

JAPAN TOO GOING AFTER “SOFT POWER”

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Executive Summary

1. Last November, an advisory council to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed that Japan harness the rising popularity of *manga* (comics) and *anime* (cartoons) to project an appealing image of Japan abroad.
2. In January 2007, Foreign Minister Aso Taro officially enunciated Japanese pop culture as a diplomatic tool.
3. Japan's emphasis on its cultural products as a vehicle for its "soft power" is made against the backdrop of a rising China and its establishment of Confucian Institutes globally.
4. Tokyo has traditionally relied on the Japan Foundation (budget of US\$146.5 million in fiscal year 2005-6) and the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (which invited 5,853 foreign youths to teach in Japanese schools in 2005) as the bedrock of its cultural diplomacy.
5. Another pillar of Japanese "soft power" is the offer of Official Developmental Assistance (US\$6.24 billion in 2007) to win the goodwill of developing countries.
6. Shackled by post-war constitutional restrictions and residual mass pacifism, Tokyo cannot exercise hard military power to coerce other states but has to adopt soft approaches like foreign aid and cultural diplomacy in its foreign relations.
7. However, the Abe Administration is seeking to pass legislation that will permit a national referendum to revise the Constitution (especially the no-war clause of Article 9) and transform Japan into a "normal state" engaged in collective security. If this move were to come to pass, then Japan will no longer be constitutionally limited to pursuing only "soft power".

8. While Foreign Minister Aso is flattered that many foreigners are mesmerized by *manga*, the reality is often just the opposite: the Chinese media has noted that the Japanese rightwing has used *manga* to promote a revisionist history which denies Imperial Japan's wartime atrocities in China.
9. "Soft power", assiduously cultivated over the years, can easily be undermined by the clumsy statements and behavior of a new generation of nationalistic leaders over politically sensitive issues pertaining to Japan's past militarism. Prime Minister Abe did Japanese "soft power" no favor when he remarked that there was no evidence of coercion against the "comfort women".
10. Without a historical reconciliation with China and South Korea, Japan is unlikely to truly win the hearts and minds of the Chinese and Koreans, notwithstanding the allure of its comics and cartoons. There are thus limits to Japanese "soft power".