

Modern Perception of Japan by Vladivostok Citizens (Based on a 2021 Survey)

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Abstract. This article presents an analysis of the contemporary perception of Japan by the Vladivostok citizens, as well as their views of the current state of Russia-Japan relations and their prospects. The research is based on the results of a survey conducted in May–September 2021 by the Public Opinion Studies Laboratory of the Institute of History of the Far East Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The data obtained are compared with the results of similar investigations of previous years and Vladivostok people's views of other countries that are significant for Vladivostok, namely, China, the USA, India, and the two Koreas.

The authors point out that the Japanese factor has played an important role in the history of the city, and therefore Japan attracts so much attention of the city's dwellers. In their opinion, the high level of attractiveness of Japan which, in the past two decades, has been recorded by public opinion surveys in Vladivostok and other centers of Pacific Russia is based, primarily, on the people's interest in the unique culture of the Land of the Rising Sun, their high assessment of the economic and technological development of Japan and the prosperity of the Japanese people. At the same time, the historical experience of Russia-Japan relations and the political contradictions existing between the two countries make a large part of the respondents (about one-third of their total number) believe that there are threats to Russia from Japan, which are naturally associated with Japan's territorial claims. Yet, the Vladivostok residents, for the most part, demonstrate a fairly high level of trust in Japan, positively assess

the quality of current Russia-Japan relations and prospects for their future, and favor their active development.

Keywords: Vladivostok, Japan, public opinion, Russia-Japan relations.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Vladivostok has always held a special place in Russian-Japanese relations. Its special status is determined by various factors and circumstances: the role of Vladivostok in the implementation of Russia's Pacific policy; its unusual perception in Japan as one of the symbols of Russia and one of the few bridgeheads of the Japanese presence in Russian territory; the real contribution that this city on the edge of Russia made to bilateral relations, being a permanent channel of economic and humanitarian interaction between the two countries and nations. These circumstances could not but form a specific public opinion of the Vladivostok people about Japan, which correspondingly influenced the quality of the work of this channel and the state of the regional component of Russia-Japan relations. There are different points of view on the role of the psychological factor in international relations in general and in Russia-Japan relations in particular. To a certain extent, by mechanically extrapolating to Russians the ideas about Russia (mostly negative ones) that have historically developed in Japan [Goryacheva 2020; Kozhevnikov 2020; Melkonyan 2018; Chugrov 2016; Bukh 2010], Nobuo Shimotomai concluded that "because of the entry of Japanese troops into Siberia after the Russian Revolution, the image of 'samurai Japan' was firmly established in Russia, and the war of 1945 became the basis for the subsequent half-century psychological cold war between Japan and Russia". According to the Japanese scholar, "our peoples have mutually strengthened the image of the 'enemy' in relation to each other, and this has become a psychological barrier to improving relations" [Shimotomai 2009, p. 189].

Most of the Russian experts do not think so. They emphasize the contradictory image of Japan in Russia, noting that, in the eyes of Russian society and the Russian political elite, Japan presents a complex, multifaceted, and multicolored picture [Streltsov 2016b, p. 25].

On the one hand, historical memory is a “catalyst of distrust” towards that country [Chugrov 2016, p. 12], superimposed on negative political assessments wherein Japan is perceived “as a country that, at best, does not have its own foreign policy, at worst, as a satellite of the United States and a geopolitical opponent of Russia” [Streltsov 2016a, p. 19]. According to the all-Russia opinion surveys of recent years, Japan is not in the focus of attention of Russians, most of whom simply do not have time to think about its existence. To them, Japan is “neither a friend nor an enemy, but just middling...”, which, according to the degree of economic importance for Russia, is located somewhere on the level of Turkey and India and is interesting mainly as a distant exotica.¹ It has not become a country of mass tourism for Russians, a country where they buy real estate, where their relatives live, and where they keep their bank accounts, which in aggregate “translates the attitude towards it into a kind of abstraction...” [Volin 2009, p. 237–238].

On the other hand, in the public consciousness of Russians, Japan has a largely mythologized and attractive image as a country of refined culture with a high level of economic and technological development. In the views of most Russians, Japan is a “symbol and image”, which often “has little in common with the original and is limited to a group of pervasive stereotypes” [Kulanov 2004, p. 55, 63].

Based on the materials of studying the public opinion of the Pacific Russia residents, we have repeatedly shown that, in this region, including Vladivostok, the attitude towards Japan is no less contradictory than on Russia’s western or southern borders, but, at the same time, has its own specifics [Larin, Larina 2011, p. 187–216]. For various reasons, Vladivostok was not presented in a separate line in these publications, although it deserves to be highlighted.

¹ About Russia and the Countries of the World. Which countries Russians consider friendly, which ones are hostile, and which ones they want to visit. 24 July 2017. *Website of the Public Opinion Foundation*. <http://fom.ru/Mir/13624>

Ideas of many residents of this city about geographically close, but culturally distant neighbors – the Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans – have been formed and continue to develop in significantly different conditions than analogous ideas of the vast majority of Russians. While for 90 percent of them Japan is a country located far from Russia [Petukhov 2010, p. 7], for the residents of Vladivostok (as well as of Khabarovsk, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Nakhodka, or Korsakov) it lies much closer than their own capital.

On the one hand, their specific ideas about Japan were determined by the close proximity and extensive long-term contacts of the port city with the island country (as early as in the late 19th century, Vladivostok was connected with Japan by regular maritime traffic) and also by living together on the territory of Vladivostok: in the first 50 years of its history, the Japanese made up a sizeable and, in certain areas, an important part of the city's population [Morgun 2014]. And even when the city was closed to foreigners, and this was almost the entire second half of the 20th century, thousands of its inhabitants, primarily sailors of the Far East Shipping Company, continued to visit Japan regularly, supplying Vladivostok residents with both scarce and exotic (for the USSR) goods and stories about the amazing country. And Japanese philology at the Far East State University was probably the most popular specialty in the 1970s and 1980s.

The opening of Vladivostok in 1990 was accompanied not only by the relocation there of the Consulate General of Japan from Nakhodka, the establishment of a Japanese Center and the signing of sister city agreements with a group of Japanese cities, but also by the active development of a unique sector of the local economy – the automotive business focused on the import and maintenance of used Japanese cars,² the appearance of Japanese businessmen and students, and direct flights connecting Vladivostok with Niigata, Tokyo, Toyama, and Osaka.

² In an artistic form, the invasion of the Japanese automobile industry in Vladivostok was wonderfully described by V. Avchenko: [Avchenko 2012].

On the other hand, the attitude towards Japan was formed in the conditions of rather complicated – throughout history – political relations between the two countries, and, during the first half of the 20th century, under the impact of awareness of their military-political confrontation in the Pacific and a feeling of Japanese threat. The Russo-Japanese War, the annexation of Korea close to Vladivostok, the 1918–1922 intervention, the Japanese aggression in Manchuria, tensions on the border and the Khasan events of the 1930s, the short, but no less fierce Soviet-Japanese War, Japanese prisoners of war, and subsequent discussions on the territorial problem – all these events affected Vladivostok and its residents to a greater or lesser extent and gradually formed a stable image of the Land of the Rising Sun on the shores of the Amur Bay.

In May–September 2021, the Public Opinion Studies Laboratory (LIOM) of the Institute of History, the Far East Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, with the financial support of the Consulate General of Japan in Vladivostok, conducted a special study on the attitude of the Vladivostok residents towards Japan and the Japanese, which made it possible to clarify, confirm, or correct on a serious documentary basis a number of previously developed assessments and judgments concerning this topic and draw a fuller image of Japan rooted in the people's minds. A total of 415 respondents were interviewed, including 197 men (47.5 percent of the respondents) and 218 women (52.5 percent). By age, the respondents were distributed as follows: under 20 years – 15 people (3.6 percent), from 20 to 30 years – 73 people (17.6 percent), from 31 to 40 years – 108 people (26.0 percent), from 41 to 50 years – 78 people (18.8 percent), from 51 to 60 years – 69 people (16.6 percent), and over 60 years – 72 people (17.4 percent). This distribution generally corresponds to the age structure of the Vladivostok population.

According to the results of the survey, there was some gender bias: there were 5 percent more women than men among the respondents. However, a careful analysis shows that gender differences are not of fundamental importance in general assessments, although they affect some responses, especially those where emotional perception plays

a more or less significant role. Gender differences in the perception of certain issues, if there are any, are noted in the text of the article.

The objective of the article is to identify the nature, dynamics, and some features of modern ideas of Vladivostok residents about Japan and Russia–Japan relations on the basis of the results of the 2021 survey and previous sociological studies.

Japan in the Context of the Far East Inhabitants' General Ideas About the Outside World

The answers to the first question that begins the study of the respondents' perception of Japan – “Which of the following countries do you like the most?” – make it possible to assess the level of their abstract-emotional perception of the countries of the world. Each respondent was asked either to choose one from a list of six alphabetically arranged states (India, China, North Korea, USA, South Korea, and Japan), or to voice their own choice by writing the name of the country that is not on the list.

After the processing of mandatory and initiative responses, a list of 19 countries was formed. In addition to the states mentioned in the questionnaire, there were 13 more on the list, including Russia, Brazil, and Nigeria, which are far and exotic for Vladivostok, and Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia, which are relatively close to it. Each of the countries initiatively named by respondents scored from 0.2 (one respondent) to 1.2 percent (5 people each) of votes.

Japan turned out to be the undisputed winner in this popularity rating: it was named by 172 respondents out of 415 (41.4 percent). South Korea (15.2 percent), China (13.3 percent), and the USA (12.3 percent) follow in a close group, but with a large margin from the leader. In total, these three countries scored 0.6 percent fewer votes than Japan (40.8 percent vs. 41.4 percent). The survey did not show a significant difference in the country preferences of men and women, although there is a 2–3 percent spread (i.e., within the acceptable statistical error) (Table 1).

Table 1

Answers to the question “Which country do you like the most?”
(Vladivostok, 2021, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Country	All respondents	Men	Women
Japan	41.4	42.6	40.4
South Korea	15.2	14.2	16.1
China	13.3	11.7	14.7
USA	12.3	15.2	9.6
India	4.1	2	6
North Korea	2.2	3	1.4
None of them	2.7	1.5	3.7
Other countries	8.8	9.8	8.1

The respondents over the age of 60 showed the greatest liking of Japan (47.2 percent of the people in this age category), while the least sympathetic ones were the respondents aged between 31 and 40 (37 percent). This variation in the views of different generations is the smallest compared to that found with regard to other countries. For China, it ranges from 6.7 to 14.8 percent, for South Korea – from 8.2 to 20.4 percent, and for the United States – from 5.8 to 21.9 percent ([Figure 1](#)).³

Japan’s status as the most attractive foreign country for Vladivostok residents has existed for the past two decades ([Figure 2](#)). The number of citizens who particularly like Japan ranged from 35 percent to 46 percent. A certain competitor to Japan was Australia, which once (in 2008) even pushed Japan into the second place (Australia was not included in the 2021 questionnaire). The short-term surge in the level of liking for both countries in 2013 is explained by the euphoria from the APEC Summit held in Vladivostok a year earlier and great expectations in the wake

³ Hereinafter the [figures](#) and tables are compiled on the basis of data from the current archive of the Public Opinion Studies Laboratory.

of optimistic statements by the Russian authorities and multiple media publications about the great future of the city in the context of Russia's "turn to the East" and "its integration into the Asia-Pacific region".

It should also be noted that this trend of positive perception of Japan is characteristic of the entire Pacific Russia. It is discussed in our recent work [Larin, Larina 2020, p. 23], so there is no need to address this issue again. It is important to keep in mind that the answers to the first question give us nothing more than a scale of country priorities of individuals, age and social groups, but in no case do they allow us to speak of their antipathies, just as they do not give us a possibility to measure the real "degree" of preferences and love of respondents.

The motivation of the people expressing liking for a particular country is of no small importance for understanding their true attitude towards it. Respondents identified three main reasons why they like Japan. 68 percent of those who admitted liking Japan mentioned its history, culture, and traditions. For 58 percent, a very important argument was also the quality and comfort of life of the Japanese, and for 54 percent – also the level of economic development of the country.

This order is typical of respondents of all ages, with the exception of 30-year-olds, among whom interest in Japan's culture and traditions is important only for 58 percent. For them, the quality and comfort of life stands in the first place (65 percent). Respondents over 60 (79 percent of those who like Japan the most) and young people under the age of 20 (71 percent) show the greatest interest in Japanese culture. The level of people's well-being (34 percent), natural diversity (22 percent), and the country's political system (5 percent) make up the second group of reasons for liking Japan. Finally, 12 percent of the respondents who like Japan explained their attitude to the country with "inexplicable liking", and most of these are found among the 30-year-old residents of Vladivostok (25 percent of those who like Japan the most), while, among the 50-year-old respondents, those who are unable to formulate the reasons for their attitude account for only 4 percent.

It is interesting to compare the reasons that guided the respondents when choosing the countries they liked. The coincidence of the scale

of values among those residents of Vladivostok who like the USA and South Korea the most is obvious. It is also noticeable that the quality and comfort of life for them is more important than the abstract “level of economic development”.

Table 2

Reasons for Vladivostok residents' liking for countries of the world
(2021, place in the list of reasons and percentage of the number
of people who like the country the most)

	Japan (172)	South Korea (63)	China (55)	USA (51)	India (17)	North Korea (9)
History, culture, traditions of the country	№ 1 (68 %)	№ 4 (24 %)	№ 1 (69 %)	№ 4 (28 %)	№ 1 (95 %)	№ 2 (46 %)
Quality and comfort of life	№ 2 (58 %)	№ 1 (73 %)	№ 4 (20 %)	№ 1 (71 %)	№ 4/5 (5 %)	№ 4 (23 %)
Level of economic development	№ 3 (54 %)	№ 2 (54 %)	№ 2 (62 %)	№ 2 (53 %)	None	№ 5/7 (9 %)
Level of well- being	№ 4 (34 %)	№ 3 (41 %)	№ 6 (13 %)	№ 3 (43 %)	None	№ 5/7 (9 %)
Natural diversity	№ 5 (22 %)	№ 5/6 (13 %)	№ 3 (26 %)	№ 5 (25 %)	№ 2 (46 %)	№ 5/7 (9 %)
Inexplicable liking	№ 6 (12 %)	№ 5/6 (13 %)	№ 7 (11 %)	№ 6/7 (14 %)	№ 3 (17 %)	№ 3 (32 %)
Political system	№ 7 (5 %)	№ 7 (3 %)	№ 5 (18 %)	№ 6/7 (14 %)	№ 4/5 (5 %)	№ 1 (55 %)

Looking at the results of our research in the last two decades, it is easy to find that the reasons for the sympathies held by Vladivostok citizens, as well as all residents of the Russian Far East, towards Japan remain

virtually unchanged, no matter what set of questions researchers use to analyze its causes. Of those who named Japan the most attractive country in 2013 (and these were 60 percent of the respondents), the overwhelming majority – 83 percent – named the level of its economic development and cultural traditions as the main reasons for their choice. In 2017 and 2019, the same two motives guided 86 to 100 percent of the Vladivostok respondents who named Japan. 42 percent of the respondents in 2013, 48 percent in 2017, and 57 percent in 2019 referred to the “friendliness and hospitality” of the Japanese. The natural diversity of the country was important for 20, 33, and 25 percent, respectively.

Considering that no more than 15 percent of Vladivostok residents could personally get acquainted with life in Japan and its cultural traditions, as the results of previous surveys show,⁴ and the level of knowledge about the country, even among those who like it, is minimal and not much higher than that of the rest of the respondents [Larin, Larina 2011, p. 193], the conclusion is obvious: liking stemmed from the mythologized and stylized image of the country “that does not exist” [Kulanov 2004, p. 59], which began to take root in the minds of Russians in the late 19th century and persists, despite all the collisions of interstate relations, to this day.

The respondents’ answers to the next question of the questionnaire – “What are the countries listed below for you in the first place?” – specify the components from which the image of Japan is formed among the residents of Vladivostok. For almost half of the respondents (48.7 percent), the main feature in this image is the high level of economic and technological development of Japan. For 16 percent of the respondents, it is primarily an “attractive and mysterious culture”, for 12 percent – a “beautiful, comfortable country to live in”. A very small proportion of

⁴ According to the results of the 2013 survey, 85 percent of the respondents from Vladivostok have never been to Japan. The number of Vladivostok residents who have visited Japan is noticeably higher than the average in Russia, but clearly not enough to form an opinion based on personal experience.

the respondents (5 percent) consider the economic partnership between the two countries to be the determining factor (Table 3). For comparison, we would like to note that it is exactly in this way – as an “important economic partner of Russia and the Far East” – that China is perceived in the region (one respondent in two surveyed in Vladivostok (51.1 percent) answered this way). The USA, on the contrary, is seen by the residents of Vladivostok, primarily, as a military-political rival of Russia (54.4 percent of the respondents).

Table 3

Answers to the question “What are the countries listed below for you in the first place?” (Vladivostok, 2021, as a percentage of the total number of respondents)

	Japan	South Korea	China	USA	India
A highly developed economic and technological power	48.7	21.2	22.4	22.6	1
Attractive and mysterious culture	15.7	7	10.6	0.7	46.3
A beautiful, comfortable country to live in	12.3	18.8	1.2	3.1	1.9
An important economic partner of Russia and the Far East	5.1	8.4	51.1	2.4	1.2
Russia's military and political rival	2.9	2.4	3.9	54.5	1.4
No answer	15.2	41.9	10.8	16.6	46.7

There are no noticeable gender and age differences in the answers to this question. The only notable feature is that, surprisingly, the proportion of men who consider the high level of economic and technological development to be a determining factor for Japan (45.2 percent) is smaller than the proportion of women (51.8 percent), while, among women, a smaller percentage noted the importance of cultural attractiveness

and mysteriousness than among men (11.9 percent and 19.8 percent respectively).

Despite the fact that Japan was named the country of the greatest liking by slightly more than 41 percent of the surveyed Vladivostok residents, a noticeably larger number of them find a lot of attractive things in that country, primarily in culture and high technology. Only 3 percent of the total number of respondents admitted that nothing attracts them in Japan (Table 4).

Table 4

The most attractive thing in Japan for residents of Vladivostok
(2021, as a percentage of the total number of respondents)

	All respondents	Men	Women
Culture	61	56.3	6.,1
High technologies	49.9	51.3	48.6
Nature	48	41.6	53.7
Cuisine	41	35.5	45.9
History	36.9	37.1	36.7
Recreational opportunities	25.1	21.3	28.4
Customs	24.6	20.8	28
Lifestyle	24.3	24.4	24.3
Order and organization	21.7	28.9	15.1
Medicine	20.2	19.3	21.1
Architecture	17.8	17.8	17.9
Entertainment	16.4	14.2	18.3
Shopping	10.8	10.7	11
Museums	8.4	9.1	7.8
Etiquette	8.4	9.6	7.3
Cinema	6.3	6.6	6
Sake	5.3	9.1	1.8
Fashion	4.3	3.6	5

Theatre	4.3	4.1	4.6
Literature	4.1	5.1	3.2
Japanese women	4.1	7.1	1.4
Religious beliefs	3.1	3.6	2.8
Traditional music	2.7	2	3.2
Sports	0.7	1.5	0
Nothing attracts	3.1	2.5	3.7

Japan's attractiveness for Vladivostok inhabitants and their great interest in various aspects of the country's life predetermined their answers to the question "Which of the following countries would you like to visit the most?". It was Japan that took the undisputed first place, having received 48 percent of the votes. It was followed by the USA (17.8 percent), South Korea (14.2 percent), China and India (8.2 percent each) by a wide margin. North Korea was in the last position (3.9 percent).

There are more people wishing to visit Japan among women (51.4 percent) than among men (44.2 percent); among young people aged 21–20 years (53.4 percent) – more than among fifty-year-olds (43.5 percent). For comparison, it should be noted that the 50-year-old respondents showed the greatest interest in traveling to India and South Korea; the people over 60 years old showed the greatest interest in China, but the young people under the age of 20 are most eager to get to the USA and North Korea. Also, Japan has been the most attractive tourist destination for Vladivostok residents for quite a long time ([Figure 3](#)).

82 percent of the respondents who would like to visit Japan first of all in 2021 explained their desire with curiosity (acquaintance with the culture, traditions, and history of the country). 54 percent were also guided by the desire to "rest and have a good time". For 27 percent, gastronomic interest was important (acquaintance with Japanese cuisine), and 8 percent were attracted by shopping. Finally, for 10 percent of the respondents, a trip was a professional need. Those respondents who chose other countries as a priority object to visit were mainly guided by the same motives (Table 5).

Table 5

Motivations for a trip to the country (Vladivostok, 2021,
as a percentage of the number of respondents who said
they would want to visit the country)

	Japan	South Korea	China	USA	India	North Korea
Curiosity (acquaintance with the country's culture, traditions, and history)	82	62	65	70	98	70
Desire to rest and have a good time	54	62	48	59	27	18
Gastronomic interest (local cuisine)	27	25	36	10	17	18
Professional need (business, study, scientific, cultural, sports, and other ties)	10	17	12	34	0	10
Shopping	8	8	21	8	12	5

Russia-Japan Relations

The attitude of Russians towards Japan is largely determined not only by their abstract interest in the country, ideas about its culture and traditions, the level of economic development and the organization of society, but also by the assessment of the state of bilateral political relations, which traditionally are seen by them, first of all, through the prism of the territorial issue and are considered in the context of threats to the interests and security of Russia.

Since security is impossible without at least a minimum level of mutual trust, the first question in this section of the survey was: "How would you assess the degree of your trust towards the following

countries?”. The respondents could choose an assessment of the level of trust towards each country in the range from 1 (the lowest level of trust) to 6 points (the highest level). The scores for Japan were distributed as follows: 1 point – 11.3 percent, 2 points – 8.4 percent, 3 points – 20.5 percent, 4 points – 21.2 percent, 5 points – 24.3 percent, 6 points – 13 percent.

For a more accurate assessment of the level of trust/distrust towards the country, we remove the average (neutral) scores – 3 and 4 points – and compare the number of respondents who chose 1–2 points (distrust) with those who chose 5–6 points (trust). For Japan, this ratio is 19.7 against 37.3 percent, i.e., there are almost twice as many respondents who trust Japan as those who do not trust it. But this ratio varies significantly depending on the age of the respondents (Table 6).

Table 6

Assessment of the degree of Vladivostok residents' trust towards Japan
(2021, by age of respondents, as a percentage
of the number of respondents)

Age	Trust	Do not trust	Difference
under 20 years	60	6.7	+ 53.7
21 to 30 years	43.8	13.7	+ 30.1
31 to 40 years	38.9	19.5	+ 19.4
41 to 50 years	33.3	26.9	+ 6.4
51 to 60 years	37.6	20.3	+ 17.3
Over 60 years	27.7	20.8	+ 7.1

As Table 6 shows, young people and the older generation trust Japan to a greater extent than middle-aged people. The biggest skeptics were found among the 40-year-old Vladivostok residents. A comparison of the degree of trust of Vladivostok residents towards different countries of the region, made according to the same criteria,

shows a very diverse attitude towards them (Table 7). It is quite obvious that Japan enjoys the greatest trust, while the USA and North Korea receive the least.

Table 7

Assessment of the degree of trust of Vladivostok residents towards countries of the world (2021, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Country	Trust (values 5+6)	Do not trust (values 1+2)	Difference
Japan	37.3	19.7	+ 17.6
South Korea	30.6	17.8	+ 12.8
China	23.1	22.7	+ 0.4
India	21.2	28.5	- 7.3
USA	12.6	53.0	- 41.4
North Korea	11.6	55.4	- 43.8

In 2013, when a similar question about trust in the countries of the region, although in a slightly different interpretation, was also present in the questionnaire, the level of trust towards Japan in Vladivostok was slightly higher ([Figure 4](#)).

The Vladivostok residents assessed the quality of current Russia-Japan relations in 2021 mostly positively. About a half of the respondents (46.5 percent) agreed that these relations could be called *neighborly*. 16.9 percent consider them friendly. There are also initiative responses: “neutral”, “partner”, “a pendulum between neighborly and tense”. However, about a third of the respondents do not share a positive attitude: 28.7 percent of the respondents called Russia-Japan relations tense, and 2.2 percent called them hostile. Comparison with other Asia-Pacific countries shows that Japan loses in terms of “good neighborliness” with Russia to China and South Korea, and in terms of “friendliness” also to India, but it is ahead of North Korea and significantly ahead of the United States of America.

Table 8

Assessment of the quality of relations with countries of the world
(Vladivostok, 2021, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Country	Positive			Negative			No answer
	Neighborhoodly	Friendly	Total	Tense	Hostile	Total	
India	35.7	53.5	89.2	3.4	0.5	3.7	7.1
China	54.2	33.5	87.7	7.7	1.4	9.1	3.2
South Korea	56.4	24.3	80.7	11.3	1.9	13.2	6.1
Japan	46.5	16.9	63.4	28.7	2.2	30.9	5.7
North Korea	39.5	14.0	53.5	32.8	4.1	36.9	9.6
USA	7.5	3.1	10.6	51.8	34.5	86.3	3.1

The quality of Russia's bilateral relations is largely shaped by the residents of the country in the context of their ideas about the presence or absence of threats from these states to the interests and security of Russia. As the answers to the question "Do you think the countries listed below pose a threat to Russia's interests and security?" show, the number of respondents who see threats from Japan (32.8 percent) only slightly diverges from the number of those who call Russia-Japan relations "tense" and "hostile" (30.9 percent). However, this correlation cannot be considered obligatory. For example, it does not work in any way in relation to China. Despite the fact that almost 88 percent of the respondents positively assessed current Russia-China relations, 42.4 percent of the respondents still believe that there are threats to Russia from the PRC (Table 9).

We also note that, over the past decade, the proportion of Vladivostok residents who see Japan as a threat has not changed (33–35 percent), while the number of those who are confident in the absence of the threat has increased. This is especially noticeable against the background of a growing negative perception of the USA and a more positive one of China and South Korea. 40-year-old residents of Vladivostok, to a greater extent than the representatives of other age groups, feel danger from Japan

(46.2 percent of the respondents). They are most acutely aware of the threats coming from the USA and South Korea (Table 10). The “Japanese threat” worries the elderly the least (18.1 percent). This generation generally assesses hypothetical threats from neighboring states more calmly. The exception is the United States: three Vladivostok residents in four see Washington’s policy as a real threat to Russia.

Table 9

Do these states pose a threat to the interests and security of Russia?
(Vladivostok, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Country	Yes, they do		No, they do not		Uncertain how to answer	
	2010	2021	2010	2021	2010	2021
USA	39	73	36	14	25	13
China	62	42	20	37	18	21
North Korea	33	38	42	41	25	21
Japan	35	33	36	46	29	21
South Korea	22	12	53	71	25	17

Table 10

Feeling a threat to the interests and security of Russia
from the countries of the Asia-Pacific region (Vladivostok, 2021,
by age, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Country	Age of Respondents					
	Under 20	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	Over 60
USA	66.7	60.3	75.9	84.6	75.4	69.4
China	33.3	56.2	42.6	52.6	40.6	20.8
North Korea	60	53.4	40.7	43.6	33.3	13.9
Japan	26.7	30.1	39.8	46.2	26.1	18.1
South Korea	6.7	11	9.3	20.5	15.9	5.6
India	6.7	11	6.5	9	4.3	0

The respondents naturally consider its territorial claims to be the main threat posed by Japan (36.6 percent of the respondents). No more than 10 percent of Vladivostok residents believe in the existence of other threats. The situation is different with other world powers – China and the USA. As for China, in addition to Beijing’s territorial claims, respondents fear its economic expansion. Moreover, almost 15 percent believe in the possibility of an armed conflict with China. There is a whole bunch of threats from the USA, starting with the undermining of Russia’s sovereignty and independence and ending with territorial claims towards it (Table 11).

Table 11

Assessment of the nature of threats coming from China,
the USA, and Japan
(Vladivostok, 2021, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

	Japan	China	USA
Territorial claims	36.6	27.5	7.7
Unpredictable behavior	10.1	19.3	27.7
Undermining the sovereignty and independence of Russia	9.2	12.8	43.1
Likelihood of an armed conflict	8.4	14.9	42.9
I feel it on a subconscious level	5.1	9.4	13.3
Ideological sabotage	4.6	7.5	37.6
Economic expansion	2.9	24.6	27.2

Despite the fact that more than a third of the respondents (36.6 percent) indicated the existence of territorial claims by Japan as a threat to Russia’s interests and security, only 14 percent of the respondents believe that Russia-Japan relations will worsen in the future. One respondent in five (22.2 percent) is sure that they will improve, while almost twice as many respondents (42.2 percent) believe that the relations will not change (Table 12). Moreover, there are twice

as many pessimists among men as among women: 19.8 percent of the former and only 8.7 percent of the latter are sure that the relations will get worse. The greatest believers in the stability of the relations (“will not change”) are young people under 20 (60 percent of the respondents of this age) and people over 60 (51.4 percent). The biggest numbers of optimists (“relations will improve”) and pessimists (“will worsen”) are found among the 20-year-olds (28.8 and 19.2 percent, respectively).

Table 12

Assessment of prospects for Russia’s relations
with the countries of the world
(Vladivostok, 2021, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Country	Prospects for Relations			
	They will improve	They will worsen	They will not change	Uncertain how to answer
Japan	22.2	14	42.4	21.4
India	33.7	2.9	49.2	14.2
China	30.4	12.8	40.2	16,6
South Korea	25.3	5.5	50.4	18.8
North Korea	14.5	7.5	53.5	24.6
USA	9.4	41.9	28.2	20.5

Assessing the dynamics of the Vladivostok residents’ expectations regarding the future of Russia-Japan relations, it is not difficult to see that pessimism and uncertainty in their assessments became noticeably greater by the end of the decade, and this applies not only to relations with Japan, but also with China ([Figure 5](#)).

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The respondents' focus on the development of cooperation between Russia and Japan also implies their choice of priority areas for cooperation. More than a half consider trade and investment to be the most important areas (54.2 percent). More than 40 percent of the respondents support the development of relations in two areas: foreign policy and security (46.3 percent), science and technology (46.7 percent), tourism (43.4 percent), as well as cross-border and interregional cooperation (40.3 percent). Energy, education, culture and public diplomacy were considered important by 10 to 15 percent of the respondents. Interestingly, women (56.4 percent of the total number) are more actively in favor of cooperation in the field of foreign policy and security than men (35 percent), and among men there are more supporters of energy cooperation (19.3 vs 3.2 percent).

Conclusion

The analysis of the results of the 2021 survey and their comparison with the research data of the last decade allow us to draw some conclusions about the current attitude of Vladivostok residents to Japan and to Russia-Japan cooperation.

1. Japan is the most attractive culture for them in the Asia-Pacific region. Having received the votes of 40 percent of the respondents, it is significantly ahead of the other countries proposed in the questionnaire (China, USA, India, North and South Korea) in this regard. Comparison of the survey results with the materials obtained in the course of the previous studies suggests that Japan's leadership as the most attractive country for residents of the entire Russian Far East has been maintained for at least the last two decades.

2. The high level of economic and technological development of Japan is the main typological feature, the basis of its image among most residents of Vladivostok. But what attracts citizens to Japan, arousing genuine interest in that country, is, first of all, its rich history, exotic culture and traditions, as well as the quality and comfort of life there.

3. The desire to get acquainted with the culture, traditions, and history of Japan is precisely the main motive for a trip there, which puts Japan on a confident first place in the list of countries that Vladivostok residents would like to visit first.

4. However, it is not only culture and nature that make the Land of the Rising Sun so popular among the residents of Vladivostok. Japan also enjoys the highest level of trust among the Asia-Pacific countries mentioned in the questionnaire. But, at the same time, about a fifth of the respondents refuse to trust it. A similar perception is typical for China and South Korea, which indicates the presence of a population group that is generally skeptical about neighboring states. In the course of previous surveys, we already identified a segment of the population in the Far East with a negative attitude to foreigners in general [Larin, Larina 2019, p. 21; Larin, Larina 2020, p. 42], so this study fully confirms the previously made conclusions.

5. Vladivostok residents assess Russia-Japan relations and prospects for their development mainly in a positive way. However, about a third of citizens do not share these assessments, considering the relationship tense and even hostile. Such views are largely determined by the existence of ideas about threats to Russia and its interests from Japan, which are mainly associated with its territorial claims. Nevertheless, Vladivostok residents advocate the development of various forms and areas of Russia-Japan cooperation, among which trade and economic ties, science and technology, foreign policy and security are given priority.

In general, the survey results show the existence of a favorable platform for the continued development of Russia-Japan relations in Vladivostok, the groundlessness of some claims about the negative influence of the Chinese factor on these ties, although there is a certain group of the population that can easily become a source of unfavorable trends in the perception of Japan with corresponding consequences for the development of the bilateral dialogue in the field of near-border and interregional ties.

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