

**Establishing and preserving new ties between
Japan and Russia:
utilizing creative problem solving skills for enhancing mutual cooperation**

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Dear guests and forum participants, my name is Toshinobu Usuyama and I am a professor of Russian linguistics at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences here at the University of Tsukuba.

I am thankful for the opportunity to give a talk at this event in front of the most promising students of Japan and Russia. I truly hope that the three sessions of “Cooperation through Innovation”, “Regional renaissance” and “Contribution to the culture of the world’s sports” which will take place here today will bring about some meaningful ideas.

1 What is “culture”?

Today I would like to share with you some ideas on how to enhance the relationship of mutual trust and friendship between Japan and Russia by means of the following five key phrases: “Cultural understanding”, “Foreign language education”, “Creative problem solving skills”, “Global human resources”, and “Philosophy of co-existence and co-prosperity”.

Let us think about the concept of culture first. This word is well-known to everyone, we hear it a lot on daily basis and it is perceived as part of our common sense. However, do we actually think about its meaning? It is one of those words we think we understand the meaning of but in fact we do not. There are three definitions of culture in the Kojien Japanese dictionary, there are three main meanings, and all of them indicate that culture is closely related to the psychological aspects of human behavior.

The term “culture” is widely used in various terminology. For instance, Japanese culture, Ainu culture, Russian culture, Chinese culture, Oriental culture, European culture, African culture, American culture and so on. It is also used in other expressions, like in “female culture”, “youngsters’ culture” etc. “children’s culture”, “spiritual culture”, “sports’ culture” etc. As seen in these examples, “culture” is also used in contexts different from those related to ethnicities and countries. In addition, “culture” is used in expressions of a larger scale, e.g. “world culture”, “Earth’s culture”. There are also expressions like “culture person”, “culture festival”, “cultural heritage”, “cultural palace” etc.

What seems to be similar to all of these terms is the meaning of “human mental pursuit”. But it is hard to claim that the term means only that.

I would like to explain the term from a perspective different from that of “human mental pursuit”. My first example is dealing with a sensitive aspect of moral human behavior. A while back a famous Japanese actor has stated his position that adultery is acceptable and so is divorce. This statement has brought about controversy in the Japanese society. I have conducted experiment by asking my Japanese students if they agreed with the statement that adultery and divorce are culture based. And most of my students replied that they disagreed. However, in the actor’s opinion, both of these phenomena are culture-based.

So what explains this discrepancy of opinions?

I have another example to illustrate this perception of culture.

It is a common knowledge that there are tribes which still practice cannibalism. So I have asked my students if they considered cannibalism a cultural phenomenon. What happened was that all the students without exception have agreed that it was culture-based. I asked one of my students about the reason for this answer. The reply I got was that cannibalism is not antihuman act but a religious and customary act.

You might get an impression that the two examples are not related at all. However, I think they are. If we want to understand the essence of the meaning of the term “culture”, I think these two examples give us very clear hints.

What explains the difference of opinions that adultery and divorce are not seen as culture-based but cannibalism is? In my opinion what becomes a criteria for the difference is whether the evaluator of the act attaches a certain value to it or not. In other words, if the evaluator considers the act as valuable, he will define it as a culture-based act and vice versa.

Hence, I think that culture is not simply a human mental pursuit related to human acts but it is closely related to whether people perceive it in terms of their value system. At the same time, culture is not being created by individuals but is a product of their coordinated actions.

Let me give you my own definition of culture.

Culture is a value system of group of people who coexisted together in the past, continue to coexist in the present and build their future.

What makes this definition special is that it emphasizes that culture is related to group values. If we perceive culture in this way, we can also define it as a product of past, present or future acts of people to which they attach value. Therefore, culture is a synthesis of the values which have emerged as a result of connection between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups of people.

2 Special characteristics of culture

Culture requires human existence and human cooperation. Let me give you an example of food culture. When we think about French food, it is well-known for a strict order of serving food, starting from appetizer, soup, fish and meat dish. Apparently, many people think that even the order itself is an illustration of peculiarity of French

food.

However, this order of serving goes back to Russian imperial custom. This is because back in the 15th century Russian court was hiring French chefs and those of them who made it back to France had taken this part of the Russian culture with them.

Let me give you one more example of matryoshka. Everyone knows what it is. It is a symbol of Russia. But few people know that there is a hypothesis that the roots of matryoshka go back to Twelve eggs and Seven lucky gods which are made in Hakone. In the past clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church visited Hakone and took them back to Russia. Of course in Russia this hypothesis is met with surprise and bewilderment which is natural as matryoshka has been symbolizing Russia for a long time.

3 What is cultural understanding?

So what does it mean to understand a culture?

I think it means having the knowledge of a value system of a given person or group of people, and the ability to admit it without taking positions of like and dislike. And in case one resonates with the given culture we can say that his or her understanding towards it has been deepened.

Individuals are surrounded by multilayered and multifaceted culture.

It is very important to be aware of being exposed to different cultural experiences.

4 On the status of foreign language education in the Japanese school system

Bearers of culture are people and groups of people. However, in fact there is a great variety of people and groups of people. Cultural variety is directly related to the variety of human groups. I think students from the Russian Federation who are here today can relate to that as they live in the country with more than 120 ethnicities.

In the center of this complex cultural system is an individual and language which is a means of his communication. Hence language becomes the most important tool for cultural exchange and a passport to a world of a new culture.

To establish a relationship between cultural understanding and foreign language education we should clarify the aims of the Japanese school system. Japanese schools aim to provide a solid platform for the children's human and social skills to become a balanced human being. This policy is based on the first article of the Law of Education. And as a result of the education the children get equipped with problem solving skills, which is indispensable for survival in the modern society.

Please take a look at Slide no 2.

As you can see, acquiring foreign language skills is a compulsory criteria at school system.

At present the education system is challenged with the rapid changes and development of technology.

Complex society of today cannot be handled with the basic problem solving skills.

To cite the Professor of the Japanese language education at the University of California in San Diego, Prof. Tosaku, 21st century is essentially different from the 20th century. While in the 20th century the status structure was quite clear, the 21st century is characterized by a complex society of mutually intercorrelated factors on global level. If in the 20th century there was a certain stability and possibility of predicting the future, everything is much more complex in the current century.

5 What is the “creative problem solving skills”?

As we can see from the Slide number 3, Japan of today is challenged by the problems of economic instability, aging society and fall of birthrate, weakening of children’s learning skills, decline of scientific achievements, regional renaissance, environmental problems etc.

To handle these problems, both on individual and group level, high negotiation skills are required.

Moreover, to preserve interests on different levels, namely, those of individual, organization, society, one’s country and other countries people of today need to live in accordance with “philosophy of co-existence and co-prosperity”.

6 Creative problem solving skills and their development

What qualities are necessary for developing creative problem-solving skills? As seen in Slide number 4, there are five factors, namely experience, mental activity, knowledge, skills and human body. These are the five factors which support the formation of creative problem solving skills.

Slide 5 shows the diagram of formation of thinking skills according to Benjamin S. Bloom.

7 What do we mean by Global human resources?

As we can see in Slide no 6, global human resources are people who are capable of functioning beyond borders of their own country, people with multilingual skills and exceptional problem solving skills, living according to the philosophy of co-existence and co-prosperity.

Finally, I would like to tell you about two famous episodes from the history of Japan-Russia relations that I used this August in NHK Russian Language Radio Course in Japan for beginners.

The first story is about a 31-year-old Japanese ship owner Daikokuya Kodayu whose cargo ship was caught in a storm in 1782 while sailing from Ise (now Mie prefecture) to Edo (now Tokyo) and after a 7-month drift finally reached one of the Aleutian Islands. Kodayu spent 4 years on that island starving and suffering from cold. He was also communicating with Russian inhabitants, which helped him to learn Russian language. Kodayu and his people managed to escape to Kamchatka by building a ship, then moved to Irkutsk where in 1789 he met Kirill

Laksman who was a scholar of natural history. Getting the support of Laksman who became a good friend of his, Kodayu left for the Russian capital Saint Petersburg where he was granted an audience with the Russian Empress Catherine the Second and got the permission to return to Japan. In the following year, 1792, he reached Nemuro, Hokkaido, finally fulfilling his dream to return to his home country. One can't stop being impressed by the fact that more than 200 years ago an ordinary Japanese was starving in Russia with the strong will and hope to return home and being devotedly supported by Russians.

My second story is about the Russian diplomatic mission that came to Japan to conclude a trade treaty between two countries and was assigned by the Edo government to stay in the port of Shimoda on Izu Peninsula in November 1854. All of a sudden the place was hit by tsunami following a powerful earthquake that resulted in critical damage to the Russian frigate Diana. While sailing to the village of Heda for repairs, the Diana sank in the bay of Suruga due to bad weather. The villagers of Heda, suffering from the earthquake and being forced to lead a tough life on their own, didn't hesitate to save and take care of the whole crew of the Diana of around 500 people. Moreover, in order to let the head of the Russian delegation Admiral Efim Putyatin (1803-1883) go back to his country, Russian engineers and the shipbuilders from the Heda village cooperated to build a new small-sized ship. The construction was finished within less than 3 months in March 1855. The ship was named "Heda-go", and Putyatin successfully left for Russia aboard it. It is true that the shipbuilders from the Heda village who took part in the shipbuilding process conducted in the spirit of friendship and cooperation between Japan and Russia, later grew up to become Japan's leading shipbuilding engineers who laid the foundation of Japanese shipbuilding in the Meiji era.

I hope to see every student in this hall creating his or her own history of Japan-Russia friendship and successfully living in the 21 century with a spirit of mutual respect, like Kirill Laksman who supported and saved Daikokuya Kodayu and like those villagers from Heda who saved the crew of the frigate Diana and helped them go back to Russia. Thank you very much for listening.

Большое Вам спасибо!

За дружбу России и Японии!

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