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## **THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE YOUTH**

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*Abstract:* The main problems of political socialization of Japanese youth are studied in the paper. According to the author's point of view, participation in the election process, youth movements, and a growing interest in international issues are the principal trends and the main indicators of Japanese youth's political activity and political socialization of young people in contemporary Japanese society.

Political socialization is the transmission of political culture to new generations of citizens in a given society and it includes such activities as voting campaigns, attending meetings, joining political parties, taking part in political discussions, etc. Whether young people have ability to quickly adapt to the changing circumstances of the world around them depends on the process of political socialization. The difficulties that characterize the Japanese youth's political socialization process during the last decade and its outcomes have become especially evident now - young people exhibit a less developed sense of civic duty, and take the obligations of citizenship more lightly than older generations. One of the factors influencing young people's tendency to be engaged in civic and political activities may be the fact that the traditional mobilizing institutions of politics in Japan are not especially interested in reaching out to young people. In the article the main problems of political socialization of Japanese youth are examined. Using the data from large-scale surveys of Pew Research Center and some data of Mainichi Shimbun surveys carried out in 2017, the author analyzes whether young Japanese people are active participants of political process or play the role of unconcerned spectators.

*Keywords:* political socialization, Japanese youth, problems, principal trends

Political activity of the youth [Sourtayev 1999, p.152], the social group of young persons aged 15 to 29, who are mostly developed as personalities but have flexible values responsive to various influences, is an indicator of processes evolving in modern society. As a rule, development outlooks of any country ascribe a key role to the young, who are the main mobilization resource of society and the generation determining the future of the state [Zagrebin 2014]. In recent years, the understanding of the role and significance of the young in the development of society and the country has grown a lot, so the place and role of the younger generation in the political process and its involvement in politics are deemed to be some of the most debated issues in the modern world.

Political socialization is particularly intensive in the young age: a person who has been passively watching the political process becomes its participant as a result of developed views, beliefs, perceptions, and development of political culture. How are the modern young Japanese involved in this process? Are the young Japanese active participants, or do they play the role of engaged bystanders?

### **Democratic relations**

Whenever political culture of the young is mentioned nowadays, people tend to describe it as underdeveloped, if not totally non-existent. The preservation and development of democratic foundations in any society are impossible without political engagement of the young, who are responsible for the country's democratic potential. The process of political socialization of young people is significant because it forges a person into a citizen and incorporates the latter into the political system. For the purpose of establishing and defining the attitude of Japanese citizens to democratic values and democratic processes (as well as the level of realization of their civil rights and freedoms), the Pew Research Center carried out a massive sociological survey in 2017 [Japanese Divided on Democracy's Success... 2017].

Democracy is vividly demonstrating its capacity to adjust to various national and cultural conditions. The question of individual rights and

freedoms is more topical for the West, while most countries of the East prioritize group rights and interests. The debate on whether democracy has grown roots in Japan and whether the political system that has become institutionalized there could be called a democracy in the traditional sense of this word is still ongoing. To a large extent, this is explained by national specifics of Japanese democracy, which makes it different from Western democratic models. Specialists affirm its historical specifics and speak about “Japanese-style democracy,” a certain hybrid that might surpass the original, i.e. the Western model, in terms of its resilience and effectiveness [Gadzhiev 2010].

Indeed, the future of Japanese politics belongs to the young, but it is also largely determined by the reaction of older generations of the Japanese to the ongoing transformations. This circumstance has prompted us to focus on age groups in our study.

According to the survey, modern Japanese are generally satisfied with the level of democracy in their society (57%). The level is much lower than those in the Netherlands (71%), Germany (69%), or Sweden (67%), but higher than the ones in the United States (51%), the United Kingdom (49%), and Australia (48%).

Meanwhile, 47% of Japanese citizens expressed certain pessimism about democracy in their country. The respondents were not divided by political or social considerations: the biggest differences in the attitude to democracy appeared between various age groups: 32% of the respondents aged 18 to 29 were “discontent”, which is fewer than in other age groups (50% in the group aged 30 to 49, and 48% in the group older than 50). The young Japanese are more satisfied with the level of democracy in society than their older compatriots, and are inclined to support the technocratic approach and the opinion of experts in the governmental decision-making process: 63% of the Japanese aged 18 to 29 believe that decisions must be made exclusively by experts (vs. 45% in the 50+ age group).

The opinion of Keio University Professor Tomohiko Taniguchi (special advisor of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Cabinet) is of interest in this respect. He analyzed the implications of Brexit for the United Kingdom, extrapolated them on Japan, and concluded that representative

democracy required substantive debates on any issues that might have global consequences for society. Obviously, Shinzo Abe realized that a referendum on such important matters as Brexit could trigger demagoguery and xenophobic sentiments in society or even split a nation. This realization leads to the conclusion that even the adoption of amendments to the Japanese Constitution would require not only a vote in both Diet chambers, but also a nationwide referendum which, in the epoch of digital democracy, when predilections prevail over sense and arguments, could be an extremely difficult thing to accomplish [Taniguchi 2016].

In addition, Brexit has shown the Japanese the potential danger created by different views of generations. For instance, British voters with life expectancy fewer than 20 years voted for leaving the EU, while those with life expectancy of over 50 years (i.e. the young Brits) voted for staying. This suggests a comparison with the situation in modern Japan, where “division” over matters that are crucial to society (e.g., the problem of women’s employment, or the regulatory reform) and have a strong effect on sentiments of the young Japanese could be even more catastrophic to society in general.

In an increasingly interconnected world, which the young Japanese understand and accept as a source of huge opportunities, the older generation of politicians should listen to the opinion of the young on issues with long-term prospects and far-reaching consequences more frequently and closely than to the opinion of their current target audience, which rejects everything new or strange in their futile hopes to go back to their young days. This is the reason for realizing the need to be more active in persuading the young Japanese to vote: the more young voters there are, the stronger the chance that their voices will not be muffled by the older voters, whose number has become disproportionately large.

### **Old problems – new voters?**

Elections are turning into an indicator of political socialization of modern young people [Denisova 2010]. Considering Japan’s aging population (over a quarter of the population is older than 60), the

political landscape has turned into one in which political candidates focus solely on the elderly demographic. As the population aged 60 and over reaches 42% of the country's total by 2050, this trend will become increasingly pronounced. Political passivity and absenteeism are more characteristic of the young people than of any other population group. So as this demographic shift happens, the young voices of Japan's future may become drowned out and they would never be heard.

Indeed, political apathy among young people is not a phenomenon unique to Japan, and it is a common trend in many developed countries today. In Canada's 2011 national election, 38.8 % of registered voters aged 18 to 24 cast their ballots, while in the U.S., 41.2 % of young people voted in the 2012 presidential election. In many developed countries, it seems that the elderly, rather than the young, are more interested in political issues [Ostaszewski 2015]. Japan is no exception. Only 38% of 20-year-old Japanese took part in the national elections in 2012 (compared to 75% of voters aged 60). However, the political apathy apparent in the recent decades has not always been typical of the young Japanese: 57.76% of young Japanese voters came to polls in 1990, but their turnout drastically dropped to 36.5% six years later.

A poll regarding "participation of the young in the country's political life," which was carried out by one of the Japanese research institutes studying the issues of the young generation, showed that only 30% of 20-year-old Japanese and 6.5% of Japanese college students believed that they could make a difference in politics and that their involvement or contribution to politics would matter. Some were disappointed with their personal participation in the political process and have no wish to participate in it, and others were not participating because of their passivity.

### **From apathy to sympathy**

Experts say, however, that the future becomes brighter for politically savvy young voters [Ostaszewski 2015]. As Japanese Diet approved the lowering of voting age in Japan from 20 to 18, 2.4 million more voters were added to the electorate of 104 million.

As the voting age was lowered, teenagers demonstrated their political activity. Shortly before the October 22, 2017 election to the House of Representatives, in September 2017, Mainichi Shimbun held two national public opinion polls [Do the young lean right?... 2017], which showed that the approval rating of the Abe Cabinet and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is higher among teenage voters and those in their 20s and 30s than among voters over 40, indicating a conservative tack in young people's views.

In the first poll by Mainichi Shimbun, roughly 40% of those over 70 and in their 40s said they supported the Cabinet. Notably, almost a half (!) of teenage voters and the Japanese in their 20s expressed their support for the Abe government. In the second poll, 40% of the young Japanese expressed their support for the government (and less than 40% of those in their 40s).

The approval rate of LDP policies was also highest among the young, standing at nearly 40% in the first survey and around 30% in the second. This stood out from the less than 30% in the first and roughly 30% in the second survey among those aged 30 to 69.

Some of the younger respondents highlighted a lack of political knowledge among many members of their age group, saying that "If I don't know anything, I just pick the most famous candidate." Young respondents criticized their generation, pointing out that "Those who aren't interested in politics just vote for the people whose names they know" and "They don't have their own political beliefs, so they just go with the candidate with the most support." This indicates a deficit of knowledge and experience of various generations of voters.

According to Prof. Masao Matsumoto, head of the Social Research Center of the Saitama University and an expert in political awareness and voter behavior, "other polls also demonstrated a high approval rating of the government and the Liberal Democratic Party, especially amongst teenage voters." Of course, these numbers do not evidence intensive political activity and a high voter turnout but, to some extent, they characterize a new group of voters which might potentially be involved in political processes in the country.

### From apathy to antipathy

Informal groups and civil associations are acquiring a strong influence on the political socialization process. Involvement of the young in the political process depends on many factors, including their confidence that this activity would have at least some positive influence on the solution of problems and the improvement of the general situation in the country. In the opinion of V. Ostaszewski, an analyst and researcher of Canada's Asia Pacific Foundation, the young Japanese, who were deemed to be political indifferent, acquired their new political voice since the beginning of the debate on the security bills<sup>1</sup> [Ostaszewski 2015]. What is more, the previous political apathy of the young Japanese might be replaced with totally different feelings [Martin 2015].

No serious student protests have happened since the 1960s, but in the past few years, such groups as *Zengakuren*<sup>2</sup> and *SEALDs*<sup>3</sup> have become active and started to discuss contentious issues of Japanese society. For instance, *SEALDs* [Slater, O'Day, Uno, Kindstrand, Takano 2015] and *TDC* have been active since the anti-nuclear demonstrations [Manabe 2014] that followed the earthquake and tsunami disaster in Japan in 2011, and they protested against the inability of the Japanese government to deal with this catastrophe and its consequences. *SEALDs* members and other young activists also protested against “the State Secrecy Act”<sup>4</sup> and the Legislation for Peace and Security (aka Collective

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<sup>1</sup> The package of security bills approved by the Diet and signed by Prime Minister Abe enables the Japanese Self-Defense Forces to give logistic support to and assist in rescue operations of foreign forces.

<sup>2</sup> *Zengakuren*, established in 1948, is an abbreviation for the All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Governing Associations which united about a half of the nation's students (See: [Shimbori 1971] ).

<sup>3</sup> *SEALD* — Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy — is the largest civic movement organized by students at the end of 2013. It holds rallies and demonstrations in various parts of Japan to fight for democracy, and to address economic equality and poor labor conditions, as well as forms research groups to study Japan's problems.

<sup>4</sup> “The State Secrecy Act” endorsed in 2014 punishes officials with up to ten years in prison for divulging information about defense, foreign policy, anti-espionage, and anti-terrorism activity. People were discontent with the hasty approval of the bill by the ruling coalition and its application to broad spheres of public life — any interview with an official pertaining to defense and foreign policy could be seen as a divulgence of state secrets.

Self-Defense law) [Katharine, Moon, Park, Whelan-Wuest 2016]. Later on, the group focused on broader matters, such as democracy, the Constitution, and national security. Interacting with other activists and using social media to reach out to broader groups of the young, *SEALDs* managed to unite tens of thousands of people across the country, including a crowd of 120 000 (on August 30, 2015), when mass protests against laws broadening the powers of the Self-Defense Forces [Massoviye antivoenniye mitingi... 2015] were held near the Diet building in Tokyo and in 300 other cities.

The above said is a vivid proof of the growing involvement of the young Japanese in organized political activity, i.e. youth organizations of various levels and civic movements the goal of which is to exert tangible influence on the government decision-making process.

### **Satisfied with economy but have some doubts...**

Japan remains one of the most economically developed countries of the world; it is also one of the most successful countries in terms of distributing economic development benefits between its citizens. This is evidenced by the opinion polls which the Prime Minister's Office has been holding since the 1960s. For almost five decades, about 90% of the Japanese have been describing themselves as middle class [Lebedeva 2017, p. 34]. No doubt, stability is a great political value; and the attitude to stability and the assessment of the situation as stable or unstable largely determines the population's readiness to accept government policies. This is particularly important for the young who are inclined to exhibit a fierce reaction whenever they disagree with the government and are ready to take action and to protest. Therefore, the psychological perception of economic and political stability depends not only on the objective situation and its subjective interpretation but also on the subject's attitude to the state (the guarantor and principal subject of stability), individual psychological features, situation, and mood [Deineka, Vartanova 2012]. Obviously, the situation of the national economy has a tangible effect on the process of political socialization of the young Japanese.

In general, the Japanese believe that their life “has greatly improved” – about two-thirds say that life in modern Japan is much better than it was 50 years ago and feel more optimistic than the Americans (37%) who have also been asked to compare their life today and half a century ago. The Japanese feel better in the present-day economic situation and have a more positive view of its condition than they had in 2016. Although the general satisfaction with the economic situation in Japan has been growing, fears about the future remain, and 51% of the Japanese believe that the condition of the global economy poses a serious threat to Japan. While such concerns are much less pronounced than concerns about cyber-attacks and other threats, these are young people aged from 18 to 29 who more often worry about the external economic turbulence (65% vs. 43% in the 50+ age group).

As for the global “economic balance”, surprisingly, only 7% of the Japanese described Japan as “a leading global economic power.” Post-war Japan demonstrated exceptionally high growth rates in a certain historical period, since the 1960s till the early 1970s. In the opinion of Naoki Tanaka, president of the Center for International Public Policy Studies, “other countries have had periods of rapid growth as well, and looking back, we can see that while a given country may experience rapid growth at a given time, no country can lay claim to the kind of enduring strengths that guarantee sustained growth from one era to the next. In fact, no nation in history has sustained high-paced economic growth as the norm. We must begin by realizing that Japan’s ‘economic miracle’ was a passing phenomenon of the 1960s and early 1970s, and nothing more” [Tanaka 2012]. It is likely due to this that the lack of faith in the country’s economic superiority has been characteristic of the Japanese society for years, while now there is a heated discussion about the methods that could give a boost to the national economic development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Speaking of the economic prospects of the next generation, only 19% of the Japanese said that today’s children will be living in a better financial and economic reality than their parents (72% feel pessimistic). Pessimism is most pronounced among the Japanese aged 30 to 49 and

older than 50: in this group, only 18% and 16% respectively believe that the next generation will prosper financially. Against this backdrop, this is inspiring news that about a third (32%) of the young Japanese believe in a better economic future for their children. These feelings are the best proof of the opinion of Japan Foundation head Yohei Sasakawa: “Japan is prosperous and stable, and more than anything else, the number of young people who view the future optimistically is increasing” [Sasakawa 2017].

### **Between the world and oneself**

It is generally believed that the younger generation is disinterested in politics, politically passive, and indifferent to international affairs. Regretfully, these conclusions are supported by numerous surveys and polls. The recent crises in international relations have created tensions in communication and hindered the achievement of understanding between societies. Under these complicated circumstances, young people are not just objects of public influence but also agenda-setting actors capable of learning and acting on the basis of knowledge about the international situation. The young perceive political reality through the lens of their “world view” and develop their attitude to international political events through their system of values, so the interest in global developments is a major form of manifestation of the political behavior of the younger generation. Understandably, the interest in political information, which is realized through the search for and consumption of necessary information, should come first. Globalization and modern technologies are of great value in this respect, as they make young citizens more experienced in collecting and using received information [Rosenau 1997]. Apparently, an important role in the process of political socialization of the youth is played by the media (both printed and electronic), which is a primary source of information and a shaper of opinions and political preferences of the young.

Conscious political, social, economic, and cultural orientation and guidelines of the younger generation largely depend on the media, which

provides information about ongoing events to the public, helps people quench their thirst for information, reflects and structures the reality as a value-based public “view of the world,” performs the role of an indisputable leader in the formation of outlook and political culture of the younger generation, and has a targeted influence on political consciousness and behavior of the young.

Judging by recent surveys, the young Japanese prefer television to the Internet, magazines, etc as their select “source of information about international events” [Zhilina 2015, p. 7]. Other studies [Kiselev, Samarkina 2007] indicate that Internet users (and young people in particular) frequently choose communication activities (contacts with experts, media, and organizations), which are maximally effective on the Internet. And only a small portion of users prefers more active forms of political participation.

Online political activity of the young also depends on whether political information is necessary for their daily life. In this respect, the Internet does not differ much from traditional media outlets, such as printed publications and television. There is an important observation to be made: most young Japanese spend less than 30 minutes per week (!) on reading, listening to, or watching international news. One in five young Japanese reports that they “absolutely have no time to spare on it.” Newspapers are not so helpful in learning about the world, either, considering their weak focus on foreign news and events [Zhilina 2016]. Yet the only way to develop a habit for political evaluation of events, the need for political knowledge, and a wish to understand the essence of global political processes is to find and comprehend necessary information. In other words, political socialization starts with the active involvement of the younger generation in the world of political attitudes, rather than with the passive learning of information.

In John Berry’s opinion, only the people who felt safe in their country could be tolerant to representatives of other countries and cultures. Whenever people feel a threat coming from other ethno-cultural communities, they do not accept cultural differences, demonstrate

intolerance, and resort to self-defense methods [Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Dasen 2002]. The latest studies conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2017 [Japanese Divided on Democracy's Success... 2017] mentioned four external "irritants" with the biggest significance for the Japanese, which make them leave, to a varying degree, their zone of comfort – Korea, both North and South, China, the United States, and Russia. They were asked to evaluate relations and to determine the level of threat from each of these.

### **Is Korea (which of them?) the problem?**

Japan's relations with both states of the Korean Peninsula are a national security priority. However, for a number of historical reasons and factors of the international situation in Northeast Asia, Japan's relations with South and North Korea have not been easy. This factor has a serious impact on the entire foreign policy of Japan [Kistanov 2016b, p. 72]; besides, there are growing fears in Japan about the nuclear and missile threat coming from North Korea [Kistanov 2017, p. 14]. North Korea, which is rapidly enlarging its nuclear potential, is seen as an existential threat by many Japanese. Two-thirds (66%) are concerned about the nuclear weapons of Pyongyang. Notably, the question was asked before North Korea tested long-range missiles and nuclear weapons. At the same time, 41% of the young Japanese speak in favor of stronger relations with Korea (vs. 21% of people older than 50).

In 2017, only 26% of the Japanese had a positive opinion about South Korea. The indicator halved since 2008, when 57% of respondents declared their favorable disposition towards their Far Eastern neighbor. Generations are divided over South Korea: 40% of the young Japanese have a positive opinion, in contrast to 18% of older citizens.

### **And no any love for China?**

Possessing powerful economies and substantial political weight, China and Japan turned into influential global actors in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Foreign political aspirations of both countries and the nature of their relationship have a significant influence on the situation in Northeast Asia and military, political, and economic climate in the region. There are numerous disagreements between China and Japan at the current stage [Zabrovskaya 2013, p. 67].

Although Japan ranks third among global economies, has the seventh largest army on the planet, and plays an important role on the world stage, almost two-thirds of the Japanese (64%) highlight “China’s power” and describe its international influence as a serious threat (although this number has declined by 10 percentage points since 2013). Differences between the young and the older generations in their evaluation of China could be rooted in differences of their opinions on China from the perspective of national security: the Japanese older than 50 (68%) are more concerned about the influence of China than young people (55%).

In general, eight in ten Japanese (83%) speak negatively of China (only 13% speak positively) and few have trust in President Xi Jinping: only 11% approve of his actions on the global political stage, and 81% “have no trust” or “feel undecided.” Importantly, the Japanese aged 30 to 49 and older than 50 express their mistrust in the Chinese leader more often (82%) than the young Japanese (68%).

### **Problems in relations: the U.S.?**

Despite the long-term military alliance and profound economic relations with the United States, Trump’s victory in the presidential election made the Japanese government worry about the future of the bilateral security alliance. During his election campaign, Trump kept expressing his wish to reconsider the alliance formalized by the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. An equally important problem, which will arise during Trump’s tenure, will be the focus of Japan’s nuclear energy program. The 1988 U.S. – Japan Agreement for Cooperation between the Government of Japan and the Government of the United States on Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy expired in July 2018. Negotiations on its resumption will unavoidably

mention the possibility of Japan's military uses of nuclear energy, especially in the light of contradictory statements of Trump concerning the possible possession of nuclear weapons by Japan [Kistanov 2016a]. Nevertheless, over half of the Japanese (57%) are favorably disposed towards the United States (despite a 15% decline in positive sentiments since 2016). A reason for the positive attitude to America is respondents' belief that "this country respects personal rights of its citizens" (69%) and that this "is the leading economy of the world" (62%). The older Japanese also have more trust in the long-standing ally than young people. The latter are prone to see Washington as a serious threat, rather than a good ally, more often (68%) than the older generation of the Japanese (58%).

An analysis of the survey by age groups indicates a big difference between the attitude of the young and the older Japanese to the United States and the U.S. president: about two-thirds (67%) of the young Japanese like this country, and half (51%) of older citizens have become disappointed in it. Just a year before, 69% of the Japanese felt rather optimistic about America. The worsening attitude to America could derive from their mistrust in the new president: more people in Japan fear that the bilateral alliance might experience problems during Trump's presidency.

About 41% of the Japanese predict "deterioration of relations." However, twice as many young Japanese (25% vs. 13% in the age group older than 50) are expecting relations to improve.

Back in 2016, the overwhelming majority (78%) expressed confidence in U.S. President Barack Obama, and in 2017 only 24% said that they trusted Trump, his policy, and approved of his actions. There was a difference in the attitude of age groups to the White House's occupant as well.

In fact, Japan has mixed feelings about Trump. The young give a more positive description of the U.S. leader than the older generation (see Table 1).

Over half of the young Japanese (60% vs. 46% from the group older than 50) described the incumbent U.S. president as "charismatic."

Approximately the same number (64% vs. 41% in the age group older than 50) called him a strong leader and indicated almost three times more often (36% vs. 10% in the age group older than 50) that “Trump cared about ordinary people.”

**Table 1**  
**President Trump’s characteristic**  
**(young Japanese are less critical of Trump) %**

	18–29 %	30-49 %	50+ %	Difference between answers of the youngest and the oldest age group
A strong leader	64	64	41	+23
Well-qualified to be president	28	16	10	+18
Caring about ordinary people	36	26	19	+17
Charismatic	60	64	46	+14
Dangerous	55	51	59	–4
Intolerant	53	60	65	–12
Arrogant	68	79	83	–16

*Source:* [Japanese Divided on Democracy’s Success... 2017].

However, many young respondents called the American president “arrogant” (68% vs. 83% in the age group older than 50), “intolerant” (53% vs. 65% from the age group older than 50) and even “dangerous” (55% vs. 59% in the group older than 50). This explains, to an extent, why only 28% of the young Japanese believe that Trump is “well-qualified to be the U.S. president” (vs. 10% in the age group older than 50). Many disagreed with certain political initiatives of the U.S. president.

Various generations differed in their opinion on the U.S. leader: 31% of the young Japanese said that they trusted Trump and his policies, and only 20% of older citizens felt the same way.

**Devil is not as black as he is painted:**

**Russia**

Despite the cooling of Russia's relations with the United States and other leading Western nations, which imposed sanctions on Moscow over Crimea and Ukraine, 2016 and the beginning of 2017 witnessed a marked rapprochement between Russia and Japan in the political and economic fields [Kistanov 2017, p. 22]. Japan's relations with Russia are sensitive to political circumstances. Hence, a key task of a Japanese leader traditionally lies in the field of domestic policy: he must demonstrate the public his ability to defend national interests by using a broad range of propaganda tools [Streltsov 2017]. According to Professor Streltsov, an expert in international relations, at the level of collective consciousness Japan "still has illusions about Russia, which are largely created by public opinion leaders. According to a prevalent view, President Putin is grateful to Abe for the 'new approach' proposed by the Japanese leader and after the election in March 2018 he will agree to make a decision on the islands that would be politically favorable for Japan" [Streltsov 2017].

According to the October 2017 poll [Japanese Divided on Democracy's Success... 2017], the older Japanese are less worried about the "threat" coming from Russia than about the threat posed by China or the United States. At the same time, 43% believe that Russia poses a serious threat to Japan, and nearly two-thirds (64%) express negative feelings toward Russia. Only 26% spoke favorably of Moscow. However, the poll titled *Publics Worldwide Unfavorable Toward Putin, Russia* exhibited a substantial difference between the ways various generations think about Russia: 53% of the Japanese aged from 18 to 29 have a favorable opinion on their "distant neighbor" (compared to 16% in the 50+ age group; the gap is 37%) (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Positive view on Russia (Russia is taken more positively by the young)**

Country	Total %	18–29 %	30-49 %	50+ %	Difference between answers of the youngest and the oldest age group
Japan	26	53	33	16	+37
Brazil	35	57	34	20	+37
Australia	37	54	38	30	+24
S. Korea	36	51	37	29	+22
UK	26	42	25	21	+21
Germany	27	39	29	22	+17
Spain	27	38	28	21	+17
America	29	40	27	25	+15
Vietnam	83	89	82	74	+15
Canada	27	35	31	21	+14
Netherlands	15	25	13	12	+13
Turkey	32	37	31	26	+11

*Source:* [Publics Worldwide Unfavorable Toward Putin, Russia 2017]

For comparison, in 2013 [Global opinion of Russia Mixed... 2013] a positive attitude towards Russia was expressed by 46% of the young Japanese and 21% of senior respondents (50+), and the gap stood at 25%. Obviously, the number of the young Japanese favorably disposed towards their neighbor in the Asia Pacific region has been on the rise (+7%). A trend of 2013 is “different attitudes towards Russia depending on the respondents’ age.” Indeed, young people aged 18 to 29 in other countries were also inclined to speak more positively of Russia than their compatriots older than 50. In more than eight countries, including G20 member states such as Japan, Canada, Brazil, Germany, the United States, and South Korea, the gap between opinions of the youngest and

oldest age groups amounted to 20%. Experts said that different opinions about Russia could result from perception of “Russia’s changing role in the world.” This trend could also be part of a more universal phenomenon: both the United States and China were often more positively taken by respondents younger than 30.

In 2017, Pew Research Center Director Bruce Stokes explained the different opinions of the young and the senior respondents by difference in evaluation of Russia’s “observance of civil freedoms.” Only 26% of the Japanese believe that Russia “respects personal freedoms of its citizens.” The share of such opinions is 60% among the youth and only 11% in the older group.

The contradictory situation around Russia is also manifested by answers given by different age groups to the question about their attitude towards the Russian leader: most people in Japan (64%) said that they had “no trust in Russian President Vladimir Putin” (vs. 28% of sympathizers). In 2017 about 49% of the young Japanese said that they “trusted the Russian president” (vs. 17% in the 50+ age group).

We should add the following: although international relations have not been easy and simple in recent years, there is a trend that deserves attention: the young Japanese are more open to the world than their older compatriots:

- The young Japanese support stronger relations with North Korea and have a rather positive attitude towards South Korea, in contrast to the older generation;

- The young Japanese are more favorably disposed to relations with China and have more trust in its leader in contrast to the older generation;

- Nearly twice as many Japanese aged 18 to 29 expect relations with the United States to improve and are more amicably disposed towards the U.S. president; they appear to be less subjective than the older Japanese;

- Russia is more favored among Japanese youth and, importantly, the number of the young Japanese who feel optimistic about their “distant neighbor” and bilateral relations has substantially grown. Besides, nearly half of them “trust the Russian president,” while the older generation is

more cautious about him. These factors inspire optimism: the young are leaving the cocoon of domestic isolation and reach out to the big world [Zhilina 2016, p. 69], which provides an optimistic perspective on the future of Japanese society. And since the future of society will be realized precisely through the activities of those who are the youth today, political leaders, understanding this fact, increasingly talk about the need for supporting political and other activity of the young.

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As we can see, the young Japanese are gradually shifting from the group of passive observers of others' victories and "audience" of the political game to the ranks of political process participants. Once the younger generation of the Japanese starts to implement its voting rights, there will be a chance to strengthen its political status with a real, rather than formal opportunity to influence the correlation of political forces in society through a vote. For now, most voters who come to polls in Japan are older than 60, rather than the ones in their 20s, and it is not ruled out that politicians will center their campaigns on older groups. However, just like *SEALDs* pooled efforts with other groups of activists to draw thousands of protesters, Japanese society should unite at every level and clearly demonstrate to the young that their voice could change the situation in politics and the daily life of Japan. The future of the country depends on this balance. In other words, the Japanese political community has a chance to engage the young in its political interests and thus gain support in the election. Even a slight change in electoral preferences in Japan, which has a complex electoral system, might have a strong impact on the division of Diet seats, which is why every vote matters.

An analysis of young people's attitude to economic stability and levels of democracy in the country leads to the following conclusion. Despite strong (compared with those of the older generation) fears about external economic turbulence, the young Japanese are more optimistic about the economic future of their country, which means that the government's

strategy and economic policy have their trust. Besides, the younger Japanese are more satisfied with democratic processes in society than the older generation, but voice a stronger support for the technocratic approach to the decision-making process in the government.

Japanese Prime Minister Abe said in his New Year greetings [New Year's Reflection... 2018] that the year 2018 "would be a period of action" for his country and emphasized that "Everything depends on the aspirations and eagerness of the Japanese people. It all depends on whether or not the Japanese people believe that they can change the future and are able to take action". He expressed confidence in Japan's capacity for significant development if it builds society where everyone is able to realize one's potential. In this context, the young Japanese are viewed not only and not so much as an age group but as a special social and psychological category of people whose importance for political processes evolving in Japan must not be underestimated. Being a subject of political and social relations, the young Japanese will become an active part of society and will be able to influence political decisions.

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