

Comparative Studies of the “Japanese Peace Corps” and U.S. Peace Corps: Program Terminations in El Salvador and Colombia

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Introduction

Since the 1960s, sending young volunteers to developing countries became a prominent trend among the developed countries, whose leaders were influenced by the idea of “universalism,” which also manifested in such advancements as the establishment of the United Nations.¹ The Peace Corps, founded in the United States in 1961, was a key player in the design of this international trend, which the Japanese government followed. In 1965, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (hereafter, JOCV), the “Japanese Peace Corps,” was founded; and the first JOCV program in Latin America began in 1968. The Peace Corps and the JOCV have operated under similar systems; for example, they both train and place ordinary citizens as volunteers who serve for two years in foreign countries, particularly “underdeveloped” countries.

This paper compares the JOCV and Peace Corps in terms of program terminations. In the case of the Peace Corps in Latin America, twelve countries stopped receiving volunteers during the 1970s and the early 1980s.² An analysis of Peace Corps official annual reports from 1961 to 2010,³ and scholarly writings reveals four major factors relevant to the Peace Corps’ withdrawal: (1) increased development, (2) political unrest in the host country, (3) expulsion from the host country, and (4) U.S. budget cuts.

On the other hand, the JOCV program in Latin America experienced significantly fewer terminations of its operations than did the Peace Corps and JOCV in Latin America has never experienced expulsion of volunteers. An analysis of JOCV’s official documents, mainly Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) annual reports,⁴ and scholarly writings reveal that there is one principal factor affecting JOCV’s withdrawal in Latin America: political unrest in the host country.⁵ This situation is the primary cause

¹ Cobbs Hoffman, *All You Need is Love*.

² Bolivia, Panama, and Guyana terminated in 1971; Uruguay in 1974; Peru in 1975; Venezuela in 1977; Nicaragua in 1979; El Salvador in 1980; Brazil and Colombia in 1981; and Grenada and Chile in 1982.

³ I explored *1st Annual Peace Corps Report to Peace Corps Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2012* in order to obtain data between 1961 to 2010.

⁴ JICA is an independent governmental agency that coordinates Japan’s official development assistance. JOCV program is a division under JICA, and annual summary of JOCV’s activity is included in JICA’s annual reports.

⁵ In addition to political unrest, other cases of ‘unclear’ termination of JOCV programs occurred in semi-developed countries in Latin America, such as Argentine, Brazil, and Uruguay; this group’s terminations were different from the previous group of political unrest because these countries had received JOCV volunteers without concluding a ‘JOCV dispatch agreement’ (*Seinen kaigai kyōryōkutai haken torikime* in Japanese) (see Table 1.2). There are two different ways of starting JOCV programs in the host country. The first way of dispatching JOCV volunteers is to conclude a ‘JOCV dispatch agreement’ between the Japanese government and the host country (e.g., Colombia, El Salvador and Peru concluded their agreements before receiving JOCV volunteers). The second possible way to send JOCV volunteers is if the

behind these program terminations for both JOCV and the Peace Corps. JOCV programs in both Colombia and El Salvador were terminated due to this, and the Peace Corps also terminated programs in both countries. So in this paper, I focus on exploring the JOCV and Peace Corps terminations due to ‘political unrest,’ in the El Salvadoran and Colombian cases in comparison to those of the Peace Corps.

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)

The JOCV was founded as a government program in 1965. Unlike the “stereotypical images” of the United States and young Americans in the 1960s—which included brilliant, white Peace Corps volunteers with bachelor degrees from Ivy League schools—Japan in the 1960s was still struggling with the scars from World War II. Given this background, Japanese participation in international development projects was significant because it signaled the country’s return to the fold of the international community in the postwar period.

Because of the similar operational systems, some scholars have remarked that the Peace Corps was considered as a major factor in stimulating the establishment of JOCV.⁶ According to the JOCV’s magazine *Wakai chikara* [Young Power], a plan to send skilled young Japanese to developing countries was discussed and prepared by a group of politicians in the Liberal Democratic Party together with activists and businessmen before the Peace Corps was established. However, it took a long time to obtain approval from the Japanese government so that JOCV’s establishment was approximately four years later than that of the Peace Corps.⁷

Peace Corps’ organizational structures and experiences probably were a model for JOCV in the early years. Since the National Diet Library of Japan in Tokyo has Japanese-translated Peace Corps training program marked by Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency (OTCA),⁸ it means the OTCA office asked the Peace Corps headquarters office to send their training manual for reference. In the program, there is detailed information about Peace Corps training. Interestingly, however, the requested Peace Corps training manual from the early 1960s included anti-communist training, but the JOCV did not regard this part as significant and left it out of their manual.⁹ Actually, one of funding fathers of JOCV, Ichiro Suetsugu’s *Mikai to hinkon he no chōsen* [Challenge to the Underdevelopment and Poverty] mentioned that Suetsugu himself met various Peace Corps volunteers and local people who received Peace Corps volunteers and discussed the Peace Corps program in order to construct the JOCV organizational structures, such as the training program.

According to the records of the National Diet, when Japanese politicians discussed the JOCV in the 1960s they often called JOCV “*Iwayuru nihon no heiwabutai*

host countries have already concluded a JICA’s technical cooperation agreement (e.g., Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay). These three countries received JOCV volunteers on a project basis.

⁶ Skinner, “Internationalism and the Early Years of the Japanese Peace Corps,” 318-319.

⁷ JOCV, *Wakai chikara* [Young Power] No. 2, 24-25.

⁸ OTCA is predecessor of JICA; it was established in 1962.

⁹ Peace Corps (edited and translated by OTCA and JOCV office), *Beikoku heiwa butai kunren keikaku: kunren no kihonteki kōsei ni kansuru yōryō* [US Peace Corps’ Training Plan: In Regard to Basic Training Plan], National Diet Library, Tokyo. This is a handwritten unpublished paper written in Japanese. JICA received from Peace Corps from Washington D.C. by official manner.

[the so-called Japanese Peace Corps],” and this way of referring to the JOCV lasted until the early 1970s. In addition, one of Japan’s major newspapers, *Mainichi Newspaper*, published a series of articles entitled *Nippon no heiwa butai* [The Japanese Peace Corps].¹⁰ As these examples show, applying the name of Peace Corps to JOCV helped Japanese people understand what the JOCV was. This explains the Peace Corps’ popularity in Japan during the 1960s.

Since the establishment of the JOCV, the program emphasized “technology transfer,” so they were recruiting specialized, skilled volunteers. The first generation of JOCV volunteers were young male engineers and agriculturalists. Many of them had skills and plenty of working experience, but not necessarily college degrees. Actually, some of the first generation of JOCV volunteers didn't even go to college. This trend has been changing recently, and JOCV volunteers today include a large number of female volunteers as well as young volunteers with Bachelor degrees but without job experience.

The JOCV has steadily added host countries in Latin America. Throughout the years, JOCV has dispatched approximately 20 percent of its volunteers to the Latin American region. Compared to the Peace Corps, the JOCV has sent fewer volunteers in terms of the total number; however, the JOCV has sent volunteers to Latin American countries where there is no Peace Corps presence today, such as Bolivia and Venezuela.¹¹

Withdrawal of JOCV and Peace Corps Programs: El Salvador and Colombia

Political unrest in the host country was the most common and clearest factor in contributing to terminations of both JOCV and Peace Corps programs in Latin America. As a first example, this was the case with the JOCV program in El Salvador, which was officially closed down on March 31, 1979. El Salvador was the first country to become a foreign market for Japanese private companies after World War II. In 1978, the total number of Japanese residents in El Salvador reached 365 persons, and of those, 312 residents were Japanese business people from banks, manufacturers, and trading companies.¹² However, since the late 1970s the political situation in El Salvador became unstable and the number of violent incidents increased. In May 1978, the Japanese President of INSINCA S.A., Fujio Matsumoto, was kidnapped and assassinated by the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (hereafter, FARN). After this incident, kidnappings targeting foreign business personnel occurred frequently in El Salvador. According to an article by Takakazu Suzuki, who was kidnapped by FARN and returned home after 114 days, the kidnapping of foreign businessmen started with Matsumoto. Suzuki said that between May and December 1978, the branch chief of Ericsson, the branch chief and vice branch chief of British BOLSA, and again Takakazu Suzuki, the INSINCA S.A. Director were kidnapped by FARN.¹³ This series of kidnappings of Japanese businessmen came as a terrible shock to Japanese businessmen

¹⁰ Maeda, *Nippon no heiwa butai* [The Japanese Peace Corps].

¹¹ JOCV has never opened a program in Cuba. However, its parent body, JICA had implemented technical cooperation in Cuba.

¹² Tanaka, “IUSAsha no kiseki” [History of the IUSA], 314.

¹³ Suzuki, “INSINCA jiken no haikai,” [Backgrounds of kidnapping incidents of the INSINCA businessmen], 301.

in El Salvador; consequently, after Suzuki was kidnapped, most Japanese businessmen left El Salvador. Also, Takashi Tanaka mentioned that Japanese companies reduced their business activities in El Salvador after these incidents; moreover, even after the peace agreement in El Salvador in 1992, Japan was relatively slow to reenter the El Salvadoran market.¹⁴

The termination of the JOCV program also was a response to the increased violence in El Salvador. According to the FY 1979 Annual Report, the JOCV said that guerrilla activities increased social unrest and made the continuation of the program in El Salvador extremely difficult. In the report, the JOCV decided on “temporary termination” not only to secure volunteers’ lives, but also because “carrying out effective cooperation for people in the host country was impossible under this situation.”¹⁵ The JOCV terminated its program in El Salvador in 1979 and agreed to reopen it there only after almost eleven years of hiatus.

According to the Peace Corps annual reports, the major reason for the termination of its programs in El Salvador was political unrest.¹⁶ In the book *Voice of Experience in Central America: Former Peace Corps Volunteers’ Insights into a Troubled Region*, former volunteers who served in El Salvador recount dangerous political situations in the decade of the 1970s. In a survey of volunteers in El Salvador, all thirty-nine respondents had been affected or had known of incidents of violence, disappearances, and forced emigration during their service, and the number of Peace Corps volunteers’ accounts regarding violent experiences increased greatly in the mid-1970s.¹⁷ A volunteer who served as a university instructor of teacher education from 1977–1978 said, “Many of my students disappeared and never returned to class. The rector of the University was assassinated in front of the building.”¹⁸ Accounts by returned volunteers about violence in El Salvador could run eight pages long. This showed that some Peace Corps volunteers there were working in very unsafe situations. The Peace Corps terminated its program in El Salvador in 1980 and did not resume it until 1993.

In the case of the program termination in Colombia, the Peace Corps had started by first pointing out the existence of a security problem for volunteers there in the late 1970s. In March of 1981, the Peace Corps made the decision to terminate programs there due to the presence of guerrilla activities and drug trafficking.¹⁹ However, except for the Peace Corps Annual Report in FY 1982, the agency made no mention of the serious safety issues that volunteers had faced in the country. In 1977, a group known as Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) had kidnapped Peace Corps volunteer Richard Starr. Members of the Latin American press, such as *El Tiempo*, then reported that Starr might be a CIA agent or a member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, even though there was no such evidence. Starr’s eventual release was facilitated by neither the U.S. government nor the Peace Corps. Instead, internationally known journalist Jack

¹⁴ Tanaka, “USA sha no kiseki,” 315.

¹⁵ JICA, *JICA Annual Report 1979*, 291.

¹⁶ Examination of by Peace Corps annual reports shows there was no Peace Corps volunteer input to El Salvador from 1981 to 1992.

¹⁷ RPCV Committee on Central America, *Voice of Experience in Central America*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹ Peace Corps, *Peace Corps Congressional Submission Budget Justification Fiscal Year 1983*, 33.

Anderson negotiated with FARC and arranged a ransom using his private connections.²⁰ After 1981, the Peace Corps did not return to Colombia for thirty years, finally resuming its program there in September 2011.²¹

The case of Columbia shows stark differences between the Peace Corp and JOCV programs. The JOCV did not even start sending volunteers to Colombia until 1985, four years after the Peace Corps terminated its programs there. In the early years of JOCV/Colombia, the volunteers were able to work actively. However, according to JICA annual reports, in 1989 the JOCV moved its volunteers working in the Medellin area to Bogotá due to the increase of violence in Medellin. Then, in 1991, an employer from a Japanese company was kidnapped, so the JOCV ordered all volunteers in the country to stay in Bogotá for two months. After this, they were sent back to their worksites; however, murders and kidnappings targeting Japanese individuals occurred. Responding to unstable conditions in the country, the JOCV changed one-third of its volunteers' host communities/institutions in Colombia in 1991, and the agency stopped sending volunteers there in March 1992.²² In 1993, the number of JOCV volunteers in Colombia dropped to zero. However, the JOCV program came back after a one-year hiatus, unlike the Peace Corps, which, as previously noted, did not return for thirty years. The situation in Columbia remained unstable after JOCV's return, so JOCV/Colombia needed to operate under a special security policy.

Under this policy, five restrictions were placed on JOCV volunteers' activities in Colombia. First, JOCV/Colombia restricted the areas to which volunteers were sent, limiting these to Bogotá or other big cities where they were relatively safe compared to rural areas. Second, JOCV/Colombia prohibited the publicizing of activities in the country because it feared that volunteers would become targets of violence. Third, JOCV volunteers were prohibited from taking intercity buses and instead were required to take airplanes. Fourth, the JOCV ceased sending volunteers to impoverished regions/towns. Fifth, the JOCV prohibited volunteers from traveling to rural areas to provide their services because of the risk of guerrilla attacks.²³ JOCV/Colombia thus set up these extra rules to protect the lives of its volunteers. Because of these rules, JOCV/Colombia's per-volunteer costs for its activities increased. In addition, since JOCV's sphere of activity in Colombia was limited by placing rural areas and impoverished regions off limits, it is an open question as to how much the JOCV was able to meet local people's needs during the time of political unrest in Colombia.

Conclusion

The timing of withdrawal was different from that of the Peace Corps, even though the two organizations were similarly established and operated under a comparable systems. Political unrest in the host country is definitely one of causes behind these program terminations for the JOCV and the Peace Corps. However, neither the program

²⁰ Joanne Roll, "Peace Corps Stories: Colombia PCV Richard Starr: He Served with Honor," Knol: A Unit of Knowledge, <http://knol.google.com/k/peace-corps-stories-colombia-pcv-richard-starr-he-served-with-honor#>[accessed Nov 1, 2011].

²¹ Peace Corps, *Peace Corps Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2012*, 19.

²² JICA (JOCV office), *Seinen kaigai kyōryokutai 20 seiki no kiseki: 1965 to 2001* [JOCV's Activities in the Twentieth Century: 1965-2001], 185.

²³ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

closings or their timing are consistent between the JOCV and the Peace Corps. In the case of Colombia, JOCV continued sending volunteers after one-year habitus, unlike the Peace Corps had not come back to Colombia for three decades. From exploring JICA annuals, I could not find possible reasons why JOCV continued to send volunteers to Colombia even though JOCV office needed to devote extra budget for supporting and maintaining volunteers safety under such as unsafe condition. One of my hypothesis was relation between Japanese companies' investment to Colombia. Because during the 1980s, there are many Japanese companies invested or joined in infrastructure related-business and natural resource development in Colombia. Therefore, for the future study, as well as studying more about economic interests of Japanese companies in Colombia during 1980s and 1990s, I plan to access to JOCV volunteers who worked in Colombia at that time for interviewing them or access to their working diaries, which reserved at JICA archive. These additional study focuses on Colombia situation, hopefully, will answer some reasons why JOCV did not choose long-term program termination in Colombia like the Peace Corps chose.

Appendix

Table 1.1: JOCV's Host Countries in Latin America

Country	The Year of Concluding Agreement	The First Year of Dispatching JOCVs	Termination or Temporary Termination
Argentina	2007/No official agreement	1996	Yes
Belize	1999	2000	No
Bolivia	1977	1977 /1978	No
Brazil	No official agreement	1996	Yes
Chile	1996	1997	No
Colombia	1985	1985	Yes
Costa Rica	1973	1974	No
Dominican R.	1985	1985	No
Ecuador	1990	1991	No
El Salvador	1968	1968	Yes
Guatemala	1987	1988	No
Honduras	1975	1975	No
Jamaica	1987	1989	No
Mexico	1993	1993	No
Nicaragua	1991	1991	No
Panama	1986	1991	No
Paraguay	1978	1977 /1978	No
Peru	1979	1979 /1980	Yes
St. Lucia	1994	1995	No
St. Vincent	2000	2003	No
Uruguay	No official agreement	2002	Yes
Venezuela	2000	2002 /2003	No

Source: JICA Annual Report from FY 1968 to FY 2012 and JICA website, “haken torikime teiketsu jyōkyō,” <http://www.jica.go.jp/volunteer/outline/publication/results/contracts/> [accessed Nov.1, 2012]. The author made the table. **Note:** Regarding the first year of dispatching JOCV volunteers to Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela, data from JICA Annual Reports and JICA’s official webpage do not agree. Thereby, I included two dates from the annual reports and JICA website. In the case of Argentina, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan’s information about JOCV dispatch and JOCV official website posted about the dispatch agreement differently. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan said that between Argentine government and JICA/JOCV concluded the dispatch agreement; however, JICA/JOCV official website had not included Argentina as JOCV host country.

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