Proactive Communications to the Public

(1) Overview
Public understanding and support are indispensable for the smooth implementation of Japan’s foreign policy. As such, providing prompt and clear explanations on the policy details and on the role of the government is crucial. Accordingly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is making efforts in timely and effective public relations, using various forms of media, lectures, publications and others.

(2) Providing Information Through Domestic Media
MOFA has committed itself to promptly and accurately providing information through various media, such as newspapers, television and the Internet, in order to gain the understanding and support of Japanese nationals for Japan’s foreign policy. To provide information efficiently, regular press conferences are conducted by the Foreign Minister and the Press Secretary, while extraordinary press conferences are held as necessary. Press conferences by the Foreign Minister with simultaneous English interpretations are open to various media including Internet media, and the records and videos of the press conferences are posted on MOFA’s website. During foreign visits by the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister, MOFA provides information from visiting countries/regions via multiple means, including the Internet, so that people can promptly follow and understand the purposes and the outcomes of the visits. MOFA also regularly releases statements by the Minister for Foreign Affairs or Press Secretary on individual international issues, expressing the position of the Government of Japan. Similarly, MOFA frequently provides press releases on its daily diplomatic activities. Additionally, the Minister and State Ministers for Foreign Affairs explain the Government’s foreign policies directly to the public through appearances on various media and interviews.

(3) Information Provision Through the Internet
MOFA’s website (in Japanese and English) promptly provides information on the diplomatic activities of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister as well as on Japan’s foreign policy including territory/sovereignty, recognition of history and security, along with the latest international relations and other basic relevant information.

MOFA’s website in the Japanese language provides a variety of contents for Japanese nationals across a wide range of age groups, including the “Anything Report from Around the World,” “Find Out about...”
International Situations” and “MOFA for Kids.” In particular, “MOFA for Kids” publishes contents for children such as videos and quizzes to explain MOFA’s activities in an easy-to-understand way, and Q&A corners explaining vocabularies and international issues that are covered frequently in the news and newspapers (see the Column on page 363).

In addition to the above, MOFA provides a variety of information through various social media platforms. In 2022, MOFA actively provided information on the situation in Ukraine, along with live streaming of the regular press conferences by the Foreign Minister (in Japanese and English) and posting of video messages delivered at international conferences on social media.

(4) Dialogue with Japanese Nationals

With the notion of “Public Relations through Dialogue with the People,” MOFA promotes direct dialogue between the people and the Foreign Minister, the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and MOFA officials.

Foreign Minister Hayashi, along with State Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKEI Shunsuke, held roundtable dialogues in November with those who are based in Nagasaki Prefecture based on the theme “Nagasaki to Global,” and in December with those who are based in Yamagata Prefecture based on the theme “Yamagata to Global.” These lively exchanges of opinions about Japan’s diplomatic policies and the appeal of each region were undertaken as a part of the “Local to Global” Project that aims to promote the attractiveness of regional areas of Japan worldwide (see Section 1.3 on page 347).

At the “Dialogue with Students,” a MOFA seminar for university students and others held online in February, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs UESUGI Kentaro gave an opening address, and Foreign Ministry officials exchanged views with a large number of the participating students during the lectures. At the “Children’s Kasumigaseki Tour Day” held in August, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Uesugi answered various questions from elementary and junior high school students regarding diplomacy and other matters in the “Children’s Press Conference.” The program “From Japan’s Overseas Diplomatic Missions! Ask Diplomats About the World” was also implemented as a two-way online exchange from Japanese diplomatic missions overseas, transmitted live and through video recordings.

Various programs in which MOFA sends its officials to venues such as local government offices, international exchange organizations, universities and high
"Namaste! Banana is highly nutritious and effective in preventing heatstroke. Now, which country produces the most bananas in the world?"

This is one of the questions posted in a quiz series on the "MOFA Yawaraka Tweet" (@MofaJapan_ITPR) Twitter account that offers a variety of overseas information in a casual and easy-to-understand manner, under the hashtag "#Instruction Manual of MOFA for Kids." Although the Philippines received the most votes in answer to this question, the correct answer is, in fact, India. Such trivia can also be found on "MOFA for Kids."

"MOFA for Kids" is a dedicated website for children, launched under MOFA’s website in 2006. Targeted mainly at elementary and junior high school students, it introduces MOFA’s work and initiatives, information about each country, international issues, and other topics in an easy-to-understand manner, such as by using quizzes and illustrations.

The most popular content is “Global Trivia Ranking”

The section that receives the most hits in the “MOFA for Kids” site is “Global Trivia Ranking.” It covers a wide range of themes, from “countries with large areas” and “highly populated countries,” to “countries that produce many bananas,” “countries with many endangered species,” and “countries with high levels of achieving the SDGs.” As the country rankings for each topic can be seen at a glance, the section has a good reputation as a useful tool for research and summer vacation homework assignments.

The “Q&A” section provides answers to questions about the international situation, such as “What is the relationship like between Japan and the United States?” and “What is Japan doing to address climate change issues?” It also provides easy-to-understand explanations to terms that are frequently used in the news, such as “EEZ” and “TICAD.”

Other contents on the site include “MOFA’s Work on Videos,” “Countries and Regions of the World,” “National Flags of the World,” and “Sport for Tomorrow,” which features Japan’s sports diplomacy. The contents are designed to allow parents and children to learn together, to increase interest and concern among children toward diplomacy and the world, and to provide an opportunity to enhance their understanding.

The keyword is “excitement”—Supporting children’s desire to learn more!

"MOFA for Kids" is packed full of information while also offering a sense of “excitement” to stir the curiosity of children. Various contrivances are hidden in the illustrations on the top page. The illustrations and their colors change depending on the time of the day, such as afternoon, evening, and night. By moving the magnifying glass cursor, users can discover statistics such as the total global population and the number of countries in the world. Each time you visit the page, you will find new surprises and interesting mechanisms that will make you want to click and find out more.
In addition, the section “Diplomat’s Test for Kids” has been renewed and republished in March. Comprising three-choice questions and a map-based puzzle, the contents are designed to enable children to play while learning. The section contains mechanisms such as, if they answer the quiz questions correctly by using the illustrations, they will be presented with a moving “reward stamp.” As a result, the number of page hits has increased rapidly by about seven times compared to before the page renewal.

To facilitate greater knowledge about MOFA’s work, diplomatic policies, and international situation, as well as to support children’s “desire to learn more,” all those in charge of the site’s contents are working hard to create a fun site and to enhance the contents of “MOFA for Kids” more than ever before.

(Note) “MOFA for Kids” (URL and QR code)  
https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kids/index.html (Japanese only)
that offered an overview of the current international situation while examining Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and its impact on the world from multifaceted viewpoints, and featured a large number of essays and other articles from renowned experts both inside and outside Japan.

Moreover, MOFA also produced various pamphlets and videos aimed at a broad readership in order to promote a deeper understanding on the organization and foreign policies of MOFA. In addition to the above, MOFA hears comments and opinions from the public through its website. Comments and opinions from the public are accordingly shared within MOFA and used as a reference in policy making and planning.

(5) Promotion of the Declassification of Diplomatic Records and Access to Information
To further enhance the public understanding of and confidence in Japan’s foreign policy, MOFA is actively engaging itself in the smooth transfer of records and their declassification, and in efforts to facilitate greater convenience in the public use of diplomatic documents.

MOFA preserves more than 120,000 historical materials, including 40,000 prewar historical documents in its Diplomatic Archives and has declassified its postwar diplomatic records since 1976 as a voluntary initiative. The Rules on the Declassification of Diplomatic Records, which were established in May 2010, stipulate: (1) the declassification of diplomatic documents created more than 30 years ago in principle, and (2) the establishment of the “Committee for the Promotion of the Declassification of the Diplomatic Records,” which is chaired by the State Minister for Foreign Affairs or the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs as well as attended by external experts, to further promote the declassification of diplomatic records and improve its transparency. The number of files that have been transferred to the Diplomatic Archives and made public since then reached approximately 37,000 by the end of 2022.

Furthermore, MOFA discloses information pursuant to the Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs, while giving consideration to national security, the relationship of mutual trust with other countries, the impact on diplomatic negotiations and the protection of personal information. In 2022, MOFA received 1,245 requests for disclosure, and documents totaling 81,068 pages were disclosed.

2 Strengthening the Foreign Policy Implementation Structure

As we fully enter an era of competition among nations, Russia launched aggressions against Ukraine and shook the very foundation of the international order. In the Indo-Pacific region as well, there are countries unilaterally changing, or attempting to change, the status quo by force, and Japan is facing the most severe and complex postwar security environment. To promote diplomatic power for maintaining and developing an international order based on universal values, it is vital to fundamentally strengthen the foreign policy implementation structure. To that end, MOFA is working on strengthening its diplomatic missions overseas in both the aspects of quantity and quality, as well as advancing efforts to improve the organizational and personnel systems at MOFA itself.

Diplomatic missions overseas, such as embassies and consulates-general, not only represent Japan and engage in diplomatic activities, but also play a key role in areas such as information-gathering and strategic communication at the frontline of diplomacy. At the same time, overseas missions also carry out operations directly related to enhancing the interests of Japanese
nationals, such as protecting their lives and safety, providing support for Japanese companies, promoting investment and tourism, and securing energy and other resources.

In January 2023, Japan established the Embassy of Japan in Kiribati. As a result, the number of diplomatic missions overseas as of fiscal year (FY) 2022 is 231 (154 embassies, 67 consulates-general and 10 permanent missions).

Kiribati is a key junction in the South Pacific with an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that is the largest among Pacific Island countries and the 12th largest in the world. Deepening Japan-Kiribati cooperative relations is essential for the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP). Furthermore, Kiribati is an important partner that has often supported Japan’s position at international fora. It is vital that Japan establish an embassy there to continue maintaining and strengthening the favorable bilateral relationship and enhancing the system for more effective gathering of various information and provision of assistance in emergency situations.

In FY2023, Japan will establish an embassy in Seychelles as well as a Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Rome, Italy (independent office). There are also plans to establish an independent office for the Mission of Japan to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Seychelles is located along sea lanes that are important to the security and economy of the Indo-Pacific region, making it an important country for the realization of FOIP. Furthermore, it is positioned along a maritime route that connects Mombasa Port in Kenya, East Africa’s largest commercial port, which Japan is helping to develop, the Nacala Corridor in Mozambique, and Toamasina Port in Madagascar. With its rich fishery resources, Japanese companies are also showing interest in expanding their businesses to Seychelles. Seychelles also supports Japan in areas such as important international elections. Hence, establishing an embassy in Seychelles is important not only for maintaining and strengthening the friendly bilateral relations between the two countries so far, but also for strengthening systems to enhance effectiveness in collecting information and providing various forms of support in emergencies.

Rome is the base of international organizations working in the areas of food and agriculture, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). These three international organizations work in close cooperation with one another to secure global food security and reduce the number of hungry people, through initiatives to stabilize the global food markets and particularly by providing food support to countries vulnerable to factors that destabilize the food market and improving the production and distribution of agricultural produce. Amidst rising food prices due to the impact of disruptions in the food supply chain as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, destabilization of grain supply due to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, and other factors, it is vital for Japan, in advancing its diplomacy, to secure Japan’s food security and help to stabilize the global food market, including facilitating access to food by countries that are particularly vulnerable to the impact of such factors. It is becoming increasingly important to cooperate with the three organizations in Rome that work to address food and agriculture issues, and establishing a Permanent Mission of Japan is important in contributing toward strengthening Japan’s presence, and to the development of systems for cooperation and forming close networks with the three organizations.

The Mission of Japan to NATO has, till now, been based in the Embassy of Japan in Belgium as it worked to gradually strengthen Japan’s relationship with NATO. NATO, too, has been increasing their interest in the Indo-Pacific region, as shown by their accord to expand cooperation with Asia Pacific partners, including Japan, at the NATO Summit Meeting held in June 2021. Against this backdrop, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, launched in February 2022, clearly showed that the security of Europe and of the Indo-Pacific regions are inseparable, a point that Japan emphasized through the attendance of Foreign Minister Hayashi and Prime Minister Kishida at a NATO Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in April and a NATO Summit in June. Against the backdrop of challenges to the international order based on the rule of law, it is extremely important to strengthen cooperation among
Changes in the Number of Diplomatic Missions

Number of diplomatic missions (embassies + consulates-general + permanent missions)


Note: As of January 2023

Comparison of the Number of Diplomatic Missions of Japan with Major Countries (P5 + Germany)

Average number of diplomatic missions among these seven countries: Approximately 251

Comparison of the Number of Staff Members at Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Major Countries

Note: based on the FY2022 survey result, etc.
like-minded countries that share fundamental values. In view of this growing need to further strengthen cooperation between Japan and NATO, and with the expectation of greater opportunities for Japan-NATO cooperation that will also contribute to the realization of FOIP, such as through the implementation of concrete cooperation across wide-ranging areas of partnership, it is important to establish the Mission of Japan to NATO.

In addition to establishing more diplomatic missions overseas, it is important to secure and increase the number of staff members to support diplomacy at the MOFA headquarters and diplomatic missions overseas. In the context of the Government’s policy to reduce the overall personnel expenses due to the current severe budget situation, the number of staff members at MOFA was increased to 6,504 in FY2022 (6,430 in FY2021) in order to address bilateral relations and regional situations, secure peace and stability and conduct strategic communications, promote economic diplomacy, contribute to addressing global issues, and implement protection and safety measures for Japanese nationals abroad. The number of staff members, however, remains insufficient in comparison with other major countries. MOFA continues its efforts to build a structure that is commensurate with Japan’s national power and diplomatic policy. In the meantime, based on the belief that enhancing the foreign policy implementation structure remains essential in FY2023, MOFA will increase its workforce by 100 staff.

In order to protect universal values in the international community and conduct diplomacy with a balanced and stable posture with a high level of responsiveness, MOFA appropriated 707.4 billion yen in the budget for FY2022 (of which 17 billion yen is appropriated in the budget of the Digital Agency). Furthermore, MOFA appropriated 267.3 billion yen in the supplementary budget for FY2022 (of which 2.57 billion yen is appropriated in the Digital Agency budget). The funding appropriated in the budget included funding for Japan to exercise its leadership as the G7 Presidency and a Non-permanent Member of the UN Security Council, to support Ukraine, and for measures to engage in flexible and firm diplomacy, particularly in the realization of FOIP. Furthermore, funding was also appropriated for measures to respond to the severe yen depreciation and high prices.

MOFA’s FY2023 initial government budget proposal appropriated 756 billion yen (of which 12.5 billion yen is appropriated in the Digital Agency budget) based on the following priorities: (1) maintaining and developing an international order based on universal values in an era of competition among nations; (2) strengthening response to new forms of warfare, including information warfare; (3) strengthening initiatives to promote human security and address global issues; and (4) fundamentally strengthening the foreign and consular policy implementation structure. This includes budgets for holding the G7 Hiroshima Summit and projects to mark the 50th
Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, realizing FOIP including support to like-minded countries for capacity building in the field of security, supporting Ukraine and countries affected by the situation in Ukraine, promoting economic security, strengthening capacity to analyze the international situation by using AI, and conducting flexible and proactive diplomacy.

In order to promote Japan’s national interests, Japan will continue to proceed strategically to develop the foreign policy implementation structure and enhance it further, while making efforts to streamline operations.

3 The Roles of Think Tanks and Experts in Diplomacy

The roles of think tanks and experts in diplomacy include promoting public understanding of diplomatic and security issues, making intellectual contributions that produce ideas for diplomatic and security policies, building global intellectual networks, and communicating Japan’s perspectives to other countries. Seminars and news commentaries by think tanks and experts are essential for improving public understanding of diplomatic and security issues as well as the government’s standpoint, and gaining public understanding can further enhance the effectiveness of the government’s diplomatic activities. Moreover, gathering information, conducting analyses, and making policy recommendations by leveraging expertise and viewpoints that are different from the ones of the government also enrich discussions on diplomatic policies within the government. Global intellectual exchanges are also important in the sense that they promote understanding of Japan among various countries and regions, and contribute to shaping public opinions in the international community. With the growing complexity and uncertainty in the international community, the roles of think tanks and experts in diplomacy are becoming increasingly important.

Against this backdrop, MOFA provides subsidies to support Japanese think tanks’ research activities in the field of foreign and security policy, in order to strengthen their capabilities to collect, analyze and disseminate information, to make policy proposals, and to further promote Japan’s comprehensive diplomacy. In FY2022, the scheme provided support to 13 projects under seven organizations, and it is effectively promoting policy proposals to policymakers that are in line with the ever-changing diplomatic and security environment, exchanges of opinions with overseas think tanks and experts, the publication of papers and dissertations activities by experts, and communications with the media. Furthermore, MOFA launched a new subsidy scheme in FY2017 that aims at supporting research and information dissemination activities of Japanese think tanks in the areas of territory, sovereignty and history. Under the scheme, the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) conducts such activities as the collection, organization and public release of materials found in Japan and overseas as well as the convention of open symposiums in Japan and in other countries. In 2022, as a part of the outcome, JIIA conducted a webinar on the name Sea of Japan by using old maps and archival materials. Furthermore, regarding the Takeshima dispute, JIIA unveiled the “Takeshima Old Map Collection,” a collection of old maps that contain references to Takeshima, and published postwar maps of Japan issued by the Geospatial Authority of Japan as well as Aeronautical Charts produced in the U.S.. It is expected that the scheme will support Japanese think tanks in accumulating historical records and knowledge pertaining to Japan’s territory, sovereignty and history, and enhancing their information dissemination domestically and abroad.

1 The relevant section of the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) website can be found here: https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/
Executive Chefs for Ambassadors/Consuls-General of Japan: At the Forefront of Diplomacy

Executive Chefs for Ambassadors/Consuls-general of Japan are licensed cooks or persons with considerable experience working as chefs, who have been recognized by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to engage in official catering work at official residences and other venues for the head of a diplomatic mission overseas (Ambassador/Consul-general). Diplomatic missions overseas are the center for diplomatic activities such as negotiations with governments, information gathering, and the development of personal networks. One of the most effective means of diplomacy is to create opportunities for meals at the official residence of the Ambassador/Consul-general, with guests such as influential politicians, businessmen and government officials from the country of assignment, as well as the diplomatic corps from various countries. For this reason, the head of the diplomatic mission is usually accompanied by the Executive Chef for the Ambassador/Consul-general, an exclusively appointed chef whose aim is to provide high-quality meals.

ITO Satoshi, Executive Chef, Consul-General of Japan in Chicago

My name is ITO Satoshi, and I work as the executive chef at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. I took up the position in Chicago in September 2021.

Although it is not as common as in New York and Los Angeles, there are still many Japanese restaurants in Chicago. There is deep understanding about Japanese cuisine among the people, and it is easy to purchase Japanese food such as sushi, soy sauce, tofu, and matcha at the local supermarkets. As a chef, it is very enjoyable and exciting to go to the supermarkets and marketplaces of other countries.

As Chicago is a large city, guests of different ethnicities with varied backgrounds are invited to meals at the official residence of the Consulate-General. In addition to food allergies, based on dietary restrictions due to religion, vegetarianism or veganism due to personal choices or other various reasons, I frequently need to prepare a few different menus for a single meal. Therefore, it is important to first determine the ingredients that cannot be offered to each guest before coming up with a menu to give them the greatest satisfaction.

When preparing a menu and selecting ingredients, I engage in elaborate discussions with the Consul-General, taking into consideration factors such as dietary restrictions, the purpose of the meal, the types of guests, and the season. For example, we may serve nostalgic Japanese cuisine even to Japanese guests, whose lives are deeply rooted to the local area, taking note of the Japanese prefectures where they are originally from. We may create menus that feature local ingredients such as Kansas beef or Iowa pork to those who are visiting the U.S. from Japan.

I have once prepared vegetable-based sushi tailored to the unique tastes of vegetarian guests. They said, “I will remember this for life, thank you!” and “It must have been hard as there are many things I cannot eat, yet you managed to produce such wonderful dishes. Thank you!” I feel genuinely happy and fortunate to be a chef when I receive such compliments in person.

In October 2022, I left the official residence with the Consul-General to conduct a sushi roll (makizushi) demonstration at the “Japan Day” event held at a university in Indiana. It was a new experience for me to teach American people, including children, to make sushi rolls while I demonstrated how to do it. During the question-and-answer session, there were participants who raised questions about crucian carp sushi (tuna-zushi) and about the history of sushi. This made me realize that there are people who are even more deeply interested in Japanese cuisine than the Japanese people themselves.

Executive Chefs work alone to complete all the processes in the preparation of a meal, including creating the menu, procuring and preparing ingredients, managing inventory, translating the menu into English, as well as the actual meal preparation and plating of the dishes. Moreover, when a chef tries to wield their skills in a foreign
country, they frequently face language and cultural barriers. For Executive Chefs to demonstrate their ability at the highest level in such an environment, it is vital to have the support of those around them. I am fortunate to receive much advice and support from the Consul-General and the staff at his official residence, consular staff, as well as all those who provide support to the Consulate-General. This support makes it possible for me to focus on my job.

Being mindful of smooth communication can expand my knowledge as a chef and as an individual, and I think that being granted with the opportunity to learn many things, including languages, is one of the attractions of this job.

While working to improve my capabilities, I will continue to make utmost efforts to demonstrate the best performance possible and fulfill my job at the forefront of diplomacy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepts applications at any time from candidates who wish to serve in diplomacy as Executive Chefs for Ambassadors/Consuls-general of Japan. If you are interested, please inquire through the following website or the QR code.

[The International Hospitality and Conference Service Association (IHCSA) http://www.ihcsa.or.jp/zaigaioukan/cook-1/]

You can also read more about the activities of Executive Chefs for Ambassadors/Consuls-general of Japan through the “MOFA Japan Chef” social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter).

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/MofaJapanChef
Twitter: https://twitter.com/mofa_japan_chef
“Creating” overseas establishments such as embassies and consulates
- The work of technical officials of the building and repair section

Were you aware that there are roles at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that do not involve diplomacy, known as “technical officials”? As the “face of Japan,” overseas establishments such as Japanese embassies abroad provide the bases and settings for Japan’s diplomatic activities, and they serve as the last strongholds for protecting Japanese nationals during emergencies. Technical officials manage, design, construct, operate and maintain these facilities. It can be said that they support diplomatic activities behind the scenes, while partly shouldering the huge responsibility of protecting the lives of Japanese nationals. Here, we feature NAGAI Yuta, a technical official of the Building and Repair section, who is responsible for construction, maintenance and repair duties at the Embassy of Japan in Sri Lanka, who describes the work that technical officials do.

Preserving and reviving a Historical Building
NAGAI Yuta, Technical Official of the Building and Repair Section, Embassy of Japan in Sri Lanka

It is often said that a building reflects the history and culture of its time. The old building of the Embassy of Japan, in Sri Lanka was built during the British colonial era, about 130 years ago. Its structure is brick, and the exterior features vertically long bay windows that are characteristic of brick buildings, while the front entrance has arched porticos (pil lared porches). The creative artistry from those days has remained to the present day, largely unchanged. The interior features decorative ceilings and beautiful triple arches extending in the east-west direction. Described as a Renaissance style building, it was purchased by the Government of Japan in the 1970s for use as its embassy. However, as 130 years had passed since it was first built, there were various problems, such as deterioration over time and building safety issues. Hence, large-scale extension and renovation works are now being carried out to improve and reinforce the functions required for use as an embassy.

In carrying out the extension and renovation works, we are required by the Department of Archaeology of Sri Lanka to restore some of the interiors, reuse materials, and preserve the exterior brick walls (front and both sides) in order to retain the historical value of the building. Retaining the old parts of a building, even partially, requires considerable information and knowledge about that building. However, because this is a very old building, as explained above, there are hardly any design blueprints left in existence. Amidst the constraints, I am working together with all other parties involved in the construction work to create an embassy that strikes a balance between functionality and design. We are moving forward with restoration and preservation work while constantly exploring ways to maintain harmony between the new and old parts of the building.

As is often the case when working on an old building, we found a reinforced concrete beam (a horizontal structural component) when dismantling the interior of the building. As this beam could not be removed for structural reasons, we had to work creatively to retain it without damaging the aesthetics of the interior. To partition out new rooms inside the building while preserving the exterior of the old building, it was necessary to partially retain the interior walls supporting the exterior walls, and to reinforce the foundation of the exterior brick walls to make them stronger. Furthermore, in
order to allow sufficient light to enter the building, we are examining methods of producing openings (cutouts in the wall to fit in windows) that can prevent the bricks at the top from falling down when new windows are installed in the brick walls.

As described so far, rather than taking the easy path of destroying everything to build something new, we are taking the route of preservation which enhances the depth and dignity of the building through its cumulative history, as with the old wooden architectures found in Kyoto and Nara in Japan. I believe the result will charm and fascinate people who visit the building after its renovation.

Against the backdrop of the current difficult social conditions in Sri Lanka, proceeding with such complex construction work is accompanied by great difficulties. However, everyone involved is working hard together to complete it on schedule, and to create a building that serves as a symbol of Japan. Featuring a multipurpose hall, library, and public relations and culture exhibition room, and it will be part of the important facilities for actively promoting Japan to the outside world. As a technical official, I take pride in the fact that after the completion of the works, this revived building will be used once again by a wide range of people as a stage for diplomacy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recruits technical officials from candidates who have passed the National Civil Service Examination for General Service (University Graduate Level), Technical Categories (Examination Categories: Architecture, Digital/Electrical/Electronics, Machinery). If you are interested, please visit the recruitment website via the following website or the QR code on the right.

[The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “National Civil Service Examination for General Service (University Graduates, Technical)”]
https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ms/prs/page23_003447.html
Research Activities Through the Diplomatic Bluebook

The Diplomatic Bluebook has been published every year since 1957 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and offers an outline record of the international situation and Japan’s diplomatic activities of the previous year. This bluebook has significance not only from the perspective of promoting understanding of Japan’s diplomacy within and outside Japan, but also as a historical record. This Column introduces some examples in which the Diplomatic Bluebook is used for research activities at universities.

● Sharing understanding of Japan’s diplomacy through the Diplomatic Bluebook

Students from the seminar on contemporary Chinese politics and foreign policy, Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University

TONOIKE Ai, ZHAO Liuxing, SAKAI Tomohiro, YEUNG Takming, MOGAMI Sora, LI Anqi

Our seminar brings together undergraduate students who are interested in contemporary Chinese politics and diplomacy, and Japan-China relations. As a part of the seminar’s activities, we read the “Diplomatic Bluebook” in turns to understand changes in the views of (the Government of) Japan toward China. For example, we compare, from various angles, how China is depicted in the Bluebook, such as by analyzing the unique expressions used in relation to China, or by counting the number of times specific words appear in the text. Although it is somewhat tedious work, the Diplomatic Bluebook serves as the ideal material to deepen understanding of the multifaceted nature of Japan’s diplomacy toward China (politics, security, economic cooperation, people-to-people exchanges), as well as to consider how Japan’s diplomacy toward China has developed while thinking about how Japan has made use of Asia as a “space” to date. It is also useful material to engage in critical discussions about Japan’s diplomacy today.

Above all, what attracts us the most is that the Diplomatic Bluebook is authored by officials of MOFA, who are working in the frontlines of Japan’s diplomacy. Moreover, as it provides an overall picture of Japan’s diplomacy, it allows readers to learn about the international environment Japan faces - lying between the two superpowers: the U.S. and China - and to expand our horizons. These make it a very interesting document.

There is strong impression that the Diplomatic Bluebook is a dry and uninteresting book, and we do actually feel this at times. It felt like something distant from our lives. However, it can be quite interesting if we read it from the perspective that it is a book explaining international relations to its readers (Japanese citizens), and with a desire to interpret its message. As a typical example, by counting the number of times and analyzing the periods in which the phrase “Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests” appears in the text, it is possible to grasp the changing process of Japan-China relations. Furthermore, by comparing it to other government publications with overlapping policy areas, such as “Defense of Japan,” it is possible to grasp the differences in views between the respective ministries, and to get a glimpse into the government’s adjustments to policy areas that it places importance on.

Of course, there are also some points that we are not satisfied with. Unlike the media, the Diplomatic Bluebook is a document that provides accurate and detailed information about Japan’s diplomacy from the government’s point of view. However, when the question arises of what a “Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests” actually means, for example, the Diplomatic Bluebook does not seem to offer a clear explanation. In such cases, we have to check other government documents for clarification, and that gives us an impression that it narrows its own door to readers.

In our seminar, which comprises students of multiple nationalities, it is an interesting experience to use the Diplomatic Bluebook as a material to understand Japan’s stance toward China, and to reach an understanding among everyone. Studying the Diplomatic Bluebook, a public document that everyone can access, in our seminar is very meaningful in the sense that it not only facilitates individual understanding, but also allows us to gain mutual understanding of knowledge and engage in lively discussions.