

Analysis of Japan's Public Diplomacy toward China

—A Case Study of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident

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Abstract

In March 2011, a major nuclear accident occurred at the Fukushima nuclear power plant due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. Afterwards, nuclear contamination around Fukushima Prefecture had a significant negative impact on the reputation of Japan in China. As a response to these adverse impacts on reputation, Japanese governments and relevant institutions performed a series of public diplomacy measures to China aimed at improving the images impaired by harmful rumors. This article examined Japan's public diplomacy measures toward China during this incident, using the pathways of connections as the framework for study and analyzing three representative Japanese governmental bodies that played critical roles in the public diplomacy process, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic, Trade and Industry and Fukushima Prefecture Government. This article found that the Japanese government mainly pursued its public diplomacy in China by amplifying the appeal of Fukushima, promoting a target-driven "direct influence" to cultivate partners in China, organizing a multi-sectoral public diplomacy model, re-framing the issue of the Fukushima nuclear accident with intentional reticence and using diversified media promotion channels. Consequently, this article concludes that the effectiveness of Japan's diplomacy toward China was negatively affected by the lack of a political solution, the weak connectivity between the negative impression and attractiveness, the long-standing bias of Chinese public opinion against negative information about Japan and the inconsistency between internal and external actions in the response to adverse impact on reputation in Fukushima nuclear accident.

Keywords

Public Diplomacy, China-Japan Relations, Fukushima Nuclear Accident

1. Introduction

On March 11, 2011, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami struck the Pacific Ocean region of northeastern Japan. The earthquake caused serious impacts on the Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 nuclear power plants, and this nuclear accident was defined as a “mega accident” by the relevant authorities. Fukushima prefecture and its surrounding areas were severely affected by the nuclear meltdown. For instance, the nuclear accident on the marine ecosystem is far-reaching. Radioisotope releases to the oceans from nuclear accidents through a variety of means, including atmospheric deposition, groundwater and surface water. According to initial projections, these hazardous substances would have serious impacts on the health of marine organisms and plants in nearby waters, which would be further amplified by ocean currents and fish migration, as well as by comparable levels of human intake. However, relevant surveys also showed that after peaking in April, these radiation effects were reduced by a factor of 1000 over the following four months, but further field data measurements are still needed (Buesseler et al., 2011). Nevertheless, there are some studies that show the persistence of these low but significant levels of radioactivity in the ocean, despite the decrease. It demonstrates that radiation from the Fukushima nuclear accident, although it has been substantially reduced, remains a hidden danger that requires long-term investigation (Pacchioli, 2013). As a result, the ongoing radiation hazard has brought Fukushima to a standstill in agriculture, tourism and fishing, and its reputation in China has plummeted. Besides, without direct contact and reliable information disclosure, many rumors surrounding the Fukushima nuclear accident have also begun to spread widely in Chinese public opinion.

Specifically, the factor that lowered Japan’s image in the Fukushima nuclear accident was the improper treatment of the Japanese government and the spread of unproven rumors (Kobayashi, 2022).

From the perspective of governmental defaults, the relevant authorities cannot give widely accepted investigations and regulations on TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company), the main responsible entities, to the domestic and foreign public. The frequent scandals inside the TEPCO, the improper treatment of the nuclear wastewater and the growing protest and distrust among local residents and company staff constantly reduced the public credibility of the Japanese government (Digges, 2014). Besides, the specific policies performed by the Japanese government also further amplify these drawbacks. For instance, Japan’s decision of discharging wastewater into the sea has triggered a new round of global criticism. Compared with other treatments, these disposal measurements involve more globalized occupations, direct interest contradictions among countries and international responsibility and moral issues. Therefore, these measures inevitably triggered wider attention and concerns overseas. For instance, the overall criticism in China collectively thrived after the discharge plan was released by Japan. For ordinary people, Japan’s solutions for nuclear wastewater were ex-

aminated morally, which concentrated on the irresponsibility and selfishness within this decision. For the Chinese government, Japan's unilateral actions were taken from the perspective of interest, which focuses on the economic and environmental losses within Chinese water territory (Pu et al., 2022). Last, this negative information all transcribed and amplified by Chinese media, resulting in the extensive negative repercussions of the Fukushima nuclear accident in Chinese public opinion.

As for the diffuse of harmful rumors, the nuclear radiation thrived by Fukushima nuclear accident profoundly affected the public impression of Fukushima in both explicit and implicit ways. On the one hand, since the existence of potential health risks caused by nuclear radiation, which is considered an extremely dangerous intriguing factor of cancer, both people at home and abroad cannot fully trust the security of Fukushima's food products and tourism services. Even though the radiation in Fukushima has been proven safe by many authoritative science institutions, for serious health reasons, there is still much distrust and arguments among ordinary people, which causes considerable uncertainty regarding the normalization and reconstruction of Fukushima (Rupert, 2016). And its negative impression will further amplify based on the theory of social amplification of risk (Hagen et al., 2022).

Consequently, although these explicit health threats have a relatively small impact on China, they still intrigue considerable concerns. On the other hand, due to the asymmetry of information, the general antipathy of the Chinese towards Japan and the unstable official relations between the two countries (Stokes, 2016). As a result, this initial and implicit bias will subconsciously influence the attitude toward the Fukushima nuclear disaster of Chinese people, which may reduce the ultimate effectiveness of Japan's public diplomacy measures with China.

In response, various Japanese governments and institutions launched a series of public diplomacy responsive measures to China in an effort to repair Japan's reputation losses. These responses were mainly conducted by the cabinet office and implemented by different departments in the central and local governments of Japan. Specifically, this article mainly discusses three key department roles in Japan's Public Diplomacy toward China, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic, Trade and Industry and the Fukushima Prefecture Government.

In the first section of the article, a review of theoretical literature concentrates on the analysis of Japan's public diplomacy policies with China. Then, a research framework based on the "six pathways of connections" presented by Efe Sevin (Sevin, 2015) will be introduced. In the second section of the article, an analysis ordered by six pathways will be released and the main paths, initiatives, basic features and concrete results of Japan's public diplomacy toward China in response to the Fukushima nuclear accident will also be examined in this part. Lastly, a conclusion based on comparative analysis and outcome assessment will be given.

2. Theoretical Framework

For a long time, the research on Japanese public diplomacy in Chinese and international academic fields has varied in perspectives and layers. They can be briefly divided into three categories according to their research levels and basic contents.

The first category is the macro interpretation of Japanese public diplomacy toward China, which includes an examination of many aspects such as policy evolution, organizational structure, basic features, and implementation mechanisms. Researchers Zhang, Meng and Wang believe Japan's public diplomacy approaches mainly focused on tourism, cultural experience and new media communication (Zhang & Zhong, 2016; Meng, 2018; Wang, 2018). And Shen and Li proposed Japan's public policy measures in China have problems of dysfunctions, sluggishness and inflexibility (Shen & Li, 2014). On the contrary, Zhang and Hara argue that Japan's public diplomacy toward China is from the perspective of soft power and international competition, which act as a new round of "conceptual competition" between China and Japan (Zhang, 2019; Hara, 2020). From the perspective of motivations, Zhang and Wang proposed the public diplomacy approaches play a supplementary role in the improvement of China-Japan relations (Zhang, 2018; Wang, 2021).

The second category is the microscopic study of the functioning mechanism of Japanese public diplomacy, which majorly focuses on the specific operational mechanisms, channels and approaches adopted during the implementation of Japanese public diplomacy toward China. Luo, Dou and Li mainly concentrate on the comprehensive use of social media platform in the implementation of Japan's public diplomacy toward China, which systematically analyze its development, application and specific operational mechanisms, arguing that social media tools can provide public diplomacy with the advantages of agenda-setting, bringing it closer to the Chinese public and improving its efficiency (Luo & Xie, 2018; Dou, 2017; Li, 2020). Besides, Ueda and Park proposed public diplomacy measures that utilize social and information networks for communication, demonstrating its advantages of providing communication efficiency, reducing costs, and stimulating creativity (Ueda, 2021; Park & Lim, 2013).

The third category is the study themed on the Fukushima nuclear accident, mainly from the perspective of public diplomacy. Since the Fukushima nuclear accident, especially the discharge of nuclear wastewater is a public event that is still occurring, it is generally under-researched in the field of academics. In general, research on the Fukushima nuclear accident related to public diplomacy focuses on the analysis of discourse strategy and social media communication. For discourse studies, Zhang and Zhong suggest Japanese government and Western media exert influence on the perceptions of people through frame selection and agenda shifting, guiding the direction of overseas public opinion directly (Zhang, 2022; Zhong, 2022). As for social media communication, He and Pu et al. systematically examine the specific dynamics of Chinese and international pub-

lic opinion regarding nuclear wastewater discharges from the perspective of social media communication (He, 2020; Pu et al., 2022).

In general, studies on Japan's public diplomacy measures toward China during the Fukushima nuclear accident are abundance in content and diverse in perspective. However, this research does not systematically examine the Japanese government's specialized efforts of reducing the image losses caused by the Fukushima nuclear accidents in China. Likewise, the existing studies also do not adequately consider the new changes in the Japanese government's public diplomacy approaches following the nuclear wastewater discharge decision. Therefore, this article aimed to complement this research and provide more up-to-date and credible explanations.

The construction of the research framework of this article is mainly composed of two parts, one of which is to determine the basic structure of the research framework and the other is to determine the specific research approach. In terms of the basic structure, this article draws on the "political communication system model of diplomacy" proposed by Zhang (2017). The model mainly uses Karl Deutsch's political communication theory as the basic template, dividing political communication into five independent parts that are interrelated in a certain order, including the subject, audience, political message, channel, and feedback. In terms of research approach, this article mainly refers to the "Six paths of connection" proposed by Efe Sevin and adds to the "channel" aspect of the communication model above. The six paths are an attraction, questioning, socialization, direct influence, agenda-setting and framing (Sevin, 2015) (Table 1).

In addition, when it comes to the analysis related to "agenda setting" and "framing", this article also introduces the Systematic framing theory proposed by Irving Goffman (Goffman & Berger, 1986). This theory complements the existing research framework of "framing" and "agenda-setting" from an exchange science perspective. Applying this theory to public diplomacy, this article finds

Table 1. Brief Introduction of Six pathways (Sevin, 2015).

Occupation	Model	Public diplomacy works by
Public Opinion	Attraction	Influencing mass public opinion
	Doubt	Creating the perception that practitioner and host countries have similar policy interests
Relationship dynamics	Socialization	Creating new relationships and new functions undertaken by the practitioner countries
	Direct influence	Changing the minds and attitudes of elites
Public debates	Agenda-setting	Introducing a given issue or increasing its salience in media or public agendas in target audiences
	Framing	Changing the coverage of an issue and highlighting more favorable aspects

that subjects of public diplomacy can achieve its goal by intentionally manipulating and monopolizing the process of “framing”, filtering and recombining information used in propaganda, constructing specific news frames, and infiltrating the ideology they wish to convey into specific public discourse. In this article, we analyze the public discourse and opinion dissemination strategies of various Japanese public diplomacy actors during the Fukushima nuclear accident based on the four mechanisms of framing theory proposed by Robert Entman, which include providing a definition, proposing a moral assessment, explaining the causes, and suggesting solutions (Entman, 1993).

In the analysis of this article, attraction, doubt, socialization and framing are the main research directions and the main focus of the Japanese government’s public diplomacy measures, and an analysis of the Chinese public’s response toward public diplomacy of Japan will be discussed at the end of the article. The following analysis of these five parts will be released sequentially.

3. Brief Introduction of Japan’s Public Diplomacy toward China

The following parts which discussed Japan’s public diplomacy toward China will be displayed by the order of different pathways enlisted above. By clarifying the specific features of each pathway, this article builds connectivity between the pathway used to analyze and correspondingly departments of the Japanese government, which used to develop a specific analysis of Japan’s public diplomacy toward China.

In terms of policy objectives, Japan concentrates on increase the larger scope of connecting with people in China by utilizing the pathway of “attraction” and “direct influence” and “socialization”, which includes media propaganda, organizing on-site promotional exhibitions, “supporting visit” and youth exchange activities. While, the pathway “doubt”, “agenda-setting” and “framing” were used to decrease the potential damage made by the adverse impact on the reputation of Japan, and among them, the disclosing sufficient information, explanatory meetings and hearings, and rephrase the discourse of the Fukushima nuclear accident in “interview trip” are representative measures in this approach.

In terms of policy implementation methods, most measures of Japan’s public diplomacy toward China take effect primarily in three similar ways: disclosure, media and activities. Disclosure mainly concentrates on the improvement of information transparency and public trust. While the media focus on the fully utilize of modern media resources from social media to traditional press. And the activities are mainly performed by conducting outreach and field trips.

To support the above analysis by providing the most appropriate and accurate cases. This article introduces the three most representative institutions which are responsible for the public diplomacy of Japan: The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (METI), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fukushima Prefectural Government. Three institutions cover nearly every level of the

Japanese Administrative Structure and have advantageous resources for public diplomacy, also relating strongly to the influence of the Fukushima nuclear accident. METI have the resources to connect with domestic and overseas merchants and consumers, acting with business and industrial development logic in the disposal of the reputation loss of the Fukushima nuclear accident. As for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a window to external communication, it has the tremendous advantage consist of multiple foreign embassies, which can easily and directly draw attention from foreigners and convey certain messages. The Fukushima prefectural government, on the other hand, has a special status and position as a party and on-site manager in the nuclear accident, which allows it to play an important role in problem-oriented initiatives and provide more first-hand information to facilitate the recovery of reputation.

4. Attraction

Compared with the other pathways of connection, the key to “Attraction” is improving the host country’s attractiveness to the practitioner country so as that achieve the goals of public diplomacy through influencing mass public opinion in a favorable opinion environment. For creating more attractiveness to the practitioner country, the host country needs to connect as more as target people with their culture, value or other soft powers that shape a positive image towards the host country.

Aiming at the larger scope of connecting, the Japanese government led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, METI and Fukushima prefectural government to launch online and offline promotional activities to attract Chinese people and its public opinion. Specifically, it mainly has two ways to establish the pathway “Attraction” by making more people contact with positive messages to change their minds.

The first way is mainly through a variety of media to promote the charm of nowadays Japan and Fukushima and respond to the adverse impact on reputation reveals from the Fukushima nuclear accidents.

The first media approach is social media. Every branch of the Embassy of Japan in China has opened social accounts on mainstream social platforms on the Chinese Internet. These accounts generally take culture as their origin point and are oriented by clearly categorized hashtags, regularly publish high-quality content, and offer various activities from time to time (Dou, 2017). At the same time, the METI and the Agency for Reconstruction have also made full use of many social media platforms, including YouTube and Instagram, to endorse Fukushima cultural tourism by inviting foreign bloggers who are well-known to travel or visit Fukushima. Besides, providing the necessary tourism resources for foreigners visiting Fukushima to overseas travel agencies is also employed by relevant government institutions (Reconstruction Agency, 2022b). Besides, the Japanese government has also produced various promotional videos and short animations on its official website, radio and television channels overseas, including

“Fukushima Today” (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2022), which promotes the current status and bright vision of Fukushima’s recovery and create a better tone for public opinion. Moreover, some of these videos have been re-produced and collaborated by international media such as Reuters, attaining considerable international exposure.

Among these media approaches, Sina Weibo in Chinese Internet is Japan’s most important publicity entity in China. For example, the Fukushima Prefectural Government opened its accounts on Sina Weibo and has posted 2064 blogs since its entry. The contents are mainly about promoting tourism and the current situation in Fukushima (Sina Weibo, 2023). On YouTube, the official account of Fukushima Prefecture, “Pref Fukushima”, has posted 2362 videos with 17,100 subscribers. Among them, the series of videos “Fukushima Nameless Ambassador” has accumulated nearly 10 million views (Pref Fukushima, 2023). The protagonist of the video series, Malyu Matsuoka, a famous Japanese actress visited many cultural and tourist spots in Fukushima under the elaborate arrangement of the Public Relations Division of the Fukushima Prefectural Government and greatly increased the attractiveness of Fukushima with the popularity of the actress and the high quality of the video, correspondingly influenced the impressions of Chinese viewers (mainly Taiwan viewers) about Fukushima (Fukushima Prefecture, 2023a).

The second media approaches are brochures and publications. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has arranged various activities and services to enable the Chinese people who visit the embassies and consulates to participate in activities or conduct business to have a more comprehensive understanding of Fukushima. All embassies and consulates of Japan in China are provided with brochures and promotional videos produced by the Agency for Reconstruction, Fukushima Prefecture and other relevant agencies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012a), which specifically introduces the specific treatment standards for Fukushima nuclear wastewater, the current status of the treatment process, and the recovery of Fukushima Prefecture, with detailed data and pictures. Besides, the Fukushima Prefectural Government also has organized an online publication named “Fukushima Now”, which is available in seven different languages. The publication details Fukushima’s recovery activities after the nuclear accident and the voices of foreign residents.

In general, the series of media measures implemented by the Japanese government has effectively delivered “correct information” about Fukushima to the Chinese Internet, increasing the tourist appeal of Fukushima, and indirectly contributing to changes in the public perception of Fukushima’s nuclear accidents in China. However, since its official character and singularity of publishers, a few of its media promotions are forwarded or focused by major press or influencers in China and the scope of people may be impacted by these limited published materials is also greatly constrained.

The second way is to conduct online and offline promotional or tourism ac-

tivities to attract people in China. Comparing with the previous way, it is equipped with a more direct capability to influence the public opinion of Chinese people.

In February 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), and several relevant Chinese and Japanese organizations, organized the “Energetic Japan” (Genki-no-Japan) exhibition in Shanghai, China. The exhibition introduced the vitality and charm of Japan and highlighted cultural tourism products and locally produced food products from Fukushima, where the nuclear disaster occurred. The exhibition attracted nearly 140,000 visitors from China. The subsequent exhibition organized in Hong Kong held in late March also received over 60,000 visitors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012b).

Successively conducted, in 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Consulate General of Japan in Shanghai again launched the “Fascination with Japan” (Gyokusen! Charm Manzai!), which was held simultaneously in Shanghai and in the Tohoku region of Japan (including Fukushima Prefecture and other affected areas in the nuclear accident). Though this time it had a smaller scale of visitors, 22 Chinese bloggers with fan effects and social impact were invited to a field trip in Fukushima and later shared their experiences through videos and blog posts to further promote the “Real Japan” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Other campaigns similar to this include the “Fukushima WAKU-WAKU Project” launched by METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2017) and other tourism and cultural broadcasting activities organized by JETRO or JNTO.

Besides, the local government also played an important role in promoting these activities. As the entity directly responsible for restoring Fukushima’s reputation overseas, the Fukushima Prefectural Government promotes its programs and measures to Chinese people mainly through the Shanghai office of the Fukushima Centre for Industrial Promotion (Fukushima Prefecture Shanghai Office). It has created various facilities and conveniences for Chinese tourists, including actively promoting regular direct flights from Fukushima to mainland China, closely working with domestic travel agencies to organize branded tourism programs that take Fukushima as a destination, and representing Fukushima at international tourism fairs, flower and craft exhibitions, and other large-scale expos in China, focusing on Fukushima’s tourism and cultural characteristics (Fukushima Prefecture Shanghai Office, 2021). These diversified activities are frequently held in many major cities in China, including Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenzhen, Nanjing, Wuhan, Dalian, and Guangzhou (Fukushima Prefecture Shanghai Office, 2019).

In general, by conducting the on-site events noted above, the Japanese government has attained several advantages. On the one hand, these measures can attract more people to travel to Fukushima, which can significantly recover the economic losses after the nuclear and earthquake disasters. On the other hand,

they help people in China understand the present situation in Fukushima directly, which can help the government eliminate rumors and create a favorable opinion environment to achieve the goal of public diplomacy. However, due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, many on-site activities couldn't be carried out smoothly, which seriously influenced the efficiency of this approach.

5. Doubt

The pathway of doubt proposes that public diplomacy projects and messages change the general attitudes of the host country by shaping the perception of the interests of the practitioner country (Sevin, 2015). Compared with the pathway of "Attraction," the pathway of benefit can have a more focused impact on the public. With the Japanese government's effort, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, METI, and the Fukushima Prefecture Government established the pathway of "Doubt" through various means to build a framework for public information about the nuclear accident in Fukushima. These measures aimed at shaping the general thoughts and attitudes of the Chinese public toward Japan. In the case of the Fukushima nuclear accident, the key approaches of the "Doubt" pathway for Japanese public diplomacy focus on offering the Chinese public enough and equal information to help them understand the actual situations of Fukushima and its nuclear accidents. Specifically, the Japanese government employed three institutions to provide sufficient information to address and alleviate doubts.

The main aspect of this pathway is disclosing sufficient information in a timely manner through official websites, social media, and explanatory meetings to address doubts.

The first tool is the website and social media. As a window to connect with the foreign public, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs makes full use of the Japanese embassy in China to convey its intentions and information. It updates information on food safety, ALPS-treated nuclear wastewater, and other Q&A in real-time, providing detailed responses to relevant questions and corresponding data on the official websites of the embassies and consulates in China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2021). Additionally, Weibo and WeChat, the most influential social media platforms in China, are also comprehensively utilized by the Japanese government. On February 3, 2017, when the Japanese media exposed another major safety issue at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, it immediately caused anxiety among Chinese people regarding traveling to Japan and buying Japanese-made food. In response, the WeChat public platform of the Japanese Embassy in China quickly responded by releasing a detailed Q&A message on February 17, addressing the accidents and citing various facts and evidence about the event in a timely and effective manner. This significantly reduced the damage to Fukushima's reputation caused by this unexpected event (Luo & Xie, 2018). Furthermore, some channels that release testified and authorized information also play a crucial role in the doubt pathway. For instance, the explanation of "ALPS treated water" in the Fukushima nuclear accident had

considerable support from several trusted institutions, including METI, the Fisheries Agency, other Japanese domestic institutions, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and other international professional authorities (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2022). As long as the credibility of this information is accepted by people overseas, the “Doubt” pathway can actually be put into action. In comparison to the efforts of the central government, the Fukushima Prefectural Government makes full use of its locality. For instance, the local government timely releases on-site testing data on its official websites, such as the “Fukushima Prefectural Radioactive Energy Measurement Map” and other testing data that have been examined and supported by professionals from the IAEA (Fukushima Prefecture, 2023a).

The second tool is explanatory meetings and hearings held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and METI. These meetings and hearings aim to update real-time information and the newest disposal measures regarding the Fukushima nuclear accident to diplomatic missions and personnel in Tokyo, and relevant meeting materials are also disclosed to the public overseas. For instance, China has participated in 14 hearings and meetings since 2011, and several meeting materials have been translated into Chinese and released on public information platforms at the Japanese embassy in China. However, due to its size and specifications, its impact on the Chinese public is destined to be limited.

Another aspect of the “Doubt” pathway focuses on the accessibility and authenticity of the information to address the doubts of the Chinese public. To enhance this capability in existing approaches, the Japanese government has launched a series of improvements. In terms of accessibility, apart from on-site activities, the relevant Japanese government ministries in charge have increased visibility and interactivity. For instance, METI and JETRO provide an innovative platform for foreign suppliers and importers to trade with Fukushima and other affected areas. On this online platform, all buyers and suppliers can easily interact through real-time Q&A and deliver live broadcasts to customers, thereby deepening their understanding of the products and facilitating business cooperation between local agricultural and fishery companies in Fukushima and overseas buyers (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2022). Regarding authenticity, METI proactively liaises with food safety authorities in China, providing samples of agricultural and fishery products produced in areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident. This reduces the concerns of Chinese importers about the impact of the nuclear accident. According to data published by the Hong Kong Department of Environmental Ecology, between January 2022 and January 2023, the Hong Kong government inspected 11,700 imported agricultural and fishery products from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Chiba, Gunma, and Tochigi prefectures in the nuclear accident-affected areas of Japan, and all of them met the food safety standards of the Hong Kong Customs institutions (NNA, 2023). With these relevant implementations, most countries and regions in the Asia-Pacific area have lifted their prohibitions on Fukushima-made agri-

cultural and fishery products. As a result, the authenticity of this important information has gained credibility among the public.

In general, by promoting greater publicity and transparency of information, the Chinese public has more opportunities to perceive the positive perception illustrated by this information, subtly changing the Chinese public's attitude toward the Fukushima nuclear accident. However, due to the deep-seated historical obstacles between Japan and China, an adequate flow of information does not necessarily influence the perception of the Chinese public. The effectiveness of this measure is difficult to assess and often yields poor results.

6. Socialization

The socialization theory postulates that public diplomacy can be used to raise the volume and breadth of interaction between a practitioner country and target audiences in public diplomacy by determining where the quality and amount of interaction between actors are crucial. As a response, Japan's public diplomacy toward China has imposed its influence on Chinese public opinion mainly through "Supporting Visit" and "Youth Exchanges".

The "Supporting Visit" is a multi-sectoral collaborative public diplomacy activity. Compared to a regular exotic visit, the supporting visit focuses on the support role of visitors to the visiting locations. In the case of the Fukushima nuclear accident, the main purpose of the supporting visit was to make foreign visitors understand the current situation of Fukushima's recovery and reconstruction more visually and directly, reducing their misunderstandings and concerns and socializing their perception after they returned home. For instance, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the Reconstruction Agency, the Fukushima Prefecture Government and its Shanghai branch office have invited representatives of Chinese foreign students in Japan to visit Fukushima on site several times, experiencing the changes brought about by Fukushima's reconstruction and to reduce concerns and misunderstanding about the safety of treatment and discharge of Fukushima's nuclear wastewater. In October 2014, the first "Fukushima Support Tour for Chinese Students" was successfully organized by the Japanese government, and dozens of Chinese students in Japan were invited to participate. During the visit in February 2016, the Chinese visitors learned about the production process technology and safety inspection methods of Fukushima agricultural products through a field trip and tasted the Fukushima local-produced cuisine (Fukushima Prefecture, 2016). In recent years, more than 200 Chinese students have participated in the "supporting visit", and these delicately arranged field trips have received positive feedback from the Chinese participants, which profoundly changed their views on Fukushima and motivate them to convey these messages and perceptions to their families and friends in China (People's Daily Oversea Editions Japan Journal, 2022).

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the supporting visit temporarily suspended. However, after the decision of discharging nuclear wastewater, the Japanese government and the Reconstruction Agency restarted this program

in April 2022, when the Japanese government made an announcement of discharging nuclear wastewater from Fukushima. 23 Chinese students in Japan and two Chinese media were invited to participate. Compared with the previous “support visit”, this event included academic lectures, on-site interviews with local people and group roundtable discussions, which provides better interaction. The representative student from Wuhan shared his empathy for Fukushima since his hometown also suffered from the damage rumors of COVID-19 (Reconstruction Agency, 2022a).

In general, the supporting visit is a beneficial attempt by the Japanese government to engage in public diplomacy toward China. Focusing on Chinese students in Japan, it has carried out a series of comprehensive public diplomacy activities with the goal of presenting the current situation of Fukushima and has effectively influenced these visitors’ perceptions and attitudes toward Fukushima. However, the coverage of these activities is still considerably small, and the influence of foreign students in Japan on domestic public opinion and attitudes in China is relatively limited.

Youth exchange has been regarded as one of the emerging channels of new public diplomacy and is widely employed by countries and international organizations around the world. Besides, the attitudes and opinions of young people are also crucial to the response to the adverse impact on reputation caused by the Fukushima nuclear accident. On the one hand, it takes decades to treat and discharge nuclear wastewater, which means the perceptions of young people were highly overstated in the following decades. On the other hand, with the spread of social media, more young people have the capability and open minds to pursue the truth and the current situation in Fukushima. Therefore, compared with traditional aged groups, the public diplomacy measures for the young are relatively more effective in terms of the cost and effectiveness of advocacy. Most importantly, promoting exchanges among young students is already an important part of developing civil relations between countries (Sustarsic & Cheng, 2022).

In the case study of Japan’s public diplomacy toward China, the Bridge for Fukushima is a representative platform dedicated to the China-Japan youth students’ exchanges. In 2012, a China-Japan friendship exchange program called “Aidemy” was launched by a high school student group in Fukushima. For over a decade, this program has sponsored hundreds of young Chinese and Japanese students for international exchange and has successfully held nine sessions in ten years, in which 67 junior and senior high school students from Chinese schools went to Fukushima for exchange (Bridge for Fukushima, 2023). In addition to appointing students for international exchange, the program also covers roundtable discussions, seminars, and symposiums on a wide range of topics, including food safety and environmental pollution, which are closely related to the Fukushima nuclear accident. For example, in the 9th session of the program, participants went on a field trip to the Fukushima nuclear power plant and produced video footage based on their perceptions. Besides, the International Af-

fairs Division of the Fukushima Prefectural Government has also launched a program called Voice of Fukushima Friends, focusing on interviews with foreigners who have visited or lived in Fukushima. Among them, a total of 87 Chinese people were interviewed, sharing their impressions and opinions about Fukushima (Fukushima Prefecture, 2023b).

In conclusion, the youth exchange program organized by the Fukushima prefectural government provided an effective channel for Chinese youth to better understand Fukushima and learn about the real situation in Fukushima after the nuclear accident. However, unlike the “supporting visit” mentioned above, the youth exchange activities organized by Fukushima Prefecture were more bilateral in their forms, and the exchange arenas were not limited to Fukushima but also included Shanghai and other places in China. Consequently, the forms and contents of these exchanges were more diverse and direct. Most importantly, these exchanges are based on the regular international affairs of Fukushima Prefecture rather than intentional overseas propaganda of the Japanese government, which can better attract a wider range of young people to participate in. However, resembling the “supporting visit”, the number of participants and the scale of public opinion the program can influence are quite limited.

Overall, the “socialization” pathways promoted by the Japanese government in public diplomacy toward China in the case of the Fukushima nuclear accident have made full use of existing international resources, creating considerable effective channels that help Chinese people to understand the reality of Fukushima. It has improved the image of Fukushima in China through well-structured and empathetic content and abundant forms of activity and reduced the impact of misunderstanding and harmful rumors about the Fukushima nuclear accident in Chinese public discourse.

However, these socialization efforts also have obvious flaws. On the one hand, because most of the visits and exchanges are small in scale and pre-arranged in contents, their credibility may be questioned by the Chinese public. On the other hand, these socialization activities relied significantly on on-site visits in Fukushima, and fewer activities were conducted in China, which made these measures not directly applicable to the Chinese and weakened their actual effect. This shortcoming was even more pronounced when it was difficult for Japan to conduct on-site visits in Fukushima due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Framing and Agenda Setting

The framing and agenda setting in public diplomacy are mainly performed by introducing a certain topic or making it more prominent in the media or on the public agendas among the target audiences. Framing analyzes which elements of a given issue are included and excluded in discussions (Entman, 1993) and is the “media selection, exclusion of, and emphasis on certain issues and approaches to promote a particular definition, interpretation, moral evaluation, or a solution” (Gilboa, 2008). Specifically, public diplomacy can be viewed as an effort by a na-

tion to exert as much control over the framing of policy issues in foreign media platforms as feasible given that it is possible to alter how a certain subject is portrayed in media channels (Entman, 2008).

As for the case study of Japan's public diplomacy toward China, the Japanese government used the framing methods to rephrase the discourse of the Fukushima nuclear accident by following four steps, providing a definition, proposing a moral assessment, explaining the causes, and suggesting solutions (Entman, 1993). In the first step of framing, Japanese propaganda agencies in China proposed a new definition of the "Fukushima nuclear accident", which abandon the narrative and explanation of the issue itself and focused instead on the recovery and reconstruction of Fukushima after the East Japan Earthquake, especially in culture and tourism, which are the most attractive content in Chinese public discourse. However, Japan has not left the focus on the nuclear accident behind, it has only subtly integrated it into its presentation of Fukushima's abundance of cultural and tourism activities. For example, the Embassy of Japan in China promoted Fukushima mainly by introducing popular travel sites. In the review of Fukushima's reconstruction on social media, the Japanese agency focused on the improvement of the lives of residents rather than the nuclear accident itself. Through this tendentious strategy, the sensitive topic was hidden and the positive implication was released (Embassy of Japan in China, 2023).

In the second step of the framing, Japanese propaganda organizations in China further presented a moral assessment of the Fukushima nuclear accident. Japanese government mainly highlights the image of earthquake victims, glorifying their strength and the remarkable results of reconstruction and avoiding the moral criticism brought by the discharge nuclear accident itself.

As for the third and fourth step, Japan motivate extensive international resources to justify the disposal measures of the Fukushima nuclear accident, especially after the decision of discharging nuclear wastewater were made, including the authoritative reports conducted by the professional agency (International Atomic Energy Agency, 2023), the positive claims and testing result from neighbor countries (Park, 2023) and the political supports from allies. In general, these endorsed publications and announcements have proved the authenticity of the explanation provided by the Japanese government in the nuclear accident of Fukushima.

As long as the framing strategy is settled, Japan starts to coordinate the existing institutional and executive resources for further implementation. The priority among these implementation methods is the media, including the traditional press, the famous journalist and influencers in major social media platforms. For example, on November 10-16, 2018, the Japanese reconstruction agency sponsored an "interview trip" for the Chinese press corps, which included over 20 journalists from China and 3 certified influencers on Weibo. During the 23-day "interview trip", members of the press corps posted frequently on Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo to record what they saw and felt in Fukushima,

setting off a considerable public discussion about Fukushima's nuclear accident on the Chinese Internet (Cui, 2018). In November 2019, the second "interview trip" invited a reporter from China Economic Weekly to Fukushima nuclear power plant, to inspect the current situation of disposal of the Fukushima nuclear accident and publish an op-ed (Guo, 2019). Besides, the METI also organized the "POP UP FUKUSHIMA" program by the name of promoting regional attractions in Fukushima. It was started in 2020 and a total of 13 participants joined this program, including famous influencers, TV staff and social activists from Taiwan (China) relevant activities were widely covered by over 50 media outlets, including NHK and major media in Taiwan (POP UP FUKUSHIMA, 2023).

Among these "interview trips" introduced above, the Japanese organizers generally pre-defined the specific contents and procedures for the interviewers, including the review of the difficulties in the first few years after the earthquakes, the introduction of the efforts made by the government for the recovery and reconstruction, and the presentation of nowadays achievements, covering the multiple site-seeing, field trips and cultural experiences. With proper framing and delicate arrangements, these journalists and influencers effectively spread the well-framed information to Chinese public opinion.

Compared with the resemble approaches in the process of socialization, the framing asks for a higher level of participants and involves a broader mechanism. The participants in the framing approaches are more capable of the effective dissemination of information in public discourses and the social network it involved was more centralized and advanced. However, since it relied upon the on-site trip and the intervals between two events are generally longer than a year, the framing scale and effect are restricted by the public emergencies or bilateral relationship between Japan and China. When the COVID-19 outbreak or the deterioration of China-Japan relations occurs, all framing measures involving on-site visits were suspended or cancelled, and the voice of Japanese information in China is also significantly weakened. Despite the framing practitioners being fully mobilized and the release in social media having also gained considerable visibility in Chinese public debate, the official media in China did not cover any messages from Fukushima, which almost occupied the mainstream of Chinese public opinion. As long as the altitudes of the Chinese government and its official press remained silent or vague in altitudes, the framing process in public discourse will be obstructed and restricted. Moreover, the widespread antipathy toward Japan among the ordinary people in China may also influence the capability of framing since this subjective bias will be brought doubts and distrust when it received information about Japan, even though it was endorsed by influencers or major media.

8. Analysis of the Chinese Public's Response toward Public Diplomacy of Japan

In general, the Chinese public has responded to Japan's public diplomacy toward

China, but not significantly. Currently, there are still relatively few surveys on the attitudes of Chinese toward Fukushima, and most Chinese respondents consider Fukushima-produced food to be “very dangerous” (Fukuchi, 2023). However, this is seemingly the opposite of the data on Chinese travel to Fukushima. As the data of Fukushima Prefecture showed, the average annual growth rate of the number of Chinese tourists in Fukushima Prefecture in the past ten years is 31.78%, which is steadily ranked as the thirteenth in the whole of Japan (Fukushima Prefecture, 2022). As for social media, Fukushima Prefecture’s main social media accounts in China have seen a significant increase in followers over the past 10 years, but the overall number of views is still at a low level (Sina Weibo, 2023).

Such contradictory survey results show the division of the Chinese public’s attitude toward the Fukushima nuclear accident. Most of the Chinese population is still subconsciously concerned about Fukushima, but this concern is limited to the agricultural and fishery products, which are considered as the outcome of the accident. However, it has also not significantly affected the Chinese people travelling to Fukushima. All the above evidence suggests that there is some effectiveness in Japan’s public diplomacy measures toward China.

Furthermore, the Chinese public’s attitude toward Japan is changing rapidly and there is often a shortage of relevant tools to measure this dramatic shift. Besides, it also followed the bilateral relationship between China and Japan. For example, the number of Chinese visitors in Fukushima Prefecture fell by 26 % in 2014, the only decline in a decade, and the main reason for this decline was not the nuclear accident, but the deterioration of China-Japanese relations due to the sovereignty dispute of Diaoyu Islands (Fukushima Prefecture, 2022). Therefore, it remains very difficult to assess whether the attitudes of the Chinese public have changed as a result of Japan’s public diplomacy efforts over time.

On August 29, 2023, China clashed with Japan over the release of nuclear pollution water from Fukushima, triggering strong anti-Japanese sentiment in the Chinese public. But similarly, this does not equal that Japan’s public diplomacy toward China has failed. Its impact remains to be seen in the long term.

9. Conclusion

Among the many cases of Japan’s public diplomacy with China, the public diplomacy applied to the “Fukushima nuclear accident” is one of the longest-running public diplomacy policies and one of the few public diplomacy policies that have not yet achieved its intended goals. According to the data revealed by the Agency for Reconstruction, the Japanese government has spent 7.5 trillion yen on “nuclear wastewater treatment” and “response to adverse impact on reputation” (public diplomacy), accounting for 20% of the total budget for reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake (NHK, 2023). In terms of specific figures, the funds earmarked for “response to adverse impact on reputation” have risen from 500 million yen in 2020 to 2 billion yen in 2021 (ASAHI, 2020). From the above

data, it is obvious to observe that the Japanese government has always attached importance to public diplomacy activities involved with the Fukushima nuclear accident. Among the various public diplomacy approaches with China organized by the Japanese government concentrated on “Fukushima nuclear accident”, there are several characteristics concluded below:

Fully utilization of the attraction approaches: By continuously exploring and creating the attractiveness of local cultural and tourism products in Fukushima to the outside world, and by leveraging Japan’s advantages in tourism infrastructure and industrial configuration, the adverse impact on the reputation of Fukushima has relatively lowered. Moreover, the attractive approaches also highly overlapped with the Japanese existing diplomacy policy toward China, for instance, the “Tourism Diplomacy” (Cai & Yu, 2019), and the comparative advantage of a soft power based on the cultural industry of Japan can also fully displayed during the implementation of public diplomacy. However, the cause-and-effect relationship between attraction enhancement and reputation recovery is still largely uncertain. For most ordinary people, the negative impression retrieved from Fukushima nuclear accident does not necessarily connect or influence the attraction measures, and the favorable impression of Japanese tourism also does not necessarily change the opinion toward Fukushima nuclear accident. Therefore, it is often difficult to assess and confirm the results of public diplomacy in attraction pathways.

Target-drive for “direct influence” to cultivate partners in China: In this case, the Japanese government used a target-drive mechanism to select the objects that are influential in Chinese public opinion and used the “supporting visit” and “youth exchange” to directly contact the objects. As long as the objects were confirmed, the Japanese government proactively “framed” their cognition and field experience on Fukushima and eventually exported this framed information to Chinese public opinion through these social figures and bloggers. More importantly, by organizing such on-field events, it is possible to profoundly establish a link with social figures and self-publishers, and this link, to a certain extent, can help the Japanese government to bypass the restrictions of the official Chinese media and discourse system and export the public diplomacy message that Japan wants to convey to the Chinese public without exterior interference. However, since the long-standing bias of Chinese public opinion against negative information about Japan and the several unpredictable interruptions outside the bilateral relationships, the effectiveness of direct influence probably be limited or weakened.

“Multi-sectoral” public diplomacy model: In the case of the Fukushima nuclear accident, the Japanese government has mobilized several governmental departments and organizations to participate in public diplomacy to promote Japan’s image abroad. In addition to the three Japanese ministries that are the main focus of this paper, other various agencies and organizations, including the Agency for Reconstruction, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), the

Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), have also been involved. For example, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced a Commercial Message (CM) themed on Fukushima and the Tohoku region, many relevant departments participated in or supported the video production and promotion process (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012c). Support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and JETRO has also been provided for many of the cultural experience events hosted by the Fukushima Prefecture Shanghai Office. This composite model of public diplomacy optimizes resource allocation, enhances professionalism and efficiency, and ultimately promotes efficient public diplomacy toward China.

Intentional reticence to provide space for re-framing: Although the Japanese government has long been concerned with transparency and openness of information since the Fukushima nuclear accident. However, the Japanese government has only tried to demonstrate to the Chinese public opinion that Fukushima's current safety, but has hardly responded directly to the Chinese public's questions and doubts about the disposition of the Fukushima nuclear accident. This seems counterintuitive. But from a PR strategy perspective, it's more likely a strategy of trading silence for space to re-framing. Due to the mechanism of social amplification of risk in the Fukushima nuclear accident, the weak advocacy capacity of Japan in China and the general negative bias of Chinese public opinion toward Japan. Japan's measures may lower its results and further stimulate mainstream discourse against the Japanese. In contrast, by remaining silent and by publicizing the positive aspects of the situation, the Japanese government has been able to circumvent the public controversy and control its reputation losses. Consequently, it is possible to re-frame the "Fukushima accident" with more space and resources, changing the attitude of Chinese public opinion toward it subtly.

Diversified media promotion channels: Japan was one of the first countries to register and start operating social media accounts in China (Li, 2020). In terms of media channels, the Japanese government flexibly uses WeChat, Weibo and short video platforms to release various types of information for different people, and its content is relatively localized and of high quality. However, despite having a good start, Japan's voice in China has always been released from the channel of singularity. After the Fukushima nuclear accident occurred, Japanese embassies and consulates in China have been delivering information to the Chinese public only through their own media channel, rarely cooperating with local Chinese media, and rarely accepting interviews with Chinese media. As a result, Japan has significant difficulty gaining the attention of the Chinese official media, which are the main and credible channels for the Chinese public to receive information about foreign countries. This "absence" from the mainstream voice channels makes it difficult for Japanese public diplomacy in China to effectively convey its message to the Chinese people.

Inconsistency between internal and external actions in the response to adverse

impact on reputation in Fukushima nuclear accident: In marketing science, the effectiveness of marketing ultimately depends on the merits of the product itself. As “marketing” in the field of diplomacy, this theory applies to public diplomacy as well. Therefore, public diplomacy concentrating on the Fukushima nuclear accident can only work if the accident disposal itself is safe, reliable and convincing. However, in the decade since the Fukushima nuclear accident, TEPCO, the company primarily responsible for the accident, has repeatedly failed to handle the follow-up disposal measures due to improper operations and non-disclosure of information. TEPCO has made several public apologies around the disposal of nuclear wastewater (NHK, 2014) and has reneged on its previous promise not to discharge wastewater (ASAHI, 2017). Consequently, the Japanese authorities’ credibility in the Fukushima nuclear accident has suffered a sharp turn, ultimately leading to the lack of a firm factual basis and reliable credibility to support public diplomacy response to the adverse impact on the reputation of the Fukushima nuclear accident. In conclusion, this negative outcome is the result of the lack of strict management, prudent consideration and comprehensive consideration of the Fukushima nuclear accident within the Japanese government. On the one hand, the Japanese government does not strictly manage the subsequent disposal of the Fukushima nuclear accident, and on the other hand, it does not link the effectiveness of public diplomacy with the disposal of the Fukushima nuclear accident and only as an aftercare measure rather than a preventive measure, which is bound to lead to far less effective public diplomacy than expected.

Public diplomacy measures lack a basis for a political solution: Due to China’s special political system, it is essential to have a political solution as an endorsement when conducting public diplomacy activities with the Chinese people. In this case, the Japanese government clearly lacks such a political foundation. The Chinese government has long been concerned about the progress of the Fukushima nuclear accident. Following the Japanese government’s decision to discharge nuclear wastewater, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly expressed China’s strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition to the Japanese decision by issuing talks and interviews and hopes that the Japanese side will treat it with caution. However, the Japanese government did not respond positively and directly to the Chinese query, and the two sides did not reach a consensus solution politically. Therefore, in the absence of a political solution, the effectiveness of Japan’s public diplomacy activities toward China will inevitably diminish.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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