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“GLOBALISATION AND LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES: RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY IN LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENTS”

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**MOTIVATION AND DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ASIAN LANGUAGES:
JAPANESE, CHINESE AND KOREAN STUDIES IN FRANCE**

Abstract

For the past 40 years, the demand for knowledge about Japanese language and culture have been increasing remarkably in France, and to some degree in the European Union. Also, the recent Chinese economical expansion and its media coverage have increased its cultural influence in the eyes of many Europeans, including the youth. This led to the currently increasing demand by young westerners for knowledge about eastern cultures, including Japanese, Chinese and Korean languages.

Here I will focus on giving an overview of several points regarding teaching of these three languages in France. First, a glimpse of how French students see Japan, China and Korea, and how their representations led to the current trends. Then an overview of the purposes and motivations to specialize in oriental languages such as Japanese, Chinese and Korean, as these three languages have been attracting a lot of western students for the past few years. We'll try to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, taking in account the external motives such as labour market constraints. Here we'll consider INALCO-Langues O' (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris) as the representative institution. Being the leading orientalist institution in France, it also benefits a certain influence in Europe, especially within the research fields. This is, in my opinion, a decent way to portray the main trends and the current reality of the demand for Japanese and Chinese studies in France (and to a certain extent, in Europe). As a student of INALCO for the last 4 years, most of this paper will be based on my direct own experience and that of my classmates to give an insight of the difficulties in learning these languages in both formal and informal context. All in all, this paper will be mostly a testimony on how westerners get interested in these languages and cultures, and what seems to modify their motivation in formal context.

KEYWORDS: second language learning, motivation in language learning, japanese studies, korean studies, chinese studies, formal and informal learning, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, student motivation, role of cultural influences in learning motivation.

Introduction

To the eyes of many westerners nowadays, cultures from East Asian countries have become more and more important. Thus the demand for knowledge about eastern cultures have greatly increased in Europe. The main eastern languages represented in France are still Japanese and Chinese. Also it seems that Korean language and culture has been gathering more and more adepts for the last few years so it might be interesting to analyse this case as well. For the past twenty years or so in France, the number of students learning Japanese have been drastically increasing. Here our point will be to understand what motivates a young European student to specialize in these languages, and see what lead to this realisation of interest.

1. Cultural influences and changes in representations: Old and new images

Representations of Japan: more of a model for westerners

Before the 70's, access to Japanese culture was rather limited to an elite of specialists who were curious of traditions and cultures. Thirty years ago already, high technologies, strong economics, dynamic industries and a very creative society were the main images of Japan which fascinated westerners. Has this evolved a lot? It does not appear so.

Nowadays, Japanese pop-culture is the first factor which seems to lead many young people to get interested into Japanese culture. As a matter of fact, during the 80's a whole generation of children has been influenced by Japanese cartoons, also called *anime*, very common on French television by that time. From that time, anime have been spreading around in western modern culture, especially thanks to the communication mediums such as Internet.

Here is an concrete example of this trend. The "Japan-Expo", a convention on Japanese pop-culture, mostly Japanese animation and *manga* industries but also video games, fashion shows and so on. This event is held for 3 days. In 2008 its attendance was of 135.000 visitors (in 2000: 8000 visitors and 81000 visitors in 2007). Along with the increasing interest and number of readers, Japanese is now the second most translated language in France thanks to the consistent publishings of *manga* books.

With DVD technologies and capacities, movies can be watched easily with original dubbings. Particularly concerning Japanese animation movies which familiarized young children with the original Japanese voices. Ghibli's films are a good example, since they are very popular among a very wide audience in western countries. Also, Japanese-made video games have prospered since the 1980s. In fact, the majority of "Role playing games" (which are said to be the most addictive genre) sold in western markets, are products from Japan.

In Paris, there are quite a lot of cultural events, films festivals, museums, displays, specialized libraries (which may might sell *manga* as well), which keep this interest for Japanese cultures going. For instance the Japan Foundation's Maison de la culture du Japon in Paris is very active, especially this year as France and Japan are celebrating the 150th anniversary of their mutual relations, there are plenty of conferences about Japanese cultures. There is also a strong interest for Japanese artistic cultures: for instance, the exhibition about Hokusai at the Guimet Museum in Paris from may 21 to august 4th 2008, has been held for 67 days and has attracted 101893 visitors (the average daily attendance was of 1521 visitors).

Japanese contemporary music (also called J-Pop sometimes, as in pop music) is also a dynamic industry which seems to please more and more westerners. Also, there are more and more live performances of Japanese bands in France, and their audiences are increasing each year. Eastern modern literature is now very common in France, although classical literature is still very rare. Indeed, we can notice that Japanese, Chinese and Korean publications are very common in French book stores such as FNAC. In this craze for Japanese culture, martial arts such as Aikido, Kobudo, Karate, Judo, are practised

by more and more adepts, adults and children. Some may even take deep interest into Japanese cooking. The increasing openings of Japanese restaurants, which tend to supplant the numerous Chinese and Vietnamese ones, this shows a lively interest for refined cuisine and aesthetics. “Refinement” is also a word that the French tend to systematically link to Japan.

The strong relation between traditions and modernity in Japan, which seems to be like a symbiosis, is what often fascinates westerners. These two images are very recurrent in western imaginary. To sum up, we can say that mass media and cultural goods are probably the major motivators for young westerners to take interest into Japanese modern cultures, as they are accustomed to them since childhood.

Old and new representations of China

As for China, the current representations are mostly due to the economic trends and the Olympic Games which have greatly changed its image toward the world. From the western point of view, China seems to look like an “El Dorado” for economical reasons. But lately, China has benefited from a certain renewal of interest as its openness is currently attracting more and more western companies, and this may lead to a better approach of Chinese culture on a long run.

Old and new representations of Korea

Interest for Korea in Europe is still very circumscribed, and Korean culture stays too confined into the general Asian images westerners make out of Eastern countries. Its image is not widely spread among the western media, but Korean cinema has started a decent trend about Korean film makers since film festivals held in France in late 90's. Also it seems that Korean *dramas* got a decent popularity judging by the increasing events held in Paris these years (especially with the Centre Culturel Coréen). So we saw that mass media which may have a cultural influence on some westerners in their childhood may lead to a strong interest into some aspects of foreign cultures, most likely because they grow accustomed to them.

2. Is there a real trend for learning eastern languages?

The increasing number of examinees for JLPT: A Concrete illustration of a trend

When the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) was first administered in 1984, there were approximately 7000 examinees who took the test, with 4473 examinees from overseas of Japan. Since then, the annual test has become a large scale event, and attracted some 524000 examinees in 2007, with 430137 examinees overseas (53655 in 1994, 100893 in 2000, 215593 in 2003).

[Ref: Japan Foundation, http://www.jlpt.jp/j/about/pdf/2007_09.pdf]

In France, the test was taken by 624 examinees in 2000, 981 examinees in 2003 and 1365 examinees in 2007. In 2007, 56% were students in higher education, 30% were employed persons and 15% were from secondary education (only 3,45% were students studying in language schools). This clearly illustrates the trend over Japanese language for the past few years.

[Ref: Statistical enquete realized by Céline Sultana, http://inalco-front1.heb.fr.coit.net/inalco/FCKeditor/userimages/Enquete%20statistique%20JLPT_2007.pdf]

Teaching trends in France: Chinese as a new second language

Lately in France, we've been witnessing that a lot of schools have started to give Chinese classes, even in secondary education system. As a matter of fact, these classes might even replace Japanese classes which were given in high school and some junior high schools. So there are two trends going on, one concerning the secondary education system, and another one noted in higher education system. The AFPC (the Association Française des professeurs de Chinois or French Association of Chinese Teachers) references more than 40 high schools and junior high schools giving Chinese classes in Paris, 194 in total territory wise. Chinese is now quickly progressing in French secondary education: +30% students in 2005 on the whole territory compared to 2004. This increase doesn't seem to be linked to the high presence of Chinese population in France (French was the mother tongue for 90% of the students learning Chinese in secondary system). Also this year in France, an inspector of academy has been charged for the first time to supervise the education programmes for teaching Chinese in high schools and junior high schools. This year, almost 12000 students are learning Chinese, whereas they were only 2500 ten years ago. 1200 children are starting to learn Chinese in elementary school. According the the Education Nationale, Chinese is soon to become the 5th language taught in France in secondary education.

As a matter of comparison, in 2004 Chinese represented 5% of “third language studies” learned by students in high school and Japanese represented 2.1%. “Third language studies” or LV3 (Langue Vivante 3), is an optional foreign language studied in high school as an auxiliary subject, contrary to LV2 and LV1 which are mandatory (LV1 being English at 96.9% in 2004, followed by Spanish 34.2% and German 18.4%). However, in high schools, the young have difficulties in understanding that learning these languages will be a tough and long way. The number of pupils seem to decrease by 60% to 70% after a few months.

Meanwhile, a new trend comes out clear in the higher education system. It is important to say that more and more business schools now decide to give Chinese courses, and organize exchanges and scholarships with Chinese universities. 110 universities, institutions and colleges are giving courses to “non-specialists” and preparatory courses giving Chinese classes are increasing as well. As for teaching for specialists, 14 departments of Chinese are delivering national degrees of Chinese, 5 of them going up to the Master's degree of Chinese (INALCO is one of them).

[Ref: Education Nationale, <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid867/index.html> , <http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/31/9/5319.pdf>]

Teaching languages in France: INALCO-Langues O' in Paris

INALCO-Langues O' (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales) is the most representative university in France as for teaching eastern languages. Other famous institutions in Europe would be the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, founded in 1916 in London), Humboldt university of Berlin or the Instituto Orientale in Naples.

The Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO or Langues O') is located in Paris. It was founded in 1795 under the French Revolution and is now one well known university with a specialization in African, Asian, East European, Oceanian languages and civilisations. Among its various studies departments (90 languages taught), we'll focus on the Japanese, Chinese and Korean departments.

The first Japanese courses in Langues O' were given in 1862. The Japanese chair was created by Léon de Rosny in 1868 (the first Chinese classes were given in 1840). For a long time, Japanese was considered as a rare and difficult but also way less studied language than Chinese. But since 1960, the Japanese department has got more and more students: 40 students in 1960 which became around 1500 new students in early 1990s. Since 2003, a quota (numerus clausus) has been established as the number of students in first year were exceeding 900. Speaking only of numbers, the Japanese department in INALCO (Langues

O') seems to be the most important in Europe. Even speaking of diploma deliveries, the flow is still above of the SOAS of London.

Why do people choose INALCO? First, this is a renowned institute. Then the tuition is not very expensive and there is no entrance exam. This allows an easy access to young students. And finally, the teachers are famous and well known for their activities involving the teaching of rare languages.

Most of the students are studying languages as a complementary formation, as many study for another degree in another university. In 2004, 1781 students were studying in another university as their main curriculum (over 12039 students in INALCO). This is usually in this field of competencies that students will look for a job after graduating.

Overall numbers of students in INALCO by year:

- 1968 / 1969: 2500 students
- 1997 / 1998: 11380 students
- 2003 / 2004: 12039 students

Registered students by department in 2003 / 2004:

- Japanese dept.: 1718
- Chinese dept.: 2008
- Russian dept.: 1176

[Ref: CNé evaluation from 2005, http://www.cne-evaluation.fr/WCNE_pdf/INALCO_2005.pdf]

Here are some statistical numbers to get the idea of the reality of the current trends:

- Registered students in Japanese department (L means Licence or bachelor's degree, which is achieved after 3 or 4 years depending on the department, M means Master's degree):
 - 2006 / 2007: first year: 573 ; second year: 453 ; third year: 174 ; M1: 91 ; M2: 33.
 - 2007 / 2008: L1: 561 ; L2: 264 ; L3: 169 ; M1: 79 ; M2: 25.
 - 2008 / 2009: L1: 584 ; L2: 210 ; L3: 100 ; M1: 54 ; M2: 14 (probably not reliable as those numbers were observed earlier than the actual start of the new term).
- Students in the Japanese department specializing in FLE. FLE is the acronym for the French Français langue étrangère or “French as a foreign language”, similar to EFL for English language.

This degree can be obtained in 2 years, starting from the second year of Licence.

- 2006 / 2007: Total: 61.
- 2007 / 2008: FLE second year: 17 ; FLE third year: 21.
- 2008 / 2009: FLE second year: 19 ; FLE third year: 8.

- Scholarship/ Exchange with Japan (and financial aid):
 - Students demanding a scholarship within Japanese universities: around 50.
 - Students granted a scholarship: 13 to 15 each year.

It becomes clear that very few students are actually going till the end of their curriculum. Even though a person's passion about a subject changes how they invest their time for such tasks, some stronger factors may eventually wither their intrinsic motivation. We'll see below what seem to be the cause for this apparent high failure or resignation rate. Also very few are able to go study abroad, especially in Japan, most likely due to the high demand for scholarship and the the scores required to apply must be very good.

- - Registered students in the Chinese department. The degree is obtained in after 4 years, contrary to Japanese and Korean degrees which are obtained after 3 years of studies.
 - 2007 / 2008: L0 (initiation): 414 ; L1: 272 ; L2: 220 ; L3: 132 ; M1: 74 ; M2: 17.
 - 2008 / 2009: L0 (initiation): 400 ; L1: 195 ; L2: 150 ; L3: 100 ; M1: 43 ; M2: 18. (these numbers are probably not reliable enough).

Note: This year is a bit particular as the number of applications is slightly lower for every departments. According to the administration, this happens sometimes and is inexplicable.

Students in Chinese department specializing in FLE in 2007:

- Second year: 1
- Third year: 12

Registered students in Korean department by year:

- 2007 / 2008: L1: 98 ; L2: 23 ; L3: 10 ; M1: 2 ; M2: 0 ; Total: 135.
- 2008 / 2009: L1: 97 ; L2: 43 ; L2: 30 ; M1: ? ; M2: ?.

Students in Korean department who specialized in FLE in 2007:

- Second year: 12
- Third year: 7

As a side note, there were 76 students from ERASMUS programme (supporting exchanges of students in higher education, as well as cooperation between universities and colleges) in 2007, and 85 students in 2003. Apart from its relations with European universities, INALCO has established 11 conventions with China (signed between 1997 and 2004) which also gave birth to ERASMUS MUNDUS (in 2003) between Beijing University and other European institutions such as SOAS.

3. What about motivations in learning?

Here we must distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, especially concerning students which are about to choose their specializations as soon as they get a high school diploma.

Intrinsic motivation occurs when people are internally motivated to do something because it either brings them pleasure, they think it is important, or they feel that what they are learning is significant. Extrinsic motivation comes into play when a student is compelled to do something or act a certain way because of factors external to him or her (like money or good grades).

But there is a paradox between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is a far stronger motivator than extrinsic motivation, yet external motivation can easily act to displace intrinsic motivation. In extrinsic motivation, deprivation of rewards, avoidance of punishment, fear of falling grades, etc. also serve as extrinsic motivators.

So what motivates a young European to specialize in Japanese, Korean or Chinese?

We may be tempted to ask ourselves what are their internal motivations, although it seems to me that internal motivation is mostly a matter of innate sensibility.

Some may answer this question by simply saying they get pleasure in learning these languages, and this is only what keeps them going. It is to be noted that learning such languages is seen as a long process which only benefits on the long run. So given the difficulties that Japanese, Chinese and Korean represent, a deep interest for the country and its cultures.

Another question would be: why Japanese and why not other languages? As we saw earlier, most students, and especially younger ones, have developed a strong interest for Japanese culture since their childhood or at least adolescence. This is true not only for pop-culture (video games, *manga*, *anime*, etc.) but also classical or traditional culture as well (through movies, books, museums, etc.).

Here are some common reasons for studying Japanese:

- It's rare language, not so common in western areas. Also, Asian studies are still a bit out-of-the-way, and the desire for some students, to make the difference with others, is a frequent factor in their decision to specialize in oriental languages.
- Difficult languages are like a challenge to learn. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.
- Getting to know more about Japanese cultures, as in its society, way of thinking, way of life...
- Basic interest in Japanese language: sounds, Chinese characters.
- Future employment: regarding Japan's dynamic economy.
- Specialists in linguistics, or even History, Politics, Geography, Geopolitics.
- Teaching French in Japan.
- Translating, interpretation.
- Facing "Old Europe", students look toward more seducing countries and way of life, which give them comfort in going on learning.
- To do International studies, studying abroad.

As for Chinese, why do people take interest into it?

- Being a language widely used in Eastern Asia, many speakers....
- Significant diaspora all around the world.
- Chinese is not only used in China, but also in Taiwan, Singapore.
- We observed that lately, corporations established in China require to be able to speak both English and Chinese (where English sufficed before).

Also the number of internet users from China has greatly increased: 50.000 in 1995 26.500.000 in 2001, 84.000.000 in 2005, and now estimated to be over 1 billion. Chinese speaking users will quickly become the first population represented on the internet.

[Ref: Education Nationale, <http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/62/1/621.pdf>]

Considering both languages, what would be the external incitations (as in “benefits expected”) for such a specialization? Does it fit the current trends on the current labour market?

Learning a foreign language while studying laws or economics allows better chances to find a decent job in various domains, especially on the global market. Students graduating with such language degrees can find opportunities in commercialism and services, particularly regarding tourism (in France as well as in Japan). They may even work in journalism, teaching, translation, culture or arts related activities. Other than that, having graduated in a such foreign languages, is usually very positive on a resume. For instance, Japanese (and soon Chinese?) being often associated with new technologies, this is often a judicious choice for computer engineering students.

4. Difficulties in learning and the influence of extrinsic motivations

As we saw earlier, to answer the demand for Chinese language courses, the French Education Nationale is opening new curricula in its secondary education system. Indeed, the given image of China might tend to eclipse that of Japan, thus reducing the number of students specializing in Japanese. But, such languages need a lot of efforts and many seem to discourage. I think the “hunger for knowledge” is what keeps internal motivations going on. Without going too deep into psychology, it is clear that people choose to study things they like and want to learn, rather than the contrary, as it would lead to failure. Motivation is often (even among students) mentioned as the key to success. A real interest in what one is learning is necessary to achieve a decent proper learning curve. However, we observe that many students don't go over one or two years of tuition.

Strengths and weaknesses of education in formal context: teaching methods and environment.

In general, teachers are capable experts (they have been evaluated in INALCO by students themselves, which reveals positive feedbacks). There is a notable diversity among teachers: native teachers are often taking care of language related courses, whereas French specialists take care of culture related courses. This forms a multi-cultural community which allows a better exposition (to both language and culture), exchanges within the classes.

But, in higher education system, pedagogic support, teaching assistance are not enough to keep interest, and bad working conditions seem to have an influence on students' motivations.

There is a very high demand for Japanese and Chinese languages, to such extent that during the first two years of the degree, the INALCO has been facing a real problem regarding the lack of room for students. Also, through a lack of money, there is not enough modern means to learn. These bad work conditions explain partially the decreasing number of students throughout the curriculum.

On the labour market, the diploma means almost nothing if it's not at least a Master's Degree, which is only obtained after 5 years (6 years in Chinese department). The degrees do not lead directly to a job, even though some sub-curricula in relation with labour market are established within the university. Thus few actually graduate, only a thin elite does, which is a problem according to teachers and the administration. Regarding the extrinsic motivations, there is no real immediate benefits in learning a language (other than being able to read materials in foreign language and the pleasure got from learning) as knowledge in this field is not very valuable on the labour market as we saw earlier.

As we saw, formal education seems to fail to motivate students to achieve efficiently their original goals, even though there may be many other reasons for a student to cease their language studies. It appears to me that more exchange programmes would allow students to keep their motivations by going abroad. Thus the need for extrinsic motivators such as immediate rewards for the learner are crucial.

The French universities are lacking money. There is more and more demand for learning eastern languages, due to economical trends. Would it be alright to entrust these teachings to business schools, which would give their students an economical approach of the language, at the expense of language school which have a better cultural approach? These knowledges, if considered as an commercial approach might gain rather immediate applications, however they lack the cultural approach and may fail on the long run.

5. Conclusion

There is no real programme such as ERASMUS for Europe, between East Asian countries and European countries. It would appear that to make it easier for students to learn languages, it would be necessary to establish more exchanges between universities, as the practising of language is as crucial as knowing about a country's culture.

Students are told to make use of informal learning as much as possible, and the Internet is a good way to keep a high motivation. The Internet may indeed fill the gap, by spreading linguistic knowledge as well as cultural images. However, since it is still difficult for a European to have a direct access to mass media from Asian countries, this would be an interesting contribution in language learning.

In any case, these languages are difficult for a westerner. Motivations are stronger when they come from positive and intrinsic images and then tend to help in learning them. For more than thirty years Japan has impressed the French society and familiarized one generation to its culture and lead many students to take interest in its language. But from now on, won't the upcoming generations be rather looking toward China instead?