

Article

Staff Still Decide Everything: "Chinese Factor" in the Training System of Russian Scientists and Diplomats Serving in East Asia

Petr E. Podalko*

Introduction

A feature of the formation and development of Russian-Chinese relations was the almost complete absence of a "military precedent" - unlike the overwhelming majority of modern state borders, the border between Russia and China was formed not as a result of long devastating wars, but through negotiations, thanks to the diplomatic efforts of both sides to avoid armed clashes. In this situation, the notorious "human factor" played and continues to play an extremely important role, in this case - personnel policy, on the basis of which the formation of an echelon of direct executors of state interests takes place, as well as the training of comprehensive specialists who, if necessary, can turn from scientists into diplomats, from diplomats into teachers, journalists, etc., and also combine several of the above-mentioned functions in their professional activities. In this proposed article, the author wants to consider some features of the history of the formation of the ranks of Russian orientalists - specialists in China and Japan in the pre-revolutionary period, combining them with individual examples from later times.

* Professor at the School of International Politics, Economics and Communication, Aoyama Gakuin University

1. Russia and China: First Contacts and First Specialists

The first known attempt by Russians to penetrate China dates back to 1608, when Tomsk governor V. V. Volynsky sent a detachment of Cossacks under the command of Ivan Belogolov to explore the routes to the country that was legendary. However, due to the lack of guides and insufficient preparation, the expedition failed at the earliest stage. The second attempt was made seven years later (August 1615), already under the new Romanov dynasty, but also without permission - Tobolsk governor Kurakin sent a detachment of Tomsk Cossacks (under the command of Vassily Tyumenets) to the Mongolian land and China. This time the Cossacks reached the upper reaches of the Abakan River (the modern Republic of Khakassia) and further, where in the area of Lake Ubsu-Nur (now the border of the Mongolian People's Republic and the Republic of Tuva within the Russian Federation) they took the oath of allegiance to the Russian Tsar from the local Mongolian Khan, along the way collecting some information about China. Such "regional initiatives" of the Siberian authorities did not please the central government in Moscow, which by a special decree of the Boyar Duma on December 31, 1616 forbade Siberians from arbitrarily sending embassies to Mongolia and China¹⁾. The desire to take this process under state control was the decision to send a new mission from Tomsk on May 9, 1618 (headed by I. Petelin, according to other sources - I. Petlin), this time directly to China.

On September 1, 1618, Russian diplomatic representatives entered the territory of Beijing for the first time in history, where they stayed for a total of almost two months (until October 24, 1618). Returning home, they carried with them a letter from Emperor Zhu Yijun (Ming Dynasty), which, however, was not read in Moscow until 1675 (!) due to the lack of translators from Chinese there. Thus, the problem of the lack of translators familiar with the language of the Celestial Empire first became apparent. I. Petelin's travel notes, which he kept throughout the expedition, were first published in England

1) *Rodina* No. 10, 2004, p. 9. A second ban on official negotiations with China was imposed in 1620 - *Ibid.*, p. 11.

in 1625²⁾, and only in 1818 in Russia³⁾. In 1689, the Treaty of Nerchinsk was concluded – the first treaty between China and a Western power (which, without a doubt, even pre-Petrine Russia was for the Celestial Empire), almost two hundred years ahead of similar treaties with the main European states. Its obvious disadvantage for Russia, which led to territorial concessions in the Amur region, was largely due to the continued lack of experts in the Chinese language and ritual on the Russian side. Thus, the need for trained personnel was too acute to remain unresolved, and on June 18, 1700, a decree was issued by Peter I to Metropolitan Varlaam Yasinsky of Kyiv on the recruitment of young people to study the Chinese and Mongolian languages at the Orthodox mission in Beijing with the aim of spreading Christianity in China, as well as training future dragomans (translators) for the further development of bilateral relations. The first official Orthodox mission consisting of 10 people, including seven clergymen (the future first Russian trained "Sinologists") arrived in Beijing in January 1716⁴⁾. Subsequently, the status of the Russian mission was secured by the Treaty of Kyakhta (1728), according to which the Chinese government allowed a mission to be sent to Beijing every ten years, consisting of the same ten people: an archimandrite, two hieromonks, a hierodeacon, two clergymen and four seminarians, whose duties, in addition to official Orthodox functions, also included studying the Chinese language; this, in particular, explains the fact that the first specialists in Sinology in Russia were clergymen (they also created our first bilingual dictionaries)⁵⁾. Subsequently, the Chinese

2) Purchas, S. *Hakluytes Posthumus or Purchas his pilgrims, containing a history of the World in sea voyagers and land travels by Englishmen and others*. London, 1625, Vol. 3, p. 797.

3) *Sibirsky Vestnik*, 1818, part 2, pp. 1-36.3) *Sibirsky Vestnik*, 1818, part 2, pp. 1-36.

4) In fact, a small Russian colony had existed in Beijing since the mid-1680s, where the Church of St. Sophia was built and consecrated in 1695.

5) It is significant that at the beginning of the 20th century, the then leading Japanologist of the Oriental Institute, Evgeny G. Spalvin, a former graduate of St. Petersburg University in the Chinese-Manchu-Mongol category, when compiling lists of books required for acquisition for the institute library, specifically indicated dictionaries and other publications of the Beijing Spiritual Mission among the most important teaching aids. See Elantseva Olga P. *E.G. Spalvin as a librarian of the Oriental Institute*. In the collection "The First Professional Japanologist of Russia" (ed. A. S. Dybovsky), Vladivostok, DVGU Publishing House, 2007, p. 107. Below, when referring to the collection, only the title of the collection and the corresponding pages are indicated.

language and everything Chinese in general began to be considered basic knowledge for studying any country and culture of the Far East, which led to the emergence of "two-part" departments of oriental specialization in the then Russian universities, such as: Sino-Mongolian, Sino-Manchu, etc.

2. The "Chinese Accent" of Russian Japanology

The official history of teaching Japanese language and the basics of Japanese culture in Russia is almost as long as in the case of China, but the actual results were more than modest for a long time. On January 8, 1702, in the village of Preobrazhenskoye, the famous meeting of Peter the Great with the Japanese shipwrecked off the coast of Kamchatka, Dembei, took place, which, as is commonly believed, marked the beginning of government interest in the prospect of establishing trade and diplomatic relations with Japan and laid the foundations for teaching Japanese in Russia, and - unlike Chinese - it was initially carried out immediately by native speakers of this language, which were Dembei and all subsequent Japanese who came to Russia in the same way as he. However, the fact that these "teachers" were mostly semi-literate fishermen, the political isolation and geographical remoteness of Japan, and most importantly, the lack of a real need to establish any serious bilateral relations led to the fact that the School of the Japanese Language, opened in St. Petersburg in accordance with Peter's order⁶⁾, having existed for more than a hundred years, was closed in 1816 as not having lived up to expectations⁷⁾. The situation began to change only on the eve of the 20th century, and not in the capital, but on the distant periphery. The Oriental Institute, which opened on October 21, 1899 in Vladivostok, had the task of "preparing students for service in the administrative and commercial and industrial institutions of East Asian Russia and the states adjacent to it,"⁸⁾ for which, along with teaching the living languages of the Far Eastern countries,

6) To be precise, Peter's order concerned only Dembei, from whom it was expected that he would be able to teach his language "to five or six lads"; the school itself was opened already in the era of Empress Anna Ioannovna, in 1736.

7) *In Irkutsk, where the school was transferred by order of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, in 1754.*

8) Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire (PSZRI). Coll. 3, Vol. 19, St. Petersburg, 1902, p. 518. News of the Eastern Institute. 1994, pp. 14-36, 37-47.

the task of preparing comprehensive specialists in these countries was set for the first time here, i.e., language as such was not the only priority. For example, at St. Petersburg University, Japanese had already been taught by that time (since 1888), but it was optional⁹⁾, i.e., at the students' request and without due diligence (and most importantly, without sufficient qualifications) of the teachers; it became a compulsory subject only in 1908¹⁰⁾. At the same time, there was a long and good tradition of studying other Eastern languages in St. Petersburg, in particular, Chinese and Mongolian, and the first Russian Japanologists (who in turn prepared the first "certified" graduation of the Oriental Institute several years later) were actual Sinologists who graduated from the Oriental Faculty.

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Obviously, such a "multi-member" structure of the departments of the Oriental Faculty in St. Petersburg had a certain influence on the new Oriental Institute, where already after the first (general education) year there was a division into independent Chinese-Japanese, Chinese-Korean, Chinese-Manchu and Chinese-Mongolian departments, and for the next three years there was actual specialization, while maintaining the Chinese element as the basic one, from the point of view of the origin of the languages and cultures of the region. The Chinese language played the role of a kind of "Latin of the Far

9) According to other sources, since 1870, Japanese was taught to 3rd-4th year students of the Chinese-Manchu-Mongolian category of St. Petersburg University. St. Petersburg became the third place in Europe where Japanese language instruction was introduced (after Paris and Vienna). - See *The First Professional Japanologist of Russia*, p. 61.

10) This, in particular, explains the fact that during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 St. Petersburg University was unable to provide the army with a single (!) Japanese translator, despite the presence of a Japanese literature department there as early as 1898.

East" at the Institute, and a detailed acquaintance with China and Chinese realities was a mandatory requirement for all students, regardless of the language of their further specialization. Subjects common to all departments also included English (and, if desired, French), theology, courses in general and commercial geography, ethnography, political and modern history of East Asian countries, the state structure of Russia and leading European countries, international civil and commercial law, history of the Far East, political economy, accounting, and commodity science. Among the special subjects, Japanologists, for example, studied an overview of the political structure and commercial and industrial activity of Japan. In order to improve the languages that they were studying, students were sent to the corresponding countries during the summer holidays. Moreover, if the teacher had to visit the country he was studying at least once every three years, then the opportunity for students to conduct independent research during vacation business trips was provided after the first year¹¹⁾, which was logical: the term of study was only four years, and further career development depended on many factors, not always favorable to former students. It is interesting that already in the second year, students and listeners of the Japanese department had to be able to read Japanese newspapers and magazines, understand shorthand, conduct conversations on everyday topics, and by the time of the end of the last, fourth year, be proficient in kanji (Japanese characters) in the amount of up to 3000 characters, translate military-political articles, write business papers, know the basics of private and official correspondence¹²⁾. Even a cursory glance at the list of subjects and especially at the requirements for the volume of knowledge of Japanese studies graduates makes one doubt, on the one hand, that they actually mastered all of the above (since the above standards significantly exceed those currently practiced for graduates of Oriental Studies departments of Russian universities), and on the other hand, makes one think about possible ways of achieving this knowledge. It seems that the study of the Chinese language and culture played an important role in this, especially when it comes to mastering kanji, cursive writing, working with

11) *FEFU. History and Modernity*. 1899-1999. Vladivostok, 1999. pp. 15, 20, 24.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 28.

text, etc. It is worth noting another important point: the need for specialists in Japan and Korea arose in many ways in connection with the sudden (both for most contemporaries, and in many ways for the Russian administration itself) activation of Russian foreign policy in the Far Eastern region, i.e. it was conditioned by the increased situation; the need for Manchu and even Mongolian studies specialists was most likely not that great in reality, and these languages themselves did not seem at that time to be overly important or difficult to master. But no one doubted the importance of the Chinese neighborhood for Russia, both economically and politically, and the consistent training of specialists in "lesser" languages/countries made it possible, if necessary, to quickly retrain the required number of Mongolian, Manchurian, Japanese, and Korean studies specialists to focus on Chinese topics. This hypothesis of the author of the article is partly confirmed by both the places of subsequent service of the officer-students of the Oriental Institute (regardless of the department of their main specialization), and a cursory review of scientific and popular works published by graduates of various departments of the Oriental Institute in subsequent years¹³). However, the absence of a proper Chinese specialization in the Oriental Institute, i.e. the training of narrowly professional Sinologists, without subsequent transition to any other language, is surprising¹⁴). Obviously, this was caused both by doubts regarding the political future of the Chinese state itself at that time, and by purely utilitarian tasks facing the Russian administration in the Far East (interaction with the Manchu elite of continental China, the desire to penetrate deep into the Korean Peninsula, emerging contacts with Japan and transit through Mongolian territory determined the increased interest in the corresponding languages and cultures). Thus, by refusing to consider China as an equal partner, the Russian side recognized the importance of studying China and the Chinese language for the development of the eastern outskirts and consolidation on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. At the same time, the

13) See *"Russian Military Orientalists before 1917. Biographical Dictionary"*. Moscow, "Eastern Literature" of the Russian Academy of Sciences. 2005

14) It should be noted that it was with the introduction of teaching Chinese in the local boys' gymnasium in 1895 that the study of Oriental languages began in Vladivostok. - *"The First Professional Japanologist of Russia,"* p. 132.

process of teaching two eastern languages was extremely difficult both due to purely linguistic difficulties (in fact, the only unifying feature of all the above-mentioned languages was Chinese kanji, which, moreover, was not so necessary for practical application among Mongol and Manchu scholars), and due to the lack of proper experience among teachers and the insufficient level of general preparation of most students and listeners. The result of the accumulated contradictions was the appeal of the director of the Oriental Institute Apollinary V. Rudakov in March 1911 to the Amur Governor-General Nikolai L. Gondatti on the issue of necessary changes in the institute's curricula, compiled on the basis of eight reports compiled by its then teachers, who considered such a method irrational. The main reason was that students did not have time to assimilate the educational material, and significant gaps were formed in the knowledge they received¹⁵⁾. The result was changes in the institute's curricula, expressed in an attempt to introduce a new, Japanese-Korean specialization (instead of Chinese-Korean and Chinese-Japanese), which was not realized for a number of reasons, and the gradual removal of the "Chinese component" from the process of teaching other languages¹⁶⁾. This process ended in the 1920s, and since then Russian universities have avoided introducing into their curricula the teaching of two or more Far Eastern languages as part of students' professional specialization¹⁷⁾.

3. Diplomats and military representatives

In the early 20th century, during the period of the greatest intensification of its diplomatic activity in the Far East, Tsarist Russia had, in addition to missions in Beijing (since 1861), Tokyo (since 1908 with the rank of Embassy)

15) *The First Professional Japanologist of Russia*, p. 25.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 26.

17) Exceptions concern the optional or "introductory" introduction of a second Eastern language, which in any case does not become a compulsory subject with differentiated final assessment. As an option, in a number of universities, as part of the study of the Japanese language, there is a course "kanbun" or "bungo," in which students get acquainted with old written forms, learn the history of Chinese kanji, etc., but the small number of class hours allocated to these subjects, and the rather formal teaching (almost always not by native speakers, but by Russian lecturers) do not ultimately lead to significant results.

and Seoul (since 1885), also many consulates and consular posts, namely: twenty four – on the territory of Qing China¹⁸⁾ (of which five in Xinjiang province and eight in Manchuria), four in Mongolia (which was also then formally subordinate to the Qing Empire¹⁹⁾), five in Korea and five in Japan (at the same time, the consulates in Korea were subordinated to the Russian embassy in Tokyo from the moment Korea was included in the Japanese Empire according to the Act of Annexation of Korea of 1910). According to the calculations of the American researcher George A. Lensen, in total 331 Russian diplomats (including civil and military representatives) served in the Far East countries from 1858 (the conclusion of the Aigun Treaty with China, which established the border along the Amur River) to 1924 (the last year of the "old" embassy in Tokyo, followed by the recognition of the Soviet government by all countries in the region), more than half of whom worked in various regions of China and Mongolia, about 20 percent in Japan, and about 15 percent in two or more countries²⁰⁾. Of the 331 diplomats, 85 people (i.e., almost every fourth) served in the Far East for ten years or more. With regard to China, of the 15 plenipotentiaries, envoys and envoys extraordinary of Russia (including Vice-Admiral Count Evfimiy V. Putyatin, who concluded the Treaty of Beijing in 1860), only six had no experience of working in East Asia before their appointment to that country; the others either became acquainted with that country as language trainees or had managed to spend some time in low-level positions in China, Japan or Korea and thus prepared themselves in a sufficiently broad historical and cultural sense for taking up their new position. In contrast, of the ten Russian envoys and ambassadors to Japan during the same period, only two – Roman R. Rosen and Vassily N. Krupensky – had experience of previous work in the East (in Japan and China, respectively)²¹⁾. It was they who ultimately proved to be the most recognized

18) The Consulate in Dairen, formally located on Chinese territory, was subordinate to the Embassy in Tokyo.

19) The territory of Mongolia at that time does not fully coincide with the modern borders of the Mongolian People's Republic, partially including the lands of the autonomous Inner Mongolia within China.

20) Lensen G.A. *Russian Diplomatic and Consular Officials in East Asia*. Sophia University, Tokyo, 1968, pp. 3-8.

21) *Ibid.*

in terms of professional authority both in the eyes of their superiors and the Japanese authorities: Rosen participated in the Portsmouth Peace Conference of 1905 as the second official representative of Russia (the future Count Sergei Yu. Witte was appointed first), and Krupensky (appointed ambassador to Japan in 1916), according to some sources, even managed to spend some time as the doyen of the entire diplomatic corps in Tokyo before leaving the country in 1921. It should also be noted that many Russian diplomats who served in Japan got there through China, having completed an internship there or having served for some time in one of the Russian missions, and thanks to such “processing” by the Chinese environment, they seemed to have settled into life in Asia²²⁾.

Here I would like to quote one of these diplomats, familiar with life and work in both of these countries, Dmitry I. Abrikosov²³⁾, who became the last representative of “old Russia” in Japan recognized by the local authorities (after the departure of Vassily N. Krupensky in the fall of 1921) and spent a total of over thirty years in the East (1912-1913, 1916-1946): according to Abrikosov’s original definition, “for some reason Russians generally feel more at home in China” than in Japan²⁴⁾.

4. Do Japanologists Need Chinese Now?

While working on the article, the author conducted a survey of a number of his fellow Orientalists who have lived and worked for ten or more years in various parts of Japan (nine people, including the author himself) and Russia (three people), regarding their attitude toward the Chinese language from the point of view of its theoretical importance and practical necessity for professional Japanologists. The twelve respondents are graduates of five universities from five regions of Russia - St. Petersburg, Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Vladivostok - and, thus, represent different schools of teaching oriental languages, among which there is a certain

22) *Russian military orientalist before 1917. Biographical dictionary*

23) About him, see: Podalko P.E. *"Japan in the fates of Russians. Essays on the history of tsarist diplomacy and the Russian diaspora in Japan."* Moscow, 2004, pp. 170-200.

24) Quoted from the manuscript of Abrikosov's memoirs, a copy of which was received by the author of the report from late Valentine F. Morozov.

continuity of traditions (St. Petersburg and Vladivostok), and complete independence of the approach to teaching Japanese (Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg, of which the latter represents the youngest school for training Orientalists among those who took part in the survey). The respondents included ten Japanologists (of whom nine people currently live and work in Japan) and two Sinologists (both live and work in Russia). The respondents' period of study covers 45 years (1953–1997), the term of study for each is five years, the term of study in the profile language is also five years, in addition to this they studied: Sinologists – Japanese as a second Oriental language (two people, term of study two years each); Japanese studies students – Chinese as a second Oriental language (three students, two years of study), “bungo” as a replacement for Chinese as a second Oriental language (three students, one year of study, including “kanbun” classes); did not have a second Oriental language – four students. The following responses were received regarding the necessity/importance of teaching Chinese to Japanese studies students (including responses from Sinologists): “needed” – 6, “not needed” – 1, “needed with reservations” – 5 (interestingly, almost all the reservations fall into the category: “maybe this language is not necessary for everyone to study, but I personally found it necessary later” (3 responses), or, alternatively, “needed by those who are going to do science, not practical work” (1 response). Also, one of the responses leaves open the question of the necessity of studying a second oriental language (“I don’t know if it is needed”), but at the same time it is acknowledged that “the culture and philosophy of China are needed”). At the same time, a completely negative answer was received from a Japanologist who had not studied Chinese in the past in any form, including "bungo"/"kanbun". Without claiming the absolute nature of the results obtained (by the way, the author of this report himself is very distrustful of various kinds of surveys, trying to resort to this method of obtaining information in his work as rarely as possible, so here we have a kind of exception to the personal rule), one can state a certain tendency of Japanologists to realize the importance of studying the Chinese language and culture as they enter their professional activities. Unfortunately, the current system of teaching oriental languages in Russia does not presuppose any serious study of Chinese by Japanologists as a "second oriental" language (the "second foreign language" is usually

English, except for cases when the second language is not provided for in the curriculum at all, as was the case with the author of the report).

5. Instead of a Conclusion

On November 4, 2008, the International Symposium "Three Hundred Years of Teaching Russian in China" was held in Shanghai. More than 200 specialists in the field of teaching Russian examined the results of the development of the process of teaching Russian in China over three hundred years, assessed its immediate prospects from the point of view of the needs of today and tomorrow. At the same time, the participants noted that the scale of admission of applicants to Russian departments in Chinese universities is constantly expanding, which is extremely indicative from the point of view of real supply and demand. Particular attention was paid at the symposium to the methods of training qualified Russianists in order to meet the needs of diplomacy, foreign trade contacts and various types of programs in the field of international exchanges²⁵⁾.

On the same day (November 4, 2008) in Japan, in the city of Hakodate, on the territory of the local branch of the Far Eastern National University (Russia), the "Russian Center" was opened - the first in Japan and the eleventh among similar centers created within the framework of the international cultural project under the auspices of the "Russian World" foundation in Russia and in foreign countries²⁶⁾.

It seems that the disparity in the scale of the two above-mentioned events (despite the coincidence of dates and some external similarity of the subject matter, such as the dissemination of the Russian language and culture in recipient countries, etc.) is a fairly typical example of the difference in the scale of phenomena and events that almost always arises when it comes

25) *Russian Language Abroad*, No. 6, 2008, p. 17.

26) Also in November 2008, Russian language&cultural centers were organized in Armenia, Belgium, and the USA. See *Russian Language Abroad*, No. 6, 2008, p. 17.

to Russia, on the one hand, and China and Japan (as objects of mutual comparison), on the other. Let us give a few more examples. In 1977, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the USSR, in honor of the 10th anniversary of MAPRYAL (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature - P. P.), established the A. S. Pushkin Medal for awarding to Russian and foreign public and government figures, scientists, and teachers who have made a significant contribution to the dissemination of the Russian language, literature, and - as a result of the latter - Russian culture in foreign countries. No more than 10 medals are awarded annually (the first award ceremony took place in Berlin in the summer of 1979). In recent years, an increasing number of this and similar awards have been going to China; for example, in 2008, the A.S. Pushkin Medal was awarded to four Chinese Russianists, including the Director of the Institute of Russian Language at Beijing University of Foreign Studies Shi Teqiang and the Director of the Institute of Russian Language at Heilongjiang University Wang Mingyu. All this confirms the growing interest in the study of the Russian language, history and culture of Russia, which began in China in the mid-1980s, one of the results of which was the appearance of a large number of new teaching aids, created taking into account the changes taking place in the world and in Russia. Thus, in 1986 the textbook "Country Studies of the Soviet Union" was published (editor Li Minbin, professor of Beijing University), and in 1996 - "Course of Linguistic Country Studies" (editor Tan Lin, professor of Jilin University). Other manuals and textbooks are also being prepared. It seems that the time has come for Russia to respond to this interest of its southern neighbor with corresponding attention to its language and culture, especially since there are good precedents for this, including in the recent past. Hope for this is inspired by two year-long events officially declared "linguistic" in our countries: in 2009 the Year of the Russian Language in China took place, and in 2010 - the Year of the Chinese Language in Russia.