

Pathways and Influencing Factors of Motivational Changes among Chinese University Students Majoring in Japanese

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Abstract. With the deepening of economic and cultural exchanges between China and Japan, many universities in China have made great efforts to train Japanese as an important language major. Japanese major once became a hot major among college students in China. Traditional educators believe that the motivation of China students to learn Japanese is the good career prospects and the influence of Japanese trend culture, which will not change much on the whole. In recent years, colleges and universities in China have carried out a series of teaching reforms, introducing artificial intelligence and other measures. The research results reveal that motivation is not merely a influencing factor. Under the influence of cross-cultural communication, students' motivations show complex changes both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, students are influenced by their personal emotional connection with Japanese, cultural attraction and conflicts between the two countries, other second language learning, and the domestic teaching standards. Vertically, lower grades focus on interests and tend to have integrated motivations. Under the impetus of career planning, senior students gradually transform into instrumental motivations. In addition, this review discusses the major choice and language development of China students in the future, providing more theoretical support for the improvement of Japanese teaching in the future.

Keywords: Learning Motivation; Japanese Majors; Second Language Learning.

1. Introduction

Students take the initiative to choose Japanese as their major, and colleges and universities train high-level Japanese majors, which are all important links to promote the deepening of friendly exchanges between China and Japan. Learning motivation, as the driving force of students' freedom, is the core factor for students to persist in putting in a lot of energy and complete high-quality learning. Summarizing students' learning motivation, studying the causes of learning motivation and improving teaching methods on this basis are the keys to the development of national language teaching and personal career development. It is found that learning motivation can be actively promoted and good learning results can be achieved through certain methods (Lin, 2025).

For a long time, scholars at home and abroad have conducted a lot of discussions on the motivation of college students' second language acquisition, resulting in many motivation theories. Dörnyei(2005) holds that the theory of second language motivation self-system shows that the motivation of second language acquisition includes ideal second language self, coping with second language self and second language learning experience. This provides a basis for the type investigation of learning motivation, but it still adopts a cross-sectional perspective, lacking a vertical perspective. Most of the domestic scholars' researches on the motivation of second language learning only focus on the data of one school or one year, with a small sample size and a lack of comparison with other schools and their own schools in recent years. At the same time, learning motivation is a complex system and the influencing factors are constantly changing (Ren&Wang, 2025). Because the tracking of dynamic data is a research process with a lot of workload, the current domestic research on it is still insufficient. At present, domestic research mainly focuses on English learning motivation, and the research on other languages, especially Japanese, is still insufficient. Some studies have investigated the motivation of students in a domestic university to learn French, and found that it is very universal to take interest in culture and appreciation of language as learning motivation. In curriculum design, students have high expectations for interactive, lively and interesting classes (Yang, 2025). Although Yang's research indicates that the students of this school are significantly influenced by cultural

interests in the process of language learning, the study only explored two grades of students in one university, lacking universality. Compared with students majoring in foreign languages, those who take foreign languages as elective courses have certain differences in teaching intensity and self-expectations. The results of this study cannot be fully compared with the influencing factors of learning motivation of Japanese major students. Therefore, regarding the influencing factors of learning motivation for Japanese major students, the question of whether interest motivation has always dominated regardless of grade changes is a part that is currently lacking in domestic research.

In recent years, under the influence of psychology and pedagogy, the importance of longitudinal motivation tracking has been emphasized more and more. According to the research of social psychologists Gardner and Lambert, motivation can be divided into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Blended motivation is the motivation orientation based on cultural identity. Be interested in the target language country and yearn for cultural exchange and integration with the target language country. Instrumental motivation is to regard language learning as a learning tool, with the ultimate goal of facilitating employment and meeting academic requirements. This motivation is often practical. The two motivation orientations symbolize the external and internal influences on personal motivation. With the development of the times, the introduction of new media teaching, the development of artificial intelligence technology, the change of policies, and other factors that affect students' motivation for second language acquisition, it is no longer possible to fully explain the learning motivation of contemporary China by using only two types of motivation.

To sum up, this study uses the method of literature analysis, aiming at the shortcomings of the study on Japanese major students' learning motivation in China, systematically discusses the possible changes of domestic students' learning motivation, summarizes the types of influencing factors, and further provides more reference and guidance for Japanese education.

2. Emotional Connection between Personal Experience and Japanese Learning

2.1 Investigation on the Career Planning of Japanese Majors

According to the theory of instrumental motivation, the pursuit of future career closely affects the learning motivation of second language learners. The more specific and ideal the career planning, the more efforts you are willing to make in the process of second language acquisition. With the advancement of globalization, the demand for Japanese in society has increased. In recent years, the enrollment scale of Japanese majors in China is still expanding, and some colleges and universities have refined the professional directions such as comics and simultaneous interpretation. Under the impact of artificial intelligence on the field of small languages, Japanese majors can still maintain their vitality in China, showing that there is still a great market demand for Japanese-related employment in China. Graduates with a higher level and more Japanese proficiency certificates are more competitive in employment, and they can get higher salaries. Higher salary will attract more students to choose Japanese as their major, and they will spend more time and energy to improve their ability. This has become a positive motivation to improve students' ability.

However, the increase of graduates also makes the employment competition of Japanese majors more and more fierce. Recently, the number of students who choose Japanese as a major oriented by employment in Japanese enterprises has decreased. Under the pressure of employment, students have begun to consider the choice of major in all aspects. A study investigated the employment planning of Japanese majors in six universities in Sichuan. In high-level institutions, the proportion of students who choose postgraduate entrance examination and study abroad is much higher than that of employment, and some of them have no plans. The number of people who choose to continue studying Japanese in colleges and universities is small, and the number of people who have no plans for the future is the largest (Hou&du, 2018). The fierce employment competition has stimulated the learning motivation of some high-level students, but at the same time weakened the learning enthusiasm of some ordinary students.

2.2 Japanese Learning and Attitude

The attitude towards the second language is influenced by emotion, nationality and other aspects, which is essentially the second language learners' acceptance of the culture of the target language country. A study investigated the attitude of Japanese majors in a university in China towards Japanese. Among the motivations, the proportion of people who are interested in Japanese itself is the highest, and most of them express a positive attitude towards Japan. However, students will also consider employment comprehensively when studying, and the result shows a combination of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Moreover, 65% of students indicated that teachers' attitude affected students' attitude towards learning Japanese to some extent (Li, 2022). Learning attitude and learning motivation have an interactive relationship. A good learning effect leads to a more positive attitude towards Japanese culture, which promotes the motivation to study Japanese hard.

2.3 Self-efficacy and Japanese Learning Efficiency

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's expectations and beliefs about whether he can successfully achieve his goals. When students think that they have the ability to master the target language and that they can improve their level through continuous efforts. At this time, students have a strong sense of self-efficacy and a high willingness to learn, and their motivation for learning will be enhanced. There is a strong correlation between Japanese learning efficiency and self-efficacy, and the higher the self-efficacy, the higher the learning efficiency (Wang, 2024). However, in recent years, the number of students majoring in Japanese has increased, and the competition is fierce. Coupled with the impact of artificial intelligence on small languages, some students' sense of self-efficacy has decreased, and their willingness to learn Japanese has declined. More and more students have begun to learn more non-verbal majors on this basis.

3. Adaptation and Conflict from a Cross-cultural Perspective

3.1 The Attraction and Conflict of Japanese Culture

A study in China took students of different grades majoring in Japanese in a university in Tianjin as the research object, and investigated their learning motivation. The results showed that students had a strong interest in Japanese pop culture, such as anime and TV series, and wanted to know more about Japanese. After formal study, the motivation gradually turns to the willingness to study Japan itself, such as traditional culture and scientific research (Liu&Wang, 2022). Therefore, it can be found that the attraction of trend culture makes young people curious about the target language country and stimulates their initial motivation for learning, but most of the initial motivation is entertainment. After in-depth study of the language, they have been exposed to more professional knowledge and social and cultural background, and senior students have also changed from entertaining language learning to considering their own development, and their learning motivation has turned into instrumental motivation.

During the period of tense political relations between China and Japan, a study investigated students who took Japanese as their major during this period. The results showed that students' learning motivation declined when the political conditions in the two countries were negative (Gao&Lv, 2018). Learning motivation is significantly influenced by the attraction and conflict of culture, which produces constant changes.

3.2 Cross-cultural Communication Mode in Colleges and Universities

Cross-cultural communication modes in colleges and universities mainly include communicating with Japanese students, studying in Japan and making Japanese friends. A study conducted a questionnaire survey among 800 Japanese major students from the first to the third year at a university in Tianjin, China. Among the 623 valid responses, it was found that before enrollment, the primary

motivation was the admiration for modern Japanese culture; after enrollment, it transformed into the aspiration for Japanese studies. As the grade level increased, students' motivations showed a trend of diversification and personalization, and their willingness for cross-cultural communication also strengthened. The researchers believe that the language exchange platforms provided by the school are factors influencing the change in motivation. The researchers proposed countermeasures such as increasing study abroad and internship opportunities in universities and encouraging students to make Japanese friends to further stimulate learning motivation. It can be seen that students' demand for cross-cultural communication affects their motivation to learn Japanese. (Liu&Wang, 2022).

In recent years, universities in China have gradually introduced more cross-cultural exchange courses, such as hiring Japanese teachers for teaching activities. With the promotion of exchanges between China and China, a large number of Japanese universities have begun to establish friendly relations with Japanese universities, and regularly send exchange students to learn from each other. The better students can be sent to better universities for exchange. In order to get in touch with more Japanese native culture, students study Japanese harder and strengthen their motivation to learn Japanese. When the available cross-cultural communication methods decrease, students' willingness to learn decreases.

3.3 The Influence of Other Languages

A study investigated Japanese majors in China under the influence of different contexts and found that they have a strong ideal English self rather than an ideal Japanese self in the workplace (Wang&Zhen, 2019). They often think that I should speak English rather than Japanese. In recent years, society has increasingly emphasized the instrumental role of language, and instrumental motivation has played a role. In the present era when English serves as the global language of communication, it cannot be ruled out that the mastery of English might have a negative impact on the subsequent learning of Japanese.

4. Teaching Mode and Teaching Feedback

4.1 The Improvement of Educational Resources in Colleges and Universities

In the process of language teaching, cultural education about Japan and Japanese people is also an important part of language learning. Because learning motivation is closely related to career planning, it is necessary for colleges and universities to add career planning courses (Liu&Wang, 2022). In recent years, the demand for Japanese talents has increased. Compared with Japanese courses which were mainly textbooks decades ago, there are more teaching resources such as simultaneous interpretation classrooms and lecture classes. These advantages gradually become the influencing factors to attract students to choose when enrolling students.

4.2 Teachers' Feedback

Teachers' feedback is considered to be the strongest factor affecting grades and learning motivation (Sadler, 1998). However, because teachers ignore students' active participation in multiple feedbacks in different environments, teachers' feedbacks have a negative impact (Handley et al, 2011). Students' reaction to feedback behavior has a direct impact on academic performance, and curriculum satisfaction is positively correlated with academic performance (Gan et al, 2021). In the past, the teacher's one-way feedback mechanism can't meet students' expectations for Japanese classes. In recent years, colleges and universities in China have gradually realized the deficiency of classroom interaction, such as introducing the evaluation system of college teachers, and gradually establishing positive two-way feedback.

5. Vertical and Horizontal Contrast of Motivation

Domestic researchers have proposed 14 core Japanese courses in accordance with the requirements of the "Teaching Guidelines for Foreign Languages and Literatures in Undergraduate Programs of Regular Institutions of Higher Learning". Through questionnaires, it was found that most domestic universities offer beginner-level courses such as Basic Japanese and Basic Japanese writing in the freshman and sophomore years. In the junior year, courses such as Advanced Japanese and Theory and Practice of Translation are offered. Among them, the transitional courses from the second to the third year are the most numerous. It indicates that domestic universities regard the third year of college as a turning point from junior to advanced (Zhao,2021). Therefore, in this study, the first and second years are also regarded as the primary stage, and the third year as the advanced stage. In a horizontal comparison, the motivation of college students in China is influenced by emotional factors, communication modes between the two countries, and teaching quality and methods. By vertical comparison, the motivation of the first and second grade students is varied, and the interest in Japanese culture is the motivation-oriented. In the senior year, more knowledge stimulated students' thirst for knowledge of their major, and changed into a motivation model based on interest to develop Japanese-related careers and further studies.

6. Conclusion

This study, based on the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and Japan and the influence of employment pressure, takes Japanese language major students in Chinese universities as the research objects. According to the actual situation of different learning stages, it uses the literature analysis method to analyze the types of motivations at different learning stages nowadays for comparison, and then analyzes the underlying influencing factors based on the results of the types. The research results are as follows: First, students will be influenced by their personal emotions and the connection with Japan. Employment competition, attention to Japan, and self-efficacy have all contributed to students' motivation to learn. Second, China-Japan relations and cultural exchanges can also influence motivation. Popular culture and the desire to communicate with the Japanese have contributed to the motivation for learning, but the study of English may affect the enthusiasm for using Japanese. Thirdly, thanks to China's attention to the Japanese language major in recent years, teaching resources have been continuously optimized and exchange opportunities have increased. These resources become an advantage during the enrollment process, and at the same time, they can provide more diverse learning opportunities when students enter a period of study fatigue in their senior years. Overall, the motivation of beginner learners tends to be integrative, while that of advanced learners leans towards instrumental motivation. The purpose of this study is to clarify the trends in the development of Japanese language majors in China in recent years, enabling universities to have a clearer understanding of students' learning motivations, which is conducive to improving teaching directions and courses, and providing more teaching references for universities and Japanese language educators. However, this study still lacks a certain degree of comprehensiveness in terms of influencing factors, and whether the mastery of English truly has an impact on the usage tendency of Japanese learners still requires further research.

Pay attention to the influence of students in learning Japanese, and pay attention to the combination of instrumental motivation and integrative motivation in the process of teaching development. In the period of learning basic Japanese in the lower grades, more teaching materials about Japanese culture are introduced to enhance students' interest in Japanese. In the middle grade stage, provide opportunities for studying abroad and exchange, and provide a foundation for career planning of senior grades. In the senior year, some courses combined with media, economics and other majors are carried out to improve students' ability. Teachers should make a positive transformation, from one-way output to active guide of motivation, and help students find their own position through feedback and conversation according to the fluctuation of motivation in different grades.

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