

Изменение в восприятии и отношении японских и российских студентов к стране-соседу (сравнение опросов 2007–2012–2021 гг.)

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Аннотация. С увеличением трансграничных образовательных контактов, которые происходят благодаря интернету, возрастает важность получения молодыми людьми объективных, а не стереотипных представлений об иностранных государствах и их гражданах.

Одной из причин выбора студентов университетов в качестве целевой группы для нашего исследования является тот факт, что образование тесно связано с ростом и развитием нации, что, в свою очередь, укрепляет социальную сплоченность и активную гражданскую позицию молодежи. Кроме того, причина сосредоточения внимания на студентах заключается в том, что именно студенты, которые вскоре станут выпускниками университетов, возможно, неизбежно будут иметь непосредственные связи или опыт в политических вопросах в будущем, и логически предполагается, что они будут влиять на будущую политику своей страны и международные отношения в Азиатско-Тихоокеанском регионе.

Основная цель настоящего проекта состояла в том, чтобы изучить изменения в общественном восприятии и отношении японских/российских студентов к России/Японии в период с 2007 по 2021 г. Это исследование не концентрируется на политических событиях, а скорее направлено на мониторинг изменений и различий, которые произошли за последние пятнадцать лет в восприятии образов стран-соседей и в отношении к России/Японии японских/российских студентов, а также на анализ того, что спровоцировало подобное восприятие и реакцию. Эмпирической базой настоящего исследования послужили проведенные в 2007–2021 гг. опросы студентов японских и российского университетов. В последние десятилетия образы стран привлекают пристальное внимание ученых всего мира. Когда мы начали исследование, насколько нам известно, не было информации о других исследованиях по изучению обозначенной выше темы именно среди этой целевой группы – студентов университетов. Таким образом, данная статья призвана заполнить этот пробел в исследованиях путем изучения и обсуждения упомянутых выше тем.

Ключевые слова: образы государств, японские студенты, опросы мнений, установки студентов, представления.

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Introduction

Trust towards neighbors is especially important both for promoting cooperation and for establishing informal ties, as it contributes to overcoming differences and even conflicts that may include territorial tensions and disputes. At the grassroots level, social integration occurs easily between neighbors with higher levels of trust [Nye 1990; Rippl et al. 2009]. On the other hand, large socio-cultural dissimilarities result in mental borders that have a negative impact on cross-border interactions [Houtum 1999].

As stressed in previous works by researchers of mutual images of Japan and Russia, public opinion surveys reveal the predominant vectors in Russian-Japanese relations that strongly correlate with the evolution of mutual images. The key points of correlation exhibit interrelated 'mirror' dynamics that are connected with the events happening in bilateral relations. These surveys, in turn, also have an effect on real politics and relations between states [Chugrov, Streltsov 2017, p. 23]. In this connection, it is equally important to note that geopolitical orientations represent a relatively volatile element of political culture and identity, subject to change under the influence of media. Furthermore, mass media, culture, communications, and social mobility all contribute to political socialization of young generation, and the media, as a soft power instrument, influences the young people's opinions and views of international issues.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, this study explores the evolution of Japanese/Russian students' perceptions of Russia/Japan at an informal level of learning.¹ The popular usage and universal confidence are the main qualities of public opinion stereotypes, thus the understanding of values attributed to stereotypes must be simple, clear, and easily perceived by people. However, it is expected that persons with more formal university education have higher reading and comprehension abilities, which are necessary to attain knowledge on diverse issues. This was one of the several reasons for choosing university students as the target group for our questionnaire/opinion poll. Another reason is that university level education evaluates communication skills of the students, which are an important factor that is improved through university education. Also, compared to other adult populations, university students exhibit less financial independence but have more free time and engage in broader activities [Hatabu et al. 2020]. It can be stated that education generally indicates a broader sphere of everyday activity, a greater number of reference groups, and more interpersonal contacts, which increases the likelihood of discussing public affairs with others. Moreover, university students are independent of their families, form their own identities, and they are very concerned about how they present themselves and how people see them. In this context, self-consciousness [Fenigstein et al. 1975] is considered a factor significantly influencing young people's behavior. It can be assumed that the extroverted nature of active interaction with others determines university students' formation of their own point of view and their own opinions.

University days are the most crucial period in forming one's self-will, and university students are much more likely to act on their self-judgment than other students. In addition, university attendance has been mentioned to lower prejudice levels and increase global issue awareness. Another reason for focusing on students was that it was presumed that the university students would, perhaps inevitably, have firsthand connection or experience with political matters in the future. This was also one reason why they were considered to be the preferred group to examine attitudes and perceptions toward neighboring countries. For all these reasons, the opinions of university students must be an important consideration for the research. In my study, an opinion poll was used to ascertain the possibility that views and opinions may have been specific to certain groups, i.e., students.

The main aim of the research

The aim of this survey is to monitor long-term changes in Japanese and Russian students' sources of information toward the neighboring state and perceptions and attitudes concerning the

¹ Informal learning takes place outside universities and arises from the learner's involvement in activities that are not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind. It is involuntary and an inescapable part of daily life; for that reason, it is sometimes called experiential learning. Formal or non-formal learning is partly intentional and partly incidental: when we consciously pursue any learning target, we cannot help learning things that are not part of that target. Informal learning is exclusively incidental.

neighboring country by conducting the survey using the same questions, and to do an analysis of the evolution of the students' perceptions of the neighboring country by comparing the data of the previous 2007 [Zhilina 2010] and 2012² [Zhilina 2015] surveys to the 2021 survey.

Materials and methods

Study design, participants, and data collection

An opinion poll is a scientific and representative survey designed to measure the views of a specific group. For my analyses, I used three datasets, which allowed for an examination of the changes of Japanese students' perception of Russia and Russians and Russian students' perception of Japan and the Japanese over the past fifteen years.

Seven universities participated in this study: JWU (Japan Women's University) – 2007, Aoyama Gakuin University – 2012; Kansai University, Takushoku University, Osaka City University, Kobe University – 2021 and Dostoevsky Omsk State University (OmSU) – 2007, 2012, 2021. The Japanese students at the named universities majored in Political Studies, Natural Sciences, Medicine, Philology, History, Mathematics, Foreign Studies, Law, Economics, and Global Cultural Studies. The respondent sample size opinion poll at the universities was 400 students per side (Japanese and Russian students). However, in 2021, the number of surveyed respondents in Japan declined to 155.³ The unwillingness to participate in studies has been a matter of concern for sociologists in Japan who recognize that the circumstances under which social research is conducted in Japan has been deteriorating and are now considered critical [Inaba 2007]. Consequently, the 2021 study had less participation than had been hoped for. Nonetheless, we feel confident that the results represent a sufficiently stratified random sample to make generalizations about the youth population.

The studies were performed in April 2007 – October 2007, in April 2012 – July 2012, and in April 2021 – July 2021. The population observed in this project was Japanese and Russian students between 17 and 24 years of age.

The studies were based on the results of a paper questionnaire and personal interviews (2007, 2012), as well as an online survey in 2021,⁴ where respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaires. Participants gave their consent by anonymously filling out the survey questionnaire. The first and second datasets, namely, the 2007 and 2012 surveys were conducted and collected at university classes and given only to the students who were eager to participate in this research. Both sets of data were obtained from representative surveys previously conducted in Japan and Russia. The third dataset came from a 2021 online survey.⁵ The data collection procedure followed the next steps: an initial email was first sent, where the purpose of the study was explained and

² The research projects "Student's representations of neighboring countries: Japan and Russia. Comparative studies" were supported by Japan Foundation Fellowship Program in 2007 and 2012.

³ The dominance of online research in Japan can be surprising to those less familiar with the country. When people are overwhelmed with various online surveys, they may simply ignore them. Another reason of lower participation in online surveys is the hesitancy to put information online due to abuses of personal data. Thus, responses to online surveys in Japan are less than administered. Also, to conduct online research in Japan, online surveys should work well on mobile devices. This is important, as the Japanese are more likely to use their smartphones to access the Internet rather than a PC or other devices. Teens and young adults (especially those in their 20s and 30s) tend to participate in online surveys using their smartphones.

⁴ Due to the emergency (caused by COVID-19 restrictions in both countries) this cross-cultural study was administered as an anonymous survey using a questionnaire constructed by using Google Forms. We distributed our online survey via the Internet thanks to university professors and instructors of universities mentioned above. Responders answered the questionnaire online. The data was collected in April – July 2021.

⁵ Online research methods remove human interaction, encouraging participation from respondents who may not enjoy the process of a face-to-face interview in the focus group. Respondents could relax without the pressures of communicating directly with another individual and were more likely to give honest and detailed responses when giving answers at their own leisure.

where respondents were asked to participate. It is also important to mention that confidentiality of the data collected was ensured.

There is evidence [Harzing et al. 2002] that the language of the questionnaire affects the way respondents answer the same question, which argues against the use of single-language surveying. That is why, in order to overcome language barriers and reduce the risk of misunderstandings, surveyed students responded the questionnaire in their native languages (which was distributed both in Japanese for Japanese students and Russian for Russian students).

As was mentioned above, our 2007 and 2012 surveys were aiming to cover the same topics as the 2021 survey, so I am going to compare the results of our 2021 poll with those of 2007 and 2012 to see if the results are similar or not. There was a slight difference in the form of survey – a paper questionnaire (2007 and 2012) and an online survey in 2021. Additionally, there was a difference in the mode of data collection (paper-questionnaire based personal interviews vs. online survey). But we should stress that low response rates for online questionnaires are a recognized problem for Japanese researchers as well [Inaba 2007; Rindfuss et al. 2015].⁶ Detailed inspection of the data showed, however, that these differences posed no serious problem for a comparative analysis.

Instrumentation

As for the examination of perceived national images, interviews with different groups can be the better choice. A questionnaire was developed by the author for use in this study and contained: demographic information including gender, respondents' majors (university), age, and nationality; 3 closed-ended and 3 open-ended question items about sources of information on the neighboring state and its sufficiency about the neighboring state, its people, and their traits. The open-ended questions required a narrative answer in the form of a word or several words and provided participants more space and opportunity to offer private opinions on researched topics, allowing the collection of the maximum amount of information on the topic, which was very important for this study. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to state their opinions in their own words and not fit into possibly limited categories. Regarding open-ended responses, the diversity of words chosen by the students was quite large and the codification of responses was done by ranking of repeating words, and these were analyzed according to recorded frequency. In order to understand the views of the students, we analyzed the questionnaire, the questions of which gave the explanation of the Japanese/Russian students' representation of the neighboring country and its people. Students' responses to the open-ended items were first translated into English and then coded and placed in themes, where percentages of each theme were calculated to facilitate comparison.

Results: general comments **Sources of information and its sufficiency**

Taking into consideration that the formation of a country's image in people's minds occurs on the basis of available information, it is necessary to know where the information shaping the image and ideas about a given state comes from. The results of the 2021 survey indicate that 32.8% of Japanese university students use the Internet for learning about Russia.⁷ At the same time, 43.7% of Russian respondents do this⁸ (Table 1).

⁶ While last poll rate does not seem high, it is in line with recent response rates of public opinion surveys in Japan (academic surveys in particular), which have declined in recent decades.

⁷ 69.7% of all Japanese students participating in the poll.

⁸ 96.7% of all Russian students participating in the poll.

Table 1. Sources of information about the neighboring state for Japanese/Russian students

Sources of Information	For Japanese Students (on Russia) %			For Russian Students (on Japan) %		
	2007	2012	2021	2007	2012	2021
The Internet	12	17.4	32.8↑	5.6	35.4	43.7↑
TV	42.1	48.2	25.5↓	42.8	28	20.2↓
Books	5.8	4.5	10↑	9.9	7.2	10.3↑
Lectures	3	13.2	20↑	5.6	4.8	3.1↓
Talking with friends	2.8	5.5	3.6↓	4.6	5.9	16.4↑
Journals	2.2	2.5	1.5↓	12.1	5.	3.3↓
Newspapers	31	7,9	4.7↓	11.3	8.7	0.5↓
Radio	1	0.8	1.2↑	8.1	4.9	0.7↓
Others	0.1	-	2.1↑	-	-	1.8↑

Created by the author on the basis of surveys conducted at the universities of Japan and Russia in 2007/2012/2021

Traditionally, in Japan, public opinion has been shaped primarily by the mass media and organizations with strong political power to influence it. Individual citizens who make up the media audience have only had an indirect influence. In the Internet age,⁹ however, it is no longer the case of the mass media simply delivering news to readers, listeners, and viewers. Audience members can contribute to the process by disseminating their reactions on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media or blogs.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the rate of Internet use is especially high in younger generations compared to other age groups. Many experts support the assumption that it is the students' audience which is becoming more and more influenced by the Internet and social networks as a ready source of information.¹¹ The survey revealed that the reasons students preferred using the Internet as the medium to search for information are multiple: it is user friendly, information is relevant and interesting, vast amount of information is available, information is interactive and personalized, and there is the opportunity to discuss information and share it.

The number of the students watching TV for news has changed significantly. In 2007 and 2012, TV news coverage of foreign countries exerted a greater influence on Japanese and Russian students' opinion about Russia and Japan than that on the Internet. Compared to print news media, television news opt for simplified and visually focused formats, which may hinder viewers' understanding [Robinson et al. 1986]. However, some studies [Neuman et al. 1992] show that television news may facilitate political knowledge gain involving more abstract information. But, as far as one can see from Table 1, in 2021, the number of Japanese students mentioning TV as a source of information about Russia has dramatically declined, from 48.2% (2012)¹² to 25.5%¹³ (2021) (almost halved). As for Russian students, this number declined less than in Japan – from 28% (2012) to 20.1%¹⁴ (2021).

⁹ For example, in 2016, the Internet penetration rate in Japan was 93.2%, which was the highest among Asian countries (e.g., South Korea=92.8%, Hong Kong=87.5%, Singapore=81.0%, Taiwan=79.8%). See: United Nations. Statistical Yearbook. 2016 edition, Issue 59.

¹⁰ Kimura, T. (2017). The Internet, Media, and Public Opinion in Japan. <https://www.nippon.com/en/currents/d00333/> (accessed: 22.09.2022).

¹¹ International Telecommunication Union. ICT facts and figures; 2017 (2017).1–8. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf>. (accessed: 22.09.2022).

¹² In 2012 – 42.1% of Japanese and 42.8% of Russian respondents chose TV.

¹³ 54.2% of all Japanese students participating in the poll.

¹⁴ 44.6% of all Russian students participating in the poll.

Lectures

In comparison to 2007 and 2012, in 2021, the number of Japanese students who learnt about Russia from lectures dramatically increased – 20%¹⁵ of Japanese students chose lectures as the source of information on Russia. As for Russian respondents, the number of students who obtained information about Japan from lectures reached the lowest level, decreasing from 4.8% (2012) to 3.1% (2021).

Books

In 2021, the next significant source of information about Russia for 10%¹⁶ of Japanese respondents were books (5.8% in 2007 and 4.5% in 2012). This is a significant development, as all other recorded sources decreased, but books saw more than a twofold increase compared to 2012. In 2021, 10.3 %¹⁷ of Russian students chose books as well (9.8% in 2007, 7.2% in 2012). These findings reveal that the students from both countries preferred books as their source of information compared to newspapers and journals. Meanwhile, in 2021, only 1.2% of Japanese students (0.8% in 2012, 1% in 2007) and 0.7% of Russian respondents (8.1% in 2012, 4.9% in 2007) chose radio as their primary source of information about the neighboring state.

Talking with friends

In 2021, 16.4%¹⁸ of respondents from Russia (5.9% in 2012, 4.6% in 2007) believed that they critically analyzed information about Japan when they were talking with their friends. The recorded increase suggests that talking with friends is in fact likely to be one of the most important sources of information for Russian students and is instrumental for keeping track of the behaviors of individuals and groups in the social environment [McAndrew et al. 2002]. As such, knowledge or beliefs gained from talking with friends are based on various social beliefs [Sommerfeld et al. 2007]. However, only 3.6%¹⁹ of the Japanese responded that they trusted their talks with friends as a source of information about Russia (5.5% in 2012, 2.8% in 2007). However, we can see that information that is particularly communicable/conversational will tend to be shared repeatedly through communication chains, thereby becoming part and parcel of a society's beliefs about individuals and groups.

Based on the gathered data, we can safely determine that, among young people in Japan and Russia, Internet use (which is a part of their daily routine) is a respectable source of information about the world and about neighboring states, becoming an indispensable instrument for information search. It means that most of the students depend on it for information. We can see the impact of the Internet on university students' perceptions of neighboring states. But we should do this by considering the adjustments that a television-dominated culture (Japan in 2007 and 2012; Russia in 2007) makes in a society where Internet communications also play an important role. However, at the same time, it can be concluded that students sometimes tend to overestimate the influence of the Internet on beliefs and behavior of others and underestimate its influence on themselves.

Sufficiency of information

With its ability to sort data quickly and collate and present large numbers of varied points of view, the Internet is gaining popularity as the preferred means of obtaining information that is curated to one's needs and conveniently available. Most of the young people of both countries who get their news online explore a variety of different news topics online. Nevertheless, in 2021, 71% of Japanese students (77.5% in 2012, 73.7% in 2007) and 37.1% of Russian students (36.2% in 2012, 55.5% in 2007) said that available information on the other country had been insufficient for them. Meanwhile, in 2021, 33.8% of Russian respondents (43.5% in 2012, 17.9% in 2007) were satisfied with the

¹⁵ 42.6% of all Japanese students participating in the poll.

¹⁶ 21.3 % of all Japanese students participating in the poll.

¹⁷ 22.8 % of all Russian students participating in the poll.

¹⁸ 36.1 % of all Russian students participating in the poll.

¹⁹ 7.7 % of all Japanese students participating in the poll.

amount of information available about Japan. And only 7.1% of Japanese respondents (6.3% in 2012, 3.3% in 2007) were satisfied with the amount of information on Russia.

The high share of Japanese and Russian respondents who stressed the insufficiency of information on the neighboring state may be interpreted in two ways: as having a negative effect on their intention to seek information about the foreign country, or as a wish to get more information about the close neighbor. This nonetheless clearly suggests that both Japanese and Russian students are interested in learning more about their close neighbor, and this lack of information represents an opportunity for policy makers to address.

Neighboring country

As was previously mentioned, the survey contained open-ended questions inviting respondents to share their first associations about Japan/Russia. To understand the opinions of the students, we analyzed the open-ended responses for extra information. In this regard, and to understand Japanese/Russian students' attitudes towards the neighboring state, we asked them to list the key things they associated with Russia and Japan.²⁰

1. Geographical associations

Geopolitical perceptions are created through the process of socialization and are influenced in part by the national system of education. However, in recent times, TV and other media have an increased influence on the political socialization of young people [Paletz et al. 2011, pp. 263–265] and perceptions of geopolitics. In this regard, we should note that national landscapes represented in movies and other media greatly influence the students' mental images and attitudes towards places and people. In 2021, 24.7% of Japanese (8% in 2012, 9.7% in 2007) and 6.4% of Russian students (8% in 2012, 6% in 2007) spoke about the other country by using key words referring to geographical associations key words (Table 2).

Table 2. Associations with Russia for Japanese students (2007, 2012, 2021)

Associations with Russia	2007 (%)	2012 (%)	2021 (%)
Cold climatic conditions	25.9	16.1	18.7↑
Geographical associations	9.70	13.8	24.7↑
Historical and political figures	8.90	7.2	19.3↑
USSR, socialism, communism, CPSU	8.30	7.9	6.7↓
Sport and athletes	6.60	3.7	6.0↑
National cuisine	6.30	7.1	6.0↓
Negative incidents and facts	7.50	6.1	5.3↓
National dances, ballet, shows, culture	4.60	1.7	5.0↑
National symbols	5.70	4.4	3.3↓
Beautiful people (women) with white skin	4.60	6.1	2.7↓
Northern Territories	2.80	5.2	1.3↓
Particular color	2.70	2.6	-
Others	6.40	15.1	1.0↓
No answer	-	3.0	-

Created by the author on the basis of surveys conducted at the universities of Japan in 2007/2012/2021

²⁰ What words first come to your mind that you would associate with Russia/Japan?

Russian respondents described Japan as “islands in the ocean,” “isolated archipelago,” and “closest neighbor,” just to name a few examples. In association with Japan, they named such cities as Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, as well as islands – Okinawa and the Kuril Islands. Russian students described Japan as “an isolated island,” “archipelago in the Pacific Ocean,” “Far Eastern neighbor,” etc. A notable open-ended response described Japan as “an island nation located to the east of our country. It is not an ally, but I have a warm attitude towards Japan because of their culture and partly their worldview.”

The proportion of “don’t know” responses was never higher than 3% in case of responses to the question regarding perceptions of the neighboring country.

The stereotyped image of Russia for Japanese students is influenced mainly by the media. The high awareness of Russia determines the key associations with this country, although there are some changes compared to the previous survey. In 2021, Japanese respondents considered Russia primarily from the geographical perspective (24.7% in 2021, 13.8% in 2012, 9.7% in 2007). Russia, for Japanese respondents, is “one of the biggest countries in the world,” “Russia is a huge place with many different people living there,” “a country with a large territory and diverse cultures,” “it occupies a huge territory,” “northern country,” “Siberia” (“Trans-Siberian Railway”), and “country near Hokkaido,” or, “geographically, Russia is a very big part of East Asia.” The cities mentioned by the Japanese respondents were represented by such well-known cities as Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Vladivostok. But Japanese students also mentioned, not only in terms of civilization, but also politically and economically, that Russia is “distant neighbor,”²¹ “neither European nor Asian” (“a country with a very large land area. It’s a country geographically close to Japan, but it doesn’t feel very close to me,” “the country is big and the military power is strong”). In other words, geopolitical images were the prevalent ones for both Japanese and Russian respondents.

Speaking about Russia, most Japanese participants also mentioned “cold climatic conditions,” “image of a cold country,” where “it’s always cold,” “severe, terrible winter,” “low temperature,” “strong cold,” “snow country,” “image of cold country, where people wear fur hats and many pieces of clothing” (16.1% in 2012, 25.9% in 2007). In 2021, this trend was observed among the Japanese students as well (18.7%). Moreover, cinematic productions that featured national landscapes influenced both sets of respondent students’ mental images of the respective country. In the case of Japanese students, these were such responses as an “image of a cold country where the people wear fur hats and many pieces of clothing,” “snow country,” etc. In other words, by visualizing landscapes, their characteristics, phenomena, and inhabitants, movies play a crucial role in informing perceptions about other countries. Thus, movies have helped to establish specific landscapes and brought them into national consciousness [Escher et al. 2001].

2. Historical and political figures; historical facts and events

In 2021, 19.3% of Japanese respondents associated Russia with Russian historical and political figures (7.2% in 2012, 8.9% in 2007). In this context, in 2007 and 2012, respondents recalled the names of President Putin, Gorbachev, Lenin, Stalin, Yekaterina II, and Tsar Romanov. In 2021, Vladimir Putin was the most frequently mentioned association with Russia among foreign students. 78.3% of all Japanese students who mentioned historical and political figures in association with Russia mentioned Putin. Some respondents associated Russia with “Putin’s country,” where “Putin is unaware of other active Russian politicians and possesses power almost like a dictator.” Japanese students’ perceptions of the Russian leader were mixed. There were such responses as “President Putin: strong military power,” “Putin’s socialism,” “Putin, Soviet Union, Belarus,” “Moscow, President Putin,” and one response said: “Putin, Zagitowa, Matryoshka, Vladivostok.”

Following a strong trend persistent over the 15 years the studies were conducted, Japanese respondents associated the image of Russia with the names of historical figures and political leaders of the country. However, in 2021, the number of Japanese students who mentioned President Putin

²¹ Russian respondents called Japan “close neighbor” and “Far Eastern neighbor.”

dramatically increased.²² However, it is not uncommon that a politician or leader may, through themselves, project his or her nation's reputation abroad, serving as the principal agent [Snow 2009] of the national image. As it was reflected in previous works of researchers studying images of political leaders, as a result of attempts to make complex information easier to process, the media has increasingly focused on the nation's leader rather than international political processes and developments. As a consequence, a country's image in the media abroad "is becoming to a large extent a reflection of its leader's image" [Balmas et al. 2014, p. 992]. The reason for this might lie in the information readily available about foreign political leaders and a low motivation to actively seek information about them [Pancer et al. 2002]. At the same time, news stories connected to a foreign politician's images are often strongly connected to their personal qualities and might therefore be more interesting; thus, the reader might be more receptive to the information provided [Ingenhoff et al. 2018, p. 4510]. An interesting comparison may be that "Putin" as the Russian leader seems much more central to Japanese images of Russia than the Japanese leaders are to the image of Japan. The current president of Russia was the most frequent association with Russia for Japanese respondents.²³

As for Russian students, in 2021, only 3% associated Japan with historical events and facts (7.4% in 2012, 2% in 2007): Japan is "a land of ancient history," "Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905," "Tsushima Naval Battle," "Tokugawa period," as well as "bushido" and "shogunate". They also mentioned "Pearl Harbor," "Nanjing Massacre," "August 6, 1945," "atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima, Nagasaki," "Second World War – negative incidents," "Aum Shinrikyo subway attack." Here, we can see that the national image of Japan for Russian students is essentially a historical image. Students also referred to "Japan as an isolated island nation with very great unique history." Mentioning historical figures, only few mentioned Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito), who was the 124th Emperor of Japan, ruling from December 25, 1926 until his death in 1989.

In 2007 and 2012, Japanese students associated Russia with the "USSR" and "communism" and further linked their images of Russia with "USSR," "socialism," "communism," and the "Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)" (7.9% in 2012, 8.3% in 2007) – "the strong image of socialism and the collapse of the Soviet Union," "the Former Soviet Union." USSR and its political system and culture were represented as "authoritarian," as "an actual military" and "political threat." In 2021, the percentage of such associations in Japanese students' responses became less significant (6.7%).

3. National cuisine (food)

The ranks of other values associated with the neighboring country are also quite similar. In 2021, 10% of Russian (11.7% in 2012, 13.5% in 2007) and 6% of Japanese students (7.1% in 2012, 6.3% in 2007) associated national cuisine with the image of the country. In general, many words used by the students are related to national cuisine. In this connection, we can state that both Japanese and Russian students understand that food also contributes to the construction of national identities, and that national cuisine is one of the symbols that show how nations position food as a part of the national identity. Food, as a metaphor of the nation, thus provides a promising referential framework through which a sense of belonging is communicated [Walravens et al. 2017]. It is a fact that national cuisine is considered a brand that highlights the identity of a particular nation [Solleh 2015, p.162; Nye 2004]. In relation to national cuisine, Japanese respondents named "borsch," "pirozhki," "caviar."

Russian students were aware of Japan's unique and delicious cuisine and listed "sushi," "sashimi," "miso soup," "green tea," "fugu fish." In 2021, they also mentioned "onigiri," "ramen," "Japanese sweets," "curry," and "udon" among their associations of Japan. We should note that the knowledge of Russian students about the culinary features of Japanese cuisine has expanded significantly.

²² In 2021, among Japanese students, Vladimir Putin was the most frequently mentioned person who was associated with Russia. 78.3% of the respondents who mentioned political and historical figures named "Putin" in association with Russia.

²³ Vladimir Putin received about 78.3% of the mentions of Japanese respondents who named political and historical personalities in association with Russia.

In 2007–2012, alcohol featured high for both Japanese and Russian students' perceptions. In 2021, 33% of Japanese students who associated Russia with national cuisine, mentioned “vodka,” but in 2012 it was the highest rate of the 15-years period of the ongoing survey – 47.5%. As for Russian respondents, in 2021, only few of them mentioned “sake” in association with Japan.

4. *Sport and athletes*

Using the Olympics to improve a country's image abroad or to foster relations between countries has been a diplomatic tool since the Olympics in Ancient Greece [Pigman 2010]. Sports events and even individual athletes can become a face of a nation and can speak through their athletic achievements in providing a friendly and positive face to a nation. It can also bring a fresh start to a relationship between nations that may have previously been complicated by problems and distrust [Trunkos et al. 2017, p. 10–11]. In 2021, 6% of Japanese students (3.7% in 2012, 6.6% in 2007) mentioned achievements of Russian athletes and recalled the name of the female figure skater Zagitova,²⁴ Russian figure skating (“Russians raise the level of world figure skating!”) and “World Cup.” These images of Russia operate in combination with individual preferences of students: ice hockey, football, volleyball is strong, judo, figure skating (“Figure skating and rhythmic gymnastics compete for the beauty of expression”).

As for Russian respondents, in 2007 and 2012, some of them mentioned judo and karate as associations with Japanese traditional sports (the number of such responses was insignificant), but, in 2021, there was no association of Japan with any athletic achievements.

5. *Traditional symbols and culture*

Every nation has a number of symbols or emblematic elements associated with it that are intrinsic to its identity and heritage, while, at the same time, the knowledge about a neighboring country and familiarity with its culture – including social norms and symbolic values – is reduced to mere stereotypes [Zotova et. al 2020]. In 2021, 3.3% of Japanese respondents (4.4% in 2012, 5.7% in 2007) and 23.7% of Russian respondents (2.7% in 2012, 12.9% in 2007) associated the other country with such national symbols.

The Japanese students often mentioned “Matryoshka” and “hats made from fur” as associations with Russia. The symbols of Russia were declared to be “balalaika,” “the Kremlin” and “the Red Square,” “the Bolshoi Theatre” and “Christian cathedrals”. This opinion was shared by most Japanese students in 2007, 2012,²⁵ and 2021.

A representation of foreign countries draws heavily on the culture and imagery of the nation. Culture and heritage are important aspects of a country's perception, and culture of any country therefore plays a significant role in the process of promoting a positive reputation of a country. It appears obvious that Russian culture is not forgotten by Japanese students, judging by the references to Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy. Other classics of Russian literature, such as Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky, were also named by some of the students, and the poets Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov were mentioned. Also, in 2021, 5% of Japanese respondents associated Russia with “show-performances”²⁶ – “national dances, ballet” (1.7% in 2012, 4.6% in 2007). Owing to the established popularity of Russian ballet, many Japanese try not to miss the opportunity of going to Russian ballet performances while visiting Russia, or when Russian ballet troupes tour Japan. One can assume that the 2018 Year of cultural exchanges between Japan and Russia may account for an improved knowledge of respective countries. The cultural exchange program included numerous

²⁴ Her overwhelming popularity in Japan is phenomenal, with fans recognizing her more frequently than in her home country, and she appeared in a Shiseido commercial.

²⁵ In 2007 and 2012, the Japanese students listed “Laika”, the dog launched into space aboard the Soviet spacecraft Sputnik-2 on November 3, 1957, and “Cheburashka,” a character from a famous cartoon. But there were no such responses in 2021.

²⁶ In 2007, Japanese respondents named Russian girls' pop-group t.A.T.u. as association with Russia (that year, there was the t.A.T.u.-boom in Japan).

cultural events, and interest in Russian culture in Japan was significant, as it was estimated that 10% of the Japanese population participated in or witnessed some aspect of the Russian cultural festival. Given the responses and the focus of the surveys, it can be stated that the interest in Russian culture features highly among the Japanese youth.

Russian youth noted in their associations with Japan that “it is a country with a long history,” “rich culture and varied topography,” naming “Mount Fuji” (“Fujiyama”),²⁷ “sakura,” “rickshaw.” Therefore, many symbols of Japan have developed over the years and are recognized, as, in 2021, traditional symbols of Japan were mentioned by 23.7% of Russian students (2.7% in 2012, 12.9% in 2007). In 2021, among all respondents who mentioned Japanese symbols, every fifth student named “sakura” and only 1% listed “geisha” and “samurai.”

Moreover, for Russian students, “culture is an essential element of Japan’s position in the world.” They stressed that “the unique blend of traditional culture and modernity makes Japan one of the most fascinating countries in the world” (11.8% in 2021, 5.2% in 2012, 18.3% in 2007), and “many Japanese people are proud to be their nation’s citizens.” Among the reasons given by students who thought that Japan is a “great connection between traditional and modern (technology, aesthetics), about a half said it was “because the country is free of conflicts,” and due to the “stability of Japanese society,” where “citizens can simply enjoy traditional meals in peace” (“Harmony is the key to best understand the Japanese culture”). Different kinds of Japanese culture are also known among the Russian youth, such as “origami” or, more rarely, “bonsai.” Only a small share mentioned Japanese traditional poems “hokku,” or “haiku”. Few mentioned Japanese writers, such as “Yukio Mishima” and “Haruki Murakami,” whose novels, essays, and short stories have been bestsellers not only in Japan, but also internationally, selling millions of copies outside Japan.

As for contemporary youth culture, in 2021, 14.4% of Russian university students associated Japan with anime “cosplay” (2.7% in 2012, but none in 2007) – an activity and performance art in which participants called “cosplayers” wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character. Students mentioned outstanding anime like “One Piece” and “Dragon Ball” (“I like anime, not everything, but some cartoons are really amazing,” “country full of kawaii (cute) things,” “the fantastic world of Anime”) – Japan has indeed kept the world entertained with its constant supply of impressive animation. Respondents named “TV shows” and “TV dramas,” “pop-music,” “J-pop,” “films by Hayao Miyazaki,” and also mentioned “Hideo Kojima” – a Japanese video game designer, director, producer, and writer, who is regarded as an auteur of video games.

6. *Economic situation*

As observed from the data, Russian students characterized their perceptions of Japan not only in terms of culture, but also in economic terms. In 2021, in positive association with Japan, Russian students mentioned Japan as “a developed country” and a “highly developed nation” – 15.5% (8.2% in 2012, 9.4% in 2007), “highly developed economy and high level of life” – 1.5% (4.2% in 2012, 3.6% in 2007). They noted “good medical services” (“high quality healthcare for almost all people”), “people’s life expectancy.” Respondents stressed that “Japan is a country where everything is for the people” with a “high quality of life”. Moreover, the conviction of Russian youth that “successful economic growth made Japan an egalitarian society where the middle-class life standard was ensured for the absolute majority of citizens” [Lebedeva 2022, p. 6] became for the Russian youth one of the prevalent parts of the image of contemporary Japan. From Russian students’ point of view, all of the above-mentioned is the result of “Japanese education” and “Japanese great educational standard,” as “the Japanese government’s priorities are education, public safety, and public health.” But, at the same time, respondents mentioned “a problem of Japanese society – rapidly aging population.” One may assume, as far as Japan’s favorable image is concerned, that Japanese education serves as one of

²⁷ The most famous and tall mountain in Japan has been registered as a World Heritage Site. It can be said that it is a symbol of Japan.

the attractive factors influencing attitudes of Russian students towards this country. In the economic realm, confidence in Japanese producers of automobiles and household electrical goods is quite high. In this context, respondents recalled the names of leading Japanese manufacturers, such as Toyota, Nissan, etc.

As for Japanese students, in 2021, 83.9% of the respondents could not give any explanation of the economic situation in modern Russia (63.2% in 2012, 62.2% in 2007), 10.3% found it “difficult to answer” (10% in 2012, 24.5% in 2007), or “heard something” (24.5% in 2012, 24.5% in 2007), and only 5.8% answered in the affirmative (2.3% in 2012 and 1.8% in 2007). The students who tried to answer the question explained the improvement of the economic situation in Russia by the following: 1. “Russia began to sell oil much more,” “owing to increase of the prices for oil”; 2. “Russia possesses minerals”; “Maybe it is not absolutely true... but it has not the image of a rich state and I think that the extraction of minerals plays an important role”; “after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic situation was rather bad, therefore I cannot explain the modern economic situation.”

7. Problems in society and negative incidents and facts

Country perceptions by the students include some negative events, thus suggesting that some conflicts and negative events might and could be magnified through the media. It indicates that international incidents, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters also play a role in shaping a country's image since they change the existing knowledge that a person might have about the area. Individuals may gradually become more knowledgeable about a place through their exposure to information [Stepchenkova et al. 2008], either through communication activities, or through contact with movies, news, and word of mouth. In this age of cheap and available Internet-based global communication, events can be played out live without censorship or edit, potentially having an even greater impact on the young viewing public, as was the case with the Fukushima tragedy and other disasters and crises. Such statements as “Russia image – country where the situation is not stable” are the result of how the media portrays the country, and this is evident in the attitudes and perceptions of the youth towards the neighboring country.

In 2021, 3% of the Russian students who had some negative emotions towards Japan cited “economic inequality,” “gender discrimination,” saying that “gender inequality is very evident” (“Married women traditionally are confined to domestic matters”) in the country, “with men often holding positions of power.” Respondents tried to explain “mental illness of Japanese people” (hikikomori), “depression,” “substance abuse (alcohol),” and “suicide” by living under the press of “educational system and a labor system which demand far too much time and energy in Japanese society.” Students also mentioned “Japanese nationalism and ignorance of other cultures.” In this context, the “Fukushima tragedy” was also mentioned by students.

In 2021, 5.3% of Japanese students (6.1% in 2012, 7.5% in 2007) associated Russia with negative incidents and facts. Here, we can see a positive trend. In this connection, we cannot but mention that, in 2021, the number of Japanese students who linked Russia with the territorial dispute (Northern Territories) was only 1.3%. In 2012, the percentage of students who mentioned the Northern Territories problem increased from 2.8% (2007) to 5.2% – as we can see the figure doubled.

To sum up, we can state that there are some changes in the perceptions of Russia and Japan in 2021 compared to 2012 and 2007. Less Japanese respondents associated Russia with USSR, socialism, communism, and the CPSU (6.7% in 2021, 7.9% in 2012, 8.3% in 2007). Looking back over the past 15 years, the data indicate that far fewer Japanese students mentioned negative incidents and facts connected with Russia (5.3% in 2021, 6.1% in 2012, 7.5% in 2007) and with the “Northern Territories” (1.3% in 2021, 5.2% in 2012, 2.8% in 2007). Such accents in the perception of Russia as national cuisine (6% in 2021, 7.1% in 2012, 6.3% in 2007), national symbols (3.3% in 2021, 4.4% in 2012, 5.7% in 2007), and association of Russia with “beautiful people (women) with white skin” (2.7% in 2021, 6.1% in 2012, 4.6% in 2007) were mentioned by less respondents. But more students

associated Russia with sport and names of athletes (6% in 2021%, 3.7% in 2012, 6.6% in 2007). This was probably a positive result of Olympic Games, which were held in Japan in 2021.

Predictably, the stereotyped image of Japan for Russian students is also determined mainly by media, specifically Internet sources.²⁸ Since culture shapes the way people perceive themselves, others, and the relationship between the two [Markus, Kitayama 1991], the popularity and international recognition of Japanese culture and traditions over the years have demonstrated the importance of Japan's policy of soft power, namely, Japan's use of culture contemporary and historical in creating a positive image of the country all over the world and, in particular, Russia.²⁹ The quite high awareness of Japan determines the key associations with this country, though there are some changes compared to the previous survey. In 2021, the Russian respondents considered Japan primarily as a collection of symbols or emblematic elements associated with it that are intrinsic to its identity and heritage (23.7% in 2021, 2.7% in 2012, 12.9% in 2007). Experts also state that the number of Russians who consider Japan to be an unfriendly country is extremely small, in spite of Japan joining the anti-Russian sanctions. Researchers suggest [Chugrov, Streltsov 2017, p. 27] that the traditionally strong sympathy for Japanese culture counterbalances the negative feelings of Russian citizens towards Japan. The second most frequent group of associations was related to the developed economy of Japan (15.5% in 2021, 8.2% in 2012, 9.4% in 2007). The third (big) group of associations was related to the traditions and culture of Japan (11.8% in 2021) and national cuisine of Japan (10% in 2021, 11.7% in 2012, 13.5% in 2007). The respondents also considered Japan from the geographical perspective and, lastly, associated it with social problems as well as negative incidents and facts.

Neighboring people

In discussing issues about the people of other countries, there is a distinction between 'Strangers' and 'Others'. While a 'Stranger' is currently or potentially dangerous and poses a threat to values that an individual holds dear, the 'Other' is one whom we do not understand and thus do not accept at all [Kozera 1999], as he/she is therefore not an 'Insider'. In the process of structuring the social world, otherness may remain just otherness, but it may also turn into strangeness. The perception of individuals and groups as other, dissimilar, or different from us does not necessarily trigger any form of strangeness if it is limited to providing facts and does not engage in evaluation. The awareness of otherness turns into strangeness only when the perceived dissimilarity is combined with negative emotions and attitudes. When cultural differences are too great, people may not be able to make sense of them when using existing knowledge and representations of otherness, so they will eventually experience discomfort [Szytniewski et al. 2017]. Nations are often described as possessing distinctive personality traits, like their individual members do. The distinctive set of personality characteristics of national groups as perceived by ordinary people is usually called national character [Peabody 1985].

To determine the students' perceptions of national traits of people from the neighboring country, they were asked about characteristics or national traits which define the Russian/Japanese people. Based on the survey results, we could see that, across the surveyed students' responses, there are significant differences in how they view national character traits of neighboring country citizens.

²⁸ Russian students increasingly prefer the Internet – 96.7% of all participants who took part in the survey.

²⁹ In this connection, we should mention that 2018 was declared "The cross-cultural year – Year of Russia in Japan and the Year of Japan in Russia — year of Russian-Japanese cultural exchanges between the two nations," and 2020–2021 were declared "Years of Japanese-Russian interregional and sister city exchanges (2020–2021)." Within the framework of these years of Japan in Russia and Russia in Japan, a series of cultural and academic events based primarily in Moscow and Tokyo, but also featuring events at venues throughout Russia and Japan, were held with the aim of introducing the many facets of Japan to the Russian people and Russia to the Japanese. It also played an important role in deepening interest towards Japanese and Russian culture in each country.

Russian respondents' perceptions of Japanese people

Based on responses of Russian participants in 2021, it is plausible to conclude that the strongest character trait of the Japanese is “workaholism, diligence, and persistence,” as it was listed by 47.5% (22.8% in 2012, 23% in 2007). Here, among the positive traits, being “hard-working,” “highly disciplined,” “effectively working,” and “organized,” as well as “creativity” were mentioned (“They succeed not because they are smarter, but because they work better together”; “they use a simple and powerful method that helps to reach effectiveness of the community to exceed the effectiveness of each of its members in sum”). At the same time, the respondents noted “a very high level of work-related stress in Japan”.

Russian students emphasized such aspects of Japanese personality as being “disciplined,” “wise,” “polite,” and “emotional.” The stereotyped image of the typical Japanese has not changed over the last fifteen years: about 50% of respondents (47.5% in 2021, 22.8% in 2012, 23% in 2007) believe that the Japanese are “highly disciplined workaholics.” Most of Russian respondents believe that adhering to native customs and traditions is important in defining national traits of the Japanese. In 2021, students noted positive traits of Japanese and named them: “people with intellect” – 12.5% (11.4% in 2012, 5.3% in 2007), “punctuality” – 9.1 %, “wise people” – 7.1%, “polite people” (“Japanese people visiting a friend, it is polite to bring gifts,” “etiquette for them is a high priority”) – 6.5%, “people who value traditions” – 4.7%, “purposeful people” (“It is very important for the Japanese that a degree is from a prestigious university”; “education is very important for them and it is oriented at getting a well-paying position at a company, not just knowledge) – 4.6%, “friendly, kind” – 3.1%. Also, there is a popular opinion among Russian students that culture, history, and society in which people have been brought up leave recognizable marks on their personality. Respondents characterized the Japanese as “patient” and “enduring” people and tried to give explanations why they thought so: “patience helps them to put up with an unpleasant situation and build a character through enduring tough times,” “in Japan, the perseverance of the people appears during calamities like earthquakes,” “the Japanese have such strong patience to go against all odds” – 2.1% (2.7% in 2012, 7.3% in 2007). Thus, the image of the typical Japanese is definitely positive, just like the image of Japan. But, at the same time, Russian students also noted that “Japanese people are cunning,” “nationalism and ignorance of other cultures is a bad thing for the Japanese nation.” The last survey records an increase of those mentioning traits associated with the Japanese as “individualistic people.”

To sum up, in 2021, conditionally positive character traits were mentioned by 97.2% of Russians respondents (78% in 2012, 97% in 2007). In comparison with 2012, this rate increased by 19.2%. In 2021, the percentage of conditionally negative character traits of Japanese, as mentioned in Russian students' responses, dramatically decreased and became insignificant – 2.8% (22% in 2012, 3% in 2007).

Japanese respondents' perceptions of Russian people

In 2021, the “Don't know” answers³⁰ given by Japanese students decreased – 12.9% (23.7% in 2012, 30.5% in 2007). But some students wrote that the “Russian national character is unique” and “not comparable to any other nation, because there are many nationalities living in Russia, that is why it is hard to describe.”

Regarding the personality of the Russian people as seen by Japanese respondents, according to the students' responses, it is determined by the cultural and social diversity of Russia and its people (nationalities) generated by its historical background. The stereotyped image of typical Russians has not changed much.

³⁰ Although “Don't know” responses have traditionally been thought to reflect a lack of opinion, we can conclude that a number of factors may prompt an individual to provide a “Don't know” response. These include insufficient knowledge of the issue, fear of providing an inaccurate answer, concern that their response will not be confidential. It is believed that the change may be attributed to how the questionnaires were administered – a paper-based survey (personal interview) in 2007 and 2012 and an online survey in 2021. As such, the students felt freer in their responses in 2021 due to it being online and self-administered.

In 2021, nearly 11.6% of Japanese respondents were sure that the Russians were “kind, friendly, and light” people; “they are usually easy to become friends with” (8.7% in 2012, but none in 2007); “gentle and calm” – 6.5% (3.2% in 2012, 2% in 2007); “strong, great spirit” – 6.5% (2.5% in 2012, 6% in 2007). “Beautiful girls,” “tall people with white skin,” and “girls like dolls” were named as character traits of Russian people (6.5% in 2021, but only few of the surveyed students in 2012 and 2007). This is quite different from using only adjectives which describe a feature of a person and his national traits, because nouns classify a person as a certain type. It may indicate Japan’s high profile of visual culture, which is formed by numerous relationships between people and images (contemporary Japan is increasingly dominated by the flow of images: manga, anime, videogames, etc.). Here, it is important to emphasize Japan’s unique cultural identity. That is why Russia has been defined by students’ visual orientations and means to interact with their society [Zhilina 2015, p. 15].

Japanese respondents described Russians as “patriots” – 1.9% (2.2% in 2012 and no one in 2007); “cool”³¹ – 1.9% (3% in 2012 and no one in 2007); “patient” and “enduring” – 2.6% (1% in 2012, 2% in 2007), with some mentioning that “Russians value family traditions” and “support each family member.”

In contrast with Russian students in 2007, 3% of Japanese students applied descriptive terms to Russians – “drunkards,” “strong to alcohol,” and “Russians drink obscene amounts of alcohol.” These words were used in a variety of contexts to express the extreme role of alcohol in the life of Russians. In 2012, we could see that the share of students who considered Russian people “heavy drunkards” increased dramatically (11.7%). This was reflected in various responses – both negative and positive (“when they drink, they become easy-going and like joking,” “they drink to be fun,” etc.), expressing moral judgments of respondents. Unfortunately, in 2021, we found that this trend did not change much, as 10.3% of Japanese respondents believed this to be a trait of the Russian people.

However, in 2021, some new views of traits of Russians, such as “caring about family and friends” (5.8%), were observed. Japanese students expressed the belief that the Russians “value their family more than anything else,” “take good care of friends and family,” and have “a spirit of helping each other” and “are quite tightly knit.” Japanese respondents also characterized Russians as “sociable, cheerful and easygoing” (5.2%). 2.6% of young Japanese named Russians “peaceful” (new!) – “There are many peaceful people. I think they will be strongly against war.”

At the same time, in 2021, the number of Japanese respondents who described Russians as “quiet, non-sociable,” “non-communicative” and pointed that they “don’t laugh” dramatically increased to 7.8% (3% in 2012, 4% in 2007). For instance, Japanese students still have an idea that climate substantially influences the nature of Russians – “people living in cold (“harsh”) climate” are “cold,” or “not smiling,” or “don’t laugh” (“the reason – it is terribly cold there” (2007), so “they are sick and tired” (2012) and “they eat ice-cream to get warm” (2007)).

3.8% of respondents pointed that Russians are “grumpy” (no one said so in 2012 and 2007). In 2021, there were other negative traits (3.8%) of Russian people listed in questionnaires. It was said that they are “greedy,” “scary,” “unfriendly,” and “cock their noses.” The last one was given in the following context: “I think it is a nation whose face is unfriendly and who value their families more than anything else.” Some stereotypes and beliefs about national character can be perceived as at least partly accurate, although we can see exaggerated descriptions of actually existing traits. For example, according to Japanese students’ opinions, Russians are typically “drunkards” (e.g., “strong to alcohol,” “heavy drunkards”), “greedy,” “unfriendly,” and “cock their noses” (e.g., are “too proud,” “narcissistic”).

Sometimes the limited list of characteristics given by Japanese students suggests that citizens of the neighboring state are poorly known: “I know nothing about Russia and don’t know Russians,”

³¹ There is no unique concept of what is considered cool, as it changes over time and varies among cultures and generations.

or “nothing special about them,” “since there are few Russians I have met, I cannot make a general statement.” However, some Japanese students, using their own experience, tried to support their answers: “My friends often smile, they just do not smile to strangers, it is a custom there,” “I thought they wouldn’t laugh too much. However, the teacher laughed a lot. So, I didn’t understand – is it typical or not.” Or: “Russians are more closed than I thought”; “I have little to do with Russians and I know too little about my personal emotions toward them, so I can’t say it now”; “From now on, if I have a chance, I would like to get in touch with them, or learn about them deeper”; “The fact that there is a Russian teacher at the university is interesting to me – that is why it is interesting to know about Russians and Russia.”

Compared with previous surveys conducted in 2021, Japanese participants tended to rate the typical Russian to be more “friendly,” more “gentle and calm,” “strong and having great spirit,” but less “communicative” and less “smiling” and “open” than it had been noted by respondents in surveys carried out in 2007 and 2012.

Thus, as we can see, the image is contradictory, which probably resembles its various estimates in the Japanese official and media discourse. Nevertheless, the generalized image of the Russians for the Japanese students who evaluate this country is positive. The positive aspects of Russians are mentioned more frequently, which can be seen from the fact that the Russian people are one of the representational aspects of the image of Russia. Among these national traits of representatives of the neighboring state noted by Japanese respondents the one that could be underlined are hospitality and the cheerful and friendly nature of the Russians. To sum up, in 2021, negative character traits were mentioned by 25.7% of Japanese students’ audience (27.8% in 2012, 18.3% in 2007) and positive character traits – by 61.4% (48.5% in 2012, 51.2% in 2007). In comparison with 2012 and 2007, this rate increased by 12.9% and 10.2% respectively.

For both Japanese and Russian students, the national character of the neighboring country representatives is one of the most relevant elements of the international image projected by Russia/Japan. In 2021, both Japanese and Russian students indicated “kindness,” “hospitality,” “friendliness,” and “patience” as characteristic features of the other nation. “Social cohesion of people” was also mentioned as a national trait by respondents of both countries. Therefore, it seems that the image of the country, as well as the personality of the residents, can influence attitudes and perceptions of them. As such, the results have demonstrated that national image is an important concept as it provides states with soft power, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes through attraction rather than the traditional coercion by means of military power [Nye 2008].

Conclusion

Since the 20th century, particularly in the Cold War era, governments became aware of the significance of systematic image construction, and with the coming of globalized communication, there has been a surge in national image construction. Promoting positive images of one’s country is not new, but the conditions for projecting soft power have transformed dramatically in recent years [Nye 2004]. Current image building efforts can improve a country’s international influence, which is deemed to be more crucial today since nations desire to integrate into global markets, to participate in global affairs, and to enhance their status on the world stage. How a country is perceived by other countries and their people can result in mutual changes in their relationships. Summarizing the results of the previous studies, together with my last research, I can point out the following trends.

First, the university students’ attitudes to the neighboring country were assessed considering the frequency and activities of information acquisition, the correct explanation of the information, and willingness to collect information through different sources. As we can see, the Internet is the preferred source for information about the neighboring state. The Internet expands individual

freedom and capability to communicate for students of both countries, which, in turn, has resulted in greater news gathering and communication among the youth, who adjust to the new communications culture. It is substantially different from the era when television was the most popular source of information. According to the 2021 survey, both for Japanese and Russian students, the influence of TV has declined.

Second, overall, we found a quite high level of basic knowledge about Japan/Russia among university students in Russia and Japan. Russian students had significantly more knowledge, stronger willingness to obtain information about Japan, and had slightly higher satisfaction with information sources. Regarding basic knowledge, Japanese and Russian students showed slight differences, indicating that the route of obtaining basic knowledge may be different. Therefore, our results provide novel information. We could see that students' individual opinions concerning neighboring countries demonstrated a certain proximity to the official political discourse.

Third, sometimes the limited list of characteristics and national traits given by Japanese students suggests that citizens of the neighboring state are poorly known to them. Maybe this is one of the reasons that the Japanese students have been exposed to negative influences of the media. When people are overwhelmed with the volume of information confronting them, they have difficulty discerning what to focus on [Nye 2004].

Fourth, the differences in representations of neighboring country's citizens reflect the differing emphasis that respondents of Japan and Russia place on the characteristics of others rather than the real differences between those people. Young people of both countries also differ in terms of how carefully they process information about others: some students have a strong need to learn about and understand others, but some students do not have a strong need for this.³²

Fifth, the results of the current study have helped us to better comprehend the changes in students' perceptions of Russia/Japan over the past fifteen years. The results of the investigation show that changes in the opinion of Japanese students towards Russia and the Russians were quite positive. Japanese students have a great interest in Russian culture and entertainment and have high respect for Russian literature. However, perhaps sometimes this impact is not very strong. Much more consistently, this research shows that Russia-related attitudes are mostly driven by symbolic interest in the nation as a whole.

Sixth, Japanese soft power in Russia remains strong. As a result, Russian respondents generally rate Japan higher. There is a high level of recognition of Japan's economic, cultural, and human capital soft power by Russian youth. Russian students have great respect for Japanese companies, popular culture, education, and have a relatively high opinion of Japanese people.

Seventh, the last survey showed that historical events influence Russian students' perceptions towards Japan, although they are not as strong as one might predict based on previous surveys. But the results also show that political personalization has become predominant for Japanese students: the neighboring country's image and the perceptions of Russia are becoming to a large extent a reflection of its leader's image. So, we can see that the political leader and his politically relevant character traits, as well as his personal characteristics need to be considered when employing public diplomacy [Ingenhoff et al. 2018, p. 4527].

Finally, by asking respondents from Japan and Russia to describe the personal traits of their neighbors and analyzing their responses, we can understand how students of both countries perceive the people of the neighboring state. Discussing neighboring countries, participants distinguish two ideas: the first is that the neighboring country is "a state and a government," and the second is that it is "a country and people" [Zotova et al. 2020]. Concerning the first, participants expressed

³² People with a strong need for cognition tend to process information more thoughtfully and therefore may make more causal attributions overall. In contrast, people without a strong need for cognition tend to be more impulsive and impatient and may make attributions more quickly and spontaneously. See: [Sargent 2004].

various and sometimes negative emotions, while, concerning the second, participants tended to express positive emotions such as sympathy and trust. The students' individual responses provided an ideal opportunity to analyze a large sample and yielded the opinions of students that display their perceptions of neighboring country's citizens. Beyond doubt, national traits of the neighboring country's citizens, as they are perceived by university students and listed in responses, do not characterize absolutely each individual of neighboring state, but they do provide an understanding of the perception of neighbors' national character, which (in turn) can facilitate deeper cross-cultural interactions.

The strength of this study is in its target group – the Japanese/Russian university students. A student population was examined because students have the greatest potential to influence public opinion and ultimately to participate in foreign policy decision-making and the public affairs of their country. When we launched the study in 2007, to the best of my knowledge, no other studies had been reported to investigate these topics among this target group.

This study has certain limitations: it used a sampling method, but, as we mentioned above, the samples were limited in number in 2021 for the Japanese side, and they exhibited imbalances in the subgroups. Thus, the results may not sufficiently represent the whole population of Japanese university students' opinion in 2021. Therefore, this should be considered when discussing the results.

Moreover, because this survey is to monitor long-term changes in Japanese/Russian students' perceptions and attitudes concerning the neighboring country, to examine the time-dependent opinion changes, prolonging survey studies is also necessary, and for this reason I intend to continue this survey. These and other issues deserve careful study in the years ahead.

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