

Interdependence of Russo-Japanese Relations and Mutual Images of Japan and Russia

SERGEY V. CHUGROV

Moscow State Institute of International Relations, MGIMO University
sergeychugrov@gmail.com

DMITRY V. STRELTSOV

Moscow State Institute of International Relations, MGIMO University
dmstrl@gmail.com

Abstract

The current efforts of Moscow and Tokyo to unblock the territorial impasse are complicated by some barriers of a socio-psychological character, including mutual mistrust and contradictory images of past events. Public opinion surveys reveal predominant vectors in Russo-Japanese relations, which the authors believe strongly correlate with the evolution of the contradictory images. Apparently, these images surprisingly exhibit interrelated ‘mirror’ dynamics connected with the independent variable – events happening in bilateral relations. Apparently, these images surprisingly exhibit interrelated ‘mirror’ dynamics connected with the independent variable – events happening in bilateral relations. The authors also investigate how public opinion has a real impact on politics and relations between states. In the authors’ opinion, Russia and Japan definitely do not have major unresolved problems in their bilateral relations, with the exception of the territorial problem. However, why is the public so suspicious of Russia? Can the territorial dispute be the only reason? It is far from that. The analyzed arguments give grounds to believe that it is very difficult for Japan and Russia to find a mutually acceptable solution, as their relations are not free from suspicion and mutual mistrust which are deeply rooted in the history of their relations. It will be much easier to overcome the mistrust and, accordingly, to reach agreement on the territorial issue when they manage to calmly analyze the historical grudges, understand their nature and origin, and realize that this is history, which has no contemporary value.

The current efforts of Moscow and Tokyo to unblock the territorial impasse are complicated by some barriers of a socio-psychological character, including mutual distrust and contradictory mutual images or opinions about the past. Public opinion surveys reveal predominant vectors in Russo-Japanese relations, which, in our view,

Table 1. *Attitude of Russians to the U.S., China, Japan (%)*

Attitude	1995	2001	2007	2011
The US				
Mostly positive	78	37	37	33
Mostly negative	9	39	45	48
Undecided	13	24	18	19
China				
Mostly positive	41	39	45	43
Mostly negative	21	21	32	29
Undecided	38	40	23	28
Japan				
Mostly positive	69	53	60	44
Mostly negative	9	16	18	31
Undecided	22	31	22	25

Source: Figures in the table have been compiled by the authors from (RAS Institute of Sociology, 2011: 195)

strongly correlate with the evolution of mutual images. Apparently, these images surprisingly exhibit interrelated ‘mirror’ dynamics connected with the independent variable – events happening in bilateral relations. Judging from surveys, public opinion also has an effect on real politics and relations between states. Such an effect is markedly apparent for key actors in East Asia suffering from hyper-insecurity in an era of the ‘new normal’, which is ‘neither in an era of war normal, nor in an era of peace normal’ (Inoguchi, 2015: 397).

Let us begin with the simplest element of mutual perception, the key pair of like/dislike, before we proceed to the quality ingredients, which set the tone. To investigate the intensity of the like/dislike sentiment, we make use of two long-term sociological studies: a series of analytical reports by the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Sociology (e.g., RAS Institute of Sociology, 2011; Gorshkov and Petukhov, 2015) and annual opinion polls on foreign policy issues conducted by the Information Bureau of the Japanese Cabinet Office.¹ The latest poll of this kind was held in Japan on 14 March 2016 (Naikakufu, 2016). The surveys each have slightly different questions and parameters, but it is still quite possible to draw certain common conclusions.

Japan’s image in Russia

Let us look at [Table 1](#) which presents the dynamics of Russia’s attitude towards Japan compared to their attitude towards the United States and China.

According to [Table 1](#), only 9% of respondents disliked the United States in 1995, while 77–78%, expressed their liking. Public sentiment underwent a marked change

¹ There was no such poll conducted in 2015.

only a few years later. The military campaign by the United States and its NATO allies in the former Yugoslavia (spring–summer 1999) was the trigger. In fact, the Russians viewed the use of force against Orthodox Serbia, historically related to Russia, as an attack on themselves, and only one year later almost 44% of respondents opined that the United States would become the main source of threat to Russia in the twenty-first century (RAS Institute of Sociology, 2011: 192).

The attitude towards China, which was steadily gaining a higher rating, has become less amicable in recent years. It would seem from the sociological survey that ‘the Russian population feels some caution about this Asian giant’ (ibid.: 194–5). (This judgment is essential for our study, given the strong correlation between the Japanese and Chinese in Russian public opinion). Against this backdrop, ‘regular demonstrative statements of certain Japanese politicians on the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands have downgraded the liking for that country, from 69% to 44%, while the degree of dislike has grown, from 19% to 31%’ (ibid., 2011: 194). Prior to that dispute, the ratio of like/dislike was practically equal. What happened?

On 11 June 2009, the lower house of the Diet unanimously voted for amendments to the Law on *Special Measures for Accelerating the Resolution of the Northern Territories*, which affirmed the belonging of the four islands to Japan. The upper house approved the amendments on 3 July. Naturally, Russia was indignant. Responding to the decision of the Japanese authorities, the State Duma considered the possibility of adopting a law of its own, but that could imply that Russia doubted its ownership of the South Kurils. Other measures, among them the abolition of visa-free travel, which had been in effect for residents of Russia’s Middle and South Kurils and Japan for 18 years, were discussed. The then President Dmitry Medvedev visited Kunashir on 1 November 2010 (the trip was a scheduled event), which became a strong irritant for the Japanese elite: the Japanese prime minister described the visit as ‘unforgivable rudeness’, which incited indignation in Russia. There were two more visits, one in July 2012 and one in August 2015, and the only difference was that Medvedev made them in the capacity of prime minister. Once again, the Japanese reaction was anxious, which could not help but impact on a shift in the political calculations of the mass consciousness of the elites. The countries faced the threat of a vicious circle of mutual reproaches and claims.

Public opinion has a certain influence on the behavior of the authorities, which have to keep public sentiment in mind both in Russia and in Japan. For instance, an absolute majority of the Russians object to the transfer of the four southern islands of the Kuril chain to Japan. According to a poll conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Study Center (VTsIOM), 89% denied support to the idea of transferring the disputable islands to Japan, and only 4% of Russians agreed to do so. The poll showed that the Russian president’s rating could decline considerably if he decided to give the islands to the Japanese – the attitude of 63% of Russians to the president would worsen if he chose to transfer the islands to Japan; the attitude of 21% of respondents would not change; and 3% claimed their attitude would improve (VTsIOM, 2014).

Following the strong anti-Russian critique offered by the Japanese media in 2010–11, the Russian mass media published numerous reports criticizing Japan, which led to a decline in positive opinions on Russian–Japanese relations in 2011. The mass media created a peculiar, contradictory, and, in some cases, even paradoxical image of Japan, in which the truth, exaggeration and new myths, attractive and repulsive features intertwined. It is, therefore, rather difficult to ascertain the truth from interlacing negative stereotypes, and simplified judgments on contemporary Japan prevail in the media.

As to the position of the Russian business community, it rarely tries to create favorable conditions for economic relations with Japan. Polls conducted in the business community demonstrated that, paradoxically, Russia did not have a stable or, more importantly, a strong interest in Japanese investments. Of course, there is some interest in money, but it goes hand in hand with a clear lack of a sense of responsibility or a desire to meet deadlines. Certain ‘laziness’ and the lack of ‘business passion’ displayed by Russian businessmen are amazing. They complain that the Japanese national style is characterized with unnecessary caution, is pedantry, lacks imagination, and has an inclination towards endless coordination, in which a business plan may drown. Besides, they cannot understand the Japanese decision-making procedures, and the functions performed by various Japanese departments are so closely knit that the Russian partners are sometimes confused as to whom they should be interacting with. (We should mention that many Japanese business persons express the same opinion on the inertness and the confusing area of responsibility of Russian agencies). The Russian approach implies a special kind of culture, which is characterized by a risk and venturesome disposition, and the Russians ascribe to the Japanese national character qualities such as hypertrophied caution in doing business, as being pedantry, unwilling to undertake personal responsibility, and inclined to endless coordination of decisions within one’s reference group (*nemawashi*).

Russia’s idea of Japan still comes from historical memory, which primarily feeds on history textbooks which influence the mentality of each new generation. Japan’s aspiration to secure a position in Manchuria on the Russian border at the end of the nineteenth century and during the Russian–Japanese War, the military intervention by Japan in the Soviet Far East, and armed clashes on Lake Khasan and River Khalkhin Gol (the Nomonhan incident), all serve as a way to pass on to future generations, at the subconscious level through socialization channels, the feeling that Japan constitutes a threat. However, the textbooks totally disregard the fact that until 1945 the four South Kuril Islands had never belonged either to tsarist Russia or to the Soviet Union.

Incidentally, we should by no means exaggerate the impact of the historical memory factor: it is not fatal for public consciousness unless it is intentionally stimulated. The best proof of that is the Federal Republic of Germany, which has managed to overcome the consequences of historical collisions with its neighboring peoples and established a solid and lasting partnership.

The Russian academic community plays a limited role in the formation of policy on Japan and in public opinion. We cannot fully deny its role, however. (The Russian

Table 2. *With what countries, in your opinion, does our state have the most solid, friendly relations? (Open question, no more than five answers, %)*

Countries	2008	2014
China	23	51
Belarus	14	32
Kazakhstan	8	20
India	7	9
Brazil	1	4
Japan	3	1
The US	9	<1

Source: Figures in the table have been compiled by the authors from (VTsIOM, 2014).

Association of Japanologists has a key role in coordinating the life of the expert community.)² We can give an example of connectivity between expert analysis and the formation of a political discourse – a report of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC, 2012) was not only noticed in Russia but was also promptly translated into Japanese and received efficient feedback from Japanese specialists and participants in the political process.

Another characteristic example is the rather definite position of prominent Russian experts on territorial disputes between Japan and China over the Senkaku Islands, since any escalation of tensions in that region is tremendously disadvantageous for Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry maintains a rather reserved and emphatically neutral position on the issue.

In 2014–15, public consciousness experienced a shock due to the financial sanctions that were imposed on Russia, including those from Japan (to be fair, we should underline that the Japanese sanctions could be called symbolic and ‘soft’, compared to the measures imposed by the United States and the European Union). The abrupt cooling of the political atmosphere caused by the events around Crimea and the civil war in southeastern Ukraine – which led to a relapse in relations to the extent that Russia was balancing on the brink of a Cold War with the West – has had a tangible impact on Russian national sentiment towards Japan. If we look at the latest data from VTsIOM polls, we will see a rather gloomy picture, reflecting the level of ‘solid, friendly’ relations with Japan in Russian conscience (Table 2).

It should be underlined that Russian mass conscience, operating on the notion of ‘friend’ and ‘foe’, displays an extremely low level of positive sentiment, such as ‘solid and friendly’, about relations with Japan; however, the level of negative sentiment, such

² The authors presented a detailed analysis of the standpoints of Russian experts in Japanese foreign policy at a conference of Russian and Japanese experts (Tokyo University, February 2013) and published it in Russian language in the journal *Political Studies (Polis, 2013, 2014)*, in English (Chugrov, 2015a), and in Japanese (Chugrov, 2015b).

Table 3. *With what countries does our state have the tensest, most hostile relations? (Open question, no more than five answers, %)*

Countries	2008	2014
	2008	2014
The US	25	73
Ukraine	21	32
The EU	1	10
Germany	1	10
The UK	8	9
Poland	5	6
Canada	–	3
France	1	3
Japan	3	2
China	2	–

Source: Figures in the table have been compiled by the authors from (VTsIOM, 2014)

as ‘tense and hostile’, is equally low. This suggests that Japanese feeling towards Russia are indifferent. What is more, it is possible that, irrespective of paroxysms of political passions, we are observing stagnation or, maybe, even a symbolic, within the limits of statistical error, decline in negative sentiment, from 3% to 2% in the 2008–14 period. This is happening amidst a drastic surge in the negative attitude towards the United States for the same period, up from 25% to 73%! (Table 3).

However, a poll conducted by a working group of the RAS Institute of Sociology in fall 2014, with a slightly different wording, ranks Japan seventh (6%) in the list of countries, which, in the opinion of Russians, are ‘unfriendly’ towards Russia. This is a rather insignificant ratio, compared to 74%, which called the United States an ‘unfriendly’ nation (Gorshkov and Petukhov, 2015: 14).

Why is the number of Russians who consider Japan to be an unfriendly country extremely small, in spite of Japan joining the anti-Russian sanctions? One may assume with a considerable degree of certainty that the traditionally intensive liking for Japanese culture counter-balances the negative feelings. An important factor influencing the attitude of Russian citizens towards Japan is the original image, which presents it as ‘a special and incomparable country’, with a veil of mystery and unique attractiveness. Amazing landscapes, picturesque holidays, and deep-rooted traditions have become the perceived identity of Japan’s ‘soft power’, which beyond doubt appeals to Russian citizens. The older generation of Russians is interested in traditional culture, while the young prefer ‘cool Japan’s’ sub-culture (anime, manga, J-pop, fashion, etc.), which unites a specific socio-cultural group of pop culture lovers – *otaku*. Japan is skillfully using such interest in its youth sub-culture, which contributes to the positive image of the Country of the Rising Sun, despite political nuances.

Russia's image in Japan

Interest in Russian culture in Japan does not have an equally strong influence on the general level of liking for Russia, probably due to certain peculiarities of the Japanese mentality, which we will now analyze.

Until 2010, the curve demonstrating likes and dislikes (*shinkinkan*) for the Japanese was devoid of spikes or plummets. We can see peaks of liking (*shitashimi-o kanjiru*) in 1990–91, when the liking for Gorbachev and his perestroika won Japanese conscience (23.3–24.3%), climbing much higher than the pre-perestroika levels. At the same time, opinions on relations with the Soviet Union improved; positive sentiments rose from 7.8% in 1984 to 38.7% in 1990. Another remarkable peak was detected after the meeting between Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and President Vladimir Putin in Irkutsk. It created another surge in expectations for a positive change (Naikakufu, 2016).

After President Medvedev's visit to the disputed territories, the percentage of those who felt no liking (*shitashimi-o kanjinai*) grew from 79.6% to 82.9% within two years (2010–11). The percentage of sympathizers fell, from 15.4% to 13.4%. Only later on, in 2012, was there any growth in the Japanese liking for Russia by 7.9%.

We believe that this hesitant growth related to two circumstances. The first circumstance was the reinstatement of Vladimir Putin as president, as Tokyo had bigger expectations for him than for Dmitry Medvedev, whom the Japanese elite associated with the trip to the disputed territories. Before his inauguration, Putin gave an interview to the editor of the *Asahi Shimbun* and used the Japanese sport term '*hajime*', which, being used in the political context, transformed a hint into a promise to search for an alternative to the current state of relations between Russia and Japan.

The second circumstance was the exacerbation of relations between China and Korea, on the one hand, and Japan, on the other hand. The problem of the northern territories compared to the situation around the Senkaku and Takeshima islands was much less hostile and negatively emotional. This somewhat compensated for the plummeting rate of liking for China and Korea.

Judging by a representative poll conducted on 26 November 2012, the Japanese liking for Russia had grown from 17.0% to 24.9% over the previous year (Naikakufu, 2016). Against this backdrop, the Japanese liking for China went down from 26.3 to 18% in 2011, and the absence of liking was claimed by 80.6%, compared to 71.4% in 2011. The attitude to South Korea, one of the closest allies of Tokyo, has undergone an even more drastic transformation. Back in 2011, 62.2% claimed to like South Korea, but the percentage dipped to 39.2% in November 2012. Similarly, the share of those who do not like the Koreans grew over the year, from 35.3% to 59.0%. This is a catastrophic fall in the liking and well-wishing attitudes towards the Chinese and the Koreans! This is also in contrast to the relative rise in liking for Russia.

By the end of 2013, escalation of the territorial dispute between Japan and Russia, which was started by the Japanese parliament's adoption of a resolution on the 'ancestral territories' and the 'retaliating' trips of Medvedev to the Kurils in 2010 and 2012, were over, and both the symptoms and the tensions curve went down. Besides, there was also

a steady tendency in the relative growth in the Japanese liking for Russia and improving opinions on the condition of bilateral relations.

First, a poll conducted in March 2016 showed that only 17.4% of the respondents liked Russia (1.9% of them clearly demonstrated their liking, and 15.5% did to a certain extent). The number of those who claimed to have no liking stood at 79.3%, including 45.8% not sure about their rejection of Russia and 33.5% (one third of all Japanese) who definitely had no liking for Russia. What is spectacular is the trend: over the year since the previous poll, the number of general sympathizers of Russia fell from 20.1% to 17.4%, and those who were of the opposite opinion grew from 76.4% to 79.3%. This is exactly the same trend we observe for the Japan–Russia relations: they were called ‘good’ by 21.8% of the respondents in the 2016 poll (1.3% said they were definitely good, and 20.5% said that with a certain degree of skepticism). The opinion that the relations were not good was maintained by 71.0% (52.5% believed that they were ‘not that good’ and 12.0% said they were definitely not good). The figures clearly demonstrate there are definite grounds to believe that, of the trend prevails, the number of sympathizers will be growing, alongside the natural change in generation.

Secondly, the climate of bilateral relations and the attitude to Russian foreign policy has also changed in Japan. Putin who took the top ranking position for the second time in 2012 was not what he used to be in the eyes of many Japanese specialists, but a new Putin who had specified his agenda (Togo, 2013: 7). The search for new ways to address the political standoff is also proven with the renewed debate on positive scenarios for the resolution of the territorial dispute. For instance, in July 2013, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published a joint article with an experienced diplomat, Kyoto Sangyo University Prof. Kazuhiko Togo and former Russian Ambassador to Japan Alexander Panov, which proposed to create a special economic zone on the Islands of Kunashir and Iturup (Panov, Togo, 2013). Later, on the same day, it was possible to read the article in the online edition of the *Asahi* newspaper, which immediately led to active feedback from Japanese experts. These responses provide a reason to believe that the problem of the northern territories has lost its edge to some degree. One can now definitely say that the negative trend has been overcome.

Despite the obvious positive shifts, the level of liking for Russia remains inadmissibly low. One can even say that prejudices about Russia have combined to become entrenched. Such entrenchment does not occur for no reason: it is a result of the long and purposeful policy of the authorities in their indoctrination of the population. One should also keep in mind the influence of anti-Russian media outlets, about which most Japanese do not feel critical. Obviously, this kind of indoctrination influences the outlook of the modern Japanese. However, one should also remember and admit that Japanese fear of Russia stems from real historical events in which Russian behavior towards Japan was not quite correct, from a present-day angle.

The Japanese became aware of the threat from the north long before the arrival of the ‘black ships’ of Commodore Perry. Back in the middle of the Tokugawa epoch, acclaimed thinker and economist Hayashi Shihei raised the question of ‘a threat of a

Russian military attack' and strongly urged rearming of the coast guard in his work, 'Discussion concerning military matters of a maritime nation' (*Kaikoku Heidan*). Many historians justly say that the principality of Matsumae, which existed in Hokkaido up until the end of the nineteenth century, was a buffer tasked to create an additional obstacle for the Russian invasion of the south. Japan is well aware of the names of Lt. Davydov and Petty Officer Khvostov who raided Japanese trading posts on the Kuril Islands in retaliation against an insult to Russia – the refusal of a shogun's representative to receive a Russian envoy. Few people know that the actions of Davydov and Khvostov were not authorized by the Russian government and that they were punished for their arbitrary actions.

Many Japanese know that in the Meiji period Russia was amongst the countries which imposed unequal treaties. It also interfered in the outcome of the Japanese–Chinese war and forced Japan to abandon some of its 'just' gains under the Treaty of Shimonoseki (for instance, the Liaodong Peninsula). Of course, there were some moments that were advantageous for Japan in those contacts: for example, Japanese intellectuals benefited from Russian culture and rightly called Russia their teacher. However, in contrast to many Western countries, Russia did not have a significant influence on Japanese culture, life, state structure, and military policy. One could say that the negative experiences had a much stronger influence on historical memory of the modern Japanese than the positive ones.

The string of clashes of interest, conflicts, and military standoffs between the two countries continued in the twentieth century. Apparently, there is no need to comment on events of recent history, which are a common knowledge: the 1941 Neutrality Pact; the Soviet Union's fight for the coalition and the military defeat of Japan in Manchuria, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands; the post-war settlement of relations on the basis of the 1956 Declaration; the long-term freeze on political relations in the Cold War era; and the limited economic and cultural contacts. As Japanese researcher Hiroshi Kimura has put it, relations between the two countries have always been so bad that there is a theory that the bad shape of these relations is normal (Kimura, 2000: 313).

True, if we look at the entire history of Russian–Japanese relations, we will see only three relatively 'warm' periods: 1909–16 (the period of the Izvolsky-Motono Convention), 1941–45 (the period of the Neutrality Pact), and 1956–60 (the period from the signing of the Joint Declaration until the notorious Gromyko Memo). It is a fact that Russia and Japan have been enemies, rivals, or competitors throughout most of their history.

Against the general, rather dismal backdrop of Japanese–Russian relations, there are three particularly 'outrageous' facts, which, in the opinion of the Japanese majority (or, to be more exact, according to the most widely spread opinion in Japan), demonstrate historical injustice of the Soviet Union as regards Japan.

Primarily, this is the Soviet breach of the Neutrality Pact dated 13 April 1941, and the declaration of war on Japan on 9 August 1945. Although that step was dictated by the wartime logic and was based on the allied commitments to the anti-Hitler

coalition countries, that changed nothing for the Japanese – formally the Soviet Union breached its international obligations and perpetrated a treacherous act as regards Japan.

Secondly, there is the problem of Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) captured in the hostilities in Manchuria, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands in August 1945. Many Japanese see the captivity of about 600,000 former servicemen of the imperial army for years despite the cessation of hostilities as outrageous injustice (repatriation continued until the signing of the Joint Declaration on 19 October 1956, which formally ended the state of war). According to various estimates, from 45,000 to 60,000 Japanese POWs died of overwork, severe climate and living conditions, scanty and unusual food, and the lack of medical attendance. The Japanese also condemned as unlawful the refusal by Soviet authorities to provide Japan with the precise number and a list of all internees by name, the intentional stalling of the repatriation process, the active communist indoctrination of the POWs for forming a ‘fifth column’ of repatriates, etc. After the Joint Declaration was signed, the Soviet Union prohibited the Japanese from visiting graves of their family members who died in captivity, did practically nothing to preserve the cemeteries, which resulted in the irreparable loss of many graves, refused to formally acknowledge labor of the POWs, and to issue the repatriates with relevant certificates, which put them into unequal conditions with POWs held in British and U.S. camps, who were issued such certificates and were entitled to seek compensation for their labor from the Japanese government.

In October 1993, in the post-perestroika period, the Russian president officially apologized to Japan for the inhumane treatment of POWs and resolved many of the outstanding problems (visits to the remaining cemeteries were permitted, labor certificates were issued, etc). Still many Japanese, the elder generation, feel bitterness, frustration, and even existential fear (Igarashi, 2012: 332).

The POW problem is well known to the younger Japanese generation, who get an impression about it from textbooks and numerous Japanese fiction books and films broadly covering the subject of ‘cruel Siberian captivity’. Kazuhiko Togo underlined the extreme intensity of national sentiment as the tragedies of the Soviet occupation were forever burned into the Japanese national conscience (Togo, 2010: 230).

Thirdly (by order, but not by its significance), there is the territorial problem which, in the opinion of the Japanese, is rooted in the illegal occupation of the Iturup, Kunashir, Habomai, and Shikotan Islands by the Soviet Union, which controlled them throughout the post-war period. The Japanese saw a threat coming from the north long before the Soviets took control. For instance, in 1942, when contacts were rather stable, historian Shinichiro Takakura wrote that the Russians had forced the aborigines out from the northern border as if they were strangers, and that the threat to Japan coming from Russia in that region helped revive the ancient spirit of nationalism and the nationalization of the military management system (Harrison, 1953: ix).

Importantly, the efforts by Tokyo provided strong support to the territorial problem and made it an issue of national prestige. In the early 1980s, a campaign was launched

with government backing to collect signatures with the demand to bring back the northern territories, and the country began to observe the Day of Northern Territories with the participation of senior Japanese officials. In fact, the negative perception of the Soviet Union with regard to the territorial problem had been evolving for decades and created its image as ‘a thief in a fire’. As a result, the Japanese public developed a strong impression of the Soviet Union as ‘an aggressor country’.

Clearly, the policy that created the image of the Soviet Union as ‘a hostile nation’ in public conscience followed the Cold War logic, and had pronounced ideological motivation – it was not accidental that the Soviet Union was named as a potential military adversary of Japan in official documents. In the opinion of Kimie Hara, the territorial problem with the Soviet Union originated as a by-product of World War II and existed as an organic element of the ‘1955 system’.³ However, the ‘1955 system’ faded but the territorial problem remained (Hara, 1998: 215).

At the same time, the propaganda campaign popularizing the territorial problem had another important hidden motive – the creation of an ‘aggrieved nation’, tasked to overshadow the guilt from the aggressive policy of Japanese militarism in World War II years. As Tsuyoshi Hasegawa has put it, the northern territories enabled the Japanese ‘to feel as an aggrieved nation, a nation – victim of World War II, and provided them with psychological comfort’ (Hasegawa, 1998: 545). In turn, US Japanologist Gilbert Roseman said that Japanese conservatives managed to galvanize Japanese public opinion over the injustice of the Soviet behavior. The syndrome of the northern territories prevailed over the Hiroshima syndrome (Hasegawa, 2003: 103). The understanding of this matter explains to an extent why most Japanese have no claims against the United States for the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which caused countless civilian fatalities, and call them ‘a necessary evil’ or even a ‘necessary measure’, while the loss of insignificant territories is seen as a national tragedy.

In the opinion of Togo, a key aspect of Japanese–Russian relations is the completely different memory of the Soviet Union as a result of the war in the Pacific. Even the United States, which is responsible for the death of 500,000 civilians in carpet bombings, including two nuclear bombardments, which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, does not cause such an acute feeling of injustice and wounded feelings as the Soviet Union amongst the Japanese people (Togo, 2010: 230–1). Clearly, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and would therefore expect there to be some reprimand. We can agree with Togo: the Japanese know that they did not attack the Soviet Union in that war. They have no need to think about the political calculations of Stalin or the Soviet repayment for the opening of the Second Front.

In addition to ‘the factor of historical memory’, a number of other constant factors existing within a limited period influence the image of Russia in Japan. These include

³ Japan’s political system of 1955–1993 is called the ‘1955 system’ by the name of foundation of the Liberal Democratic Party which played there the dominant role.

'the factor of popularity of a leader', 'the factor of one-off events', 'the factor of empiric experience', and others.

'The factor of popularity of a leader' implies the image of a country through the image of its leader. In this case, there is the charismatic influence of the Russian political leader on a rather broad strata of the Japanese public (or the lack of such influence). The factor is limited because the tenure and consequences of the activity of a particular politician manifest themselves over a historically short period of time, which does not exceed the empiric experience of one generation.

'The factor of popularity of a leader' should be assessed in the context of the 'personal' orientation of the Japanese electorate, which is a characteristic feature of the Japanese political culture. It is also true in many ways that the Japanese tend to equate the personality of the leader of a foreign partner country with the 'identity' of the country. The image of the leader is therefore extremely important as it is unconsciously projected on to the country as a whole. This circumstance bears special significance in case of Russia due to the the Japanese citizen's relatively scanty knowledge about this country. In the 'mediacracy' epoch, the appearance of Russian political leaders on Japanese television in situations which demonstrated their respect for Japanese traditions and customs or compliance with certain 'correct' standards could have a significant correction effect on the Russian image as a whole.

A good example is Russia's popularity during the tenure of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Russian leader most promoted in the West. One cannot explain such fluctuations in public opinion based on the theory of the 'perestroika boom'; moreover that the boom did not exist in Japan in the Western meaning at all. Certainly, one may presume the appearance of a certain hope for compromises on the territorial issue that Gorbachev was expected to make in the wake of perestroika. Purely mercantile considerations were probably not the only reason. More likely, the Japanese were charmed by the open, smiling, and charismatic leader of the Soviet Union, who looked different from the party bosses of the Brezhnev epoch.

This idea was confirmed by the example of Boris Yeltsin, the opposite to Gorbachev loved by the Japanese. Although Yeltsin continued the course of his predecessor towards the recognition of the territorial problem, publicly promised to sign a peace treaty with Japan within a definite period, presented Russia's formal apologies for the inhumane treatment of POWs in the totalitarian period, signed a number of important documents, and did lots of other good things for bilateral contacts with Japan, the Japanese public never came to truly like him. The leader of new Russia rarely smiled, was straightforward, had a dislike for politesse, and often failed to grasp what was being said, which alienated many who felt basically neutral, if not well-wishing, about Russia. The Japanese were particularly disgruntled by the indelicate manner on the Russian side, which failed to offer satisfactory explanations to why Yeltsin's visits to Japan were called off twice (in September 1992 and May 1993). A poll held in that period revealed that Yeltsin's failure to apologize to Miyazawa for his refusal to visit Tokyo really angered the Japanese (Nimmo, 1994: 157). All that had an immediate effect on Russia's rating,

which fell to the pre-perestroika low. Even in 1997–98, the best times for diplomacy, informal meetings, and the great friendship between ‘Boris and Ryu’, an overwhelming majority of the Japanese were indifferent towards Russia and skeptical about relations with it. As British researcher William Nimmo said, one had to remember that the Japanese, more than any other country of the world, were inclined to righteous anger whenever any event happened contrary to their expectations, especially if it conflicted with their special ‘Japanese way’ (ibid.).

Putin’s election as the Russian president began the period of a slight revival of interest in Russia and hopes for relations with it. On the one hand, there was no crucial change in public sentiment about Russia after the resignation of the unpopular Yeltsin; as of February 2001, an overwhelming majority of respondents, or 66.1%, said they were not very hopeful of any improvement in relations with the election of a new administration, while 14% claimed the opposite. On the other hand, polls exhibited a significant decline in the number of persons who clearly dubbed Russia ‘a disliked country’ (from 35% in 1998 to 23% in 2003) and a certain rise in the well-wishing attitude towards Russia in the Japanese public (Streltsov, 2004: 89). Outcomes of the surveys were influenced by hopes for a generally positive change in interstate relations, particularly with the new Russian leader: his way of speaking, his clothes, habits, manners, demonstration of understanding and interest in Japan (such as being a fan of Judo). The personal image of Putin spread by the media is more important to the Japanese than another ‘joint plan of actions’ or other diplomatic documents.

The meeting between Putin and Abe held in April 2013 showed that the visit was important for strengthening personal relations between the leaders of two countries, and in building the framework for interstate contacts. Historical experience shows that personal diplomacy of chiefs of state has huge significance for both Russia and Japan. It is also important that the meeting between the leaders helped improve the image of Russia in the eyes of the public.

In addition, Russia’s image in Japan is influenced by the factor of one-off events, which can create fluctuations in public sentiment. For example, performances given by Russian theatric and circus companies or musicians draw full houses and are good publicity for the country. However, while such events can create a positive image of Russia for a brief period of time, unfortunately they do not change the general overall negative trend in Japanese public opinion. At the same time, information about various kinds of unpleasant incidents in bilateral relations, presented by the media in a particular manner, is well received. This kind of negative information corresponds with existing Japanese public opinion, which says, ‘What else can you expect from those Russians?’

Such incidents are happening in various areas. In the environmental field, one can recall the crash of the Nakhodka tanker carrying crude oil from China in January 1987, which resulted in a spill of several thousand tonnes of oil into the ocean (Hasegawa, 1998: 504), causing severe pollution of the Japanese territorial waters. It was not until 1993, however, that Russia admitted that the Soviet Union had a long-standing practice of dumping liquid and solid radioactive waste into the Sea of Japan. Russian leaders came

to understanding that the Japanese were particularly sensitive to this kind of information, as a substantial part of the seafood they consumed came from the coastal waters.

The 'gloomy country' image is also supported in the eyes of the Japanese by the lawful actions of the Russian Border Service, which detains dozens of fishing vessels poaching sea bio-resources in the Russian territorial waters. The creation of the 200-mile border zone resulted in a situation when huge areas of the Pacific Ocean containing the most valuable types of sea bio-resources (crab, salmon, mackerel, sea urchin, Pollock, and others) appeared to be in the Soviet zone. Approximately 10,000 Japanese fishermen have been detained in the post-war period, and many of them stood trial (Nimmo, 1994: 130). Every case of poachers caught by Russian border guards in the post-bipolar period also triggered a fair amount of negative emotions.

The Japanese strongly resent any activity by Russian military forces stationed in the Far East, including military exercises, relocation to areas adjoining the Japanese territories (including the South Kuril Islands), not to mention repeated violations of the airspace by Russian warplanes. Although Russia has not been called a potential adversary of Japan in official documents since 1991, many Japanese who grew up in the epoch of confrontation and remember the high-profile incidents of the relatively recent past (the downing of a KAL jetliner in 1983, the expulsion of Soviet citizens from Japan on espionage counts etc.) subconsciously see Russia as a 'hostile' country having aggressive intensions towards Japan. This has been proven by outcomes of public opinion polls. According to a poll conducted in November 2013 by the newspaper *Yomiuri* and the Gallup Institute, 40% of the Japanese deem Russia to be a source of threat to Japan. Notably, Russia ranks fourth on the list of threats to Japan, after China (78%), North Korea (74%), and South Korea (45%) (*Yomiuri*, 2013).

Suspicion about Russia is also fueled by the growing nationalist sentiment in certain strata of Russian society, violence against foreigners, the activity of skinheads, and so on. For instance, the Japanese media broadly covered attacks and beating of Japanese citizens in Moscow during 2002 FIFA World Cup when the Japanese defeated the Russian national team.

The factor of alienation from Russia rooted in cultural differences and national mentality (the factor of empirical experience) deserves a special mention. In fact, in the words of Yamanashi Gakuin University Professor, Minoru Takahashi, 'neighbors, who differ so much by their living conditions, national development processes, history, public traditions, methods of communication with foreign subjects, etc., are rare' (Shimotomai 2002: 236). Of course, one can disagree: US culture based on the cult of individualism and rational commercialism is actually more distant from Japanese culture than Russian culture with its community spirit of collectivism. Yet, in the real life, the post-war generation of Japanese is convinced that the United States gave them freedom and saved them from communist enslavement (practically everyone knows since childhood about the occupation of the northern territories and Stalin's plan of the occupation of Hokkaido), and the enslavement itself is solidly associated with the image of 'evil and treacherous Russians'. Most people in Japan see the US as 'the father

protecting Japan'. This socio-psychological stereotype stems from multiple layers of centuries-old traditions of paternalism.

At the same time, not even in the post-perestroika period, let alone in the Soviet period, could Japanese–Russian relations boast real citizen diplomacy, which has long existed between Japan and most Western nations. Humanitarian exchanges have been rather limited, and the activities of certain categories of Russian citizens, who found themselves in Japan by a twist of fate, have not contributed to the positive image of Russia in Japan, to put it mildly. One example is the massive opening of the so-called 'Russian bars' hosted by women from CIS and East European countries. Although the work of most women is unrelated to prostitution, many Japanese are not favorably disposed to such institutions and subconsciously project their attitude onto the country supplying particular kinds of labor force. This factor is more important because the Russians in Japan do not have another, more intellectual niche in the labor market, unlike the Americans and the Britons, who are employed as language teachers, or the Chinese, who are actively conquering the area of information technologies. The factor is enhanced by the rising xenophobic, nationalist feelings of the masses under the influence of a general increase in the rate of crime committed by foreigners. The Japanese media gladly savors details of the operations of Russian criminal groups, which have long involved Japan in their orbit by supplying weapons in exchange for second-hand cars or smuggling seafood (it would be fair to say that the latter activity was significantly limited by intergovernmental decisions).

Russia's image in the eyes of the Japanese intellectual and political elites also deserves to be mentioned. Studies of the Soviet Union and Russia are rather deep rooted in the Japanese academic community. There is no need to dwell on different approaches by particular Japanese experts to ways of building bilateral relations, resolving the territorial problem, etc. However, an understanding of the general trend is important for the appropriate casting of a vision on this subject. The point is that the academic community members act as community leaders in Japan and take an active part in forming public opinion. They are invited to participate on television programs, they are interviewed by newspapers and magazines, and their books are prominently displayed in bookstores.

This group of intellectuals has a fair share of reservations and skepticism about Russia's ability to become a full-value partner of Japan. Japanese intellectual elites are more pragmatic than their Western colleagues and are less fixated on traditions of democracy and liberalism, human rights, etc. (e.g., Hakamada, 2002: 216–22). They cherish much more the values of a strong and wise government, capable of ensuring order and social harmony. So, their assessment of Russian events is not based on the criteria of 'compliance or of non-compliance with democratic values' but on the idea of 'closer to the order and farther from the chaos or vice versa'. This is why Japanese intellectuals, and the public, have never had high expectations of Russia's rapid shift to the camp of democratic countries, unlike the West in the early 1990s. Regarding bilateral relations, they largely believe that Japan should be pragmatic in the territorial

dispute, with disregard of any ideological principles (which is a ‘sin’ of US diplomacy, for instance).

Some Japanese researchers, including those of the younger generation, call for a rational perception of the Russian position. Talented researcher Iwao Osaki has noted ‘the problem of the northern territories invented by the Japanese government plays an important role in the promotion of “nationalism” as a political principle and a way to attribute a common, collective identity to the “nation”’ (Osaki, 2007: 37). This is not a stand-alone opinion, which demonstrates the broadness of the spectrum of ideas on the territorial dispute.

The Russian image was tainted in the 1990s with the economic chaos, the rule of criminals, chaotic privatizations, the lack of a clear investment policy, and the protection of rights of foreign owners, etc. Although Russia joined the G-8 in 1998 as a full member and could boast relative media freedom, its unpredictability was much more frightening for the Japanese public than its successes on the path of glasnost and democracy. As to the latest Putin period, Japanese intellectual elites have made the public believe that the strengthened central power points to Russia’s advancement to order, and the suppression of the freedom of speech was a necessary evil, which requires at least understanding, if not forgiveness. This circumstance is the probable cause of a certain rise in the well-wishing attitude to Russia.

Japanese business elites have their own image of Russia, which is far from being ideal. The opportunity to make money and the profit/risk ratio are universal criteria corporations all over the world apply to judge the attractiveness of their sphere of operation. We should mention that, even in the midst of the Cold War, the Soviet Union had the reputation of a reliable and solvent business partner and, despite all phobias, was a best friend of Japanese businessmen who sometimes breached the law in order to achieve their profit target. An example of this is the Toshiba Corporation, which supplied the Soviet Union in May 1987 with precision grinding machines in evasion of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls, CoCom, which enabled Soviet designers to reduce the level of noise coming from submarine screws and made them invisible to US radars (Kimura, 2000: 250).

Speaking of post-Soviet Russia, the core of its perception by Japanese business is a pragmatic assessment of the country’s reliability as a business partner, which is a criterion that has nothing to do with public stereotyping. In other words, business mostly sees Russia through international country ratings, the credit history of Russian corporations, and the level of trust in them, as well as the investment climate, protection of the rights of foreign owners, etc. Obviously, modern Russia, which has yet to create such climate and to build a system that offers guarantees for foreign investors, can hardly claim to comply with these criteria. In the opinion of business circles, the risks levels in Russia are so high that can be done there without governmental guarantees, and their absence of sure guarantees is circumstantial proof of negative public sentiment about the unresolved territorial problem.

Not only business but also other elements of the ‘Iron Triangle’⁴ – bureaucracy and the political world – are hostages of the public opinion in their anti-Russian position. After the crackdown on the ‘pro-Russian group’ in the Japanese Foreign Ministry in February 2002 in the context of the ‘Suzuki case’, Japanese diplomats had to put aside their personal opinion on the development of relations with Russia. As a result, their functions were limited to technical processing and meticulous fulfillment of the decisions made by the political administration of the country.

There is another characteristic feature of the Japanese political world: all political parties of the country see eye-to-eye on Russian foreign policy against a background of relative public unanimity regarding the territorial issue. Given this circumstance, the hands of ruling party members are tied, as any demonstration of an amicable attitude towards Russia would jeopardize the position of leading Japanese politicians and their electoral rating.

There are also other factors influencing the evolution of Russia’s image in Japan. Japanese society is particularly sensitive to the lack or, rather, instability of legal guarantees in Russia. There is common public opinion that business in Russia is a game without any rules or with rules that tend to constantly (and abruptly) change. The Japanese are extremely irritated by the low level of services in Russia. Besides, the Japanese business community is extremely sensitive to any information about the high crime rate in Russia and is inclined to overdramatize that.

Overall, a primary reason for the absence of Russia from the list of countries ranking high in the Japanese system of foreign policy coordinates is the historically negative image of Russia. Perception and subjective historical memory are two key elements influencing public opinion and the political course of the country, according to policy expert Joseph Ferguson (Ferguson, 2008: 191).

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of overlaps between Russian and Japanese political cultures leads to a conclusion that the malleability of the mentality of both societies and the coincidence of some of their essential characteristics enables efficient promotion of the Russian image in Japan. The main tool to make Russia’s image more positive in the eyes of the Japanese is the genuine interest of Japanese society (not only intellectuals) in Russian classic literature, primarily in the masterpieces of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov, which are close in their psychological intensity and tone to the ethno-psychological mind and constants of the meaning of life in the Japanese outlook. The Japanese sincerely admire the achievements of theatrical art and Russian school of performing art and offer teaching positions to Russian pianists, violinists, and singers. ‘Fierce maestro’, conductor Valery Gergiyev, figure skater Evgeny Plushchenko, and many other talented Russians rank high in Japan.

⁴ In Japanese politics Iron Triangle refers to a special relationship between the bureaucracy, politicians and economic circles that supports the system of political power.

One can hardly claim with confidence that the only source of the negative attitude to Russia is the unresolved problem of the northern territories. Russia has found itself in a rather disadvantageous position in the eyes of a substantial part of the international community, given the atmosphere of psychosis generated by the ‘Crimea syndrome’, the irritation of the West at the political and moral support provided to the militia in southeastern Ukraine and, in a broader sense, its independent policy. The exacerbation of relations between Moscow and Kiev, and the introduction of sanctions against Russia were a heavy blow at Russia’s credibility, and Japan and Russia should overcome this negative trend as soon as possible, no matter how difficult it would be, in order to open up new opportunities for bettering relations in the post-Crimean period.

Japan is at the crossroads. It has reached a certain point where it needs to choose whether to work with like-minded countries to construct order based on shared interests and values or to stay exclusive. This would require the resolution of outstanding World War II issues. Russia and Japan definitely do not have major unresolved problems in their bilateral relations, with the exception of the territorial problem. However, why is the public so suspicious of Russia? Can the territorial dispute be the only reason? It is far from that. The analyzed arguments give grounds to believe that it is very difficult for Japan and Russia to find a mutually acceptable solution, as their relations are not free from suspicion and mutual mistrust deeply rooted in the history of their relations. It will be much easier to overcome the mistrust and, accordingly, to come to terms on the territorial issue when they manage to calmly analyze historical grudges, understand their nature and origin, and realize that this is history, which has no contemporary value.

About the authors

Sergei Chugrov, professor (sociology), Moscow State Institute of International Relations, MGIMO University (since 2002); chief editor of the journal, *Polis, Political Studies*; columnist, *Izvestia daily* (1977–87); senior researcher, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (since 1988). Main publications: *Japan in Search of New Identity* (in Russian), Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2010; ‘American World Order: The End of the “End of History”’, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 16(3, September 2015).

Dmitry Streltsov, professor (history), Moscow State Institute of International Relations, MGIMO University (since 2008); leading researcher, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (since 1989); President of Russian Association of Japanologists (since 2008). Main publications: *Foreign Policy Priorities of Japan in the Asia Pacific* (in Russian), Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2015; ‘Russian views of Japanese history’, *The ASAN Forum*, 4(4, July–August 2016).

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