

COMPARISON OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THAI STUDENTS' CHOICES OF A MINOR SUBJECT BETWEEN JAPANESE AND CHINESE

การเปรียบเทียบปัจจัยที่ทำให้นักศึกษาไทยเลือกเรียนเป็นวิชาโท
ระหว่างวิชาภาษาญี่ปุ่นกับภาษาจีน

Kazuyoshi Tajima¹

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore and compare the different factors influencing students' choice of a minor subject between Japanese and Chinese. 124 second-year Thai students at Panyapiwat Institute of Management participated in the study. This study was a quantitative type of research and the major research tool was a questionnaire administered during class time. Factor analysis was implemented. Moreover, each factor was categorized into 5 regulations, and these 5 regulations were classified into intrinsic or extrinsic motivation patterns. It was found that learners were more motivated to take Chinese by intrinsic reasons than learners who chose Japanese. On the contrary, Japanese learners were more motivated by instrumental reasons than Chinese learners. Furthermore, this study revealed that Japanese learners thought it was more difficult to learn Japanese and obtain a good grade than their Chinese counterparts.

Keyword : Factors influencing Thai students' choices, Minor subjects, Japanese, and Chinese

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเปรียบเทียบปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจของนักศึกษาไทยที่เลือกเรียนระหว่างวิชาภาษาญี่ปุ่นและวิชาภาษาจีนเป็นวิชาโท กลุ่มประชากรประกอบด้วยนักศึกษาจำนวน 124 คน ที่กำลังศึกษาในระดับปริญญาตรีชั้นปีที่ 2 สถาบันการจัดการปัญญาภิวัฒน์ เครื่องมือหลักในการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณนี้ คือแบบสอบถามที่ใช้ในระหว่างการเรียนการสอนและการใช้การวิเคราะห์ปัจจัย นอกจากนี้ ยังมีการจัดประเภทปัจจัยแต่ละตัวให้อยู่ในข้อกำหนด 5 ประการ ตามรูปแบบการกระตุ้นภายในหรือภายนอก ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ปัจจัยที่ทำให้นักศึกษาไทยเลือกเรียนภาษาจีนมากกว่าภาษาญี่ปุ่น คือ แรงจูงใจภายใน ในขณะที่นักศึกษาไทยที่เลือกเรียนวิชาภาษา

¹ A full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Panyapiwat Institute of Management
E-mail: kazuyoshitaj@pim.ac.th

ญี่ปุ่นเลือกด้วยแรงจูงใจเชิงสังคม ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น ยังมีผลการวิจัยอีกประการหนึ่งว่า กลุ่มผู้เรียนภาษาญี่ปุ่นเชื่อว่าการเรียนภาษาญี่ปุ่น และการบรรลุผลสัมฤทธิ์ในการเรียนภาษาญี่ปุ่นนั้นยากกว่าเมื่อเทียบกับการเรียนภาษาจีน

คำสำคัญ : ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อการเลือกของนักศึกษา วิชาโท ภาษาญี่ปุ่น ภาษาจีน

INTRODUCTION

Thailand and Japan have long maintained a cordial relationship. Their links went back as far as 600 years ago between Okinawa (Japan) and Ayutthaya (Thailand). In 1887, Thailand and Japan formally established diplomatic relations, and in September 2007, they celebrated the 120th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The friendship between the two countries has become stronger during recent years. It is certain that this good friendship will continue to develop in the future (www.mofa.go.jp).

As for relationship between Thailand and China, the year 2010 marked the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Thailand. Strategic cooperation in economic, cultural, education and military fields between the two countries made steady progress (www.chinaembassy.or.th).

A survey reported by Japan Foundation (2009), showed there are approximately 3.65 millions of people who are studying the Japanese language in the world, and Thailand ranked seventh in the world, fifth in Asia (after China, Indonesia, Korea, and Taiwan) having about 79,000 learners. At present, the number of learners of Japanese in Thailand has gone up to 10.9% greater than what was recorded by

a survey in 2006. In addition, Japan foundation's announcement regarding preliminary results of the "Survey on Japanese-Language Education Abroad 2012" showed that the number of Japanese-language learners abroad increased by 9.1%, reaching a total of 3.98 million. Thailand ranks seventh the same as the year of 2009; however, the number of Japanese-language learner in Thailand increased by 64.5%, having about 130,000 learners (The Japan Foundation, 2013).

As for Chinese education, Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) Ministry of Education, Thailand (2010) announced that there are approximately 610,000 learners of Chinese in Thailand. At present, the number of learners of Chinese in Thailand has gone up to 270%, greater than what was recorded by a survey in 2005. This is a considerable rate of increase. Furthermore, to compare the number of learners of Japanese and Chinese in Thailand, learners of Chinese are 10 times greater than learners of Japanese in 2009. In addition, according to a senior official at the Confucius Institute Headquarters, there are over 40 million foreigners currently studying Chinese in the world, and that number is steadily rising. (www.chinesecio.com).

Based on the statistic data stated above, needless to say, the Chinese language is the most influential language not only in Thailand, but in the world and only second to English. However, in Thailand, the Japanese language is absolutely one of the most practical languages after English and Chinese. Due to these reasons, I decided to examine the present situation of Japanese and Chinese teaching and learning in Thailand, especially the factors that influence student choices when they select a minor subject.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is to investigate and compare factors influencing Thai students' choice of a minor subject between Japanese and Chinese. This involves the following specific objectives: 1) to identify the differences of the factors influencing students' choice of a minor subject between Japanese and Chinese, and 2) to recommend the implications of the finding in this study for Japanese and Chinese teachers and the institute.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I have explored literature in the fields of motivation and, in particular, the scene of motivation research both in educational psychology and in the second language (L2) field (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972, 1959). Moreover, extensive reading was done in the fields of foreign language teaching and learning, particularly, Japanese and Chinese teaching

and learning, as well as achievement and motivation researches in the world and in Thailand (e.g., Narita, 1998; Nuibe, Kano, & Ito, 1995).

1. Self-determination theory, Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation

Self-determination theory, SDT, hereafter, (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) is one of the well-developed motivation theories in psychology, and has been elaborated and refined by scholars from many countries. In SDT, they distinguish between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action.

The most basic distinction is between *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation*.

1) *Intrinsic motivation* is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards (Deci and Ryan, 2000: 56).

2) *Extrinsic motivation* is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcomes. Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than its instrumental value (Deci and Ryan, 2000: 60).

2. Organismic Integration Theory

Within SDT a second subtheory, referred to as *Organismic Integration Theory* (OIT), was introduced to detail the different forms of extrinsic motivation and the contextual factors

that either promote or hinder internalization behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
and integration of the regulation for these

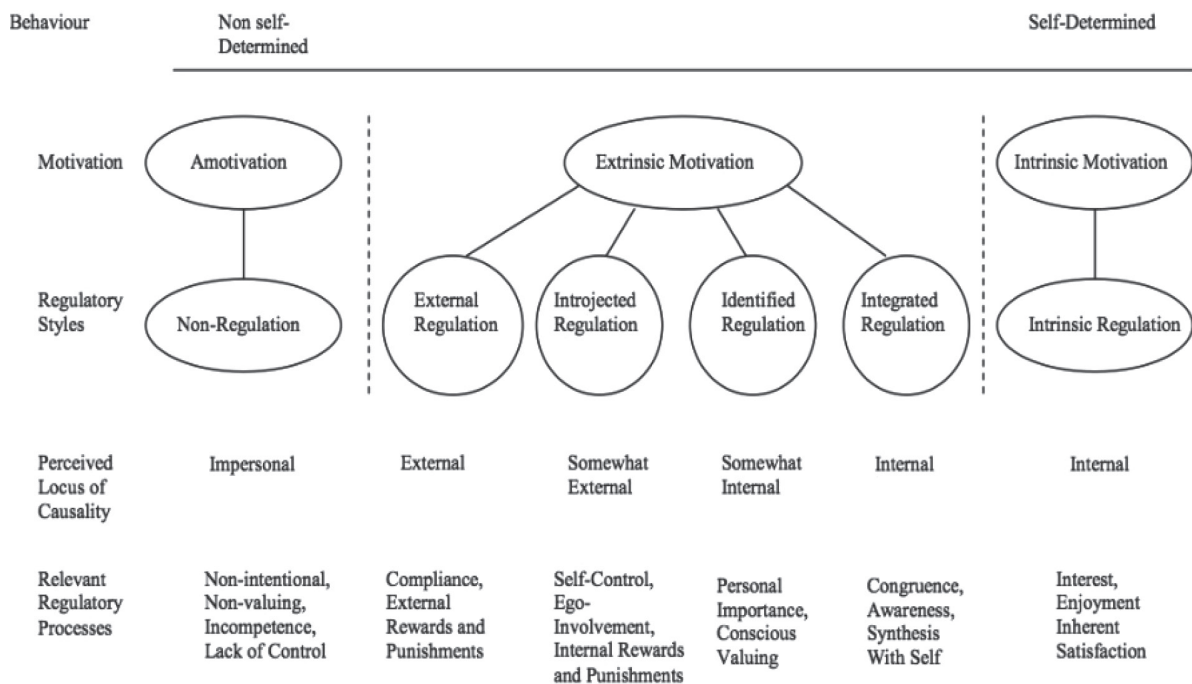


Figure1 A taxonomy of human motivation

Note: Cited from 'Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: classic definitions and new directions' (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Figure 1 illustrates the OIT taxonomy of types of motivation, arranged from left to right in terms of the extent to which the motivation for one's behavior emanates from one's self. The theory is composed of six regulations (*non-regulation*, *external regulation*, *introjected regulation*, *identified regulation*, *integrated regulation*, and *intrinsic regulation*) under three types of motivation (*amotivation*, *extrinsic motivation*, and *intrinsic motivation*).

There are many classroom motivation researches from the perspective of SDT. The researcher consulted Noels, K. A., Pelletier, L.,

Clement, R., & Vallerand, R. (2000) and Hiromori, T. (2003) to validate the applicability of SDT to the study of Japanese and Chinese learner motivation.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research design

In this study, I adopted a quantitative research method, involving on a large number of participants, to look into the context. The participants were composed of 124 second-year Thai students, who selected Japanese course or Chinese course as their minor subject.

A 17-item survey questionnaire was originally designed in English, but later translated into Thai for Thai students.

2. Research instruments

I prepared the questionnaire which was composed of 17 questions based on Nuibe, Kano & Ito (1995), Narita (1998), Guo & Quan (2006), and Utsugi (2011), and aimed to survey factors influencing Thai students' choice of Japanese or Chinese as a minor subject. The subjects were asked to answer on a five-scale

Likert, ranging from the far left column "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Not sure or Not important", "Agree" to "Strongly agree", on the far right column.

3. Participants

The research population consisted of the beginner's level students who were studying Japanese or Chinese as their minor subject in the second year at the institute – totaling 124 students as follows.

Table 1 Distribution of subject by number of the students

Subject	Student
Japanese	52 (42%)
Chinese	72 (58%)
Total	124 (100%)

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

1. Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal axis factoring extraction technique followed by promax oblique rotation. Two sets of criteria were used. One, factors with an eigenvalue was set greater than 1.0. Two, the analysis strategy involved an iterative process, whereby any item that did not contribute appreciably to the solution (i.e., those with loadings < |.35| or the item which is remarkably low, less than .14, in communalities) was eliminated. The result of the first analysis

eliminated one item, question number 15 "I would like to have Japanese/Chinese friends" (factor loading=.302), and the correlation matrix was reanalyzed. This process was repeated the second time and the results of this analysis yielded five factors, accounting for 42.6% of the variance. An examination of the factor structure revealed that the factors represented the five hypothesized motivational constructs. The Cronbach alpha index of internal consistency was acceptable for all subscales, varying between .60 and .76.

Table 2 Pattern matrix, Factor correlation matrix and Cronbach coefficient alpha for the final principal axis factor analysis of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation items

Items	Factors				
Factor.1: Identified Regulation ($\alpha = .635$)	I	II	III	IV	V
5. I would like to work for a Japanese / Chinese company.	.690	.028	-.052	-.110	.219
12. I would like to go abroad to study in Japan / China.	.570	-.085	.034	.288	-.086
8. I would like to live in Japan / China some day.	.495	.010	-.080	-.124	.216
2. I would like to travel for a holiday to Japan / China.	.452	.112	.060	.057	-.129
Factor.2: External Regulation ($\alpha = .615$)					
16. My parents urged me to study Japanese / Chinese.	.081	.717	.094	-.078	-.122
13. I would like to be with my friends who are studying Japanese / Chinese.	.003	.565	-.007	.136	.000
17. I have heard that Japanese / Chinese teachers are friendly and helpful.	-.052	.485	-.123	-.014	.297
7. My friends convinced me to take Japanese / Chinese course.	.019	.440	-.025	-.041	-.017
Factor.3: Introjected Regulation ($\alpha = .764$)					
14. I thought it would be easy to learn Japanese / Chinese.	-.008	.082	.807	-.043	-.064
9. I thought Japanese / Chinese course would be easy to obtain a good grade.	-.017	-.091	.794	-.127	.141
Factor.4: Integrated Regulation ($\alpha = .616$)					
6. I would like to communicate with Japanese / Chinese people.	-.005	.027	-.184	.661	-.106
10. I would like to be able to read Japanese / Chinese books, magazines or newspaper.	-.147	-.065	.063	.612	.341
11. I would like to get a job in tourism for Japanese / Chinese people.	.269	-.030	.097	.476	-.027
Factor.5: Intrinsic Regulation ($\alpha = .605$)					
1. I am interested in the Japanese / Chinese pop culture such as songs, cartoons, animated films, TV games, films and fashion.	.159	-.110	.021	-.144	.688
4. I am interested in Japanese / Chinese language.	.069	.102	.025	.184	.482
3. I believe that Japanese / Chinese is one of the most important foreign languages.	-.072	.174	.123	.086	.364
Factor Correlation Matrix	I	II	III	IV	V
I	1.00				
II	.139	1.00			
III	.184	.399	1.00		
IV	.357	.239	.417	1.00	
IV	.388	.276	.393	.530	1.00

2. Categorization of each factor to 5 regulations, and classification of each regulation into either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation

I categorized each factor into 5 regulations

as the table mentioned above, and classified each regulation into intrinsic or extrinsic motivation according to the definition of *Organismic Integration Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as displayed in the following lists.

Table 3 Classification of each regulation into either intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

Intrinsic Motivation
Factor.5: Intrinsic Regulation (Item number 1, 4 and 3)
Factor.4: Integrated Regulation (Item number 6, 10 and 11)
Extrinsic Motivation
Factor.1: Identified Regulation (Item number 5, 12, 8 and 2)
Factor.3: Introjected Regulation (Item number 14 and 9)
Factor.2: External Regulation (Item number 16, 13, 17 and 7)

3. Differences between Thai Japanese learners and Thai Chinese learners

Table 4 Means and Standard Deviations on the Motivational Questions for Thai Japanese learners and Thai Chinese learners

Questions	Japanese L		Chinese L	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
1. Interested in the Japanese / Chinese pop culture	4.33	0.79	4.11	0.72
2. To travel for a holiday to Japan / China	4.50*	0.80	4.31	0.94
3. One of the most important foreign languages***	4.24	0.62	4.65*	0.54
4. Interested in Japanese / Chinese language	4.48*	0.58	4.64*	0.59
5. To work for a Japanese / Chinese company	4.06	0.94	3.93	0.79
6. To communicate with Japanese / Chinese people	4.48*	0.78	4.58*	0.67
7. Friend's influence	3.48	1.21	3.63**	1.14
8. To live in Japan / China***	4.04	1.05	3.70	1.01
9. Easy to obtain a good grade***	3.12**	1.10	3.72	0.95
10. To read Japanese / Chinese books, magazines or newspaper	4.19	0.86	4.36	0.7

Table 4 Means and Standard Deviations on the Motivational Questions for Thai Japanese learners and Thai Chinese learners (cont.)

Questions	Japanese L		Chinese L	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
11. To get a job in tourism for Japanese / Chinese people	4.00	1.01	4.17	0.79
12. To go abroad to study in Japan / China	4.15	0.83	4.06	0.95
13. To be with my friends ^{***}	3.77	1.11	4.11	0.87
14. Easy to learn Japanese / Chinese ^{***}	3.10 ^{**}	0.98	3.53 ^{**}	0.90
15. Parents' pressure ^{***}	3.04 ^{**}	1.28	3.65 ^{**}	1.28
16. Liking of teacher	4.52 [*]	0.61	4.69 [*]	0.72
	3.97	0.91	4.12	0.85

Note. High mean scores are marked *, low mean scores are marked **, the items remarkable difference between Japanese learners and Chinese learners are marked ***

As shown in Table 4, six items indicated the most noticeable difference between Japanese learners and Chinese learners, from the highest to the lowest, respectively. The highest was number 16, "Parents' pressure" (Japanese learners: M=3.04, Chinese learners: M=3.65), followed by number 9, "Easy to obtain a good grade" (JL: M=3.12, CL: M=3.72), number 14

"Easy to learn Japanese / Chinese" (JL: M=3.10, CL: M=3.53), and number 3 "One of the most important foreign languages" (JL: M=4.24, CL: M=4.65). In addition, the two lowest were number 13 "To be with my friends" (JL: M=3.77, CL: M=4.11) and number 8 "To live in Japan / China some day" (JL: M=4.04, CL: M=3.70).

Table 5 Means and Standard Deviations of the different types of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation on various question items for all Japanese and Chinese learners

Intrinsic Motivation

	Japanese L		Chinese L	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Factor.5: Intrinsic Regulation (Item number 1, 4 and 3)	4.35 [*]	0.66	4.47 [*]	0.62
Factor.4: Integrated Regulation (Item number 6, 10, 11)	4.22	0.88	4.37	0.73
Intrinsic Motivation	4.29	0.77	4.41	0.68

Table 5 Means and Standard Deviations of the different types of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation on various question items for all Japanese and Chinese learners (cont.)**Extrinsic Motivation**

	Japanese L		Chinese L	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Factor.1: Identified Regulation (Item number 5, 12, 8 and 2)	4.19	0.91	4.00	0.92
Factor.3: Introjected Regulation (Item number 14 and 9)	3.11 **	1.04	3.63 **	0.93
Factor.2: External Regulation (Item number 16, 13, 17, 7)	3.70	1.05	4.02	1.00
Extrinsic Motivation	3.78	0.99	3.93	0.96

Note. High mean score is marked*, low mean score is marked**

As shown in Table 5, both Japanese learners and Chinese learners were more motivated by intrinsic reasons than extrinsic reasons. However, learners were more inclined to take Chinese by intrinsic reasons than learners who chose Japanese. It should be noted that the mean score of Japanese learners in identified regulation was higher than that Chinese learners. This revealed that Japanese learners were more motivated by instrumental reasons than Chinese learners. Furthermore, the mean score of introjected regulation showed that Japanese learners thought it was more difficult to learn Japanese and obtain a good grade than Chinese learners. Moreover, the mean score of external regulation indicated that Japanese learners chose Japanese of their own volition than Chinese learners.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that Chinese learners were more motivated by intrinsic reasons than

Japanese learners, which indicated the most significant factor was that Chinese learners regarded Chinese as one of the most important foreign languages. The reason for this could be found from the phenomenal and rapid Chinese economic growth in the 21st century and recent years' explosive increase of Chinese tourists to Thailand. It can be said that a country which has great economic power completely grasp the trends in the world economy in a capitalist society, and the economic power of a country can be one of the most influential factors to increase its language learners. In addition, the students probably understood that Chinese is the most widely spoken language by "First language" speakers (Ethnologue, 2009). This must be a major advantage for Chinese language education to increase Chinese learners and to raise their motivation towards learning.

On the contrary, Japanese learners were more motivated by instrumental reason than Chinese learners. However, finding employment

at Japanese companies did not play an important role for Japanese learners. If the research was conducted with participants who were the students taking Japanese as a major subject, most likely the result would not be the same. It could be expected that they would put a stronger focus on finding job opportunities with Japanese companies.

As a consequence, it would be a great disadvantage for Japanese language education if the students thought that studying Japanese was difficult. This is a serious matter for Japanese language education to raise and maintain learner's motivation towards learning.

Based on my experience as a Japanese instructor, it can be claimed that Japanese is more difficult than Chinese for Thais, because Thai language is very close in resemblance to Chinese language. Thai language belongs to *Tai-Kadai Language family*, while, Chinese language belongs to *Sino-Tibetan language family*. The Tai-Kadai languages were formerly considered to be part of the Sino-Tibetan family, but outside of China they are now classified as an independent family. They contain large numbers of words that are similar in Sino-Tibetan languages (Ostapirat, 2005).

Based on this finding, it needs to be

emphasized that for those who are engaged in teaching Japanese language, they should be aware of Thai students' perception of Japanese as difficult. Thus, teachers of the Japanese language need to improve their teaching approaches and lesson plans to make Japanese a much more attractive language to learn.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results, it is recommended that for those who are engaged in teaching Japanese or Chinese, they should be aware of the different factors influencing the choices that learners made in taking Japanese or Chinese. Therefore, the curriculum should be redesigned to utilize their merits, and to raise learners' motivation towards learning.

In addition, it is clear that in teaching any subject, the teacher has to understand students' preferences, interesting and enjoyable activities, as well as their needs. This knowledge is crucial because it would most likely help the teacher in preparing lessons to meet the students' learning purposes.

The findings would be useful for the institute's courses and syllabus designs, marketing, and ideas for other researchers who may have different or similar contexts.

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Kazuyoshi Tajima received his Master's degree of Bilingual Education at the Faculty of Education, Rangsit University. He is currently a full time lecturer in Faculty of Liberal Arts, Panyapiwat Institute of Management.