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**JAPANESE-POLISH AID FOR REFUGEES
FROM UKRAINE:
MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE, SOFT POWER
AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION¹**

Abstract

Japan and Poland were among the countries which in 2022 provided financial aid to Ukraine, while putting sanctions on Russia in order to consolidate the alliance of those opposing the aggression. Within a few days after the Russian aggression on Ukraine, both the Japanese institutions and individual entrepreneurs decided to provide aid to refugees. Poland has become one of the key partners to the Japanese donors in delivering assistance to the displaced people. In this paper, we have applied multilevel governance (MLG) theory to analyze the management of international aid flow, operated by both governmental and non-governmental actors. High-profile examples of cooperation among initiatives for refugees in the first year of the Russo-Ukrainian war were examined, highlighting international networks of

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civil society partly supported by the state: NGOs, religious charities, small business entities and cultural institutions, and demonstrating the success of MLG in short-term crisis management.

K e y w o r d s: humanitarian aid, multilevel governance, soft power, Polish-Japanese relations, refugees from Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

After the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war on 24 February 2022, news about the crowds of refugees crossing the border to neighboring Poland and entering the EU engaged public opinion in Japan. Japanese organizations and individuals sought the most efficient ways to deliver humanitarian aid to the civilian victims of this latest European war. From the first days of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Japanese donors, in cooperation with Polish organizations, dispatched aid to refugees who had arrived on Polish territory. Both state and non-state actors in Japan and Poland mobilized considerable resources to deliver aid to Ukraine (for a general overview of Japanese humanitarian aid in the early stages of the war, see Kuwana, 2022; in the context of Poland, see: Socha & Gońda, 2023). The war and related refugee crisis was covered extensively in global media, and to an unusual degree in Japan (on the global media coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war, see Eddy & Fletcher, 2022; on coverage in Japan, see Hikotani, 2022; Iida et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024; Mitsui & Green, 2024; Ninivaggi, 2023).

In this article, we discuss high-profile² examples of Japanese-Polish cooperation among a myriad of initiatives for refugees from Ukraine, launched by the organizations generally described as civil society but partly supported by the state: NGOs, religious charities, small business entities, and cultural institutions. We focus on the events from the period of 2022–2023, the first year of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the emergent refugee crisis. We argue that, due to flexible cooperation with both governmental and non-governmental actors in Poland, Japan delivered aid promptly and efficiently, despite little experience in the region and the untypical circumstances

² By “high-profile”, we mean: reported not only in social media but also in the mainstream news media; we refer to the media sources, along with the original interviews, in each case accordingly (individual initiatives by the Japanese entrepreneurs in Poland, discussed in the latter half of the article, were also featured in the mainstream media).

(no large refugee camps in the border zone, high mobility of refugees; Barbasiewicz & Merklejn, 2024) of the sudden mass migration caused by the war in Ukraine. This efficiency was driven not only by multilevel governance (MLG) but also by the deliberate use of historical and cultural ties (soft power), which influenced the geographical allocation of resources.

Japan and Poland were among the countries which provided financial aid both to Ukraine and its citizens, while putting sanctions on Russia, consolidating the alliance of those opposing the aggression and shaping the “Political West”, consisting of numerous European and North American countries, as well as Asian democracies (Schirm, 2023). Among the EU member states, Poland was also the country into which the first enormous wave of Ukrainian refugees (millions within a few months; UNHCR, 2023) fled. This situation gained the attention of Japanese institutions and individual entrepreneurs who decided to provide aid to displaced people. Poland became a place of interest to the Japanese donors, and various organizations with which they had worked before received inquiries about providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees.

Our article focuses on Japanese-Polish aid for refugees from Ukraine during the critical first year of the Russo-Ukrainian war (2022–2023), with a special highlight on the collaboration as seen through the lens of multilevel governance, soft power, and international cooperation. In existing research, the concept of social resilience is often applied as a helpful framework for analyzing how specific governance and civil society actors (e.g., local administrations, NGOs, community-based organizations) respond to crises, such as the impact of war and the consequences of an influx of forced migrants. While recent academic papers demonstrate the significant role of social resilience in these scenarios (Pachocka et al., 2025), we contend that, specifically in the Japanese context, the notion of soft power is also a crucial factor that shall be considered alongside with the community-driven and institutional decisions to help. The prompt and substantial involvement of the Japanese actors – ranging from state bodies to civil society organizations – in Poland, the primary host country for the initial wave of refugees, presents a compelling case study. The idea that social resilience is primarily built by individual volunteers, communities, and civil-society organizations due to their non-institutionalized flexibility, local knowledge, and capacity for resource mobilization, is a widely accepted view (Pachocka et

al., 2025). In the context of the Japanese aid, specifically regarding assistance to Poland, this concept does not provide the full picture. Here, governmental institutions and diplomatic staff were deliberately included in order to promote and facilitate humanitarian efforts. Hence, the Japanese model demonstrates that effective resilience-building and aid deployment can successfully integrate the state's institutional support with the flexibility of civil society. One of the key elements of the analyzed model was operational outsourcing to external entities, which was crucial for the speed of response. Hence, we focus on three main research questions:

1) How did multilevel governance (MLG) enable and organize the effective distribution of humanitarian aid from Japan to the Ukrainian refugees in Poland in the period of 2022–2023?

2) What was the influence of Japan's soft power strategy – including the appeals to cultural and historical ties – on the geographical concentration of financial aid in Poland (specifically in Krakow) compared to the actual needs at the border?

3) What synergies and challenges resulted from the model where humanitarian aid was outsourced to external entities (e.g. commercial subcontractors, religious organizations, cultural institutions), and how does this outsourcing mechanism fit into the effectiveness of MLG?

In the first part we analyze the theoretical framework, related research and methodology, adopting multilevel governance and soft power theories into the humanitarian context. Then, we explore the Japan-Poland aid distribution chain. We first adopt a Japan-centric viewpoint to examine the distribution channels and the diverse network of partners, emphasizing how material aid connects to cultural exchange and historical ties, and how corporate donations are managed. We then pivot to the Poland-centered viewpoint, focusing on the final delivery mechanisms on the ground. This delivery is executed through both structured channels – the formal state channel and institutions focused on culture and welfare – and decentralized individual efforts. These grassroots initiatives, which offered immediate relief ranging from sharing Japanese food to specialized services like architecture design, collectively reveal a comprehensive, multilayered strategy for aid delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, RELATED RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED RESEARCH

In this research, we follow two theoretical approaches. The first one is the multilevel governance (MLG) theory (Marks, 1993), by which the relations between supranational, national, and local authorities, as well as public, private, and third-sector organizations, can be analyzed (Gerli, Navio-Marco & Whalley, 2021). MLG involves the transfer of power from majority actors to private companies or citizens through the participatory mechanisms (Papadopoulos, Tortola & Geyer, 2024). In this approach, the management of migration flows is operated by multiple actors, involving both governmental and nongovernmental, local, regional, and central institutions, none of which is a clear leader, but all maintain coordination and cooperation (Scholten, 2013; Podgórska et al., 2023). Regarding the migration policy, the countries were reluctant to share power in this matter. Therefore, Caponio argues that it is a specific case or configuration of policy-making within the broader category of MLG (Caponio, 2021).

During the crises such as the rapid flow of Ukrainian migrants into Poland in 2022, existing cooperation patterns between NGOs and other non-state actors (such as city partnerships and well-established bilateral cooperation among both official and grassroots initiatives) have to be taken into consideration (Guiraudon, 2000; Podgórska et al., 2023). Thus, we are dealing with systems of governance in which power is both horizontally and vertically distributed (Gerli, Navio-Marco & Whalley, 2021). We define these social movements as the collective actions of organizations, groups and individual entrepreneurs taken together over a period of time in order to bring about change in society, often (but not always) in opposition to the authorities (Bochorodycz, 2022). An important aspect is also the aforementioned social resilience, relying on the ability of individual actors to access a wide range of options, their proactivity and, therefore, access to capital (Podgórska et al., 2023).

Secondly, we apply the conceptual apparatus of soft power – a major factor in the context of global hype surrounding the Russo-Ukrainian war in the early stages. Japan has contributed to the international community and enhanced its soft power (Nye, 1990, 2008) through Official Development Assistance (ODA) as well as

humanitarian aid, shifting focus in the 21st century to demonstrate engagement also beyond Asia (Winkler, 2019). State agencies such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) contribute to Japanese soft power by their activity (Winkler, 2019). This approach enables an analysis of “international aid and donors as a process of attaining soft power”, focusing on case studies to understand whether and how humanitarian aid projects are leveraged for a real benefit in diplomatic relations between nations or regions (Jeong & Grix, 2023).

Even though the soft power of Japan is often discussed as nation branding, including popular culture, food culture or tourism, from the late 20th century on Japan has also promoted democratic values as an important part of the nation’s self-image, or even national identity. Japan shapes itself as a “champion of access to the global commons and a defender of global norms,” “trouble-shooter” of challenges the world faces, through the military resources engaged in capacity-building and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (Japan Self-Defence Forces (SDF); Heng, 2017). Even though Japan is a pacifist and demilitarized country, the SDF “allow Japan to demonstrate a very important part of its soft power” via “substantive humanitarian assistance and aid in post-conflict reconstruction” (Akaha, 2005). ODA is also a part of Japan’s soft power providing “a human security perspective on development and development aid” (Akaha, 2005). Even though Japan is considered to be on the fringes of the international humanitarian system by strategic choice or necessity (Gómez, 2021), the Japanese state takes part in “fiscal burden-sharing efforts in global refugee governance” (Fujibayashi, 2022), making it an atypical, by Western standards, model of humanitarian assistance.

Among post-Soviet states, the provision of development aid was granted mainly to the Central Asian republics (Szczepanska, Barbasiewicz & Voytsekhovska, 2024). It changed after February 2022. Hoshiro (2020) claims that the number of official visits to the state in need by Japanese politicians corresponds with the amount of aid dispatched from Japan. In the case of Ukraine, we have noted an unprecedented scale of Japanese diplomatic visits to Central-Eastern Europe, as well as visits to Japan by the Ukrainian representatives, and face-to-face talks between the representatives of Ukraine and Japan in the few years before the outbreak of the war. Most frequently, however, the site of such meetings has been Poland, which is rich in knowledge about the situation in Ukraine from the beginning of the Russian aggression, providing a safe and convenient space for

Japanese projects, which was possible also due to the trust developed earlier between both nations (Kōno, 2019).

As an EU member state, Poland is also a part of the EU strategy towards migrants, including the refugees. Unlike Japan, Europe has been exposed to multitudes of migrants. In 2015 and 2016, Greek islands received almost one million out of 1.6 million refugees (Bousiou, 2021). On this experience, the EU institutions have drawn that “in order to reduce local contestation in the area of refugee reception, it is necessary to allow consultation with both local governments and civil society in the policy-making processes” (Bousiou, 2021). In previous research, it was claimed that the assistance towards refugees can be carried out by “agents from different levels of the government” (including charities and churches), but when the state fails or refuses to support refugees, humanitarian intervention by civil society or volunteers serves as compensation for these failures (Korteweg, Labman & Macklin, 2023). The private sponsors’ role has also been discussed in previous research, showing that they are able to express “care, concern, and respect across linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious differences”, giving the refugees “opportunities to cross social boundaries, and potential access to greater social capital” (Ali, Zendo & Somers, 2021).

V4 group countries opposed the relocation mechanism when it was directed towards refugees from Syria or North Africa (Bosse, 2022). However, when the great influx of refugees from Ukraine occurred at the EU borders (mainly Poland), the European approach to the crisis revealed double standards of international protection and asylum policy, which turned out to be different for European and non-European refugees (Bosse, 2022). The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) implemented by the EU, allowed Ukrainians “to live, work, access healthcare, housing, and education in the EU for three years, without the requirement to go through lengthy asylum procedures,” changing the perspective of V4 group members towards migrants, claiming “close historical, economic and social ties with Ukraine” (Bosse, 2022). During this crisis, the non-governmental agents did not undertake action as a result of the state’s failure. As Podgórska et al. recount,

Activities were to be developed in various directions: collection and shaping of needs, reception and distribution of international aid, organization of medical aid provision, social adaptation for the temporarily displaced, coordination with volunteers, NGOs, religious organizations, transport structures, mass media, etc. [...] Private businesses as well as religious organizations have been

performing complementary functions to the initiatives of local authorities in those areas where the latter cannot provide service, which can be considered a synergy (Podgórska et al., 2023).

During the influx of the refugees from Ukraine in 2022, the governmental actors in Poland worked in consultation and cooperation with the third sector, grassroots movements and private companies (Firlit-Fesnak, 2023).

This enabled both governmental and non-governmental Japanese organizations to support the Ukrainian side in the conflict and implement the policy of soft power, understood as democratic values and humanitarian assistance, this time without the need of SDF participation. Stable and favorable relations with Poland, the main country to which, or through which, Ukrainian refugees were fleeing, made it possible to cooperate between not only supranational, national, local authorities but also public, private and third-sector organizations, from governmental actors such as diplomatic missions to NGOs, companies and private donors to provide coordinated aid to refugees. Japanese assistance benefited from the open and multi-level management system in Poland, which facilitated broad cooperation ranging from embassies to individual entrepreneurs.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a qualitative study, including semi-structured and unstructured interviews with actors providing aid to Ukrainian refugees both on Japanese and Polish side. Building on existing research, we have focused on interviewing representatives of institutions and organizations providing aid to the Ukrainian refugees. Our sources highlight multilevel cooperation of various actors, who encountered one another in 2022, mobilized by the common cause of humanitarian aid and communication of their activities through public diplomacy and media channels.

In the main part of the article, we chose to employ the descriptive method, documenting the facts and patterns of Polish-Japanese cooperation in humanitarian aid for Ukraine, precisely because this is a niche, understudied topic, necessitating a fundamental effort to establish a baseline of knowledge and context before deeper analysis. While we recognize the method's inherent limitations – including the lack of a comparative perspective – this approach, which began with participant observation and gradually documented the resulting

pattern of multilevel governance enhanced by soft power factors, was an essential first step to producing knowledge on this complex social activity, a necessity supported by methodological arguments (e.g., Avant, 2024) and precedent in crisis studies (Gill, et al., 2015). The critical reading method was applied in the analysis of the official documents compiled and published by the organizations in question, media reports, press releases and governmental data sources. In the final discussion, we also provide an essential quantitative breakdown of aid funding, according to the data released by each organization (Table 2).

The primary qualitative material comprised two main components: eight semi-structured and unstructured, in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) and documentary evidence. The IDIs were conducted with organizational representatives, consisting of three interviews in Japan and five in Poland. Documentary evidence supplemented this data, including Activity Reports and email correspondence obtained directly from AAR Japan and the Sisters of Maria Immaculata. One of the authors who is based in Tokyo, was personally involved in the work of AAR Japan in the early days of the war on a volunteer basis, so some of the information used in this article come from direct communication with the members of that organization.

The case studies were selected using a two-tiered, initial strategy. First, we prioritized the institutions listed on the official website of the Polish Institute in Tokyo (Instytut Polski w Tokio, 2025; hereafter discussed in the alphabetical order). Within this group, the selection was narrowed to those organizations for which direct contact was possible and whose operational details (beyond simple bank account numbers, such as in the case of Mirai Ukraina Nanmin Shien Kikin) were publicly available. Secondly, for grassroots initiatives, the focus was placed on organizations highly visible in mainstream and social media during the initial weeks of the invasion. Specific attention was paid to organizations operating in major Polish railway stations and metropolitan hubs, particularly the Central (Main) and Western Stations in Warsaw, and the Central (Main) Station in Krakow. As noted by other researchers, these sites functioned as “accidental, chaotic refugee reception centers,” serving as critical first points of safety and aid. In fact, these hubs were the locus of immediate direct support provided by thousands of volunteers, who acted as the essential first human interface in the massive humanitarian crisis (Łukasiewicz et al., 2023).

All research material was subsequently transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. At the same time, the respondents were fully informed about the purpose and nature of the study and provided written consent via a review and signature of the information sheet. All interviewees communicated with us as official representatives of their organizations,³ acting within the scope of their routine professional duties. These roles included press spokespersons (AAR Japan, Fukudenkai, Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception) and individuals at the highest management levels (AAR Japan, ASAGAO, PCCIJ). Information about the aid project conducted by the prominent Japanese architect Ban Shigeru was partly obtained from media reports and partly from the interview with the representative of Solidarity Fund.

This article underwent initial proofreading by a native speaker. After receiving valuable reviewer remarks, an additional language verification was conducted using the AI Tool Gemini Pro (Business/Enterprise version).

JAPAN-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE: IN SEARCH OF DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

AAR JAPAN AND SISTERS OF MARIA IMMACULATA: FOCUS ON A VULNERABLE MINORITY

AAR Japan (Association for Aid and Relief, Japan; also known in Japanese as: *Nanmin o Tasukeru Kai*, literally ‘Association to Save Refugees’) was among the first Japanese NGOs to dispatch a representative to Poland in response to the refugee crisis of 2022. Since its launch in 1979, AAR Japan has provided aid to refugees and victims of natural disasters globally. The organization has a specific mission of relief for persons with disabilities and other underprivileged minorities doubly affected in case of a crisis. With 70 members of staff as of 2023, it is not a very big NGO but boasts a lot of international experience. It has multiple sources of funding, including Japanese government support, corporate sponsors and private donors (AAR Japan, 2022a). The Ukraine crisis was its first time operating in Eastern Europe.

³ During the data coding process, no detailed or sensitive information (pertaining either to aid providers or refugees) was collected or disclosed that could raise concerns regarding personal data protection.

From 10 March 2022 till 31 October 2023 AAR Japan implemented a project of cooperation with a Catholic convent based in Poland, becoming a starting point for operations on the proper territory of Ukraine. While searching for suitable partners for AAR Japan in Poland, one of the authors introduced Japanese activists to the first Polish organization reaching out to her personally, with urgent requests for supplies. The request for daily necessities for 30 families evacuated from Ukraine had come from a parents' mailing list of an elementary school and kindergarten in Warsaw, previously attended by her own child. The school in Warsaw is run by the Catholic Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (hereafter: Sisters of Maria Immaculata), one of 22 women's religious orders which at the point of writing operate charities between Poland and Ukraine (Puścikowska, 2022).

Eventually, aid and assistance from the Japanese organization was redirected from Warsaw to a temporary refugee shelter located in the Congregation's monastery in Yazlovets, Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine. In early March 2022, the monastery accommodated between 80 and 200 refugees, most of them women and children evacuated from a single mothers' shelter in Kharkiv, operated by another convent – the Orionine Sisters (Puscikowska, 2022, 2023).⁴ The PR executive of AAR Japan, Nakatsubo Hiroaki, traveled to Warsaw, Poland from March 8 to 17, 2022 (Nakatsubo, 2022) and to Yazlovets, Ukraine, in July of the same year. The first visit focused on the emergency response via Warsaw (within the first five months of the conflict, AAR Japan transferred to the Sisters 60,000 EUR and 5,000 USD (4757 EUR⁵); email from the honorary chairperson of AAR Japan, Yanase Fusako, July 4, 2022) and on collecting information about the situation on the Polish-Ukrainian border (AAR Japan, 2022b). The second visit, documented with numerous photos in the official AAR Japan reports (AAR Japan, 2022c), confirmed the commitment of the Japanese organization to the support of the refugee shelter in Yazlovets.

By December 2022, AAR Japan had transferred to the Sisters of Maria Immaculata the total of 100,000 EUR and 5,000 USD (4,757 EUR) for maintenance costs of the shelter. Other necessities such as food, have been provided mostly by Polish organizations.

⁴ 200 according to Puścikowska, 2022, 2023. The number 80 was provided as a moderate estimate by the Sisters of Maria Immaculata by email, September 8, 2023.

⁵ All conversions from USD and PLN to Euro were made using the generalized EUR exchange rate for 2022 (Exchange Rates, n.d.).

Volunteers from Poland have traveled to Yazlovets on a regular basis (email from the Sisters of Maria Immaculata, Dec. 1, 2022). According to the reports delivered by the Sisters and AAR Japan, every possible effort has been made to create “normal” life routines for the evacuated women and children. The Sisters also reported health problems and social issues among the evacuees, who had been traumatized in a number of ways (reports by the Sisters of Maria Immaculata for AAR Japan, Dec. 2022 – March 2023).

The decision to channel the aid from a non-religious NGO into a Catholic convent might appear controversial, but three practical motivations were identified: focus on a vulnerable minority (single mothers and their children), consistent with the mission of AAR Japan; robust networks already in place built by the Sisters of Maria Immaculata between Ukraine and Poland; and the convenient location of Yazlovets, which became not only a shelter, but also a distribution center of humanitarian aid from various sources (reports for AAR Japan by the Sisters of Maria Immaculata, December 2022 – March 2023). In mid-2023, AAR Japan had started aid and relief activities in several other locations in Ukraine and in Moldova, where an office of the organization for the region was set up (AAR Japan, 2023a, b). By the last quarter of 2023, the majority of refugees taking shelter in Yazlovets left voluntarily for other locations. Consequently, the project was ended by the decision of the Sisters of Maria Immaculata on 31 October 2023 (email from Nakatsubo Hiroaki, AAR Japan, November 26, 2023). While relatively small in scale, the project was highlighted in AAR Japan reports, illustrated with pictures of happy-looking beneficiaries wearing T-shirts with the logos of Japanese donor companies (Montbell, Rakuten) (AAR Japan, 2022d): 1, 4) and reported broadly in Japanese media (AAR Japan, 2023b).

ASAGAO AND FUKUDENKAI: FOSTERING CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS

The influx of Ukrainian refugees to Poland triggered a few initiatives among small and middle-size enterprises, operating between Japan and Poland. One energetic charity drive for Ukraine, featured on Japanese national television, *Nihon Terebi* (ASAGAO, 2023b), was conducted in February and March 2022. It was launched by ASAGAO Ltd. – a company founded in 2019 in Krakow, Poland – by two Japanese women, with a mission of supporting business, cultural,

and educational exchanges between Japan and Poland. In its short history, ASAGAO had ventured into the export of Polish products to Japan; but its major business is targeted at providing expertise from Poland to Japanese corporations, including the recruitment of a highly qualified workforce (ASAGAO, 2023a).

According to the reports by the ASAGAO representative in Tokyo, Jimbo Ayaka, in 2022 the company raised 34,301,972 JPY (248,758 EUR) for the victims of war in Ukraine and used the funds to dispatch 20 trucks with humanitarian aid to Ukraine (email communication with Jimbo Ayaka, March 16–17, 2023; full reports: ASAGAO, 2023b). The aid included a variety of daily necessities from diapers to batteries. Since the fundraiser targeted mainly Japanese nationals, a clear statement had been made that the donations would not be used to purchase weapons and other military goods (ASAGAO, 2023b) in compliance with the pacifist Constitution of Japan. ASAGAO got involved in the direct distribution of food to the refugees who fled to Krakow. The founders reported volunteer work in the early stages of the crisis (Interview with Jimbo Ayaka, December 8, 2022). ASAGAO has been building a strong brand as a reliable intermediary between two, or even three (including Ukrainian) distant cultures; this process has rapidly accelerated with the outbreak of the war, putting the entire region at the center of global attention. ASAGAO has been effective in international communication through a skillful combination of the media technologies (ranging from “traditional” television channels to social networking sites, photo-blogs and online newsletters) and up-to-date knowledge grounded in management practice in Eastern Europe – a region which is still a *terra incognita* to many large Japanese organizations.

In 2022, ASAGAO also became a local contractor in Poland for Fukudenkai – a charity organization which sheltered hundreds of Polish children who had been rescued from the wartime chaos of Siberia in the 1920s (Matsumoto & Theiss, 2009; Theiss, 2020). Fukudenkai is a local Tokyo charity with Buddhist roots and a history of enjoying patronage by the Japanese imperial family; currently, it operates independently of any religious organization and is funded mainly by the Japanese government. It runs institutions for the children with special needs and its international outreach is based on the historical connection to Poland (Interview with Wagatsuma Mizuki, June 2, 2023). Memories of the “Siberian Children” rescue operation, documented by ASAGAO and Fukudenkai became a part

of a broadly defined Japanese-Polish cultural exchange and common history of the two nations (Fukudenkai, 2023a).

Fukudenkai had collected funds in Japan and subsequently delivered them to the Ukrainian refugees in Poland, in cooperation with ASAGAO distributing aid on the ground. In early 2023, Fukudenkai reported that their fundraising in Japan for the Ukrainian refugees in Poland had resulted in total donations of 120,000,000 JPY (870,240 EUR), which were used mainly to purchase food and other daily necessities (Fukudenkai, 2023b). Fukudenkai report dated January 31, 2023 shared with the author (Interview with Wagatsuma Mizuki, June 2, 2023; Fukudenkai, 2023c) provides specific information on aid distribution in Poland. The Tokyo-based organization sponsored the distribution of food and daily necessities (such as toiletries) at two locations inside the Central (Main) Station in Krakow: “Peron 4” (Platform 4; the destination of trains from Ukraine and an *ad hoc* refugee support point organized by local volunteers) and a temporary shelter managed by Caritas Polska, a major Catholic charity in Poland. According to the list provided by Caritas, cited in the report, no fewer than 600 displaced persons received aid funded by Fukudenkai alone through that channel. Moreover, the Japanese organization cooperated with five restaurants in the city, which offered free meals to the refugees in exchange for Fukudenkai-sponsored coupons and with local supermarkets, offering coupons for grocery shopping for those who could cook at their temporary accommodations (35 families). Other forms of aid funded by Fukudenkai included sponsorship of a soccer tournament for children from a nursing home in Ukraine and a donation to an animal shelter in Przemysl, a town located on the Polish-Ukrainian border, which claimed to have accommodated 100 abandoned domestic animals from Ukraine. Although based in Krakow, the Japanese aid financed by Fukudenkai has also reached schools and welfare institutions which sheltered the refugee children in Kielce and Olkusz – respectively 118 km and 43 km from the old capital city of Poland (full report and details of funding distribution: Fukudenkai, 2023c).

The cooperation between ASAGAO and Fukudenkai demonstrates how the outsourcing of humanitarian aid to a for-profit contractor becomes a rational choice, when a distant non-profit organization willing to deliver it lacks the personnel and resources indispensable for conducting effective operations on the ground, and a prompt response is crucial. Fukudenkai funds were specifically targeted at

the Ukrainian refugees in Poland, while ASAGAO developed activities reaching not only those in Poland, but also the victims of war on the proper Ukrainian territory (Interview with Wagatsuma Mizuki, June 2, 2023). ASAGAO also cooperated with Polish non-profit institutions, such as Caritas Polska and Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in Krakow. In 2023 aid was continued and included weekly shopping (payment at supermarkets) for those refugees who gathered to purchase basic necessities in selected chain stores (Interview with Yoshida Yumi, April 24, 2023). In 2023, Fukudenkai continued charity fundraising for the victims of war taking refuge in Krakow, also in cooperation with the Polish Institute in Tokyo and the Polish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (email from the Polish Institute in Tokyo, April 5, 2023; email from the PCCIJ, April 10, 2023).

PCCIJ: MANAGING DONATIONS FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Polish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (PCCIJ; Polska Izba Gospodarcza w Japonii, Zainichi Pōrando Shōkō Kaigisho) was founded in Tokyo in 2006, in order to “foster economic exchange between the nations of Japan and Poland, particularly in the area of trade.” (PCCIJ, 2022). Its membership is open to organizations (both for-profit and non-profit) and individual entrepreneurs involved in broadly defined commercial exchanges between the two nations. The PCCIJ promotes investing in Poland and disseminates information about Polish companies which have successfully entered the Japanese market. It has also established the close cooperation with both the Polish Embassy and Polish Institute in Tokyo. In 2022, PCCIJ made a commitment to deliver aid to the refugees crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border: essentially, a non-profit activity but, consequently, building a peaceful environment in which both Japanese and Polish international enterprises might invest with confidence. In early March 2022, the PCCIJ started to collect donations and search for channels through which they could deliver aid on the ground (most of the information in the following section comes from an unpublished document “Support for the Ukrainian refugees” provided by Piotr R. Suszycki, the Chairman of the PCCIJ by email, February 24, 2023).

The first, symbolically important channel of distribution was provided by a Catholic convent, the Canossian Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor (hereafter: the Canossian Daughters of Charity).

It operates both in Japan and in Poland (the Congregation is based in overall 35 countries; the Canossian Daughters of Charity, 2023) and hold a membership in the PCCIJ. In mid-March 2022, the Canossian Daughters of Charity turned their retreat center in Gosławice near Tarnów, Poland into a temporary shelter for refugees. Its scale was smaller than that of the shelter in Yazlovets – it accommodated six mothers with children in April 2022, and seven families with children by June the same year. However, it also distributed aid and relief to the other refugees who were calling upon Sisters on a daily basis (PCCIJ, 2023; Ugoletti, 2022). In June 2022, the PCCIJ had granted the center a donation of 2,000,000 JPY (14,504 EUR) at the Congregation's Tokyo Headquarters, and this act of generosity was acknowledged by Japanese public television (NHK News Web, 2022; PCCIJ, 2023).

The second channel was established through the cooperation between the PCCIJ and the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce (hereafter: the PUCC). The will to seek cooperation in order to provide the Japanese aid to the refugees in Poland, was expressed in an official letter from the PCCIJ to the PUCC dated April 7, 2022. Finally, an agreement concerning a donation of 5,000,000 JPY (36,260 EUR) for the needs of the refugees was signed between the PCCIJ and the PUCC on 16 October, 2022. It was to be operating through a project called “Package for a family from Ukraine” (PCCIJ, 2023). The “package” meant a weekly food parcel for one family, containing necessary products according to criteria set by the Ministry of Development of Local Communities and Territories of Ukraine. As a result, eight tons of food were donated and 809 packages were distributed to the refugee families in six locations in Eastern, Central and Western Poland (PCCIJ 2023).

The third channel of aid distribution established by the PCCIJ operated through the local branch of the Polish Red Cross in Opole (Western Poland). On 2 November 2022, an agreement on a donation of 5,000,000 JPY (36,260 EUR) from the PCCIJ to the Polish Red Cross in Opole was signed. It was aimed at the purchase of daily necessities, to be subsequently distributed at the Temporary Support Center for Ukraine (TOWU) in Zawada near Opole. In fact, the mentioned temporary center may be considered as a unique example of combined efforts made by various agents to support the refugees. Particular locations where aid was delivered were determined by personal connections, such as the place of origin in Poland of the

PCCIJ members (email from Piotr Suszycki, February 24, 2023). In 2022 and 2023 the PCCIJ also regularly supported cultural activities: charity concerts and exhibitions launched both to raise aid for refugees and awareness of the ongoing war and the related humanitarian crisis.

POLAND-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE: DISTRIBUTION ON THE GROUND
DISTRIBUTION BY THE LOCAL CULTURAL AND WELFARE
SYSTEM INSTITUTIONS: MUNICIPAL SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRE (MOPS)
AND MANGGHA MUSEUM, KRAKOW

After February 2022, the voivodes⁶ transferred some of their duties regarding aid for Ukrainian refugees to the Municipal Social Welfare Centers. Those centers (in Polish: Miejskie Ośrodki Pomocy Społecznej, MOPS) carry out social assistance tasks in communes as organizational units (Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance). Apart from supporting disabled or unemployed people, paying contributions for pensions and disability insurance, helping people to get out of homelessness (or generally providing help to those who cannot take care of themselves), the local government authorities in Poland are responsible for integrating refugees who came to certain location (Miruć, 2007: 237–238).

Krakow Social Welfare Center, which supports 5% of the city's population (Interview with Agnieszka Pers, May 11, 2023), became the most heavily burdened institution offering help for the refugees from Ukraine (Business Insider, 2022). One of the biggest challenges was to provide both help to refugees and towards those Polish citizens who regularly rely on welfare, with the same number of social workers. Therefore, social workers suddenly had to take care of an incomparably larger number of people than before the war.

After the huge influx of Ukrainian refugees, responsibilities to provide aid to them were transferred to the mayors, who redirected the required duties to MOPS, providing it with money from the Voivodeship Office. The MOPS organized Support Centers for Ukraine as temporary shelters for the refugees. In those centers the Japanese aid for Ukraine was distributed. In the process of cooperation between MOPS and ASAGAO, specific project objectives had to be determined and put into practice by the Polish side. Despite staff shortages and

⁶ Voivode—the head of voivodeship, the highest level administrative division of Poland (there are 16 voivodeships in the country).

difficulties in reaching recipients, MOPS representatives indicated smooth cooperation with the Japanese, referring at the same time to positive relations between Poland and Japan in the past.

From summer 2022, ASAGAO has cooperated with MOPS in Krakow to distribute vouchers sponsored by Fukudenkai for the Ukrainian refugees. The decision to contact MOPS was based on its experience in distributing funds provided by the Polish government for the refugees. Fukudenkai provided vouchers for the amount of 500 PLN (107 EUR), aimed at the purchase of winter clothing for Ukrainians. It was agreed that 300 PLN (64 EUR) was to be spent on clothes and 200 PLN (43 EUR) on shoes (Interview with Agnieszka Pers, May 11, 2023). Moreover, specific shops had been identified in order to facilitate the access to these resources to the refugees and 2000 vouchers were issued on the basis of prior qualification. Several difficulties in meeting the requirements from the Japanese side were identified, since there were more vouchers than refugees classified for aid. Therefore, MOPS had to seek out people in private accommodation eligible for assistance, and distribute the rest of the vouchers based on provided lists of potential interested parties.

The official distribution ceremony was held in Manggha Museum in cooperation with ASAGAO, MOPS and the Japanese Embassy. The Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology (Manggha), had been opened in 1994 as a branch of the National Museum in Krakow, received the status of a state cultural institution in 2005 and has operated as a museum since 2007 (Manggha, 2023). As Katarzyna Nowak, the director of the museum describes, since February 24, 2022, it has provided individual and emergency help to Ukraine through the network of museums (Interview with Katarzyna Nowak, 12 April, 2023). When Fukudenkai (via ASAGAO) organized a gala to distribute vouchers for winter clothes, the Manggha Museum supported the initiative by providing a hall and refreshments. The ceremony to distribute around one hundred vouchers (Interview with Agnieszka Pers, May 11, 2023) was honored by the visit of the Japanese Ambassador to Poland Miyajima Akio. In his speech he referred to the history of Polish-Japanese solidarity and the assistance provided to the "Siberian Children" one hundred years ago (Kraków.pl, 2022). Such references, so frequently present in diplomats' speeches and in conversations between people involved in Japanese-Polish cooperation, reveal an enormous impact of the historical relations

between Japan and Poland on building the cooperation as far as the current support for Ukraine.

The cooperation between ASAGAO and MOPS, with the support of cultural and diplomatic institutions, also provides an insight on the implementation of Polish-Japanese projects. As Agnieszka Pers recalls, all employees involved “fell in love” with Japan and the whole cooperation was smooth and friendly (Interview with Agnieszka Pers, May 11, 2023). Most importantly, the Japanese side did not impose any additional requirements, thus bilateral relations were almost trouble-free. After signing the agreement, the vouchers were automatically transferred to the Polish side. The planned period of cooperation (from August to October) was extended twice – first until the end of the year 2022, and then until the end of February 2023 due to the time necessary to identify the beneficiaries. The project lasted half a year and resulted in recognition of the history of Fukudenkai on the part of MOPS employees, with regard to acknowledging the link between their current task and the history of “Siberian Children.”

INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVES:
SHARING JAPANESE FOOD AND ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

One of the most active Japanese residents of Poland during the first months of the war was Sakamoto Hikoemon, an entrepreneur who runs a Japanese grocery store in Warsaw. Sakamoto is the originator of the Free Onigiri Project (for details, see Free Onigiri Project Group on Facebook, 2023), which began on 6 March 2022. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Sakamoto was a sake sommelier; however, the 2020 restrictions around anti-Covid measures caused him to open a shop selling Japanese products. After Russia’s attack on Ukraine, as hundreds of refugees arrived at train stations in Warsaw, Sakamoto decided to provide aid, bringing the refugees *onigiri*—Japanese rice sandwiches, which he sells in his shop in the center of Warsaw. He prepared these snacks once or twice a day and went to the Central Station in order to distribute them to those in need (Interview with Sakamoto Hikoemon, May 11, 2023). As described in the article published by a major Japanese newspaper “Asahi Shimbun,” he was delivering around 100 pieces daily (Asahi Shimbun, 2023).

From April 2022 Sakamoto changed his distribution method. Due to the dislocation of refugees into permanent accommodation and into

the Support Centers for Ukrainian Refugees (Polish: Centrum Pomocy Uchodźcom z Ukrainy), he began delivering 300 pieces of *onigiri* daily to the selected Centers. Initially, Sakamoto funded this activity by himself. When his project became public, his customers based in Japan also provided him with an amount of money to purchase the ingredients to prepare *onigiri*. On the day of the interview (May 11, 2023), he reported distributing 15,000 *onigiri* to Ukrainians in Poland. At the beginning of the Russian aggression, when the influx of refugees was high, Sakamoto also traveled around once a week to distribute *onigiri* in Medyka at the Polish-Ukrainian border. He was handing out *onigiri* to refugees together with his friend, so that they could eat them in the buses, transporting them from the border (Asahi Shimbun, 2023). He has continued the aid by himself, occasionally cooperating with small non-governmental organizations.

Sakamoto consequently promotes Japanese food among Ukrainians, whose knowledge usually barely extends beyond sushi. Moreover, Sakamoto emphasizes that after the Russian invasion Japanese people started to gain some knowledge about Ukraine, which had been a rather unknown country for them. Now they not only are able to specify in which area this country is located, but also name its main cities (Interview with Sakamoto Hikoemon, May 11, 2023).

Another prominent Japanese activist in providing aid to Ukrainians is an architect, Ban Shigeru. He has focused on a transitional shelter approach (TSA). As an initiator of the Paper Partition System (PPS), together with his colleagues, Japanese and Polish architects, he implemented the emergency shelter project – “a concept of partitioning large spaces such as gymnasiums into smaller units – rooms measuring approximately 2 x 2 meters” (Ban et al., 2022: 31). This form of temporary shelter was used for the first time after a big earthquake in Niigata in 2004. In the case of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, PPSs were located in border towns, as well in the cities – all together covering nine sites in Poland and three cities in Ukraine, where 16 units were located (Ban et al., 2022: 33).

The Japanese architect’s aid to the Ukrainian refugees was also implemented with the cooperation of the Solidarity Fund – a Polish State Treasury Foundation established in 1997 to implement tasks in the field of international development cooperation. Within the framework of the cooperation established by the Solidarity Fund, from November 2022 to March 2023, Ban Shigeru Architects delivered 170

portable heating stoves to the foundation's warehouse in Pruszków (Poland); the stoves were later transported to Lviv (Ukraine). They were distributed among public heating centers, internally displaced people centers and to beneficiaries who signaled their need to receive resources for space heating (Interview with Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, March 30, 2023).

Moreover, as an extension of the collaborative project initiated by Ban Shigeru, the Solidarity Fund also established cooperation with UNIQLO Ltd., a globally successful Japanese fast fashion brand which, between December 2022 and January 2023, delivered to the Foundation's warehouse in Pruszków 1,276 sets of thermal clothing and 1,000 items of clothing for children and adults, which were transported by the Foundation to Lviv and then handed over to the Association of Youth Centers in Ukraine, which proceeded to distribute the clothing to the internally displaced persons who had been received into their centers (Interview with Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, March 30, 2023).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Multilevel cooperation between actors of divergent cultural and social backgrounds, operating in varied institutional settings to aid the citizens of a third nation created opportunities to improve the international profile of both Japan and Poland – nations which have been long criticized for their refugee-unfriendly policies and perceived failures to meet the standards set by the EU member states of Western Europe (Kalicki, 2019; Karolewski & Wilga 2018; Narkowicz, 2018). Both Japan and Poland have recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of the “Siberian Children” rescue operation as an example of international humanitarian aid, and emphasized the continuity between the 20th-century cooperation and current aid for Ukraine (Fukudenkai, 2023a; Polish Institute in Tokyo, 2022). Personal connections and dramatic “human stories” have high symbolic value long recognized by the media and national governments, and are utilized as soft power resources at diplomatic, cultural and educational occasions. But in the case of long-term, aggravated conflicts such as the one between Russia and Ukraine, a more systematic approach to humanitarian aid, especially from the viewpoint of multilevel governance, is necessary to inform future

policies. Of course, the ultimate success of a humanitarian aid project can be fully evaluated only after including the perspective of the receiving side; this part, however, requires more longitudinal research which is outside the scope of this study.

In this paper, we have analyzed the management of international aid flow in the short-term, immediate response perspective, as a process operated by multiple actors. Starting from the national actors, in this case Japan, Ukraine and Poland, the process of transferring international aid engaged both governmental and nongovernmental institutions, as well as individual Japanese entrepreneurs reaching Poland. As an EU border state, Poland responded to the migration crisis not only via its national legislations but also as a member of the supranational organization. Using official tools “to provide humanitarian, budget and emergency assistance to Ukraine” was a part of the European Union policy (Raik, Blockmans, Osypchuk & Suslov, 2024). But in the immediate wake of the Russian aggression on Ukraine, when the stance of European institutions had not been precisely decided, the Polish government, acting according to its own national regulations, shared the power with citizens and organizations to face the mass influx of refugees through an unprecedented participatory mechanism (Firlit-Fiesnak, 2023).

Especially, when a third country – in this case, Japan – was willing to donate aid to refugees, Poland, with its multiple actors, who, along with the inclusive management of the migration flows, brokered in distributing foreign funds and showed deep confidence in bilateral cooperation, became a convenient destination. Thus, without revealing a clear leader, coordination and cooperation were maintained between Japanese and Polish organizations, as well as among institutions within Poland. The participatory mechanisms were launched by transferring considerable power from the central level to local government (MOPS), state institutions of culture (Manggha, Polish Institute in Tokyo), quasi-governmental organizations (PCCIJ, PUCC, Solidarity Fund), religious institutions (Canossian Daughters of Charity, Caritas Polska, Sisters of Maria Immaculata), typical NGOs (AAR Japan, Fukudenkai, Polish Red Cross), small businesses and individual entrepreneurs (ASAGAO, Ban Shigeru, Sakamoto Hikoemon).

Their roles are summarized in Table 1:

TABLE 1
Types of organizations involved in Japanese-Polish aid for refugees
from Ukraine (2022)

JAPAN		
Actor Type	Specific Organization	Core Role in MLG
1	2	3
Traditional NGO	AAR Japan	Specialized humanitarian aid and focus on vulnerable minorities (persons with disabilities, single mothers). Utilized robust religious networks (Sisters of Maria Immaculata) for direct aid delivery into Ukraine.
Historical Charity/ NGO	Fukudenkai	Largest financial donor for refugee support in Poland (by far). Leveraged historical ties to Poland (“Siberian Children”) to raise funds. Outsourced on-the-ground operations to ASAGAO, focusing funding on Krakow.
Small Business/ Contractor	ASAGAO Ltd.	Local for-profit contractor and operational intermediary. Managed direct distribution of funds and material aid for Fukudenkai and collaborated with local Polish institutions (MOPS, Manggha). Accelerated aid delivery where non-profits lacked local personnel.
Business Chamber	PCCIJ	Managed donations from the Japanese business community. Diversified aid channels by cooperating with religious orders (Canossian Daughters), the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce (PUCC), and the Polish Red Cross.
Individual Entrepreneur	Sakamoto Hikoemon	Provided immediate, grassroots relief (Free Onigiri Project) at critical first reception points (Warsaw Central Station). Contributed to Japanese soft power by promoting food culture.
Prominent Individual/Architect	Ban Shigeru	Implemented specialized, transitional shelter solutions (Paper Partition System – PPS). Cooperated with the Polish state foundation (Solidarity Fund) for logistics and distribution of materials.
POLAND		
Actor Type	Specific Organization	Core Role in MLG
Local Government/ Welfare	MOPS, Krakow	Final distribution mechanism for large aid packages. Integrated international aid (Fukudenkai vouchers) into the formal state system. Managed the unprecedented participatory mechanism by taking transferred duties from the voivodes.

1	2	3
Cultural Institution	Manggha Museum	Provided a high-profile, neutral space for public diplomacy events (e.g., voucher distribution ceremony). Served as a location that reinforced historical and cultural ties (soft power) for Japanese donors.
Religious/Third Sector	Sisters of Maria Immaculata (PL/UA)	Provided existing, robust networks and acted as both a shelter and distribution center for aid channeled from AAR Japan, often directly across the border into Ukraine.
Polish State Foundation	Solidarity Fund	Served as a formal channel and logistical partner for specialized international aid (e.g., Ban Shigeru's stoves, UNIQLO clothing) destined for Ukraine.
Quasi-Governmental Business	Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce (PUCC)	Facilitated the transfer of funds from the PCCIJ, acting as a broker to distribute aid packages for Ukrainian families.

While most of the participants in our study emphasized smooth cooperation and high levels of trust between Japanese and Polish partners, their stories also revealed problems such as excess concentration of humanitarian aid in big cities, resulting in excess burdens on local governments and infrastructure of those hubs (MOPS), as well as in waste and potential neglect of smaller municipalities which had also accepted refugees. Geographically speaking, humanitarian aid flowing from Japan to Poland, targeted at Ukrainian war refugees could have been more evenly distributed. High concentration of the Japanese aid resources in Krakow was caused by a combination of historical, cultural and public diplomacy-driven factors. Fukudenkai, the Japanese charity most intensely promoted by the Polish Embassy and Polish Institute in Tokyo (and prominent figures from both countries, including imperial and presidential spouses) set up a local branch in Krakow in cooperation with ASAGAO. The fact that the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology is located in Krakow, and that the city is widely known in Japan as a tourist destination (UNESCO World Heritage and the starting point for tours of the Auschwitz concentration camp) was also a likely factor behind the charity's focus on the old capital of Poland.

Below, quantitative data on the contributions of individual organizations are presented to illustrate the mechanisms and determinants of the flow of Japanese financial donations intended for aid to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, in order to show the effectiveness of the soft power strategy and the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) model.

TABLE 2
Funding breakdown by organization

Organization	Total donations (EUR)	Total share (%)
Fukudenkai	€870,240.00	66.4%
ASAGAO (Tokyo)	€248,757.90	19.0%
AAR Japan	€104,756.50	8.0%
PCCIJ	€87,024.00	6.6%
TOTAL	€1,310,778.40	100%

The largest donor was the Fukudenkai organization, which has long-standing relations with Poland. This may prove that Japan's soft power strategy, combining elements of historical heritage (including the story of the Siberian Children) with public diplomacy (the ceremony at Manggha) was exceptionally effective in mobilizing financial resources in Japan. It was responsible for almost two-thirds (66.4%) of the total analyzed aid. The transfer of one-fourth of the total aid to the project in Krakow (via Manggha and MOPS) proves that historical and cultural factors, rather than exclusively needs at the border, shaped the geographic flow of Japanese funds, leading to a concentration and potential neglect of smaller centers. This may represent the dominant role of the soft power factor, as well as the concentration of MLG.

Thanks to the above quantitative analysis, we can distinguish the roles played by other individual organizations in MLG. The significant financial contribution of ASAGAO (19.0%) underscores an effective model for rapid crisis response, which is the outsourcing of humanitarian aid to locally rooted, yet flexible and commercial entities acting as contractors for Fukudenkai, and this approach should inform future MLG (Multi-Level Governance) policies. In contrast, the smaller but still significant financial roles of AAR Japan (8.0%) and PCCIJ (6.6%) represent diversification strategies: AAR Japan focused on vulnerable minorities and smaller centers via existing religious networks (Sisters of Maria Immaculata) consistent with its mission, while PCCIJ utilized mechanisms to build a stable business environment, with both smaller channels demonstrating vertical coherence between their actions and the goals of their parent organizations.

The above calculations did not include the small, yet symbolic significance of individual initiatives, whose modest financial

contribution is linked to the symbolic meaning of helping people in need while simultaneously promoting Japanese values and culture and building interpersonal relationships. Their contribution to the realization of Japanese soft power may be disproportionately high relative to the financial amount. Of particular note is the promotion of Shigeru Ban's architectural solutions (also applied to refugees) in the form of an exhibition launched at the Manggha Museum frequently mentioned in this paper, which premiered more than three years after the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the Japanese architect's relevant activities (Manggha, 2025).

The success of MLG in the case of Japan's aid to Ukraine with Polish support was exceptional and conditional on Poland's and EU's different approach to refugees from Ukraine compared to non-European refugees. This success was made possible by political openness and trust (which is not the rule in Polish migration policy), as well as by the TPD implemented by the EU.

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Interviews

Conducted in Tokyo, Japan (chronological order):

Interview with Jimbo Ayaka (December 8, 2022)

Interview with Piotr Suszycki (February 26–27, 2023, email)

Interview with Wagatsuma Mizuki (June 2, 2023)

Conducted in Warsaw and Krakow, Poland (chronological order):

Interview with Aleksandra Jarosiewicz (Warsaw, March 30, 2023)

Interview with Katarzyna Nowak (Krakow, April 2, 2023)

Interview with Yoshida Yumi (Krakow, April 24, 2023)

Interview with Agnieszka Pers (Krakow, May 11, 2023)

Interview with Sakamoto Hikoemon (Warsaw, May 11, 2023)

Other sources

Activity reports and email correspondence obtained through communication with AAR Japan and the Sisters of Maria Immaculata (2022–2023) were used with permission.

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