

Japan's gastrodiploamacy as soft power: global washoku and national food security

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Until recently, Japanese cuisine was known only for sushi and was still considered exotic outside the archipelago. However, today the number of specialized restaurants which serve other traditional foods is constantly increasing all over the world, making Japanese gastronomy one of the most influential. Japanese government has supported the promotion of national cuisine worldwide in different ways, making washoku (Japanese traditional cuisine) one of the main elements of Japan's soft power and cultural diplomacy.

In this paper, I will analyse the connection between Japan's gastrodiploamacy, defined as the use of typical food and dishes as an instrument of soft power, and Japan's food security strategy. I will argue that the strategy of promotion of washoku worldwide is not a mere act of popularization of Japanese food but it is strictly related to the issue of the low self-sufficiency rate of the country, as the main objective of the government is the raise of food export, in order to foster agricultural production and improve self-sufficiency.

Keywords: Japan's gastrodiploamacy, washoku, soft power, food self-sufficiency, food export

Introduction

The World Expo held in Milan in 2015 under the title “Feeding the Planet, Energy for life” saw the great success of the Japan Pavilion, which received a total of 2.28 million guests and was awarded the gold prize for best exhibition in the history of Japan's participations in International Registered Exhibitions (MOFA, 2016: 114). The pavilion showcased Japanese culinary culture, from its ingredients and dishes to production techniques and dining habits. The success at the World Expo was preceded by another important international recognition in December 2013, when UNESCO included washoku (Japanese traditional cuisine, lit. food of Japan) in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The increasing number of Japanese restaurants worldwide and the recent growth of Japanese food exports are also significant evidence of washoku popularity. According to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan (2017a), the number of Japanese restaurants in the world has drastically increased from 24,000 in 2006 to over 117,000 in 2017; the food and agricultural exports rose from 445 billion yen in 2009 to over 750 billion in

2016 (MAFF, 2017b: 80), and in 2013 Japanese cuisine was ranked as the most popular “foreign cuisine” in a survey conducted in seven countries (JETRO, 2013).

In recent years, scholars have approached the globalization of Japanese cuisine from different perspectives (See: Bestor, 2000, 2004; Cwiertka, 2006, 2013; Farrer [ed.], 2015; Issenberg, 2007; Niehaus and Walravens [eds.], 2017) and a number of authors have examined the relationship between washoku and Japan's soft power and public diplomacy. Stephanie Assman (2017) has defined Japan's culinary soft power as one element of Japan's culinary politics, which aims towards the recognition of Japanese haute cuisine in the globalized world, through a process of re-territorialization of popular globalized food such as sushi, and the creation of a national identity through food. Theodore Bestor (2014) points out that Japan's UNESCO washoku campaign “projected on a global screen of cultural identities (culturally defined) and cultural politics for national recognition, as well as to promote domestic goals of cultural identity formation.” According to Reynolds (2012), soft food-power has enabled Japan to enhance its global attractiveness, achieving “democratic changes”, such as the adoption of Japan's know-how or problem solving skills in the countries where washoku has most spread.

No doubt, recent scholarship has produced crucial results by analyzing food as an instrument of Japan's soft power and public diplomacy. However, its emphasis seems confined to concepts of nation branding and identity construction.

This paper will deal with one aspect that has received scarce scholarly attention so far, namely the connection between Japanese “gastrodiplomacy” and food security. Food security is a crucial issue in Japan's postwar politics, because of the constant decline of food self-sufficiency rate since 1945 (38% in 2016, one of the lowest percentages among industrialized countries, MAFF, 2017b). The government has tried to raise the rate by stimulating demand among Japanese consumers, but the attempt has proven unsuccessful. This is why, more recently, the government has shifted its objective towards the increase of food export, in order to foster agricultural production and thus secure self-sufficiency. The need for self-sufficiency plays an important part in Japan's worldwide promotion of washoku, which turns out to be, as the paper will show, not only a cultural strategy aimed at popularization or identity-branding, but a strategic policy implemented to increase food export and strengthen national food security.

This paper is divided in three parts. In the first one, the concept of gastrodiplomacy will be introduced; then the decline of Japan's food security and food self-sufficiency will be more closely addressed. Finally, the strategy of gastrodiplomacy adopted by the Japanese government and its connection with food security will be dealt with and expounded.

Japan's gastrodiplomacy: a theoretical framework

Public diplomacy is one of the most debated topics in the field of International Relations. The term “public diplomacy” was first introduced in 1965 to indicate the “process by which international

actors seek to accomplish the goals of their foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics” (Cull, 2008: 31). It has been defined by Tuch (1990: 3) as “a government process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies”, and in more succinct way by Sharp (2015: 106) as “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented.” One of the elements of public diplomacy is “cultural diplomacy¹”. There are many definitions of cultural diplomacy and it may best be described as the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture and identity, among nations and their people, in order to strengthen relationships, enhance cooperation or promote national interests (Goff, 2013). However, the two terms are often used interchangeably by several countries' ministries of Foreign Affairs, as, for example, in the case of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who uses the expression “public cultural diplomacy” (in Japanese, *kōkokubunka gaikō*).

The significance of public and cultural diplomacy is located within a broader debate on soft power. The concept of soft power was coined by Joseph Nye in the early 1990s but it gained worldwide popularity after the publication of his immensely influential *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2008). According to Nye (2008), soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants without tangible threats or payoffs but through attraction and inducement. Compared to hard power, it “co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Nye, 2008: 5). One country's soft power can come primarily from three sources: political values, culture, and foreign policy, but, more often, it emerges as a combination of these elements (Nye, 2002: 11).

Soft power has also received many criticisms. Niall Ferguson (2003) criticized that soft power is “too soft” to obtain a country's interest. Other authors raised questions about the nature of one country's culture and attraction (Mattern, 2005; Watanabe, 2008). Nevertheless, the concept of soft power has been central to many conceptualisations of public diplomacy, however the relationship between the two concepts is often vague (Szondi, 2008). Broadly speaking, it is possible to say that soft power and public diplomacy are different sides of the same coin: if the former is the overall positive perception that people have over a nation, the latter is the tool used by governments to promote a country's soft power (Nye, 2008). Nevertheless, public diplomacy can produce as well some hard power results, such as alliance management, conflict prevention or military intervention (Melissen, 2005: 14). In this sense, public diplomacy must be seen as a vital construct for preserving national security through strengthening national policy objectives (Nirwandy&Awang, 2014: 326).

Food is one of the elements of soft power and public diplomacy, and several studies have appeared recently that have analysed its role in diplomacy. Culinary soft power has been defined as “the acknowledged attractiveness and appeal of food culture that adheres to a nation, region, or locality (Farrer, 2015: 10). When applied to public diplomacy, scholars use the expressions

¹ Nicholas J. Cull (2008: 32) divides public diplomacy practices into five elements: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting.

“gastrodiplomacy” or “culinary diplomacy”². Although the two expressions are sometimes used interchangeably (see: Wolf, 2006, and Chapple-sokol, 2013), scholars usually distinguish between the two by arguing that they involve two different levels of diplomacy. According to Paul Rockower (2014), culinary diplomacy can be defined as the use of food and cuisine as “a medium to enhance formal diplomacy in official diplomatic functions”. In this sense, culinary diplomacy seeks to increase bilateral ties by strengthening relationships through the use of food and dining experiences as a means to engage visiting dignitaries. In comparison, gastrodiplomacy has a broader dimension and can be defined as “a public diplomacy attempt to communicate culinary culture to foreign publics in a fashion that is more diffuse” (Rockower, 2014: 13). Compared to culinary diplomacy, then, gastrodiplomacy seeks to influence a wider public audience rather than only high-level elites³.

Gastrodiplomacy is not only a promotion of one country's cuisine abroad, but it allows states to use their national cuisine as soft power resource to increase the appeal and desirability of its culture, people, values, and ideals, strengthening the association of some foods with that country, and obtain also economic outcomes, such as food export or increasing tourism. In order for a country to display itself on the strength of its food, it requires a process of standardization of its national eating habits, that has been called “gastronationalism” (De Soucey, 2010: 433) or “culinary nationalism” (Ferguson, 2010: 102), sometimes also through an external recognition, like the UNESCO-recognized cuisines.

Japan became one of the most discussed soft power countries across the 2000s; some scholars came to refer to Japan as a “soft power superpower” (Watanabe and McConnell, 2008). The literature about Japan's soft power ranges from critical discussion of Japanese culture (Kawakatsu 2006; Iwabuchi 2007) to studies of the reception of Japanese cultural products (Otmazgin, 2008, 2012) and broad analyses of Japan’s cultural diplomacy (Lam, 2007; Fukushima, 2011). As we already mentioned in the introduction, in recent years some scholars debated about Japan's use of food as a tool of soft power have, however these studies have always linked Japan's gastrodiplomacy to the dominant discourses on national identity and nation branding.

The purpose of this paper is to focus the attention on the motivations and goals behind Japan’s gastrodiplomacy policy and the means used to achieve them. In the following section, we will use the word “gastrodiplomacy” to indicate the strategy pursued by Japanese government to promote washoku worldwide in order to boost agri-food exports and improve national food security.

² “Culinary diplomacy” or “gastrodiplomacy” should not be confused with “food diplomacy” or “food power”. In international politics, “food power” is usually defined as the ability of one state to use food as a political weapon, while “food diplomacy” is the use by one state of its food resources (i.e. “food power”) in order to influence international food markets or to influence international economic and political relationships going beyond food markets. See: Henry Nau (1978), “The Diplomacy of World Food: Goals, Capabilities, Issues and Arenas”, *International Organization*, vol. 32, n. 3, p. 777, and Peter Wallersten (1976), “Scarce Goods as Political Weapons: The Case of Food”, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 13 n. 4, p. 281.

³ The same two concepts have been named by Sam Chapple-sokol, respectively, “private culinary diplomacy” and “public culinary diplomacy”. See: Chapple-sokol, 2013, p. 162.

Methodology

The success of washoku is commonly associated with qualities inherent to the cuisine itself – healthiness, aesthetics, simplicity and adaptability (Farrer, 2015: 12). Such characteristics, however, are shared by many cuisines around the world, and are unlikely to account alone for the boom of Japanese food. As James Farrer has suggested (Ibid. 13), the international spread of any cuisine is best explained by shifting the focus away from its intrinsic qualities and towards institutional and political key-factors. Based on this assumption, I will use a case study approach - Japan's gastrodiploamacy - to describe a gastrodiploamacy strategy within the framework of domestic food politics and national security interests. As a way to understand how gastrodiploamacy can be used outside the framework of national identity and how it can relate to food security initiatives, this study examines the role of Japanese planners in conceptualizing and adopting a gastrodiploamacy strategy. In this paper, I assert that Japan's gastrodiploamacy achievements would have been impossible without the government's efforts to promote national cuisine abroad. Indeed, the Japanese government and its ministries have been active agents in redefining and promoting washoku, making it one of the main traits of Japan's soft power and cultural diplomacy. By emphasizing the role of Japanese planners in conceptualizing and activating a gastrodiploamacy strategy, this study will highlight the food security motivations behind this strategy.

More specifically, I will focus on the actions taken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the ministries most involved in the promotion of washoku worldwide and in the improvement of national food security, but also on other government-related organizations, such as Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) or the Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad (JRO).

The primary sources here analysed include documents such as MAFF's White Papers, MOFA's Diplomatic Bluebooks, and other official reports (such as reports from JETRO or other agencies created by the two ministries for implementing Japan's soft power). The focus will be placed on the main objectives of Japan's gastrodiploamacy strategy, in order to highlight its connection with the food security issue. This research uses also secondary data, which come from books, journals, magazines, articles and internet websites.

Japan's food self-sufficiency and food security

Japan's food self-sufficiency rate was 73% in 1960, but it constantly decreased, reaching 38% in 2016, the lowest among major industrialized countries (MAFF, 2017b). The rate, which is based on calorific intake, refers to the ratio of calorie supply from domestically produced food to the total calorie consumed by each person on a daily basis. This means that over 60% of the calories that each Japanese consumes every day come from imported food.

Both the government and scholars have attributed this drastic decline to both a weakening of domestic production, as well as to a radical change in dietary habits in post-war years. On the one hand, the small farm sizes, the aging farming population, the decline of farming income and a fall in cultivable land have reduced Japan's capability to produce enough food to meet the needs of its population. On the other hand, the lifestyle of Japanese consumers changed from a traditional diet to a westernized one, with an increase in the consumption of meat, wheat, oils, dairy products, and a decrease in the consumption of “traditional” food, such as rice, that has led to a major consumption of imported food and to a decline in national production. Other reasons have been identified in the post-war agricultural protectionist politics, which prevented growth in agricultural productivity (George Mulgan, 2005); in the international food trade system created by the USA, whose grains and other agricultural products flooded into the Japanese market during the Occupation and in the years immediately after (Suzuki, 2013); or in the objectives of government's economic diplomacy, more focused on the promotion of industrial production and manufacturing exports, in order to get foreign currency to import food (Farina, 2017).

The analysis of the causes of the decline of Japan's food self-sufficiency rate is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note how, regardless of its reasons, this decline and the consequent high dependence on food imports have raised serious concerns about Japan's national food security situation. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), a low food self-sufficiency rate is a risk factor because it makes Japan more exposed to the fluctuations of the international food market, resulting from, for example, food crises due to bad harvests, structural changes in world food markets or political turmoil altering international trade.

Government strategy has sought to counter the decline of self-sufficiency through a state-led food education campaign (shokuiku, lit. food education). The objective of food education campaign is the promotion of consumption of local agricultural products, by revitalising the significance of rice as Japan's main staple food and by associating local products with healthiness and imported foods with unsafeness (Assman, 2015). Yet the results have been very unsatisfactory, as the food self-sufficiency rate continued to decline, forcing the government to change continuously its objectives. In 2000 the government announced the Basic Plan for Agriculture and Rural Areas (Shokuryō nōgyō nōson kihon keikan), where it decided to raise the food self-sufficiency rate from 40% to 45% by 2010. In 2010, a new plan provided for an increase in the rate to 50% by 2020. The last plan of 2015 provides a target of 45% by 2025 (MAFF 2015).

Due to these difficulties in changing Japanese consumption behaviour, more recently the government shifted its focus towards the promotion of Japanese food abroad, in order to increase food export. According to MAFF, an increase in agro-food export will help Japan's food security for two main reasons, both associated with an improvement in food self-sufficiency. To understand the relationship between self-sufficiency and food export, we must take a closer look at how food self-sufficiency is calculated. We already said that the rate refers to the ratio of calorie supply from domestically produced food to the total calorie consumed by each person on a daily basis. However, the self-sufficiency ratio is calculated by MAFF (but also FAO) in the following way:

$$\text{Domestic production}/(\text{domestic production}+\text{imports}-\text{exports})$$

It is clear that any increase in exports will result in an increase in food self-sufficiency rate. At the same time, more exports will mean ideally more food production, and, consequently, a higher self-sufficiency rate⁴.

Japan's strategy of gastrodiploamacy, which will be analysed in detail in next section, is one the most significant example of an active use of public diplomacy and soft power in order to improve exports and national food security.

Japan's gastrodiploamacy: the promotion of washoku and the enhance of food export

Washoku

As we have seen, the promotion of a particular cuisine worldwide follows a fundamental process of standardization – “gastronationalism” – of food habits that leads to the creation of a national cuisine. However, it is widely acknowledged among scholars that there is no such a thing like “national cuisine” and many of these cuisines have emerged only in modern times. In particular, in the Japanese case, Cwiertka (2006), in her seminal work about Japanese culinary tradition, showed how the concept of modern Japanese cuisine is constructed on a “Japanese-Western-Chinese tripod” combining pre-existing Japanese local food customs with Chinese and Western influences.

But what is Japanese cuisine? First of all, we must distinguish between washoku (or nihonshoku), which consists of the Chinese characters for wa (an old name for Japan) and shoku (which, depending on its usage, can mean food, diet, eating), and nihon ryōri (lit. Japanese cooking). According to the MAFF, washoku has a broader meaning, and it refers not only to food, but also to all cultural aspects related to it (preparation methods, tableware, etiquette, etc.), while nihon ryōri usually refers to a particular cuisine, like Kyoto cuisine or kaiseki – the Japanese haute cuisine (MAFF, 2015). The Japanese government and the MAFF usually use the term washoku or nihonshoku when they refer to the Japanese cuisine to promote abroad.

On the site of UNESCO, washoku is defined as “a social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge, practice and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature that is closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources”⁵, confirming the idea that washoku is not a particular food or recipe but the overall culture of food of Japan. The MAFF says that washoku is “based on rice in accordance with the Japanese climate and consists of a variety of side dishes such as seafood, meat and pickles (Assmann, 2015: 170)”. According to this definition, a washoku

⁴ See: http://www.maff.go.jp/j/wpaper/w_maff/h19_h/trend/1/t1_t_04.html

⁵ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869> (accessed: 2018/1/13)

typical dish is based on the principle of *ichijū sansai*, which means one soup with three side dishes served with rice and pickles.

Japan's gastrodiploamacy

In his 2002 article on Foreign Policy, Douglas McGray highlighted Japan's cultural influence and soft power, creating the expression “Japan's Gross National Cool”. Gaining wide popularity in the media and among academics, the concept of Cool Japan has been adopted by the government of Japan to exploit and promote Japan cultural and creative industries and branding the nation⁶.

In 2003, the prime minister's office established the Task Force on Contents (*kontentsu senmon chōsa kai*), whose focus laid on the management of media contents, such as music, movies, game software and animation. In 2004 the Japan Brand Working Group (*nihon brando wāking gurupu*, JBWG) was organized within the Task Force to conduct more in-depth discussions about national branding. In February 2005, the JBWG compiled the report entitled Promotion of Japan Brand Strategy where culinary culture was identified as one of the three most important contents of cultural diplomacy along with fashion and local brands. The report also underlined the need of establishing a strategy for improving food education at home and promoting *washoku* abroad (JBWG, 2005). In the same year, the Committee for the Promotion of Research on Food Culture (*Shoku bunka kenkyū kondankai*) was established within the Strategic Council on Intellectual Property. In its report, the Committee reiterated the importance of food as tool to promote a positive image of Japan abroad and outlined the situation of Japanese restaurants abroad in terms of number, preparation techniques and customers (Committee for the Promotion of Research on Food Culture, 2005). The report also recommended some practical actions to be undertaken by the government, including the creation of relevant texts about the standards of Japanese cuisine, the establishment of culinary training courses for foreigners, the strengthening of the collaboration between the farmers and the restaurants, and the introduction of traditional Japanese cuisine to foreign tourists in Japan (*Ibid.*).

It was in 2006 that the first big campaign for the presentation of Japanese food and food culture abroad – named “*Washoku-Try Japan's Good Food*” – was launched. The aim of this campaign was to introduce Japanese dishes at special events held by Japanese diplomatic mission abroad and create the demand of consumers through media⁷. In the same year, the MAFF introduced one particularly aggressive measure to foster Japan rich culture and “make Japan a nation that is loved and respected by people throughout the world” (IPSH, 2005: 126), which was the establishment of a certification system for Japanese restaurants outside Japan. The monitoring of the “authenticity” of Japanese cuisine abroad was strongly criticized and labeled as “sushi police” (Farrer, 2015: 11). In 2007, in reaction to this criticism, the MAFF later changed the name to

⁶ http://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/mono_info_service/creative_industries/creative_industries.html (accessed: 2018/2/20)

⁷ See: http://www.maff.go.jp/e/export/washoku_try/2009.html

“recommendation” instead of “certification” and transferred the project to a nonprofit organization called the Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad (JRO) (Ibid.).

In 2006, the MAFF also established the Award for Overseas Promotion of Japanese Food to persons who made outstanding contributions to the introductions and spread of Japanese cuisine, Japanese food and other Japanese agricultural products. Subsequently, in 2009, other three reports issued by the Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters (IPSH) and the Japan Brand Liaison Group (JBLG) included Japanese food culture along with other cultural industries as forms of “soft power industries”.

Also the Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) have played an active role in promoting Japanese cuisine abroad. In a 2010 report, titled “Towards Nation Building through Cultural Industries”, the METI emphasized the importance of cultural industry as nation's “soft power” resource. The report highlighted also the importance of exporting agricultural crops, processed foods, and tableware together in the marketing of Japanese cuisine, in order to carry with it elements of Japanese “authentic” culture (Farrer, 2015: 11). The MOFA created the Public Diplomacy Department in August 2004. With two divisions, namely, the Public Diplomacy Planning and Cultural Affairs Divisions, this department aims at combining “public relations and cultural exchange in a more systematic way” (Diplomatic Bluebook 2005: 207) and indicated “Japan brand” as one of the main pillars of Japan's economic diplomacy in 2011 (Bergeijk et al., 2013: 61) and washoku as a vehicle to promote understanding of and trust in Japan (MOFA, 2014: 38).

More recently, on April 2017, the Japan Food Products Overseas Promotion Center was created within the JETRO, whose activity is focused on the collection of information about overseas market, the promotion of Japanese food and the assistance to business operators⁸.

The promotion of food export

As all the examples above showed, Japanese government is putting a lot of efforts in the promotion of washoku worldwide, in order to provide a positive image of Japan, but this strategy is not limited only to the mere branding of Japanese culture. As we mentioned, gastrodiploamacy allows states to use their national cuisine as “soft power” resource to increase the appeal and desirability of its culture, but, at the same time, it proves to be an important tool to obtain also economic outcomes, such as food export or increasing tourism. A more detailed analysis of Japan's strategy of promotion of washoku shows, as we shall see, the purpose of incrementing agri-food export through the spreading of Japanese cuisine worldwide.

With a food trade deficit of 67 billions dollars, Japan ranked as the largest net import country of agricultural products in the world in 2012⁹. The serious difficulties in incrementing food-self

⁸ Official site: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/jfoodo/> (accessed: 2018/5/13)

⁹ http://www.maff.go.jp/j/pr/annual/pdf/syoku_jjyyou.pdf (accessed: 2018/2/19)

sufficiency through food education have pushed the government to undertake an appropriate strategy of increasing food export to help farmers and food producers to increment production and find markets for their products (Matsui, 2014: 101).

In July 2003, a new “Japanese Food Foreign Market Development Committee” (Nihonshokuhintō kaigai shijō kaitaku iinkai) was created within the JETRO. The main task of the committee was to advice and instruct JETRO about the creation and the implementation of action plans on overseas market development projects such as overseas market research, participation in international trade fairs, and measures to overcome the problems in overseas market development (Ruan, 2005: 38). In addition, in April 2004, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries established the “Export Promotion Office (yushutsu sokushin shitsu)” and, the following year, created the “National Council for the Promotion of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Products Export (Nōrinsuisanbutsutō yushutsu sokushin zenkoku kyōgikai) with the aim of strengthening the ministry's export support system.

However, the first time that the word washoku was used in correlation to the strategy of food export was in the 2005 Japan Brand Working Group's Promotion of Japan Brand Strategy, where the Group underlined the need to study the East Asian markets in order to expand export in the area (JBWG, 2005: 3). In April 2006, in the “21st Century New Agricultural Policy”, the government emphasised the need for developing a regional export strategies, through the promotion of Japanese food culture (MAFF, 2006).

Also in the above-mentioned 2009 Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters' report, it was recommended to strengthen the network between the subjects related to the Japanese cuisine – producers, retailers, wholesalers, etc. – and the overseas cities where Japanese restaurants were present, in order to increase the export of ingredients produced in Japan (IPSH, 2009: 10).

But it was in August 2013 that the MAFF outlined in details the strategy for incrementing the export of food products through the promotion of Japanese food culture, whose objective was to increase the export to over one trillion yen by 2020 (it was over five hundred billion in 2013)¹⁰. This strategy provided direction for the achievement of three main goals: the promotion of the use of Japanese ingredients in the various cuisines of the world (“made from Japan”); the development of food industries and the promotion of Japan's food culture (“made by Japan”); and the expansion of Japan's food export (“made in Japan”)¹¹.

In the 2015 Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, the MAFF re-emphasised the importance of increasing consumption to raise the food self-sufficiency rate, but for the first time it referred to “domestic and foreign demand (kokunaigai no juyō)”, highlighting the strategic role of food export in improving national food security (MAFF, 2015: 15). In order to better understand the productive capacity of Japan, the Plan established a new indicator – the “food self-sufficiency

¹⁰ http://www.maff.go.jp/j/shokusan/export/e_info/attach/pdf/zisseki-98.pdf (accessed: 2018/2/17)

¹¹ <http://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/shokusan/kaigai/pdf/130517-01.pdf> (accessed: 2018/2/17)

potential (shokuryō jikyū ryoku) –, which, compared to the food self-sufficiency rate, shows the possible per capita caloric supply per domestic food produced using all farmland in Japan, including abandoned, but recoverable farmland (MAFF, 2015: 24). The new indicator has been created to understand Japan's capacity to cope with any crisis of food import that might arise, but it can be also used to highlight to what extent Japan is able to respond to a major increase in external demand of agricultural products (MAFF, 2015: 24). For this reason, in the 2016 White Paper, the MAFF declared that “the government will continue to improve food self-sufficiency potential and the food self-sufficiency ratio through efforts such as the increase in the demands of domestic agricultural products at home and abroad including exports” (MAFF, 2016: 10). This requires, according to the report, to enhance competitiveness of Japan's agriculture through some important reforms – such as reducing costs of farming inputs, development of manpower, structural reform of distribution and processing, etc. – but also through the development of strategic export system (Ibid.: 4).

In order to develop this export system, the MAFF established the Executive Committee for the Export Strategy (yushutsu senryaku iinkai) and formulated the Export Expansion Policy (yushutsu kakudai hōshin), where seven categories of food and agricultural products to promote abroad were identified – seafood products, rice and rice-made processed foods, forest products, flowering trees (bonsai), vegetables, beef meat and tea¹². In the same year, the ministry implemented a new more detailed strategy. The new strategy is based on seven main actions – the collection of data concerning the export markets; the promotion of Japanese food culture by highlighting the “good quality” of Japanese food and agricultural products; holding regular events where to promote Japanese foods and improve logistic networks; supporting the creation of overseas sales bases; reviewing the current regulation and help foreign buyers to buy directly from Japanese wholesalers; relax export regulations; and renovate the procedures for food export. Through these measures, the government is trying to achieve the goal of reaching JPY one trillion in food exports for the year 2019¹³.

Conclusions

In this paper, I analysed one of the most successful elements of Japan's soft power –washoku, the Japanese traditional cuisine. I have argued that Japanese government has played a prominent role in the redefinition and promotion of washoku worldwide, making it one the main features of Japan's soft power and public diplomacy.

While stressing the unique nature of food as an element of identity and nation building, my analysis of Japan's gastrodiploamacy also proposed that the promotion of washoku has been used by the government as a fundamental political resource connected to security and economic concerns. Starting from the assumption that food self-sufficiency rate, one of the lowest in the world, could

¹² http://www.maff.go.jp/j/shokusan/export/e_kikaku/pdf/6_housin.pdf (accessed: 2018/2/17)

¹³ https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/nousui/kyouka_wg/dai10/siryou4.pdf (accessed: 2018/2/19)

be improved only by increasing the demand for Japanese food at home and abroad, this paper showed that Japanese government implemented a strategy of gastrodiploamacy to increase agri-food export and help national agricultural production.

In terms of the broader literature on Japan's soft power and cultural diplomacy, my arguments suggest the need to incorporate the national interests and security-related discourse into empirical analysis of Japan's public diplomacy, as the literature has focused mostly on identity and nation branding-discourse. This type of analysis would lead to a better understanding of the process that shape Japan's cultural diplomacy.

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