



**Tetsuya TOYODA**

Associate Professor  
Akita International University

## **CHAPTER 8. FOR MORE STUDENT EXCHANGES BETWEEN RUSSIA AND JAPAN**

Everywhere in the world, universities are becoming more and more international or even cosmopolitan. In addition to local students, there are often students from Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South Americas. Friendship and mutual understanding are developed not only between foreign students and local students, but also among foreign students themselves. In some cases, it happens more among foreign students themselves than with local students, because foreign students share the same situation of being foreigners in a host country.

This may be particularly true of Japanese students in Russia. In Russia, Japanese students can easily make friends with Chinese, South Korean, or even North Korean students, in spite of rather difficult relationships between their governments. There are no North Korean students in Japan, but Japanese students can have contacts, and possibly even make friends with North Korean students in Russia. This is of huge importance in view of the

normalization of bilateral relations between North Korea and Japan in not so distant future. Russia can be an attractive place for Japanese students to have truly international experience.

Therefore, it is desirable to increase the number of Russian students in Japan as well as the number of Japanese students in Russia, not only for further development of Russo-Japanese relations, but also for strengthening of Russian and Japanese diplomacy in multilateral relations. This is particularly true in Northeast Asia, the region where intergovernmental relations sometime have serious conflicts. Vladivostok, where the Far Eastern Federal University is established, has direct flights to Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul, Pyongyang and Moscow. Russia offers a unique international learning environment for Japanese students.

In reality, however, there are few Japanese students in Russia. In academic year 2014 (from April 2014 to March 2015), only 509 Japanese university students studied in Russia: 290 as exchange students and 219 students as non-exchange students.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the number of Chinese students studying in Russia (20 thousand in 2014)<sup>2</sup>, the number of Japanese exchange students in China (17 thousand in 2013)<sup>3</sup>, or the number of Chinese students in Japan (94 thousand in 2014)<sup>4</sup>, the number of Japanese students in Russia is surprisingly small. The number of Russian students in Japan is higher, 692 in

---

<sup>1</sup> Response from Japan Student Services Organization by email in 13 June 2016. Exchange students are those who are sent to under student exchange agreements between home and host universities.

<sup>2</sup> St. Petersburg Polytechnic University Media Center, "Why do Students from China Come to Study in Russia," 21 April 2016, <http://en.russia.edu.ru/news/2260/>, visited 11 June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, "Statistics on Study Abroad by Japanese University Students," 2016, in Japanese, [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/koutou/ryugaku/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/04/08/1345878\\_1.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/04/08/1345878_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Japan Student Services Organization, "Foreign Study Abroad Students in 2015," [http://www.jasso.go.jp/about/statistics/intl\\_student\\_e/2015/index.html](http://www.jasso.go.jp/about/statistics/intl_student_e/2015/index.html)

2014<sup>5</sup>, even though less than one hundredth of the number of Chinese students in Japan. The scarcity of student exchanges between Russia and Japan will certainly handicap the development of Russo-Japanese relations in the future.

### **More trade and investment, more student exchanges**

The apparent reason why there are so few Japanese students is that there is little trade between Russia and Japan. In 2014, Russia's exports to Japan stood at \$19.9 billion USD, while Russia's imports from Japan amounted to \$10.9 billion USD.<sup>6</sup> China's export to Japan was \$149.4 billion USD and China's import from Japan \$163.0 billion USD in the same year.<sup>7</sup> Russia's export to China was \$37.5 billion USD and Russia's import from China \$50.9 billion USD in 2014<sup>8</sup>. However, if the Russo-Japanese trade is small in both directions, it is not small enough to explain such a scarcity of student exchanges between the two nations. Japan's trade volume, export and import put together, with China is slightly more than ten times as large as its trade volume with Russia. This does not fully explain why there are over 100 times more Chinese students in Japan than Russian students and over 50 times more Japanese students in China than in Russia.

This is also a chicken-and-egg problem. One may also say that there is not much trade because there are not enough people interested in economic cooperation between Russia and Japan. With more Russians studying in Japan and more Japanese studying in Russia, the vol-

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics by Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). [https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/russia\\_cis/ru/basic\\_01.html](https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/russia_cis/ru/basic_01.html)

<sup>7</sup> Statistics by Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). [https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/asia/cn/basic\\_01.html](https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/asia/cn/basic_01.html)

<sup>8</sup> Federal State Statistics Service, "External trade of the Russian Federation with other countries," [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b15\\_12/Is-sWWW.exe/stg/d02/27-06.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b15_12/Is-sWWW.exe/stg/d02/27-06.htm)

ume of economic exchanges both in trade and investment should increase in the future. It is necessary to break this vicious cycle of little human intercourse and little economic cooperation. There are two key issues to making a breakthrough: more courses in English and more government support.

### **Russian universities should attract more Japanese students by teaching in English**

Below is the list of top ten destinations for Japanese university students studying overseas as exchange students (i.e. under a student exchange agreement between his/her home university and the destination university):

- #1 U.S. 12,434 Japanese exchange students
- #2 Australia 5,170 Japanese exchange students
- #3 Canada 4,890 Japanese exchange students
- #4 U.K. 4,262 Japanese exchange students
- #5 South Korea 4,217 Japanese exchange students
- #6 China 3,477 Japanese exchange students
- #7 Thailand 2,013 Japanese exchange students
- #8 Taiwan 1,991 Japanese exchange students
- #9 Germany 1,719 Japanese exchange students
- #10 France 1,681 Japanese exchange students

Because these students went for study abroad for a short period of time, usually one or two semesters, they did not have time to study local languages, only English. This explains why most popular destinations are English-speaking countries. The comparison is interesting with the list of long term-study abroad destinations in 2013<sup>9</sup>, where China comes in the second place:

---

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education, "Statistics on Study Abroad by Japanese University Students," 2016, in Japanese, [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/koutou/ryugaku/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/04/08/1345878\\_1.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/04/08/1345878_1.pdf)

- #1 U.S. 19,334 Japanese long-term students
- #2 China 17,226 Japanese long-term students
- #3 Taiwan 5,798 Japanese long-term students
- #4 U.K. 3,071 Japanese long-term students
- #5 Australia 1,732 Japanese long-term students
- #6 Germany 1,658 Japanese long-term students
- #7 France 1,362 Japanese long-term students
- #8 South Korea 1,154 Japanese long-term students
- #9 Canada 837 Japanese long-term students
- #10 New Zealand 729 Japanese long-term students

One thing noticeable is that South Korea is more popular for Japanese than China for student exchanges but less popular than China for long-term study abroad. This is because there are many courses in English offered at South Korean universities. Since the late 1990s, the South Korean government has strongly pushed for the internationalization of higher education and many universities in the country now offer a great variety of courses in English. For Japanese students who wish to learn about Korea but are not yet fully trained in the Korean language, spending a semester in Seoul or other cities in South Korea can be an attractive option. For the same reason, Thailand appears in the list of top student exchange destinations but not in the list of top long-term destinations. There are many courses in English offered by universities in Thailand, too.

Internationalization *alias* Anglicization of higher education is unavoidable in the age of globalization. Some countries internationalize quickly and some others slowly. Relatively small countries, such as South Korea and Malaysia, internationalize more quickly than larger countries, but every country needs it in order for its higher education to survive in the age of global competition for both foreign and domestic students. If that is what the Far Eastern Federal University and other universities in Russia need, it should be done as soon as possible, to make

Russian universities competitively attractive. That will attract Japanese students as well.

### **Government financial support is urgently needed on both sides**

The Anglicization of higher education, however, will not be enough to rectify the lack of student exchange relations between Russia and Japan. If that is of political importance, there should be financial support for Russian students to study in Japan and Japanese students to study in Russia. Attracting Japanese students to Russia, especially to the Russian Far East, is what the Russian government should and can do immediately, with relatively small financial incentives or even simply with visa procedure facilitation. The increase in the number of Japanese students in Russia will make the composition of foreign students in Russian universities, especially in the Russian Far East, more balanced. This will make Russia a more attractive destination also for students of other nationalities.

At the same time, the Japanese government should create incentives for Japanese students to spend time in Russia in order to better educate Japan's human resource and to improve its position in multilateral politics in Northeast Asia. Russia and Japan share many national interests in Northeast Asia. They are both neighbors of the rising giant, China. It is not for pure altruism but for its own interests, that the Japanese government should strengthen the bilateral relationship with Russia in order to strengthen its position in multilateral relations in Northeast Asia. The same is true for the Russian government.

At the summit meeting on 6 May 2016, President Putin and Prime Minister Abe confirmed their commitment to "increase cultural and people-people interactions" and Prime Minister Abe explained to President Putin that "Russia is a priority in Japan's strategic review of eas-

ing visas.”<sup>10</sup> The Russian government should work to ease visa requirements for Japanese students, too.

Both Russia and Japan should do what they can do to increase the mutual exchange of young people for a better future of their bilateral relations, for their respective economies and diplomacy and for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Russia Summit meeting," 7 May 2016, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e\\_000427.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e_000427.html); in the same token, Foreign Ministers Kishida and Lavrov had a meeting on 15 April 2016 and the two Foreign Ministers agreed that "cultural, human, and youth exchanges are meaningful from the standpoint of promoting mutual understanding among the peoples of Japan and Russia" and Kishida explained to Lavrov that "Japan is reviewing strategic easing of visa restrictions to stimulate human exchanges to countries including Russia." ([http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e\\_000417.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e_000417.html))