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An Interdisciplinary Study of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)

**Volunteer Disappointment and Outcome of Activities
— Regional Perspective of Japan Overseas Cooperation
Volunteers (JOCV) —**

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Volunteer Disappointment and Outcome of Activities—Regional Perspective of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)—

Hisao Sekine*

Abstract

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) are dispatched to a range of countries around the world, where they work with people from local communities to provide expertise and training in programs related to education, healthcare, and other kinds of technical assistance. Destination countries are often characterized as traditional societies seeking to preserve their own values and customs. In undertaking such work the volunteers need to understand how local values and customs may be practiced by the local community members and engage in a discussion of the desired “outcomes” based on the socio-cultural characteristics of the region. This will help to promote an understanding of both JOCV activities and the actual local conditions. This study presents the regional realities that manifested as a result of interplay between cooperative activities and the specific socio-cultural context of the dispatch region. Moreover, it suggests the need to evaluate the outcomes of cooperative activities from a socio-cultural perspective. This study focuses on the Pacific Islands region, where I have been conducting anthropological research since 1987. The regional characteristics of the Pacific Islands include a subsistence economy, in which non-industrial elements are prominent, and abundant and cherished interpersonal relationships (i.e., possessing the feature of mutual support). However, the locals can also be labeled as island people or people who seemingly lack ambition, do not want to work, and have no desire to improve; or, people who are merely waiting for aid. The majority of volunteers were disappointed with this unanticipated reality, though they came to understand it (and some to admire it) after a while. The volunteers attempted to resolve these conflicting feelings between their expectations and reality by idealizing an image of themselves as volunteers who “blend in” and mutually interact with the locals. Embracing this status served as a mediator, allowing the volunteers to internalize the regional characteristics and make the activities “their own.” Finally, this study demonstrates that, where attitudes diverge drastically from the Japanese work ethic and values, evaluations should focus on the unique interactions between volunteers and locals that occur in each society, workplace, and living space.

Keywords: Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), regionality, disappointment, youth development, outcomes of JOCV

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1. Introduction

The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), an important part of technical assistance undertakings by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), is expected to achieve results through its activities during every two-year term. The volunteers are aware of this when leaving for their dispatch region. However, due to great differences in volunteer qualifications and placement environments, results of evaluations provided by JOCV are believed to be invalid, as these differences make it difficult to apply universal standards. Considering this, I focus on the 1974 JICA Act, Paragraph 2, Article 21:¹

The Agency shall conduct the following operations in order to promote and encourage youth activities overseas...with the purpose of cooperating in the economic and social development of the developing countries by working together with the people from local communities.

Shoichi Ban, who served as the JOCV Secretary General between 1972 and 1977, selected the following five key concepts from this article: (1) “working together with people from the developing countries,” (2) “working toward the economic and social development of the given region,” (3) “to aim for cooperation,” (4) “overseas,” and (5) “youth activities.” From these, he emphasized that the wording of the act clearly indicates that the main agent of cooperation activities are “youth” rather than JICA (Ban 1978, 23-24). When JICA was founded, activities by JOCV were conducted as per the “General Plan of JOCV,” which states the purpose and nature of JOCV as something based “on requests from developing countries to dispatch young volunteers, who are both physically and mentally healthy and who possess professional skills to cooperate in the socio-economic development of host countries, and to facilitate friendship and mutual understanding with these countries, while at the same time

¹ Report on the Evaluation of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, from the webpage of Official Development Assistance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/hyouka/kunibetu/gai/seinen/th01_01_0201.html).

contributing to the cultivation of international perspectives among the Japanese youth.”² As such, while the main objective of JOCV is to work toward the nation building of the host country, it is also expected to nurture those Japanese youth who participate in the program.

In October 2003, JICA realigned its organizational system from being a government-affiliated corporation to an independent administrative agency. Since then, JOCV volunteers have been called “citizens” or “individuals desiring to join the citizens' cooperation activities ... in unity with the inhabitants of the developing area,” rather than “youth,” in the new JICA Act, Section 4, Article 13. However, even with these verbiage changes, the target demographic of JOCV actually remains young people.

Furthermore, although JOCV is a nationally managed program, it is also a volunteering program, which suggests that it is based on broad public participation. The latter of these has historically been “dependent on the aspiration ... of youth,” and their implied sense of willingness. While Irie (1999, 4-10) views this willingness as the volunteers' driving force, along with a sense of selflessness and desire to do public good, Tamura (2009, 3) suggests that there is an underlying notion of transcending “suffering,” “grief,” “poverty,” and other “hardships” through solidarity. In the case of JOCV volunteers, if solidarity emerges from “working together with people from the local communities,” it is reasonable to assume that the volunteers do not consider their placement merely as office work, but rather that they view themselves as embedded within the local context. Furthermore, Tokuda, Umeki, Kodama, Taniguchi, Terai, Nakajima et al. (1999, 130), who conducted an awareness survey of JOCV volunteers, stated that, “the group, imbued with the characteristics of youth, participates in various cooperation and exchange activities throughout the host country, and therefore possesses the distinctive characteristic of ‘cooperation in totality’.” Since the activities should

² Referred from a portal site of administrative information operated by the Administrative Management Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. (<http://law.e-gov.go.jp/haishi/S49HO062.html>).

be viewed within a broader perspective and as a process of strenuous efforts between the local people and “inexperienced” youth, various elements related to both professional and daily life come into play, making it difficult to clearly indicate tangible outcomes at the end of the volunteers’ stay.

When evaluating volunteer activities from a holistic perspective, it is necessary to consider the development of the youth themselves as a key outcome. Tokuda, Umeki, Kodama, Taniguchi, Terai, Nakajima et al. (1999, 149) found that youth participants’ activities largely contribute to their own human development. Ban (1978) also concurs that it is of crucial importance to conceive the “development” of the volunteers in relation to the socio-cultural environment in which they are placed:

“If one connects with people at the grassroots level, one is at first surprised by the fact that the majority of them do not harbor any misgivings about continuing to live in a daily rhythm as it was lived by their ancestors and in accordance with their native conventions. For these people, it is a rather a nuisance to disturb their rhythm for cooperative activities” (Ban 1978, 41).

In each of the countries in which JOCV volunteers conduct activities, there is a strong impetus to retain traditional values and customs among local community members. The volunteers have to work together with the people from the community (i.e., with people who have internalized these values and customs). Discussing the outcomes based on socio-cultural characteristics of the respective regions, therefore, will facilitate an understanding of both the JOCV activities and the actual local conditions.

This study aims to present the regional realities that result from the interplay between cooperative activities and the specific socio-cultural context of the dispatch region. Moreover, it suggests the possibility of evaluating these cooperative activities’ outcomes from a socio-cultural perspective. This study focuses on the Pacific Islands region, which, as of July 2014, had received 140 volunteers, constituting less than 5% of the total number of global

volunteers. However, the limited scale and isolated geographical position as an island nation highlights its socio-cultural characteristics within the context of their dynamic interplay between the regional aspects of the cooperative activities and volunteers.

Moreover, general perceptions held by the JOCV headquarters and local offices often bear little resemblance to local realities; therefore, considering these differences, this study focuses on the ways that JOCV should develop its projects to better reflect the region. The Pacific Islands lie in an isolated region made up of small-scale, insular countries, and its people are connected by their natural environments and a strong custom of mutual support. Due to general economic conditions, in which non-industrial features such as subsistence economies and rent income play a significant role, Oceania's socio-cultural conditions are often distinct from those of other regions.

For the purpose of this study, interviews with volunteers, their counterparts, and local volunteer branch leaders were conducted as follows: November 2006 in Tonga and Samoa; September 2011 in Palau; February 2012 in Pohnpei Island in the Federated States of Micronesia; and November 2012 and February 2014 in the Solomon Islands. Furthermore, a written interview survey was mailed to thirty former volunteers, and interviews with two volunteers at the JICA Global Plaza in Tokyo were also conducted.

2. Rent, Industry, and Subsistence: “Affluence” in the Pacific Islands³

The Pacific Islands region is divided into three sub-regions: Micronesia (Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Kiribati), which extends from the Northwest Pacific to the Central North Pacific region; Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji), which spreads into the Western Pacific Ocean; and Central and Eastern South Pacific Polynesia (the Independent State of Samoa, Kingdom of Tonga). Although this

³ Cited from Chapter 2 of my previously published paper (Sekine 2009).

division appears to be framed around environmental, cultural, linguistic, and genetic characteristics, it is not a strict classification and is, at best, based primarily on geographical convenience. Moreover, there are diverse political, economic, and social circumstances both among and within each of the sub-regions.

Some of the primary characteristics of the economic situation in the Pacific Islands region are as follows: the small scale of its economy, high cost of transportation and infrastructure due to the region's remoteness from the world's major markets, chronic trade balance deficits, small volume of trade among Pacific Island countries, and a limited number of trading partners, such as the former colonizing nations. Moreover, the region is considered to have a dual economy, in that it encompasses both the traditional sector and the modern or import sector (Kakazu 1986, 53-57).

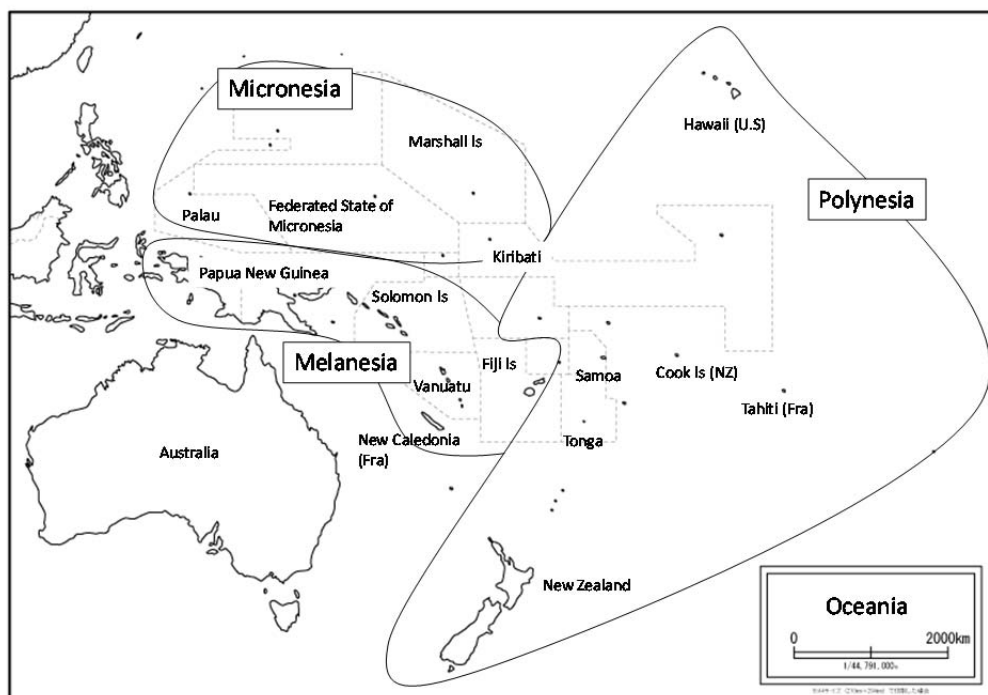


Fig.1 Map of Oceanic countries

The economy of this region broadly comprises industry, rent, and subsistence. Rent refers to low earned-revenue income not directly related to production capacity growth, such as remittances from overseas, developmental and financial assistance from other countries and

international organizations, and income from natural resources. In the case of the Pacific Islands region, the three states of Micronesia (Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Marshall Islands) signed a Compact of Free Association (hereafter ‘Compact’) with the United States, the economic aid from which constitutes more than 50% of Micronesia’s finance resources.⁴ Papua New Guinea exports primarily consist of copper, gold, timber, and petroleum, while the Solomon Islands export wood, gold, nickel, copper, and palm oil. Palau and the Fiji Islands utilize the beautiful landscape for tourism and resort development. Although these economic activities fall within the category of “industry,” since they are characterized as non-earned revenue, they may also be included in the rent income category. In short, the Pacific Islands region is characterized as a rentier state, dependent on rent income, as it includes aspects that can also be considered industrial promotion.

Foreign assistance, which is an important component of rentier states, is mainly contributed by Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan, China, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom, and the United States. These nations have supported the modernization of public facilities and infrastructure development (primarily of the smaller island countries) through financial aid. Native peoples in the region have increased their material desires, along with the desire for modern benefits such as formal school education and a more westernized urban lifestyle, through the discourse of underdevelopment that was brought by the penetration of cash income and personal exchange.

However, people’s everyday lives are still characterized by the subsistence economy, despite some limited trading of cash crops in open-air markets. Primarily, agriculture is reduced to farm work for growing rhizome crops, green and yellow vegetables, and legumes.

⁴ The Compact of Free Association, which went into effect in 1994, provided participating countries with economic assistance from the United States for the following 15 years. The assistance involved a trust fund of USD70 million to be used for government finance operations after 2009. Although the trust fund was managed effectively at first, the investment profit was not able to be sustained due to price increases and the slow growth of annual revenue; therefore Palau strongly requested that the United States extend its economic assistance to all three Micronesian countries. The United States accepted the proposal after negotiations (Uehara 2011).

Fishing and forest utilization are limited to satisfying households' individual consumption and have no commercial prospects as a revenue source. Kobayashi (1994, 242) emphasizes that the existence of the subsistence economy supports the "abundance" in people's lives. This is further supported by the traditional social system of mutual support, which is predominantly present in rural areas, where people's social life is based on kinship and regional bonds. For example, if food shortages occur, the required provisions are provided through the aforementioned networks involving relatives, neighbors, and friends. Ultimately, it is a society in which one can typically resolve issues through relationships characterized by mutual help and common values.

Fisk (1982) refers to this phenomenon as "subsistence affluence," where people are able to produce sufficient food supplies from natural resources owned by the people (such as land), and the surplus needed to secure the required labor for traditional activities. This is primarily the case in areas where land is not overused, where a sufficient labor force exists, and where the commercial economy is restricted (Fisk 1982, 1-2, 5-6, 11). For example, the Solomon Islands of Melanesia, which boast favorable agricultural and fishing resources, offers a typical example of subsistence affluence in the Pacific Islands region. In 2005, home production (37%) was the greatest source of income for Solomon Islanders. This industry comprises shifting cultivation (i.e., an agricultural system in which plots of land are cultivated temporarily, then allowed to revert to their natural vegetation while the cultivator moves on to another plot) and coastal fishing, and its output is mainly consumed domestically. In farming villages, the ratio is as high as 55%; in addition, bartering transactions between families and donations of goods and money for mutual aid constitute up to 9% of incomes in these farming villages (Solomon Islands Statistics Office 2006, 39).

Building on this premise, the economists Bertram and Watters (1985) utilize the concept of MIRAB to explain the characteristics of the economy of Pacific Islands. They argue that the economies of these island societies are essentially formed by the modern sector built on

the relationships among four elements: MI: migration, R: remittances, A: aid, and B: bureaucracy (MIRAB). This is then supplemented by a traditional subsistence economy based on slash-and-burn farming, fishing, hunting and gathering, and the network of relatives living overseas (Bertram and Watters 1985; Bertram 1986). Within this structure, it becomes evident that the modern sector alone cannot sustain everyday life; therefore, subsistence affluence and the traditional kinship networks are emphasized and necessary.

In the Solomon Islands, local residents have explained the aforementioned “abundance” as follows: “as long as one has land, one will have enough to eat even if there is no monetary income” (Sekine 2001, 245). This is a common, local narrative of subsistence affluence. When these people happen to encounter the contemporary Western reality of scarce food supplies, limited formal education, and few economic opportunities (in a capitalistic sense), they come to recognize their state as “abnormal” and emphasize their “poverty.”

Thus, these societies have the ambivalent nature of being both abundant and poor at the same time, as people’s values are firmly embedded within the notions of both the traditional subsistence economy and the modern, Western one. In that sense, these values have a transitory nature, continually shifting between abundance and poverty, depending on the context in which people experience them.

3. Pacific Islands and JOCV

3.1 Cooperation by JOCV

The amount that Japan contributed to the Pacific Islands region through Official Development Assistance (ODA) was about 1.6% of Japan’s total global bilateral assistance for the year 2012 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014a, 859). Of this, technical cooperation projects, including JOCV activities, constituted USD59.92 million, or 46.8% of the entire ODA for Pacific Island countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014b, 139). This amount has

grown steadily since 2005, when it was 0.9%. Although yen credits were extended to Papua New Guinea in 2009 and Vanuatu in 2012 from Japan's ODA, the major scheme of the bilateral ODA for the Pacific islands has been grant aid and technical aid, including JOCV and training courses for working people within the Pacific Islands region. Recently, region-wide assistance for the development of waste management capacity protection for the ecological environment, and guidance on coping with climate change have been actively implemented.

Table 1 shows the number and occupational category of JOCV volunteers dispatched to the Pacific Islands as of July 31, 2014. The main types of JOCV volunteer occupations across the three sub-regions all fall in the field of human resources, specifically primary school teachers, environmental education tutors, and other types of instructors. Volunteers from the field of science education, specifically, are prevalent, with math and science teachers being relatively prominent. A small number of volunteers from the fields of Japanese language education and *soroban*⁵ training have been continually dispatched to Tonga for more than 20 years. The overall trend of Japan's ODA to the Pacific Islands region is the result of agreements made at the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM), which is held in Japan once every three years. The type of JOCV volunteer occupations, however, does not necessarily directly correspond to the overall ODA program. From a medium- to long-term perspective, JOCV activities in the Pacific Islands region aim to develop human resources at a grassroots level, supporting the respective countries by building up relevant technological skills.

3.2 “Apathetic” or “Perfunctory” Pacific Islanders

The volunteers often express doubts as to whether and to what extent the people from the Pacific Islands are working toward developing their countries and building stronger societies.

⁵ The *Soroban*, also known as an abacus, is a Japanese traditional calculator based on the decimal system. It has vertical rods with sliding beads and a fixed bar across the rods. It was introduced into the public education system in Tonga in 1975.

This paper posits that Japan's ODA should aim to promote self-reliance among local people, as this idea of improving the existing state of the country via hard work is consistent with the general Japanese work ethic. However, the volunteers serving in the host countries were concerned that their local counterparts lacked such convictions and were, thus, disappointed with the situation:

“Maybe the people of Palau do not have a concept of ‘autonomy.’ They receive aid from the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, but they take it for granted. Many people in Palau think it is okay to let things be the way they are. They are not facing any food shortages; tapioca and taro are always available. As a nation, they don’t tend to make efforts and achieve something” (Palau).⁶

“The local people say that they think of only tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Actually, I feel that it is true. It is the reason for their satisfaction with their current daily life” (Fiji).⁷

“I am in this country to provide them guidance professionally, but I am actually playing the role of my colleagues who don't want to work. They sometimes entrust their jobs to me, a JOCV volunteer, and chat with other members of the local staff in the teacher’s room. Even if a class teacher is absent from the school, nobody handles the class for that teacher” (Palau).⁸

“Local teachers basically want to loaf on the job. They don’t feel guilty about coming late to work. Their behaviors of ‘not coming,’ ‘coming late,’ and ‘loafing on the job’ are representative of the JOCV volunteers’ local colleagues. Few teachers prepare properly for the class and review it thoroughly; there are only two or three such teachers. Other teachers conduct classes in the same manner that they were taught in school and lack creativity” (Federated State of Micronesia).⁹

“[The] Solomon [Islands] can perhaps be characterized as ‘non-committal.’ No one there thinks of their future. They cannot make a plan even for a week, so it follows that they can’t think about the future” (Solomon Islands).¹⁰

“Solomon Islanders are considerably accustomed to depending on overseas aid. In addition, they do not make self-help efforts and lack the courage to be innovative about their own lives” (Solomon Islands).¹¹

“Samoan people lack ambition. I sense that they think the addition of a new staff member [will] make things easier. They tend to be dependent on the volunteer. Some of my colleagues just take an afternoon nap and return home. Since they are accustomed to aid, they use all they have, believing that once it is over, they can receive it again from somewhere” (Samoa).¹²

⁶ Interview with a volunteer in Palau on September 27, 2011.

⁷ Interview with a returning volunteer from Fiji in Tokyo on September 27, 2013.

⁸ Interview with a volunteer in Palau on September 27, 2011.

⁹ Interview with a volunteer in the Federated State of Micronesia on February 21, 2012.

¹⁰ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on February 18, 2014.

¹¹ Interview with a JICA staff member in Solomon Islands on February 19, 2014.

¹² Interview with a volunteer in Samoa on November 23, 2006.

There are volunteers who state that, “the local people are used to being dependent” or that “they are not the type that want to improve their current situation; rather, they merely do not want their current situation to deteriorate.” Local people often seem to have the mentality that they can leave it all to the volunteers and if something is damaged, it could be easily replaced from new aid deliveries. A volunteer was told by a high school student from the Federated States of Micronesia that “even if the Compact aid from the United States does not arrive, there is still Japan, and if it is not possible to receive anything from Japan, one can get assistance from China.”¹³ This dependence on aid is increasingly becoming the local culture, transmitted across generations; therefore, the “abundance” based on the MIRAB economy leads to lack of motivation, which results in a sense of disappointment among the volunteers. This, then, affects locals’ feelings toward the presence of volunteers. In the following sections, we examine whether this would lead (or has already led) to a request by volunteers for the dispatch of successors.

We asked volunteers within various occupational fields whether they would request a successor (or whether they have done so already), and responses were frequently related to “manpower supply type.” This suggests uncertainty about whether their presence at the workplace was that of a staff member or of simply manpower.

“I have not requested [a] successor, although if there is no JOCV volunteer, work will stall. But even if one is dispatched, ultimately, the same situation will continue” (Palau).¹⁴

“I shall not request a successor. It is no use repeating this a number of times” (Palau).¹⁵

“I have doubts about requesting a successor. Eventually, [the local people will become dependent on] the new volunteer; however, if there is no such volunteer, research on teaching materials and the training of teachers will not be conducted properly, and the problem will not be solved” (Palau).¹⁶

¹³ Interview with a staff member working at Embassy of Japan in a Pacific Island location on February 20, 2012.

¹⁴ Interview with a volunteer in Palau on September 26, 2011.

¹⁵ Interview with a volunteer in Palau on September 26, 2011.

¹⁶ Interview with a volunteer in Palau on September 28, 2011.

“A successor is not required. I have doubts about the need for one. The scope for doing things is extremely limited, and there is no need for a volunteer [to come] all the way from Japan. Samoans themselves are adequate” (Samoa).¹⁷

On one hand, if one assumes that the local workers are, even unknowingly, assuming that a new volunteer will reduce the workload per person, then this may be upsetting and discouraging for enthusiastic and passionate volunteers.

On the other hand, there are volunteers who have requested a successor. In some cases, the request is made because “I thought that since there is a project, a replacement request is normal and I requested one without thinking too much about it,”¹⁸ or because the volunteer realizes that due to the nature of work within a given department, there is an acute need for new volunteers. Even if volunteers feel that they are merely a manpower supply, some volunteers who do not have substantial doubts about the situation state the following:

“I am placing a request for a successor. Technically, I can teach my counterpart professional skills in six months. However, because the theory for technology support is more important, the successor was expected to assume responsibility for it. Instead of being a leader, I am working as a staff member. I have no problems with working like a regular laborer. Certainly, the workplace will function if I am no longer present, but that is the same in Japan as well” (Samoa).¹⁹

“At the workplace, I am just one additional laborer. I should ideally be supporting my colleagues, but since I am a nurse, I think there is no choice but to [carry out] work like a regular laborer. If I can be of any help by doing the same thing that I do in Japan, I am fine with that” (Solomon Islands).²⁰

In the Pacific Islands region, there is a striking shortage of professionals, particularly in the countries of Polynesia and Micronesia. Here, even if locals have obtained professional education overseas, they often do not choose to seek a job in their home country and tend to find employment overseas; in addition, they tend to change jobs frequently to find better conditions. In this situation, the locally required labor tends to be of the manpower type. Since

¹⁷ Interview with a volunteer in Samoa on November 24, 2006.

¹⁸ Interview with a volunteer in Samoa on November 23, 2006.

¹⁹ Interview with a volunteer in Samoa on November 24, 2006.

²⁰ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on November 13, 2012.

each country lacks the specific human resources to fill particular roles, they request volunteers from overseas. The problem, therefore, is the way that these volunteers should be acquired and assigned.

Volunteers arrive with the objective of facilitating technical cooperation. They do not consider themselves to be merely cogs in the organizational structure but rather aim to provide improvement, advancement, and—in certain cases—guidance. However, as the volunteers themselves have mentioned, if local people consider it enough to maintain the status quo, do not possess the desire to improve things, and simply wait for the delivery of aid, then the volunteers who suggest new ways of doing things or enthusiastically try to implement innovative activities can be viewed as a “nuisance.” It is necessary to understand the JOCV volunteer activities by taking into account such reality. Narratives of JOCV volunteers indicate that the Pacific Islands region is “accustomed to abundant aid,” and that the people there are trying unconsciously to maintain an economic situation based on subsistence affluence.

4. Surprising “Affluence” and Human Development of Volunteers

As discussed in the former previous, although JOCV volunteers generally exhibit impatience regarding the negative attitudes of their local colleagues, they in turn praise the different lifestyle and values of the local people that are not found in Japanese culture.

Although conditions vary depending on the country, the social conditions in the Pacific Islands region are thriving both materially and in terms of interpersonal relations. Some volunteers experience surprise at the difference between their previous assumptions about the dispatch region (i.e., being a developing country) and the actual situation, while other volunteers experience disappointment. For example, a volunteer in the Solomon Islands said: “The people of Solomon have no food shortages. Even if there is no food, the people help each other. In ordinary households in the metropolis, even if households are out of propane gas and it cannot be supplied, they use firewood and cook as usual. If they believe that way of life to be

good enough for them or prefer it to be that way, there is no need to think about so-called modernization.”²¹ Even in a difficult economic situation with limited cash income, people in the Pacific Islands seem to be living comfortably. Related comments from volunteers in the Pacific Islands region regarding this specific abundance, despite the obviously poor conditions, align with the statement that “from the perspective of the locals, it can perhaps be said that it is a happy, satisfying life.” Based on this premise, some volunteers express doubts regarding the purpose of their presence: “Is aid really necessary?” “Are volunteers required?” “Isn’t JICA itself unnecessary?”

There were also volunteers who stated that even if local people experience no trouble in their daily lives, the volunteers’ role is to improve future prospects. This indicates that even though people may consider that they have sufficient food at the present time, more information and guidance is needed to ensure long-term success. Furthermore, there were volunteers who suggested that if people desire a lifestyle that requires more money than they currently have, or if they aspire to study and work overseas, then formal education is essential, and therefore the dispatch of JOCV volunteers in this regard is meaningful.

“There is much more to learn from the people here than to teach them. People here live a life in which they naturally help each other. Although it may appear chaotic, all of them feel happy, and I feel happy too. I feel that my sense of values has broadened, and I feel that this kind of life is also good. The people here are really warmhearted, so I have never doubted why I am here. It is natural that my presence or absence would not make much of a difference, which is the same even if I were in Japan” (Federated State of Micronesia).²²

“If one observes the village life, one gets the impression that the people do not want a lot of development. If development occurs, it is good but even if it does not, things will somehow work out. Everyone says that they want work and income, but they are living by helping each other. It is usual for those who have to give to those who do not” (Federated State of Micronesia).²³

“The people of my host country are very kind, optimistic, and friendly. In the village, the relationships between family members are very important and religion constitutes the center of their lives. It is a relaxed life. Since they are blessed with environment that

²¹ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on November 12, 2012.

²² Interview with a volunteer in the Federated States of Micronesia on February 20, 2012.

²³ Interview with a volunteer in the Federated States of Micronesia on February 22, 2012.

doesn't require the people to work hard, development and progress is slow" (Fiji).²⁴

There is a common view among the volunteers that the local people have leisurely lives. They are generous, kind, and friendly, and cherish their relatives and neighbors. Even if they do not have money, they help each other and live happily. Although this may vary among the Pacific Island countries, these are common characteristics for the region as a whole, as noted by volunteers. A volunteer in the Solomon Islands said that "relationships between people are a treasure,"²⁵ while another mentioned that "even if they become modernized I do not want them to be westernized, as they might lose their 'identity'."²⁶ This is praise for "another kind of abundance" that is rooted in the relationships between people and subsistence affluence that differs from the modern notion of abundance based on generous aid. Both kinds of abundance were unexpected realities that volunteers could discover only by working "on the ground" in those countries. Another volunteer said: "[The] Solomon [Islands are] different from the image of developing countries that I had until now. Although they do not have money, they seem wealthy."²⁷

A Fiji volunteer expresses similar thoughts: "When I first went to Fiji, I was surprised that it was a big metropolis. I even wondered why I was there."²⁸ Volunteers experienced surprise that resembled disappointment when exposed to such an "abundant" environment, which was the opposite of their preconceived notions of developing countries, while simultaneously noting the low motivation for improvement among their local colleagues. This manifested either as dissatisfaction with their positions as merely manpower or hesitation regarding the request for a successor.

²⁴ From emailed answers to a questionnaire completed by a former volunteer from Fiji in September 2013.

²⁵ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on February 21, 2014.

²⁶ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on November 13, 2012.

²⁷ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on November 15, 2012.

²⁸ Interview with a returning volunteer from Fiji in Tokyo on September 27, 2013.

Nonetheless, even volunteers who were continuously dissatisfied with the local people and the work environment did not feel disappointed during the final phase of completing their duties. Once they became accustomed to the workplace and everyday life, they seemed to gradually become adjusted to the culture shock. There are many volunteers who reflected on the past and felt that they succeeded in reconditioning their work and life in accordance with the “non-committal” locals, becoming lenient toward such attitudes by acclimating themselves to the collective local psyche and adjusting to the pace. A JOCV volunteer said the following about achievement: “It is important that a volunteer does not expect to get excellent results from work. My mind will be in a spin if I try hard to do that.”²⁹ Another said: “I do not like their lack of seriousness, but I do my best on my work to get good results.”³⁰ To borrow some of the expressions the Solomon Islands volunteers used, “I learned to relax,” “I have become someone who is capable of living in any kind of environment,” and “After living here I have become patient. I do not easily get angry anymore. In a way, this may be a feeling of resignation.”³¹ Furthermore, teacher volunteers at schools in Palau, although perplexed by the pride of the locals, learned to be sensitive to their feelings and behave humbly by “preparing a printout, for example, and presenting proposals to other teachers as suggestions.”³² A Japanese staff member at the JICA office in one of the island countries commented that the majority of returning volunteers acquired the confidence to live anywhere in the region and the ability to survive in tough conditions and environments that are strikingly different from Japan. He referred to this condition as “the result of integration into the local life of the region.”³³ Here, whether their work has yielded results is outside the scope of this discussion.

The majority of volunteers who have returned to Japan or will soon return reminisce that they “learned much more from the people compared to what they taught them.” What they

²⁹ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on February 19, 2014.

³⁰ Interview in Solomon Islands on November 13, 2012.

³¹ Interview with a volunteer in Solomon Islands on February 18, 2014.

³² Interview with a volunteer in Palau on September 28, 2011.

³³ Interview with a JICA staff in Solomon Islands on February 17, 2014.

learned does not strictly relate to professional skills; rather, there is a focus on psychosocial and interpersonal aspects, such as forming relationships with colleagues, the importance of family ties, and the meaning of “true abundance.” In other words, through the process of working in and carrying out daily life within those countries, volunteers become aware of their development by going through psychological changes such as resignation, relaxation, and becoming more lenient, as well as through the act of praising the local ways of life and values (i.e., change of values regarding modernization).

5. Outcome of JOCV from the Viewpoint of Pacific Regionality

The regional characteristics of the Pacific Islands include the coexistence of abundance (e.g., foreign aid, interpersonal relationships) and poverty (e.g., lack of cash income prospects), as well as cherished interpersonal relationships (e.g., possessing the feature of mutual assistance). Additionally, the region is characterized by a subsistence, or rentier state economy in which external elements regarding industry are prominent. However, it is also possible to label the locals as non-committal island people who seemingly possess no ambition, do not want to work, have no desire to improve, and who are merely waiting for the next foreign aid delivery to arrive. The majority of volunteers were disappointed with this unanticipated reality, though many soon came to understand and even admire it. They attempted to resolve this internal conflict between disappointment and admiration by idealizing their image as volunteers who “blend in” and mutually interact with the locals, thus enabling the volunteers to internalize the regional characteristics and make the activities their own.

This type of volunteer, however, has little, if any, control over the actual outcomes of their work. One volunteer who lived in a village on the Solomon Islands blended quickly into the local community and felt that she behaved like an “ideal” JOCV volunteer; however, she said that she could not carry out her mission properly due to chronic problems in her office.

Conversely, there was a volunteer who proactively created jobs for himself, and his activities positively impacted the local community despite being unable to reach an understanding with his colleagues. These indicate that the “ideal” figure of a JOCV volunteer—one who blends into the community and works together with colleagues—does not necessarily correlate with the results of his or her official work. The volunteers assimilated into the regional characteristics of the Pacific Islands by undergoing psychological transformations such as resignation (e.g., disregarding work results), becoming lenient and learning to relax, and experiencing changes in their value system concerning abundance as a result of exchanges with colleagues and people from the local communities.

Such “development of youth” accomplished through JOCV activities is not limited to the volunteers in the Pacific Islands region, as similar outcomes occur with volunteers posted in other regions through the common thread of “there is much more that I learned from the local people here than what I taught them” (Sakuma 1991, 110-11). Itsuo Yoshioka, a journalist and former JOCV volunteer in Ethiopia, asserted that the term “volunteer” is a “beautiful image that contains the meaning of good and at the same time connotes deception.” If a volunteer considers his or her activity to be good, then the person who is helped by the activity is the volunteer. Based on that notion, Yoshioka says that the common assumption of “volunteer,” as one who selflessly helps others, is a deception; however, he simultaneously acknowledges the significance of the JOCV in the sense that it provides Japanese youth the chance to cultivate their mental capacities in an environment different from Japan (Yoshioka 1998).

Additionally, feelings of disappointment resulting from the reality of the host country are also common. Based on a review of JOCV’s Volunteer Reports,³⁴ Nakamura (2011, 95) discusses the gap between the “ideal” and “real” that volunteers experience and notes that “most attempts to compel the local people to improve their awareness were felt to be

³⁴ JOCV volunteers are required to submit five reports on the activity to the JICA office during their term.

frustrating.” In one volunteer report, a volunteer exclaimed “Why do people here not realize they must improve on their work?” The lack of motivation is also not restricted to the Pacific Islands region; rather, focus should be placed on the unique circumstances of each region that produce such a condition. With respect to this, this paper examines the Pacific Islands region by highlighting abundance in terms of both the material aspects and traditional, interpersonal relations.

Yoshioka (1998, 214-16) emphasizes that making progress does not necessarily mean improvement: “Is there any problem in continuing in the same state today, tomorrow or even a year later?” There is no universal determination about whether or not this statement is true, but if the people of the Pacific Islands region were to be asked, they might collectively say that they desire progress; however, they do not go as far as making their own efforts and working hard to obtain it. Such an attitude, which drastically diverges from the Japanese work ethic and values, should be evaluated individually, based on the unique interactions between volunteers and locals that occur in each society, workplace, and living space.

Furthermore, there are local people who talk about former volunteers with a sense of fond nostalgia. For example, a politician belonging to the ministerial rank of the Solomon Islands reminisced fondly: “I used to work with a volunteer when I was young. We often talked about all kinds of things and also drank beer together.” There are also numerous cases of former volunteers who keep in touch with colleagues and locals from their time serving in the Solomon Islands long after they have returned to Japan. Even if there are no notable or sustainable work-related results, there are many cases in which the image of the volunteer remains firmly ingrained in the memories of the local people. In order to determine whether this is a regional or a specific characteristic of the Pacific Islands, results must be obtained from a similar survey conducted in other regions. Nevertheless, it can be asserted that the positive memories that remain with the local people can be attributed to those who served as the ideal figure of a JOCV volunteer. Such memories can be considered an essential element of volunteer activities,

including both official work and everyday life in the Pacific Islands. As such, it is necessary to evaluate JOCV activities by adopting a medium- to long-term perspective.

6. Conclusion

This paper argues for an understanding of volunteer activities and their outcomes from a socio-cultural viewpoint of their Pacific Islands region host countries. Results from the above research and analysis are as follows.

The economic situation in the Pacific Islands is characterized by MIRAB, with subsistence affluence and the custom of mutual support. These local societies seem to be surrounded by “affluence” regarding food security and “well-being” in social and personal relationships; however, in this context, JOCV volunteers are apt to recognize Pacific Islanders as people who lack ambition for individual or local development and continue to wait for more foreign aid. The volunteers come to these host countries to act alongside the local people for their own development; therefore, they are often deeply disappointed in the local situation.

Conversely, in the process that they feel disappointment, these JOCV volunteers also come to empathize with the lifestyle of the local people and adjust their sense of values to align with the culture. Through their experiences in daily life with the local people, the volunteers do not see these locals as needing to unconditionally improve their situation, but have reinterpreted the condition as “affluent life” or “satisfied life.”

Thus far, volunteers have undergone a long course of training before leaving for their host countries, and JOCV has provided the volunteers with opportunities to participate in lectures and discussions on the social and working conditions of the respective host countries, particularly focusing on language learning. It is also necessary, however, to utilize logic and experience to explain to the JOCV trainees that (1) many volunteers will experience disappointment about the actual conditions of the host countries, (2) the nature of this

disappointment can vary depending on the unique socio-cultural conditions in the host country, and (3) this process is relevant to the outcome of achieving personal development, one of JOCV's main objectives.

This study presented the regional realities of JOCV activities and considered the results of volunteer activities from a socio-cultural perspective. Examining the continuity between volunteers' disappointment upon experiencing the host country and their subsequent personal development related to interaction with socio-cultural realities that occur between volunteers and local society, it is possible to clarify qualitative outcomes of volunteer activities, which heretofore have been invisible. This also involves both a micro and macro view of the realities of the volunteers' lives, in which various aspects of their stay in the host country—such as their work environment and home life—are intertwined. This will also facilitate the promotion of detailed JOCV projects for specific countries and regions based on unique socio-cultural characteristics.

Table 1. Number and occupational category of JOCV volunteers by country as of 31/7/2014

Micronesia

Federated States of Micronesia (8 volunteers)	Since July 1989						
	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (7)	Health & Medical Services (0)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Environmental education (2) Physical education Primary education (3) Primary teacher	

Marshall Islands (9 volunteers)	Since July 1991						
	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (8)	Health & Medical Services (0)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Environment education Japanese education Primary education (3) Primary teacher (2) Science & Mathematics Teacher	

Palau (8 volunteers)	Since July 1997						
	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (6)	Health & Medical Services (0)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Environment education (2) Primary education (2) Primary teacher (2)	

Kiribati (6 volunteers)	Since September 2008						
	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (3)	Health & Medical Services (2)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Table tennis Japanese education Science education	Dental hygienist Midwifery

Micronesia

Since July 1989							
Federated States of Micronesia (8 volunteers)	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (7)	Health & Medical Services (0)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Environmental education (2) Physical education Primary education (3) Primary teacher	

Since July 1991							
Marshall Islands (9 volunteers)	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (8)	Health & Medical Services (0)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Environment education Japanese education Primary education (3) Primary teacher (2) Science & Mathematics Teacher	

Since July 1997							
Palau (8 volunteers)	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (6)	Health & Medical Services (0)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Environment education (2) Primary education (2) Primary teacher (2)	

Since September 2008							
Kiribati (6 volunteers)	Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (0)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (3)	Health & Medical Services (2)
	Occupation	Computer specialist				Table tennis Japanese education Science education	Dental hygienist Midwifery

Polynesia

		Since December 1972						
		Field	Planning & Administration (0)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (2)	Mining & Manufacturing (0)	Human Development (14)	Health & Medical Services (1)
Samoa (17 volunteers)	Occupation				Vegetable cultivation Animal hygiene		PC instructor (2) Art Science education (3) Science & Mathematics Teacher Primary education (7)	Occupational therapist

		Since March 1973						
		Field	Planning & Administration (1)	Public Service (0)	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery (1)	Mining & Manufacturing (1)	Human Development (7)	Health & Medical Services (4)
Tonga (14 volunteers)	Occupation	Village development			Forestry & Forest conservation	Automobile mechanic	Abacus teacher Japanese language education Japanese language teacher (2) Physical education Primary teacher Preschool education	Nurse (2) Dental hygienist Support for handicapped person

Source : Author's editing from the JICA Webpage (accessed on 8/9/2014)

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Abstract (in Japanese)

要約

本稿は、筆者が1987年以来人類学的調査研究をおこなっている太平洋島嶼地域を取り上げ、派遣地域の社会および文化に関わる特定文脈で青年海外協力隊を包み込むことによって見えてくる協力隊の地域的実態を示し、隊員活動の成果を捉える新たな質的視点の可能性を提示する。

太平洋島嶼地域は、産業外的要素や相互扶助的人間関係を特徴とするサブシステム経済が顕著である。しかし、人々はその特徴に基づき社会的・食糧的には「豊か」ではあっても、一般的に職務に積極的ではなく、現状を改善しようという向上心も不足している。外国などからの援助を待ち続けるだけの姿勢も見られる。多くの隊員は、派遣前に想定していなかったそのような現実戸惑い、落胆する。しかし彼らは、滞在期間を経る中で現地の人々への期待と現実との乖離を、「理想的な隊員像」としての「現地の人々との一体化、相互交流」を通じて克服しようとし、やがて人々の労働観や価値観、慣習などに関わる地域性を内面化し、落胆の対象であったはずの人々の思考や振る舞いを賛美するようになる。本稿では、現地の「豊かさ」に起因する現実とそれに対する隊員の「落胆」の感情を手がかりに考察し、多くの隊員が任国の現実を知ることによって落胆を経験すること、それは各国・地域固有の社会文化的条件によって異なること、落胆は協力隊の主要な目的の一つである日本青年の成長という成果と関係していることを派遣前研修等において具体的に示すことを通じて、その後の隊員活動の円滑化を図っていく必要性を指摘する。



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**“An Interdisciplinary Study of Japan Overseas Cooperation
Volunteers (JOCV)”**

JICA-RI Working Paper No. 72

Political Origins of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, 1960-1965:

Why the State Sends Young Volunteers Abroad

Yasunobu Okabe