

University of Belgrade-Faculty of Political Science

MA in Peace, Security and Development

MA Thesis

Everyday Soft Power of Japan in Serbia (1999–2025)

Mentor: Prof. dr. Filip Ejodus

Student: Masamichi Koshinaga

Index No. 14/2022

Plagiarism disclaimer:

This work was written by me, in my own words, except for quotations from different sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such. I am conscious that the incorporation of material from other works or a paraphrase of such material without acknowledgement will be treated as plagiarism, subject to the custom and usage of the subject, according to the Faculty of Political Science and University of Belgrade regulations.

Table of Contents

<i>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>LIST OF IMAGES.....</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>LIST OF TABLES.....</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>INTRODUCTION.....</i>	<i>1</i>
Research Questions and Main Findings	<i>2</i>
<i>CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</i>	<i>4</i>
1.1 Soft Power	<i>4</i>
1.2 Japan’s Soft Power	<i>5</i>
1.3 Soft Power in Serbia	<i>6</i>
1.3.1 Russia.....	<i>7</i>
1.3.2 China	<i>7</i>
1.3.3 EU	<i>8</i>
1.3.4 US	<i>8</i>
1.3.5 Japan	<i>9</i>
<i>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</i>	<i>12</i>
2.1 Concept of Power.....	<i>12</i>
2.2 Soft Power	<i>15</i>
2.3 Everyday Soft Power	<i>17</i>
<i>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>CHAPTER 4: SOFT POWER OF JAPAN AND ITS RESOURCES IN SERBIA.....</i>	<i>26</i>
4.1 Historical Context of Japan’s Soft Power	<i>27</i>
4.1.1 Post-war Japan’s Non-Militarism.....	<i>27</i>
4.1.2 From Human Security to Economic Security.....	<i>29</i>
4.1.3 Section Summary	<i>31</i>
4.2 Policies	<i>31</i>
4.2.1 Impartial Stance	<i>31</i>
4.2.2 Japan’s ODA	<i>37</i>
4.2.3 Economic Policies	<i>39</i>
4.2.4 Section Summary	<i>41</i>

4.3 Political values.....	42
4.3.1 Hospitality.....	42
4.3.2 Morality.....	44
4.3.3 Democracy	50
4.3.4 Section Summary	55
4.4 Culture.....	55
4.4.1 Japaneseness in Serbian Culture: Books, Films, and Television.....	56
4.4.2 Demystification of Japan.....	59
4.4.3 Japan as Non-China.....	62
4.4.4 Section Summary	65
4.5 Chapter Summary	65
<i>CHAPTER 5: SOFT POWER OF JAPAN IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS IN SERBIA..</i>	<i>67</i>
5.1 Belgrade.....	67
5.1.1 Belgrade as a Special Place In Serbia	68
5.1.2 Yellow Bus, Chinese Presence, and Japanese Nature	68
5.2 Kragujevac	72
5.2.1 Treatment of Japanese	72
5.2.2 Cultural Influences and Historical Memory in Kragujevac.....	74
5.3 Ražanj.....	78
5.3.1 Positive Impressions about Japanese Donation	78
5.3.2 Japan is Neutral, But the Others Are Not.	79
5.3.3 Socioeconomic Challenges in Ražanj	83
5.4 Vrnjačka Banja.....	84
5.4.1 Positive Impression of the Japanese Garden	84
5.4.2 Different Scenarios.....	88
5.4.3 Does It Look Like a Japanese Garden?	90
5.5 Chapter Summary	92
<i>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</i>	<i>96</i>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IR - International Relations

LDP-JSP - Liberal Democratic Party - Japan Socialist Party

ODA - Official Development Assistance

UN PKO Law - United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Law

EU - European Union

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Kosovo - Kosovo and Metohija

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

JBIC - Japan Bank for International Cooperation

JBAS - Japanese Business Alliance in Serbia

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

MOFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

JETRO - Japan External Trade Organization

ICTY - International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

G7 - Group of Seven

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UNMIK - United Nations Mission in Kosovo

SNS - Serbian Progressive Party

POPOS - Projects for Basic Population Needs

CSIS - Center for Strategic and International Studies

UNTAC - United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

EBRD - European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Japanese anime symbol in FPN in Belgrade (2025)	53
Image 2: Japanese anime placards during protests (2025).....	53
Image 3: Japanese manga in a bookstore (2025)	58
Image 4: Japanese word without context in Subotica (2021)	60
Image 5: Japanese flag inside the bus (2022)	69
Image 6: Chinese Cultural Center and Japanese Embassy in Belgrade (2025)	71
Image 7: Japanese garden in Belgrade (2023)	72
Image 8: Gynecology Department Doors, Kragujevac; Left (2023), Right (2025).....	74
Image 9: EU Billboard, Kragujevac City Center (2025)	75
Image 10: Playground Boards, Kragujevac; Left (2021), Right (2024)	76
Image 11: Monument in the center of Kragujevac (2023).....	76
Image 12: Graffiti about NATO airstrikes in Kragujevac (2025).....	77
Image 13: Ivan Vušović School and Donation Board, Ražanj (2021).....	78
Image 14: Doors at Ivan Vušović School, Ražanj (2025)	79
Image 15: Donation Boards from Germany and Japan, Ivan Vušović School (2025)	80
Image 16: EU Donations in Ražanj (2025).....	81
Image 17: Folklore Festival, Ražanj (2025)	82
Image 18: Central Park in Vrnjačka Banja (2025).....	85
Image 19: Sign in Vrnjačka Banja and Board for cyclists (2025)	86
Image 20: Japanese garden overview (2025).....	87
Image 21: Waterfall and wooden pavilion (2025)	87
Image 22: Japanese Garden at Night (2025).....	89
Image 23: Pond in Japanese garden (2025)	91

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Japanese ODA in different categories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023) 38

INTRODUCTION

Following Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Serbia in 2018, Japan's presence in the country has grown more visible, opening a new chapter in bilateral relations between Japan and Serbia. Deepening the countries' bilateral relations occurred via the significant investment from several Japanese companies. The successful strengthening of economic ties can be attributed to the effective use of Japan's soft power to achieve its goals. However, despite this, the research on Japan's soft power in Serbia remains significantly limited. Hence, it is essential to examine the workings of Japan's soft power among Serbian audiences.

This research aims to explore how Japan's soft power in Serbia has been articulated in the period between 1999 and 2025. Drawing on sociologically inspired scholarship focusing on everyday life that shifts the focus of International Relations (IR) from the one focusing on state agents to the locally-grounded perspectives and shedding light on micro-level interactions (Björkdahl, Hall, & Svensson, 2019), this study will address both elite-level policies and discourses and the local-level experiences and perceptions about Japan. By including the perspective of Everyday IR, the study will contribute to understanding the relationships between the two countries, as seen from the perspective of international relations, soft power, and everyday studies.

The pursuit of everyday soft power in this thesis is driven by the need to ground Joseph Nye's soft power concept in the lived experiences of local audiences. Nye (2005) highlights that the value of soft power lies in its adaptability, enabling policymakers and diplomats to consider strategies that enhance influence. However, soft power assessments often rely on sole diplomatic policies or elite discourses, which may overlook how target audiences perceive and engage with these efforts. By integrating everyday aspects, this study tries to capture the nuanced perceptions of Japan's soft power in Serbia and provide more comprehensive and diverse evidence to inform evidence-based policy making (Parkhurst 2017).

This thesis begins its analysis in 1999 intentionally, and there are two reasons to corroborate such a claim. First, since 1999, the Japanese government has been providing Serbian citizens with "the necessary funds and services for everyday life" through Projects for Basic Population Needs (POPOS) (Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in Serbia 2024). This is an important aspect to consider in the Japan-Serbia

relationship in Japan's human security policies as a soft power resource. Second, as Subotić and Ejđus (2021) argue, the truth regime surrounding the NATO intervention in 1999 has outlived Milošević's political regime in Serbia. The 1999 NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia have constructed the worldviews of the Serbian citizens to some extent.

Research Questions and Main Findings

To understand the focus of this study better, it will explore the following main research question and two subquestions:

How has Japan's soft power been articulated and perceived in Serbia from 1999 to 2025?

- In what ways do elites articulate and perceive Japan's soft power in Serbia through policies and discourses?
- In what ways do local citizens in Serbia experience and perceive Japan's soft power in their everyday lives?

Japan's soft power in Serbia from 1999 to 2025 has been articulated in everyday life as an interesting blend of policies, culture, and political values as Japan's soft power resources.

At the elite level, Japan's soft power in Serbia is articulated and perceived through policies and discourses. In terms of policies, Japan's impartial stance in the region, ODA, and economic policies can be significant soft power resources. In terms of political values, the hospitality of each nation, nuanced position in morality, and democracy can be interpreted as effective forms of soft power.

In contrast, Serbian citizens experience and perceive Japan's soft power through Japanese cultural works, which serve as valuable soft power resources. Moreover, Serbian citizens employ their own tactics to engage with these strategic soft power resources, beyond the intentions of elites. Japan's soft power manifests differently across locations: residents of Belgrade have encountered yellow buses donated by Japan, while those in Kragujevac do not recognize connections or symbolic donations from Japan. In Ražanj, a school board on the main road highlights Japanese contributions. The Japanese garden in Vrnjačka Banja exemplifies visitors' positive impressions of Japan.

Considering the various articulations of Japan's soft power shaped across different regions and cultural perceptions in Serbia, this thesis is organized in the following way:

Chapter 1 reviews existing literature about soft power, Japan's global soft power strategies, and soft power in Serbia in terms of Russia, China, the EU, the US, and Japan. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework, discussing the concept of power, soft power studies, and everyday soft power, including concepts of strategy and tactic. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed for the research. Chapter 4 focuses on Japan's soft power in Serbia, covering policies (impartial policies, ODA, economic initiatives), political values (hospitality, morality, and democracy), and culture (Serbian culture concerning Japan, and stereotypes towards Japan and China in Serbia). Chapter 5 investigates the regional differences of Japan's soft power in Serbia, with case studies in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Ražanj, and Vrnjačka Banja. The conclusion summarizes the findings and reflects on their implications for understanding Japan's soft power in Serbia.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Soft Power

Since the 1980s, soft power has been a widely discussed concept in academic circles. One of the simplest definitions of soft power is “the ability to affect others and obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment” (Nye 2023, 37).¹ Nye popularizes the term “soft power” and elaborates on it across several works. In *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990), Nye introduces soft power, emphasizing the role of cultural and ideological attractiveness (Nye 1990, 267). *Soft Power* (2004) provides a more detailed theoretical framework of soft power, identifying its sources (culture, political values, and foreign policies) (Nye 2004, Chapter 1). In *The Future of Power* (2011), Nye introduces “smart power,” which integrates hard power (coercion and payment) with soft power (persuasion and attraction) to achieve strategic outcomes (Nye 2011, xiii).

The concept of soft power has gained significant political traction among practitioners. One reason for its prominence in both academic and policy circles is Joseph Nye’s dual role as a scholar and practitioner, bridging these domains.² In the context of the US-Japan alliance, Nye has exerted considerable influence in policy circles. In 2000, Nye and Richard Armitage formed a bipartisan group to shape a vision for the US-Japan alliance. This effort continued with the “Armitage-Nye reports” in 2007, 2012, 2018, 2020, and 2024, which assess the alliance and propose agendas for future challenges. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has supported these bipartisan efforts and hosted the report releases (CSIS n.d.).

Although widely adopted in policy circles, soft power has faced scrutiny in academic disciplines such as political science. Following Nye’s seminal work, *Soft Power* (2004), scholars have sought to operationalize and elucidate the concept. Despite its importance in explaining international influence, soft power has been criticized for lacking rigor (Zahran and Ramos 2010, 16) and for a research gap in its operationalization (Blanchard and Lu 2012,

¹ The earliest known use of the noun *soft power* is in the 1980s. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/soft-power_n?tl=true

² From 1977 to 1979, Nye served as Deputy to the Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science, and Technology and chaired the National Security Council Group on Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In 1994 and 1995, Nye served as Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs (Greg 2024, 163).

570). These issues render the concept vague, making it prone to appropriation by states and organizations that reinterpret it to suit their strategic interests (Hayden 2015, 19). These challenges are further explored in *The Routledge Handbook of Soft Power* (2023), edited by Naren Chitty, Lilian Ji, and Gary D. Rawnsley, which is divided into three sections: conceptualizing soft power, measuring it, and linking it to broader themes such as international education, statecraft, and science communication. In the handbook, Ji (2023, 91) addresses the challenge of soft power's intangible assets, which are shaped by globalization, global media, commodities, and influential discourses. Consequently, the subjective assets make soft power's effects difficult to measure (Ji 2023, 220).

1.2 Japan's Soft Power

In Eastern Asia, the concept of soft power has gained traction as a strategic tool, especially in countries like Japan, South Korea, and China, to promote their cultural exports and enhance global influence (Otmazgin 2012). Japan, in particular, has effectively harnessed soft power. Winkler (2019) interprets Japan's soft power as a conceptual tool, state practice, or anti-anxiety mechanism, shaped by public diplomacy, its relationship with the United States, and security policies. Japan's soft power encompasses pop culture (e.g., anime, manga, music, fashion) (Iwabuchi 2015), sports mega-events (Jeong and Grix 2023), cultural heritage (Nakano and Zhu 2020), cuisine, cultural traditions, technology, hospitality services (Tamaki 2019), fashion, electronics (Watanabe and McConnell 2008), which foster cultural attraction and global influence. Watanabe (2014) identifies three key domains of Japanese soft power: contributions to peace and human security, Cool Japan, and infrastructure exports.

In Japanese domestic discourse, soft power is closely tied to the Cool Japan, which is rooted in Douglas McGray's article "Japan's Gross National Cool" (2002) in *Foreign Policy*. McGray argues that, despite economic decline, Japan has become a cultural superpower through its global influence in manga, anime, fashion, music, and consumer electronics. Following the 2011 earthquake, which prompted efforts to rebuild Japan's global image, the government launched the Cool Japan initiative, led by policy elites, to brand cultural products and advance national interests through soft power (Cabinet Office, Japan 2019).

However, the Cool Japan initiative and the concept of soft power have faced significant criticism. David Leheny (2015) argues that Japan's focus on soft power, particularly through the Cool Japan initiative, reflects a nation-branding strategy to offset perceptions of its

economic decline relative to China's rising power. Beyond economic critiques, scholars have questioned the initiative's cultural implications. Iwabuchi (2015) critically analyzes Japan's pop-culture diplomacy, situating it within the broader context of global soft power and nation branding trends. Concerning the Cool Japan initiative, Iwabuchi argues that it primarily projects a one-way, homogenized version of Japanese culture rather than engaging in meaningful cross-border dialogue. Not only does such an approach fail to promote genuine intercultural exchange, but it also overlooks Japan's internal cultural diversity, reinforcing a unitary national image (Iwabuchi 2015). Similarly, Tamaki (2019) notes that this initiative reveals the lack of clear focus and highlights the challenge of integrating identity representation with trade promotion. This issue frustrates efforts to create a coherent Japan brand for international audiences (Tamaki 2019).

1.3 Soft Power in Serbia

In the context of Serbia, soft power is essential in understanding its geopolitical relations amidst the influences of global powers such as Russia, China, the EU, the US, and Japan. Although the measurement of soft power is debated, public opinion polls offer a valuable approach by capturing perceptions of cultural and political influence. In the case of Serbia, polls reveal distinct perceptions shaped by its geopolitical balancing. Zuzanna Sielska (2024) shows that Serbian citizens perceive their strongest international relationships as rooted in cultural and political alignment, with 55.8% identifying Russia as the primary ally, followed by China at 29.7%, the EU at 10.5%, and the US at 0.7% (Sielska 2024).³

Similarly, the International Republican Institute (IRI) Western Balkans Regional Poll (February 2–March 2, 2024) reported that 46% view Russia as an important ally, 14% name China, and 36% identify the US as the greatest threat to Serbia (International Republican Institute 2024).⁴

The most recent study by Vuksanović (2025) analyzes Serbian public opinion based on data from a survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in selected European and neighboring countries. The study provides both comparative and interpretive insights into the 2025 findings, revealing a general skepticism toward Western-led institutions and a

³ Conducted between November 2021 and June 2022, the study surveyed 589 randomly selected individuals aged 18 to 65 (Sielska, 2024).

⁴ The EU is not included, as it is not a state.

pragmatic approach in balancing ties with Russia, China, and Western powers. Notably, 70% of respondents identified the United States as the main threat to peace and security in Europe, whereas only 33% perceived Russia as a threat, and just 18% expressed similar concerns about China (Vuksanović 2025, 8). These findings highlight Serbia's complex alignment with non-Western powers, reflecting the effectiveness of Russia and China's soft power.

1.3.1 Russia

The perception of Russia has been positive in Serbia, due to shared historical heritage, religious beliefs, and its support of Serbia in the context of the Kosovo issue (Ejdus 2020; Vuksanović, Cvijić and Samorukov 2022). According to Vuk Vuksanović et al (2022; 2024), Russian soft power is perceived as one of the three pillars of Russian influence in Serbia, alongside energy ties and its position on the unresolved Kosovo question. Interestingly, against the common belief, neither cultural diplomacy nor the shared religious belief (Orthodox Christianity) contributed to the popularity of Russia in Serbia; it is rooted in Serbian history and the preferences of the ruling elites. Moreover, seeing Russia as non-West is another example of Russian appeal to the people of Serbia, especially triggering memories from the 1990s and supporting the claim of victimhood, i.e., the Serbian attitude of being alone against the entire world, or being disliked by everyone. Vuksanović et al argue that such an interpretation of Russian soft power in Serbia works as an “antidepressant-like narrative,” reassuring Serbian people about their deeply held beliefs (2022, 7-8). Furthermore, direct Russian influence is conveyed to Serbian citizens via two media outlets, “Sputnik Serbia” and “RT” (formerly Russia Today). These media outlets do not claim a high presence among the Serbian audience; they have only a limited number of readers. However, despite the lower numbers of consumers of the mentioned outlets, most of the Russian influence comes through the domestic media, especially pro-regime tabloids (Vuksanović, Cvijić and Samorukov 2022).

1.3.2 China

China's role in international cooperation has significantly expanded over the past decade in Eastern Europe, including the Balkans, through the 16+1 framework. Among these countries, the highest level of international cooperation has been established with Serbia, especially via the economic and infrastructural projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, making Serbia its "comprehensive strategic partner" (Obradović 2021, 1772). According to Obradović

(2021), the international cooperation between the two countries is reflected in numerous fields, from economic to cultural. In addition to these aspects of China's soft power in Serbia, Trailović (2024) also emphasizes the positive representation of China among the Serbian political elites as well as media outlets. Such a relationship between Serbia and China is also described by the recently popularized terms in Serbian media discourse, like the "steel" or "iron-clad" friendship (2024, 296).

It should be relevant to add that the soft power of countries like Russia and China also gained prominence in the context of Serbian protests against the lithium mining. The report entitled "Weaponizing Influence: How Russia's and China's Soft Power Clashes Serbia's Civil Society Using Lithium Controversies" (2024) showcases the role both countries had while supporting the Serbian government in restricting civic freedoms, targeting "civil society organizations that supported democratic values and human rights" (2024, 3). While aligning with the Western economic interests in lithium mining, the Serbian government has intensified its repression of civil society, including anti-mining protesters and activists, by utilizing suppressive tactics associated with Russia and China. For instance, the smear campaigns against the activists are mostly inspired by the Chinese report complaining about the American interference in the internal affairs of Serbia (Ibid., 9).

1.3.3 EU

Public discourse in Serbia regarding the European Union and accession is quite complex. Vuksanović et al. (2022) point out a duality in Serbia: while the West is the main role model for the silent majority, evidenced by their very emigration, living, and study plans, the public opinion polls reveal a skepticism towards the EU. For instance, a survey by Leadingtom Research and the Institute for European Studies in May 2025, 52 percent of the Serbian citizens answered they would certainly or probably vote against the referendum on EU membership, while 39 percent would certainly or probably vote for it (Danas 2025).

1.3.4 US

While the public opinion polls show a strong skepticism towards the US, the American culture, including Coca-Cola, jazz, and Hollywood films, has been significant to Serbian culture since the 1960s. During the Yugoslav era, famous American actors appeared in Yugoslav films, and civic culture in Serbia was more Western-oriented than Eastern-oriented

(Vucetic 2018). As a powerful means of soft power are widely consumed in Serbia, which is to be perceived as a desirable locus for the popularization of Hollywood films; that can be addressed as a form of new reality (Milošević 2024). Furthermore, American news was widely consumed in Serbia, particularly during October 2000. During the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević, approximately 45% of Serbian adults listened to Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, compared to 31% who listened to state-controlled radio stations (Nye 2008, 100).

1.3.5 Japan

One of the few studies on Japan and Yugoslav relations is Jelana Glišić's (2017) doctoral thesis "Japanese-Yugoslav Diplomatic Relations in the Cold War, 1952-1980." During the Cold War, Yugoslavia and Japan struggled to maintain autonomy in foreign policy-making and invested considerable effort into preserving a neutral stance in the bipolar world order. Due to the significant influence of the superpowers, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, on both nations, their interactions with these global powers played a crucial role in shaping their diplomatic strategies (Glišić 2017).

Furthermore, according to Blagoje Babić (2009), Serbia, as a former Yugoslav country, has inherited a favorable diplomatic framework for building strong economic ties with Japan. In 1997, the agreements Japan made with Yugoslavia were continued with Serbia, resulting in the regulation of relations via 24 bilateral agreements in trade, cultural cooperation, and science and technology. In 2006, Japan recognized Serbia as a successor of the State Community of Serbia and Montenegro. In the same year, the JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) opened an office in Belgrade (Babić 2009, 149-150).

In terms of Japanese foreign policy concerning its soft power in the region, the most comprehensive existing works are written by Marcela Perić (2019, 2020, 2022), and each of the works deals with different eras of Japan's diplomacy toward (ex)Yugoslavia, from 1989-1993, 1994-1997, and 1998-2013. Perić examines how Japan strategically shifted towards non-military engagement through trilateral (US–Europe–Japan) and multilateral frameworks in relation to dealing with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Japan utilized international institutions like the EBRD, G7, UN, and OSCE to provide humanitarian aid, reconstruction support, and election monitoring, fostering democratic and economic reforms. Between 1994 and 1997, Japan's foreign policy exemplified its commitment to preventive diplomacy and

post-conflict reconstruction. Furthermore, Japan provided substantial humanitarian aid from 1998-2013, especially focusing on human security. Japan's involvement in the Western Balkans shows Japan's use of human security and aid to enhance soft power.

While Perić somewhat positively evaluates Japan's involvement in the region, other studies regard its contribution as less significant. Huliaras (2007) examines Japan's political engagement in Southeastern Europe, particularly the Western Balkans, during and after the 1990s Yugoslav wars. According to the author, Japan's role as a major aid donor was due to Japan's policy constrained by constitutional limits on military engagement. The study highlights Japan's minor involvement in Southeastern Europe, noting that economic motives and political ambitions, including Japan's pursuit of a permanent UN Security Council seat, drove aid to the Balkans (A. C. Huliaras 2007).

Bechev (2015) also argues that Japan's engagement in the Balkans focuses on human security, post-conflict reconstruction, and economic development, complementing the EU's stabilization and integration efforts. Through initiatives led by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Japan has prioritized locally-based projects, such as providing grants to Serbian municipalities. Unlike Western donors, Japan prefers collaborating with municipal authorities over NGOs. Bechev suggests two perspectives on Japan's approach. First, it reflects a traditionalist, hierarchical view of providing aid. Second, Japanese projects aim to maintain political neutrality, positioning themselves as impartial across all parties. Japan prioritizes material support over more politically charged activities (Bechev 2015, 209).

Huliaras and Tzifakis (2007) also compare differences in approaches to human security between Canada and Japan. Both countries have used human security as a new framework for peacekeeping for Canada and development assistance for Japan. That said, authors evaluate that their aid commitments, particularly in the Balkans, remained limited compared to other international actors and their own aid budgets (Huliaras and Tzifakis 2007).

Beyond trade and humanitarian donations from Japan, its influence in Serbia is quite prominent culturally as well. According to Jelena Srbinovski (2009), showing respect for the Serbian cultural scene, Japan's support is visible through cultural and educational exchange based on donations, grants, and funding of the major cultural institutions, like the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, Museum of Vojvodina,

Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad, as well as Belgrade National Theatre (2009, 213). Japanese martial arts, like aikido, karate, and kendo, are also widely practiced across Serbia. Concerning more recent influences, as of the 1990s onward, the popularization of Japanese manga, anime, and literature has been observed not only globally, but in Serbia too (Ibid., 214).

In the context of the Japanese soft power in Belgrade, Ivan Filipović's doctoral thesis, "Soft Power Architecture: Mechanisms, Manifestations, and Spatial Consequences of Embassy Buildings and Exported Ideologies", is also relevant. Filipović focuses on buildings and spaces, using Foucauldian and Marxist frameworks to analyze the Japanese Embassy and Chinese Cultural Center in Belgrade, emphasizing their architectural processes and spatial implications. The research examines how the structures legitimize state ideologies and project soft power. However, the author concludes that "it is postulated that architecture (spatial manifestation) will not (cannot) play a conclusive role of soft power architecture (currently), as the rigid legal framework already defines what and how will be built" (Filipović 2021, 284). Moreover, these diplomatic structures require stringent security measures and receive privileges that limit freedoms typically available in public spaces (Filipović 2021, 285).

Despite the valuable insights offered by existing studies on Japan's soft power in Serbia, the literature exhibits notable limitations. Research on soft power in Serbia predominantly focuses on the influence of major global powers such as Russia, China, the European Union, and the United States, with Japan's role receiving comparatively limited attention. A significant research gap exists in examining how Japan is positioned within Serbian discourses and how these representations shape societal perceptions of Japanese influence. Moreover, the majority of studies in relation to the soft power of Japan emphasize Japan's diplomatic and aid strategies, often neglecting the perspectives of Serbian citizens. This gap is particularly pronounced in the under-exploration of both macro- and micro-level dimensions of Japan's soft power.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for analyzing the concepts of power, soft power, and everyday studies, while exploring their intersection. First, it examines foundational sociological and philosophical perspectives. Second, the discussion shifts to IR-specific frameworks and Joseph Nye's conceptualization of hard and soft power. Building on Nye's framework, the chapter introduces the concept of everyday life, as articulated by Michel de Certeau, to explore how micro-level practices and tactics shape power dynamics. By integrating insights from soft power theory and everyday life, this theoretical framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conceptualization of everyday soft power.

2.1 Concept of Power

Like many important concepts in the humanities and social sciences, power has been extensively discussed across academic disciplines, resulting in a broad range of possible interpretations. Not only has the concept of power been extensively used in IR or security studies, but also across the broader context of the fields of humanities and social sciences.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2014, 823), power is described as “the concept that is at the heart of the subject of social stratification”. It is broadly recognized as a sensitive and controversial concept and requires taking a particular stance depending on the context and theoretical application. Despite its contested nature, power remains an essential concept in the humanities and social sciences.

Max Weber is the central thinker in defining power, especially in the social sciences. Weber developed his perspective to challenge the concept of power in Marx, especially its tendency to conflate economic dominance with political authority. His aim was to point out that power does not necessarily come only from control over economic resources (Scott 2014, 823-824). In his essay “The Distribution of Power within the Political Community: Class, Status, Party,” Weber defines power as “the chance of (...) men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (1958, 180). He also describes power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the

basis on which this probability rests" (Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* 1978, 53).

However, it is relevant to add that Weber's definition has faced some criticism. For instance, the role of will in influencing action raises questions about whether free will is relevant in the acts of individuals (Scott 2014, 823-824). In particular, in cognitive science, free will is typically viewed as distinct. For example, Libet et al (1983) show that brain activity linked to a voluntary action occurs several hundred milliseconds before the conscious awareness of the intent to act. This finding suggests that the brain, rather than free will, triggers voluntary actions (Frith and Haggard 2018).

Following Weber's definition, the behavioral perception of power was further developed by Robert Dahl, who emphasizes that power is a relationship between two actors. Dahl describes power as the ability of actor A to get actor B to do something that B would not otherwise do (Dahl 1957, 202-203). In addition to Dahl's understanding, Steven Lukes (1974) introduced a third face of power, illustrating how power can manipulate actors by shaping their preferences. As Lukes describes, B's choices can occur under "conditions of relative autonomy and, in particular, independently of A's power—for example, through democratic participation" (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 53).

The alternative definition of power is proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and later by their followers, the so-called Marxists. Marxist understanding of 'power' often reflects on the economic power that is defined as a form of control of the means of production. That said, multiple usages of power are important in their conceptual framework. Social and material power often correspond to economic power and, in some cases, are treated as power per se. Moreover, political power is often referred to as state power. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels define this state power as "merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another" (Engels and Marx [1848] 1970, 59). Social power is articulated differently: capital itself is seen as a form of social power. So, as they argue, to be a capitalist requires both personal wealth and social status, for the capital is not individually produced; it is possible only through the united action of many members of society (Ibid., 49). Thus, it may be inferred that this social power cannot pertain to any material thing or property. Instead, for Marx and Engels, 'political power' is attributed to the state, which is where the power is articulated, contested, and exercised (Nigam 1996).

Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci (1971) builds on Marx's conception of power by introducing a more specific concept of 'hegemony,' deflecting attention from economic power or coercion to the realm of dominance through consent. In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci writes that "the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" ([1929] 1971, 504). Thus, the political power of the state is not to be understood as solely repressive but is also secured through the consent of the subordinates by shaping the ideological perceptions and creating a sort of common sense through a plethora of nonrepressive modes of knowledge production" (Ibid.).

Challenging the definitions of power suggested by prominent thinkers, Michel Foucault (1977) further decentralizes the concept of power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that power is capillary; it is everywhere; it is not the privilege of the ruling elites, nor solely a form of resistance, but also operates through people, subjecting them to docility (1977, 26-27). Unlike Gramsci's discussion of ruling through active consent and Marxist perception of power allocated in the relations between the state and its citizens, Foucault sees power as a pervasive network transpiring through individuals, institutions, and discourses alike. This power operates from the "depths of society" through particular mechanisms of surveillance and discipline, constituting subjects who resist and internalize it at the same time (Ibid., 27). Furthermore, Foucault later expands his notion of power by exploring how it shapes subjects. In "The Subject and Power," Foucault contends that the subjects are created in two ways: by a means of subjection to someone else, and through exercising self-control (1982, 781).

While the discussions of the above theorists are frequently referred to in IR, the IR theorizations of power also often reflect realist perspectives, articulating power in traditional terms. For realists, power serves as the core concept foregrounding their analyses. Hans Morgenthau (1948), a prominent realist thinker, argues that regardless of the ultimate goals in international politics, pursuing power is an immediate objective. While realists tend to agree that power plays a central role in political relations, their interpretations of the concept are different. For instance, John Mearsheimer (2001) contends that the structure of the international system compels states to seek power and continuously maximize their interests.

Apart from realist definitions, the IR scholars also discuss the definition of power. Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall Toward (2005) suggested four types of power: compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive. Compulsory power is defined as

“relations of interaction of direct control by one actor over another”. Institutional power is described as “the control actors exercise indirectly over others through diffuse relations of interaction”. Structural power is explained as “the constitution of subjects' capacities in direct structural relation to one another”. Productive power is defined as “the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification” (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 43).

2.2 Soft Power

In contrast to the traditional realist conception of power, Joseph Nye distinguishes between two forms: hard and soft power. Nye first defines power as “an ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not” (2023, 4). He also observes that the capacity to influence others is frequently linked to specific assets. As a result, politicians and diplomats often characterize power as a means of control over the “population, territory, natural resources, economic strength, military capabilities, and political stability” (Nye 2023, 4).

Hard power, according to Nye, is rooted in a nation's military and economic strength and enables coercion (2023, 48). It relies on the use of threats or incentives, for example, if an individual points a gun at you, demands your money, and takes your wallet, your preferences become irrelevant; this is a clear example of hard power (Nye 2023, 114). Although Nye is widely recognized for introducing the concept of soft power, he argues that the term does not encompass all forms of power that avoid the use of force. Power can be based on the strength of a country's military or the strength of its economic resources, but it can also rest on whose narrative prevails (Nye 2023, 113).

On the other hand, soft power is foregrounded on the ability to “shape the preferences of others” (Nye 2005, 5). It is more than just influence or persuasion; in behavioral terms, it is an attractive power (2005, 6). Unlike the traditional understanding of power, soft power manifests quite differently and it utilizes voluntary actions based on attraction to shared values, and a sense of duty, promoting these (2005, 6-7). Soft power is not exclusive to any single nation. It extends beyond mere persuasion or convincing through arguments. It also includes the ability to entice and attract (Nye 2023, 102). Nye also explains that a country's soft power is shaped by its culture (when it appeals to others), its values (when they are

compelling and consistently upheld), and its policies (when they are viewed as inclusive and credible) (Nye 2023, 64). These are called soft power resources.

Scholars like Li Ji (2023) argue that the important aspect of identifying soft power is the fact that it is a three-stage process: “(1) application of soft power resources; (2) cognitive processes of the recipients; and (3) soft power production” (2023, 132). Furthermore, according to Todd Hall (2010), soft power resources must (1) “produce an attraction, and (2) this attraction should help a given state in its pursuit of foreign policy goals” (2010, 198). That considered, it can be argued that Nye’s conceptualization of soft power needs to be refined to meet contemporary academic standards.

There are also some challenges in conducting research on soft power. Firstly, there is a challenge of what qualifies as soft power resources. Nye himself explains it differently across his works. As written above, most notably, he addresses foreign policies, political values and culture as three soft power resources (Nye 2011, 84). On the other hand, Nye also expands this list of soft power resources to incorporate “culture, values, legitimate policies, a positive domestic model, a successful economy, and a competent military” (2011, 99). Considering Nye’s variegating interpretations of soft power, the broader definitions, including categories such as cultural, economic, ethical, legal, military, political, and scientific, can be found in the works of other scholars (Ji 2023, 220).

Once soft power resources are identified, the next challenge is identifying the cognitive processes of the audiences. Research on emotions and perceptions brings forth additional conceptual challenges. For example, recent developments in brain science suggest that emotions cannot be understood solely through brain imaging; language and culture are also discussed as invaluable for understanding how emotions are socially constructed. This perspective corresponds with Lisa Feldman Barrett’s theory of constructed emotions. In her work, *How Emotions Are Made*, Feldman Barrett challenges the classical views of emotions as biologically hardwired brute reflexes, embedded in social institutions, and, as such, reducing humans to mere emotional beasts without rationality (Barrett 2017, xi-xii). Instead, she suggests that emotions are not universal, triggered, or built-in; they are constituted through the combination of people’s internal processes—the actual body properties, and adaptive powers of the brain—and the external influence coming from the people’s environment, which is the result of the culture and the upbringing (Ibid., xii). In this view, different linguistic and cultural settings need to be understood as crucial in shaping soft

power effectiveness instead of mere reliance on emotional responses triggered by certain appeals and other forms of interest.

In a similar vein, in her work *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions*, Batja Mesquita provides additional insight into how emotions are not solely deeply embedded, but are also relational and dependent on the situations/cultures they occur in different languages (Mesquita 2022, 30). Mesquita compares the introspective and essentialist MINE (Mental, INside the person, and Essentialist) model of emotions with the OURS (Outside the person, Relational, and Situated) model of emotions. The former one is foregrounded on the idea of emotions being individually specific, inwardly directed, and having always the same properties. Such a perception of emotions, according to Mesquita, is common in the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) cultures, while the latter model is prominent in the non-WEIRD cultures. So, the OURS model of emotions challenges the understanding of emotions as individually specific; they are outwardly directed, emergent in social interactions, and dependent on situations/cultures in which they arise (2022, 31).

2.3 Everyday Soft Power

That being the case, the theories of the everyday are useful for addressing more nuanced cultural differences, which are vital for the further development of the proposed theoretical approach. By applying the theories of everyday life, this study will address the concept of everyday soft power, a term rarely used in academic discourse. This section seeks to integrate and harmonize the perspectives of soft power and everyday studies, offering a unified approach to the analysis, including the scope of everyday theories to allocate emotions to their situational and societal frameworks.

The theory of everyday life emerged within French cultural thought in the 1980s. Naming Henri Lefebvre as a fundamental source, Michel de Certeau elaborates on the theory of everyday life by demonstrating how everyday practices are not to be seen as the "obscure background of social activity" but rather as active components of social life (1984, xii). According to de Certeau, the main focus of the theory of everyday life should not be on the individual, but on how they affect the social systems they are immersed in via their everyday modes of action and practices(Ibid.).

This theoretical approach was also adopted by IR and security scholars like Daniel Stevens and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2016) and Björkdahl, Hall, and Svensson (2019). For

example, Björkdahl, Hall, and Svensson argue that the theory of everyday life in the context of international relations decentralizes traditional notions of the international by focusing on mundane perspectives and activities. This approach contests elitist methods that depend on abstract frameworks by prioritizing lived experiences and small-scale political perspectives. They also argue that centralizing the everyday is an essential driving force in international relations, for not only does it highlight transformative sites within the field, but it also contextualizes the entire discipline in the “lived space of the everyday” (Björkdahl, Hall and Svensson 2019, 124). Thus, the focus on everyday life intends to expand the scope of the research in IR and focuses on the role of everyday practices in understanding global politics (Ibid.).

However, some scholars point out that everyday life has been under-theorized in the context of IR, even though they agree that examining micro-level patterns enables the identification of macro-level outcomes (Björkdahl, Hall and Svensson 2019, 126). So it is better to return to de Certeau’s framework once again. One of the most important points of his work is that he refines his theoretical framework by offering two binary concepts: strategy and tactic. In terms of strategy, de Certeau argues that:

A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles," "targets," or "objects" of research). Strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed (de Certeau 1984, xix).

In this passage, de Certeau depicts how powerful establishments create a controlled, “proper” space where they can exert influence by shaping relations with others. By establishing this place of power, they can constitute totalizing discourses or systems to organize and showcase their influence across both social and physical domains.

Regarding the concept of a "tactic," a counter concept to strategy, de Certeau argues that:

A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The "proper" is a victory of space over time (de Certeau 1984, xix)

In addition, he adds that:

Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation (de Certeau 1984, 39)⁵.

The passages illustrate de Certeau's key distinction between strategies and tactics. As discussed above, the strategies are grounded in definitive, institutionalized positions of power, while tactics appear to be more adaptable. That is, de Certeau describes how less powerful actors operate in spaces controlled by those with greater power and control, employing opportunistic or time-sensitive actions that can be understood as a form of resistance to these dominant structures.

Soft power resources, such as cultural diplomacy and ODA, can be strategically deployed by state actors to influence perceptions and behaviors. Drawing on de Certeau's framework, the concepts of strategy and tactics are particularly relevant. For instance, active audiences may employ tactics to engage with or reinterpret spaces and resources provided by state actors pursuing soft power objectives. However, not all soft power resources afford audiences significant room for tactical improvisation. For example, when governments provide physical infrastructure, such as doors or windows, audiences may be limited to basic interactions, such as opening or closing them, leaving little space for creative or subversive tactics.

In this sense, everyday soft power can incorporate de Certeau's dichotomies to analyze the configuration of the concepts as well as the phenomena. For example, in soft power studies, scholars often employ binary concepts, such as strategic and non-strategic soft power. While non-strategic soft power is relevant, Nye's framework emphasizes the importance of intentionally targeting audiences to shape their preferences, suggesting that how messages are received is as crucial as their intended recipients. Within this context, soft power can be both strategic and non-strategic, as influence may arise intentionally or unintentionally through soft power resources (Ji 2023, 14). Then, how can we apply the logic of everyday life to the dichotomy between strategic and non-strategic soft power? This theoretical framework posits

⁵ The fact that these explanations are lengthy and somewhat vague can be attributed to the academic era they were created—France in the 1970s. As de Certeau himself refers to Foucault, it can be noted that his writing is strongly influenced by the style of post-structuralism. Furthermore, looking into the difference between strategy and tactic, de Certeau illustrates the procedural nature of tactics by reflecting on a post-structuralist way of thinking that rejects strict and binary modes of thinking favoring more fluid, non-binary perspectives.

that strategic soft power may be enacted through public diplomacy, yet its actual influence on audiences may yield non-strategic or unintended effects. Consequently, both strategic and non-strategic soft power can be perceived differently depending on cultural communities or even locations.

Furthermore, in soft power studies, both the perspectives of agents and audiences must be considered. Ji (2023) distinguishes between two methodological frameworks: the ‘agent-focused’ and ‘audience-centered’ approaches. However, she notes that relatively little attention has been paid to the empirical analysis of how audiences receive and interpret messages (Ji 2023, 91). Soft power audiences are active participants whose perceptions are shaped by their values and worldviews; this does not negate the fundamentally strategic nature of soft power (Ji 2023, 14). In this context, the study of everyday soft power can include micro-actors alongside state actors. Both soft power and everyday studies consider not only state or macro-actors but also the roles of the public and other micro-actors. As demonstrated in Vaughan-Williams and Pisani’s (2018) research, incorporating non-elite knowledge and experiences into dominant elite discourses or policies can provide a more nuanced perspective.

As such, the everyday soft power approach is also valuable because it deflects attention from public diplomacy, state actors, and the sender of soft power. For example, when a state-funded project attracts only 10 to 20 participants, its actual impact may be far smaller than expected. On the other hand, informal or non-state-funded events, without coverage by the state media, may attract thousands of participants and exert greater soft power influence. Observing societies deeply divided between regime supporters and opponents, solely relying on certain state media might be limiting.

Another key dichotomy arises in the context of Japanese soft power in Serbia. Agents and audiences in both countries often share thoughts or narratives, blurring the lines between agent and audience. In such cases, Japanese and Serbian agents may mutually influence each other. Moreover, the Japanese government may strategically craft narratives for international audiences, but Serbian audiences may interpret these messages differently from audiences in other countries. Thus, the dichotomy between local (Serbian) and international audiences is also significant.

In that sense, everyday life studies are also linked to the contemporary discussions of ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding, as discussed by Filip Ejodus (2021) and Nemanja Džuverović (2023). Speaking about the problematic dichotomy between local and international, as well as the necessity to surpass the state-centric perspective, is critical in analyzing the ‘local turn.’ Looking into Ejodus’s (2021) discussion of critical perspectives on the local turn, one can argue that the emphasis on the local aligns with the ideas posed by the theories of everyday life in an attempt to challenge rather binary understandings of power within the context of local vs. international. That is, as Ejodus illustrates, such an understanding might easily fall under the scope of postcolonial interpretation for its persistent portrayal of the local as inferior and monolithic in comparison to the international (2021, 51). He proposes that it is necessary to overcome such a binary perception of power and allow for a more nuanced, “diffused” interpretation. Also, resorting to anthropological and ethnographic methodologies might be an equally fruitful direction for further research of the local turn (Ibid., 52-53).

In a similar vein, Džuverović also emphasizes how ethnography and geography are relevant lenses to address the local turn for providing a needed nuanced perspective to peace studies and corroborating the perception of the local in plurality (2022, 2). He also addresses the literature on social relations to emphasize local-local relations and not solely relations between the local and international actors. In this way, the research perspective is broadened and allows for a “hidden transcript,” often unavailable for international researchers (Džuverović 2022, 2).

As outlined, the everyday soft power approach offers a framework to transcend binary understandings of soft power. This thesis identifies several theoretical dichotomies: strategic and non-strategic soft power, strategy and tactics, agent and audience, local and international, local and national, and Japan and Serbia. Crucially, these dichotomies do not primarily involve one concept or community seeking to overcome or dominate the other. Instead, the focus is on analyzing the configuration of these binaries in practice. To this end, this research adopts relationalism, which emphasizes the configurations of these binaries as the primary focus of analysis (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 318). This perspective is significant because it illustrates how everyday soft power treats these concepts not as passive entities but as dynamic.

Furthermore, it is important to better understand how everyday soft power can be investigated. Referring to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, de Certeau highlights the following insight:

If it is true that the grid of "discipline" is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what "ways of operating" form the counterpart, on the consumer's (or "dominee's"?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order. (de Certeau 1984, xv)

In this paragraph, de Certeau shows how discipline and control cannot be understood as absolute: within these spaces, there is always a place for resistance and creativity intended to evade the mentioned systems of power. By emphasizing these “popular procedures,” de Certeau demonstrates the pervasive existence of power and how ordinary people are not powerless; on the contrary, they find ways to resist the dominant structures, asserting their very autonomy.

In conclusion, integrating soft power and everyday studies provides a robust theoretical framework for analyzing soft power dynamics. The concept of everyday soft power, informed by Nye's notion of soft power and de Certeau's theory of everyday life, shifts the analytical focus from elite-driven strategies to micro-level practices and tactics that shape power through lived experiences. Furthermore, this framework deconstructs several binary concepts explored in this thesis, including strategic and non-strategic soft power, strategy and tactics, agent and audience, local and international, and Japan and Serbia.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed discourse analysis, ethnography, and multimodal approaches to examine Japanese soft power in Serbia. Discourse analysis is used to explore how Japan's soft power resources—policies, political values, and culture—are constructed, articulated, and received within the Serbian context.⁶ By focusing on discourse analysis, this study seeks to understand the meanings and interpretations that shape Japan's soft power in Serbia, emphasizing the interplay between Japan as the agent and Serbian audiences. Primary sources include governmental websites, news outlets, videos, and social media posts in Serbian, English, and Japanese, analyzing the discourse of politicians and diplomats, such as the Japanese Prime Minister, the Japanese ambassador to Serbia, the Serbian President, and the Serbian ambassador to Japan. Secondary sources comprised existing literature.

The ethnography was employed to analyze both Serbian national tendencies and the unique characteristics of each research location in relation to Japan's soft power. I sought to capture nuanced insights into how Serbian citizens perceive and interact with Japanese culture, policies, and values. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the interplay between national-level attitudes toward Japan and localized perspectives shaped by each region's distinct socio-cultural.

The ethnography involved semi-structured interviews conducted between June and July 2025 with 22 Serbian citizens: 10 individual interviews and one group interview with 12 participants. Most interviews were conducted in person, with two conducted online. Participants were selected from personal acquaintances or through personal connections and divided into two groups: experts familiar with Serbia-Japan relations and local residents without specific knowledge of Japan from the research locations (Belgrade, Kragujevac, Ražanj, and Vrnjačka Banja). Among the experts, interviews included four individuals: two former employees of the Japanese embassy in Serbia, one former employee of the Serbian embassy in Japan, and two PhD holders familiar with the topic, alongside three researchers who conducted studies in Japan with governmental or research funding. Among local residents, interviews included two Belgrade residents (one with a BA in Japanese Studies, both Japanese speakers, one a former online English teacher for Japanese students), three

⁶ Discourse analysis is seen as one of the valid methods to analyze the soft power evaluations (Ji 2023, 92).

Kragujevac residents (one a former online English teacher for Japanese students), twelve school workers in Ražanj (one a former online English teacher for Japanese students), one Vrnjačka Banja resident, and two tourists in Vrnjačka Banja.^{7 8}

Ethnographic observations were drawn from visits to various Serbian locations between 2017 and 2019 and during my residence in Serbia as a Japanese citizen from 2016 to 2017 and 2020 to 2025, living in Novi Sad, Subotica, Belgrade, Kragujevac, and Ražanj, with research-related visits to Vrnjačka Banja. Observations focused on opinions about Japan and Japanese people overheard in these locations, and perceptions of Japan as well as Japanese people. In Belgrade, Kragujevac, and Ražanj, where I resided for one year, four years, and six months, respectively, photographs were taken. In Vrnjačka Banja, observations were conducted as a tourist over two days in 2020, with additional observations in the Japanese garden on July 15 and 16, 2025.

The research locations were selected for the following reasons: Belgrade has the highest concentration of Japanese soft power resources in Serbia, including Japanese donations, products, and restaurants. Kragujevac was chosen as a typical Serbian city with minimal Japanese presence, selected due to my extended residence there. Ražanj was included because its city center features a school with a prominent board noting a Japanese donation, visible to all entering the city. Vrnjačka Banja was selected for its Japanese garden, a tourist attraction donated by the Japanese government.

As a researcher, I position myself as an outsider who learned Serbian culture and language later in life. However, as my partner is Serbian, some locals perceive me as a “*srpski zet*” (a foreigner married to a Serbian), which can influence how I am viewed compared to other foreigners. When necessary, I explained this to interviewees but did not disclose it to all, as it was not always relevant.

The multimodal approach provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing the multifaceted nature of everyday life within socio-cultural contexts. Unlike traditional discourse analysis, which focuses on verbal texts, multimodality incorporates visual and other representational modes embedded in everyday settings. Perceptions of the world in everyday life are shaped by senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—each relying on specialized

⁷ Twelve individuals were primarily approached for a group interview based on their request. Some were interviewed individually, and some entered or left the room during the process. All are school workers.

⁸ This section is written not to disclose personal profiles.

"perceptual receptors" (Holloway and Hubbard 2001, 40). De Certeau's (1984) observations of urban walking practices exemplify multimodality. As Theo van Leeuwen (2024), this approach is particularly relevant in understanding everyday interaction. This approach bridges micro-level practices and macro-level structures, aligning with the everyday soft power framework.⁹

Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed. This research adhered to strict ethical standards to protect participants' rights and privacy. The project abstract and application were reviewed and approved by the ethical committee at Belgrade University. All participants provided informed consent through signed forms after receiving written and oral explanations of the project's objectives and procedures. Participation was voluntary, involved no vulnerable groups, and offered no financial compensation. All data was anonymized, and audio recordings, made only with explicit consent, were deleted immediately after transcription. Transcripts are securely stored on encrypted devices and will be destroyed upon completion of the Master's program. The study posed no risk of harm or environmental impact. Results were made available to participants and the public to ensure transparency. No ethical concerns arose during the research.

⁹ Ji (2023) also points out, Ji argues that studies on soft power also focuses heavily on discursive constructs (Ibid., 91).

CHAPTER 4: SOFT POWER OF JAPAN AND ITS RESOURCES IN SERBIA

Japan's soft power exerts varying degrees of influence depending on the audience. While some of the Japanese soft power resources are globally recognized as hallmarks of Japan's soft power, their reception and impact differ significantly across countries. There are soft power resources that are not explicitly framed as such by external actors but resonate strongly within Serbian society. Furthermore, the articulation and perception of Japanese soft power may diverge from how it is strategically projected by Japanese agencies, as local citizens interpret these resources through their own lenses. Despite the growing academic interest in Japan's soft power globally, its specific dynamics in Serbia remain underexplored. This chapter seeks to address this research gap by analyzing how Japan's soft power has been articulated and perceived in Serbia from 1999 to 2025.

This chapter examines the historical foundations and key dimensions of Japan's soft power (foreign policies, political values, and culture) in Serbia, following Joseph Nye's framework. It is organized as follows: it. First, before examining the Serbian case, it provides a historical overview of Japanese soft power, tracing its political evolution since the end of World War II. Second, it explores how Japanese policymakers and diplomats strategically engage in policies and discourses to promote Japan's impartial stance, ODA, and economic policies. Third, it discusses how political values—such as hospitality, morality, and democratic principles—are shaped and co-constructed through mutual narratives involving Japanese and Serbian politicians, diplomats, media, and citizens. Fourth, it examines culture, highlighting how Serbian citizens actively engage with Japanese books, films, anime, and other cultural products. The culture section includes stereotypes about Japan and China as well. While positive stereotypes of Japan persist, direct experiences often demystify these idealized perceptions. Additionally, Serbian citizens frequently compare Japan to China, with Japan often viewed more favorably due to negative perceptions of Chinese products or influence.

4.1 Historical Context of Japan's Soft Power

4.1.1 *Post-war Japan's Non-Militarism*

One of the primary reasons Japan adopted soft power as a strategic tool is its post-war commitment to a non-militaristic stance, enshrined in its constitution, which was promulgated on November 3, 1946, and enacted on May 3, 1947, with Article 9 playing a pivotal role in this transformation.¹⁰

Article 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized (Prime Minister's Office of Japan).

Article 9 significantly reshaped Japan's post-war trajectory by embedding pacifism in its national policy. However, interpretations of Article 9 have evolved, sparking debates about the constitutionality of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, established in 1954. For instance, the Japan Socialist Party's Basic Policy historically deemed both the Japan-US Security Treaty and the Self-Defense Forces unconstitutional, a stance that persisted until the 1994 coalition government led by Socialist Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama pragmatically acknowledged the Self-Defense Forces' legitimacy. Similarly, until the 2015 reinterpretation of the constitution, collective defense was widely considered incompatible with Article 9 (Sakaiya 2023). Despite these debates, successive Japanese governments have maintained that Article 9 prohibits the establishment of a traditional national defense force, relying instead on the Self-Defense Forces and exercising caution in overseas deployments. Scholars argue that this pacifist framework has enabled Japan to avoid direct involvement in international military engagements, unlike its ally, the United States (Hasebe 2012), thereby enhancing its soft power through a global image of peace and restraint.

¹⁰ A key point of contention surrounding Article 9 is its origin—whether it was imposed by the United States or emerged from Japan's own aspirations. Historical research strongly corroborates that General MacArthur was the primary architect of Article 9 (Sugitani 2024). However, the debate over whether Article 9 was externally imposed or internally driven, and whether Article 9 is beneficial or detrimental to Japan's interests, remains a political issue in postwar Japanese discourse(Ibid.).

On April 28, 1952, the San Francisco Peace Treaty, with only 49 countries signing, and the Japan–US Security Treaty went into effect.¹¹ The peace treaty did not achieve full peace, as the Soviet Union, China, and some allies abstained (Iokibe 2011, 55). The Japan–US Security Treaty solidified Japan's position as a pro-American economic power aligned with the Western bloc. Afterwards, under Article 6 of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, and the US–Japan Administrative Agreement, US Forces have been stationed in Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1960).

Japan's postwar trajectory, shaped by its non-militaristic stance under Article 9 and the Japan–US Security Treaty, established a pacifist, liberal democratic framework (Sakaiya 2023, 56). Scholars note that since the 1950s, Japan adhered to the Yoshida Doctrine, which prioritized economic recovery, minimal armament, and reliance on the Japan–US Security Treaty. This doctrine guided Japan's alignment with the Western bloc, fostering stability while constraining its foreign policy to a reactive stance during the Cold War (Ichihara 2018, 12-13). As Japan's economy expanded rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s, driven by the Yoshida Doctrine, it faced growing international expectations to contribute to global peace. Regarding ODA, Japan's contributions became among the largest globally. When Japan joined the Development Assistance Committee in 1960, its aid was approximately one-twentieth of that of the United States; however, by the 1980s, Japan's economic growth enabled it to surpass the United States as the world's leading donor country (Yamagata 2023, 194).¹² Japan's traditional ODA emphasized non-military and non-political principles, focusing on rebuilding trust and enabling developing nations to access resources and markets for economic recovery while avoiding aid tied to promoting democracy or human rights, which was perceived as political interference (Shiga 2023, 252).¹³

¹¹ In the 1951 peace treaty negotiations, Prime Minister Yoshida resisted John Foster Dulles, an advisor to President Harry Truman, who urged rapid Japanese rearmament, favoring instead a gradual approach to focus on economic recovery. Yoshida strategically deepened Japan's alliance with the United States to advance this goal (Iokibe 2011, 215).

¹² Then, the burst of Japan's economic bubble in the early 1990s led to a continuous expansion of government borrowing and aimed to curtail government spending in the 2000s, which included cuts to ODA (Yamagata 2023).

¹³ Apart from the ODA, broader security responsibilities were undertaken in response to the Gulf Crisis. While there was internal backlash, Japan passed the UN PKO Law in 1992, permitting its Self-Defense Forces to engage in peacekeeping operations (Iokibe 2011, 180).

4.1.2 From Human Security to Economic Security

In the 1990s, Japan adopted the human security approach as an additional strategy to fulfill its global responsibilities. Since then, Japan has leveraged the concept of human security to strengthen its soft power by fostering peace and development through non-military means.¹⁴ Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, defines human security as “a way of thinking that focuses on each individual and places top priority on their safety while emphasizing that people themselves promote their own safety and development field” (Osa 2021, 253). Hideaki Ueda, former Japanese ambassador to Austria, notes that human security has become a hallmark of Japan’s brand within the United Nations (Ueda 2017).

In practice, Japan formalized its commitment to human security through key initiatives. In a December 1998 policy speech in Hanoi, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi announced the establishment of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, with Japan contributing approximately USD 4.63 million in March 1999 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022). Since 1998, Japan’s Diplomatic Bluebook has incorporated human security as a core pillar of its foreign policy, reflecting its integration into Japanese diplomacy.¹⁵ By embedding human security in its aid policy, Japan has actively promoted this concept through bilateral assistance and support for international organizations, employing targeted strategies—such as health, education, and disaster relief programs—to address global human security challenges (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023). These efforts have enhanced Japan’s global reputation as a leader in non-military peacebuilding, a key facet of its soft power.

However, ongoing discussions question whether Japan’s current policies, including soft power and human security, remain aligned with their traditional emphasis, particularly

¹⁴ Since the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, 'human security' has been considered a significant concept in theory and practice. UNDP identified four characteristics in considering the basic concept of "human security" in its Human Development Report. Human security is defined in the following four characteristics: (1) it is a universal concern, (2) The components of human security are interdependent, (3) it is easier to ensure through early prevention than later intervention, and (4) it must be human-centered. Furthermore, the report identified two major components of human security: 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want.' In order to reflect on the idea of human security, the basic measures are stipulated 'from territorial-oriented security to people-oriented security,' and 'from security based on armaments to security based on sustainable human development' (UNDP 1994, 22-24, UNDP 1999).

¹⁵ Japan has adopted the following human security approaches: 1) the approach of protection from the objective and the enhancement of capacity that enables one's own choices and actions objectively, 2) a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to various objectives, 3) national and international organizations advocating a participatory approach involving NGOs and civil society, and 4) top-down and bottom-up thinking (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023)'.

following the policy shifts during and after Shinzo Abe's second administration (2012–2020). Abe's nearly eight-year tenure as prime minister significantly reshaped Japan's security and foreign policy. His administration established the National Security Strategy and Council, reinterpreted Article 9 in 2014 to permit collective self-defense, and passed the 2015 security legislation, comprising eleven bills. These bills expanded the roles of the Self-Defense Forces to include overseas rescues, UN peacekeeping missions, and logistical support for allied forces in regional crises (Hornung 2021).

Japan's ODA policy also underwent significant changes. Abe lifted bans on weapons exports, integrating ODA into the National Security Strategy to bolster regional security, particularly in response to China's growing influence (Yamamoto 2016). Consequently, Japan's ODA has increasingly prioritized national security interests. As global power competition intensifies, Japan has prioritized geopolitical strategic relationships over the political systems of recipient countries, including authoritarian regimes. This shift poses a dilemma, as Japan must balance its commitment to universal values with the strategic need to counter China's influence (Shiga 2023).

While Japan has traditionally emphasized human security as a core component of its soft power, the concept of economic security (*keizai anzen hoshō*) has recently emerged as a prominent term in Japanese policy discourse.¹⁶ The Liberal Democratic Party defines economic security as “ensuring the nation's independence, survival, and prosperity from an economic perspective” (Institute of Geoeconomics 2024). Unlike traditional security, economic security involves both state and corporate actors. To institutionalize this concept, the Japanese government appointed a minister of economic security and established economic security divisions within key agencies. In 2022, the Economic Security Promotion Act was passed to secure supply chains, protect patents, develop advanced technologies, and ensure infrastructure security (Adler 2023). In 2025, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underwent its largest reorganization in nearly two decades, creating a dedicated economic security division (Mainichi 2025).

Critics argue that the revised Development Cooperation Charter of 2023 places greater emphasis on Japan's national interest, particularly in fostering peace and economic stability,

¹⁶ As written in Foreign Policy(2023), “economic security” has become a buzzword in Japanese government documents (Adler 2023).

compared to the 2015 Charter (Yamagata 2023, 262). The Charter's central focus has shifted toward security, including economic security (Yamagata 2025). Similarly, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's statements on economic security have been critiqued for employing securitization rhetoric, framing economic policies as legitimate security concerns to justify emergency measures (Kishino 2023).

4.1.3 Section Summary

Japan's soft power, rooted in its postwar non-militarist Constitution and Article 9, prioritized economic growth over military engagement, reinforced by the Japan–US Security Treaty and Yoshida Doctrine. As a leading ODA donor, Japan emphasized nonmilitary aid for economic recovery. Since the 1990s, soft power has been channeled through human security, promoting peace via initiatives like the UN Trust Fund for Human Security. However, geopolitical shifts have pivoted Japan's focus toward economic security, with ODA aligned with strategic national interests, notably countering China.

4.2 Policies

This section examines Japan's strategic use of soft power in Serbia, particularly through its impartial diplomatic stance, ODA, and economic policies. By maintaining an impartial stance during the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s, Japan avoided the politicization that characterized Western countries' relations with Serbia, fostering a positive perception among Serbian audiences. Key Japanese diplomats, such as Yasushi Akashi and Sadako Ogata, and politicians, such as Shinzo Abe, played pivotal roles. Furthermore, Japan's ODA and economic policies have reinforced its soft power by supporting Serbia's development and promoting sustainable economic growth.

4.2.1 Impartial Stance

Research in political science suggests that domestic politics can significantly shape the effects of soft power, particularly when bilateral relationships become politicized, leading to negative perceptions of soft power resources by target audiences (Incerti et al. 2021).¹⁷ In

¹⁷ The paper "The logic of soft power competition: evidence from East Asia" itself in the video is still not published in July 2025.

Serbia, domestic political actors have not framed Japan as a politicized entity. Consequently, Serbian citizens likely perceived Japan as a neutral or positive actor within their worldview under the "truth regime" (Subotić and Ejđus 2021). This perception stems from Japan's non-involvement in the NATO intervention and its distinct diplomatic approach. Japan leveraged this favorable perception in Serbia, maintained through the truth regime during and after the 1990s, by adopting an impartial stance to foster and strengthen ties. This approach preserved existing economic interests and created opportunities for future engagement (Perić 2020).¹⁸

Although Japan did not participate militarily in the Yugoslav conflicts, two key Japanese diplomats represented its national interests through international organizations: Yasushi Akashi, who served as the UN Secretary-General's envoy for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1994 to 1995, and Sadako Ogata, who led the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from 1991 to 2000. The impartiality of Akashi and Ogata left a relatively positive impression on Serbian public discourse, unlike the perceptions of many Western countries. By avoiding being cast as an overt adversary in the Serbian narrative, these Japanese officials laid the foundation for Serbian audiences to view Japan's soft power resource positively.

In 1993, under Yasushi Akashi's leadership, Japan contributed to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) mission, facilitating successful elections and reshaping its approach to peacekeeping (Iokibe 2011, 180). Building on this success in non-military contributions to the international community, Akashi was appointed as the UN Secretary-General's envoy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, with his impartial stance endorsed by the Japanese government. Amid the Yugoslav wars, which had already resulted in significant casualties, Japan's foreign minister expressed support for Akashi and the UN's role, stating in May 1995: "The only true solution is through negotiations, not by the use of armed forces, and has repeatedly urged this upon the conflicting parties" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1995).

¹⁸ Yasushi Akashi prefers the concept of "impartial" over "neutral." According to him, a neutral intermediary lacks ideas and principles. In contrast, an impartial intermediary acts fairly and objectively, guided by justice in determining how one should act. It does not necessarily take a central position among the positions of the actors involved (Akashi 2010, 48).

Akashi later reflected on the conflicting narratives of the Yugoslav wars, emphasizing the complexity of perspectives among ethnic groups (Akashi 2014). In a 2010 interview, he argued that Western media portrayals of the Bosnian War were overly simplistic, stating:

The reality of the Bosnian War differed from how Western media portrayed it. Both sides committed atrocities, targeting non-combatant civilians, and there were cases where the Bosnian government provoked the other side. (...) Namely, while there were differences in degree, all three parties to the conflict were both perpetrators and victims. Our views never aligned with the simplistic good-guy/bad-guy narrative depicted by Western media. (Akashi 2010, 138-139)

Notably, Akashi did not view Slobodan Milošević negatively; instead, Akashi evaluated him positively, highlighting Milošević's sharp intellect in international diplomacy. Akashi noted:

Regarding international affairs, Milošević, with his keen insight and sharp intellect, was highly regarded and held in great expectation by figures such as Lord David Owen, Thorvald Stoltenberg, and Richard Holbrooke. He was entirely different from the emotionally driven Serbian nationalists like Karadžić or Mladić. However, many of the people Milošević relied on as subordinates were utterly incompetent (Akashi 2010, 147-148)

Akashi frequently mentioned Milošević positively in subsequent interviews (Akashi 2010).¹⁹

However, the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 drew significant criticism toward Akashi, particularly from non-Serb parties. His impartial stance, intended to avoid confrontation with the Serbs, reportedly frustrated Kofi Annan, then head of UN peacekeeping operations (ICTY 2007). Akashi resigned, accepting responsibility for failing to prevent the tragedy. Nevertheless, Japan's basic stance on the Bosnian War remained consistent, as articulated by the Japanese press secretary in a July 1995 press conference:

[...] We support the United Nations resolution which calls on the Bosnian Serbs to withdraw from Srebrenica. In that statement, we also stated that a lasting solution to the problem cannot be achieved through the use of force, that only peaceful dialogue can bring peace to the region. We also stated that we supported the efforts of the United Nations led by Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Former Yugoslavia Yasushi Akashi, by the Co-Chairmen of the

¹⁹ In Japanese, *Serbia Travelogue* (セルビア紀行), published in 2022 by Junichi Maruyama, former Japanese ambassador to Serbia (2017–2020), frequently references the works of Nobuhiro Shiba, especially his book *Modern History of Yugoslavia* (ユーゴスラヴィア現代史), originally published in 1996 and revised in 2021. *Modern History of Yugoslavia* is written in a tone similar to Yasushi Akashi's interviews, defending the Yugoslav side, particularly Milošević and the Serbs as an ethnic group, while critically addressing the other republics (except Serbia) and the international community.

Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, and also the efforts of the Contact Group. That is our basic stance on the situation in Bosnia (Press Conference by Press Secretary 18 July 1995).

The Srebrenica failure under Akashi's leadership prompted Japanese foreign policy and aid officials to act, leading Tokyo to channel substantial humanitarian aid to Bosnia to bolster Japan's regional standing while maintaining impartiality toward ethnic divisions (A. C. Huliaras 2007).

In contrast, Sadako Ogata's account reveals a different perspective, highlighting attempts by Milošević's administration to manipulate perceptions of the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. Ogata recounts:

I traveled from Belgrade to Kosovo and visited a place where many displaced people had taken refuge in a mosque. I spoke with several women, all exhausted, who described how they were driven from their villages. They recounted horrific stories, like having their homes set on fire or their livestock killed before their eyes.

I immediately sent a letter to President Milošević detailing what I had heard. When I arrived in Montenegro next, a Serbian refugee minister—likely dispatched by Milošević—was waiting for me. He claimed that everything I had seen and heard in Kosovo was staged by Albanian residents. I strongly refuted this, saying it was impossible, but I was genuinely shocked. It showed how much UNHCR's activities mattered to them and how concerned they were (Ogata 2015, 174).

Ogata played a pivotal role in advancing human security policies, urging Japan to assume a more prominent global role. Her influence galvanized public and governmental support for significant humanitarian aid to refugees, particularly during and after the Kosovo conflict (A. C. Huliaras 2007, 22).

During the 1999 NATO airstrikes, Japan articulated a nuanced position, stating that it “understood the use of force by NATO” while continuing to advocate for “the pursuit of a peaceful resolution” (Gilson 2010, 70).^{20 21} Notably, the Japanese embassy in Belgrade

²⁰ According to existing research, Japanese officials were unaware of NATO's airstrike plans until 20 minutes before the attacks began (A. C. Huliaras 2007, 21). However, the original source is unclear, and one of my interviewees expressed doubt about this claim, suggesting that a Japanese television company might have known about the plans in advance..

²¹ In the Japanese-speaking world, the lack of knowledge about the Kosovo War is striking. For instance, the book *Human Rights and the State* (『人権と国家』), written by Stanford University sociology professor Kiyoteru Tsutsui, received the prestigious Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities. Despite the selection committee including prominent figures such as Akihiko Tanaka (President of JICA) and Yuichi Hosoya (a leading political historian and former member of the Advisory Board of Japan's National Security

remained operational during this period, unlike many Western embassies that evacuated, earning appreciation from Slobodan Milošević for Japan's steadfast presence (Akashi 2010, 161-162). Furthermore, when Yugoslavia severed diplomatic relations with Germany due to its participation in the NATO airstrikes, Germany requested Japan to represent its interests in Yugoslavia. Consequently, a section titled "Representation of German Interests at the Embassy of Japan" was established within the Japanese Embassy in Belgrade (Owada 2021).

Following the Kosovo conflict, Japan pursued non-military approaches to support the Western Balkans, emphasizing mediation and humanitarian aid delivered through multilateral organizations (Perić 2020). In 2001, Japan's Foreign Minister visited Serbia, further facilitating significant ODA to the country. Although Serbian officials above the ministerial level frequently visited Japan, high-level bilateral contacts remained limited (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024).

Japan's consistent advocacy for an impartial stance since the 1990s continues to distinguish its relationship with Serbia from that of other Western countries. A notable example is Japan's stance on the Belgrade-Prishtina relation. With its strong ties with the United States and susceptibility to its influence, Japan recognized Kosovo's independence on March 18, 2008 (Perić 2020, 41). However, Japan abstained from voting on Kosovo's membership in UNESCO and Interpol (Project of MIND 2024; RTS 2018). During a UNESCO meeting, a Japanese official expressed concerns that accepting Kosovo as a member could mirror the case of Palestine, which joined UNESCO in 2011 despite the strong US opposition, leading to a 22% reduction in the US funding for the organization. The official noted that China and Russia, which do not recognize Kosovo's statehood, might take similar actions. Consequently, Japan concluded that granting UNESCO membership to Kosovo was "premature" and that "political issues should not be dealt with in UNESCO" (MEXT 2016). Japan's abstention prompted Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, during a visit to Japan, to express appreciation for the "balanced attitude" from the Japanese Prime Minister regarding Kosovo (Cord Magazine 2019). While Japan's abstention may have been motivated by concerns about the financial stability of international organizations, it effectively aligned with Serbia's interests, reinforcing Japan's impartial stance in contrast to many Western countries.

Council), the book contains factual errors, such as misidentifying Radovan Karadžić and claiming that the number of victims in the Kosovo War exceeds 100,000 (Tsutsui 2022, 102, 106).

The relationship between Japan and Serbia deepened significantly in the late 2010s. In January 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Belgrade and launched the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative to strengthen Japan's presence in the region.²² The initiative aimed to promote socio-economic reforms to support EU accession and foster ethnic reconciliation to address regional challenges, continuing Japan's tradition of impartiality (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024).

Shinzo Abe maintained an impartial stance in the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue. In 2022, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić awarded Abe the Medal of the Republic of Serbia on Vidovdan, recognizing his contributions to fostering friendly relations between the two countries (Danas 2022). Following Abe's assassination on July 8, 2022, his legacy of impartiality endured. On October 3, 2023, Shinzo Abe Park was inaugurated in central Pristina, honoring the late Prime Minister's dedication to Kosovo and the Western Balkans, particularly through the 2018 Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative (Embassy of Japan in Kosovo 2023).

In July 2024, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa visited both Serbia and Pristina, marking the first ministerial visit to Kosovo since Japan recognized its independence. Reflecting on this visit, Japan's ambassador emphasized Japan's support for a resolution through the EU-mediated Belgrade-Prishtina Dialogue, including the establishment of the Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities in Kosovo (Cord Magazine 2025).

Impartiality remains a cornerstone of Japan's stance in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia. This approach is not perceived negatively by Serbian elites or citizens, and Japan's soft power in Serbia is closely tied to its diplomatic policies during and after the 1990s. Given the Serbian people's "collective memories and modes of political truth-telling" regarding the NATO intervention (Subotić and Ejđus 2021, 189), Japan's non-interventionist policies were readily embraced by the local audiences.

²² There are three concrete measures in the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative. First, Japan enhances bilateral relations through high-level dialogues, a designated ambassador, new embassies, and ODA to support Japanese investment. Second, on a regional level, Japan shares expertise via seminars on disaster prevention, SME promotion, and environmental protection, while fostering youth exchanges and civil society capacity building. Third, Japan also partners with third parties such as EU nations and collaborates with the Berlin Process to support the Western Balkans' EU integrations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan). After the Abe's visit, indeed there are new measures, including opening the Embassy of Japan in Prishtina (Project of MIND 2024). After the Abe's visit, indeed there are new measures, including opening the Embassy of Japan in Pristina (Project of MIND 2024).

4.2.2 Japan's ODA

Japan's ODA policies are frequently highlighted in the strategic narratives of Japanese diplomats as key soft power resources. In Serbia, where foreign influence is often politicized, Japan's ODA is notably perceived as non-political, with no significant evidence suggesting it is viewed as political material.²³ In 1999, the Japanese government initiated funding and services for Serbian citizens through the Projects for Basic Population Needs (POPOS) (Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in Serbia 2024).

One expert interviewee emphasized the visibility of Japanese donations, stating:

The Japanese embassy ensures stickers saying "From the People of Japan" are everywhere. That's soft power—visible to the public. (...) Japan's buses, parks, and memorials make people, even grandparents and kids, feel Japan's presence. It's a positive impact, done smartly (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 10).

These stickers enhance the visibility of Japanese donations across Serbia. While Japan's ODA may be appreciated or its budget deemed modest depending on interpretations, its strategic soft power resources are distributed not only in urban areas but also in rural areas, ensuring a broad national reach.

Japan's soft power is strategically rooted in its human security policies, particularly through its ODA initiatives in Serbia. Japanese institutions, such as the Embassy of Japan in Serbia, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), collaborate with local institutions like the Development Agency of Serbia (RAS) to support sustainable economic growth, and regional cooperation to address shared challenges with neighboring countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019; Cord Magazine 2018).

²³ Yamagata (2023) explains that Japan traditionally adopts three principles in ODA policies; the investment expenditure principle, the foreign currency principle, and the request-based principle. The investment expenditure principle restricts aid to capital investments, such as building a water purification plant, which provide long-term benefits, while recurring operational costs are covered by the recipient government. The foreign currency principle ensures that aid is used for items requiring foreign currency, avoiding locally procurable goods to mitigate exchange rate risks. The request-based principle stipulates that aid is provided based on requests from the recipient country's central government, excluding direct aid to NGOs or local entities (Yamagata 2023, 203-204).

Below is the table of Japan's cumulative Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Serbia as of 2023.²⁴

Category	Amount (Billion JPY)	Amount (Billion RSD)
Yen Loans	282.52	203.41
Grant Aid	232.37	167.31
Technical Cooperation	66.28	47.72
Total	581.17	418.44

Table 1: Japanese ODA in different categories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023)

In terms of Yen loans, Japan has supported environmental projects, such as the installation of flue gas desulfurization equipment at the Nikola Tesla Thermal Power Plant, Serbia's largest thermal power facility, to reduce air pollution and promote sustainable development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2017). Regarding grant aid, the Embassy of Japan has implemented grassroots projects and human security grants across Serbia. Technical cooperation includes initiatives like the Project for the Modernization of Public Urban Transport in the City of Belgrade, along with various capacity-building programs (Cord Magazine 2022).

Japan's ODA in Serbia leverages expertise in three key areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019). First, it supports private sector development by strengthening small and medium enterprises and tourism, drawing on Japan's experience to enhance economic competitiveness. Second, it addresses environmental challenges, focusing on issues like air and water pollution, waste management, renewable energy, and energy conservation to meet EU environmental standards. Third, it aims to reduce socio-economic disparities in Serbia, particularly in healthcare and education, with an emphasis on supporting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023).

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2002–2024), the healthcare sector received the most ODA attention, reflecting Japan's priority to enhance

²⁴ The data is provided in both Japanese Yen (JPY, in billions) and Serbian Dinar (RSD, in billions), using an indicative exchange rate of 1 JPY = 0.72 RSD as of June 2025. The USD value of 581.17 billion JPY in June 2025, using an estimated exchange rate of 1 JPY = 0.0067 USD, is approximately 3.894 billion USD. The table reflects the three main forms of assistance: Yen Loans (円借款), Grant Aid, and Technical Cooperation. In older documents, the start date is listed as May 1997. In the source for the table, the start date is not specified but is assumed to be the same (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan n.d.).

medical facilities, equipment, and services in Serbia. Education initiatives, including the renovation of educational infrastructure and vocational training, have also been significant. Water supply and sanitation projects addressed critical needs in waste management and water provision, while social welfare, environmental protection, and other social infrastructure supported community welfare and disability care. A smaller number of projects were undertaken in disaster prevention, transport and storage, emergency response, and conflict prevention and resolution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024).

As strategic soft power resources, these ODA projects have a nationwide presence in Serbia. However, many Serbian citizens remain unaware of these donations or have not directly benefited from them, in my observation. While debates persist about whether ODA sufficiently addresses human security needs, negative opinions about Japan's contributions are rare, underscoring the effectiveness of Japan's soft power in Serbia.

4.2.3 Economic Policies

As outlined in the theoretical framework, soft power seeks to achieve specific objectives by enhancing a country's attractiveness to others. This thesis argues that Japan's soft power has effectively positioned Japan as an attractive partner for Serbia. Due to the geographical distance between Japan and Serbia and Japan's non-military tradition, it can be argued that Japan prioritizes economic interests in Serbia over traditional security concerns.²⁵ These economic interests serve the goals of both Japanese companies and the broader objectives of the Japanese government.

Economic policies also serve as soft power resources while advancing Japan's national interests. According to recent data, 57% of Serbian citizens view foreign investments in general as having a very or somewhat positive effect on the local economy, 22% perceive a negative effect, and 12% believe they have no effect (Danas 2025).²⁶ Although economic investments are typically associated with hard power, the Serbian president has crafted a narrative attributing the establishment of new companies and factories to his leadership, often by attending their opening ceremonies (The President of the Republic of Serbia 2020). Consequently, Japanese investments, facilitated by the Japanese government, serve as both

²⁵ Peace in terms of traditional security is also important for Japan. For example, Japan recognizes the changed situation in Kosovo since the establishment of UNMIK and calls for a review of its mandate to reduce overlaps with the activities of the EU and OSCE. Such a review is essential for ensuring regional stability and easing Japan's financial burden (Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations 2023).

²⁶ The public opinion is not particularly about Japan, but foreign investments in general.

hard power resources (through economic impact) and soft power resources (by enhancing Japan's image).

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's 2018 visit to Serbia, accompanied by 16 Japanese CEOs, significantly contributed to subsequent investments and strengthened Japan's soft power (Cord Magazine 2018). Although the first Japanese company, Japan Tobacco International (JTI), entered Serbia in 2006, the number of Japanese firms investing in Serbia has grown substantially since the late 2010s. In 2017, Yazaki Corporation and Hirex Corporation established automotive parts manufacturing plants, while Kansai Paint, through its acquisition of Helios, began producing paints and coatings. That same year, Itochu Corporation launched two ventures in Belgrade. In 2019, Mayekawa Manufacturing established a refrigeration and freezing equipment facility, followed by Toyo Tire's tire manufacturing plant in 2020. More recently, Nidec Corporation began producing electric motors in 2021, and JFE Shoji Corporation set up a steel components facility in 2024 (Japanese embassy in Serbia 2024).

The public sector has supported the establishment and activities of non-public sector organizations, facilitating Japanese investments in Serbia. In 2017, the Japanese Business Alliance in Serbia (JBAS) was established as a key entry point for Japanese firms (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan n.d.).²⁷ From the Serbian side, the Serbia-Japan Business Club was founded in 2023 (Embassy of Serbia in Japan 2023). Following the Investment Conference at World Expo Osaka 2025, attended by Siniša Mali, Serbia's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between JBAS and the Serbia-Japan Business Club to enhance cooperation and promote investments (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia 2025).

In 2024, Japanese ambassador Imamura stated:

Many highlight that the value of Japanese investments lies not only in technology transfer but also in corporate ethics, business culture, and environmental protection concepts embedded in their corporate social responsibility. This approach will contribute to Serbia's sustainable development (Tanjug 2024).

Currently, nearly 40 Japanese companies operate in Serbia, employing over 3,000 people (The Government of the Republic of Serbia 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023).

²⁷ JBAS is a member of the Japan Chamber of Commerce & Industry, strengthening its role in fostering business ties (Cord Magazine 2018).

²⁸ In 2024, over 100 Japanese companies participated in the Serbia-Japan Business Forum hosted in Serbia (Politika, 2024). In 2025, the Executive Director of JETRO emphasized Serbia's importance, stating, "Serbia is one of the countries that JETRO is paying the most attention to." (JETRO 2025)

Japan's economic policies foster robust investment relations with Serbia, enhancing Japan's visibility and soft power. These efforts align with Serbia's generally positive perceptions of Japanese investments, reinforcing Japan's image as a reliable and attractive partner. However, some Serbian citizens express skepticism about foreign investments in general, viewing them as potentially detrimental to the local economy due to concerns over dependency or loss of economic sovereignty. Despite this, during my stay in Serbia, I frequently heard from local citizens about Japanese companies opening factories in the country. Those who shared this news often viewed Japan's investments positively.

4.2.4 Section Summary

Japan's soft power in Serbia, shaped by an impartial diplomatic approach, ODA, and economic policies, enhances its attractiveness nationwide. By maintaining an impartial stance during the 1990s Yugoslav conflicts and in subsequent diplomatic policies, Japan cultivated positive perceptions among Serbian audiences, distinguishing itself from Western nations associated with NATO interventions. Its human security-focused ODA can reinforce Japan's positive image across urban and rural areas. Economic policies, particularly since the late 2010s, have driven investments from Japanese firms, fostering closer bilateral economic ties and strengthening Japan's soft power through widespread socio-economic contributions.

²⁸ As a goal of Japanese soft power, the Japanese companies have gotten profit from the favorable environment for the investments. Japanese embassy documents facilitate investments in Serbia showing the following reasons for the investments in Serbia; Serbia offers low labor costs compared to Western Europe, Serbia's workforce is also highly skilled, with a strong base of educated and technically proficient workers, Serbia's geographical position at the crossroads of Central and Southeast Europe provides access to European Union markets through free trade agreements, as well as proximity to non-EU regional markets (Embassy of Japan in Serbia 2024). Additionally, the Serbian government supports foreign investment through generous incentives, including subsidies, corporate tax exemptions, and reduced social security contributions. These policies create a cost-effective environment for businesses. Japanese investment is also directed towards Serbia's economic free zones, which offer significant tax benefits for companies. Firms operating in these zones are exempt from value-added tax, import duties on raw materials, transportation, energy, and taxes related to equipment and factory construction (Embassy of Japan in Serbia 2024).

4.3 Political values

The political values of Serbia and Japan reveal striking parallels that shape their bilateral relationship and soft power dynamics. This section explores three key dimensions—hospitality, morality, and democracy—that define their mutual engagement. Hospitality manifests through reciprocal acts of generosity, such as Serbia’s aid to Japan post-2011 tsunami and Japan’s support during Serbia’s 2014 floods, which diplomats strategically leverage to enhance soft power. Shared moral frameworks, particularly political apologies influenced by nationalist sentiments and narratives of victimhood from historical events like Japan’s atomic bombings and Serbia’s NATO airstrikes, foster a sense of solidarity. Additionally, Japan’s democratic image is amplified through its symbolic presence during Serbia’s 2024-2025 protests.

4.3.1 Hospitality

In Serbia, the tradition of gift-giving, rooted in the concept of hospitality (*domaćinska kultura*), is deeply ingrained in everyday social interactions. When visiting someone’s home, I was often met with warm hospitality, demonstrated through generous offerings of food, drink, and companionship. It is also customary for guests to bring gifts when visiting, like food or beverages. Mutual obligation is a social expectation: hosts expect their guests will return the visit in the future and invite them to their homes. Failure to reciprocate this form of hospitality can be seen negatively, as a failure to adhere to basic social conventions.

Serbia and Japan share a history of mutual support, frequently highlighted by politicians and diplomats. Every Japanese ambassador has stated that, since 2011, they have appreciated Serbia’s donations following the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. During his 2018 visit to Belgrade, then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated, “In the First World War in 1914, we helped you, and we will never forget the help you gave us after the earthquake and tsunami in 2011” (RTS 2018). He also emphasized that many European countries imposed sanctions on imports from Japan after the tsunami, which Serbia was the first to lift (RTS 2018). In return, the Serbian president expressed gratitude for Japan’s aid following the 2014 floods in Serbia (N1 2018). This reciprocal support is a recurring theme in elite narratives and media coverage, reflecting a broader cultural emphasis on mutual hospitality.

Regarding Japan’s support during World War I, the Serbian news outlet Politika reported that Japanese army personnel warmly welcomed a Russian railway train transporting

Serbian soldiers, presenting them with gifts such as biscuits, oranges, and cigarettes (Politika 2015). Additionally, the Serbian ambassador to Japan has cited historical documents from the early stages of World War I, when Japan and Serbia were allies. These documents include a humanitarian appeal by a Japanese village mayor, who advocated for aid to Serbian citizens, stating, “Serbs also have families, brothers, sisters and children, including elderly people, but because of the current unprecedented war, they are unable to provide for their families.” (Hersey n.d.)

Following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, Serbian citizens contributed \$2,321,570 to aid recovery efforts, including funds raised through 178,891 text messages sent to the Red Cross of Serbia. This donation ranked ninth among European countries and eighteenth globally (Tanjung 2012). In Serbia, donations via text messages are a common practice, and posters promoting donations are displayed in many places, both offline and online. Such actions are voluntary, but the fact that Serbian citizens helped Japan is often used by Japanese elites in narratives to highlight shared hospitality between the two nations. These narratives suggest that Japan is returning the favor received from Serbia, following social conventions. For example, Ambassador Takahara says:

The Japanese people will never forget the material and moral support they received from the Serbian people when we were in need after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. As proof, after the unprecedented floods last year, the Government of Japan had no dilemma about providing emergency aid or supporting the recovery efforts.

The Japanese people also visited the Embassy of Serbia in Tokyo for days, in order to make individual contributions to Serbia. In that sense, I think that the people of our two countries are really considerate and warm-hearted towards people in need. Our friendship is based on the simple notion that we trust and support each other through good times and bad (Cord Magazine 2016).

Japanese ambassadors consistently leverage narratives of mutual support to enhance Japan’s soft power, emphasizing Serbia’s contributions to foster goodwill. Similarly, Serbian diplomats use these narratives to strengthen Serbia’s image in Japan, illustrating how both nations strategically employ shared histories of solidarity to advance their national interests through soft power. The Serbian ambassador to Japan states:

During challenging periods marked by wars and natural disasters, the foundation of our friendship has been steadfastly rooted in a profound sense of solidarity. Notably, in times like World War I, the Japanese people made valuable contributions to support Serbia’s resilient efforts and courageous achievements, demonstrating solidarity in the

face of significant Serbian casualties. Japan helped Serbia recover after devastating consequences arising from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia through official development aid, which included donations, loans and technical cooperation worth over half a billion euros. When the catastrophic earthquake struck Japan in 2011, our embassy continued to operate in Tokyo, and the citizens of Serbia raised significant donations for the affected population. Both Serbia and Japan were hit by great floods, in 2014 and 2018, respectively; Japan gave considerable donations to our country, while Serbia, for its part, was at Europe's forefront in donating humanitarian aid to help Japan recover from this natural disaster (Yomiuri Shinben 2024).

Both Japanese and Serbian diplomats strategically employ narratives of mutual aid to enhance their respective soft power. By highlighting shared histories of support, such as Japan's aid during Serbia's post-Yugoslav recovery and Serbia's donations after Japan's 2011 tsunami, both nations foster favorable perceptions that serve their mutual national interests, including strengthened diplomatic ties and increased cultural influence.

4.3.2 Morality

When discussing the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Japanese narratives often challenge the portrayal of Serbs as the sole aggressor, instead emphasizing the roles of Croats and Bosniaks.²⁹ Conversely, I have frequently heard people in Serbia claim that the US dropped atomic bombs on Japan. These statements often lack atrocities committed by the Serbian and Japanese armies and are used to express mutual anti-American sentiments. I also heard the shared discourses such as: "How long must we keep apologizing? The interpretations of history between Japan and Serbia seem to align in ways that support similar arguments.

It can be argued that Japan and Serbia are drawn to each other due to shared moral perspectives. As Nye demonstrates, morality is a critical component of soft power in his theoretical framework (Nye 2004). However, rather than high morality, the similarity in moral outlooks between Japan and Serbia may function as a soft power resource. Byrne (1971) suggests that individuals who share similar values are more likely to be attracted to each other. As nations are collectives of individuals, the argument here is that the shared moralities between Japan and Serbia serve as a form of soft power.

Let us now explore how discourses of apologies, nationalism, and victimization coexist in each nation's narratives. First of all, Japan claims to have apologized for its past atrocities

²⁹ Japanese journalist Yukihiro Kimura wrote several books with the message that Serbia is not the only bad one; other sides are bad too. He received an award from the Serbian ambassador in Japan (Tokyo Shinbun 2024)

but continues to exhibit nationalistic tendencies.³⁰ According to the Political Apologies Database, 366 apologies have been made between and within countries worldwide (Political Apologies Database n.d.). Japan is noted as the state that has issued the most official apologies globally, with 58 formal apologies (30 between countries, 26 transnational, and 2 within-country), all addressing its wartime actions and colonial rule (Political Apologies Database n.d.).

Despite these apologies, the Japanese government has shown reluctance to criticize domestic war criminals, partly due to the complex issue of war responsibility, including that of the emperor and public figures like Nobusuke Kishi, a pardoned Class A war criminal.³¹ Postwar Japanese elites often adopted an aggressive nationalist stance, reminiscent of prewar and wartime ideologies. For instance, the enshrinement of 14 Class A war criminals at Yasukuni Shrine in 1978, including seven executed after the Tokyo Trials, five who died in prison, and two who died during their trials, sparked significant controversy. Since then, neighboring countries have strongly condemned the enshrinement, particularly objecting to Japanese prime ministers' visits to the shrine (Sakamoto 2014).

Since the 1990s, Japan's wartime atrocities have faced increasing criticism from neighboring countries, particularly South Korea and China. The issue of "comfort women" during World War II has been a major point of contention in Japan-South Korea relations, with Japan taking steps to acknowledge and address it (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023). While the Japanese government reached an agreement on this issue with the Korean government in 2015, it has faced criticism from academic circles. The Japanese Prime Minister did not offer a direct apology to the victims, and the government explicitly stated that the one billion yen provided to South Korea was not compensation.³² Most controversially, both governments declared the issue "finally and irreversibly resolved" and agreed to refrain from raising it in international forums such as the United Nations. This stance effectively rejected the preventive measures promised in the 1993 Kono Statement. As part of the agreement, Japan even demanded the removal of the "Statue of Peace," a memorial erected outside Japan to honor the victims (Yoshimi 2025, 252).

³⁰ Political apologies can serve as a source of soft power as they are recognized as moral behaviors (Nye 2020; Wang 2023).

³¹ In the 1950s, Japanese politics experienced the "Reverse Course," a movement aimed at undoing Allied occupation reforms and restoring elements of the prewar system (Sakaiya 2023, 47). With the end of the occupation, individuals previously barred from public office were able to return to politics (Sakaiya 2023, 38).

³² In 2015, one billion Japanese yen was approximately equivalent to 8.3 million U.S. dollars, based on the average exchange rate of around 120 yen per dollar at the time.

Similarly, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre remains contentious, with Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledging that the Japanese Army's entry into Nanjing led to acts such as the killing of non-combatants and looting (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023). While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and some Japanese political scientists closely tied to the government suggest that China exaggerates the number of victims, Japanese scholars who critically assess domestic discourse contend that the Ministry's stance implies, "if the correct number of victims cannot be confirmed, the true nature of the incident also remains unclear, making it seem almost as if it were a 'phantom'" (Kasahara 2025, 242).³³ These issues have generated extensive academic discussion; however, public discourses remain deeply divided along national lines.

Similarly, Serbia has officially apologized five times for its actions during the 1990s wars (Political Apologies Database n.d.). However, a parallel to Yasukuni Shrine can be seen in Serbia with the case of the mural of Ratko Mladić, a war criminal sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in the Srebrenica massacre. Painted on a wall in Belgrade, this mural has been protected by the current regime, with local police prohibiting its removal. In 2021, an activist who threw eggs at the mural was arrested (Balkan Insight 2021).

Extending this parallel, the issue of "comfort women", sexual violence during the Bosnian War, particularly systematic wartime rape, is a significant point of contention (Son 2023). While sexual violence was committed against Serbs as well, narratives in Serbia often focus on accusing the opposing side rather than acknowledging their own nationals' actions (Clark 2017; Blic 2016).

Comparable to the Nanjing Massacre for Japan, the number of victims in the Srebrenica massacre has been politicized. In 2002, the Documentation Centre of the Republic of Srpska for War Crimes Research published its Srebrenica Report, which described the genocide as an "alleged massacre" and claimed that "no more than 2,000 Bosnian Army soldiers were killed" (Simic 2024, 5).³⁴ In response to the persistent denial of the Srebrenica genocide, Serbian opposition groups submitted a draft resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica to the Serbian Parliament (Radio Free Europe 2025).

³³ Japanese political scientists closely tied to the government says joint Japan-China historical research project highlighted this divide: Japanese scholars estimated 20,000 to 40,000 victims, with a maximum of 200,000, while Chinese scholars insisted on over 300,000, reflecting entrenched positions (Yamauchi and Hosoya 2023, 298).

³⁴ ICMP estimates the number of persons killed as a result of the fall of Srebrenica as just over 8,000 (ICMP n.d.).

The historical experiences of Japan and Serbia reveal notable parallels in their approaches to political apologies and past atrocities. Milan Mišić (2015) analyzes these similarities, comparing Japan's and Serbia's responses to their wartime actions. Mišić characterizes Japan as an "aggressive nationalist" state that offers insincere apologies, a trait he also attributes to Serbia.

What is the experience of the most notable cases of apologies and reconciliation between states? At best, it is varied. From examples of truly resolute confrontation with an unpleasant past, as in the case of Germany, to merely formal expressions of regret, as Japan persistently demonstrates, which regularly strains its relations with its neighbors, China and South Korea, despite these Far Eastern countries being important economic partners to one another. (...)

Why, despite official apologies from Belgrade (Boris Tadić, Tomislav Nikolić, Aleksandar Vučić) for the great Srebrenica crime, characterized as genocide by the rulings of two international courts, has there been no significant progress in reconciling Serbs and Bosniaks? Perhaps because (...) the impact of apologies and repentance is determined by the political context. The meaning of apologies, as in the case of Japan, is undermined by aggressive nationalists on both sides, and in this regard, truth and reconciliation commissions, lustrations, or even trials that establish individual guilt for atrocities are not helpful. (...) The main reason is most likely that, after the conflict that brought about the breakup of Yugoslavia, the entire region insists on the "Japanese" model instead of the "German" one. There will be no substantial reconciliation between Serbs, Bosniaks, Croats, Albanians, and Slovenes until each side admits that it committed crimes against someone else – and until the weighing of these crimes to determine which one is heavier stops. (Mišić 2015)³⁵

Notably, there are parallels with the Serbian and Japanese cases. It is no coincidence that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was the first war crimes court established by the United Nations and the first international tribunal since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials (ICTY n.d.).

Apart from nationalist tendencies while issuing apologies, Japan and Serbia share parallels in their narratives of victimhood, particularly in their experiences of the US military actions, Japan's atomic bombings in 1945, and Serbia's NATO airstrikes during the 1999 Kosovo conflict. Both nations perceive themselves as victims of US aggression, fostering critical attitudes toward the West and shaping their national identities. This shared narrative also enhances Japan's soft power in Serbia, as Serbian discourse frequently draws analogies to Japan's historical experiences.

³⁵ The Political Apology Database and Mišić's approach to interpreting or counting apologies differ, but I have cited the source as it stands.

Japan emphasizes its unique experience as the only nation in the world subjected to atomic bombings (Hiroshima and Nagasaki), fostering a narrative of victimhood that overshadows its role as a perpetrator (Lerner 2019, 70). Similarly, Serbia's narrative centers on the 1999 NATO airstrikes during the Kosovo conflict, portraying itself as an innocent victim (Subotić and Ejđus 2021, 173). Neither Japan nor Serbia got a formal apology from the US, and both countries continue to behave as victims (The Diplomat 2020; N1 2021).

Both nations' victimhood narratives reinforce skepticism toward Western countries. In Japan, the 2024 Nagasaki commemoration exemplified this tension when G7 ambassadors abstained after Israeli officials were excluded, prompting Japanese discourse to criticize Western double standards (Nagasaki Broadcasting 2024).

Similarly, in Serbia, President Aleksandar Vučić responded to Czech President Miloš Zeman's 2021 apology for the NATO airstrikes by questioning the sincerity of Western intentions:

They will keep saying that they did the best possible thing and only wanted to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and if there is any truth in that I have to ask if the killing of thousands, especially 72 Serbian children was just collateral damage? I don't believe in any kind of institutional apology from NATO (N1 2021).

As exemplified above, to critically perceive the West has been common in the narratives of the bombing of both Japan and Serbia.

The absence of an apology for the atomic bombings of Japan can be considered a source of Japanese soft power in Serbia, particularly due to the frequent use of Japan as a point of comparison in Serbian discourse surrounding the NATO airstrikes during the Kosovo conflict.

On the one hand, Western political and military figures drew parallels between Serbia and Japan. For instance, then-Senator Joe Biden referenced Japan in discussions about occupying Yugoslavia, stating: "We should go to Belgrade and we should have a Japanese-German style occupation of that country (Democracy Now 2021)."

Similarly, NATO General Biaggio di Grazia compared the NATO airstrikes on Serbia to the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, noting:

If the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima can partly be understood as a military action, the next one, dropped on Nagasaki, at the moment when Japan was already accepting capitulation, marked the beginning of the Cold War and was a kind of message from the US to the Soviet Union. (...)

And by bombing Serbia, a message was sent to Russia about who was the winner in the Cold War. And none of that is Serbia's fault, which did everything it could, because the international circumstances were such that Russia was weak (RTS 2017).

While these statements do not necessarily originate within Serbian discourse, they are amplified within Serbian domestic media, shaping public perceptions.

On the other hand, Serbian political figures and media have also drawn parallels with Japan, particularly referencing Hiroshima. During the 1999 NATO airstrikes, Yugoslavia's Deputy Prime Minister Vuk Drašković stated on CNN:

Yugoslavia is a victim of aggression by NATO and the United States, which is the biggest humanitarian tragedy, a Hiroshima for our civilization, law, and morality (Borba 1999).

Following the conflict, the destruction caused by NATO missiles in Aleksinac was termed the “Serbian Hiroshima” in Serbian media (Politika 2025). Additionally, General Vladimir Lazarević, speaking at a history lecture in the Serbian Army Hall on the 19th anniversary of the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of NATO Aggression, remarked: “NATO used more bombs than Hitler did during World War II, and the equivalent of that is six to eight nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima” and “the events of 1999 are being compared to Hiroshima and Kosovo is being called the Serbian Hiroshima” (Jugpress 2018).

In summary, significant parallels can be drawn between Japan and Serbia in their approaches to historical narratives. Both nations contend with the legacies of past atrocities—Japan's actions during the Asia-Pacific War and Serbia's role in the 1990s conflicts—often shaped by nationalist perspectives. The shared experience of receiving no formal apology from the United States for the atomic bombings of Japan and the NATO airstrikes on Serbia fosters a critical stance toward the West in both countries. Although some citizens in both countries seek to acknowledge past atrocities, the comparison between NATO airstrikes and Japan's historical experiences deeply resonates with Serbian audiences, shaping public perceptions and emphasizing perceived parallels between the two nations. This shared moral outlook enhances Japan's soft power in Serbia.

4.3.3 Democracy

Promoting democracy is a key theme in Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which he describes as "particularly relevant to the realization of milieu goals". He argues that soft power plays a crucial role in advancing democracy, human rights, and open markets, noting, "it is easier to attract people to democracy than to coerce them to be democratic" (Nye 2023, 18).

In this sense, Japan's democracy, as a source of soft power, appears to appeal to citizens in Serbia. Japan ranks highly on the Democracy Index, reflecting its status as a robust democratic nation (Economist Intelligence Unit n.d.). Official Japanese government documents, such as the ODA Charters of 1992 and 2003 and the 1996 Partnership for Democratic Development, underscore democracy as a cornerstone of Japan's developmental aid policy (Ichihara 2018, 12). Since the 2000s, Japan has increasingly emphasized democracy as a universal value in its value-based diplomacy (Ichihara 2018, 116).

However, Japan's diplomatic silence following Serbia's alleged election fraud on December 17, 2023, raises questions about its commitment to promoting democracy. On December 18, 2023, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mission reported irregularities in the Serbian elections, including misuse of public funds, media control by the regime, and the presence of ghost voters. That same day, the German Foreign Ministry declared these irregularities unacceptable for an EU candidate, while the European Commission and the U.S. State Department spokesperson also criticized the electoral process (European Western Balkans 2023).

In contrast, Japan did not address the irregularities. On December 18, 2023, a reception marking the establishment of the Serbia-Japan Business Club was held in Tokyo, attended by representatives from the institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, JICA, JETRO, Keidanren, the Japanese Ambassador to Serbia, and the Serbian Ambassador to Japan (Embassy of Serbia in Japan 2023). On December 27, 2023, Parliamentary Vice-Minister Fukazawa met with the Serbian ambassador and expressed Japan's desire to collaborate with Serbia's newly formed cabinet in politics, economics, and people-to-people exchanges, referencing the December 17 elections without mentioning irregularities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023).

Japan's reluctance to criticize Serbia's regime may stem from its own domestic challenges, such as media freedom. Japan ranked 66th in the 2025 press freedom rankings by Reporters Without Borders (Japan Times 2025). Notably, in November 2023, Japan hosted a seminar in Belgrade on media freedom during election campaigns (Embassy of Japan in Serbia 2024).³⁶ Referencing the event, the Japanese ambassador emphasized the importance of the media for democracy, stating:

Talking about Japan's democracy, we witnessed its development in the 1920s, but it was disrupted in the 1930s due to the rise of militarism, and we paid a huge price by resorting to war. Japan learned from our own mistake and achieved a mature and stable postwar democracy in which the media play a crucial role; the media has even been called the fourth branch of power. However, as JICA Senior Advisor Keiichi Hashimoto, a former journalist, noted at this seminar, the Japanese media hasn't always been perfect in terms of media reporting on elections. There were cases of politically biased reporting during pre-election periods, which became a problem afterwards. As discussed in the seminar, it is important for the media of any country to be impartial on political opinions and to report facts objectively (Cord Magazine 2024).

Following Serbia's 2023 election fraud protests, large-scale demonstrations in 2024 criticized the undemocratic process surrounding lithium mining. Regarding this matter, Japan's position aligns closely with the regime. The Serbian president highlighted Japanese companies' interest in Serbia for cathode and battery production, stating:

I will bring them. I guarantee you that I am capable enough, I have a high enough reputation in the People's Republic of China and in many other countries. I am negotiating with the Japanese and the Koreans and everyone else. I will bring them, just we need to resolve these battery production issues (Insajder 2024).

Japanese policy documents identify lithium as critical for economic security (Cabinet Secretariat 2024). In 2024, a Serbian state-economic delegation met Japan's Minister of Economic Security, Sanae Takaichi, and in 2025, Minister Minoru Kiuchi further deepened ties with Serbian officials (The Government of the Republic of Serbia 2024; Kiuchi 2025). While Japanese policy discourses and documents do not directly mention lithium in Serbia, they also lack direct criticism of the current regime regarding election fraud or the lithium mining process.

³⁶ It is unclear who was invited to the seminar. Milan Antonijević may have attended the event, according to his post on X: <https://x.com/AntonMilan/status/1726724545170825631>.

Despite this, Japan's democratic image gained traction and its soft power surged after the Novi Sad incident on November 1, 2024, when a collapsed roof was linked to a Chinese company (N1 2024).³⁷ Instead of targeting the Chinese company, protesters adopted a cosmopolitan identity (DW news 2025). This cosmopolitan branding, combined with Japan's increasing presence in Serbian discourse and activism, amplified Japan's soft power. For example, in February 2025, Bojan Vranić, appearing on RTS OKO, described Serbia as divided into two groups, one embracing a "new Japanese culture." He stated:

We compare these two groups that simply captured our complete attention as something that is related and polarized as if they were some kind of two Serbias, one that belongs to a new culture today was something very nice like a new Japanese culture while the other one belongs to a culture that is more like what we may not like so much in Serbia but no matter how you turn it, it is just what seems to us to be part of the language that is something where the language basically leads us to compare it but if we look (RTS OKO 2025).

Additionally, Japanese culture was frequently mentioned favorably by protesters and on social media. Protesters adopted certain "Japanese features." First, they often cleaned city streets after large protests, a practice particularly prominent in Kragujevac, Niš, and Belgrade (Glas Sumadije 2025; Danas 2025; Nova S 2025). This action of cleaning was labeled as "Japanese" and went viral on social media several times (X 2025).³⁸ Second, disciplined students marching between cities were described as "Japanese" (X 2025).³⁹ Public figures, such as Miloš Pavlović, dean of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU) and a kendo practitioner, were also associated with Japanese culture (X 2025).⁴⁰ These "Japanese features" were positively amplified within Serbia's social media community.

Japanese culture, particularly anime, was also symbolically adopted by protesters. As the protests were largely organized by students, young people frequently used Japanese anime to convey their messages.

³⁷ Most protesters refrained from directly criticizing China (Vladisavljev 2025). In Serbia, China's role has already become a polarizing topic in political and media narratives, particularly between the regime and the oppositions. While opposition groups and critical media have highlighted issues such as Chinese vaccines (Direktno 2020) and inhumane working conditions at Linglong, a Chinese company (Nin 2024), the SNS regime has frequently defended China against criticism (Politika 2024).

³⁸ <https://x.com/medigomladen/status/1884186425803038925?t=IBBLG-qD6-7xRL5xVnOjeQ&s=09>

³⁹ <https://x.com/atamanzagliblje/status/1884935669304152309>

⁴⁰ https://x.com/sviublokade_fdu/status/1884349965767696764

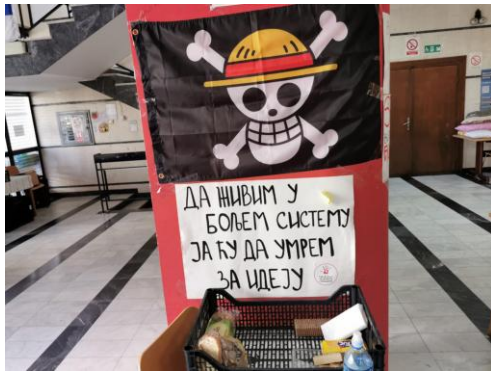


Image 1: Japanese anime symbol in FPN in Belgrade (2025)



Image 2: Japanese anime placards during protests (2025)

Opposition leaders and critical media also referenced Japan to justify their actions. After throwing smoke bombs in parliament, opposition member Ćuta claimed similar incidents occur in parliaments in Greece and Japan, suggesting such actions are not unique (N1 2025). Similarly, Srđan Milivojević's video was titled "Japan has Yakuza, and we have Ćaci" (N1 2025). In May 2025, Nova S uploaded a video comparing the resignations of Japanese and Serbian politicians from ministerial positions (Nova S 2025).

References to Japan extended beyond planned protests, public figures, and media to spontaneous citizen actions. In March 2025, during a ceremony marking the retirement of Belgrade's yellow buses, a citizen accused Mayor Aleksandar Šapić of corruption in front of the Japanese ambassador, stating:

The gentleman [Japanese ambassador] deserves all respect and you [Šapić] must not stand next to him. Because he is a virtuous and honest man. He does not steal, unlike you (Danas 2025).

In Serbian discourse, Japan has emerged as a symbol of incorruptible and anti-regime values. As a result, Japan's soft power experienced an unexpected surge. However, if citizens had perceived Japan as complicit with the current regime, they might not have used Japanese symbols in their protests. In this case, the use of soft power by Serbian citizens was not based on Japan's diplomatic policies, but rather on an imagined perception of Japan formed through

a combination of limited knowledge, political distance, and perceived irrelevance, which allowed Japan to be symbolically appropriated, thus enhancing its soft power.

Conversely, regime representatives also referenced Japan as a democratic exemplar. For instance, after the use of a sound cannon on March 15, 2025, Ivica Dačić cited its use in democratic countries, stating:

How is the system in Serbia now undemocratic, and here we are talking about some supposedly democratic countries. USA, Canada, Japan, Israel, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Greece, Poland, Australia, Czech Republic, New Zealand, Singapore... (B92 2025).

A significant boost to Japan's soft power came with the appearance of Pikachu in Serbia's anti-government protests, mirroring similar protest symbols in Turkey and the United States (NDTV World 2025).⁴¹ Pikachu became an emblem of democracy, embraced by Serbian protesters and nicknamed "Dinstaću" (Let's stew), combining the Pokémon character with the protest slogan "dinstati" popularized by sociologist Jovo Bakić (N1 2025; N1 2025). Protesters from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts produced a video parodying an RTS news program, featuring a reporter singing a Digimon song while Pikachu danced alongside (SVI U BLOKADE | FDU 2025).

Japan's portrayal as a symbol of democracy in Serbian protests demonstrates the effectiveness of its soft power, with Japanese anime and characters, such as Pikachu, serving as mascots for democratic movements worldwide. This highlights an international dimension to Japan's cultural influence. However, the use of these characters reflects Japan's soft power as a cultural phenomenon rather than an endorsement of its foreign policy or democratic values. Japan's non-interventionist stance and perceived complicity with Serbia's regime could invite criticism from protesters, though such criticism has not yet materialized. The absence of criticism from Serbian citizens may stem from their low expectations of Japan's political engagement. In this sense, Japanese soft power remains limited to its symbolic, cultural influence, with protesters embracing Japanese culture as a preferred symbol during demonstrations. Moreover, the values associated with Japanese anime and characters are less about Japan's political values and more about the universal values advocated by the characters within these works, given the intangible nature of such soft power resources.

⁴¹ Milan Antonijević also wrote an article about Pikachu before students adopted it as a symbol for their movements (Antonijević 2025).

4.3.4 Section Summary

Serbia's embrace of Japan's soft power is deeply rooted in shared values, nuanced by local dynamics. Serbia and Japan share mutual support, exemplified by Serbia's aid after Japan's 2011 tsunami and Japan's assistance during Serbia's 2014 floods. In terms of morality, although both nations have issued political apologies for past atrocities, their similar morality is reflected through narratives shaped by domestic nationalism. Their shared sense of victimhood, Japan from atomic bombings and Serbia from NATO airstrikes, fuels nationalist narratives and a critical view of the West, enhancing Japan's soft power appeal. Japan's image as a democratic nation gained traction in Serbia during the 2024-2025 protests, with Japanese cultural symbols like Pikachu embraced as emblems of democratic ideals.

4.4 Culture

The cultural influence of Japan in Serbia, explored through the lens of soft power, reveals a fascinating interplay between global cultural exports and local interpretations. Same as the policies and political values; there are strategic soft power resources such as the Cool Japan initiative. However, culture is not solely shaped by political elites; ordinary citizens play a significant role in determining which cultural resources are meaningful. As Fish (1980, 171) argues, culture is not passively absorbed but actively constructed by interpretive communities that assign distinct properties and intentions to cultural products.

This section examines how Japanese culture manifests in Serbian society. From the widespread translation of Japanese books to the enduring popularity of films and the growing appeal of anime and manga, Japanese cultural products have left a significant imprint on Serbian culture. However, this influence is not merely absorbed passively; Serbian audiences actively construct their perceptions of "Japaneseness" through local media, canonical works, and personal experiences. This section also delves into the demystification of Japan, challenging preconceived notions and stereotypes through direct interactions. In contrast, the section compares Japan's cultural presence with that of China, highlighting how differing community sizes, commercial visibility, and stereotypes shape their respective soft power in Serbia.

4.4.1 Japaneseness in Serbian Culture: Books, Films, and Television

Japanese culture resonates in Serbia much as it does globally, with over 100 Japanese literary works being translated into Serbian (Cord Magazine 2016).⁴² Bookstores in Serbia increasingly stock new translations, reflecting growing interest in Japanese literature. Authors such as Haruki Murakami and Yukio Mishima frequently appear in public discussions, underscoring their prominence.⁴³

Beyond literature, films significantly shape Serbian perceptions of Japan. Akira Kurosawa's films gained significant popularity among Serbian audiences during the 1970s and 1980s, drawing frequent crowds to cinemas to experience his work. Names like Kurosawa and actor Toshiro Mifune are widely recognized.⁴⁴ For instance, Oliver Mandić's song "Moja draga voli Kurosavu" references this cultural affinity, and Jadranka Stojaković's relocation to Japan was reportedly influenced by her admiration for Kurosawa's films (RTS 2016).

Japanese culture also permeates Serbian canonical works.⁴⁵ The 1982 comedy film *Tesna Koža* (A Tight Spot) features a character named Japanac (Japanese man), played by Irfan Mensur, who humorously highlights Japanese discipline and work ethic:

Japanac: If the Japanese behaved like this, what would happen to them?

Student: They would fail.

Japanac: True! They have no land, no raw materials, they sit on each other's heads, they lost the war, but that's why they don't lose what!?

Student: Time.

Japanac: True! A young Japanese does not spin a magic cube, he does not trade pictures of football players, a young Japanese does not shout and spit on corners. The sick do not go on sick leave, the tired do not go on annual vacation, the Japanese work, they work, they work! And in Japan, the blackboard is cleaned and the chalk is sharpened (Mensur 1982).

⁴² In Serbian language, some nouns are related to Japan. For example, sandals are called *japanke*. *Kaki* (japanska jabuka) or *japanska tresnja* (cherry blossom) are also in Serbian language.

⁴³ Radovan Karadžić liked to read books written by Yukio Mishima (Akashi 2010).

⁴⁴ The Japanese ambassador also mentioned the popularity of Akira Kurosawa's films in Serbia (Vreme 2012).

⁴⁵ Since culture is intangible, people sometimes perceive Japanese culture through Serbian public figures. For example, when Novak Djoković plays tennis against a Japanese player, I have often heard people mention his victories, especially from those who know I am Japanese. Similarly, Dragan Stojković's career as a football player and manager in Japan can create a positive impression of Japan among the Serbian public. Moreover, these public figures appear in both Japanese and Serbian strategic narratives crafted by diplomats (Vreme 2012; Hersey n.d.).

The character also states that the Japanese have only one holiday and work even on that day, collect garbage and process it into food, and exhibit discipline.

Similarly, in the comedy series *Srećni Ljudi* (Happy People, 1993–1996), the character of Riska Golubović, played by Radmila Savićević, remarks:

You will sing too. Listen, director, there's nothing to be silent about. Well, we can never work like the Japanese. We just don't have those work habits. And that's why we have a soul (Savićević 1993-1996).

The phrase “Serbia to Tokyo” also appears in graffiti in the film *Lepa Sela Lepo Gore* (Pretty Village, Pretty Flame) (Dragojevic 1996), further embedding Japanese imagery in Serbian popular culture.⁴⁶ These canonical works, frequently broadcast on national television, remain influential despite their age.

Quiz programs like *Slagalica* reinforce general knowledge about Japan, often featuring Japanese cultural concepts (Novosti 2025). The Japanese TV program *Nindža Ratnici* (*Sasuke*) has also gained popularity among Serbian audiences (Nova S 2023). In parallel with global trends, anime and manga have surged in popularity. One interviewee recalled watching *Plava Princeza* (Bosco Adventure) in the 1990s, alongside series like *Dragon Ball*, *Digimon*, *Pokémon*, and *Naruto*, which were widely broadcast on Serbian television (Vice 2017).



⁴⁶ The phrase “Serbia to Tokyo” originally emerged on December 8, 1991, during a football game. It became a slogan following the historic success of Red Star, and to this day it is used as a slogan in many cases including nationalistic ones. (Prva 2016). Ivica Dacic remarked that “Serbia to Tokyo sounds beautiful, but is not realistic” (BN TELEVIZIJA 2019).

Image 3: Japanese manga in a bookstore (2025)

While television still holds influence, particularly among older generations, younger generations increasingly consume anime online. The internet has transformed access to Japanese culture. One expert interviewee noted:

Then there's a big shift, pre- and post-internet. Before the internet, only people who went to movies or read books had an image of Japan. Post-internet, music, anime, movies, and dramas are easily accessible. Here, piracy is rampant, downloading whatever's trending (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 10).

Younger generations increasingly consume anime online, often with English subtitles, through streaming platforms or web communities. Some Serbian fans engage with anime more extensively than their Japanese counterparts.

Some of the most popular Japanese anime films among Serbian audiences are those produced by Studio Ghibli, such as *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Spirited Away*. In Japan, Hayao Miyazaki, a renowned director at Studio Ghibli, is known to have been deeply influenced by the Yugoslav conflict. Japanese critic Shunsuke Sugita highlights this influence:

Since Princess Mononoke, Miyazaki has said in various places that he was influenced by the Yugoslav conflict. No matter how much you build up, war breaks out, and disasters sweep everything away. Yet, within that, we keep living. There's a quality in Miyazaki's works that embraces this kind of nihilism while still encouraging us (47news 2023).

Below are quotes from an interview with Hayao Miyazaki himself:

I thought a war wouldn't break out in Yugoslavia—though it was just my own naive assumption—but when it descended into civil war, history began to shift. (...)

There came a time when we could no longer create works as extensions of what we had made before (My Navi News 2013)

Although many people in Serbia may not be aware of Miyazaki's thoughts on the Yugoslav conflict or the extent to which it influenced his work, his films convey messages about how he perceives the world, including the collapse of Yugoslavia.⁴⁷

Many Serbian citizens claim they like Japanese cultural products. Older generations' perceptions of Japan are often shaped by Kurosawa's films or canonical domestic works like *Tesna Koža*. In contrast, younger generations may be less familiar with these domestic classics and instead engage with Japanese culture online. These cultural products are widely perceived as a form of Japanese attractiveness.

4.4.2 Demystification of Japan

Representations of Japan often blend factual elements with orientalism, a trend also observed in other European countries. Serbian audiences, influenced by their unique worldviews, may interpret Japanese culture differently from audiences in other countries. This divergence shapes perceptions of Japanese attractiveness. One expert stated:

People have this notion in their head of something that's incredibly far away, mystical, with a strong connection to the past, to nature—those are (...), not in a bad sense, but pre-conceived notions, if we can call them that. I had my own images, my own, how do I say, desires and thoughts about Japan that maybe weren't in line with reality at all because I had never been there, never seen it, never experienced it (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 9).

As the interviewee suggests, these preconceived notions are reinforced by Japanese cultural products and “Japaneseness” embedded in Serbian narratives. Such stereotypes are often linked to concepts like *samurai*, *kamikaze*, *seppuku*, and Japan as the “Land of the Rising Sun”. Additionally, martial arts contribute to these perceptions. According to a 2016 statement by the Japanese ambassador, over 8,000 people in Serbia practice some form of budo, such as karate, aikido, judo, or kendo (Cord Magazine 2016).

⁴⁷ While it is less influential compared to Hayao Miyazaki's works, Project Itoh's 虐殺器官 (*Genocidal Organ*), one of the most important Japanese science fiction novels of the 2000s, which was also adapted into a film, explores the theme of how a US PR firm shaped global perceptions during the Bosnian War (Itoh 2012).



Image 4: Japanese word without context in Subotica (2021)

These mythical impressions, in my observations, often stem from both Orientalist perspectives and a lack of knowledge. Many Serbian citizens, particularly from older generations, acknowledge having limited familiarity with Japan, relying primarily on school education and domestic media for information. Even when Japanese cultural products or elements are featured on platforms like RTS, as is common with other countries, some Serbian citizens uncritically accept orientalist views. Such positive impressions of Japan strengthen its soft power. One expert described soft power as follows:

There's the good image of Japan, but also the lack of knowledge. That's the soft power thing, good impressions without deep understanding. Soft power is about image, not actual knowledge. Things like origami, kimonos, or karate—that's soft power. It's not about actually doing karate; it's the image of samurai or shoguns. Serbs love that stuff, like kamikaze (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 10).

The limitation of knowledge also stems from the limited direct communication between Japanese and Serbian citizens. As of October 2024, Serbia hosts 255 Japanese residents, while Japan is home to 260 Serbian residents, according to Japan's Ministry of Justice statistics from June 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024).

However, some individuals experience what I term the “demystification of Japan” through serious study of Japanese culture or extended stays in Japan. To facilitate such experiences, the Japanese embassy in Serbia has collaborated with the Japanese Language Department at Belgrade University since 1976 (Belgrade University n.d.). Additionally, the Japanese government's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology offers scholarships for Serbian students, and some Japanese companies provide support

programs for Serbian students to study abroad (Cord Magazine 2022). Youth programs, such as the MIRAI Program, have also enabled young Serbian people to visit Japan (RYCO 2024).

While these diplomatic efforts to foster strategic soft power are limited, some individuals gain authentic experiences of Japan. Those who study or live in Japan often act as agents, developing their own tactics to engage with Japanese culture beyond the constraints of official narratives. One interviewee who conducted research in Japan noted:

I don't overhype Japan, you understand, it's a great place for studying, for professional and personal growth, that's very important. But, as I said, it's a society and a country like any other, with its good and bad sides. When you present both, someone can make a decision based, let's say, on facts, as much as possible, even though everyone's experience is individual (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 9).

While preconceived notions and stereotypes about Japan persist, those with firsthand experience in Japan form more nuanced opinions over time.

Although few Serbian citizens have lived in Japan, online communication between Japanese and Serbian individuals has been consistent. In Japan, Serbia is recognized as a hub for online English teachers (Tajima 2025). A Japanese diplomat noted that many capable Serbian people are fluent in English, and online English teachers are mentioned in materials from the Japanese embassy in Serbia (Cord Magazine 2024; Embassy of Japan in Serbia 2024). The websites of two prominent online English tutoring platforms, *DMM Eikaiwa* and *NativeCamp*, for Japanese people show that *DMM Eikaiwa* has 393 Serbian teachers registered, while *NativeCamp* shows 934 Serbian teachers in July 2025.⁴⁸ However, many Serbian teachers who previously worked on these platforms are no longer registered, possibly due to taxation issues and freelancer protests in 2020-2021 (Global Voices 2021). Additionally, in my observations, online English teaching has expanded to include Chinese learners through other Chinese platforms, suggesting that the total number of Serbian online English teachers, including those no longer active, is likely higher.

One interviewee, who worked as an online English teacher for Japanese students from 2014 to 2017, described interacting with over 1,000 Japanese individuals. At that time, nearly all students on the platform were Japanese. These teachers facilitated not only grammar

⁴⁸ On July 8th in 2025, I counted the numbers on the websites.

lessons but also free conversation. When asked whether these interactions changed her perceptions of Japan, the interviewee responded:

I didn't have an opinion about Japan or Japanese people, I didn't have any opinion. (...) But by working with Japanese people, I formed opinions, I didn't change them, I gained all sorts of opinions. The stories that Japan is some land of the rising sun, that people are incredibly hardworking, that people are this or that, that there are geishas, samurai, maiko, absolutely none of that is true. To me, Japanese people are completely ordinary mortals like everyone else, a bit annoying with their habits and customs, and that's it (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 7).

Another former online English teacher welcomed Japanese learners in Belgrade, fostering direct communication that shaped impressions of Japan in both positive and negative ways. These interactions, enabled by technology, allowed some Serbian citizens to experience Japanese soft power directly, often leading to a clearer, demystified image of Japan.

Furthermore, one interviewee suggested that Japan's soft power in Serbia lies in its people, professors of Japanese studies, diplomats, and bilingual individuals fluent in both Japanese and Serbian. In this sense, Serbian citizens who have studied in Japan or engaged with Japanese individuals may themselves become soft power resources for Japan. However, several interviewees who acquired proficiency in Japanese expressed dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities to use their skills both privately and professionally.

4.4.3 Japan as Non-China

If people can act as conduits for soft power resources, China could become much better known to Serbian citizens. An estimated 20,000 Chinese citizens live in Serbia, potentially higher than the officially reported 14,500 (Vladislavljev 2023). In contrast, only 255 Japanese people reside in Serbia, making the Chinese population approximately 50 times larger than the Japanese population, according to official figures (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024). Moreover, Chinese individuals are highly visible across many Serbian cities, including smaller ones. Chinese shops (*kineska prodavnica*) are present in nearly every city, and Chinese department stores (*kineska robna kuća*) can be found in many locations. Additionally, alongside Serbian employees, Chinese individuals often work in these shops. Some speak Serbian fluently, while others know at least basic words and numbers.

As an East Asian minority in Serbia, my appearance does not immediately reveal my Japanese nationality. Even in China, I was often mistaken for a Chinese person, as there is little difference in physical appearance. Consequently, it is common for people in Serbia to assume I am Chinese. However, this assumption often leads to negative treatment.⁴⁹ In some cities, I have frequently encountered mocking remarks such as “*Nihao*,” “*Chinchanchon*,” or “*Xi Jinping*” while walking, waiting in line, or riding the bus. These incidents occur almost daily, sometimes multiple times a day, depending on the location. For instance, during the year I lived in Voždovac, Belgrade, I did not experience such treatment, likely because residents there are accustomed to foreigners or are less likely to engage with strangers. Similarly, in the smaller city of Ražanj, I encountered no such incidents, possibly because the tight-knit community was aware of my presence.

When I respond to such remarks by stating that I am from Japan, I have several times heard comments like, “I don’t like Chinese, but I like Japanese.” One interviewee shared a perspective on this matter:

Generally, positive connotations are associated with Japanese people. They’re hardworking, disciplined, good, nice people. They’d probably make a comparison. I think my mom once commented on that because she had a negative experience at some Chinese restaurant. And she said something like, “If these were Japanese, it would’ve been different” (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 11).

People in Serbia often compare Japan and China. This contrast—if it had been Japan instead of China—became evident after the Novi Sad incident, as reflected on social media (X 2024).⁵⁰ Although the protesters did not explicitly criticize China or Chinese companies, their use of Japan as a symbol in the protests may be rooted in such discourses. This contrast between Japan and China often appears in Serbian discourse, where Japan is associated with positive values. Just as Russia’s popularity reflects a critical view of the West, Japan’s positive image in Serbian narratives may arise from a critical perspective on China.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Perhaps, negative treatments are not only because of nationality but also because of negative connotations toward Asian looks. For example, in June 2017, when the Serbian female national volleyball team had qualified to compete in the World Championships held in Japan took a group photo, many of the players were seen making the “slant-eye pose,” which became a hot topic in Japan. Also in 2021 one volleyball player again did the same against Thai national team player (ELLE girl 2021). Additionally, greeting Japanese people with “*Nihao*” is mentioned in a book written by the former Japanese ambassador (Maruyama 2022).

⁵⁰ https://x.com/sofi2022_2023/status/1852476807691321844

⁵¹ Vuksanović explains that Russia’s popularity in Serbia stems not from what it is, but from what it is not: it is not the West (IR thinker 2023). He further notes that Serbian society is highly Westernized in everyday life.

One interviewee explained that negative connotations about Chinese people partly stem from the perception of Chinese products as low quality:

Yes, definitely. Because the first association when I talk about China is “Made in China.” And that’s the association with something mass-produced, something cheap, and essentially low-quality consumer goods. Which is, I think, a bad thing because China is so rich in culture, philosophy, history (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 9).

In the Serbian language, products purchased from Chinese shops are often described as bought “at the Chinese person’s place” (*kod Kineza*). Interviewees noted that this phrase carries negative connotations. One interviewee elaborated:

There’s that stigma among people because if you say, not in a Chinese shop, but “at the Chinese.” So you identify that stuff with an entire nation, and that makes it bad. That’s the perception people have that the Chinese are bad. People don’t say “Chinese shop,” they say “at the Chinese,” yeah. No, no, it’s a serious thing that you identify all of them as something bad and low quality (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 7).

Another interviewee reflected on a 2024 incident in Novi Sad, highlighting stereotypes about both Japan and China:

But it’s the same, I think we understand, with the mythologization of Japan or giving Japan some aura of glamour, even though not everything there is the happiest. You know what I mean—neither side is exactly the happiest. But since that was the first association with China, that stereotype just builds and amplifies, especially now with these things. If a Chinese company comes and does something poorly, then it’s like, Aha, they don’t just make low-quality consumer goods quickly, they do everything like that (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 9).

However, perceptions of Chinese products are evolving due to technological advancements. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Serbian citizens received Chinese vaccines. The presence of Chinese electronic brands like Huawei and Xiaomi has also grown, with their products available even in small Serbian stores. As a result, the use of Chinese technology is increasing. One interviewee noted:

I have to admit, it’s changing very, very fast. People don’t mind anymore, for example, BYD [Chinese brand] cars, incredible. People in the last ten years who buy

Similarly, China feels closer to Serbian citizens in their daily experiences. In Serbian, there is an expression, “*da komšiji crkne krava*” (“I want my neighbor’s cow to die”), which reflects a mindset of envy, where people may only feel satisfied when their neighbor suffers. Possibly, Chinese people are perceived as “neighbors” in this sense, while the Japanese are not.

Chinese technology as a synonym for quality. I mean, people buy Xiaomi now, from scooters to rice cookers to phones and earphones and so on (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 9).

In the past, Japan was renowned for its technology and products, but it has largely been overtaken by China in these areas, little by little.

While Chinese products may contribute to negative perceptions of China in Serbia, in Serbia, cultural consumption often diverges from political orientations. For example, individuals may wear American-branded clothing while expressing anti-American sentiments or admire Russia without visiting it, yet travel to Germany for tourism. This suggests that the consumption of cultural products is not always directly tied to political views. Similarly, people may criticize Chinese products, but such opinions may not necessarily reflect their political stance. There can be a significant gap between opinions about products and politics, even when referring to the same country.

Just as Japanese individuals can enhance Japan's soft power through direct interactions, Chinese individuals in Serbia could similarly strengthen China's soft power. The Chinese community in Serbia has the potential to deepen the reach of Chinese soft power (Vladislavljev 2023). Unlike temporary cultural events that serve as soft power resources, constant direct communication and human relationships may be more significant.

4.4.4 Section Summary

Japanese culture shapes Serbian society through soft power channels like literature, films, and television. In addition to books, classic and modern films, along with anime, are popular via traditional and online platforms. Serbian media often depict Japan favorably, highlighting discipline and work ethic, which bolsters its cultural appeal. In contrast, Chinese cultural influence, more prominent due to a larger diaspora and commercial presence, often encounters negative stereotypes tied to product quality, though perceptions are improving with advanced Chinese technology.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined Japan's soft power resources in Serbia from 1999 to 2025, employing Nye's framework of soft power, which encompasses resources, policies, political values, and culture, to analyze their articulation and reception. Although quantitative data on public

perceptions of Japan and its people are absent, this chapter qualitatively addressed several evident soft power resources.

The analysis reveals that Serbian citizens generally hold positive perceptions of Japan. However, these perceptions are not uniform and vary depending on the specific resources and their articulation. Both the agency (Japan) and the audience (Serbian citizens) play critical roles in shaping this dynamic. The qualitative nature of these resources varies significantly: some, such as cultural products, are tangible, while others, like shared values, are intangible, posing challenges for standardized quantitative research.

The effectiveness of Japan's soft power in Serbia depends on a diffused interpretation, where both the agency and the audience actively shape its impact. For Japanese elites, strategically deployed soft power resources may be received by Serbian elites or citizens as intended. However, in some instances, Japan's strategies do not yield the anticipated outcomes, or Serbian citizens' interpretations highlight Japan as a favorable symbol in unintended ways.

For Japan, as the agent, the strategic deployment of soft power requires adaptability to Serbia's unique socio-political context. Concurrently, Serbian audiences interpret these resources through their own cultural and historical lenses, which influence their perception of value. This interplay underscores that soft power is not a unidirectional projection but a dynamic, co-creative process that enhances its resonance and relevance in Serbia. Policymakers must acknowledge the nuanced meanings embedded in these soft power resources.

The significance of Japan's soft power lies in its diversity, which resists confinement to a single category. Drawing on observations of Serbian society, this chapter identifies these resources and provides insights into how Japan's soft power resonates within this context. By focusing on the "how" of soft power, its reception and articulation, this analysis highlights the nuanced nature of Japan's soft power in Serbia.

CHAPTER 5: SOFT POWER OF JAPAN IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS IN SERBIA

Japanese soft power has established a presence in Serbia, yet its impact varies significantly across cities due to deeply rooted local identities. Regional identities in Serbia play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of Japanese soft power. Residents strongly identify with their local affiliations, such as *Beogradjani* (people from Belgrade), *Kragujevčani* (people from Kragujevac), or other regional groups, each fostering unique worldviews.

The influence of Japanese soft power in Serbia is shaped by local contexts, with variations in the visibility of symbolic donations and the availability of cultural products such as restaurants and shops. In some cities, Japanese government contributions, such as infrastructure or cultural projects, are prominent and foster positive perceptions, while in others, Japanese influence remains limited or absent. These differences contribute to distinct local narratives about Japanese culture and its role in Serbian society.

While the previous chapter analyzed the broader dynamics of Japanese soft power at the national level in Serbia, this chapter shifts its focus to the localized experiences within four specific cities: Belgrade, Kragujevac, Ražanj, and Vrnjačka Banja. These cities are selected for their diverse engagement with Japanese influence, ranging from abundant cultural resources in Belgrade to minimal presence in Kragujevac, a notable school donation in Ražanj, and a Japanese garden in Vrnjačka Banja. By exploring these cities' unique engagements with Japanese influence, this chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how Japanese soft power is perceived and experienced at the local level, contributing to a more comprehensive picture of its impact in Serbia.

5.1 Belgrade

This section examines the everyday soft power of Japan in Belgrade, where strategic and symbolic initiatives, such as the 2003 yellow bus donations, existed. It explores how Belgrade's residents engage with Japanese cultural resources, ranging from restaurants to cultural spaces, through their own values and daily experiences. The analysis highlights how the effects of soft power interplay within Belgrade's unique cultural and urban context, revealing the complex reception of foreign influence.

5.1.1 Belgrade as a Special Place In Serbia

While teaching Japanese online to students in Belgrade for several months, I was constantly asking them (in Japanese) about their activities during the week or weekend. Their responses often reflected participation in various events, indicating that Belgrade residents engage in a diverse array of hobbies and lifestyle choices.

A broader range of hobbies may correlate with greater interest in foreign products. Similarly, cities offering diverse opportunities may encourage residents to explore multiple options compared to those in less diverse settings. For instance, Belgrade hosts numerous Asian shops, restaurants, and a visible Asian population. Like other major European cities, there are Japanese restaurants, sushi restaurants, and confectionery shops. This cultural diversity cannot be attributed solely to Belgrade's status as the capital or its transportation advantages; rather, its large population, exceeding that of other Serbian cities, plays a significant role.

Having lived in Novi Sad for over two years, I was frequently asked to compare it with Belgrade. From an outsider's perspective, Novi Sad residents often view their city in relation to Belgrade. Consequently, my choice to reside in Novi Sad rather than Belgrade was sometimes perceived as noteworthy, leading to a sense of special treatment. Conversely, while relocating to Belgrade with assistance from the people from Kragujevac, I noticed that Belgrade residents often remarked to them, "Oh, you're from Šumadija," without further context. This phrase suggests that both Belgrade and Kragujevac are part of the Šumadija region; however, Kragujevac is more readily associated with Šumadija, while Belgrade is perceived as distinct, both by its residents and those from other areas. This perception underscores a broader cultural narrative, where distinctions between Belgrade and non-Belgrade are deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts rather than solely in recent political developments.

5.1.2 Yellow Bus, Chinese Presence, and Japanese Nature

In Belgrade, often regarded as a distinctive city within Serbia, the influence of Japanese soft power is notably visible through Japan's donation of 93 yellow buses in 2003. These buses, which became a symbolic representation of Japan's soft power, were gradually withdrawn from service by the end of 2023 and officially retired in 2025 (Politika 2025).

During a retirement ceremony for the buses, Belgrade Mayor Aleksandar Šapić expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan on behalf of previous mayors and the city’s residents, stating: “I believe this bus today symbolizes the help we received from Japan when it was likely most needed by Belgrade and Serbia” (Politika 2025). When I interviewed Belgrade residents about these yellow buses, all were aware of their existence, even after their retirement. One interviewee demonstrated detailed knowledge of the buses, citing media reports.

In my example, in 2022, I rode one of these buses in Voždovac. Though visibly aged, the bus, with its yellow exterior and the Japanese flag, served as a tangible reminder of Japan’s contribution to Serbia. The buses were often crowded, giving passengers a great opportunity to notice the markings inside the vehicle indicating Japan’s donation.

In a book by a Japanese ambassador, it is noted that Belgrade residents often express appreciation when Japanese individuals identify their nationality (Maruyama 2022). However, during my one-year stay in Belgrade, I did not experience any direct expressions of gratitude. I would find it unusual if someone thanked me solely for being Japanese.

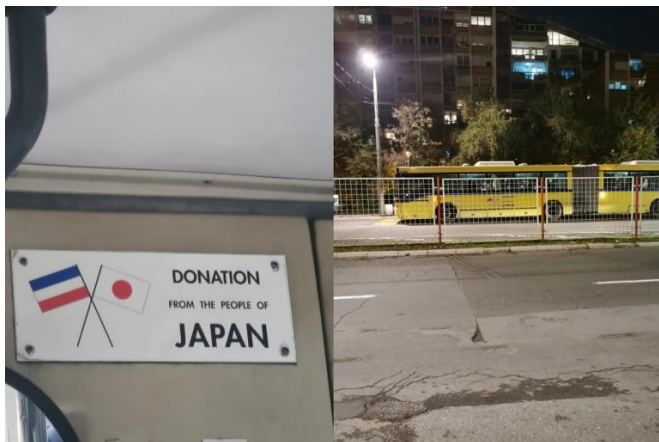


Image 5: Japanese flag inside the bus (2022)

While some individuals might appreciate preferential treatment based on nationality, I found it refreshing that Belgrade residents generally did not treat foreigners differently based on their origins. My impression was that the presence of foreigners, including Japanese individuals, was unremarkable in Belgrade, where locals appeared accustomed to interacting with people of diverse backgrounds. Unlike other parts of Serbia, where I occasionally felt othered, such a gaze was nearly absent in Belgrade. For instance, during my stay, I observed that refugees in parks near the Faculty of Economics were able to remain there safely. This

suggests that Belgrade's cosmopolitan norms, possibly tied to an expectation of intellectual openness among its residents, shape attitudes toward foreigners.

Beyond the well-known Japanese yellow buses, Belgrade's medical institutions and educational facilities have also benefited from Japanese ODA, a pattern seen in other Serbian cities. In addition, the high school teaching the Japanese language and the Japanese department at the University of Belgrade often collaborate with the Japanese embassy and academic communities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024). Cultural events related to Japanese anime and manga are also held in Belgrade. However, given the city's abundance of attractions, these donations and cultural initiatives may have a limited impact on the broader public. Some interviewees, apart from mentioning the yellow buses, were unaware of these contributions and expressed no particular emotional response regarding Japanese donations or events.

While visiting a bookstore in Belgrade, I also noticed numerous books by Japanese authors translated into Serbian. According to one interviewee, a long-term Belgrade resident, these translations are often sourced from English or French versions, even when the original is Japanese. This trend mirrors the growing popularity of Japanese literature in other European nations, such as the United Kingdom and France. Thus, Japanese soft power in Belgrade and other Serbian cities may be partially mediated through the cultural influence of other countries.

A notable Japan-related site in Belgrade is Cherry Blossom Road, located in the vicinity of the Japanese embassy.^{52 53} However, adjacent to this site is the Chinese Cultural Center, built on the location of the former Chinese embassy, which was destroyed during NATO airstrikes in 1999. The center features a memorial where Chinese visitors pay their respects. While Cherry Blossom Road is highlighted in Serbian media as a symbol of Japanese culture (Politika 2020), the Chinese Cultural Center appears to have a more prominent impact on visitors due to its historical significance.

⁵² It seems that Cherry Blossom Street (Serbian: ulica Trešnjinog cveta) is also called Confucius' Street (Serbian: ulica Konfučijeva). However, according to the cadastre data provided by the Republic Geodetic Authority (Serbian: Republički geodetski zavod), Confucius' Street does not appear in the database. (Filipović 2021, 198)

⁵³ Japan is known for its cherry blossoms, and it made news when its government donated cherry blossom trees to Serbia, sparking a violent scramble among the citizens to get them (Blic 2011).



Image 6: Chinese Cultural Center and Japanese Embassy in Belgrade (2025)

In New Belgrade, the Chinese population has increased significantly over the past decade. Having occasionally stayed at a hotel in this area during my ten years in Serbia, I observed a notable change: ten years ago, Chinese-language signs were scarce, whereas today, they are prevalent. In 2019, I visited a Chinese restaurant a short walk from the hotel; now, the area surrounding the hotel features numerous Chinese restaurants and shops, some with signage exclusively in Chinese. The hotel itself has leased part of its premises to a Chinese hairdresser, and nearby, there are Chinese-operated car mechanics, restaurants, and shops. One interviewee, a frequent visitor to these shops, noted that Japanese products are also available there, indicating a blend of cultural influences.⁵⁴

Furthermore, as a form of Japanese soft power, the Belgrade Botanical Garden includes a Japanese garden, one of only two official Japanese gardens in Serbia. Though small, it offers a serene and authentic Japanese atmosphere. Compared to other Japanese gardens in Europe, where quality varies, Belgrade's garden feels distinctly Japanese, with a well-maintained bridge and plants. However, access requires an entrance fee to the botanical garden, with exemptions for certain groups, such as students. The garden is not visible from outside, and visitor numbers appear low. Although some interviewees spoke positively about the garden, during my visit in 2023, I observed only a small number of visitors.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, in addition to these Chinese shops, Japanese products can also be bought in a Korean shop in Belgrade.



Image 7: Japanese garden in Belgrade (2023)

In addition to the garden, Kalemegdan hosts the *Japanska česma* (Japanese Tap), and Miljković features a Japanese park, both representing strategic governmental soft power initiatives. However, some Belgrade residents are unaware of these sites. In the private sector, Japanese restaurants, ramen shops, sushi restaurants, and taiyaki shops exist, but their numbers are significantly fewer than Chinese establishments. Some residents are unaware of these Japanese venues, limiting their cultural visibility.

Belgrade's size and the multitude of events occurring throughout the city may dilute the impact of Japanese cultural initiatives. Events showcasing Japanese pop culture, such as anime and manga displays, are organized, but they lack significant visibility or popularity. While Japan has provided donations to various Belgrade institutions and maintains several Japan-related sites, the retirement of the iconic yellow buses in 2025 has left uncertainty about which Japanese soft power resource might next capture the public's imagination.

5.2 Kragujevac

This section examines the limited Japanese soft power in Kragujevac, a typical Serbian city with minimal Japanese cultural presence. Unlike Belgrade, Ražanj, and Vrnjačka Banja, which feature symbolic Japanese donations or cultural landmarks, Kragujevac lacks such symbols, a situation common in many Serbian cities.

5.2.1 Treatment of Japanese

As my partner is from Kragujevac, I have spent considerable time there during my stay in Serbia. Generally, few people focus on my Japanese nationality. Despite Kragujevac's history

of significant Serbian casualties during World War II—approximately 2,800 people were killed in the area (Pavlowitch 2007, 62)—there appears to be no lingering resentment toward the Japanese as former enemies. Having met many individuals from Kragujevac, I have never heard negative remarks about Japan in the context of World War II, though comments critical of Germany are more common. When I discuss historical topics, including Japan’s wartime actions, people show curiosity rather than hostility.

In Kragujevac, I am more often perceived as a *srpski zet* (Serbian son-in-law) than as Japanese, with the former identity carrying greater significance. People frequently ask about my wife’s name and whether it is typically Serbian. When I respond that her name is Jelena, a common Serbian name, people often react positively, a pattern I have observed not only in Kragujevac but across Serbia, though the intensity of this response may vary by location.

Those who know my family treat me warmly, not because of my Japanese nationality but because I am a family member. This acceptance, characterized by smiles and casual conversation, stems from my role as a *zet* rather than my status as a *srpski zet*. Within Serbia’s community-oriented culture, foreigners integrated into families are generally well-accepted. However, outside these circles, particularly in public spaces, I am often identified as East Asian, either Chinese or Japanese. At times, I am treated as a rare foreigner, with people repeating “Japanac” or “Japan” more than necessary, often with enthusiasm, especially when they learn I am a *srpski zet* who speaks Serbian.

Conversely, I have encountered unpleasant remarks in public, such as mocking phrases like “chin chan chon.” When I respond, people often claim no ill intent, describing such comments as casual. When my family discussed this mocking issue with friends, some revealed a subculture among young males who consider it “cool” to mock East Asians with phrases like “chin chan chon”. People often advised me to ignore such remarks. However, after my Japanese-Serbian daughter was born, those close to me became more protective, emphasizing the importance of shielding children from such negative experiences.

These experiences are not unique to Kragujevac. Similar incidents occurred during my time in Novi Sad and Subotica, suggesting a regional pattern. Such behavior appears much less common in Belgrade or Ražanj. These phenomena suggest that people may not have specific emotions toward East Asians, including the Japanese. There is a possibility that

people mistake Japanese individuals for Chinese, which may lead to mockery, as some believe, but Japan's soft power may also not be as significant as Japanese diplomats claim from the perspective of local people.

5.2.2 Cultural Influences and Historical Memory in Kragujevac

According to an official source, the Clinical Center in Kragujevac received a donation of medical equipment from Japan in 2005. During my visit to the hospital in 2022, I noticed a Japanese sticker on a gynecology department door, but following renovations, the sticker was no longer present by 2025.



Image 8: Gynecology Department Doors, Kragujevac; Left (2023), Right (2025)

One interviewee recalled seeing a Japanese-donated machine in the hospital, stating:

In the hospital, it was really pleasant for me because I'm aware of how terrible our healthcare is, absolutely terrible, especially public healthcare. And when you go there to gynecology and see a modern machine that can clearly show you the fetus or whatever, you feel more comfortable. Let's be clear, I felt safer it said Japan (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 7).⁵⁵

However, when I asked other women in Kragujevac about the sonogram machine, they were unaware of the Japanese donation, with one noting she had not visited the gynecology department.

⁵⁵ Donations of medical equipment are not exclusively from Japan. An interviewee noted seeing a mammogram machine in Kragujevac marked as a donation from USAID. Additionally, during a pregnancy school organized at a public hospital, the interviewee received prenatal vitamins, a small children's ball, a spoon, and stretch mark creams, all provided by USAID.

This limited awareness reflects a broader pattern in Kragujevac, where, despite some residents' passion about Japanese anime, their study of the Japanese language, or the experience of interacting with Japanese visitors, the city lacks a strong and visible Japanese cultural presence. Bookstores stock Japanese books, including manga, and the city has hosted anime and manga-related events, although these are not exclusively focused on Japanese content. Unlike Belgrade, Kragujevac, like most Serbian cities, has limited access to imported Japanese products or Japanese restaurants.

In contrast, EU promotion is highly visible in Kragujevac. A billboard in front of the municipal office in the city center promotes the EU with slogans like “The EU for You” and “It’s Better Together.” These messages, which change periodically, emphasize the EU’s contributions to Serbian citizens and advocate for Serbia’s EU membership.

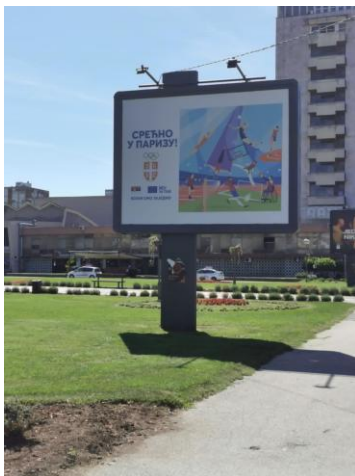


Image 9: EU Billboard, Kragujevac City Center (2025)

In close proximity to this billboard is a children’s playground, funded by EU donations. However, the playground equipment is frequently damaged, possibly vandalized at night, and the accompanying board displaying the EU flag is often defaced with nationalistic graffiti. On one occasion, the board was entirely replaced.



Image 10: Playground Boards, Kragujevac; Left (2021), Right (2024)

Located in the city center, the billboard and playground are highly visible. However, in 2025, prolonged winter weather and extremely hot summers rendered the unshaded playground unsuitable for young children.

Monuments, graffiti, murals, and photographs in public places in Kragujevac commemorate victims of the 1990s wars, reflecting both grassroots nationalism and collective memory, both officially and unofficially. Inside the Ministry of Internal Affairs building, adjacent to the municipal office, photographs honor those who died during the war. Opposite the EU billboard in the city center stands a monument dedicated to 1990s war victims.



Image 11: Monument in the center of Kragujevac (2023)

It is often unclear which commemorative objects or ideological apparatuses in Serbia originate from spontaneous citizen initiatives and which are politically motivated. In other words, a central issue with these ideological structures is the ambiguity surrounding their origins, whether they were created by individual citizens or implemented under the direction of authorities. While Japan is not negatively portrayed in this context, discussions about NATO airstrikes often prompt comparisons to Japan's atomic bombings, suggesting a shared sense of victimhood. For instance, some individuals who criticized NATO actions also referenced Japan's wartime suffering in conversations with me.



Image 12: Graffiti about NATO airstrikes in Kragujevac (2025)

In contrast to the limited Japanese presence, Kragujevac hosts two prominent Chinese department stores, Cosmos and Raffles, enhancing the visibility of Chinese culture. An interviewee noted:

There's no presence of Japanese people. (...) Japanese people haven't come to live [in Kragujevac]. That's why they don't have associations. Yeah. But I can say people have an opinion about China and the Chinese, and that's because they live in Kragujevac (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 7).

The interviewee also recalled interacting with a Chinese family in the neighborhood. Additionally, Chinese companies employ many locals, and new Chinese restaurants have opened, making Chinese products, shops, and residents far more visible than their Japanese counterparts.

Unlike Belgrade, Ražanj, and Vrnjačka Banja, Kragujevac lacks symbolic Japanese donations or cultural landmarks, which is common in many Serbian cities. In the absence of a specific narrative about Japan, the positioning of Japan in Serbian citizens' worldview is not reflected in any concrete articulations of Japan's soft power.

5.3 Ražanj

This section examines the workings of Japanese soft power in Ražanj, focusing on a 2011–2012 school renovation donation that has left a positive impression on many of its residents. It explores how the visible Japanese contribution, marked by boards and stickers, is perceived favorably by school workers. However, Ražanj's socioeconomic challenges, including depopulation and unemployment, may diminish the broader impact of Japan's soft power.

5.3.1 Positive Impressions about Japanese Donation

Located along the highway between Niš and Belgrade, the municipality of Ražanj is surrounded by Kruševac, Aleksinac, and Paraćin, approximately 55 km from Niš in the direction of Belgrade (Opština Ražanj n.d.). The Ivan Vušović primary school, near the town center, prominently displays a board acknowledging a donation from Japan. Facing the main road, the board is visible to all who pass through Ražanj. The donation, valued at €68,546 and implemented in 2011–2012, addressed critical infrastructure needs by replacing outdated wooden windows and doors and renovating sanitary facilities.⁵⁶ The school principal secured the grant by submitting the necessary documentation for these renovations.



Image 13: Ivan Vušović School and Donation Board, Ražanj (2021)

⁵⁶ €68,546 was approximately equivalent to \$82,000 USD between 2011 and 2022, based on an average exchange rate of 1.20 USD per euro.



Image 14: Doors at Ivan Vušović School, Ražanj (2025)

Although the board and stickers are slowly deteriorating, the Japanese flags and messages remain clearly visible. The donation represents a significant and tangible improvement to the school's infrastructure, contributing to Japan's soft power. School workers have expressed positive sentiments about the donation, even over a decade later. School workers noted:

It was what we needed at that moment, urgently needed, yes, it helped, nothing was wasted, everything was done properly. (...) We're not cold in the school anymore (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

I would like to thank you personally and all the citizens of Japan for donating what you donated and, of course, for improving the working conditions here at the school (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

The donation was effectively implemented based on the school's request, and no negative feedback was heard. However, in conversations with residents outside the school, including former students, I observed a lack of strong emotional attachment to the donation or to Japan in general, indicating a limited broader impact on the community. Furthermore, the person who had expressed appreciation to all the citizens of Japan behaved quite normally when I saw him in the city; he did not exaggerate his gratitude in any noticeable way.

5.3.2 Japan is Neutral, But the Others Are Not.

Since 2024, a board acknowledging German donations has been displayed alongside the Japanese one at the Ivan Vušović primary school in Ražanj. The German projects, completed

by 2024 and supported through Serbia's Office for Public Investment Management, were formalized by a contract between the Ministry of Public Investment and Ražanj's local government. A school worker described the German contributions:

They invested and paid for workers and materials for the school's reconstruction of the ceilings, floors, floor insulation, heating, school dining hall, ceramics on the staircase, hallways, lobbies, and fixtures (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20)



Image 15: Donation Boards from Germany and Japan, Ivan Vušović School (2025)

School workers expressed positive sentiments about the German donation, similar to their appreciation for Japan's contribution.

In addition to these donations in Ražanj, the EU flags are also visible on other donated items, such as municipal buildings, an ambulance car, and a nursery, reflecting the EU's broader presence.



Image 16: EU Donations in Ražanj (2025)

Apart from the EU donation, the market in Ražanj was reconstructed with USAID funding. However, it operates only on Thursdays, with vendors selling vegetables and fruits on the streets during other weekdays. Given Ražanj's aging population, vendors face difficulties bringing products to the market due to stairs, and the shrinking demographics reduce the need for numerous sellers.

Some interviewees' perceptions of donation boards displaying various national flags revealed distinct attitudes. Japan is consistently viewed as a neutral, non-political actor, unlike the EU, US, and China, whose contributions are often perceived as politically motivated. This neutrality enhances Japan's soft power in Ražanj by fostering trust, a key component of cultural influence. The school workers noted:

Well, people in Ražanj, probably in all of Serbia, my impression is, look at Japan and the Japanese completely neutrally, unlike the others, China, America, Europe, in the sense that a lot here is viewed politically. In terms of the political influences of other countries on ours. And now, people here almost don't perceive Japan's political influence on Serbia at all, and that's why they look at Japan differently than other countries, Europe, or China. All the others, essentially, America, China, and Europe, have a strong political influence in Serbia, and a good part of Serbs consider that influence, let's not say bad, but they don't have a very positive impression of that influence on Serbia. On the other hand, Japan, such an influence isn't noticed here, maybe it exists, but people simply don't notice such an influence of Japan on events in Serbia, and therefore, in general, people here have that, let's say, perhaps neutral stance toward Japan, and maybe a bit more positive compared to these other countries (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

Japanese investments would be the most attractive compared to European ones and American ones... Everyone in Ražanj has a positive opinion of [Japan]. You can't say,

here, they're foreign mercenaries now, because the Japanese installed doors and windows. (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20)

Japan's geographic distance can contribute to its neutral image, as other interviewees explained:

Japan is far away, so the donations from Japan are the most neutral. They can't be politically abused. But this [EU, America] can... You can't argue against Japan. That there's some hidden agenda behind those investments (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

Well, the contacts are closer [to the other European countries], many people from Ražanj are there, all the media and everything else is much closer to Europe. Aha. But it's remembered in Ražanj that the Japanese changed the carpentry, that's something I think almost everyone in Ražanj knows (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

Despite critical views of the EU, EU-supported festivals in Ražanj, such as a folklore event (including one with Bulgarian participation), attract significant crowds.

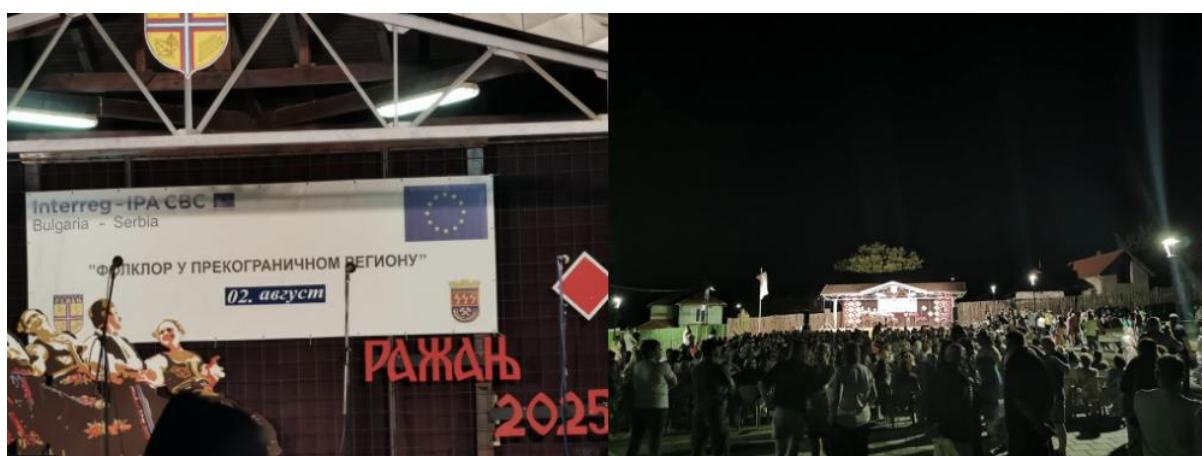


Image 17: Folklore Festival, Ražanj (2025)

Beyond Japan, the EU, and the US, Ražanj hosts a visible Chinese presence through two local stores and resident Chinese families. An interviewee highlighted differing cultural approaches:

Well, we may have learned more about the people because we actually meet them, there are more Chinese in Ražanj and in Serbia, and we have a student from China now, this year. So, in that sense, we're closer because we know more about each other, and they've been living here for a long time; they've adapted (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

While Japan's strategic donation, marked by a visible board, enhances its soft power, the Chinese community's direct engagement with locals fosters greater familiarity. A Serbian proverb, "*daleko od očiju, daleko od srca*" ("out of sight, out of mind"), reflects this dynamic, suggesting that Japan's distance limits its cultural impact. Another interviewee noted:

Well, I don't have any direct experience with Japanese culture. Everything I know about the culture, history, and so on, and so forth, about Japan, is through the media and through education. To be honest, through education here in Serbia, we don't talk much about Japan. (...) Perhaps, the perception of Japan here in Serbia is somewhat unfairly neglected, or it seems to everyone that Japan is too far away because of that cultural difference between us, Europeans, and you, Japanese (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

During my stay in Ražanj, locals treated me primarily as a community member rather than specifically as Japanese. A neighbor referred to me as "*Bankovićev Japanac*," referencing my spouse's great-grandfather, Banković, while others called me "*komšija*" (neighbor). This warm treatment likely stems from my familial ties to Ražanj rather than my nationality, though being Japanese may contribute subtly to positive perceptions.

5.3.3 Socioeconomic Challenges in Ražanj

Interviews in Ražanj highlight socioeconomic challenges, including unemployment and population decline, which influence the reception of Japanese aid. While the 2011–2012 school donation is valued as a vital contribution, socioeconomic challenges limit the broader impact of Japan's soft power. The number of first-grade students has dwindled to approximately 10, with one interviewee noting a 50% reduction in student enrollment over the past 15 years. They explained:

People move to bigger cities to find jobs... Ražanj, as a small place, doesn't have a large number of inhabitants (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20)..

If something opened here... some small factory... our people would do that. There's nothing here to work on (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

Another added:

And that's a trend that will probably continue for the next 10-15 years. The number of young people will decrease, and with that, the number of children. (...) [people who have houses but do not live in Ražanj] come here because it's peaceful, a small place. It's peaceful, and there are also young people who have moved here now, currently living here. That's a small number. A larger number leave, and a smaller number return.(Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20)

The interviewees also express a desire for further Japanese involvement, particularly in economic investment to address local challenges like depopulation and unemployment.

Interviewer: What can the Japanese government do for the people in Ražanj?...

Interviewee: To open some kind of plant, some factories, anything. That's needed, so people can work; there are no jobs (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

Another noted:

There were seven strong companies, where a large number of people worked... and people came from other cities, small towns, to work here. And this was a lively place (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the school workers by the author. June 20).

Nye (2023, 4) argues that politicians and diplomats view the population as a form of power. In this context, Ražanj's declining population reduces the number of the audience for Japanese soft power. Conversations with locals suggested that, despite clean and functional facilities, including beautiful but unoccupied houses, many residents have relocated to larger cities or abroad, returning to Ražanj only occasionally for its peaceful environment. Near the main bus station, a large motel, once a vibrant hub for tourists and events, now stands empty.

5.4 Vrnjačka Banja

This section explores the role of Japanese soft power in Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia's renowned spa town, through the 2011 Japanese garden in Central Park. It examines how the garden is perceived and experienced by tourists and locals as a relaxing and romantic spot.

5.4.1 Positive Impression of the Japanese Garden

The history of Vrnjačka Banja traces back to the Roman era, evidenced by the 1924 discovery of a Roman mineral spring. After World War II, the spa became a hub for state-supported medical tourism, thriving in the 1950s–60s and 1980s with approximately 200,000 annual visitors (Turistička Organizacija Vrnjačka Banja n.d.). Central Park is a notable tourist

spot, with the river running alongside the main road, enhancing the town's scenic atmosphere. Vrnjačka Banja is often called “the queen of tourism,” Serbia's most beautiful spa (Turistička Organizacija Vrnjačka Banja n.d.).



Image 18: Central Park in Vrnjačka Banja (2025)

In 2011, a 3000-square-meter Japanese garden was opened in Vrnjačka Banja's central park, funded by Japan and local authorities at a cost of about 12 million dinars.⁵⁷ Designed with traditional Japanese elements, it was inaugurated with the Japanese ambassador's hope that it would be a relaxing space for locals and visitors. This is Serbia's second Japanese garden, after one in Belgrade's Botanical Garden (RTS 2011).⁵⁸

An interviewee who owns a local villa in Vrnjacka Banja says: “When the Japanese Garden was created, it was a sensation” (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 15). The garden is now prominently featured on maps, landmarks, and guides. In conversations with locals, many consider it a popular sightseeing spot for tourists.

⁵⁷ As average rate of 2011, 1 USD = 75 RSD is used. Based on this rate, a total of 12,000,000 RSD converts to approximately 160,000 USD (12,000,000 RSD ÷ 75 RSD/USD ≈ 160,000 USD).

⁵⁸ In Serbia, gardens (*vrt* or *bašta*) are cherished, often used for flower gardens, children's play areas, or small agricultural plots. Locals frequently gather in gardens to drink coffee with family or neighbors, reflecting a cultural appreciation for such spaces.





Image 20: Japanese garden overview (2025)



Image 21: Waterfall and wooden pavilion (2025)

The sound of the waterfall, a prominent feature of Japanese gardens, immediately captures visitors' attention. It enhances both the visual and aural experience and makes the area feel cooler. Some visitors touch the water, engaging sight, hearing, and touch. People come there to find peace and relaxation.

A tourist from the outskirts of Belgrade shared:

Honestly, it's my first time here, and I didn't even know this existed. I saw the Japanese garden when I passed by a sign that said "Japanese Garden." I was like,

wow, I'm so impressed. It's just so positive for people—it helps you relax and unwind (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the tourist by the author. July 15).

Another tourist echoed similar sentiments: “I feel... peace. Bliss. I feel calm, nice. Enjoyment.” He also appreciated its cultural significance, stating, “I feel like I'm in Japan, and Japan is far away (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the tourist by the author. July 15).”

The villa owner commented:

It's in a beautiful location. Location-wise, it's the Heart of the Spa, in the park itself, well-kept and maintained. When I walk, the person who protects the park regularly picks up leaves, rakes them, the grass is absolutely immaculate. Children play there, spread out their lawns, have picnics, bring animals (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 15).

During observations, I saw visitors taking photos. The garden features Japanese elements like a torii gate, bridge, a wooden pavilion, and a waterfall, distinct from typical Serbian designs. On social media, tourist photos and videos promote the garden, amplifying Japanese soft power.

5.4.2 Different Scenarios

During my first visit to the Japanese garden in winter 2020, it was nearly empty, and Central Park felt less vibrant. While beautiful all the year-round, the peak tourism season highlights the park's lush foliage and flowers, ideal for leisurely walks. Visitor numbers also increase during events like the carnival, film festival, and Love Fest. My second visit coincided with the carnival, supported by the Federation of European Carnival Cities, which is the most popular family event in Vrnjačka Banja.

It is also important to note that, despite summer being the peak tourist season in Vrnjačka Banja, global warming is taking its toll in Serbia, causing people to reconsider their daily plans and activities. The weather in Serbia has been changing abruptly, from feeling like winter in April to a 20-degree increase the following week. In such unusual weather conditions, July can become problematic, with temperatures sometimes reaching 40 degrees Celsius. As a result, many people choose to stay indoors rather than go out.

With this in mind, I organized my field observations accordingly, avoiding the hottest days, which inevitably reduced the number of visitors in Vrnjačka Banja. Although Vrnjačka

Banja was strategically designed as a relaxing destination, the extreme summer heat, with temperatures reaching 40 degrees Celsius even in the shade, can make it feel neither relaxing nor comfortable. Therefore, conducting my fieldwork on July 15 and 16, when temperatures were around 30 degrees Celsius, was relatively pleasant given the aforementioned weather trends in Serbia.

At night, the atmosphere of the garden somehow changes again. As the temperature drops, tourists who earlier decided to stay put begin to swarm the place, usually after 7 p.m..

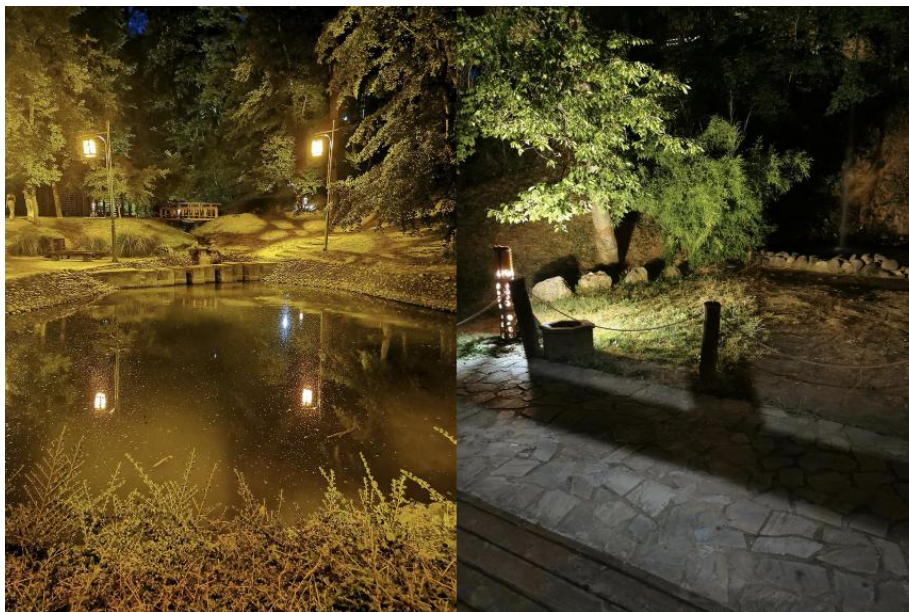


Image 22: Japanese Garden at Night (2025)

Amid the crowd, I observed a group of children, possibly on a school trip, taking photos one by one around the bridge, wooden pavilion, and waterfall. Visiting the Japanese garden is a must for any tourist in Vrnjačka Banja; there is no reason to miss it.

What I find most intriguing about the garden is that locals also describe it as a popular dating spot. During my visit around 9 p.m., I saw six couples (or what I assumed to be couples) who chose to avoid the carnival festivities and crowds, opting instead for the peaceful setting of the Japanese garden, where they could listen to the waterfall and the buzzing of summer insects. This suggests that, while the garden was designed for night visits, it is unclear whether Japanese diplomats intended it to become a romantic dating spot. The couples, as active agents, use the garden tactically to deepen their relationships in this romantic setting.

The Japanese garden, designed with strategic investment from Japan, was intended to be a relaxing yet spiritual spot, embodying Japan's aesthetics. However, visitors, through their tactics, such as going on dates, resist this intentional ideological framing. These romantic outings represent how people adapt the space to surpass its strategically planned values.

5.4.3 Does It Look Like a Japanese Garden?

During my first visit to the Japanese garden in Vrnjačka Banja, I distinctly felt that it was different from traditional Japanese gardens, like those in Kyoto, which are highly refined. Moreover, the Japanese garden in Belgrade's Botanical Garden feels more authentic than the one in Vrnjačka Banja.

Unlike the Belgrade garden, which requires an entrance fee, the Vrnjačka Banja garden is free. Both were funded by Japan and are designated as official Japanese gardens in Serbia. Initially, I was unaware that both were financed by the Japanese government or the extent of their investment. For visitors, the official sponsorship may be less important than the garden's quality.

In addition to my perspective, locals also expressed doubts about the garden's authenticity. During casual conversations in Vrnjačka Banja, I was asked if it resembled a Japanese garden, to which I responded positively, noting its Japanese elements, such as the bridge, and their designs. However, some locals and tourists questioned the cleanliness of the water or the design of the buildings. While the garden is maintained regularly, Japanese gardens in Japan often benefit from higher investment and meticulous care.



Image 23: Pond in Japanese garden (2025)

Some locals mentioned they hadn't visited the garden in years, a common phenomenon at tourist destinations worldwide. The local villa owner stated:

It offers peace and tranquility, beautiful during the day and at night when it's lit up. But maybe some locals got tired of it because there haven't been new investments or exciting additions, so they take it for granted. It hasn't lost its beauty, but maybe they're just used to it. For them, it might need new investments to make them say "wow" again. But for tourists, it's always interesting because they see it now and then, maybe again in a year or two when they return (Anonymous. 2025. Interview with the local citizen by the author. July 15).

According to the interviewee, since its opening in 2011, the Japanese garden has seen little change. As a tourist attraction, it remains appealing to newcomers, though locals and tourists often hold differing opinions. Those who have experienced more refined Japanese gardens, whether in person or through videos, may view this garden as a replica. Aesthetically, despite limited investment, diplomats cannot fully control what feels authentic to visitors and locals. Genuine communication between Japanese and Serbian people can help dispel stereotypes, but sustaining soft power through the Japanese garden in Vrnjačka Banja may require additional funding and aesthetic improvements.

The impact of soft power cannot be judged solely by visitor numbers, though it is notable that even during peak seasons, such as the carnival, turnout remains relatively low. The challenge of measuring soft power's effects persists. Despite fewer visitors, the garden has become a popular romantic dating spot, perceived positively by both locals and tourists. The couples lingering on the benches may represent those deeply attracted to Japan and its soft power, rather than a transient flow of visitors.

5.5 Chapter Summary

In four Serbian cities, Belgrade, Kragujevac, Ražanj, and Vrnjačka Banja, Japanese cultural influence manifests differently, shaping varied perceptions among locals. Belgrade hosts various Japanese restaurants, yet its large, diverse population dilutes the impact of Japanese soft power. Kragujevac shows minimal Japanese influence, overshadowed by visible Chinese shops and EU promotions. Ražanj benefits from a significant Japanese donation to a school, fostering a neutral and positive view of Japan as a non-political actor. Vrnjačka Banja's Japanese garden, a popular tourist attraction, evokes relaxation and cultural curiosity with its romantic appeal, enhancing Japan's soft power.

My observations as an outsider revealed nuanced differences across these cities, necessitating an analysis of how location shapes perceptions. While individual observations as a Japanese person can differ from the collective Serbian perception of Japanese soft power, a connection exists, as national soft power is expressed through interactions and articulations. This connection between collectives and individuals is qualitatively addressed when evaluating the effects of soft power.

Observations across these cities reveal that Japanese soft power operates at both national and local levels, influencing people differently. As discussed in the previous chapter, national tendencies shape perceptions, but this chapter highlights how these vary across locales. Articulations of Japanese soft power among Serbian elites and locals reflect these national and local differences. Citizens, tied to their specific communities, engage with Japanese soft power resources in ways that reflect their desires. They may adapt cultural spaces or narratives for their own purposes, diverging from the intended objectives, which demonstrates that their actions are driven not only by national or foreign strategies but also by their own tactics in engaging with these soft power resources.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study examined how Japan's soft power has been articulated and perceived in Serbia from 1999 to 2025, exploring both elite-level policies and local-level experiences through the lenses of soft power and everyday life studies. The research highlights the interplay between agents and audiences, introducing a novel concept of "everyday soft power" and providing a comprehensive analysis of Japan's soft power in Serbia. The period since 1999, shaped by Japan's human security initiatives and the lingering impact of NATO airstrikes on Serbian worldviews, offers multiple layers for understanding Japan's soft power.

The literature review provides an in-depth examination of soft power, with a particular focus on Japan's approach and its relevance in the Serbian context. While discussions of soft power are often dominated by major geopolitical actors such as Russia, China, the EU, and the US, Japan's role has received relatively little attention. Moreover, existing studies on Japan's soft power tend to focus on diplomatic initiatives and development aid, often overlooking how Serbian citizens perceive and experience these efforts.

Empirically, this thesis extensively analyzes Japan-Serbia-related data, employing ethnography and multilingual discourse analysis of English, Serbian, and Japanese sources to uncover both elite-driven strategies and non-elite tactics. This approach offers a comprehensive view of soft power dynamics. Interviews with experts and non-expert citizens reveal diverse receptions of Japan's influence, with the ethnographic approach capturing nuanced local perspectives.

Theoretically, the thesis incorporates perspectives from everyday life to address the ambiguity and measurement challenges inherent in soft power research. The theoretical framework draws on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power and Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday life, integrating concepts such as strategy and tactics into the notion of everyday soft power. This concept decentralizes elite-driven narratives and emphasizes micro-level practices and local perceptions.

The analysis demonstrates that Japanese soft power in Serbia operates as a dynamic, co-constructed process rather than a unilateral projection. Japan, as the agent, must tailor its strategies to Serbia's socio-political context, while Serbian audiences interpret and engage

with these resources through their own lenses. The diverse forms of soft power, ranging from tangible products to intangible values, are experienced qualitatively and often reshaped by local tactics.

In some instances, audiences aligned with the intentions of Japanese agencies. For example, Serbian elites and citizens often perceive Japan as balanced or neutral, reflecting Japan's intended strategy. Observations across various Serbian cities reveal how local contexts shape these perceptions, with soft power operating simultaneously at national and local levels.

In other cases, audience perceptions diverged from Japan's strategic goals. Despite deliberate efforts, many Serbian citizens remain unaware of Japan or its contributions, highlighting limitations in the reach of Japan's soft power initiatives. For instance, while infrastructure projects are viewed positively by those who use them regularly, many citizens are unaware of these efforts.

Unexpected outcomes also emerged. Neither Japanese nor Serbian elites anticipated Japan's prominence in Serbian protests or comparisons with China, yet these events unexpectedly bolstered Japan's soft power. These phenomena, independent of the Serbian regime's intentions, underscore the unpredictable nature of soft power dynamics. Japan's diplomacy and political values, however, were not thoroughly considered by locals in this context.

Measuring soft power in academic discussions has been and remains problematic. As this thesis demonstrates, the qualitative nature of soft power resources varies significantly, making survey research challenging. Rather than yielding limited results, such research risks altering the inherently ambiguous concept of soft power itself. One potential approach is to conduct ethnography, monitor local media, and observe the diffusion of soft power between macro- and micro-level actors.

The study faced several limitations. Japan's soft power resources, being a vast topic, were only briefly explored, and analyzing the bilateral relationship required an understanding of both nations, which proved challenging. Budget constraints and limited experience restricted the scope of interviews and observations across various fields. Additionally, limited engagement with Serbian and Japanese policymakers and diplomats constrained the depth of

policy analysis, and the absence of a regional context from other Western Balkan nations limited broader comparisons. Future research should directly engage policymakers, incorporate regional perspectives, and expand ethnographic methods to track evolving perceptions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Parkhurst, Justin. 2017. *The Politics of Evidence From evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence*.
2020. "Introduction: In the Midst of Global Power Shifts." In *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*, by Hendrik W. Ohnesorge, 1-22. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Zahran, Geraldo, and Leonardo Ramos. 2010. "From Hegemony to Soft Power: Implications of a Conceptual Change." In *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Inderjeet Parmar and John Dumbrell, 12-31. Routledge.
- Blanchard, Jean-Marc F., and Fujia Lu. 2012. "Thinking Hard About Soft Power: A Review and Critique of the Literature on China and Soft Power." *Asian Perspective* 565-589.
- Hayden, Craig. 2015. "Scope, Mechanism, and Outcome: Arguing Soft Power in the Context of Public." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 1-27.
- Kolaković, Aleksandra. 2020. "Kultura i Diplomacija." *Kultura* 5-7.
- Otmazgin, Nissim Kadosh. 2012. "Geopolitics and Soft Power: Japan's Cultural Policy and Cultural Diplomacy in Asia." *Asia-Pacific Review* 37-61.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi. 2015. "Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of 'international cultural exchange'." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 419-432.
- Jeong, Joonoh, and Jonathan Grix. 2023. "An analysis of Japan's soft power strategies through the prism of sports mega-events." *Sport in Society* 1756-1776.
- Nakano, Ryoko, and Yujie Zhu. 2020. "Heritage as soft power: Japan and China in international politics." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 869-881.
- Tamaki, Taku. 2019. "Repackaging national identity: Cool Japan and the resilience of Japanese identity narratives." *Asian Journal of Political Science* 108-126.
- Winkler, Stephanie Christine. 2019. "'Soft power is such a benign animal': narrative power and the reification of concepts in Japan." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 483-501.

- Vuksanović, Vuk, Srdjan Cvijić, and Maksim Samorukov. 2022. "Beyond Sputnik and RT: How Does Russian Soft Power in Serbia Really Work?" *The Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP)*.
- Richard Grievesson, Julia Gruebler, Mario Holzner. 2018. "Western Balkans EU Accession: Is the 2025 Target Date Realistic?" 05. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326416876_Western_Balkans_EU_Accession_Is_the_2025_Target_Date_Realistic.
- Fouéré, Erwan. 2019. "The EU's re-engagement with the Western Balkans: A new chapter long over due." 1 10. Accessed 12 7, 2019. https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/PB2019_01_EF_WesternBalkans.pdf.
- Gorana Krstić, Friedrich Schneider. 2015. *Formalizing the Shadow Economy in Serbia: Policy Measures and Growth Effects*. 2015th. Springer.
- Huliaras, Asteris C. 2007. "Japan and Southeastern Europe." *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 15-27.
- Bechev, Dimitar. 2015. "The EU, Japan and the Balkans: Cooperation for Post-conflict Nation-building." In *The European Union and Japan: A New Chapter in Civilian Power Cooperation?*, by Paul Bacon, Hartmut Mayer and Hidetoshi Nakamura, 201-211.
- Huliaras, Asteris, and Nikolaos Tzifakis. 2007. "Contextual Approaches to Human Security: Canada and Japan in the Balkans." *International Journal* 559-575.
- Engels, Friedrich, and Karl Marx. [1848] 1970. *The Communist Manifesto*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press.
- Nigam, Aditya. 1996. "Marxism and Power." *Social Scientist* 24 (4/6): 3-22.
- Scott, John, ed. 2014. *A Dictionary of Sociology (Oxford Quick Reference)*. Oxford Univ.
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 777-795.
- Morgenthau, Hans. 1948. *Politics Among Nations*.
- Mearsheimer, John. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
- Nye, Joseph. 2023. *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition*. Springer.
- Ji, Li. 2023. "Measuring soft power." In *The Routledge Handbook of Soft Power*, by Naren Chitty, Lilian Ji and Gary D Rawnsley, 84-100. Routledge.

- Fish, Stanley. 1980. "Interpreting the "Variorum"." In *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, by Stanley Fish, 147-173. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Björkdahl, Annika, Martin Hall, and Ted Svensson. 2019. "Everyday international relations: Editors' introduction." *Cooperation and Conflict* 123-130.
- Holloway, Lewis, and Phil Hubbard. 2001. *People and place: The extraordinary geographies of everyday life*.
- Vaughan-Williams, Nick, and Maria Pisani. 2018. "Migrating borders, bordering lives: everyday geographies of ontological security and insecurity in Malta." *Social & Cultural Geography* 651-673.
- Ejdus, Filip. 2021. "Revisiting the Local Turn in Peacebuilding." In *A Requiem for Peacebuilding?*, 41-58.
- Džuverović, Nemanja. 2022. "How to Study Peace and Security in the Western Balkans." In *Peace and Security in the Western Balkans*.
- Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loug. 2014. "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power." *Media, War & Conflict* p.70-84.
- Danas. 2025. "Većina građana nije za članstvo Srbije u EU, ali je vidi kao glavnog ekonomskog partnera." *Danas*. June 12. Accessed June 14, 2025. https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/vecina-gradjana-nije-za-clanstvo-u-eu/#google_vignette.
2020. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/comment/faq/culture/gaiko.html>.
- Cabinet Office, Japan. 2019. *About the Cool Japan Strategy*. https://www.cao.go.jp/cool_japan/about/about.html.
- Milošević, Zoran. 2024. "In Film and Politics." *Films and Series as Instruments of Geopolitics* 83-103.
- Nye, Joseph. 2008. *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*.
- Putre, Jelena. 2023. *What You Need To Know About American Soft Power in Serbia*. <https://lazomagazine.com/american-soft-power/>.
- Srbinovski, Jelena. 2009. "Japanese and Serbian cultural exchange." In *Japan and Serbia in a foreseeable future: proceedings of round table conference*.
- Wang, Chenjun. 2024. "A study of soft power rankings." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwXVFeFTR9c>.
- Ichihara, Maiko. 2018. *Japan's International Democracy Assistance as Soft Power*.

- Yellen, Jeremy A. 2019. *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*.
- Shoji, Junichiro. 2011. "A Study on the Issue of Naming Wars in Japan (日本における戦争呼称に関する問題の一考察)." *Bulletin of the National Institute for Defense Studies* 43-80.
- Hasebe, Yukio. 2012. "War Powers." *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*. Accessed 12 10, 2018. <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578610.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199578610-e-24>.
- Sugitani, Naoya. 2024. "The True Image of Douglas MacArthur, the Pacifist: A History of Discourse on the Father of Article 9 of the Constitution 「“平和主義者” ダグラス・マッカーサーの実像－憲法第九条の父をめぐる言説史－」."
- Iokibe, Makoto. 2011. *The Diplomatic History of Postwar Japan*.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 1960. "Agreement under Article VI of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America, Regarding Facilities and Areas and the Status of United States Armed Forces in Japan." Accessed 12 11, 2018. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/sfa/pdfs/fulltext.pdf>.
- . 2022. *ODA (Official Development Assistance) Projects supported by the Fund for Human Security*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/bunya/security/ah_list.html.
- Yamauchi, Masayuki, and Yuichi Hosoya, . 2023. *Modern Japan's Place in World History: From Meiji to Reiwa*.
- Sakamoto, Kazuya. 2014. "Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister and Japan-China Relations: What is Confusing the Debate?" 阪大法学.
- Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs. n.d. *Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between China and Japan: 50 Years of Development and Inspirations for the Future*. <https://www.cpifa.org/en/cms/book/359>.
- Edamura, Junro. 2008. *Thirty Years Since the "Fukuda Doctrine" - Ideology-led Diplomacy*. 49. <https://www.jiia.or.jp/column/column-155.html>.
1995. *Press Conference by Press Secretary 18 July 1995*. 7 18. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1995/7/718.html>.
- Ueda, Hideaki. 2017. *人間の安全保障と日本の外交政策*. https://ippjapan.org/pdf/Opinion072_HUeda.pdf.

- Watanabe, Yasushi. 2014. *Soft Power: Influence and Persuasion*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pp936E-BH4Y&t=285s>.
- UNDP. 1994. "Human Development Report 1994." Human Development Report 1994.
- Osa, Yukie. 2021. *Introduction to Human Security*(入門 人間の安全保障). Chuko Shinsho.
- United Nations. 2023. *United Nations Trust Fund for human security*.
<https://www.un.org/humansecurity/>.
- Nasukawa, Toshiyuki Nasukawa, Toshiyuki. 2008. "The History and Development of The History and Development of History and Development of “Human Security Human Security Human Security” in Japanese Foreign Policy ."
- Hornung, Jeffrey W. 2021. "Abe Shinzō's Lasting Impact: Proactive Contributions to Japan's Security and Foreign Policies." *Asia-Pacific Review* 22-48.
- Yamamoto, Raymond. 2016. "The Securitization of Japan's ODA: New Strategies in Changing Global and National Contexts." In *Japanese Development Cooperation: The Making of an Aid Architecture Pivoting to Asia*, 72-89.
- Shiga, Hiroaki. 2023. "The new dynamics of Japan's Official Development Assistance in an era of great power competition." *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 249-263.
- Yamagata, Tatsufumi. 2023. 入門 開発経済学 グローバルな貧困削減と途上国が起こすイノベーション (Introduction to Development Economics: Global Poverty Reduction and Innovation Driven by Developing Countries) .
- Japan Bank for International Cooperation Research Department. 2023. ヨーロッパの安定：セルビア共和国にロシアのウクライナ侵攻が及ぼす影響【前編】. 7 14. Accessed 6 23, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKL9tIXlyhg>.
- Cord Magazine. 2024. Farewell “Japanac”. 2 1. Accessed 6 18, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/diplomacy/akira-imamura-ambassador-japan-u-srbiji-farewell-japanac/>.
- . 2018. *We Want to Learn More About Serbia*. 12 13. Accessed 6 19, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/interview/junichi-maruyama-ambassador-of-japan-to-serbia-we-must-learn-more-about-serbia/>.
- Japanese embassy in Serbia. 2024. 日本企業のためのセルビア関連情報. 8. Accessed 6 19, 2025. https://www.yu.emb-japan.go.jp/files/2024_toushi_manual_serbia.pdf.
- Government of Republic of Serbia. 2023. *Инвестиције из Јапана увек добродошле у Србију*. 8 16. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/724908/investicije-iz-japana-uvek-dobrodosle-u-srbiju.php>.

- Politika. 2024. *Вучић на Пословном форуму Србија - Јапан (видео)*. 10 17. Accessed 6 19, 2025. <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/638611/vucic-na-poslovnom-forumu-srbija-japan-video>.
- Cord Magazine. 2016. *Cooperation Based On Strong Cultural Ties*. 12 21. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/interview/juichi-takahara-ambassador-of-japan-cooperation-based-on-strong-cultural-ties/>.
- . 2022. *The Story Of A Longstanding Friendship*. 2 1. Accessed 6 19, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/interview/takahiko-katsumata-ambassador-of-japan-the-story-of-a-longstanding-friendship/>.
- Politika. 2025. *Аутобуси из Јапана донирани Београду 2003. од данас званично у пензији*. 3 29. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/669858/%D0%90%D1%83%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8-%D0%B8%D0%B7-%D0%88%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%91%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%83-2003-%D0%BE%D0%B>.
- Tanjug. 2024. *Imamura: Podržavamo EU integracije Srbije kroz nove investicije*. 6 23. Accessed 6 19, 2025. https://www.tanjug.rs/ekonomija/srbija/95674/imamura-podrzavamo-eu-integracije-srbije-kroz-nove-investicije/vest?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- Cord Magazine. 2016. *Japan Sees Serbia As A True Friend*. 12 21. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/interview/yoshifumi-kanno-first-secretary-at-the-embassy-of-japan-japan-sees-serbia-as-a-true-friend/>.
- My navi news. 2013. *宮崎駿監督引退会見・一問一答、全文書き起こし*. <https://news.mynavi.jp/article/20130907-miyazaki/6>.
- 47news. 2023. *【ジブリと私#5】批評家の杉田俊介さん「ニヒリズムを受け、励ましてくれる宮崎作品」*. <https://www.47news.jp/9582413.html>.
- Akashi, Yasushi. 2014. *国際社会における日本のあり方*. <https://khrri.or.jp/publiclecture/lecture/yasushiakashi.html>.
- . 2010. *「独裁者」との交渉術*.
- Owada, Tokuro. 2021. *大和田恵朗——コンヴォ危機の際の日本によるドイツの利益代表——相互信頼に基づく日本的誠実外交*. jdzb.

- Ogata, Sadako. 2015. 聞き書 緒方貞子回顧録.
- Shiba, Nobuhiro. 2021. ユーゴスラヴィア現代史(*Modern history of Yugoslavia*). Iwanami.
- RTS. 2018. Vučić: Poseta Abea novi vetar u leđa odnosima Srbije i Japana. 1 15. Accessed 6 18, 2025. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/politika/3003772/vucic-poseta-abea-novi-vetar-u-ledja-odnosima-srbije-i-japana.html>.
- Politika. 2015. Срби марширали у пред Јапаницима. 5 8. Accessed 6 22, 2025. https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/327049/srbi-marsirali-i-pred-japancima?fbclid=IwY2xjawLD2h1leHRuA2FlbQIxMQBicmlkETE2cjI4dWZheEhxNUU3alFwAR5RqkmLxTbaq1tN1uLFIHr9KQZN8r0PmnhzEV0Hb4UfwoF9oaBO7MYVJiGphA_aem_uOsh8eW5s588UoVO-ArcoA.
- RTS. 2018. Šinzo Abe u ponedeljak u istorijskoj poseti Srbiji. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/politika/3001894/sinzo-abe-u-ponedeljak-u-istorijskoj-poseti-srbiji.html>.
- Cord Magazine. 2016. *Enthusiastic Friendship*. 3 22. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/interview/juichi-takahara-ambassador-of-japan-to-serbia-enthusiastic-friendship/>.
- N1. 2018. Abe: Nećemo zaboraviti pomoć Srbije posle zemljotresa 2011. 1 15. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/a356844-Japanski-premier-Sinzo-Abe-doputovao-u-Beograd/>.
- Tanjug. 2012. U te transfere spada i novac od 178.891 "sms" poruka građana, navodi u saopštenju Crveni krst Srbije. 7 10. Accessed 6 22, 2025. https://www.vijesti.me/svijet/balkan/312066/srbija-japanu-nakon-cunamija-poslala-pomoc-od-oko-2-3-miliona-dolara#google_vignette.
- Insajder. 2024. Vučić: Od sledeće nedelje proizvodnja električnih vozila u Kragujevcu; Sa proizvodnjom katoda i baterija, mogli bismo da dovedemo nove proizvođače. 7 19. Accessed 7 21, 2025. <https://www.insajder.net/prenosimo/vucic-ima-mnogo-cudnih-stvari-istraga-ce-pokazati-sve-motive-ubistva-policaica-u-loznici>.
- Serbian embassy in Japan. 2023. 「セルビア・日本ビジネスクラブ」が発足. 12 18. Accessed 6 18, 2025. https://web.archive.org/web/20250428094835/http://www.tokyo.mfa.gov.rs/jpn/newstext.php?subaction=showfull&id=1703058215&ucat=106&template=HeadlinesCir&#disqus_thread.

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2023. コヴァチュ駐日セルビア共和国大使による深澤外務大臣政務官への表敬. 12 27. Accessed 6 18, 2025. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/c_see/serbia/pageit_000001_00149.html.
- Opština Ražanj. n.d. *Geografski položaj*. Accessed 1 20, 2025. <https://www.razanj.ls.gov.rs/sr/upoznajte-ra%C5%BEnj/li%C4%8Dna-karta-ra%C5%BEnja/geografski-polo%C5%BEnj/>.
- Perić, Marcela. 2020. "Japanese foreign policy towards the Western Balkans: Kosovo crisis, instability in Macedonia, and European integration between 1998-2013." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*.
- Perić, Marcela. 2022. "Japanese foreign policy towards the Republic of Croatia: the non-military practice of post-Cold War trilateralism and multilateralism 1989–1993." *Japan Forum* 649-674 .
- Peric, Marcela. 2019. "Japanese Foreign Policy towards the Republic of Croatia: Preventive Diplomacy and Post-conflict Reconstruction 1994 - 1997." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies* 16-33.
- Embassy of Japan in Kosovo. 2023. *Inauguration Ceremony of the “Shinzo ABE” Park has been held (3 October 2023)*. 10 6. Accessed 6 18, 2025. https://www.ks.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/kosovo_news_ShinzoAbePark_en20231006.html.
- RTS. 2018. *Ko sve nije dao glas za prijem Kosova u Interpol*. 11 21. Accessed 6 18, 2025. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/politika/3329643/ko-sve-nije-dao-glas-za-prijem-kosova-u-interpol.html>.
- Project of MIND. 2024. *Status of Kosovo*. 04 24. Accessed 6 18, 2025. <https://statusofkosovo.info/>.
- Cord Magazine. 2019. *Prime Minister Abe Welcomes Prime Minister Brnabic on her two day visit to Tokyo*. 10 21. Accessed 6 21, 2025. <https://cordmagazine.com/news/prime-minister-abe-welcomes-prime-minister-brnabic-on-her-two-day-visit-to-tokyo/>.
- Danas. 2022. *Najmlađi premijer Japana, obeležen skandalima, dobio i orden od Vučića: Ko je bio Šinzo Abe, na koga je pucano dok je držao govor na mitingu*. 7 8. Accessed 6 18, 2025. <https://www.danas.rs/svet/najmladji-premijer-japana-obeleden-skandalima-dobio-i-orden-od-vucica-ko-je-bio-sinzo-abe-koji-je-ubijen-dok-je-drzao-govor-na-mitingu/>.

- Cord Magazine. 2022. *The Story Of A Longstanding Friendship*.
<https://cordmagazine.com/interview/takahiko-katsumata-ambassador-of-japan-the-story-of-a-longstanding-friendship/>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2024. *Republic of Serbia*.
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/serbia/data.html>.
- Cord Magazine. 2025. *A Glimpse Into the Future*. 2 4. Accessed 6 18, 2025.
<https://cordmagazine.com/country-in-focus/japan/akira-imamura-ambassador-of-japan-to-serbia-a-glimpse-into-the-future/>.
- Yamazaki, Shinichi, and Kenta Suzuki. 2021. "『ユーゴスラヴィア現代史 新版』 に
よせて (For "Modern History of Yugoslavia New Edition")." 9 2. Accessed 1 30,
2023. <https://www.iwanamishinsho80.com/post/jugoslavija>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2023. 海外進出日系企業拠点数調査. 10 1. Accessed
6 24, 2025. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ecm/ec/page22_003410.html.
- European Western Balkans. 2023. *Growing concerns of international community over
regularity of Serbian elections*. 12 19. Accessed 6 24, 2025.
<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/12/19/growing-concerns-of-international-community-over-regularity-of-serbian-elections/>.
- Blic. 2025. *"TO TI JE ŽIVOT" Evo šta je danas sa kućom u kojoj se snimala "Tesna koža":
Nalazi se U SRCU BEOGRADA, a komšije otkrile šta se desilo*. 2 12. Accessed 6 25,
2025. <https://www.blic.rs/zabava/evo-sta-je-danas-sa-kucom-u-kojoj-se-snimala-tesna-koza-u-srcu-beograda-komsije/v2flbe6>.
- Novosti. 2025. *JAPANAC SPAVA, A SRBIJA NA NOGAMA! Hit pitanje u
„Slagalici“ odlučilo pobednika*. 3 26. Accessed 6 25, 2025.
<https://www.magazin.novosti.rs/sr/zanimljivosti/vesti/vest/japanac-spava-a-srbija-na-nogama-hit-pitanje-u-slagalici-odlucilo-pobednika-video/1568494>.
- Prva. 2016. *On this day, Red Star Belgrade became world champions and the expression
"Serbia to Tokyo" was born!* 12 8. Accessed 6 25, 2025.
https://www.prva.rs/zivot/zanimljivosti/na-danasnji-dan-crvena-zvezda-postala-je-prvak-sveta-i-nastao-je-izraz-srbija-do-tokija-1957013?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- BN TELEVIZIJA. 2019. *Ivica Dacic - Srbija do Tokija? (BN Televizija 2019) HD*. 2 22.
Accessed 6 25, 2-25. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oum4kbhW04.

- Vreme. 2012. *Intervju – Tošio Cunozaki – ambasador Japana u Srbiji Kultura prijateljstva*. 12 19. Accessed 6 25, 2025. https://vreme.com/dodatno/kultura-prijateljstva/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- Economist Intelligence Unit. n.d. *Democracy index*. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu?tab=chart&country=JPN~SRB~DEU~USA&mapSelect=~JPN>.
- Japan Times. 2025. *Japan ranks 66th in press freedom, lowest among G7*. 3 3. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/05/03/japan/japan-press-freedom-ranking/>.
- N1. 2024. *Ko je radio rekonstrukciju zgrade Železničke stanice u Novom Sadu*. 11 1. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://n1info.rs/biznis/ko-je-radio-rekonstrukciju-zgrade-zeleznicke-stanice-u-novom-sadu/>.
- Direktno. 2020. *Đilas: Želimo vakcinu koju će koristiti Nemci, Francuzi, cela Evropa, a ne onu iz Kine*. 8 3. Accessed 6 25, 2025. https://direktno.rs/vesti/drustvo-i-ekonomija/292556/djilas-zelimo-vakcinu-koju-ce-koristiti-nemci-francuzi-cela-evropa-a-ne-onu-iz-kine.html#google_vignette.
- Nin. 2024. *Chinese-style sliced Serbian salami: “Linglong” starts operation without an environmental protection act*. 9 5. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.nin.rs/english/news/56572/chinese-style-sliced-serbian-salami-linglong-starts-operation-without-an-environmental-protection-act>.
- Politika. 2024. *Brnabić: Istorijaska poseta Si Đinpinga koju opozicija i tajkunski mediji ne mogu da prežale*. 5 7. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/613032/Brnabic-Istorijaska-poseta-Si-Dinpinga-koju-opozicija-i-tajkunski-mediji-ne-mogu-da-prezale>.
- N1. 2025. *Dnevnik u 19 /Beograd/ 4.3.2025*. 3 4. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7AXeeNz9pg>.
- RTS. 2024. *RTS Intervju: Predsednik Srbije Aleksandar Vučić*. 10 22. Accessed 6 25, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pD_MC4ey_2A.
- SVI U BLOKADE | FDU. 2025. *Digimoni, Pokémoni, zar je bitno*. 4 16. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=688635080420553&rdid=S4pIR1PwuInMp6m4>.
- NDTV Wold. 2025. *Pikachu, New Face Of Resistance, Makes Washington Cameo After Turkey*. 4 6. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/trump-protests-pikachu-new-face-of-resistance-makes-washington-cameo-after-turkey-8099403>.

- N1. 2025. *Bakić: Režimu poslata poruka - trinaestogodišnja govedina je skuvana, sad mora da se dinsta*. 3 16. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/bakic-rezimu-poslata-poruka-trinaestogodisnja-govedina-je-skuvana-sad-mora-da-se-dinsta/>.
- . 2025. *Na blokadi i Pikaču, ali postao - Dinstaču*. 4 20. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/na-blokadi-i-pikacu-ali-postao-dinstacu/>.
- Danas. 2025. (VIDEO) *A citizen of Belgrade accused Šapić of robbing the city in front of the Japanese ambassador*. 3 29. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/sapic-japanski-ambasador-optuzbe/>.
- Nova S. 2025. *Ostavke u Japanu, ostavke u Srbiji*. 5 22. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ZZO-ARchYFg>.
- David Leheny. 2015. *Naruto's Limits: What Soft Power Can Actually Achieve*. 1 20. Accessed 6 26, 2025. <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a03902/>.
- McGray, Douglas. 2002. *Japan's Gross National Cool*. Accessed 6 26, 2025. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/japans-gross-national-cool/>.
- Glas Sumadije. 2025. *Grad nakon protesta: Čisti obrazi i ulice*. 2 16. Accessed 6 26, 2025. <https://www.glassumadije.rs/grad-nakon-protesta-cisti-obrazi-i-ulice/>.
- Danas. 2025. *Niš osvanuo čist: Studenti do ranih jutarnjih sati uklanjali smeće*. 3 2. Accessed 6 26, 2025. https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/nis-jutros-osvanuo-cist/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- Nova S. 2025. *Studenti i nakon velikog protesta u subotu čistili Beograd*. 3 17. Accessed 6 26, 2025. <https://nova.rs/emisije/studenti-i-nakon-velikog-protesta-u-subotu-cistili-beograd/>.
- X. 2025. *Αθαμανή ζαΓλιβλιαηςκι*. 1 30. Accessed 6 26, 2025. <https://x.com/atamanzagliblje/status/1884935669304152309>.
- . 2025. *Naš dekan, kao kendo majstor*. 1 28. Accessed 6 26, 2025. https://x.com/sviublokade_fdu/status/1884349965767696764.
- Adler, David E. 2023. *Why 'Economic Security' Became Magic Words in Japan*. 01 20. Accessed 01 12, 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/20/japan-china-economic-security-strategic-threat/>.
- The government of the Republic of Serbia. 2024. *Innovative economy, potential for cooperation with Japan*. 6 6. Accessed 6 26, 2025. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/224728/innovative-economy-potential-for-cooperation-with-japan.php>.

- Kiuchi, Minoru. 2025. 経済安全保障に関する意見交換. 2 11. Accessed 6 26, 2025. https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1070300051573592&id=100057808221051.
- Suzuki, Kazuto. 2021. エコノミック・ステイトクラフトと国際社会(*Economic statecraft and international society*).
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia. 2025. *Serbia and Japan – Partners for the Future, Economic Cooperation Deepens*. 6 23. Accessed 6 27, 2025. <https://en.pks.rs/news/serbia-and-japan-partners-for-the-future-economic-cooperation-deepens>.
- Yomiuri Shinbun. 2024. *National Day of Serbia*. 2 15. Accessed 6 27, 2025. <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/jn/20240215NationalDayofSerbia.pdf>.
- B92. 2025. *Dacic showed the vehicle filmed at the Assembly; It is forbidden to use the device as a sound cannon PHOTO*. 3 19. Accessed 6 27, 2025. <https://www.b92.net/info/politika/113276/dacic-pokazao-vozilo-snimljeno-kod-skupstine-zabranjeno-koriscenje-uredjaja-u-funkciji-zvucnog-topa-foto/vest>.
- Wang, Chenjun. 2023. "When political apology becomes a source of soft power: a case of South Korea and its Vietnam War experience." *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 9 19: 569-577.
- Mišić, Milan. 2015. *Žao nam je, nije nam žao, mada...* 7 20. Accessed 6 27, 2025. <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/333523/tema-nedelje/cena-izvinjenja-i-pomirenja-između-drzava/zao-nam-je-nije-nam-zao-mada>.
- Vukasovic, Vladimir. 2015. *Ново јапанско извињење – дужност или мазохизам*. 4 24. Accessed 6 27, 2025. https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/325505/novo-japansko-izvinjenje-duznost-ili-mazohizam?fbclid=IwY2xjawLD2iVleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFyOVI2RWVXaTdJcWkza0VIAR6fzUtVmyc86pkAE98dl-miEohRLxoKNDhD8Kho-NWrsahqfx5scg4NXGKGXg_aem_rSmC9NVlsspS9TxB6-PQbg.
- Political Apologies Database. n.d. *Political Apologies Database*. Accessed 6 28, 2025. <https://www.politicalapologies.com/>.
- Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in Serbia. 2024. *MORE THAN EUR 314.000 OF JAPANESE GOVERNMENT'S AID FOR SIX LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN SERBIA*. 2 23. Accessed 6 29, 2025. <https://mduls.gov.rs/en/announcements/more-than-eur-314-000-of-japanese->

- government-s-aid-for-six-local-self-governments-in-serbia/#:~:text=He%20added%20that%20the%20Government%20of%20Japan,16%20million%20have%20been%20donated%20through%20POPOS.
1982. *A Tight Spot*. Directed by Mića Milošević. Performed by Irfan Mensur.
- RTS. 2011. *Japanski vrt u Vrnjačkoj Banji*. 6 11. Accessed 6 30, 2025. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/907072/japanski-vrt-u-vrnjackoj-banji.html>.
- Turistička Organizacija Vrnjačka Banja. n.d. *Istorija Banje*. Accessed 6 30, 2025. <https://vrnjackabanja.co.rs/istorija-banje/>.
- Son, Hee-Won. 2023. "Militarising Rape: A Strategic Analysis of Bosnian Rape Camps and the Japanese "Comfort Women" System." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*.
- ICTY. n.d. *About the ICTY*. Accessed 6 30, 2025. <https://www.icty.org/en/about>.
- Subotić, Jelena, and Filip Ejodus. 2021. "Constructing a Truth Regime: The 1999 NATO Intervention in Serbian Political Memory." In *Nationalism and the Politicization of History in the Former Yugoslavia*, 169–193.
- Ejodus, Filip. 2020. *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession*.
- Lerner, Adam B. 2019. "The uses and abuses of victimhood nationalism in international politics ." *European Journal of International Relations*.
- N1. 2021. *Vucic does not expect NATO to apologize for air campaign*. 3 25. Accessed 6 30, 2025. <https://n1info.rs/english/news/vucic-does-not-expect-nato-to-apologize-for-air-campaign/>.
- Euractive. 2021. *Czech president apologises to Serbia for NATO bombing*. 5 19. Accessed 6 30, 2025. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/czech-president-apologises-to-serbia-for-nato-bombing/.
- The Diplomat. 2020. *'Hey, Let's Forget That': No US Apology for the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. 8 25. Accessed 6 30, 2025. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/hey-lets-forget-that-no-us-apology-for-the-atomic-bombings-of-hiroshima-and-nagasaki/>.
- Balkan insight. 2021. *Serbia Arrests Activists for Egging Ratko Mladic Mural* . 11 9. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/09/serbia-arrests-activists-for-egging-ratko-mladic-mural/>.
- The Chugoku Shimbun. 2023. *被爆樹木の笛 東欧で共鳴を*. 8 31. Accessed 7 1, 2025. IwAR0Swf6nlSQp3NrQ0hm6oCTPNQhUQ2BrJx_4H1q4RuZh7Xkikqr2ykU_Td8.

- Politika. 2025. *Noć kada je NATO od Aleksinca napravio „srpsku Hirošimu”*. 4 5. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/671098/noc-kada-je-nato-od-aleksinca-napravio-srpsku-hirosimu>.
- RTS. 2017. *General NATO-a: Bombardovanje SRJ slično napadu na Nagasaki*. 6 18. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/svet/2773245/general-nato-a-bombardovanje-srj-slicno-napadu-na-nagasaki.html?print=true>.
- Jugpress. 2018. *General Vladimir Lazarević, 19 godina posle: Da se ne zaboravi srpska Hirošima*. 3 23. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://jugpress.com/general-vladimir-lazarevic-19-godina-posle-da-se-ne-zaboravi-srpska-hirosima/>.
- Democracy Now. 2021. *“Empire Politician”: Joe Biden’s Half-Century Record on Foreign Policy, War, Militarism & the CIA*. 4 28. Accessed 7 1, 2025. https://www.democracynow.org/2021/4/28/empire_politician_joe_biden_jeremy_scahill.
- Borba. 1999. *IZ IHTEPBJVA BYKA DRAŠKOVITĀ CMM*. 3 29. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://pretraziva.rs/prikaz/borba/1999-03-29/2>.
- EU vs Disinfo. 2020. *DISINFO: There is no accurate list of victims who were killed during NATO bombing of Yugoslavia*. 2 12. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/there-is-no-accurate-list-of-victims-who-were-killed-during-nato-bombing-of-yugoslavia/>.
- Simic, Olivera. 2024. *“Celebrating” Srebrenica Genocide: Impunity and Indoctrination as Contributing Factors to the Glorification of Mass Atrocities*. 2 1. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2024.2308326>.
- Nagasaki Broadcasting. 2024. *G7 駐日大使らが長崎平和祈念式典を欠席 今後の影響は？専門家に聞く*. 8 9. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://newsdig.tbs.co.jp/articles/nbc/1352206?display=1>.
- Power, Samantha, interview by Radio Television Serbia. 2023. *Administrator Samantha Power speaks with Radio Television Serbia State Newswire*, (May 18).
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. n.d. *セルビア日本商工会に対する在外公館長表彰の授与（セルビア）*. Accessed 7 2, 2025. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100420225.pdf>.
- Chitty, Naren, Lilian Ji, and Gary D.Rawnsley, . 2023. *Routledge Handbook of Soft Power*. Routledge.
- Nye, Joseph. 2004. *Soft Power*.

- Obradović, Žarko V. 2021. "Meka Moć Kine i Balkan: Primer Srbije." *Sociološki Pregled* 1771-1798.
- Trailović, Dragan. 2024. "Steel Friendship" of the Political Elites: How China Became a Soft Power Player in Serbia. Vol. 4, in *Harvesting the Winds of Change: China and the Global Actors*, edited by Aleksandar Mitić and Katarina Zakić, 283–306.
- Vuksanovic, Vuk. 2024. "The Vulnerable Little Brother: Opportunistic Partnership and Serbia's Exposure to Russia's Spoiler Tactics." In *Russian Warfare and Influence: States in the Intersection Between East and West*, edited by Niklas Nilsson and Mikael Weissmann, 83-106. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Civic Initiatives. 2024. *Weaponizing Influence: How Russia's and China's Soft Power Clashes Serbia's Civil Society using Lithium Controversies*. Research Team of Civic Initiatives.
- Babić, Blagoje S. 2009. "Serbia and Japan: An Asymmetric Partnership." In *Japan and Serbia: Contemporary Issues*, edited by Edita Stojić Karanović, Džemal Hatibović and Ivona Lađevac, 148-156. Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics.
- Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Leeuwen, Theo van. 2024. "Social Semiotics and Multimodality." In *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, edited by Li Wei, Zhu Hua and James Simpson, 320-336. London and New York: Routledge.
- Watanabe, Yasushi, and David L. McConnell. 2008. "Introduction." In *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, edited by Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, xvii-xxxii. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Vucetic, Radina. 2018. *Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties*.
- Vujačić, Ivan. 2024. "Serbia–US Relations in the Two Decades Since the Democratic Changes." *GODIŠNJAK* 173.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Prison Notebooks*. Translated by Geoffrey Nowell Smith and Quentin Hoare. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hall, Todd. 2010. "An Unclear Attraction: A Critical Examination of Soft Power as an Analytical Category." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 189-211.
- Nye, Joseph. 2011. *The Future of Power*.
- Barrett, Lisa Feldman. 2017. *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*.

- Mesquita, Batja. 2022. *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions*.
- Stevens, Daniel, and Nick Vaughan-Williams. 2016. *Everyday security threats: Perceptions, experiences, and consequences*.
- Incerti, Trevor, Changwook Ju, Daniel Mattingly, Colin Moreshead, Frances Rosenbluth, Seiki Tanaka, and Hikaru Yamagishi. 2021. *Yale University Conference on Japanese Soft Power in East Asia, Session 1*. 4 5. Accessed 7 3, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aODpTY__pwU&t=1678s.
- Gilson, Julie. 2010. "Japan in Kosovo: lessons in the politics of 'complex engagement'." *Japan Forum* 65-75.
- Hersey. n.d. アレクサンドラ・コヴァチュ 特命全権大使閣下. Accessed 7 3, 2025. <https://hersey.jp/serbian-ambassador-to-japan-aleksandra-kovac-2/27328/>.
- Nye, Joseph. 2020. *Do Morals Matter?*
- Clark, Janine. 2017. *Rape, Sexual Violence and Transitional Justice Challenges: Lessons from Bosnia Herzegovina*.
- Kishino, Koichi. 2023. "Securitization as Illocutionary Act : Towards Speech Act Analysis of Economic Security in Japan." *Journal of Inquiry and Research*.
- BCSP. 2025. *BCSP podcast Lighthouse – Hiroyuki Akita*. 1 30. Accessed 7 4, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twYvZH5CZY&t=115s>.
- Weber, Max. 1958. "The Distribution of Power within the Political Community: Class, Status, Party." In *Max Weber's essay in sociology*, 180-95.
- ICTY. 2007. *PRE-TRIAL BRIEF OF GENERAL ANTE GOTOVINA Public Version*. 4 5. Accessed 7 5, 2025. <https://ucr.irmct.org/LegalRef/CMSDocStore/Public/English/PretrialBrief/NotIndexable/IT-06-90/MS05885R0000190108.pdf>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2023. 対セルビア共和国 事業展開計画. 4. Accessed 6 22, 2025. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000072661.pdf>.
- Blic. 2016. *STRAVIČNI ZLOČINI NAD SRBIMA Devojčica dozivala mamu dok su je muslimanski vojnici silovali*. 7 15. Accessed 7 5, 2025. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/stravicni-zlocini-nad-srbima-devojica-dozivala-mamu-dok-su-je-muslimanski-vojnici/sppgmzy>.
- Embassy of Japan in Serbia. 2024. 2023 年（令和 5 年）下半期の活動まとめ～政務編～. 1 5. Accessed 7 5, 2025. https://www.yu.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00027.html.

- Cabinet Secretariat. 2024. サプライチェーン強靱化の取組のフォローアップと今後の見直しの方向性. 12. Accessed 7 5, 2025. https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/keizai_anzen_hosyohousei/r6_dai11/siryoul.pdf.
- DW news. 2025. *Protesti u Srbiji: „Kosmopolitizam naspram primitivizmu“*. 1 23. Accessed 7 5, 2025. <https://www.dw.com/bs/protesti-u-srbiji-kosmopolitizam-naspram-primitivizmu/a-71383662>.
- N1. 2025. *Milivojević: Japan ima jakuze, mi imamo "ćacije"*. 5 28. Accessed 7 5, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GPZ5lCIRiI>.
- Vladislavljev, Stefan. 2025. *Voice for CHOICE #50: Beyond Novi Sad – The Future of Sino-Serbian Relations with Stefan Vladislavljev*. 1 16. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://chinaobservers.eu/voice-for-choice-50-beyond-novi-sad-the-future-of-sino-serbian-relations-with-stefan-vladislavljev/>.
- RTS OKO. 2025. *Okolice: Sretenje, dve Srbije koje se ne sreću*. 2 17. Accessed 6 25, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWZcA6ExKb4>.
- Blic. 2011. *Tri Beogradjanke povredjene prilikom podele sadnica tresnje*. 4 10. Accessed 7 6, 2025. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/tri-beogradjanke-povredjene-prilikom-podele-sadnica-tresnje/fwm7445>.
- RYCO. 2024. *The MIRAI Program 2024 welcomes 13 young participants from WB to visit Japan*. 2 12. Accessed 7 7, 2025. <https://www.rycowb.org/the-mirai-program-2024-welcomes-13-young-participants-from-wb-to-visit-japan/>.
- RTS. 2016. *„Hvala, Jadranka“ u Japanu*. 7 24. Accessed 7 7, 2025. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/magazin/muzika/2396645/hvala-jadranka-u-japanu.html>.
- Tajima, Misako. 2025. "Ideological positioning of Serbian teachers in Japan's online eikaiwa industry: peripheral whiteness and exploitation of Eastern European labor." *Japan Forum*.
- Filipović, Ivan. 2021. "Soft Power Architecture: Mechanisms, Manifestations and Spatial Consequences of Embassy Buildings and Exported." Accessed 7 8, 2025. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ivan-Filipovic-3/publication/355119741_Soft_Power_Architecture_Mechanisms_Manifestations_and_Spatial_Consequences_of_Embassy_Buildings_and_Exported_Ideologies/links/615edda7fbd5153f47eb72ae/Soft-Power-Architecture-Mech.
- Interview by Masamichi Koshinaga. 2025. *Interview with local experts* (11 9).

- Vladislavlj, Stefan. 2023. *With Growing Investment, Serbia Sees More and More Chinese Citizens Coming to the Country*. 4 20. Accessed 7 11, 2025. <https://chinaobservers.eu/with-growing-investment-serbia-sees-more-and-more-chinese-citizens-coming-to-the-country/#:~:text=The%20influx%20of%20Chinese%20citizens,of%20the%20Smederevo%20steel%20mill>.
- Vice. 2017. *Ovo su TV programi koji su nam obeležili detinjstvo*. 11 4. Accessed 7 12, 2025. <https://www.vice.com/sr/article/ovo-su-tv-programi-koji-su-nam-obelezili-detinjstvo/>.
- 1993-1996. *Srećni ljudi*. Performed by Radmila Savićević.
1996. *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*. Directed by Srdan Dragojevic.
- ELLE girl. 2021. 試合中に“つり目ポーズ”……「アジア人差別だ！」と批判されたセルビアのバレーボール選手が対戦相手のタイ代表に謝罪. 6 10. Accessed 7 12, 2025. <https://www.ellegirl.jp/sports/athletes/a36627701/serbia-volleyball-asian-hate-21-0610/>.
- Maruyama, Junichi. 2022. *セルビア紀行*.
- Pavlowitch, Stevan K. 2007. *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia*. Belgrade University. n.d. *Japanski jezik, književnost, kultura*. Accessed 7 1, 2025. <https://www.fil.bg.ac.rs/sr-lat/katedre/orijentalistika/japanski-jezik-knjizevnost-kultura>.
- Nova S. 2023. *VIDEO Makoto Nagano je bio faca svih faca u Srbiji, a u svetu ga malo ko zna: Postao zvezda emisije zbog koje su se deca „lepila“ za TV, danas se vratio*. 3 30. Accessed 7 18, 2025. <https://nova.rs/sport/sport-ostalo/makoto-nagano-nindza-ratnici-sta-radi-danas-video/>.
- UNDP. 1999. *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1994*. Accessed 7 20, 2025. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr1994encompletenostats.pdf>.
- Tsutsui, Kiyoteru. 2022. *人権と国家(Human rights and state)*.
- Itoh, Project. 2012. *Genocidal Organ*.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2023. *よくある質問集 人間の安全保障*. 06 06. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/comment/faq/kadai/hs.html?fbclid=IwAR2DgnwzHio-7qtpqKM_v7EDYDZOdwNdh8WCNc6OGj6JykrtrwG9ky-l284.
- . 2021. *Issues regarding History*. 2 1. Accessed 6 27, 2025. https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html.

- . 2024. *ODA（政府開発援助）セルビア 約束状況*. 7 1. Accessed 6 23, 2025.
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/region/europe/serbia/exchange.html>.
- . n.d. *Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative*. Accessed 7 21, 2025.
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100139248.pdf>.
- . 2024. *Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative*. 10 30. Accessed 6 18, 2025.
https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/page22e_000937.html.
- . 2017. 中根外務副大臣の対セルビア円借款「ニコラ・テスラ火力発電所排煙脱硫装置建設計画」工事契約書署名式への出席. 9 11. Accessed 6 22, 2025.
https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/c_see/serbia/page24_000913.html.
- . 2023. *政府開発援助（ODA）国別データ集 2023*. Accessed 6 22, 2025.
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/100730081.pdf#page=320>.
- . 1995. *Statement by the Foreign Minister on the Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. 5 29. Accessed 6 27, 2025.
https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/archive_2/bosnia531.html.
- . 2019. *対セルビア共和国 国別開発協力方針*. 9. Accessed 6 21, 2025.
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000080283.pdf>.
- Greg, Esheya. 2024. "Analysis of Three Forms of Power by Joseph Nye." *ADVANCES IN LAW, PEDAGOGY, AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES* 162-172.
- Glišić, Jelena. 2017. *Japanese-Yugoslav Diplomatic Relations in the Cold War, 1952-1980*. Accessed 3 23, 2023. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/87202727.pdf>.
- Jackson, P. T., and D. H. Nexon. 1999. "Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations* 291-332.
- Saunders, Robert A., and Rhys Crilley. 2019. "Pissing On the Past: The Highland Clearances, Effigial Resistance and the Everyday Politics of the Urinal." *Millennium* 444-469.
- Barnett, Michael, and Raymond Duvall. 2005. "Power in International Politics." *International Organization* 39-75.
- The President of the Republic of Serbia. 2020. "President Vučić attends groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the "Toyo Tires" factory." *The president of the republic of Serbia*. 12 15. Accessed 7 8, 2025. <https://www.predsednik.rs/en/press-center/news/president-vucic-attends-groundbreaking-ceremony-for-the-construction-of-the-toyo-tires-factory>.
- Sielska, Zuzanna. 2024. "Who Is a Friend and Who Is an Enemy? Serbia's Relations with Selected International Entities from the Perspective of the Inhabitants of Serbia."

Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska, sectio M – Balcaniensis et Carpathiensis 143-168.

International Republican Institute. 2024. *Western Balkans Regional Poll February –March 2024*. 5 14. Accessed 7 27, 2025. <https://www.iri.org/resources/western-balkans-regional-poll-february-march-2024-full/>.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. n.d. *Serbia*. Accessed 7 27, 2025. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/kuni/11_databook/pdfs/08-05.pdf.

Serbian embassy in Japan. 2021. *Twitter*. 12 6. Accessed 1 27, 2023. <https://twitter.com/SRBInJapan/status/1467742317780287488>.

Tokyo Shinbun. 2024. *旧ユーゴ取材でセルビア大使から表彰 木村元彦さん*. 5 4. Accessed 7 27, 2025. <https://genkaikyokaiekkyo.blogspot.com/2024/05/blog-post.html>.

X. 2025. *Odušveljeni smo kada Japanci ociste javni prostor za sobom*. 1 28. Accessed 7 27, 2025. <https://x.com/medigomladen/status/1884186425803038925?t=IBBLG-qD6-7xRL5xVnOjeQ&s=09>.

Nye, Joseph. 1990. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*.

—. 2011. *The Future of Power*.

CSIS. n.d. *Armitage Nye Reports on the U.S.-Japan Alliance*. Accessed 7 28, 2025. <https://www.csis.org/programs/japan-chair/projects/armitage-nye-reports-us-japan-alliance>.

Dahl, Robert. 1957. "THE CONCEPT OF POWER ." *Behavioral Science* 201-215.

Lukes, Steven. 1974. *Power*.

Mainichi. 2025. *Japan Foreign Ministry reorganization to focus on economic security*. 7 29. Accessed 8 1, 2025. <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20250729/p2g/00m/0na/012000c>.

Institute of Geoeconomics. 2024. *What is economic security?* 5 15. Accessed 7 31, 2025. <https://instituteofgeoeconomics.org/research/2024051557609/>.

Yamagata, Tatsufumi. 2025. *The Future of Development Cooperation: Don't tie ODA to security*. 1 15. Accessed 7 31, 2025. <https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/diplomacy/pt2025011512073514994.html>.

Sakaiya, Shiro. 2023. *Postwar Japanese Political History: From the Occupation Period to the "Neo 55 System"* () 戦後日本政治史-占領期から「ネオ55年体制」まで.

Kasahara, Tokushi. 2025. *南京事件 新版*.

- ICMP. n.d. *Srebrenica Genocide*. Accessed 8 3, 2025. <https://icmp.int/srebrenica/>.
- JETRO. 2025. セルビア第 1 副首相兼財務相が訪日、大阪でのイベントで投資呼びかけ . 6 25. Accessed 7 3, 2025. <https://www.jetro.go.jp/biznews/2025/06/d1b20527986eefe8.html>.
- Byrne, Donn. 1971. *The Attraction Paradigm*.
- Radio Free Europe. 2025. *Part of the opposition submitted a proposal for a Resolution on Srebrenica to the Serbian Parliament*. 7 3. Accessed 8 4, 2025. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-srebrenica-rezolucija-skupstina/33463183.html>.
- Antonijević, Milan. 2025. *Pikaču i Slobodan*. 3 29. Accessed 8 4, 2025. Kurir.
- Frith, Chris D, and Patrick Haggard. 2018. "Volition and the Brain – Revisiting a Classic Experimental Study." *Trends in Neuroscience* 405-407.
- Vuksanović, Vuk. 2025. *Through The Eyes of a Serb Public Opinion in a Time of Global Upheaval*. 7. Accessed 8 6, 2025. <https://bezbednost.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Security-Radar-Serbia.pdf>.
- MEXT. 2016. "日本ユネスコ委員会第 138 回国内委員会議事録." 02 01. Accessed 8 7, 2025. <https://www.mext.go.jp/unesco/002/006/001/gijiroku/1375969.htm>.
- Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations. 2023. *Statement by H.E. Ambassador ISHIKANE Kimihiro, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, at the United Nations Security Council Briefing (UNMIK: United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo)*. 4 27. Accessed 8 7, 2025. https://www.un.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/ishikane042723.html.
- Yoshimi, Yoshiaki. 2025. *日本軍慰安婦*.
- Global Voices. 2021. *Serbian freelancers protest new taxation law that threatens to push thousands into poverty*. 4 9. Accessed 8 7, 2025. <https://globalvoices.org/2021/04/09/serbian-freelancers-protest-new-taxation-law-that-threatens-to-push-thousands-into-poverty/>.
- X. 2024. *Šta mislite zašto po Srbiji ne grade Japanske već kineske firme?* . 11 1. Accessed 8 7, 2025. https://x.com/sofi2022_2023/status/1852476807691321844.
- Politika. 2020. *Rascvetale japanske trešnje u Ulici trešnjinog cveta*. 3 18. Accessed 8 7, 2025. <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/450242/rascvetale-japanske-tresnje-u-ulici-tresnjinog-cveta>.

IR thinker. 2023. *Serbia - Russia: Energy & Politics - Vuk Vuksanovic / 2023 Episode 5. 2 4*.
Accessed 8 7, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6nVjfQVdWA>.