people's growing negativity toward Japan. Previous studies have argued that this policy failed to accomplish that goal. The best-known event was the resignation of Chinese members of the Oriental Cultural Project Committee in protest against Japan in the Jinan (Tsinan) Incident on May 3, 1928. As a result, the Sino-Japanese cultural cooperation, which had begun in 1925, was halted in 1928.

Although the period of cooperation was short, it highlighted the possibilities and limitations of cultural diplomacy. I believe that analyzing and comparing the ideas of Japanese politicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals about Japanese cultural diplomacy toward China and China's objections after WWI will help us to evaluate the policy in a new light. By so doing, I found out that the Cultural Policy toward China failed for the following reasons.

Firstly, it failed because of its political nature. Japan's intellectuals and China's educational organizations regarded cultural diplomacy as a political tool because it was under the jurisdiction of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and funded by Japan's national budget, which was approved by

the Imperial Diet. Asataro Goto, one of the most famous Japanese sinologists, has evaluated the system of Cultural Policy toward China as follows: "Cultural Policy toward China can cause discord between China and Japan, as both countries hold different grounds in the project. While Japan run the project using its own budget, China is only an object." Jitsuzo Kuwabara, one of Japan's famous sinologists and historians, once said, "This project should not aim at gaining the popularity of Chinese people in a short period of time. Beyond that, we should aim for eternal values." Time has proved these insights right. Some Chinese intellectuals interpreted the policy as a cultural invasion. As it provoked resentment among the Chinese public, Japan's government tried to weaken its political aspects, resulting in an "outward depoliticization" of the policy.

Secondly, almost all Japanese regarded Japan as a cultural representative of Asia. Although Chinese members outnumbered Japanese members in the Cultural Policy toward China Committee (Oriental Cultural Project Committee), Japan did not treat its Chinese counterpart equally in this project. Japan had been enhancing the sense of national greatness and prestige of Asia after WWI and attempted to gain acceptance and support from Western great powers as "the representative of Asia" by enacting the Cultural Policy toward China. Also, Japan's politicians expect that by promoting Western powers' understanding of Asian culture, they will understand Japan's behavior on the international arena. These are the reasons why Japan continued the project even after the Chinese committees had resigned. However, the Chinese side could not accept the idea.

Some Japanese intellectuals argued that eliminating the political aspects from the Cultural Policy toward China would be impossible. Therefore, they tried to shift the public's attention toward the so-called "people-to-people diplomacy" approach and non-governmental actors.

Moreover, the democratization of diplomacy was strongly emphasized through Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points after WWI. From this perspective, we could see that the people-to-people diplomacy was in line with the international trend in preventing wars. As a result, mutual reconciliation between Japan and China was sought through scholarly, artistic, and other exchanges as well as official governmental interactions.

After WWI, people-to-people diplomacy contained two definitions for Japan according to Junpei Shinobu, a scholar in international law and also a representative intellectual of those days. The first was the "Government's diplomacy on behalf of the people's thoughts and awareness." The second was "diplomacy among non-governmental actors." The intellectuals of these days seem to share this common belief. Here, I will focus only on the second definition: people-to-people diplomacy as "diplomacy among non-governmental actors."

Undeniably, people-to-people diplomacy during this period was not a completely "non-governmental" approach, as some exchange activities were supported by governments or the Cultural Policy toward China. For example, when Japan sent scholars to the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), which was an organization of the League of Nations,

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported this program and intervened in the personnel selection process. Moreover, when some business sectors took part in the diplomacy, their initiatives were often supported by the Japanese government.

We have to understand that people-to-people diplomacy should aim not only to solve short-term diplomatic issues but also to facilitate long-term relations between the two countries. Asataro Goto once said,

In particular, we consider only solving immediate problems as diplomacy, and take the problem of mutual understanding for granted. Actually, long-term issues between the two countries should also be put into account. If everyone tries to solve only sudden incidents by negotiation and ignores long-term problems, the diplomacy will surely fail.

Goto further states that “if we could build strong friendship between influential persons of Japan and China as much as possible over the years, we could even prevent diplomatic problems which are prone to erupt in short notice.” In brief, Japan has to depend on people-to-people diplomacy to build sustainable friendship with the international society. This might sound too optimistic, but it is essential for Japan’s intellectuals to recognize the importance of people-to-people exchange in the diplomatic sphere.

Some Japanese intellectuals regarded people-to-people diplomacy as the best way to mend the Sino-Japanese relationship. Conventional methods of diplomacy sought to solve specific issues, but advocates of people-to-people diplomacy tended to aim for a more sustainable relationship. This can be regarded as the mainstream diplomatic idea in this age. Japan’s government also began to pay attention to people-to-people diplomacy and tried to achieve conciliation through those avenues rather than direct manipulation of cultural policy. Undeniably, people-to-people diplomacy was sometimes officially or unofficially involved with governmental actors, and it was not exposed to a harsh criticism by the Chinese side.

This approach is similar to the current notion of a “new public diplomacy.” Of course, the notion of “public diplomacy” existed first. Encyclopedia Britannica has defined public diplomacy as follows:

Public diplomacy, also called people’s diplomacy, any of various government-sponsored efforts aimed at communicating directly with foreign publics. Public diplomacy includes all official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support or tolerate a government’s strategic objectives. Methods include statements by decision makers, purposeful campaigns conducted by government organizations dedicated to public diplomacy, and efforts to persuade international media to portray official policies favourably to foreign audiences.

Today, the role of the government is changing from that of controlling an actor in international cultural exchange to that of supporting them. People-to-people exchange of

non-governmental actors was considered as the new public diplomacy in a broader sense. In conventional public diplomacy, the capability of controlling active actors in diplomacy is the key. However, the new public diplomacy is based on the idea that if the government's involvement is too strong, the attractiveness, credibility, and legitimacy of public diplomacy will be weakened. In other words, if a government hopes to improve diplomatic outcomes, it must limit its role and involvement in the exchanges.

Ultimately, the "Cultural Policy toward China" and people-to-people diplomacy did not bring about international conciliations, but the idea of cultural diplomacy might help us imagine various historical possibilities. In other words, by analyzing the current discussion, we can find the possibility and limitation of cultural diplomacy. Japanese intellectuals tried to weaken the political aspects of their cultural diplomacy, however it is difficult to get rid of its political aspects as long as it is "diplomacy."

From the above-mentioned arguments, I would like to summarize my presentation in 2 points.

Firstly, for cultural diplomacy, it is not necessary (or possible) to eliminate its political nature completely. However, the more people from their respective countries feel that the government is controlling their cultural exchanges, the more cultural diplomacy will provoke negative feelings.

Secondly, equality is the most important notion in cultural diplomacy. Both countries should establish equality of systems and ideas in cultural exchanges.

Today, we have to focus on long-term relations and sustainability to facilitate the Sino-Japanese relationship. I hope that both countries will learn from their history and put more effort on the betterment of the relationship between the two countries.

Thoughts of Pre-War Cultural Diplomacy

Japan's Policy Toward China during the 1920s

At Peking University

31 May 2019

Taro Kuwabara

Research question

A case study of Japan's pre-war cultural diplomacy toward China

Focusing on intellectuals' idea

- ▶ The idea and plan of pre-war cultural diplomacy
- ▶ Japan's trial and error of cultural diplomacy



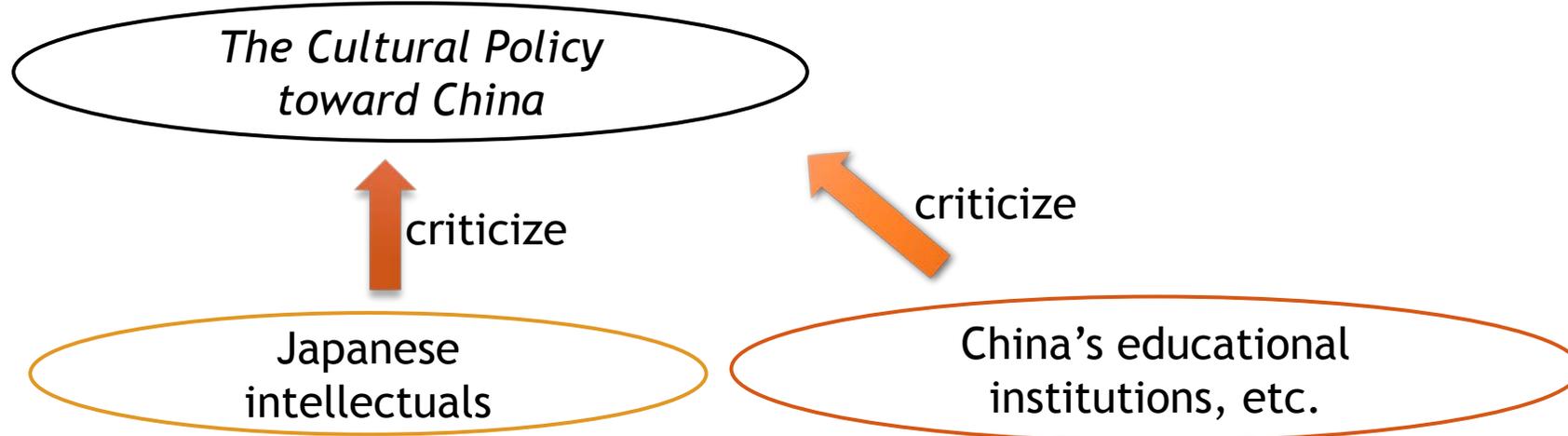
Analysis

Trying to find out the possibility and limitation of cultural diplomacy

Research question

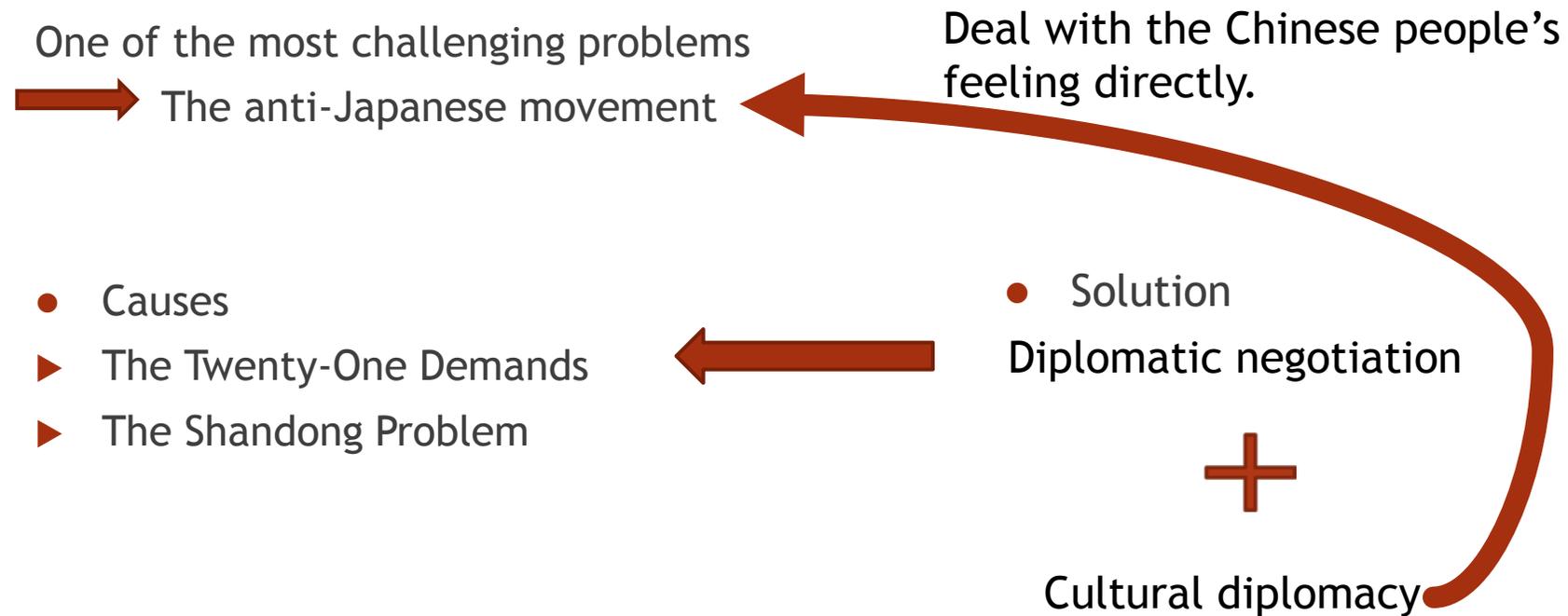
Japan's cultural diplomacy toward China = "*diplomacy*"

→ *political nature*



- ▶ What was the idea of Japan's cultural diplomacy toward China after WWI ?
 - ▶ Should the government participate in international cultural exchanges?
 - ▶ if yes, what scope should the government participate in?

Japan's diplomacy after WWI



TaiShi Bunkajigyo (东方文化事业) “The Cultural Policy toward China”

In 1923, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set forth the TaiShi Bunkajigyo (“Cultural Policy toward China”).

◆ the Oriental Cultural Project Committee

Chairperson: Shaomin Ke (柯劭忞)

Including:

11 Chinese members
7 Japanese members

◆ Contents

- The human science research center(Beijing)
- The natural science research center(Shanghai)
- Student and scholar exchange policy
- Promote private cultural activities and support medical institute in China

TaiShi Bunkajigyo (东方文化事业)

“The Cultural Policy toward China”

- ◆ The Sino-Japanese cultural cooperation in “The Cultural Policy toward China”

The Chinese members of the Oriental Cultural Project Committee resigned to protest against Japan in the Jinan (Tsinan) Incident on May 3, 1928.

1925



1928



This policy failed to deal with Chinese anti-Japanese sentiment.

The causes of failure are not only The Jinan Incident, but also the criticism of “cultural invasion” within Chinese people.

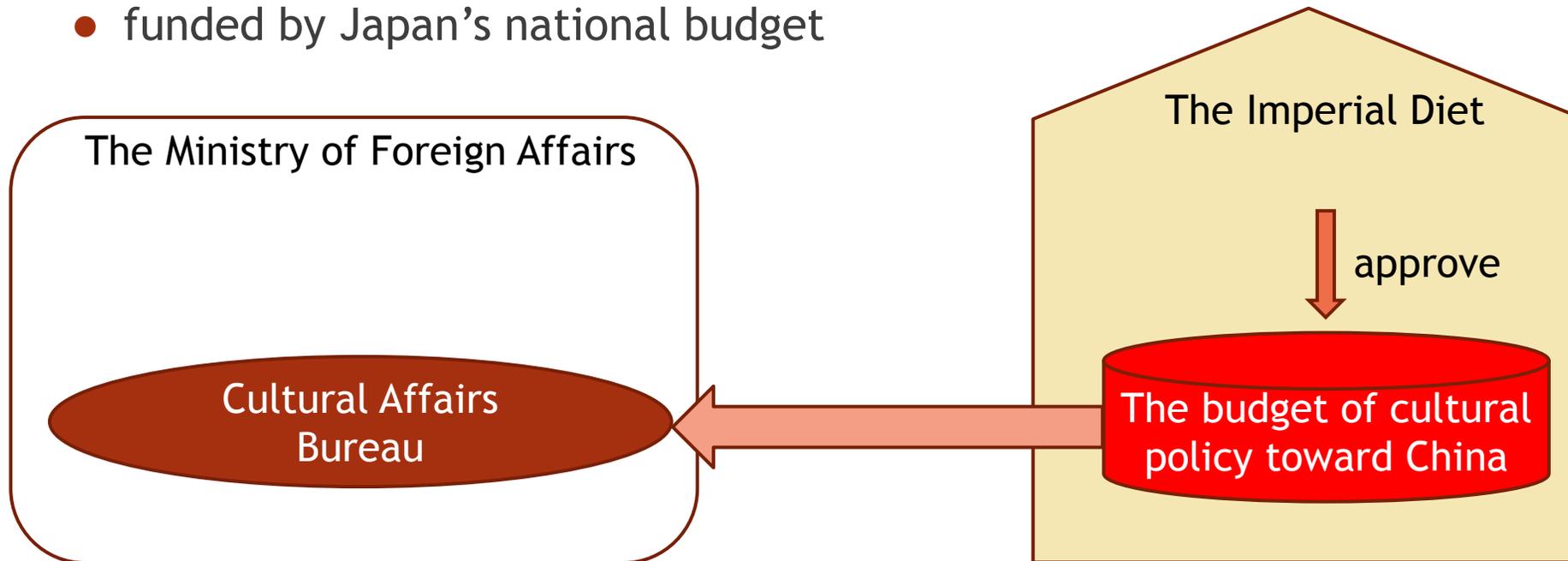
The criticism of “Cultural invasion”

Why did many Chinese regard the policy
as “Cultural invasion” ?

- ◆ political nature of “The Cultural Policy toward China”
- ◆ Japan’s idea of cultural policy (Japan’s cultural mission)

The criticism of “Cultural invasion”

- ▶ Political nature of the system
 - under the jurisdiction of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 - funded by Japan’s national budget

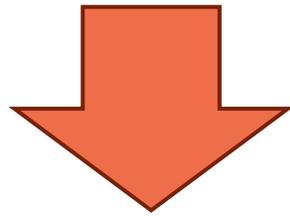


- ▶ Political nature of the purpose
 - To deal with the Chinese people’s anti-Japanese sentiment

The criticism of “Cultural invasion”

The anti-Japanese statement of the National Educational Union(1925)

- under the jurisdiction of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- funded by Japan’s national budget



“Cultural invasion”

The criticism of “Cultural invasion”



Asataro Goto
(Sinologists, Linguist)

“Cultural Policy toward China can cause discord between China and Japan, as both countries hold different grounds in the project. While Japan run the project using its own budget, China is only an object.”

Asataro Goto(1923).The basic knowledge of the cultural diplomacy toward China, *Gaiko Jiho*.No.446

“This project should not aim at gaining the popularity of Chinese people in a short period of time. Beyond that, we should aim for eternal values.”

Jitsuzo Kuwabara(1924).The request of the cultural diplomacy toward China, *Gaiko Jiho*.No.458



Jitsuzo Kuwabara
(Sinologist, Historian)

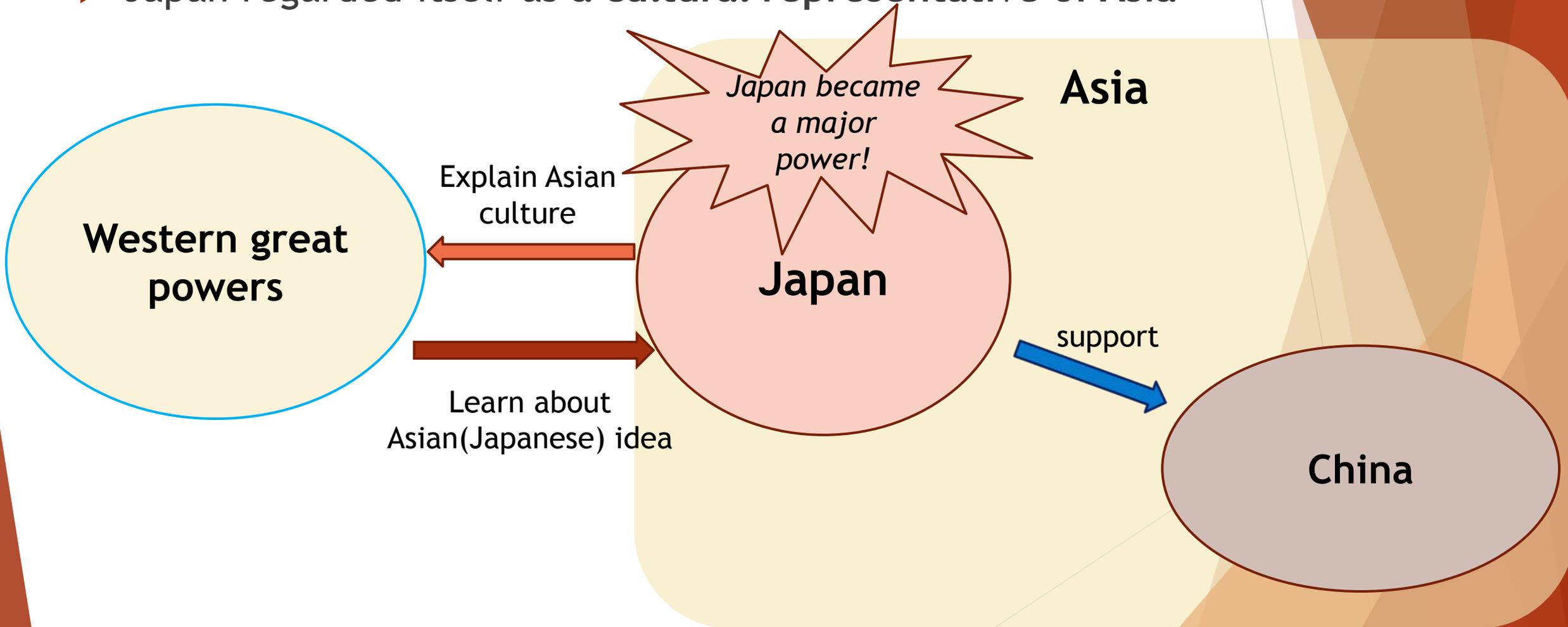
Out of date

The policy
will
backfire

Eliminate
political
aspect!

“Japan’s cultural mission”

- ▶ Japan regarded itself as a cultural representative of Asia



“Outward depoliticization” of the policy

▶ Previous studies

The Cultural Policy toward China

Cultural invasion!

Chinese

“Depoliticization”

▶ New discovery

The Cultural Policy toward China

criticism

Japanese intellectuals

Cultural invasion!

China’s educational institutions, etc.

“Depoliticization”

The policy changed its slogan
“Deal with Chinese people’s anti-Japanese sentiment”

↓
“Boost Asian culture!”

People-to-people diplomacy(国民外交)

- ▶ Some Japanese intellectuals argued that eliminating the political aspects from the Cultural Policy toward China would be impossible.

➔ People-to-people diplomacy

- What is people-to-people diplomacy

“Government’s diplomacy on behalf of the people’s thoughts and awareness.”

“diplomacy among non-governmental actors.”

Junpei Shinobu(1926).The essence of people-to-people diplomacy, *Gaiko Jiho*.No.513

- In Japan’s diplomacy toward China, we should focus on the second definition: people-to-people diplomacy as “diplomacy among non-governmental actors.”



Junpei Shinobu
(scholar in
international law)

People-to-people diplomacy(国民外交)

- ▶ Asataro Goto considered international exchanges of *journalists*, *politicians*, *business sectors*, *scholars* and *artist* as people-to-people diplomacy

In particular, we consider only solving immediate problems as diplomacy, and take the problem of mutual understanding for granted. Actually, long-term issues between the two countries should also be put into account. If everyone tries to solve only sudden incidents by negotiation and ignores long-term problems, the diplomacy will surely fail.

if we could build strong friendship between influential persons of Japan and China as much as possible over the years, we could even prevent diplomatic problems which are prone to erupt in short notice.

Asataro Goto(1923).The popularization of China's diplomacy, *Gaiko Jiho*.No.454

People-to-people diplomacy



Sustainable
friendship

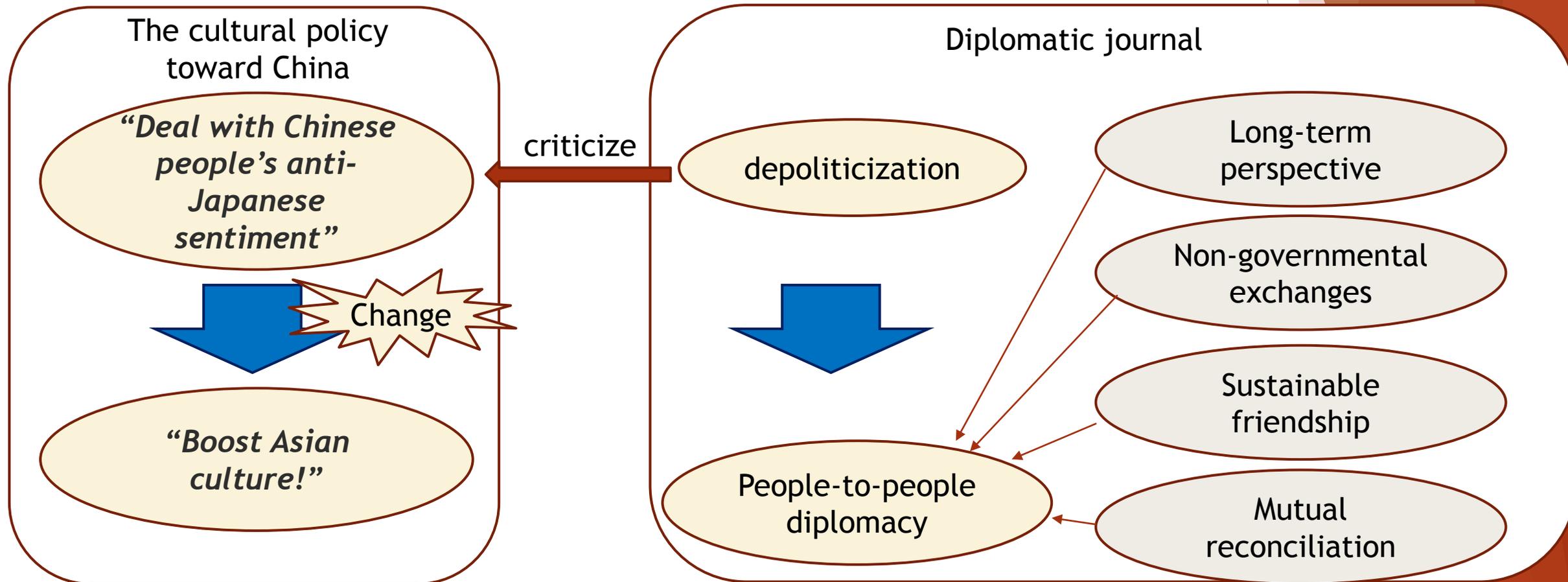
Mutual
reconciliation



Asataro Goto

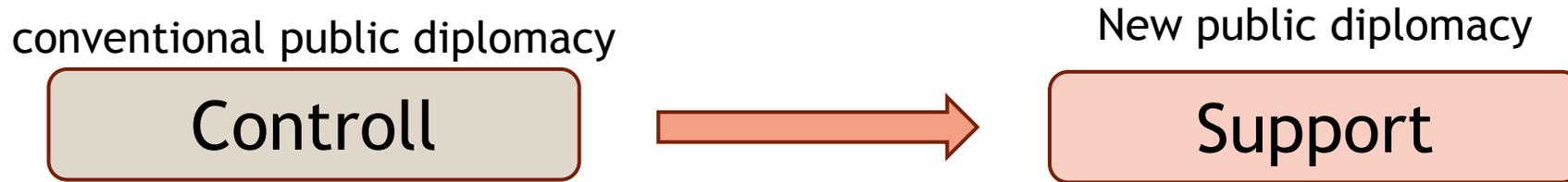
The characteristic of Japan's cultural diplomacy after WWI

- ▶ Intellectuals' discussion influenced Japan's cultural policy



New public diplomacy

- ▶ The role of government in international cultural exchange



- ▶ the government's involvement is too strong



attractiveness, credibility, and legitimacy

A small, solid orange arrow pointing downwards and slightly to the right, indicating a consequence or result.

Conclusion

- ▶ Japanese intellectuals tried to weaken the political aspects of their cultural diplomacy, however it is difficult to get rid of its political aspects as long as it is “diplomacy.”
- ▶ the more people from their respective countries feel that the government is controlling their cultural exchanges, the more cultural diplomacy will provoke negative feelings.

Thank you for listening !!