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Public Opinion about Neighboring Countries: Russia and Japan in Students' Imaginations

Larisa Zhilina

Abstract

Globalization and the information and communication technology that defines contact between people on the grassroots level are rapidly increasing and having a greater impact on national and international policy. This paper tests this by comparing the perceptions of students in Universities in Japan and Russia. In the initial stage of this study, students' knowledge about the countries in general; their traits or characteristics (national character), the countries, contemporary economic situation, and their sources of information about each state were examined. The study¹ showed that the Japanese students had a significantly more negative perception of Russia than the Russian students of Japan and the means by which information was communicated and facts learnt greatly varied between the two groups.

I. Introduction

The mass media in any society is arguably best placed to potentially educate and steer public opinion. The interaction of the mass media and the consuming public is described as the two-way communication between a communicator and recipient. However, the absence of reliable information facilitates rumors, myths, and in crisis moments - fear, panic and confusion. Exacerbating the potential for misinformation may be the mass media's concentration on certain topics and neglect of others therein also creating or reinforcing stereotypes and false perceptions.

The mass media may have an agenda-setting (Iyengar, Peters and Kinder, 1982) goal or may choose to apply a "priming effect" on topics raising the visibility to the consumer. The mass media therefore is a very powerful tool and plays an equally important role in the formulation of perceptions and belief systems. Galtung and Ruge regard the media as the "first rate competitors for the number one position as international image former" (Galtung and Ruge, 1965:65; see also Tanstall, 1970:260). Information and opinions communicated

by the mass media penetrate the subconscious, influencing emotions, moods, and even the traditions of people. In McCombs' article, "The Agenda-setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion", he says:

The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news – lead story on page one, other front-page display, large headlines, etc. Television news also offers numerous cues about salience – the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story, etc. These cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic. In other words, the news media can set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion forms (McCombs, 2002).

The media is one of the premier sources of information and socialization in society, making it an important factor in defining and perpetuating stereotypes. In the process of stereotyping, the mass media is seen as the main source of easily accessible and widely available information, possibly as powerful information channels and image factories, creating and sustaining stereotypical beliefs about foreigners (Lester et al., 1996; Lippmann, 1961; Gorham, 1999; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Bartels (1993) stated that consistent, distinctive media information has a long-term impact on its audience over a relatively extensive period of time. This can make the mass media very effective in influencing people's long-term perceptions of other countries. According to McNelly and Izcaray (1986), the mass media can contribute to people's understanding or misunderstanding of each other's countries (1986:546).

The source of our news, whether print, television, or the Internet is more complicated than simply the presentation of information. In an effort to understand how media outlets construct news stories and distribute them, we must also first look at why news is covered. The media, being a competitor for the position an image former lends itself to the perpetuation of stereotypes that may be expected and comfortable for the consuming public to accept. This accounts for priming as a known practice and means for covering the events. Navasky noted that, "it is based largely on journalism that we make up our national mind" (Navasky cf Zelizer and Allen, 2002:1) and news editors determine what is news worthy. The significance and influence of how and what the media reports as news has long been of interest to students of international affairs because it is generally acknowledged as having an important influence on the relations between nations (McCracken, 1987:183).

II. Research Methodology

The principles of assessing public opinion are founded on the collection of the maximum amount of information from varied sources and the logical extrapolation of patterns and relationships. In the case of this study, a structured public opinion poll was employed due to its potential to be best representative of the student population and the future leaders in society. Using this method, we are not able to be representative of the general population, but we can be representative of university students.

Public opinion polls offer a great measure of accuracy if the sample is properly chosen and can over time illustrate the evolution of public opinion further justifying their use as a means to assess society. To ensure the integrity of the research, identical questions were asked of both Russian and Japanese students. Students' knowledge about the other country: geography, history etc, (whatever they associated with the country), the people and their traits or characteristics (national character), the economic situation, and lastly the students' sources of information. The opinion poll conducted allowed the identification of the students' sources of information and what were the main news topics and stereotypes the respective students held of the other and or were exposed to.

Why the Choice of Universities and Students for the Survey

University students are of interest to us because they are more likely to be more open-minded, with more cultured, rational, and consistent thought patterns. In addition, university attendance has been shown to positively counter prejudice and increase knowledge of global issues (Rowley and Hurtado, 2002). For these reasons, the opinions of university students were regarded to be important considerations for this research.

There are several reasons why our opinion survey was conducted at the subject universities in Japan and Russia. First, communication skills; persons with more formal education are expected to have higher reading and comprehension abilities necessary to appreciate public affairs or science knowledge. Second, the amount of stored information, or existing knowledge resulting from prior exposure to the topic through mass media or formal education itself. Persons who are already better informed are more likely to be aware of the topic when it appears in the mass media and are better prepared to understand it. Third, relevant social contact; 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 topics with others (Katz, 1961). Last, students' selective exposure, their acceptance of and ability for information retention. As Sears and Freedman have pointed out, voluntary exposure is often more closely related to education than to any other set of variables. They contend that what appears to be selective exposure according to attitudes might more often appropriately be called "de facto selectivity" (Sears and Freedman,

1967) resulting from educational differences. Selective acceptance and retention, however, might be a result of both attitude and educational differences. A persistent theme in mass media research is the apparent tendency to interpret and recall information (Klapper, 1960) in ways congruent with existing beliefs and values.

The final factor is the delivery system of the mass media system that presents certain stories in a manner to capture the interest of intended consumers. Thus far, most science and public affairs news (with the possible recent exceptions of crisis events) is carried in print media which, traditionally, has been more heavily used by higher-status persons (higher status persons are traditionally more influential in society making university students logically more representative of the core of opinion and policy formulation within society regarding international affairs and matters). Print media is geared to the interests and tastes of this higher-status segment and may taper off on reporting many topics when they begin to lose the novel characteristic of news (a clear possibility where and why news priming has become commonplace). Unlike a great deal of contemporary advertising, science and public affairs news ordinarily lacks the constant repetition that facilitates learning and familiarity among lower-status persons. Highly educated persons are more likely to have been exposed to a heavily publicized topic in the past; they are already "in motion" on this topic and are easier to move still farther than less educated persons.

Sample Composition, Size Determination and the Questionnaire

To represent the possibility that views and opinions may have been specific to certain groups, the stratified random sample system was employed as the most logical choice for this study. Although the age variance range within the universities was relatively small in size, it was deemed important to attempt to chronicle how students' views and opinions evolved throughout the time spent at university. In other words, how education affected their views of the world, but more specifically their neighbors.

Smaller samples are more economical for research purposes and can be better controlled to minimize errors. It is an established fact that a properly chosen sample can be perfectly representative of the whole population. The method of random stratification essentially allocates quotas to specific identifiable characteristic groups and is very convenient for small population sets. For research on large populations the sample size averages between 400 to 600 respondents. If we needed to form credible conclusions with plus or minus 5% margin of error or a 0.95 "level of confidence" - from general population of 5000 - the sample size should be at least 370 persons, 10000 persons - a sample of 385 persons is needed and, any population above 10000 - a 400 person sample size is needed (Dobrenikov and Kravchenko, 2004). Further, having the enrolment list of the university, it was easiest for practical purposes to identify distinguishable stratification within the population and thereafter randomly select respondents within these strata to achieve the appropriate sample size for enquiry. Strata were defined along parameters of faculty and year of program.

The opinion survey on Russia was conducted at Japan Women's University (JWU) in June 2007². JWU is the largest and oldest private women's university in Japan and has approximately 200 full-time teaching staff and 6182 students. The population of potential respondents was limited to the 6182 students from first to fourth year of study at JWU. Following established methodological principles, the optimal sample size for research was determined to be 400 students. For this study, general population strata were defined along two criteria, age and faculty: age (18-19 years old, 19-20 years old, 20-21 years old, 21-22 years old). Essentially an equal number of students from each age group was randomly selected for participation from each faculty fulfilling quotas for representation of population variance in the sample. In the case of JWU sex could not be a determinant factor for fulfilling quotas as the general population of respondents were all female. The sample was produced from homogeneous sets as the number of "nits" in the general population was sufficient – 6182 persons (Zhilina, 2008). The respondents to the questionnaire on Russia were presented with 2 types of questions: "close-ended" (multiple choice answers) types and "open-ended" ("what do you think of...?")³.

The same opinion survey on Japan (knowledge of Japan, Japanese people, the Japanese "economic miracle", national character of Japanese people and their features, sources of information about Japan) was conducted in April 2006 in F.M. Dostoevsky Omsk State University (OmSU, Russia). OmSU has a record of excellence of more than 30 years and is one of the largest universities in Omsk city⁴. The pool of students from which the sample was selected was 6565 in number constituting students from first to fourth year courses at OmSU. The optimal sample for the population size was determined to be 400 persons; the same as JWU. Sampling was conducted along similar principles that guided JWU research; stratified random stratification but in the case of OmSU the sample also had to be stratified by sex (male or female), in addition to the other "standard" criteria - age (16-17 years old, 18 years old, 19 years old, 20 -21 years old that generally corresponded to 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year courses), and lastly, faculty. The respondents to the questionnaire on Japan were also presented with 2 types of questions: "close-ended" types and "open-ended" ⁵.

III. Results

Main Information Source about Russia/Japan and Sufficiency of the Volume of Information on Russia/Japan

Considering the process of public opinion formation, it is possible to identify the factors that influence this process:

- 1) One's own experience (including prevailing socio-economic factors);
- 2) Interpersonal communications that supplements or complements the individual's own experience to the level of a cumulative or group experience;
- 3) Social institutions (church, school, and so on), duplicating the experience of vari-

ous social groups;

4) Mass media, giving possibility to everyone to use everyone's experience in all its variety of forms and contents.

Mass media, including newspapers, magazines, television and the books - allows the contemporary people to realize their place in political systems. However the contribution of each factor to this process greatly differs for people of different backgrounds. From Figure 1 we can see that television held first place as the main source of information about the respective countries - for OmSU 42.8% and JWU 42.1%. The second most important source of the information for JWU students was newspapers (31%), but magazines (12.1%) for the students of OmSU.

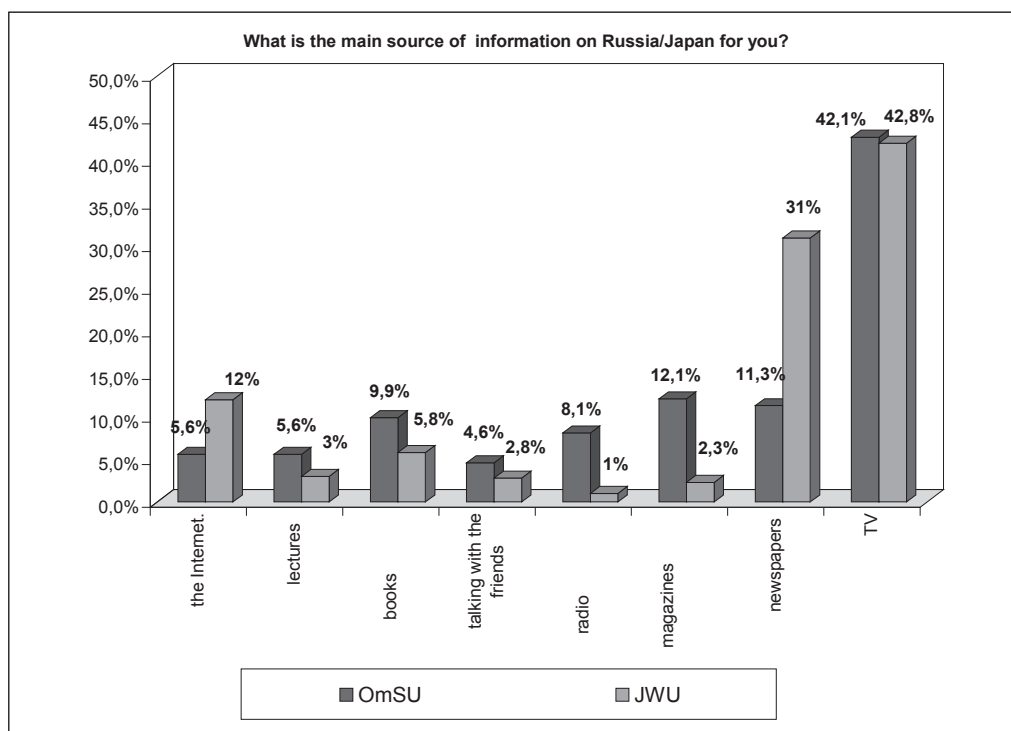


Fig.1. Main Source of the Information about Russia/Japan for the Students

For Japanese students, the information obtained from magazines is at the penultimate position (2.3%), and radio (1%) last. Summarizing the finding of the research that examines the main sources of information on Russia/Japan for Japanese/Russian students, the data indicates that:

The main sources of information on Russia for the Japanese students are:

- 1) Television (42.1%);
- 2) Newspapers (31%);
- 3) The Internet (12%).

The main sources of information on Japan for the Russian students:

- 1) Television (42.8%);
- 2) Magazines (12.1%);
- 3) Newspapers (11.3%).

Both students of OmSU and JWU said that the volume of information was not sufficient (OmSU-55.5% and JWU-73.7%) (See Fig.2). However, seventeen point nine percent (17.9%) of Russian students are satisfied with the volume of information available on Japan. But only three point three percent (3.3%) of Japanese students are satisfied with the volume of information on Russia. Twenty six point one percent (26.1%) of Russian students and twenty three percent (23.0%) of Japanese students said “difficult to answer”.

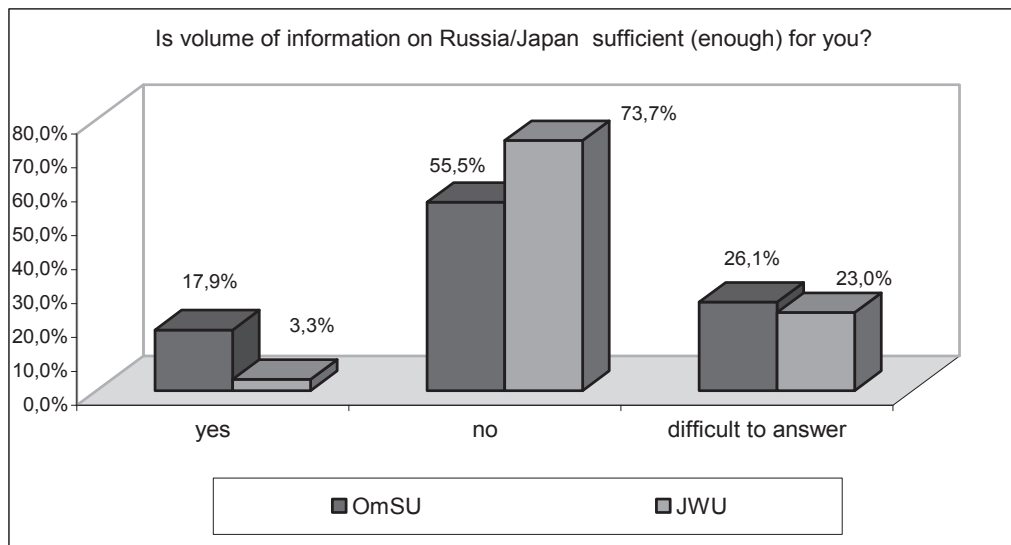


Fig. 2. Sufficiency of the Volume of Information on Russia/Japan for Students

Students' Knowledge of Economic Situations of the Countries

After the Second World War, the Japanese economy experienced dramatic growth, often described as the “Japanese Economic Miracle.” However, only thirty nine point one percent (39.1%) of the Russian students surveyed said they “know” or “have heard something” about Japan’s economic boom (36.3%). Sixty two point two percent (62.2%) of Japanese students could not give an affirmative answer about the economic situation in Russia whe-

reas sixty two point nine percent (62.9%) of Russian students were able to answer the following open-ended question: “Why did the ‘economic miracle’ happen in Japan?” Most students of OmSU explained this ‘miracle’ making reference to the peculiarities of the Japanese character.

JWU students were not able to answer the following open-ended question: Can you explain why there has been an improvement of the economic situation in Russia over the last few years? It should also be noted that the Japanese students also indicated that the volume of information available on Russia was inadequate, but how this may be reflective of knowledge of recent historical events is debatable.

Words Associated with “Russia” and “Japan”

A country’s image can be defined as “a representation of a country’s positive or negative standing in media, in terms of historical, political, economic, military, diplomatic and religious context” (Hanan, 2006:8). “Image” can be defined as a conceptual picture in the mind of a person, about a person, thing or a country and it may be a product of some specific political, social, or religious background or circumstances. In reference to the subject of methodology defining journalistic works, “image of a country can be defined in the terms of political, economic, military, diplomatic and religious relations in the changing domestic, regional and international scenario and its effects on the thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and inclinations of the owners of the media organization” (Noshina, 2000:6). Walter Lippmann succinctly captured the fundamentals of this influence in his 1922 classic, “Public Opinion”, which began with a chapter titled “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads.” As he noted, the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind ” (Lippmann,1922:29).

Therefore we can attest to the fact that the mass media and the communication processes they impact upon have become very significant elements in the formation of country’s images. The result is that much of the information, knowledge and images of the world that individuals have, has come from the mass media. While “selecting and emphasizing” certain aspects of reality, mass media establish the media frame (Entman, 1993). This study which examines and asks how students frame both Russia and Japan in images indicates that:

1. The strongest image of Japan for Russian students is that of a country of great culture and old traditions. Eighteen point three percent (18.3%) of respondents mentioned “traditional ceremonies”, “ikebana”, “tea ceremony”, “hara-kiri”, “high reverence”, “a high regard for traditions”, “respect for original culture”. In the students’ opinion, the Japanese are able “to maintain old traditions” and “make harmony in their life”. The strongest association with Russia for the students of JWU (25.9 %) is “cold climatic conditions”, “ image of cold country”, “ there is a lot of snow”, “it is always cold”, “the severe winter”, “every

day it is snowing”, “low temperature”, “it is cold whole year”, “snow country”, image of a “cold country”, because it is a very northern country”, “strong image of cold country, where the people wear fur caps” etc.

2. The students both of Japan and Russia associate national cuisine of the country with the image of the country (13.5 % - OmsU and 6.3% - JWU). The Japanese students named – “alcohol”, “caviar”, “pies” and “borch”. The Russian students named - “sake”, “sushi”, “rice”, “chopstick”, “a fish-Fugu”, “tasty spicy food” and “green tea”.

3. Students of both Japan and Russia associate the countries with national symbols (12.9% - OmsU and 5.7% - JWU). The students of JWU often named “the Kremlin”, “a Red Square”, “Moscow”, “Matryoshka”, “National clothes”, “Caps made from furs” (“shaggy caps”). The students of OmsU named the symbols of Japan as: “sakura”, “samurai”, “geisha”, “Fuji-yama”, “the sun”, “sumo-karate-aikido”, “kimono”, “a Japanese flag” (“a flag with a red point”, “the red sun on a flag”), “country of the rising sun”, “samurai’s sword”, and “Emperor”.

4. Students of both JWU and OmsU defined the respective countries through geographically associative keywords (9.7% - JWU and 6% - OmsU). For the students of OmsU, Japan is an “island country”, “eastern neighbor”, “small country in the East”. As for students of JWU - Russia is a “country far from Japan”, “near to North Korea and China”, “Siberia”, “big northern country” etc.

5. Students of OmsU see Japan as a “successful state” with “a developed economy”. Russian students associate Japan with Japanese automobiles (9.4%), excellent engineering (6.9%) and “high technologies” (6.6%). Japan is famous for “high-quality goods,” “high-quality radio and video equipments,” “high-quality personal computers” and “great cars”. In this context, respondents recall the names of leading Japanese manufacturers such as “Sony,” “Panasonic,” “Hitachi,” “Toshiba,” “Toyota,” and others. Students of JWU link their representations about Russia with “USSR, Socialism, Communism and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) (8.3 %) – “The strong image of socialism and the disorganization of the Soviet Union”, “It was the Soviet Union many years ago”, “The country where socialism is still staying”, “The image of the country where the background of the socialism remains”, “Soviet Union’s collapse”, “The Former Soviet Union”.

6. Nine point two percent (9.2%) of the students of OmsU associate the word “Japan” with literature and culture – “Abe Kobo”, “haiku”, “tanka”, “anime”, “Haruki Murakami”, “Mishima Yukio”, “theatre Kabuki”, “Takeshi Kitano”, “origami”, “netsuke”, “manga”, “animated cartoons, where all of the heroes have artistically big eyes” and so on. But there was only a single answer in the questionnaire form in JWU – “Dostoevsky and Prokofiev”.

7. The Japanese students associate Russia with historical and political figures of Russia (8.9%). In this context, respondents recall the names of President Putin, Gorbachev, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Tsar’s Family - Nicolay and Aleksandr Romanovs, Yekaterina-II, and Rasputin. As for Russian students, they associate Japan with historical events and facts,

connecting the historical facts such as World War II - Hiroshima, Nagasaki, also respondents named Pearl-Harbor, and Tsushima, Meiji revolution, "Tokugawa", "shogun", "kami-kaze"- with the country (but only 2% of the students). Here we could see that the national image of Japan for Russian students is essentially a historical image - that is an image which extends through time, backward into a supposedly recorded or perhaps mythological past and forward into an imagined future.

8. It is interesting to note that Japanese students associate Russia with a particular color – two point seven percent (2.7%) of respondents associate Russia with color: gray, grayish, dark, white. There is also association with three-colors - white, dark blue; red (similar to the Russian national flag). As for students of OmSU – there were no "color association" with Japan. In our opinion, the different point in student responses of JWU (from OmSU students) was the association with "the beautiful people with a white skin" and "people like dolls" (4.6%) and "show - performances" - national dances, ballet and duet TATU (Russian pop-group). In an era which is increasingly dominated by the flow of images, contemporary Japan has a high profile, producing, for example, manga (comic books), anime (animation), video games and so on. This "visual culture" is formed by numerous relationships between people and images. Japanese students were found to have very original visual perceptions of Russia which may have been defined by their visual orientations and means to interact with their society in comparison to the opposite in Russia.

9. As we can see from the above-mentioned list, the Russian students have only positive images associated with Japan. Students of OmSU feel positively towards Japan in general. The Japanese students named a lot of negative events (7.5%) associated with Russia. Russia's image for the Japanese students is very mixed with the negative traits dominating. These associations may be divided into 8 groups as follows:

- 1) Negative incidents: the war in Chechnya is a very important component of Russia's negative image.
- 2) Hard social conditions: "Society gap is big", "People are poor", "Life is hard".
- 3) Low level of safety in society: "Danger", "Russian Mafia", "Killing", "There are many crimes", "Now, public safety is bad", "Terrorism" etc.
- 4) Cold War: The image of the "cold war" in the Soviet period, "Cold war" with post-war America.
- 5) Instability: "Country where economy is not stable", "The society which still is unstable".
- 6) Bad relations with other countries: "There is image of the country which isn't on good terms with Japan", "The image of the country which is on bad terms with Japan", "It is not on good terms with Europe".
- 7) Political, financial problems: "There are many problems in the politics", "There is no transparency in political situation", "Image of the country with financial difficulties (problems)", "Though it is a republic, politics is monopolistic".
- 8) Some historical facts: "Military State", "It fought against Japan many years ago",

“The Russo-Japanese War”.

The “territorial problem” was not mentioned by the students of OmSU, but it was mentioned in a negative context by the students of JWU. This negative context in students’ answers is the result of the policy towards Japan, including the territorial issue, under the former Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the Japanese students’ view toward Russia is probably less favorable. But I think, a lot is based on lack of information and on misunderstanding.

Features Associated with Japanese and Russian People

For practical purposes to best contextualize and appreciate the responses given, it is necessary to consider the fact that all the basic characteristics used for the description of national character represent predominantly stereotypical images of an ethnic group and the person. It is difficult to ascertain at an individual level the specificity of national character even in the event that it is understood as set, more or less, of constant psychological features and properties inherent in the majority of representatives of the nation. It could also be described as the specificity of behavior of people representing the majority of the nation. The contemporary “Soviet-Russian” researcher Igor Kon proved in his work on the examples of the Russians, the Chinese, the Georgians and the Spaniards that the features of the nation are unique but one cannot say that there are some stable, non-changeable features of national character (Kon, 1971:147).

Assessing the students’ knowledge⁶ of national traits or characteristics of citizens of neighboring countries, the following was found:

1. Based on outcomes the survey obtained at OmSU, it is plausible to conclude that most students of all faculties of Omsk University consider the main character trait of the Japanese people to be “diligence”, “work-holism” and “persistence” (23% - highest percent of the answers). Russian students describe the Japanese people as industrious and scrupulous people devoting all their energies to work; many of students call them “workaholics”. The Japanese students named “stubbornness”, as a character trait of Russian people within the descriptive or explanatory context of “hard, obstinate, resolute and categorical”. Ten point five percent (10.5%) (highest percent of the answers) of students of JWU named another feature of Russian character “strictness, severity, seriousness”, and eight point three percent (8.3%) of the students describe Russian people as “cold, cool, composed” people.
2. Both the Japanese students and Russian students note such feature as “patience” (1.5% - JWU and 7.3% - OmSU).
3. The students of OmSU described Japanese people as - “accurate”, “the cautious people”, “clever”, “phlegmatic”, “pedantic”, “conservative”, “the noble people”, “cheerful”, “naive”, “curious” and “the direct people”. The students noted “female’s submission”, “endurance”, “the women are beautiful”, “they are kind, lovely people”, “scrupulous”, “obedient”, “practical”, live “a healthy style of life”, “harmonic” and “economical”, “all of them are workaholics and patriots”, “They love their state very much.”.

OmSU students perceived the negative character traits of representatives of the Japanese as “severe” and “fussy”, and further described Japanese people as “having dark souls” “hypocritical”, “prudent”, “they have no emotions”, “very strange people”, and “aggressive”. Some notable responses included that “all of them are identical” and “they are tortured by their own traditions”. But it is necessary to note, these were the single responses that were included in “Others” category of the questionnaire. Only such one feature as “reticence” was marked by two percent (2%) of the Russian students. But the “conditionally” negative character traits of the Russian people were marked in eighteen point three percent (18.3%) of the answers of the students of JWU: eight point three percent (8.3%) of the respondents consider Russians to be “cold”; four percent (4%) of the respondents consider the Russians are “reticent and gloomy”; three point five percent (3.5%) of the respondents listed “rough”, “hardened”, and “nervous” as a Russian character trait. Two point five percent (2.5%) of the responses suggested that Russians are “the fans of alcoholic drinks, heavy drinkers and dipsomaniac”. Also the students of JWU think that the Russians are “self-confident”, “egoistic”, “they are short-tempered”, “their faces seem a little stiff”, “selfishness”, and “expressionless people”.

4. Based on these answers, it is possible to conclude that Japanese students assume that one fifth of the components of Russian character is negative. The “conditionally” negative characteristics of the Japanese people are marked only by three percent (3%) of the Russian students.

5. The majority of positive features of the Japanese people as perceived by Russian students are traditional values (respect for traditions, politeness, respect, diligence, national pride, and patriotism). Many students refer to the Japanese as clever and well-educated people with intellectual potential.

The group of traditional character traits of Japanese people is perceived by Russian students - “corporate priority” and “discipline” (“a highly disciplined nation,” “discipline and order”). In this context, students of OmSU also mentioned ancient cultural traditions of Japan.

IV. Discussion

One cannot overestimate the importance of a country’s image abroad. This study seeks to assess peoples’ perceptions of another country – whether they like, respect it, are interested in it and whether they wish to visit. The students have many narrow images of people, places, or things that are unique to their personal outlook. This will affect the daily decisions they take about that country – be they of a political nature or relate to business or more leisurely activities like tourism. These perceptions based on an image may thus have considerable positive or negative consequences for a given country.

The concept of the “stereotype” is borrowed from an old printing technology where copies of a “composed type” were made by using “papier mache” as molds for new printing

plates, identical to the original. The term stereotype, as allegedly used for the first time by Walter Lippmann in 1922 (Lippmann, 1922), is used today to mean a readily available image of a given social group, usually based on rough, often negative generalizations. Sociologist Charles E. Hurst of the College of Wooster states that, "one reason for stereotypes is the lack of personal, concrete familiarity that individuals have with persons in other racial or ethnic groups. Lack of familiarity encourages the lumping together of unknown individuals" (Hurst, 2007). A stereotype is a valuable tool in the analysis of popular culture because once the stereotype has been identified and defined, it automatically provides the researcher with an important and revealing expression of otherwise hidden beliefs and values. This means that stereotypes are especially useful in tracing the evolution of popular thought and the way by which the beliefs and values associated with specific groups change over time. As may be - institutionalized channels of information exchange, such as the mass media, can have a significant impact not only on the content of stereotypes, but also on the process of learning stereotypes through social interaction.

It is largely accepted that cultural representations in the media are often based on stereotypes. These stereotypes are generalized and simplistic representations of by far more complex social groups and behavioral patterns. The continued use of these representations is largely perceived as being problematic as they can be non-representative of the culture in question. Yet, the continued prevalence of cultural stereotypes in the media is in part due to the space and time constraints of the media itself, media producers' understanding and knowledge of a foreign culture, and audience expectations and assumptions about those foreign cultures.

In Media Studies, stereotypes refer to "the continuous repetition of ideas about groups of people in the media. It involves taking an easily grasped feature or characteristic assumed to belong to a group and making it representative of the whole group." (McQueen, 1998:141). Ting-Toomey (1999:161) asserts, "stereotyping is an exaggerated set of expectations and beliefs about the attributes of a group membership category. A stereotype is an over-generalization about an identity group without any attempt to perceive individual variations within the identity category". Similarly, Hall, (2002:257) states that: "Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics" which may be assigned "according to class, gender, age group, nationality, 'race', linguistic group, sexual preference and so on".

Even though stereotypes are useful conventions in popular storytelling, this does not mean that we can ignore them as examples of significant cultural beliefs and values. Stereotypes in students' imaginary, created worlds are often valuable indicators of attitudes and feelings which are very real-beliefs and values held quite deeply and sincerely by the population. The actions taken or facilitated by cultural stereotypes are not as often benign or neutral as may have been suggested thus far. So, these stereotypes are frequently negative, and because a culture bases its actions upon beliefs and values which characterize the cultural mindset, negative stereotypes can be associated with actions of exceedingly negative,

harmful nature-ugly emotions.

It is fair to suppose that Japanese students' attitudes toward Russians and Russia, for example, can be easily marked by the changing nature of the popular stereotype associated with Russians from the Second World War ("fur-hatted, vodka drinking comrades-in-arms"), the Cold War ("Godless communists in an Evil Empire") to the break-up of the Soviet Union ("poor, hungry victims of a disorganized and self-defeating socialist system"). The historical legacy is still strong and little has been done or reported on in the media to change these stereotypes. For some Japanese students it relates to the fear of war and military aggression during the Soviet era, but also to the then suppression of human rights in Russia – popular opinion tends to view the Russian Federation as the imperial successor to the Soviet Union. Another negative point - Russia's sometimes difficult relations with the other former Soviet Republics and some foreign countries has a strong impact on Russia's image in Japan. Japanese students also cited strengthened State and political control over central television news channels ("speech control") as domestic developments that negatively impact their perceptions of Russia. The high crime rate in Russian society also tends to contribute to the negative Japanese have of Russia.

In this context, it is instructive to pay attention to the useful function of stereotypes in the use of what can be termed "countertypes" (Shea, 1996). A "countertype" is a positive stereotype (one which arouses "good" emotions and associates a group of people with positive social characteristics) that evolves as an attempt to replace or "counter" a stereotype (negative). Components of the countertype perceived by the Japanese students include "a huge country", "an interesting country", "a picturesque landscape", "good writers and sportsmen" and "huge and mysterious". Japanese students have great admiration and love for Russian literature; also nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian art. It is extremely difficult to find a Japanese who has never read Tolstoy or Dostoevsky nor moved by their works. Russian folk songs and pop songs are also quite popular in Japan, especially among students.

Japanese students have associated Russians with a number of stereotypes that can be grouped into several categories. Russians are stereotyped as resolute and categorical, cold people, reticent and gloomy, hardened, nervous, heavy drinkers and dipsomaniac. The image of "the fans of alcoholic drinks" could be due to perception of Russian drinks in the world, such as the popularity and international popularity of the Russian vodka. More positive depictions appeared where the Russians are portrayed as excellent sportsmen. So-called positive images of Russian people can lead to stereotypes about Russian sportsmen (such as Pluschenko, Sharapova etc.).

As previously noted, Russian students have a far more favorable view of Japan than do Japanese of Russia. Japan is viewed as always "country of rising sun" "island country", "eastern neighbor" and a "successful country with great economical potential". Russian students consider the Japanese character to be the main factor of Japan's economic success. The students described the Japanese as scrupulous people devoting all their energies to

work (many students call them “workaholics” and “self-disciplined” with the “highest priority for education”) and are often typically perceived as “accurate”, “clever”, “phlegmatic”, “pedantic”, “conservative”, “cheerful” and “naive”.

There are strong positive elements of Japan’s image as mentioned by the Russian students. The most important is probably the interest in, and admiration for Japanese culture, old and new - “haiku”, “tanka”, “Abe Kobo”, “Haruki Murakami”, “Mishima Yukio” and “anime”. Another positive point is the interest in the Japanese language as the embodiment of the culture and as one of the global means of communication.

Also we can see that there is another reason, besides what we shall call “an economy of effort,” why people so often hold on to their stereotypes when they might pursue a more objective vision. The systems of stereotypes may be the core of their personal tradition and the basis for the defense of their position in society. All these stereotypes are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world to which people’s habits, tastes, capacities, comforts and hopes have adjusted themselves. These stereotypes may not constitute a complete view of the world, but they do constitute a picture of a possible world to which the students have adapted.

Any stereotype is a standardized conception or image of a specific group of people or objects. Stereotypes are “mental cookie cutters” (Lippmann, 1961), they force a simple pattern upon a complex mass and assign a limited number of characteristics to all members of a group (for example – “All of Russian people like vodka” or “All of Japanese people are workaholics”). While we commonly use the term as it is applied to human beings, it is quite possible to stereotype objects as well. Objects can also be an integral part of a stereotype according to characteristics of places; for example - “In Russia, it is cold all the time”. An example where a stereotype refers to an object is “all Russians wear fur caps” and “all Japanese people wear kimono”.

Russia’s image abroad is very mixed - with the negative traits dominating. Of course, Russia’s image varies from one set of countries to another suggesting the varying impact of the media and even the possibility to manage these external perceptions. Japanese students’ views and perceptions being generally based on limited and sometimes inaccurate information given by such sources as TV, newspapers, animations or cartoons, have no dominant positive image of Russia. In Japan, Russia’s image comprises several, often contradictory notions such as “a closed country”, “the country which does not return the northern territory”, “a country less advanced than western States” and “a country with strong opportunities in sport”.

As we can see, such standardized conceptions are held in common by the members of groups – university students in Japan and Russia. Popular stereotypes are images that are shared by those who hold a common cultural mindset - they are the way a culture, or significant sub-group within that culture, defines and labels a specific group of people.

V. Conclusion

As active participants and recipients in the global information flow, media audiences are directly and indirectly inundated with images, sounds, video and news bites that over time defines their perceptions of reality. So pervasive and influential is this flow of information, that very little of what media consumers believe constitutes an objective social reality. This study attests to the media's power to influence public perception and shows degree of media representations' influence on students. It shows that the mass media is one of the most significant influences in developed societies.

Thus we see, for the Japanese and Russian students the main source of obtaining knowledge about countries is the television and second place - newspapers (for the Japanese students) and magazines (for the Russian students). However, they play an important role in the process of creation of public opinion about one or another country.

The study showed that the Japanese students had a significantly more negative perception of Russia than the Russian students of Japan. Eloquently placing Russia within the current and future psyche of the Japanese public, Director-General of Intelligence and Analysis Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Jiro Koderu (2009) noted that

in any opinion poll in Japan, Russia is near the bottom of the list of 'most beloved country.' The average Japanese person holds the image of Russia as 'frightening and not trustworthy.' But the Russians hold a favorable view of Japan. The newly formed Russian Federation is now undergoing tremendous changes to transform its society to democracy with a market economy. We should take advantage of this opportunity to promote mutual understanding on a people-to-people basis so that eventually we can build mutual trust in our relations.

In this study, a student population was examined because students have the greatest potential to influence public opinion. University students may not have formed a strong opinion and may be more open to studying the issues related to international relations and images of neighboring countries. We cannot speak about the whole population, but only about the ideas of university students and even only at these universities (students at other universities might have different opinions). But university students are of interest to us because of their potential income and their resultant influence on general public opinion. The better we are able to redirect and recreate public opinion, the better the progress we can make in improving of the relations between Japan and Russia.

Notes

¹ Present survey was conducted at Japan Women's University, and F.M. Dostoevsky Omsk State University (Russia).

² The Project "The Forming of Public Opinion of Japanese people about Russia and the Russians at the beginning of 21st Century. Comparative studies"(21 世紀初頭日本におけるロシア及びロシア人に対する世論形成 : 比較研究) was supported by The Japan Foundation in 2007. (See The Japan Foundation - http://www.jpf.go.jp/j/intel_j/topics/fellows/2007.html). I would like to thank the Japan Foundation for supporting this Project. Also I would like to say special thanks to Prof. Kira Yoshie and Ms. Reiko Oomura for helping conduct the opinion survey at the Japan Women's University.

³ A: The open-ended questions which assumed the original narrative answer in the form of a word, or several words. There were 3 questions in this group:

- 1) What words first come to your mind that you would associate with Russia?
- 2) Can you explain why there has been an improvement of the economic situation in Russia over the last few years?
- 3) What characteristics or traits would you say accurately define the Japanese people (the national character)?

B: Questions - Multiple Choice answers. There were 3 questions in this group:

- 1) What is your main source of information about Russia?

Response Choices:

1 - Newspapers 2 - Magazines 3 - Radio 4 - TV 5 - Books 6 - Lectures 7 - Speaking with friends
8 - The Internet

- 2) Do you think the available information on Russia is sufficient (enough for you)?

Response Choices:

1 - Yes 2 - No 3 - Difficult to answer

- 3) Do you know about an improvement of the economic situation in Russia?

Response Choices:

1 - Know 2 - Heard something 3 - Hearing for the first time 4 - Difficult to answer

⁴ The results of this survey were published in dissertation paper "The Forming of Public Opinion in Russia about Japan and Japanese People at the End of the 20th Century - Beginning of the 21st Century (materials of journal publication)" (Zhilina, 2006). The studies were conducted in the framework of a dissertation.

⁵ The questionnaire was divided into 2 groups:

A: The open-ended questions that assumed the original narrative answer in the form of a word, or several words. The answers to open-ended questions give a maximum of the information on the theme of research that is rather important for our research. There were 3 questions in this group:

- 1) What words first come to your mind that you would associate with "Japan"?

- 2) Can you explain why the Japanese “economic miracle” occurred?
- 3) What characteristics or traits would you say accurately define the Japanese people (the national character)? (Your point of view)

B: Questions- Multiple Choice answers. There were 3 questions in this group:

- 1) What is your main source of the information about Japan?

Response Choices:

1 - Newspapers 2 - Magazines 3 - Radio 4 - TV 5 - Books 6 - Lectures 7 - Talking with the friends 8 - The Internet

- 2) Do you think the available information on Japan is sufficient (enough for you)?

Response Choices:

1 - Yes 2 - No 3 - Difficult to answer

- 3) Do you know about the Japanese “economic miracle”?

Response Choices:

1 - Know 2 - Heard something 3 - Hearing for the first time 4 - Difficult to answer

⁶ In OmSU, only 6.6% of respondents offered no answers to this question, whereas 30.5 % of the students of JWU did not answer the same question.

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