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## **Understanding the dynamics of motivation for learning Japanese among Chinese learners: An Elicited Metaphor Analysis**

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## **Understanding the dynamics of motivation for learning Japanese among Chinese learners: An Elicited Metaphor Analysis**

This paper examines the motivations of Chinese learners of Japanese across three different grades through Elicited Metaphor Analysis and semi-structured interview. Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 Japanese majors (55 in total) in a Chinese university were asked to produce metaphors that reflected their motivations to learn Japanese. The metaphor data were analysed by two coders in three steps: Labelling, Sorting and Categorisation. It is found that Year 1 learners were enthusiastic about learning Japanese, using mostly *leisure* and *eating* metaphors; Year 2 learners often used *journey* metaphors to indicate the difficulty they were facing; and Year 3 learners were more concerned about the benefits and practical outcomes of learning, using mainly *learning other skills* metaphors. The metaphor and interview data together confirm the dynamic and situated nature of language learning motivation. The data also reveal that Japanese learning in mainland China was associated with an interest in the culture of Japan and subject to negative interference from English. The study concludes with implications for enhancing the teaching of Japanese in similar contexts.

Keywords: motivation; Chinese learners of Japanese; Elicited Metaphor Analysis; Second Language Learning

### **Introduction**

Motivation plays an important role in foreign language learning (Tsang 2012; Lee, Yu, and Liu 2018). In recent years, increasing attention in language learning motivation research has been directed toward exploring ‘contextual and dynamic aspects of

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motivation' (Boo, Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, 146). However, this line of research has predominantly investigated English as the target language (Boo, Dörnyei and Ryan 2015; Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). As multilingualism has become the normative reality in the twenty-first century and language teaching and learning research is undergoing a 'Multilingual Turn' (May 2014), an exclusive focus on English learning motivation does not do full justice to our understanding of language learning motivation as a whole. As Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017, 456) have argued, 'a focus on the study of languages other than English (LOTEs) is a valid and fruitful research direction to enrich the notion of L2 motivation'. Similarly, Gao and Lv (2018) pointed out that studies on motivation to learn LOTEs can add to what we know about language learners' motivation because so much research has been based on English language learners. Therefore, investigating LOTE learning motivation is an important next step for language learning motivation research.

This study focuses on motivations to learn Japanese as an additional language. Studies on motivation in this regard can enrich our understanding of language learning motivation based on the learning of English. First, the learning of Japanese is often motivated by an interest in Japanese culture (e.g. Humphrey and Miyazoe-Wong 2007; Northwood and Thomson 2012). For example, in Hong Kong, Humphrey and Miyazoe-Wong (2007) identified the appeal of Japanese culture as the top reason for the popularity of choosing Japanese as an additional language. Northwood and Thomson (2012) found that many Australian learners of Japanese were attracted by manga and other Japanese popular cultural products. Second, Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) suggested that the learning of English can interfere with the learning of a LOTE in either a positive or a negative way. In mainland China, the learning of Japanese in tertiary education also 'takes place in conjunction with the study of English' (Dörnyei

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and Al-Hoorie 2017, 464). In this situation, the learning of English is likely to impact on the study of Japanese. However, our understanding of motivations for learning Japanese is still rather limited.

This study aims to contribute to this body of literature by investigating the motivations for learning Japanese among Chinese learners. The Japan Foundation has estimated that China had the largest number of Japanese language learners in 2012 (roughly 1.046 million out of 3.985 million Japanese language learners worldwide). Japanese in mainland China enjoys a high profile as it is the second largest foreign language (Gao and Lv 2018) in tertiary education, second only to English. It must be noted that there is a dearth of research on this group of learners. Existing studies have focused on either what attracted learners to choose Japanese as an additional language (e.g. Humphrey and Miyazoe-Wong 2007), or whether shifting diplomatic relations between China and Japan influenced Japanese learning motivation (e.g. Lv, Gao and Teo 2017; Gao and Lv 2018). It remains to be explored how students' immediate learning environments influence their motivation to learn Japanese. In particular, to the best of our knowledge no research has explored how Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 students' motivations to learn Japanese might differ. This is important given that the successful learning of a second language is always a long-term endeavour over many years (Lamb 2016), and also considering that motivation is increasingly viewed as being intrinsically dynamic (Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan 2015; Lamb 2016). Addressing this need, this study compares the language learning motivations of three cohorts of Japanese majors in a Chinese university using Elicited Metaphor Analysis and semi-structured interviews. The findings will deepen our understanding of motivation as a dynamic construct, providing valuable information to inform and enhance the teaching of Japanese in similar contexts. It answers the following research questions:

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- 1) Is there any difference in the metaphorical representations of Japanese learning for Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 students?
- 2) If there is any difference, how do the participants' experiences of learning help explain the difference?

### **Motivation as a dynamic and situated construct**

Before the 1990s, motivation was regarded as 'a relatively stable learner trait' (Dörnyei 2001, 44). Since the 1990s, there was a shift in emphasis towards a more situated understanding of motivation (Dörnyei 2001; Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005; Lamb 2016). This situated approach drew researchers' attention to the intrinsically dynamic nature of motivation (Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005; Lamb 2016), which was studied both longitudinally in the same population (e.g. Lamb 2007; Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005) and cross-sectionally in different populations (e.g. Williams, Burden, and Lanvers 2002; Lee, Yu, and Liu 2018). As for longitudinal studies, by interviewing 25 participants of mixed nationalities, Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005) identified six "motivational transformation episodes" in the lives of their participants: maturation and gradually increasing interest, stand-still period, moving into a new life phase, internalising external goals/visions, relationship with significant others, and time spent in the host environment. Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005) further documented seven dimensions of motivational sources: affective/integrative, instrumental, self-concept-related, goal-oriented, educational-context-related, significant-other-related, and host-environment-related. In the Indonesian context, using a mixed-method design, Lamb (2007) found that during the first 20 months in junior high school students became more aware of the utilitarian value of the English language, although they made more complaints about their school learning experience. With regard to cross-sectional studies, Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002) compared Year 7, 8 and 9 students' motivations to learn

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foreign languages in secondary schools in the southwest of England. The results revealed that students in higher grades were less active in learning. In Hong Kong, Lee, Yu, and Liu (2018) surveyed 1395 secondary school students and found that students' motivation to write in English differed significantly across three different grades.

In investigating the dynamic nature of motivation, we also seek to answer the 'why' question, i.e. why learners are motivated in different ways at different times. The answer must be sought from students' immediate learning environments and experiences, given that motivation is 'highly susceptible to contextual influence' (Lamb 2016, 3). Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2005) includes an *L2 learning experience* component, concerning the actual experience learning an L2. Ushioda suggested that motivation should be understood based on 'the interaction between this self-reflective agent, and the fluid and complex web of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts' (2011, 13). Previous studies have documented how learning experience influences the motivation to learn Japanese or other LOTEs. With regard to research on the motivation to learn Japanese, by surveying 102 students studying Japanese at the University of Washington in America, Tsang (2012) identified four motivational/demotivational sources: 1) teachers; 2) feedback; 3) difficulty of the class; and 4) feeling of progress. Matsumoto (2007) revealed that interacting with Japanese people and studying abroad enhanced American learners' motivation to learn Japanese. As for studies on other LOTEs, Thompson (2017), investigated the motivation of 195 undergraduate learners learning different LOTEs (e.g. Spanish, Italian, German etc.) in the United States, and revealed that context plays an important role in students' language choice. Lanvers (2016) highlighted the need to understand contextual influences from the micro-, meso-, and macro-level in motivation research.

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It must be noted that the studies summarised above are on the learning of English, Japanese, or LOTEs outside mainland China. Given that language learning motivation may vary ‘depending on the target language and the country in which the study is conducted’ (Tsang 2012, 56), it is worthy of further investigation whether and how Japanese learning motivation among Chinese learners varies across three different grades.

### **The Study**

In investigating the dynamic nature of motivation, previous studies either used longitudinal (e.g. Lamb 2007; Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005) or cross-sectional samples (e.g. Williams, Burden and Lanvers 2002; Lee, Yu and Liu 2018). In this study we will use cross-sectional samples because building a temporal element into second language research brings significant challenges, such as the constraint of project length and the risk of participant attrition in longer projects (Lamb 2016). Lamb (2016) further pointed out that fieldwork in most longitudinal research in L2 motivation does not extend beyond a year because of the constraint of project length. As for participant attrition, prolonged involvement in qualitative studies may change the behaviour of participants, for example through enhanced self-awareness or the formation of relationships with researchers (Holliday 2007). In comparison, cross-sectional research allows for the collection of data within a short period of time and avoids the problem of participant attrition, and therefore suits the purpose of the current study.

### ***Elicited Metaphor Analysis***

Metaphor functions as a powerful cognitive tool to explore students’ and teachers’ beliefs about language learning (Wan, Low and Li 2011). It helps make their implicit

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assumptions explicit, and thus gives insights into individuals' perspectives on given topics (Cameron and Low 1999).

Generally, metaphors are collected from either natural conversations or writing (e.g. interviews or personal accounts), or by asking participants to complete a prompt such as: *A is (like) B because...* (e.g. *Learning English is like... because...*) (Wan, Low and Li 2011). The latter method, asking participants to complete a prompt, is called Elicited Metaphor Analysis (EMA). It involves the analytic procedures of grouping and classifying the metaphors under conceptual metaphors, and then recursively examining the classified data to suggest underlying beliefs and values (Cameron and Low 1999).

EMA as a qualitative research method has gained prominence in recent years in the study of learners' and teachers' beliefs (e.g. Ma and Gao 2017; Wan, Low, and Li 2011). However, it has yet to be further incorporated into motivation research. Ushioda (2001) argued that qualitative approaches are especially appropriate where motivation is conceived of as a dynamic construct. EMA disambiguates itself from other forms of qualitative methods such as interviews and narratives in the following ways: 1) it can be quantified, thus allowing for direct comparison between different participant groups, and it is therefore particularly appropriate for the current study on comparing motivation among three cohorts of participants; and 2) the use of metaphor is not only a cognitive phenomenon, but also a socio-cultural one that 'emerges from cognition in interaction with various socio-cultural processes and conditions' (Ma and Gao 2017, 72). Therefore, metaphors can help us better understand the social and cultural contexts of learning.

Despite being a useful tool, EMA has its disadvantages. For example, the method may impose the researcher's meanings upon the metaphors used (Lynch and Fisher-Ari 2017). It is therefore necessary to take into account learners' perspectives to show what

they actually mean by using a particular metaphor. One possible solution to this problem is to supplement EMA with interviews. In this study we interviewed each student individually after the metaphor elicitation procedure, to improve our understanding of the metaphors used and learn more about their language learning experience.

### ***Participants***

The study was conducted in the Department of Japanese Language and Literature in a university in Beijing, China. This university is a respectable liberal arts-oriented university with Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degree programmes in Japanese Language and Literature and Japan's Politics and Diplomacy. It admits students from across the country, and the participants in this study were from different parts of China. There was a total of 55 Japanese major students from Year 1 to Year 3, who were contacted for the study through the school authority. They were informed about the study by the first author and filled in a written consent form. Except for one student from Year 1 and two students from Year 2, none of the learners had studied Japanese before they entered university. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Learner demographic information

Year	Number	Mean Age	Female	Male
1	20	18.15	14	6
2	19	19.00	13	6
3	16	20.25	10	6

### ***Data collection***

Data collection took place in three stages, involving a theory-based workshop, a metaphor completion task and follow-up interviews. First, the 55 participants were invited to attend a workshop on metaphors. Through attending this workshop they learned what a metaphor is and how to come up with metaphors. Second, a short questionnaire in Chinese (Appendix A) was distributed to all the participants to collect their demographic information and to elicit metaphors in Chinese. The learners were given a prompt: '*Learning Japanese is... because...*' with two examples provided. Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted with four Year 4 students from the same department. Based on their feedback, we made minor wording changes in the demographic section.

Finally, after the metaphor completion task each student was interviewed in Chinese. The interview prompts are provided in Appendix B. First, introductory questions were asked to gather background information about the learner's language learning history. Subsequent questions focused on topics such as the meaning of the metaphor that the learner produced, their reasons for choosing Japanese as their major, their level of satisfaction with the courses attended, the reactions of their family and friends to their Japanese learning, and so on. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were told that their identities would be kept confidential and only pseudonyms would be used when reporting the research findings. In this paper, S1Y1 refers to student number 1 in Year 1.

### ***Data Analysis***

Cameron and Low (1999, 88) explained that analysing metaphors involves 'collecting linguistic metaphors, generalizing from them to the conceptual metaphors and using the results to suggest understandings or constructing people's beliefs'. With these

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suggestions in mind, we analysed the metaphors in three steps, including Naming/Labelling, Sorting and Categorisation.

#### *Step 1: Naming/Labelling*

The first author and a research assistant worked as the coders. They first translated the data from Chinese to English. Then they ‘named’ or ‘labelled’ each metaphor according to its main content (such as *playing games*, *exploring Amazon*). If the learner did not write anything at all or if the response could not be identified as a metaphor, the response was marked as ‘no metaphor’. At this stage, two responses from Year 2 students were labelled as no metaphor and were excluded from further analysis. Thus, the sample was reduced to 53 metaphors in total: 20 from Year 1, 17 from Year 2 and 16 from Year 3.

#### *Step 2: Sorting*

In the second stage, the two coders went through the raw data and analysed each metaphor in terms of three elements: a) the target domain, which was usually an abstract topic, for example ‘learning Japanese’; b) the source domain, which was usually a concrete image as compared to the abstract topic, for example ‘climbing a mountain’ (as in ‘learning Japanese is climbing a mountain’); c) the entailment, which explains the learner’s reasons for choosing the metaphor, for example ‘because it takes lots of effort’.

#### *Step 3: Categorisation*

The two coders classified the metaphors into five categories according to the meanings of the source domain and the entailment: journey, eating, leisure, learning other skills, and instrument. Samples for each category are given in Table 2. It was noted in the analysis that the same metaphor could be used by participants to convey different intended meanings. For instance, S11Y1 and S6Y2 both compared ‘learning Japanese’

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to ‘swimming’, but they wrote different entailments. It meant ‘great fun and relaxation’ for S11Y1, while S6Y2 likened it to ‘not knowing where to go as it is an arduous journey’. Considering such differences, the two coders decided to classify the two metaphors into two categories, i.e. leisure activity and journey. It is also inevitable that coders may have different views when classifying particular metaphors. The learners’ self-reported intended meanings about the metaphors from the interview data contributed to high inter-rater agreement between the researchers (92.6%). Discrepancies in classification were negotiated until an agreement was reached.

Table 2. Metaphors used by Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 participants ( $n=53$ )

	Journey	Eating	Leisure	Learning other skills	Instrument
Sample metaphors	<i>Climbing mountains;</i> <i>Swimming</i>	<i>Eating hot pot;</i> <i>Eating snack</i>	<i>Strolling around in a garden;</i> <i>Playing computer games</i>	<i>Learning English;</i> <i>Learning Math</i>	<i>A key to a door;</i> <i>A window</i>
Year 1 ( $n=20$ )	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	7 (35%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)
Year 2 ( $n=17$ )	10 (58.82%)	2 (11.76%)	2 (11.76%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.76%)
Year 3 ( $n=16$ )	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	2 (12.5%)

## Findings

This section answers research questions about whether there is any difference in Japanese learning motivation among the three cohorts of participants, and about how their experiences of learning may help to explain these differences.

The metaphor analysis shows that most Year 1 students (18 out of 20) were enthusiastic about learning Japanese; the majority of Year 2 students (13 out of 17) experienced difficulty and made complaints about the learning of Japanese, while Year 3 students' attitudes became polarised, with 11 (out of 16) conveying a sense of fulfilment in learning the language and the remaining 5 regarding it as a *have-to-do* job in which they had little interest. The following three subsections will elaborate on how and why students' learning motivations differed across the three cohorts of students.

#### *Year 1 students' motivation to learn Japanese*

As Table 2 shows, for Year 1 students the two dominant categories of source domains were *leisure* (35%, 7 metaphors) and *eating* (25%, 5 metaphors), demonstrating their positive feelings about learning the language. In addition, 2 metaphors in the *instrument* category, 2 in the *journey* category and 2 in the *learning other skills* category also underscore the point that learning Japanese is enjoyable and fun for these students.

In specific terms, this enthusiasm is first related to the attraction of Japanese popular culture and the appeal of the new university environment. In writing up the metaphors, 12 students mentioned terms such as anime, pop music, Japanese idols, Japanese computer games and TV series etc. For example, one student (S2Y1) compared learning Japanese to 'strolling in a garden filled with flowers and grass because I can watch anime without subtitles'. Similarly, another student (S18Y1) compared her Japanese learning experience to 'eating snacks because I feel I am a bit closer to my Japanese idols and it is fantastic'. S2Y1 explained in follow-up interview:

#### **Extract 1**

For those of us who were born in the 1990s in China, Japanese popular culture is fascinating, and it is fair to say that we have grown up with Japanese pop culture.

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From this extract, we can infer that this student chose to learn Japanese because they were exposed to Japanese popular culture from an early age and had a natural favourable attitude toward Japan. This result echoes the findings of previous studies on Australian (Northwood and Thomson 2012), Hong Kong (Humphrey and Miyazoe-Wong 2007) and mainland Chinese (Gao and Lv 2018) learners. Echoing this enthusiasm about learning Japanese, other participants highlighted the point that university life was new and appealing to them. Three students used metaphors such as ‘playing computer games for the first time because it is a brand new experience’ (S7Y1), ‘watching an enjoyable movie because it is so interesting’ (S6Y1) and ‘swimming because there is great fun and relaxation’ (S11Y1) to capture this passionate feeling. S7Y1 mentioned in her interview:

**Extract 2**

I felt that university is very different from high school. We threw away the pressure of university entrance exams. I have more freedom and spare time.

Japanese for me is a cute language. I like its pronunciation.

Her experience shows that some Year 1 learners were in a honeymoon period of university life. They felt liberated from the heavy exam-driven learning at high school and were given more freedom in their learning. Consequently, they felt passion for their major, Japanese.

Second, this enthusiasm is related to learning more about Japanese ways of doing things. For example, S19Y1 compared learning Japanese to ‘eating dumplings because I have found lots of similarities between Japanese and Chinese cultures which makes me feel at home’. Cultural affinity was also mentioned by S8Y1, S1Y1 and S4Y1, using the metaphors ‘learning Chinese’, ‘drinking tea’ and ‘learning martial arts’ respectively. It can be inferred from these metaphors that the students concerned were aware of the

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shared cultural traditions between the two countries. They felt close to Japanese culture because Chinese and Japanese cultures have a lot in common, including shared written characters in the two languages and the influence of Confucianism. It is interesting to note that the Hong Kong participants in Humphrey and Miyazoe-Wong's (2007) study didn't mention cultural affinity, instead referring to geographical proximity.

Despite some cultural affinity, however, Japan and China also differ in many aspects. Five students articulated that they could learn Japanese ways of doing things by learning Japanese, using metaphors including 'opening a door' (S3Y1; S5Y1), 'opening a window' (S10Y1), 'walking into a new world' (S20Y1) and 'eating chocolate' (S9Y1). For instance, S20Y1 mentioned in the follow-up interview:

**Extract 3**

Learning Japanese has brought me into a brand new world. My mother always told me that Japan is very clean and Japanese people are modest. By learning this language, I want to explore why Japan is such a nice country.

This extract suggests that this participant's favourable attitude towards Japan was cultivated by her mother, demonstrating the importance of parental influence (Shoib and Dörnyei 2005) in motivation. Her mother's positive impression of Japan motivated her to explore Japanese ways of doing things, in particular by learning Japanese.

*Year 2 Students' motivation to learn Japanese*

For many Year 2 students, Japanese was no longer a fascinating subject after a full year of study. The sole predominant domain was *journey* for Year 2 students, accounting for 10 out of 17 or 58.82% of the metaphors produced. In these metaphors, learning Japanese learning was compared to a long and arduous journey. In addition to the 10 *journey* metaphors, 2 metaphors in the *eating* category and 1 in the *learning other skills*

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category also convey the message that the learners were exhausted and tired of learning Japanese because of the loss of clear goals and the feeling of not making progress.

This negative attitude may first be related to the loss of clear goals. For instance, S2Y2 and S6Y2 both suggested that ‘learning Japanese is swimming in the ocean because it seems to be an endless process and I have no direction’. S10Y2 and S7Y2 similarly compared learning Japanese to ‘walking in a maze’ because they couldn’t find a way out. These metaphors demonstrate the learners’ lack of a clear goal in the second year, and their feeling of frustration. This lack of a clear goal is partially caused by English interference (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). In response to the question ‘Are you fond of Japanese now?’, S10Y2 gave the following answer:

**Extract 4**

I am not sure ... we have to take a nationwide English proficiency test in Year 2, the College English Test (CET) Band 4. I feel that it distracts me a lot. Whenever I have time, I find myself perplexed. Study Japanese or study English?

This extract underscores the point that English learning competed with or interfered with Japanese learning for this learner (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). He was confused about investing time in learning English or learning Japanese. He couldn’t focus on Japanese learning in Year 2 because he wanted to pass the CET-4 exam. In addition to high-stake exams such as the CET 4 in English, 12 (out of 19) Year 2 students mentioned that they had to pass two high-stakes Japanese exams in Year 2, which made them feel frustrated. A typical answer is as follows:

**Extract 5**

In Year 2, as Japanese majors, we are required to take a nationwide Japanese proficiency test, NSS4. In addition, in order to have more competitive edge

globally, we also want to pass the worldwide Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N2 or N1, implemented by the Japan Foundation. I felt distressed or even choked by so many exams. I don't know which exam to prepare for. (S6Y2)

From this extract, it can be inferred that the two high-stakes Japanese exams may discourage students and take away their pleasure in learning (Xu and Gao 2014; Lee, Yu, and Liu 2018). Faced with so many exams, they didn't know which exam to prepare for and therefore didn't have a clear goal in learning.

Another reason for the negative attitude was the feeling of making no progress. For example, both S1Y2 and S3Y2 used the metaphor of 'running an obstacle course' because for S1Y2 'learning Japanese is an exhausting job', and for S3Y2 'we need to overcome lots of barriers in learning and I am not fond of it'. Furthermore, S4Y2 and S5Y2 compared learning Japanese to 'rock climbing' and 'looking for treasures in a vast desert' respectively, because they 'had invested lots of time and energy but made little progress'. This result coincides with Tsang's (2012) and Matsumoto's (2007) finding of 'a lack of progress' as the major demotivator. In the follow-up interview, in response to the question 'Are you fond of Japanese now?' S4Y2 explained that:

**Extract 6**

I found Japanese in Year 2 suddenly became very difficult. We have to learn far more grammar points than in Year 1... In Year 1, I could feel that I made progress day by day. However, in Year 2, I don't feel I am making progress. I feel very frustrated in Year 2.

This interview data suggest that her feeling of making no progress was caused by the elevated difficulty of learning materials. In addition, the feeling of a lack of progress was affected by the teachers, as evidenced by the following extract:

**Extract 7**

Maybe it is because they have more difficult grammar points to explain... It seems that the teachers in Year 2 are not passionate about teaching and accordingly, I am not enthusiastic in learning... I don't want to overcome the obstacles in learning. (S3Y2)

In Year 2 the participants felt that the teacher showed little enthusiasm for teaching because of far more grammar points in the curriculum than in Year 1. Accordingly, some students chose to invest little effort in learning. This interview data corroborates the finding that the teacher is one of the major reasons for learners to invest effort in learning (Tsang 2012; Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005).

Taken together, Year 2 students' metaphors and interview data show that students had more complaints about their Japanese learning as they progressed to a higher level (Lamb 2007; Lee, Yu, and Liu 2018).

*Year 3 Students' motivation to learn Japanese*

Since most of the Y3 students had passed high-stakes Japanese and English exams in Year 2, in Year 3 they were released from the intense pressure of exams and given more freedom in learning. However, a further difference between the Year 2 and Year 3 students is that in Year 2 there was no urgent pressure to seek employment or pursue a Master's degree. In Year 3, students began to face the pressure of graduation. For Year 3 students the two dominant categories were *learning other skills* (37.5%, 6 metaphors) and *eating* (25%, 4 metaphors) as shown in Table 2. A close examination of these dominant categories and other categories reveals polarized attitudes in Year 3 students. 11 (out of 16) students felt fulfilled with their Japanese learning experience while the remaining 5 construed their Japanese learning endeavour as a *have-to-do* job in which

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they had little interest. These findings will be illustrated with relevant metaphors together with interview data.

First, the benefits and their sense of accomplishment in learning Japanese were conveyed by 6 metaphors under the *learning other skills* category, 1 metaphor under the *leisure* category, 2 metaphors under the *eating* category and 2 metaphors under the *instrument* category. For metaphors under the *learning other skills* category, S1Y3 compared learning Japanese to ‘learning to solve mathematical problems’ because ‘I have a sense of fulfilment’, while S9Y3 compared it to ‘learning to ride a bike’ because ‘it feels so good after I have mastered this skill’. Four students compared learning Japanese to learning English because ‘both have opened a new world for me’ (S6Y3), ‘I can communicate with foreigners’ (S7Y3) and ‘I now have a new way of thinking’ (S13Y3; S16Y3). For the *leisure* category, S10Y3 metaphorically represented learning Japanese as ‘watching TV because it gives you lots of new information and new perspectives’. For the *instrument* category, both S3Y3 and S8Y3 described ‘learning Japanese as a door to a new world because I saw different things’. Ten students stated that in Year 3 they were no longer engaged in ‘monotonous language drills’. They were able to follow courses such as ‘Japanese history’ and ‘Japanese culture’. A typical answer is as follows:

#### **Extract 8**

In the first two years of study, we mainly focused on improving language skills. Starting from Year 3, we had content courses like Japanese history, Japanese culture. From these courses, we know that Japanese people are meticulous, clean and attending to details... If I hadn’t learnt Japanese, I would not have known how these qualities are crucial for the development of a nation. This is what is lacking in China. (S4Y3)

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As shown in the extract above, through attending content courses on Japanese history and culture the participant appreciated the positive qualities of Japanese people and why Japan is such a developed country. These qualities and her understanding of what makes Japan such a well-developed country represent her new perspectives and understanding (Gao and Lv 2018). She also realised that these good qualities are lacking in China, and she wouldn't have realised how important they are to the development of a nation if she hadn't learnt Japanese. Another participant mentioned how contact with Japanese people had made him into a different person:

**Extract 9**

I made friends with some Japanese guys through my short-term study in Japan for three months in Year 3. Japanese students are generally well-groomed and polite. Under their influence, I began to care more about my looks. In addition, I also cared more about others. If given a second chance, I would still choose to learn Japanese.

This extract underscores how time spent in the host environment and interaction with Japanese people helped him acquire the 'desirable attributes that are considered Japanese' (Gao and Lv 2018, 9), which further sustained and enhanced his motivation to learn.

Second, 5 students seemed to feel that they had to invest efforts in learning despite little interest in it. For example, one metaphor under the eating category is 'eating because I have to do it every day although I have little interest in it' (S11Y3). Eating is a daily routine that provides nutrition to the body, signifying the importance the participant ascribed to Japanese learning. However, she mentioned she had little interest in it. In her follow-up interview, she explained that:

**Extract 10**

I know Japanese is important to my future. I want to pursue a Master's degree in Japan and transfer to another major. Japanese is an edge for me. But I find I am not interested in this language by itself.

From this extract, we can infer that she was well aware of the utilitarian value of this language to her future. Therefore, she would work hard despite little interest in it. This echoes another participant who used 'body building exercise' to describe her learning experience, since:

**Extract 11**

I have to do it in order to have a strong body. But this process is painful. I will graduate next year. I need to get the degree and find a good job in a Japanese company. (S5Y3)

The two extracts suggest that under the pressure of graduation, the value of learning the Japanese language became more evident for Year 3 learners, either for pursuing further study in Japan or for getting a good job in a Japanese company. We can also infer that Year 3 students seemed to be more practical than students in the other two grades. We may understand their motivation in Year 3 in terms of *investment* (Norton 2000); they were investing in learning Japanese in the hope of getting 'a wide range of symbolic and material resources' (Norton 1995, 17) after graduation.

**Discussion**

This cross-sectional study, by analysing elicited metaphors and interpreting interview data, reveals how motivation to learn Japanese differed among Y1, Y2 and Y3 Japanese majors. The metaphor and interview data together help us understand 'the interaction between this self-reflective agent, and the fluid and complex web of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts' (Ushioda 2011, 13).

Year 1 learners were generally enthusiastic, using mostly *leisure* and *eating* metaphors. This positive attitude can be explained by several contextual influences. First, many students had been interested in Japanese pop culture since their childhood (Extract 1). They wanted to be closer to their idols and explore Japanese ways of doing things (Gao and Lv 2018; Humphrey and Miyazoe-Wong 2007; Northwood and Thomson 2012). This supports the argument that LOTE learning will ‘have closer ties with the disposition toward a specific population than with the image of becoming a global citizen’ (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, 459). Second, they were in a honeymoon period in their university life and were passionate about their study (Extract 2). They felt liberated from the heavy exam-driven learning at high school during which time they had to learn subjects like mathematics and history, probably not out of their interest. After entering university they were able to study their chosen major and were given more freedom in learning. Finally, family influence is also an important factor in cultivating the students’ positive attitudes. The students’ early exposure to Japanese culture and the reason they chose Japanese as a major were in many cases due to their parents’ familiarity with and positive attitude towards Japan and Japanese people (Extract 3) (Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005; Tsang 2012).

Year 2 learners often used *journey* metaphors to indicate the difficulties they were facing. Their frustration arises out of the following contextual influences. First, they were required to take the nationwide College English Test (Band 4) which distracted their attention from learning Japanese (Extract 4) (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). As the learning of Japanese ‘takes place in conjunction with the study of English’ (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, 464), Japanese learning motivation was found in this study to be subject to negative interference from English (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). Second, Year 2 students were also required to take a nationwide Japanese test (NSS4), and most

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of them also wanted to pass the worldwide Japanese Language Proficiency Test (N2 or N1). They had to do a lot of examination-driven drilling of grammar patterns, memorisation of vocabulary and so on, which took away the pleasure of learning (Xu and Gao 2014; Lee, Yu, and Liu 2018). Third, concurrent with the examinations was the dramatic increase in grammar points in the Year 2 curriculum, in terms of both quantity and level of difficulty (Extract 6). As a result, students constantly felt that they were making no progress (cf. Tsang 2012; Matsumoto 2007). At the same time, the teachers became less enthusiastic about teaching because they had far more grammar points to explain than in Year 1 (Extract 7), which further demotivated the students.

Year 3 learners were more concerned about the benefits and practical outcomes of learning, using mainly *learning other skills* metaphors. There are several possible reasons for such attitudes. First, Year 3 students were starting to prepare for their future after graduation. Some students wished to pursue further study in Japan (Extract 10) while others might intend to find a job in a Japanese company (Extract 11). In this situation, they were more aware of the utilitarian value of Japanese (Lamb 2007). Second, unlike the Year 2 curriculum which focused on language drills, in Year 3 they had content courses like ‘Japanese history’ and ‘Japanese culture’, which gave them more opportunities to understand Japan and Japanese people. Such courses were not just more fun, but were also essential for their further studies in Japan or their careers in Japanese companies. Third, in Year 3, there were usually exchange programmes and students would spend three to six months in Japan. They interacted with Japanese native speakers (Extract 9) which helped them acquire the ‘desirable attributes that are considered Japanese’ (Gao & Lv 2018, 9).

Taken together, the findings confirm the dynamic and situated nature of language learning motivation (Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan 2015; Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005). They

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further underscore that language learning motivation theories must accommodate two unique features of LOTE learning. First, LOTE learning has close ties with the target language community. Second, LOTE learning is subject to interference from the learning of Global English.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates that EMA, as a qualitative approach, can complement other research methods in the exploration of learner motivation, particularly when motivation is seen as a dynamic and context-dependent construct. When constructing metaphors, learners are free to express their ideas and to describe their learning experience. Therefore, the elicited metaphors can provide rich data (Jin et al. 2014) and offset the artificial pre-determination of questionnaires. In addition, the number of metaphorical categories can be quantified, thus allowing for direct comparison between different learner groups. Future enquiries in this area are warranted to determine how best to employ EMA together with other methods, although avoiding misinterpreting or over-interpreting the data during analysis merits further study.

The findings will help teachers and curriculum designers address the needs of students across different grades. First, based on the finding that Year 2 students are facing the most difficulty, it is suggested that curriculum designers and textbook developers could shift some difficult grammar points from Year 2 to Year 1, to make the workload more evenly distributed. Second, teachers could give Year 2 students psychological support and academic help in terms of exam preparation. Third, facing the pressure of graduation, some Grade 3 learners became more realistic. Teachers could incorporate activities in class such as how to polish CVs and how to stand out in job interviews in Japanese.

## **Conclusion**

The enquiry, through EMA and interview, addresses the question of whether there was motivational difference among Y1, Y2 and Y3 Chinese learners of Japanese. The results indicate that the three cohorts of students were motivated in different ways, thus confirming the dynamic and situated nature of language learning motivation (Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan 2015; Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005). Motivational differences arise out of multiple macro and micro-contextual influences interacting with self-reflective agents. In addition, the study demonstrates that LOTE learning has two unique features: close ties with the target language community, and interference from the learning of Global English.

There are nevertheless some limitations of this study. First, despite its significance, a cross-sectional study cannot directly reveal the learners' motivation change as a longitudinal study could. Second, the sample is too small for the result to have statistical significance. Future studies may track the motivation change of a larger group of learners.

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**Appendix A: Metaphor Questionnaire** (*Note: the original questionnaire was in Chinese. This is the translated version.*)

### **Instructions**

Thank you for taking part in this survey. We are interested in your Japanese learning experience. Can you think of a metaphor and complete the sentence “Learning Japanese is.....because.....” You may explain why you choose specific metaphors (after ‘because.....’)

### **I Basic Information**

1. Gender: 1) male 2) female
2. Age:
3. Grade: 1) Year 1 2) Year 2 3) Year 3

## **II Metaphor Completion**

1. Please complete the sentence:

Learning Japanese is.....because.....

2. If you have any difficulty coming up with a metaphor, would you please specify below

## **Appendix B Guided questions for interview** (*Note: the original interview was in Chinese. This is the translated version.*)

1. What do you mean by the metaphor that you have produced?
2. Why did you choose Japanese as your major in college?
3. Are you fond of Japanese now?
4. If given a second chance, would you still choose Japanese as your major in college?
5. How many courses are you taking in Year 1(/2/3)?
6. Had you studied Japanese before entering university?
7. What were your parents', friends' and teachers' reactions to your choice of Japanese as your major?
8. How do you learn Japanese after class?
9. What is your plan after graduation?
10. Do you like your Japanese teachers in this university?