Comparative Studies of the “Japanese Program Terminations in

Kumiko Kawachi, who graduated with a PhD from LLILAS in 2013, received the award for Best LLILAS Student Paper at the ILASSA33 Conference in February. Her paper is reprinted here in an abridged version. The full-text version with complete references is available in the LANIC Etext Collection/LLILAS Archive at http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/LLILAS/ILASSA/2013.

Introduction
Since the 1960s, sending young volunteers to developing countries has become 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. 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 (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. An analysis of Peace Corps official documents 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.

The JOCV program in Latin America experienced significantly fewer terminations of its operations than did the Peace Corps. An analysis of JOCV’s official documents, mainly Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) annual reports, and scholarly writings reveal that there is one principal factor affecting JOCV’s withdrawal in Latin America: political unrest in the host country. This situation is the primary cause behind these program terminations for both JOCV and the Peace Corps. JOCV programs in both Colombia and El Salvador were terminated due to this; the Peace Corps also terminated programs in both countries. So I focus on exploring the JOCV terminations 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.

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 agriculturists. 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 BA 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.

Withdrawal of 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. However, in 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 (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 Director Takakazu Suzuki, again from INSINCA S.A., were kidnapped by FARN. These serial kidnappings came as a terrible shock to the other Japanese businessmen 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.

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.” The JOCV terminated its program in El Salvador in 1979 and agreed to reopen it there after 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. 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. 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.” 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. 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 Anderson negotiated with FARC and arranged a ransom using his private connections. After 1981, the Peace Corps did not return to Colombia for thirty years, finally resuming its program there in September 2011.

The case of Colombia shows stark differences between the Peace Corps 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 Medellín area to Bogotá due to the increase of violence in Medellín. 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. 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 Colombia 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. JOCV/Colombia thus set up these extra rules to protect the lives of its volunteers. Because of these policies, 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**

Even though the JOCV and the Peace Corps were similarly established and operated under comparable systems, the two organizations timed their withdrawals from host countries differently, especially in the case of Colombia. Although political unrest in the host country is the primary cause behind these program terminations, the JOCV and the Peace Corps responded to the political unrest in very different ways. In the case of Colombia, the JOCV continued sending volunteers after just a one-year hiatus, whereas the Peace Corps did not return to Colombia for three decades. Political unrest in the host country is definitely one of the causes behind these program terminations for the JOCV. However, neither the program closings nor their timing is consistent between the JOCV and the Peace Corps.

**Notes**

2. Unlike the Peace Corps’ independent status, the JOCV program is subordinated under JICA, which is the U.S. equivalent of USAID.