

[Pedagogy]

# Changes of Japanese Majors' Learning Motivation from the Perspective of New Liberal Arts

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to explore the changes in the motivation of Japanese majors with a view to finding ways to improve the quality of foreign language education. Based on the field investigation results of Japanese majors and students from Grade One to Grade Three in Tianjin Foreign Studies University, this paper tries to explain the reasons why students keep and change their learning motivation, and then explore a new mode of teaching support service for Japanese majors from the perspective of new liberal arts, to provide a scientific basis for improving the quality of foreign language education for majors in universities. The following conclusions are drawn through the statistics and analysis of the survey results. First, from the source of students, non-university areas, the proportion of non-urban students than the same survey rate. Second, the students learning motivation has changed from the subjective perceptual motivation such as the simple interest and longing for the Japanese language and Japanese social culture to the rational motivation dominated by the objective aspirations such as the study of the Japanese language and the acquisition of interests. Thirdly, the concept of university education and teaching and educational resources and services are the influencing factors of students' motivation to keep. Fourthly, it is essential to strengthening the teaching of basic Japanese and cross-cultural communication in the context of globalization of higher education.

**Keywords:** Japanese major; learning motivation; teaching service; field research; dynamic analysis

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## Introduction

According to separate statistics published by the Japan Foundation for International Exchange in 2019, the number of Japanese language learners at Chinese mainland higher education institutions increased from about

530,000 in 2014 to about 660,000 in 2018 (Japan Foundation 2019). There are relatively few large-scale empirical studies on Japanese professional education in colleges and universities in China, the composition of students and learning motivation. Under the background of educational globalization, the development of higher education in China has also ushered in the diversification of Japanese majors' idiosyncratic abilities. Ensuring quality and improving teaching efficiency are the challenges faced by Japanese teaching in higher education. From the perspective of learner-orientedness, this study will investigate the relationship between education providers and education demanders and select universities with representative Japanese majors in Chinese universities to investigate and analyze students' Japanese learning motivation by exploring the changes in Japanese language students' motivation for learning with a view to improving the quality of education.

## 1 Research Purposes and Selection of Field Research Objects

Through the field research, a collective questionnaire survey was conducted among students in school. Through quantitative analysis and field investigation, analyzing the changing trends of learning motivation before and after entering school and based on the survey results of university education institutions, this paper attempts to explain the reasons behind students' keeping and changing their learning motivation, and makes a bidirectional dynamic analysis of education demand-side and education supply side in university education, to explore a new model of teaching support service for Japanese majors, and provide a scientific basis for improving the quality of foreign language education for university majors. The Japanese language institute of Tianjin Foreign Studies University is chosen as the field research object for the following reasons. First, In terms of the history of Japanese teaching and the scale of running a school, Japanese major began in 1973, and now it has formed a complete training level of undergraduate, master and doctoral degrees.

At present, among more than 500 Japanese majors in colleges and universities in China, students rank second<sup>①</sup>. Secondly, in terms of Japanese teaching level, from 2013 to 2018, the School of Japanese of Tianjin Foreign Studies University was the secretariat of the National Japanese Teaching Research Association, the joint cooperative unit of Japanese language education of Japan International Exchange Foundation in China, and one of the centres of Japanese teaching and research in China. It has been at the forefront of Japanese majors in China in constructing high-level teachers, high-quality achievements and high-level personnel training<sup>②</sup>. Thirdly, in terms of international exchanges between universities and the economic situation of foreign investment in the region, Tianjin Foreign Studies University has established friendly inter-school exchange relations with 28 Japanese institutions of higher learning. According to the statistics of "List of Enterprises Entering and Exiting China" published by Sososha in 2018–2019, as of September 2018, there were 536 enterprise legal persons and offices registered in Tianjin, which had a continuous demand for Japanese professionals.

## 2 The Field Research Content and the Fundamental Situation Analysis

### 2.1 *The methods and contents of field research*

In accordance with the above-mentioned research objectives, this paper focuses on the issue of students'

motivation, which is the main concern of foreign language learning research, in order to sharpen the characteristics of the relationship between the supply and demand sides of educational and teaching activities in university foreign language education.

This is because a correct grasp of the change process of learners' motivation is an important guarantee for mobilizing and motivating learners' motivation and motivation in the long term. This paper mainly draws on and adopts the survey index items related to the "Study on the New System of Distance Higher Education in China" (Liu Yong 2006)<sup>③</sup>, and conducts a collective questionnaire survey on university education enrolled students to address the following topics through a quantitative analysis and a comparative analysis of the field visit research situation.

First, the questionnaire survey was used to understand the composition of students majoring in Japanese language education at the university under the new social conditions. The regional distribution of students, their families' household registration and parents' professional differences explain the social significance and effects of the Japanese language education program at the university.

Questions such as whether students come from remote rural areas or large cities, whether their families have agricultural or non-agricultural household registration, how many school students have parents whose occupations belong to socially marginalized groups, etc. need to be explained. Second, the results of the questionnaire are processed using statistical methods to summarize the specific types of motivational structures of university Japanese majors. At the same time, in order to reflect more accurately, the different characteristics of the beginner level and the intermediate and advanced level of Japanese language are to be analyzed. Third, based on the statistical results, a two-way dynamic analysis of the demand side of education and the supply side of education in the context of university education is conducted. Whether the influence of university education factors is reflected behind the changes in students' motivation to learn, and which of the students' motivation to learn is related to teaching measures and service environment.

There are two main features of the survey design as well as the analysis of the results in this paper. First, a stratified sample was taken at different grade levels to analyze the patterns of learners and their motivation in relation to academic performance, which were easily overlooked in prior studies. Second, it concentrates on the rational design and analysis of comprehensive indicators of students' motivation and academic performance, students' gender, and study abroad experience: to find out the main factors affecting students' learning motivation, to propose targeted opinions on how to improve teaching in the future, and to explore new modes of teaching Japanese in the new period and form.

In May 2019, a questionnaire survey was conducted among students majoring in Japanese at Tianjin Foreign Studies University. The questionnaire is directly distributed and directly collected. A total of 800 paper questionnaires were distributed, and 623 were effectively recovered, with an effective recovery rate of 78%. The questionnaire includes students' attributes, family and regional sources, time of major study activities and examination results of professional courses, and learning motivation before and after enrollment. This study will focus on analyzing the basic situation of all students in school, the whole from grade one to grade three, and the change process of learning motivation before and after entering school<sup>④</sup>.

## 2.2 Analysis of social information composition of students in school

Gender		Source of students		Regional distribution of students		Parents' household registration		Parents' occupational groups	
Female	Male	Non-Tianjin	Tianjin	Rural (county/township/village)	Cities	Agricultural household registration	Non-agricultural household registration	Low social status	High social status
83%	17%	62%	38%	43% (17%/26%)	57%	33%	67%	35%	65%

Table 1: Percentage of respondents in major Japanese survey (N=623)

As shown in Table 1<sup>5</sup>, girls make up more than 80 per cent of the student population, reflecting the traditional phenomenon of the sex ratio of foreign language learners. Regarding the significant indicators of great sociological significance, the ratio of students from other provinces and cities to students from Tianjin is about 62% to 38%. On the one hand, this result shows that the Tianjin Foreign Studies University plays an active role in balancing regional differences in access to higher education; On the other hand, there are differences in entrance scores between Tianjin students and students from other provinces and cities. The ratio of rural students to urban students is 4.3 to 5.7, reflecting that Japanese majors provide opportunities for children in rural and remote areas to train foreign language talents<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, from the household registrations of the students' parents, this proportion is the same as the proportion of rural students absorbed by the subordinate colleges and higher vocational colleges in other higher education surveys. In terms of the occupational characteristics of the parents of the students, the proportion of the occupational groups with lower social status was 34%, almost the same as the proportion of 34.7% in the affiliated institutions. Japanese majors in local foreign language universities provide opportunities for students in rural and remote areas to train foreign language talents and opportunities for lower social status professional groups to further their studies.

## 3 Analysis of Learning Motivation of Students in School

### 3.1 An analysis of students' learning motivation

Based on the existing research, 34 primary Japanese students' learning motivation questionnaires are designed, which are called the original variables in the following analysis. Four choices are given for each item (in order: one very inconsistent, two inconsistent, three consistent, four very consistent). In order to have a comprehensive understanding of students learning motivation, the factor analysis method is used to analyze the potential variables to explain the original objective variables. Results Eight common factors were extracted from the original variables of students' learning motivation before and after enrollment (The internal reliability coefficients are all >0.9, and the reliability is good); they are named as: the first common factor: the aspiration of modern Japanese culture, second common factor: Japanese research ambition, the third common factor: mastering Japanese written information ambition, the fourth common factor: Profit instruments aspirations, the fifth common factor: cross-cultural communication ambition, the sixth common factor: interest ambition of

Japanese related knowledge, the seventh common factor: motivation ambition of shared cultural background and the eighth common factor: professional translation ambition. The above summary summarizes the specific types of motivation of university Japanese majors and reflects the different characteristics of the beginner level and the intermediate and advanced level of Japanese language. On this basis, the original investigation items with a factor load above 0.50 are selected, and the items with the same attributes are classified and compared. The following is a detailed analysis of the statistical results, explaining the changes in students' learning motivation before and after entering school<sup>⑦</sup>.

### ***3.2 Comparative analysis of students' learning motivation before and after enrollment***

Before entering school, the ambition of modern Japanese culture, the ambition of Japanese research and the ambition of mastering Japanese knowledge and information are in the top three respectively; After entering school; the top three learning motives are Japanese research ambition, Japanese cultural longing ambition and Profit instruments aspirations. With the deepening of Japanese learning, students begin to pay attention to and think about their future after graduation. The factors of Japanese research and interest tool acquisition ambition have increased in the ranking of the importance of affecting students' learning motivation. This result also reflects the current trend that the proportion of Japanese language graduates applying for graduate school is increasing year by year. In addition, college students born after 1990 have been influenced by Japanese animation since childhood. Influenced by Japanese anime, the ambition of modern Japanese culture before entering school occupies the most important position. After entering school, the Japanese professional study and in-depth understanding of Japanese society stimulate and promote students' enthusiasm for scientific research to a great extent. Before entering school, the fourth Profit instruments aspirations, and jumped to the second place after entering school. Many Japanese-funded enterprises settled in Tianjin, providing employment opportunities for local professional college students. The analysis of the employment rate of foreign companies with more than 25% of graduates indirectly proves that there is a strong correlation between students' motivation and the use of Japanese to pursue a career.

### ***3.3 The comparison of learning motivation of students of different grades after entering school***

An analysis of the student population showed that the same eight categories of motivation were extracted as a common factor before and after admission. When the factor analysis is carried out step by step by grade, it is found that the common factors obtained by grade keep their independent characteristics and, at the same time, take into account the information of the original variables of other factors. For the convenience of comparative analysis, the common factors obtained my grades are no longer named independently. However, their names are determined by way of accumulating the names of the original common factors mentioned above, and the order before and after the name accumulation is determined according to the factor load. For example, all students have Japanese research aspirations before entering school. However, after entering the first grade, they have Japanese research aspirations and Japanese knowledge interest aspirations, so they are accumulated into Japanese research interest aspirations. As shown in Table 2, the first learning motivation of Grade One and Grade Two shows a diversified trend. After entering school, the interest in studying Japanese cultural knowledge increases, and the objects are more extensive. When analyzing all students before, it belongs to the content of deep

understanding motivation of Japanese social culture, which is included in the first factor characteristics after entering school in Grade One and Grade Two. It shows that the depth and breadth of students' learning are deepening, and students show an intense thirst for knowledge to absorb more professional knowledge. In the critical Japanese bare stage, strengthening and enriching learning support services and educational resources is particularly important for professional Japanese learners entering the intermediate learning stage<sup>®</sup>.

First Grade (N=213)			Second Grade (N=115)			Third Grade (N =228)		
Type of motivation	Questionnaire items	Load capacity	Type of motivation	Questionnaire items	Load capacity	Type of motivation	Questionnaire items	Load capacity
Japanese research knowledge interest character information ambition	Studying the Japanese economy	0.756	Knowledge interest and the ambition of mastering Japanese character information	Interest in Japanese studies	0.764	Profit instruments aspirations	Japanese companies have an interest in working	0.702
	Studying Japanese society	0.696		Interest in Japanese literature	0.635		Learning Japanese pays well	0.743
	Studying Japanese literature and education	0.674		Japanese interest in education	0.709		Learning Japanese is good for your job	0.785
	Interest in Japanese literature	0.579		Studying Japanese literature	0.617		Japanese firms are better off in the office	0.812
	Japanese interest in education	0.662		Studying Japanese literature and education	0.524	The vision of modern Japanese language and culture	Japanese songs and movies	0.875
	Japanese social interest	0.691		Reading Japanese novels	0.569		Manga	0.796
	Japan's economic interests	0.809	The acquisition of interest tools and the vision of modern Japanese language and culture	Japanese companies have an interest in working	0.796		Japanese magazine	0.593

续表

First Grade (N=213)			Second Grade (N=115)			Third Grade (N =228)		
Type of motivation	Questionnaire items	Load capacity	Type of motivation	Questionnaire items	Load capacity	Type of motivation	Questionnaire items	Load capacity
	Interest in Japanese studies	0.576		Money to learn Japanese	0.824		Japanese TV animation	0.615
	Professional articles in Japanese	0.514		Japanese is good for the job	0.793	The ambition of mastering Japanese character information	Reading Japanese novels	0.681
The vision of modern Japanese language and culture	like Japanese	0.553		Japanese firms are better off in the office	0.749		Reading Japanese news on the Internet	0.689
	Japanese song, film and television	0.749		like Japanese	0.521		Read articles on Japanese	0.649
	Manga	0.741		Japanese song, film and television	0.708	Japan's interest in research knowledge	Studying the Japanese economy	0.775
	Japanese magazine	0.708		Manga	0.806		Studying Japanese society	0.751
	Japanese TV animation	0.584		Japanese magazine	0.596		Studying Japanese literature and education	0.504
Profit instruments aspirations	Japanese companies have an interest in working	0.672		Japanese goods	0.523		Japan's economic interests	0.567
	Money to learn Japanese	0.691		Japanese TV animation	0.562			

**Table 2: Comparison of learning motivation and ambition among first, second and third-grade students after entering school**

It is worth noting that after three years of professional study, students still keep their aspirations for Japanese culture before entering school, which shows that Japanese learning is closely related to students' interests. Centralized classroom teaching is the core of teaching mode, and participatory learning can improve classroom teaching and promote students' autonomous and spontaneous learning. The ambition of professional translation



has risen from the last place in the first grade to the fourth place. First-year students are fresh high school graduates who have no Japanese learning experience. At the beginning of learning a new language, many students will be reluctant, afraid of difficulties and uneasy, which will affect students' self-efficacy. Therefore, it is particularly crucial to build confidence and cultivate interest. According to the analysis of the characteristics of college students in the past studies, the longing for and interest in modern Japanese social culture belong to the comprehensive type. In contrast, Japanese studies belong to the deep research type<sup>⑨</sup>. The essential purpose of studying deep modelling motivation is to give up the consideration of income temporarily objectively. This survey shows that students' learning motivation has changed from comprehensive type to research type, which reflects that subject atmosphere plays a subtle role in students' learning motivation. From the overall learning motivation changes in the three grades, students' Japanese learning started from zero before entering school. There is no noticeable difference in learning motivation among the respondents, which has substantial homogeneity. However, after more than one year's study and life, the learning motivation of all the respondents has experienced a process of diversification and integration and tends to be precise and personalized. It reflects the diversity of Japanese teaching and the role of the factors behind selectivity in autonomous learning. Based on the statistical results, combined with the two-way dynamic analysis of the demand side of education and the supply side of education, it is proved that the influence of the educational factors of the university is fully reflected behind the changes in the students' motivation to learn, which is related to the foreign language education measures and the service support environment.

## 4 Conclusion

This thesis is based on the field investigation results of the basic situation and learning motivation of Japanese majors and students from Grade One to Grade Three in Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Based on the theory that learning motivation affects learning effect, according to the actual situation of different grades, using the statistical analysis method of factor analysis, analyze and compare the changing trends of learning motivation before and after entering school, and combined with the results of the investigation of university educational institutions, the reasons behind students' keeping and changing their learning motivation are explained and analyzed, thus providing scientific basis for exploring and discovering a new mode of teaching support service for Japanese majors and ensuring and improving the quality of foreign language education for universities. Through analysis and investigation, the following conclusions are drawn. First, from the perspective of students' regional sources, the distribution of students reflects that Japanese majors in foreign language colleges provide opportunities for children in rural and remote areas and social and occupational vulnerable groups to receive higher foreign language education. Second, students' learning motivation has changed from subjective motivation such as simple interest in Japanese before entering school to objective motivation such as Japanese research and obtaining benefits. Third, education and teaching ideas adapted to students' needs, teachers, and other educational resources and services affect students' motivation. The survey results show a close relationship between students' motivation and using Japanese to seek jobs. It is necessary to add career planning and other related content to elective courses. At the same time, how to establish and consolidate the communication and cooperation between universities and related enterprises is essential, which can play an excellent guiding role for



teachers and students to grasp and improve the direction of teaching and learning. With the deepening of Japanese learning and the improvement of the Japanese language level, the students' professional translation ambition motivation gradually rises. Professional translation ambition is independent of the profit instruments aspirations, which is a unique and challenging profession. What teaching methods should be adopted to guide students to gain confidence is an important issue. Although pure business workplace translation maintains certain social needs, to meet the requirements of the future society for talents with cross-cultural communicative competence and accurately express and convey Chinese voice to the world, the characteristics and importance of translation major are still the top priority foreign language universities. The results of this motivation-centred survey also prove that the supply and demand of university education providers and demanders are consistent from another angle.

The results of the analysis of a stratified sample by different grades, the learning patterns of learners, and the issue of the relationship between their motivation and academic performance were clarified. At the same time, we analyzed and examined the correlation between students' motivation and the comprehensive indicators of academic performance, students' gender, and study abroad experience, and found out the main factors affecting students' motivation, and put forward targeted opinions on how to improve foreign language education activities in the future, which will be beneficial for exploring a new model of Japanese language education in the new liberal arts perspective. For the first time, this study proves the close relationship between learning motivation and teaching service by empirical method and scientific investigation with solid visibility. Here, this study puts forward the following suggestions for the future teaching of college Japanese majors.

First, in the primary stage of Japanese learning, we should continue to make good use of Japanese pronunciation and intonation and use various network resources to let students listen, see and imitate more. Use international cyberspace to conduct live cloud classroom connection activities with friendly universities. Let students get in touch with the original Japanese in the primary stage of Japanese learning, and at the same time become good friends with Japanese college students, and further expand offline communication through various channels such as WeChat and email, to enhance students' learning motivation and interest.

Second, students with a certain Japanese foundation are encouraged to participate in various Japanese-related competitions organized by third parties, such as speech contests, composition contests, dubbing contests, etc., and carry out mass Japanese learning activities through layer-by-layer selection. Actively organize students to take the Japanese proficiency test, give full play to the characteristics of advanced Japanese and students' strong absorption, promote learning by the test, and realize the transformation from oral listening and speaking ability to article reading and writing ability, even translation ability.

Third, according to the multiple needs of senior students, such as employment, graduation thesis and postgraduate entrance examination, we should increase and improve internship opportunities in Japanese-funded enterprises and related institutions in Japan. By using activities such as exchange of short-term visits to study abroad, we can set topics and introduce experiences so that students can bring practical enlightenment and benefits to Japanese teaching before, during and after studying abroad. Make learning support services meet students' multiple needs.

As a future research topic, the differences in students' learning motivation are tested according to social indicators such as students' gender, origin area and social status of parents' occupation. The specific learning motivations of students with different regional characteristics and family backgrounds need to be further

discussed.

### Notes:

① There are about 1200 undergraduates in the Japanese College of Tianjin Foreign Studies University and about 3500 undergraduates in Dalian Foreign Studies University, ranking first in China.

② Since the new century, the College of Japanese has won dozens of national, provincial and ministerial scientific research projects and has been identified as a national key discipline of foreign languages.

③ Liu Yong. (2006). A study of a new system of distance higher education in China: Centering on radio and television universities. Nagoya University Library Collection, CiNii (Academic Information Navigation System) Search Japanese Doctoral Dissertation, unpublished, 75–78.

④ The reasons why the fourth-grade students are not taken as the object of learning motivation analysis. First, the fourth grade is different from the other three grades in the number and content of teaching and course selection. Second, Fourth-grade students are facing the choice and preparation for further education and employment after graduation. Third, Fourth-grade students need to write a graduation thesis in the second semester, which has a special nature compared with the other three grades.

⑤ Students' age is not included in Table 1. The survey results show that the average age of Japanese majors is graduating. Compared with the early stage of reform and opening up, there is no in-service staff in the same class, so the learning motivation will not be biased due to age differences.

⑥ According to the current research on the definition of rural areas in China, this study defines the administrative units below the county as rural areas. Education-related research shows that the proportion of students in rural local colleges and universities in China is 25% – 30%.

⑦ Following other relevant social education research methods, this study defines the group whose father is engaged in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, migrant workers, production and transportation equipment operation or has no occupation as the occupational group with low social status.

⑧ The primary variable items of the questionnaire on students' learning motivation contained in each common factor are as follows: Vision and ambition of modern Japanese culture: like Japanese, like Japanese film and television works, like Japanese animation, like Japanese goods, like Japanese magazines and watch Japanese animation; Japanese research ambition: want to study Japanese literature, want to apply for graduate students, want to study Japanese economy, want to study Japanese society, want to study Japanese culture and education; Master the ambition of Japanese text information: read Japanese novels, read Japanese newspapers and web pages, and write Japanese professional articles; Interest tool acquisition ambition: working in a Japanese enterprise can benefit one's life, learning Japanese can make one's economy rich, learning Japanese is helpful for taking office in the future, and taking office in a Japanese enterprise can make one's life rich; Cross-cultural communication ambition: communicate with Japan and Japanese friends. He studied in Japan, worked in Japan and studied Japanese, so he can become a world-class talent with global vision; Japanese related knowledge and aspirations: interested in Japanese literature, Japanese education, Japanese culture, Japanese society and Japanese economy; Common cultural background inspires ambition: it is easy to learn Japanese, there are many Chinese characters in Japanese, and Chinese and Japanese cultures have a lot in common; Professional translation ambition. Want to be a professional interpreter, want to be a professional translator.

⑨ Because the order of factors depends on the importance of the factor in the variables, the factor load shows that the factor is closely related to the original variables. Therefore, the higher the learning motivation factor is the stronger its importance is and vice versa.

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