

COMPLETION REPORT

Shifting motivations and 'Japanese postures' of Japanese language learners in China (1980-2010)

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In light of the rising tensions between China and Japan, this study investigated what motivated Chinese learners to learn Japanese in terms of Japanese postures (i.e. their attitudes towards or perceptions of Japanese culture and people). The study used a cross-sectional survey approach to examine 665 Japanese language learners' Japanese postures. The study explored whether the Japanese postures of participants who started learning Japanese at different times in the last three decades in China varied. Despite the shifting Sino-Japanese relations and massive anti-Japanese protests in recent years, this study did not find any statistically significant variations in the perceptions and attitudes of participants who had started learning the language at different times. 339 participants claimed their perceptions and attitudes improved after they started learning Japanese regardless of the shifting political and diplomatic relations between China and Japan. 230 of them claimed that their perceptions and attitudes remained same as when they had started learning Japanese. The analysis of qualitative data revealed that 582 out of 665 participants made both positive and negative comments on cultural, environmental, social and political aspects of the country as well as on Japanese people. Echoing the statistical findings, 405 participants, including 257 participants who have never been to Japan, made positive-only comments on Japan's social, cultural and environmental conditions. Only a small number of negative comments were made by those who have never been to Japan on Japan's culture and politics. Qualitative answers also suggest that the participants changed their impressions about Japan changed after learning the language and having better knowledge of the country. Those who had been to Japan were also found to have returned with improved perceptions of and attitudes towards Japan. Further analysis identified that those who display positive Japanese postures are usually those who had in-depth and extended engagement with the Japanese language, culture and people, suggesting the positive impact that the learning of Japanese might have upon the participants' Japanese postures. These findings confirm that the critical role that learning a foreign language plays in promoting better intercultural dialogue and sustaining goodwill among language learners towards the target community. For this reason, it is important for Japanese language educators to promote 'intercultural competence' and 'intercultural citizenship' in the educational process. 'International postures' or 'Japanese postures' may be a useful conceptual tool to examine why and how learners are motivated to learn particular languages and how language learning mediates their orientation towards target language communities.

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