

# *Chapter IV*

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## INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

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### A. PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL EXCHANGE

#### (a) Overview

In today's international community, with the advance of Information and Communications Technology (IT), information exerts stronger influence than it has in the past on policy making of each nation, as international public opinion can be formed within a very short period of time. Promoting accurate understanding of Japan in foreign countries is critical for Japan's effective diplomacy, and cultural exchange is an important means of doing that. While introducing Japanese culture abroad, the Japanese government is supporting activities to introduce foreign cultures to Japan, and thus actively promote the Japanese citizens' understanding of other countries. Additionally, by supporting developing countries to preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritages of their countries, the government of Japan is contributing to the maintenance and development of cultural diversity. In the year 2001, Japan actively contributed to the United Nations (UN) Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, implemented large-scale Japanese culture events in the U.K. and other countries, prepared large-scale projects with the Republic of Korea (ROK) and China, conducted youth exchange programs, and provided cultural cooperation to developing countries.

## (b) Japan's Approach to the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Achieving mutual understanding through the respect of the differences among cultures, civilizations, and values in a spirit of tolerance is essential if we are to prevent conflicts caused by differences among ethnicities and cultures. Japan, long recognizing that dialogue among civilizations contributes to true mutual understanding, has made diverse efforts to promote dialogue among civilizations, beginning with the Kono Initiative, whose main pillar is to advance dialogue with Islamic civilization. During 2001, which the United Nations designated as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Japan provided particularly active support by dispatching government representatives and experts to international conferences focused on dialogue among civilizations, and by cooperating with the International Conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations organized by the United Nations University. Japan also jointly sponsored the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations—submitted to and adopted by the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly—which sets objectives and a program of action for advancing dialogue among civilizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## (c) Japan's Approach to Large-Scale Presentation of Japanese Culture and the FIFA World Cup

Through its diplomatic missions and the Japan Foundation, Japan is implementing cultural exchange projects in many countries in cooperation with private-sector bodies. In 2001, one particularly large-scale project was “Japan 2001,” which took place for a year throughout the United Kingdom and featured diverse grassroots exchanges, performances by the Shochiku Grand Kabuki (Chikamatsu-za theater company), and numerous other events designed to introduce Japanese culture.

The year 2002 was designated as the Year of Japan–Republic of Korea (ROK) National Exchange, and this is also the year in which Japan and the ROK will be co-hosting the FIFA World Cup. Wide-ranging exchange events are being planned, including exchanges at the grassroots level, all designed to further advance friendly bilateral relations. Japan is actively preparing public relations activities to take advantage of the World Cup as an opportunity to introduce Japan to foreign countries. The year 2002 will also mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, and numerous events are scheduled under 2002 “Japan Year” in China and “China Year” in Japan. Additionally, the year 2002 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan's establishment of diplomatic relations with India and other South Asian countries, and preparations are steadily proceeding for various cultural commemorative events.

### (d) Youth Exchange and Education

Since the younger generation bears the responsibility for our future, international exchange among young people is extremely important for reinforcing the mutual understanding between Japan and other countries, and Japan is strengthening its efforts in the youth exchange and education field. In 2000, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme<sup>1</sup> celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary and established the JET Programme Special Evaluation Commission of private-sector experts, which released a report in November 2001. The JET Programme will now work toward advancing fuller exchange based on the report's proposals. Japan is also strengthening its support of exchange-student activities by providing assistance to more than 150 Japan Alumni Associations all over the world, by creating a comprehensive guide to exchange-student study in Japan through the Website "Study in Japan" (<http://www.studyjapan.go.jp>), and by otherwise promoting exchange to foster the growth of a pool of foreigners who in the future will have a good understanding of Japan based on their experience of studying in Japan.

#### Column

### My Experience with the JET Programme

**D**uring its 15-year history, the JET Programme has made Japan a wealthy country in terms of international exchange. During my three years with the Programme, JET transformed the town where I was working by improving students' English-language abilities and increasing local residents' exchanges with foreigners. But that type of impact is by no means limited to the town where I was posted. In fact, JET has been reaping abundant fruit nationwide—from major urban centers to small country villages.

The vast majority of JET participants are employed as assistant language teachers, and they now provide supplementary language instruction aimed at improving the English-language abilities of students attending most public junior and senior high schools throughout Japan. With JET, Japanese students now get the chance to learn foreign languages while listening to the native pronunciation of foreigners, and this has made a real difference. The time spent outside of class is also important. The students are given the opportunity to communicate using the English they have learned, and that completely changes their attitude toward English-language studies. They become motivated, take real joy in learning, and come to speak remarkably well. With JET, Japan has entered an era in which students can enjoy many of the merits of studying abroad without ever leaving their hometowns.

Moreover, the influence of the JET Programme extends beyond the schools to the daily lives of Japanese citizens. During my participation in JET, I helped to coordinate an international exchange event and a study group about my own country, and I also taught an adult education class run by the town office. As I taught English and shared my personal experiences, the local residents came to know various things that they could not have otherwise learned. My predecessor came from a different country with a different background, and this highlights another one of the wonderful aspects of the JET Programme: it helps local

The spread of overseas Japanese language education and research on Japan is also very important to foster a wide-ranging understanding of Japanese culture and society. The government of Japan has been working to promote Japanese research and Japanese language education in foreign countries for many years, for example, by providing support to overseas Japanese research organizations, dispatching Japanese language experts, holding training sessions abroad for foreign Japanese language teachers, donating educational materials, and implementing the Japanese Language Proficiency Test.

1. The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme was launched in 1987 to enhance foreign language education in Japan and to advance international exchange at the local level via youth exchange. The JET Programme now has over 6,000 foreign participants each year and is implemented by local governments with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications; and the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations.

Japanese learn about the different countries throughout the English-speaking world. There are now JET participants in most cities, towns, and villages across Japan, and I believe that JET is one of the premier international exchange programs on earth. Thanks to JET, ordinary Japanese citizens living everywhere from central Tokyo to outlying rural districts have the opportunity to speak directly with foreigners and to engage in international exchange as part of their daily lives. When they see foreigners who live in their towns buying groceries at the same markets and eating at the same restaurants, they no longer view foreigners as outsiders, but rather as fellow human beings. I think JET is a true grassroots exchange since it facilitates this understanding of how much human beings really share, despite the differences among languages and cultures.

What is more, the young JET participants remain involved in international exchange after they return to their home countries. The JET Alumni Association (JETAA), which comprises former JET participants, will soon have approximately 15,000 members, and they maintain their ties with Japan after they return to their homes. They share their experiences in Japan with their friends, families, and acquaintances, and the vast majority of them remain active in Japan-related activities. We former JET participants have found that our time in Japan has had a dramatic influence on our subsequent lives as many of us pursue Japanese studies, are engaged in work that involves Japan, or assist with Japan-related events. During international sports events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, I think most of the 15,000 former JET participants root for the success of Japan as their second mother country.

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### (e) Cultural Cooperation

There is a growing interest in promoting cultural activities in developing countries, and Japan has been actively providing support for the cultural aspects of country-building efforts. As a mainstay of such support, Japan has been providing developing countries with equipment and materials for cultural and educational activities through cultural grant aid programs. Since FY 2000, Japan has widened the range of such cooperation by introducing Grant Assistance for Cultural Grassroots Projects, which offers highly detailed cooperation on a small scale such as support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and Grant Aid for Cultural Heritage, which supports large-scale projects such as the improvement of environments surrounding cultural heritage sites.

Moreover, Japan has long been supporting the efforts to preserve the world's tangible and intangible cultural heritage through its funds-in-trust in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The preservation and restoration works being conducted at the Angkor ruins in Cambodia are a good example of such efforts. At its May 2001 General Conference, UNESCO announced the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, which lists intangible heritage formally recognized as invaluable by UNESCO. Based on such UNESCO activities, Japan intends to further strengthen its cooperation for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. In July 2001, the Crown Prince and Princess attended a ceremony commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan's accession to UNESCO.