

# A Study on the Significance of a Japanese Language Teacher Dispatch Program: Using Russia as an Example

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## **1. Research Background**

The Japan Foundation and other public organizations, such as the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, offer Japanese language teacher dispatch programs to support Japanese language education conducted outside of Japan. While each organization has its own unique format for dispatch, treatment of dispatched teachers, and purpose of dispatch, the activities of Japanese language teachers in the destination countries are not limited to those related to Japanese language education. They are often dispatched to take on the role of interacting with the citizens of the destination countries and introducing them to Japanese culture.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of working directly with people is currently being reexamined, and I believe it is meaningful to once again consider the role of Japanese language education through teacher dispatch programs. This paper discusses the significance and role of the Japanese language teacher dispatch program of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center, which was established through an intergovernmental agreement between Japan and Russia, based on a survey of those who have participated in the dispatch program.

This survey was conducted in 2017, 2018 and 2019. In this challenging time, I would like to reexamine the significance of the Japanese language teacher dispatch program, which directly involves people.

## **2. About the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center**

This section describes the establishment of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center, which is the subject of the survey, and an overview of its program.

### **2.1 Details of the Organization's Founding**

The Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center was established as the executive office of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Committee, which was created based on an intergovernmental agreement reached at the Japan-Russia Summit in November 1998. According to their website, since the program's inception in July 1999, the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center has conducted exchange programs for approximately 8,000 youth between Japan and Russia as of the end of 2018. Based on the decisions of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Committee, the main programs include (1) short-term invitation and dispatch programs, (2) Japanese language teacher dispatch programs, and (3) fellowship programs for young researchers and others.

## **2.2 Overview of the Japanese Language Teacher Dispatch Program**

Since 1999, the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center has sent Japanese language teachers to universities around Russia as part of the Japan-Russia youth exchange programs. In 2018, the 20th year of the program, 18 teachers were sent to 18 universities, meaning that for 20 years, the Center has continuously dispatched Japanese language teachers from Japan to universities in various parts of Russia. The teachers arrive at their posts in September, and a debriefing session is held when they return to Japan in July (or August). All teachers are required to report on the status of their activities at their assigned post, including the implementation of Japanese language classes and their youth exchange activities. According to the annual "Post-program Report on the Japanese Language Teacher Dispatch Program," most dispatched teachers organized Japanese speech contests, events introducing Japan, and visits to local elementary schools. Many events are organized jointly with local Russian teachers, indicating that dispatched teachers are expected not only to teach Japanese but also to collaborate with Russian colleagues and manage events together with local staff and students.

## **3. Survey on Motivations for Applying**

This section describes the survey I conducted regarding the teachers' motivation for applying and its results.

### **3.1 The Survey and its Results**

This section describes the survey.

#### **3.1.1 Survey Method**

The survey was conducted with a total of 34 participants during the 2017 and 2018 pre-dispatch training periods. The survey was divided into four sections asking the participants about their: ① motivation for applying, ② perceptions of Russia at the time of application, ③ changes in perceptions of Russia after arriving in Russia, and ④ opinions on the role of

Japanese language education in bilateral relations between Japan and Russia. Each question was to be answered in a free-response format. Since the maximum term of the Japanese language teacher dispatch program of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center is three years, some of the survey collaborators participated in the pre-dispatch training programs in both 2017 and 2018 (hereafter referred to as “continuing dispatched teachers”).

### 3.1.2 Survey Results

Table 1 summarizes the responses to each question in the survey. (Similar responses are grouped together.) The number of responses in Table 1 includes responses from the continuing dispatched teachers.

① The two main motivations for applying were "interest in Russia" and "career advancement as a Japanese language teacher." 18 respondents answered that they were interested in Russia because they "majored in Russian" or "had an interest in Russia." Six respondents said that they "wanted to teach abroad on an official dispatch" (the responses of the continuing dispatched teachers were omitted in order to avoid duplication). ② In the responses regarding perceptions of Russia at the time of application, the group that had applied because of their interest in Russia showed some positive comments, while some negative comments, such as describing Russia as "a little scary," were also observed. Responses from the group whose motivation for applying was career advancement described Russia as "closed and dark" or "not something of particular interest." ③ Regarding changes in perceptions of Russia, many respondents indicated that there has been a change, with responses such as "[my perception has changed from thinking Russians] don't laugh to that they do laugh" and "[Russian people are] similar to the Japanese," suggesting that a sense of affinity has developed. When asked what they thought about the role of Japanese language education in ④, many responded with comments meaning "It plays a role in connecting Japan and Russia, and in fostering human resources for that purpose." Thus, these responses indicate that they are aware of their ability to build bridges between the two countries. At the same time, there are also those who say that Japanese people's understanding of Russia and the number of Russian language learners in Japan are not sufficient to foster a mutual understanding, suggesting that they feel the limits of what Japanese language teachers can do.

**Table 1: Summary of Survey Responses**

Questions	Responses	Number of Responses
Motivation for applying	I wanted to work in Russia. I was interested in Russia.	13
	I majored in Russian.	8

	I used to teach in Russia.	2
	I'd like to become an interpreter for Russian language but have never lived in Russia.	1
	I wanted to live abroad.	3
	I wanted to teach abroad on an official dispatch.	2
	I wanted to become a career Japanese language teacher.	2
	I wanted to improve my skills.	1
	I can teach at a university.	1
	I was satisfied with the conditions of the dispatch program.	1
Perceptions of Russia at the time of application	I sympathize with Russia.	4
	I used to live in Russia as a child.	2
	I have studied in Russia before.	2
	I have a good impression of Russia. I think Russians are highly spiritual.	2
	Russians have a mysterious charm. Russians are unique.	2
	Russia has potential, but it is not making the most of it.	1
	I have both good and bad impressions.	1
	Paperwork is complicated in Russia.	1
	Not enough information.	2
	Cold, dark, closed.	7
[Russian people] don't laugh very much.	3	
Scary.	1	
Not particularly interested.	2	
I want to know what kind of country it is.	1	
Changes in perceptions of Russia after arriving in Russia	My impression changed from "the people are cold" to "there are many kind people."	3
	My impression changed from "the people don't laugh" to "people laugh a lot."	1
	I began to feel closer to Russia.	1
	I think that Russians are similar to Japanese people.	1
	Life in Russia is much easier now.	2
	It was much colder and darker than I thought.	1
	Russians in general are not tolerant of Asians.	1
My impressions haven't changed.	3	
The role of Japanese language education in bilateral relations between Japan and Russia	Connecting Japan and Russia and fostering human resources for that purpose.	15
	Enabling Japanese and Russian people get to know each other to build good relationships.	5
	It plays both an economic and cultural role.	3
	To deepen understandings of Japan, (however, this is asymmetrical).	2
	To develop Japanese-speaking human resources.	2
	Information dissemination in Japanese.	1
	To expand one's personal interests into various fields.	1
To foster human resources that stimulate and energize Japanese society.	1	

### **3.2 Semi-structured Interview and SCAT Analysis**

Surveys revealed that the two main motivations for applying were "interest in Russia" and "career advancement as a Japanese language teacher." Therefore, in order to investigate in more detail, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers who had different motivations for applying.

The following describes the semi-structured interviews conducted with Participant A whose motivation for applying was "interest in Russia," and Participant B, whose motivation for applying was "career advancement as a Japanese language teacher," and their respective SCAT analysis.

#### **3.2.1 Survey Method**

In August 2018, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two applicants: one (Participant A) whose motivation for applying was "interest in Russia" and one (Participant B) whose motivation for applying was "career advancement as a Japanese language teacher." Both Participant A and Participant B were newly dispatched in 2018. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with the SCAT method. SCAT (Steps for Coding and Theorization) analysis is a method of qualitative data analysis that consists of four steps of coding and a procedure for describing storylines and theories by weaving together their themes and constructive concepts (Otani 2007).

#### **3.2.2 Survey Results**

Participant A was fluent in Russian but had never lived in Russia and wanted to live there. Participant A had already been engaged in work such as being a translator and interpreter, as well as receiving delegations from Russia, and had a clear vision of exchange activities after his/her arrival to Russia. He/She is eager to work in Russia-related fields for the rest of his/her life.

For those who specialize in the Russian language and the Russian region, the Japanese language teacher dispatch program offered by the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center is an excellent opportunity to gain experience in Russia while making use of their expertise in the Russian language, and it is possible that a considerable number of applicants are motivated by the desire to enhance their expertise as specialists on Russia.

Participant B, in contrast, wanted to continue working as a Japanese language teacher after gaining experience abroad. Although he/she had no interest in Russia, he/she applied for the Japanese language teacher dispatch program of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center, believing that a dispatch from a public organization would give him/her an advantage in the future.

It is expected that a certain percentage of applicants, such as Participant B, apply for the

position in order to advance their careers as Japanese language teachers. For those who wish to build a career as Japanese language teachers, the fact that they are dispatched by a public organization is a major factor in their motivation for applying.

### **3.3 Considerations Regarding Motivations for Applying**

Hirahata (2017) conducted a survey of a total of 116 former and current Japanese language teachers dispatched from the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV). In recent years, the number of applicants for Japanese language teachers for the JOCV has been decreasing. The purpose of the survey was to verify whether the "difficulty in finding employment after returning to Japan," which is said to be the main reason for the decrease, is valid and to explore solutions. Among the series of surveys conducted by Hirahata, the participants were also asked about their reasons for applying. According to the survey, the number one reason for applying was "to live abroad," the second most popular reason was "to teach Japanese language and about Japan overseas," and the third most popular reason was "to develop a career as a Japanese language teacher." This shows that applicants are more attracted to "providing Japanese language education overseas" than to "contributing to the welfare and development of developing countries," which is JOCV's objective, or to "having a fixed income," according to Hirahata. In addition to motivations for applying, the survey also asked several questions about pre-deployment reflections, and Hirahata concluded, "In general, we can see that applicants have a very strong orientation towards Japanese language teaching in the pre-dispatch stage." There is a clear difference between the results of the survey by Hirahata and the answers given by applicants to the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center regarding their motivations for applying. In the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center's program, which is part of Japanese-Russian exchange, it seems that the participants' motivations were more strongly "Russia-oriented" rather than "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented."

As mentioned in the previous section, Participant A is a typical case of having "Russia-oriented" motives, and the survey suggests that there are more participants who are "Russia-oriented" like Participant A than "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented" like Participant B.

In an interview conducted in 2018, Participant A explained, "My biggest motivation for applying was to live in Russia. Personally, I majored in Russian. The work I did after graduation was also related to Russia. (...) As I was approaching the milestone of turning 30 soon, I wondered what would be a good asset for me. I thought that working in Russia might help to enhance the skills I had already been using. I wanted to practice my Russian. I wondered if there were many things that I would not understand about how Russians feel until I lived there. I also wanted to improve my Russian. My main motivation was that I

wanted to experience Russia first-hand.”

In the surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018, there is a question about the applicants' experiences in teaching Japanese at the time of application. Applicants who were more "Russia-oriented" in their motivations for applying were not necessarily those with little experience as Japanese language teachers, but it was characteristic of some of them to have almost no experience as Japanese language teachers.

In the interview, Participant A described his/her work as a Japanese language teacher as follows.

“[I need to give] lectures soon and my training in that was my weakest point. What I want to do outside of teaching Japanese is too ambitious. I don't have any skills as a Japanese teacher or experience doing it. I'm very worried about it.” “I have many things I want to do and I have dreams, but I have to put them aside for now. I would like to focus on my work as a Japanese language teacher first, while maintaining some level of communication with the local Russian people.” (Participant A's interview in 2018)

Participant B, on the other hand, commented on his/her motivation for applying: "The main reason I applied was to improve my skills as a teacher and broaden my teaching methods. To be honest, I wasn't really interested in Russia, but I thought it would be a good experience for me as a teacher, so I applied." When asked about his/her perception of Russia, he/she replied, "As I have participated in the training, my image of Russia has changed a lot since the time I first applied, but at first I was a little scared and had an image of a very closed, dark, and cold country." Participant B further stated the following about his/her perception of Russia.

“It has changed a bit (as I've undergone training). A Russian Japanese teacher is currently participating in the program here, and I had the opportunity to talk to him/her. First, I had thought that Russians did not smile very much, but this teacher had a big smile with gentle eyes, so I wondered if the image I had before was actually wrong. That was the first time I saw a Russian person's facial expressions.” (Participant B's interview in 2018)

Participant B also responded to the question, "Is there any activity in particular that you would like to do in Russia?" as follows:

“One thing I'd like to focus on is speaking instructions. As I talk to students on various

issues, I am curious to find out if when a student who has reached a certain level of proficiency speaks with a Japanese person, who is not a Japanese language teacher, better intonation and accent may make the student's Japanese sound better [to the Japanese person] than speaking with correct grammar." (Participant B's interview in 2018)

From the above information, in the case of Japanese language teacher dispatch programs conducted under bilateral agreements, it is evident that these programs provide a steppingstone to professional development for those who wish to become specialists in the destination country. For those who had no interest in the destination country, the program has not only helped them advance their careers as Japanese language teachers, but has also provided them with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the country they were stationed in.

#### **4. Changing Perception and the Significance of Dispatch Programs**

As described in Section 3, the surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018 also examined participants' "changes in perceptions of Russia after arriving in Russia." Many people in the group that had always been interested in Russia responded that their perception had not changed, but some responded that their perception had changed from "[Russians are] cold [people]" to "there are many kind people" or from "[Russian people] don't laugh very much" to "[Russian people] laugh a lot." It was apparent that the actual visit to Russia and contact with Russian students and colleagues had changed their perception of Russia and Russians, and created a new sense of affinity.

In this section, I will examine the changes in participants' perceptions of Russia after the dispatch, and consider the significance of the Japanese language teacher dispatch program.

##### **4.1 Survey Method**

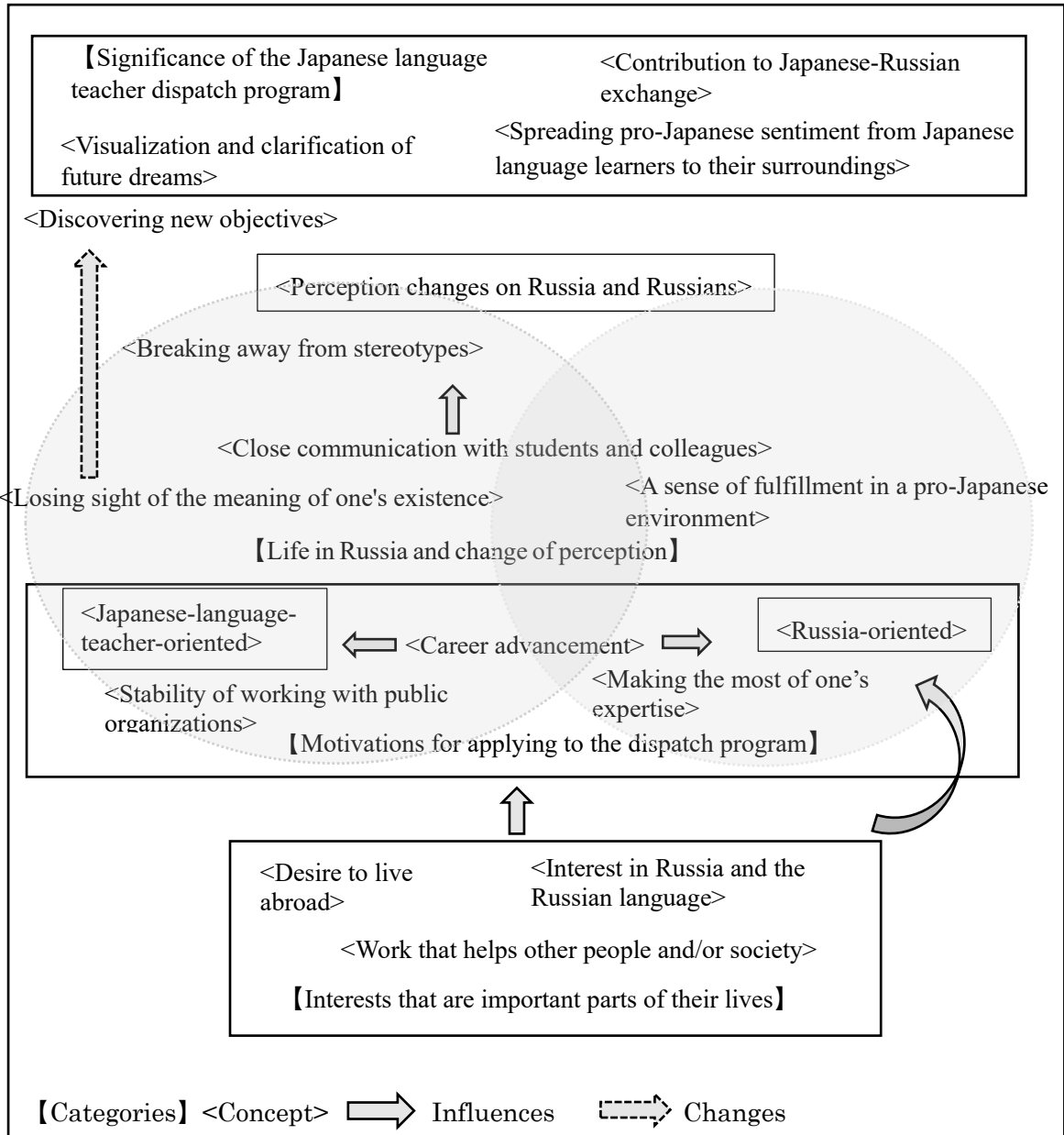
Semi-structured interviews were conducted again with the participants of the interviews from Section 3 (Participants A and B) in August 2019, after one year of assignment. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed together with interviews conducted prior to the 2018 dispatch, using the Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) by Kinoshita (2003). Specifically, in this approach, concepts are generated from the transcribed interview data, such concepts are categorized, and the results of the survey are represented by result charts and storylines.

##### **4.2 Survey Results**

As a result of the analysis, 17 concepts were generated and grouped into 4 categories. The



resulting chart is summarized in Figure 1, "The Significance of the Japanese Language Teacher Dispatch Program as Seen from the Changes in Motivation for Applying and Perceptions Towards Russia."



**Figure 1: The Significance of the Japanese Language Teacher Dispatch Program as Seen from the Motivation for Applying and the Changes in Perceptions Towards Russia**

Applicants to the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center's Japanese language teacher dispatch program have "interests that are important parts of their lives" at the root of their

motivations for applying. For Participant A, it was his/her "interest in Russia and the Russian language," and for Participant B, it was "teaching Japanese" as a "job that helps other people and society," which he/she had been aiming for since he/she was a university student. As is clear from the survey, motivations for applying can generally be divided into two categories: "interest in Russia and the Russian language," which can be described as being "Russia-oriented," and "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented," as pointed out by Hirahata (2017). Applicants whose motivations are "Russia-oriented" will go to Russia with the hope of using their Russian language skills to engage in a variety of local activities and further refine their expertise with a focus on Russia. Applicants whose motivations are "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented" may arrive at their new post with high expectations for stability and career advancement as a Japanese language teacher dispatched from a public organization, only to be faced with unexpected difficulties and a sense of frustration towards Russia.

In an interview after returning to Japan, Participant A stated that he/she took pride in the fact that he/she was able to work in various activities because he/she had a wealth of knowledge about Russia beforehand.

“All in all, it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it, and I was very fortunate to be in the place where I was assigned, as there were very few difficulties or hardships in either work or personal life. In that sense, I really had a lot of fun. I didn't get sick and I didn't have any issues with personal relationships, so my first year was very smooth.” “[That goes for] Russia and the Russian people. I had studied [Russian] at university to some extent, and I had been working on projects related to Russia after my graduation, so I had some idea of what to expect. I was aware of all kinds of irrationality and things that happen in Russia that don't happen in Japan, so I thought, well, it's just the way it is. In that sense, I didn't find any negatives or new negatives.” “It has really been smooth sailing for the first year, and I realized a lot of things I wish I had done but hadn't had the chance to do, and came up with a lot of ideas for new things I would like to do. I hope to be able to do all of those things in the second year.” (Participant A's interview in 2019)

In contrast, Participant B stated the following in an interview after returning to Japan, indicating that he/she had felt difficulties in his/her life and work at the beginning of his/her assignment.

“I felt very tired after a year of emotional ups and downs.” “I didn't have high

expectations to begin with, but it was even lower than my expectations. What should I say? I asked myself why I was in Russia, especially in the first part of the year.” (Participant B’s interview in 2019)

However, even for Participant B, while continuing to live in Russia, he/she came into contact with the lives of the Russian people, which he/she had never known before, and felt a "close connection with students and colleagues," and his/her perception of Russia and the Russian people began to change.

“When I met with other teachers around December, I found out that they were also anxious, had worries, and were stressed just like I was. So, what can I say? For the first time, I felt that I could communicate heart-to-heart with other people, and I started to think about what I could do to help.” “From the time I started saying, ‘Let's do X,’ I think I was able to discover for myself the meaning of my existence, or, what can I say, rather, the reason I came.” (Participant B’s interview in 2019)

As mentioned in Section 3, many of the Japanese language teachers dispatched by the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center answered that the role of Japanese language education in bilateral relations between Japan and Russia is to "connect Japan and Russia and to foster human resources for that purpose," and it is believed that they realize their "contribution to Japan-Russia exchanges" during their dispatch period.

In an interview after his return to Japan, Participant A stated the following in this regard:

“I think it is the students rather than Japanese language teachers sending out information. I believe that there are students to whom the Japanese language teacher give information, and that the information then spreads from the students. The students’ friends and families then talk about Japan to other people. They might say “He/She studied something like this” or “I just learned this, but isn’t it fascinating?” and I think that’s how the information spreads. I think it's a very important grassroots activity.” (Participant A’s interview in 2019)

Participant B described the ripple effect on his/her surroundings:

“People around me in Japan were also not interested in Russia, but me going there made them interested as well. If this dispatch program continues, the number of such people will increase as well. More and more people will have those kinds of

experiences and feelings. I am sure that this will eventually lead to and spread friendship between Japan and Russia, so I think this project is very meaningful.” (Participant B’s interview in 2019)

Thus, regardless of whether they are "Russia-oriented or "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented," the dispatched teachers realized the “significance of the Japanese language teacher dispatch program.” It is also apparent that each of the dispatched teachers felt the "significance" of the program not only in terms of bilateral exchange between Japan and Russia, but also in terms of "visualizing and clarifying their dreams for the future" in their own lives.

Regarding his/her own dreams for the future, Participant A said that the dispatch has made his/her future more "clear," and that “I feel that my dreams have become more bright.” Participant B added, "I used to think I would get a master's degree just to get a degree, but I want to be able to do research that will be useful in the field. My goal is the same, but the reason I’m aiming for it has changed," as he/she mentioned his/her change of heart.

#### **4.3 Examination**

As described above, there are applicants for the Japanese language teacher dispatch program of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center who are "Russia-oriented" and those who are "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented.” In both cases, the applicants have “interests that are important parts of their lives,” and are applying with the aim of pursuing career advancement in their respective lives.

In a survey of Japanese language teachers dispatched by the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), Hirahata (2017) found that, "Initially, participants’ motivations for applying for the JOCV is primarily to accumulate experiences as Japanese language teachers abroad, hoping to become Japanese language teachers who can 'make a living doing this.' However, what they gained through their activities in the destination countries was not so much greater expertise as Japanese language teachers, but rather a strong sense of personal growth.” Also, in the Japanese language teacher dispatch program of the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center, the "personal growth" of the teachers seems to be an important element of the "significance" of the program. The "personal growth" referred to here naturally includes "breaking away from stereotypes" through direct contact with Russia and Russians.

Kadoi (2017) recognized from her own experience that the role of Japanese language teachers is also to be transmitters of information on Japan. She noted that while actually working in Russia, she was able to deepen her understanding of both Russian and Japanese culture, break away from stereotypes, and become aware of diversity by deeply engaging with

students through the study of Japanese.

Participant B also stated the following regarding "changing their perception on Russia and Russians."

"When I saw a person talking without much facial expression, I thought, 'he/she was a cold person.' But after talking to him/her more often, I realized that he/she was not that kind of person. So in December, I'm sure I would have said he/she was a 'cold' person, but if asked again now, I would say he/she is a 'kind' person." "If I'm in trouble, he/she will help me. What surprised me the most is that I take the bus to work, and everyone quickly gives up their seats to women, children, and the elderly. I think that's wonderful. I thought to myself, "This is something I don't see in Japan anymore, but this is the way it should be." (Participant B's interview in 2019)

Allport (1954), known for his work on diminishing stereotypes and prejudice, noted that absence of knowledge about the other person is involved in the formation of prejudice, and contact is important in eliminating prejudice. The "contact hypothesis" was born from this perspective, and a series of studies were conducted. Allport states that prejudice is reduced when contact is made on an equal footing, with common goals, with outside groups that differ in race, religion, etc., and is even more effective when that contact is made with institutional support and in recognition of common interests. The activities of dispatch teachers may be said to match these specific conditions.

## **5. Summary and Future Considerations**

This paper describes the results of a survey of Japanese language teachers dispatched to Russia under the Japan Russia Youth Exchange Center's Japanese language teacher dispatch program regarding their "motivation for applying," "perception on Russia and Russians," and "perception on the role of Japanese language education (Japanese language teachers) in Japan-Russia friendship." The survey revealed that there were two main motivations for applying: "Russia-oriented" motivations and "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented" motivations, and that many dispatched teachers believed that "Japanese language education plays a role in connecting Japan and Russia, and in nurturing human resources for that purpose."

Semi-structured interviews conducted before and after the dispatch were transcribed and analyzed using the Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) to examine the motivation for applying and the change in perception after the dispatch, as well as the significance of

the Japanese language teacher dispatch program. The results suggest that the understanding of Japan in Russia will deepen through Japanese language learners and their families, that there will be opportunities for the people around the Japanese teachers to develop an understanding of Russia, and that, for the teachers themselves, this could be an opportunity to break away from stereotypes about Russia and to clarify their dreams for the future, leading to career progress.

However, since the primary data presented in this paper is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with one each of "Russia-oriented" and "Japanese-language-teacher-oriented" respondents, it is hard to say that there is sufficient information and analysis for conclusive results. Further investigation will be necessary in the future.

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