Why College Students Want to Learn Asian Languages:  
A Comparative Study of Motivational Factors  
for the Selection of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vi-  
etnamese 

Jack Jinghui Liu and Setsue Shibata  
California State University, Fullerton 

Abstract  
In recent years, more higher educational institutions started to offer less commonly taught languages, and the enrollments in Asian languages have been increasing. However, little was known about why students are interested in the study of a certain Asian language. This study investigates students’ motivation in the selection of one of four Asian languages: Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese, and compares the motivational factors across these languages. Ninety-nine college students who enrolled in the first semester of one of these Asian language classes responded to a Likert-scale questionnaire and open-ended questions. The findings showed that a wide variety of reasons initially motivated college students to learn an Asian language. These fell into six major motivational factors: cultural understanding, heritage-related factor, instrumental orientation, integrative orientation, achievement orientation, and administrative. The study found that there were both similarities and differences in the motivational factors across the four Asian languages. The cultural understanding and integrative orientation were the top two shared motivational factors, and administrative orientation was a weak factor across all language groups. In addition, differences in rank order among the six motivational factors were found between East Asian and Southeast Asian languages. 

Introduction  
A nationwide interest in Asian languages has become apparent recently. According to the survey of Furman, Goldberg, and Lusin (2007), Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese language class enrollment increased by a larger percentage in 2006 than they
did in 2002. Chinese showed a dramatic increase of 51.2% (34,153 to 51, 582 enrollments). Although increases in Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese class enrollments were more modest than those in Chinese, they continued an upward trend: 37.1% (5, 211 to 7, 145 enrollments) for Korean, 27.5% (58, 238 to 66, 605 enrollments) for Japanese, and 11.1% (2,236 to 2, 485 enrollments) for Vietnamese (Furman et al, 2007).

Institutions in the state of California are schools with the greatest increase in enrollment and lead the country in undergraduate course enrollments. According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA, 2007) and Furman et al. (2007), Chinese is offered at 101 colleges/universities in California and 678 colleges/universities in the U.S. and the undergraduate course enrollments in California make up 29.3% (14,773 enrollments) of national enrollments. Japanese is offered at 120 colleges/universities in California and 914 colleges/universities in the U.S. making up 36.6% (24,047 enrollments); Korean at 29 California colleges/universities of 159 U.S. colleges/universities in the U.S., and 45.4% (3,138 enrollments); and Vietnamese, at 23 colleges/universities in California of 74 nationally, 77.8% (1,916 enrollments) in 2007. In addition, the four Asian languages have been listed among the 16 leading languages: Japanese was ranked sixth, Chinese seventh, Korean fifteenth, and Vietnamese sixteenth (Furman et al, 2007).

Educators also predict future increase in the number of enrollments in Asian languages. Based on the survey conducted by Walker and Li (2003), chairs or heads of language departments were positive about future Asian language enrollments in their programs; more than half of them predicted that their Asian programs would experience either a “great increase” or a “gradual increase” in the future. Sung and Padilla (1998) give two possible explanations for the recent enrollment increases in Asian languages. One is the prominence of Asian countries in economic and political power, and the other is the increase in the number of Asian-American students who see learning an Asian language as more meaningful than studying an Indo-European language. However, it is not certain if these explanations would be consistent among students across Asian languages. Husseinali (2006) states that “finding out the initial motivation of different learners will be of great value for teachers, material designers,
and program coordinators” (p. 396). However, no previous study has investigated college freshmen’s motivations for learning Asian languages through comparative analysis surveys.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the students’ motivations and factors that influence selection of an Asian language and to compare the results across the languages chosen by students to determine if these factors vary. There were two research questions in this study:

1. What initially motivates college students to learn an Asian language?
2. Are there any similarities and/or differences in motivational factors among the Asian languages?

**Review of the Literature**

**Early Motivational Theory: Instrumental and Integrative Motivations**

Motivation to learn a foreign language has been a popular topic for researchers because it plays an important role in achieving proficiency in the language. Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) were the early scholars who classified the motivation to learn a foreign language into two categories: instrumental and integrative motivations. Instrumental motivation involves learning a language for a practical purpose in order to gain a benefit from acquiring the language. Integrative motivation reflects the individual’s interest and willingness in social interaction with people who speak the target language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

Although “instrumental motivation” and “integrative motivation” persist in being the essential components of motivation among foreign language researchers, many researchers recently have explored alternative motivation models to explain, more adequately, students’ motivation to study a foreign language (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Gardner, 2000; Hernandez, 2006; Koshiyama & Shibata, 2005; Narita, 1998; Nuibe, 1991; Nuibe, Karino & Ito, 1995; Nunn, 2006; Price & Gascoigne, 2006; Warden & Lin, 2000). One of these factors is an ethnic or heritage-related motivation (e.g., “I study language X since it’s my ancestor’s language”, “I think I can strengthen my identity as X if I study its language”), which seems to be independent
from either instrumental or integrative motivations. As the second and third generations of immigrants from various areas such as from Spanish-speaking countries and Asian countries reach college age, researchers include the heritage-related factor to explain why students choose a particular foreign or second language to study.

Motivation to Study an Asian Language as a Foreign Language

Although the number of enrollments in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese in the U.S. has been increasing, the number of studies focused on these four languages together is still limited. Narita (1998) investigated the relationship between students’ motivation to study Japanese and their scores on Japanese tests among college students in Thailand. In his research, he found six motivational factors and named them as understanding of Japanese culture, integrative orientation, instrumental orientation, pursuit of advantages, international awareness, and incentive orientation. Narita found that integrative orientation was strongly associated with higher test scores. On the other hand, he found “pursuit of advantages and incentive orientation were associated with lower test scores” (Narita, 1998, p. 9). Hasegawa (2003) examined what motivates college learners of Japanese to continue to study the language. Hasegawa categorized motivation into seven factors, and found “self-actualization” (i.e., perceiving Japanese study as a process in which students achieve goals for self-actualization such as “I want to live in Japan in the future”) and “communication” were the most significant orientations for continuing learners. In the study of Koshiyama and Shibata (2005), it was found that understanding culture and interest in language itself outranked the other motivation factors among college students. Luo (2004) found that interest in Japanese culture was the motivational factor most closely associated with initial preference for study of Japanese.

As mentioned earlier, the heritage-related factor is one of the important factors to learn a language for students who have the ethnic or heritage background which is related to the language (Valdes, 2001; Nunn, 2006). It is reported that heritage-related motivation and parental involvement are currently the most significant variables for East Asian language learners studying languages, such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Sung and Padilla, 1998).
Nunn (2006) investigated the influence of students’ ethnic backgrounds on their motivation to study Japanese. Nunn divided high school Japanese language learners into three ethnic groups, i.e., students with Japanese heritage background, Asian learners (Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese), and Caucasian learners. Nunn also categorized non-heritage-related motivation as instrumental, integrative, travel-related, and intrinsic. She found that integrative motivation was more associated with learners with Japanese heritage background and Asian learners than with Caucasian students. For Korean, the leading motivation factor among Korean-American students to learn Korean is the ethnicity-related motivation (equivalent to “heritage-related motivation”) (Cho, 2000; Cho and Tse, 1997). Kim (1992) found that parental attitudes were the important determinants of the students’ attitudes towards learning Korean as a heritage language. Wen (1997) investigated the motivation factors of college students who were from Asian and Asian-American backgrounds to learn Chinese. The results indicated that intrinsic interest in Chinese culture and the desire to understand one’s own cultural heritage were the initial motivations for students to start learning Chinese. Lam (2006) found that most college-aged Vietnamese Americans enrolling in Vietnamese language courses were the Vietnam-born and American-born children of Vietnamese immigrants who came to the United States in the 1970s. The motivations of many of these students to study Vietnamese were to communicate better with family members in the U.S., to correspond with relatives and friends, and to travel to Vietnam. As well, “a small number envision future research activities or business ventures abroad” (Lam, 2006, p. 6).

Since there are still an insufficient number of comparative studies that shed light on motivational factors associated with the selection of an Asian language, the present study was designed to compare the motivation factors across the four Asian languages of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese.

Methods

Institution

The study took place at the beginning of fall semester of 2006 at a four-year university in California. The Department offered four
Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese). Japanese had programs that allow students to major and minor in the language. Chinese had all levels courses, and a proposal was reviewed for the possibility of offering a minor at the time of study. The department did not offer any major or minor in Korean or Vietnamese, but it offered one year of Korean and two years of Vietnamese language courses.

Participants

Students who were enrolled in one of the four first-semester language classes, i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese in Fall, 2006, were asked to voluntarily participate in the study and complete the survey during regular class hours during the second week of the semester. There were 27 students in Chinese (14 males and 13 females), 29 in Japanese (15 males and 14 females), 23 in Korean (14 males and 9 females) and 20 in Vietnamese (7 males and 13 females).

Instrument

The survey consisted of two parts: 1) Personal data of gender and experience of visiting the country where the language is spoken, and 2) Thirty-seven items related to motivational information (see appendix A). This second part was a modified version of Narita (1998), which was originally adapted from Motivation Questionnaires Battery by Gardener and Lambert (1972). This part consisted of 36 Likert-scale questions ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) and an open-ended question (question #37). The instrument, as modified, achieved a reliability of 0.88 (Cronbach’s alpha).

The obtained raw data were analyzed using factor analysis with SPSS 14.0.

Findings

Since many students did not understand or misinterpreted Question # 22 (“The language is one of the international auxiliary languages”), this item was eliminated from the analysis. Results having a loading of greater than 0.40 were considered to contribute meaningfully to the factor in question. Item # 23, # 29 and # 34 are
used for the analysis of more than one factor because of their moderately high rotations (larger than 0.40). Mean scores of the sum of each factor were compared to see if there was a significant difference in the motivation factor among the language groups.

**Question 1: What initially motivates college students to learn an Asian language?**

Table 1 is the loaded factor matrix of all items except, as noted above, item #22, which was eliminated since many students misinterpreted or didn’t understand the item. Six motivation factors were identified using factor analysis: Cultural Understanding, Heritage-related Factor, Instrumental Orientation, Integrative Orientation, Achievement Orientation, and Administrative Orientation. These six factors were rotated by means of the Varimax procedure.

Table 1
*Factor Analysis of Motivational Factors: Rotated Factor Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Factor I</th>
<th>Factor II</th>
<th>Factor III</th>
<th>Factor IV</th>
<th>Factor V</th>
<th>Factor VI</th>
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<td>0.81</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Factor I: Cultural Understanding; Factor II: Heritage-related; Factor III: Instrumental Orientation; Factor IV: Integrative Orientation; Factor V: Achievement Orientation; Factor VI: Administrative Orientation.*

**Factor I: Cultural Understanding**

Factor I obtained high loadings from nine items (#13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 27, 29, 30, 34). These items are related to the interest in the literature, linguistics and culture of the target language such as “I am interested in the X literature”, “I am interested in intercultural differences between X and U.S.”, “I want to have deeper understanding of X culture”, etc. Therefore, this factor is best defined as cultural understanding. The internal consistency was 0.88.
Factor II: Heritage-related Factor

Factor II consists of six items (#23, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36). These items are related to how students’ Asian family backgrounds motivate them to communicate in the target language. They are “My ancestor is X, and I would like to know more about the culture and language”, “I want to communicate with my grandparents and relatives in X”, “I want to involve myself more in X community”, etc. The internal consistency of Factor II was 0.89.

Factor III: Instrumental Orientation

Five items received high loadings on Factor III (#11, 12, 18, 19, 20). These items are related to the use of the language for their future career, i.e., learn the language as an instrument. Therefore, this factor is defined as Instrumental Orientation. This factor obtained 0.84 for the internal consistency.

Factor IV: Integrative Orientation

There are five items (#1, 2, 3, 4, 35) that have high loadings on Factor IV. These items are related to enjoying the pop-music, TV, and films of a particular country and to interact with people who speak the target language. Factor IV is named Integrative Orientation in this study. The internal consistency of this factor was 0.81.

Factor V: Achievement Orientation

Four items received high loadings on Factor V (#7, 23, 24, 25). They are: “I want to get good marks in the tests”, “My parents urge me to learn X”, “I want to earn superior grades in X”, etc. This factor is named Achievement Orientation. The internal consistency was 0.66.

Factor VI: Administrative Orientation

Finally, Factor VI had high loadings from four items (#6, 9, 10, 21), such as “It is an easy language to start”, “I studied the language at high school,” “It happens to be one of the subjects offered and I don’t have any definite purpose”, and “I just want to challenge another language”. This factor is not directly related to the desire to learn the target language, but seems to be for administrative reasons.
Therefore, it was defined as “Administrative Orientation”. The internal consistency was 0.55.

Findings from Open-ended Questions

In addition, four additional reasons were given that were not included in the original survey questionnaires but found through the open-ended questions (Personal Data #3 and Question #37). We grouped them into four categories: Individual Travel Experience, Influence from Siblings, Religion, and Romance and Marriage.

Individual Travel Experience

The personal question #3 in this study centered on the students’ individual experience visiting the country where the target language is spoken: “Have you ever been to China/Japan/Korea/Vietnam?” and “How long did you stay?” The participants in this study who had visited the target country (n = 5) expressed that visiting the country positively impacted their motivation for learning the foreign language. Typical responses from participants were: “I have been to Korea for 10 months. [I study Korean in order] to teach ESL to Koreans” (Ian, Korean Learner #8).

Travel experience (Personal Data #3) is a different reason from item #26 (“I want to travel in XX.”). Item #26 indicates that individuals study a foreign language to prepare for a travel experience. However, students’ comments reveal that a positive travel experience often becomes a motivation to study the language of that country. The survey revealed that a positive travel experience and exposure to the target language and culture motivated individuals to study the language regardless of the length of their stay traveling in the country. Traveling in a new country is always exciting, and it is not unexpected that students might become interested in the language and culture of a country they have visited.

Influence of Siblings

One student wrote his motivation to study the language was “Brothers know it.” (Braver, Japanese Learner #19. He is a native speaker of English who has never been to Japan). The “Influence of siblings” may be considered as an “Achievement Orientation” (e.g., satisfies his/her sense of competition, to please his/her siblings, etc.),
as item #23 (‘‘My parents urge me to learn XX.’’) and #24 (‘‘My
friends urge me to learn XX.’’). In-depth comments and/or factor
analysis from further research may be able to provide more infor-
mation.

Religion

One student wrote: ‘‘Go to Korean-American Church.’’ (Ro-
sie, Korean Learner #15. She is a native speaker of Vietnamese who
has never been to Korea). ‘‘Religion’’ can be considered as ‘‘Integra-
tive Orientation’’ (e.g., ‘‘I want to be involved in the community’’) or
‘‘Instrumental Orientation’’ (e.g., ‘‘to learn Korean on mission to Ko-
rean people’’). However, it is also possible that some people want to
study a language originally associated with their religion (e.g., a new
believer of Buddhism takes Chinese or Japanese).

Romance and Marriage

The fourth reason (n = 2) is ‘‘Marriage and romance.’’ Typi-
cal answers are as follows:

(1) ‘‘I married a Korean woman.’’ (Garrett, Korean Learner
#13. He is a native speaker of English who has been to
Korea for 10 days).
(2) ‘‘Hit on Korean girls.’’ (Rarlan, Korean Learner #23. He is a
native speaker of English who never has been to Korea).

This can be considered as ‘‘Integrative Orientation’’, since
s/he wants to communicate with and to understand better his/her
partner who is a non-native English speaker. However, each case
varies and it cannot be determined which motivation factor is associ-
ated with each case unless the appropriate analysis is conducted.

**Question 2: Are there any similarities and/or differences in mo-
tivational factors among the Asian languages?**

Motivation Factors across Asian Languages

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to see if
there was a significant difference in each of the motivation factors
across the language groups. As shown in Table 2, no significant dif-
ferences were found for Factors I (Cultural Understanding), III (Instrumental Orientation) and VI (Administrative Orientation). Significant differences were found in three motivational factors, i.e., Factor II (Heritage-related), Factor IV (Integrative Orientation) and Factor V (Achievement Orientation).

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Motivational Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Chinese (n = 27)</th>
<th>Japanese (n = 29)</th>
<th>Korean (n = 24)</th>
<th>Vietnamese (n = 20)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>Heritage-related</td>
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<td>18.64 9.12</td>
<td>25.61 4.49</td>
<td>20.74 9.01</td>
<td>14.90 4.22</td>
<td>9.34**abc</td>
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<td>Factor III</td>
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<td>Instrumental Orientation</td>
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<td>15.43 5.09</td>
<td>12.93 3.85</td>
<td>15.21 5.61</td>
<td>13.70 4.88</td>
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<td>Factor IV</td>
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<td>Integrative Orientation</td>
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<td>12.60 4.45</td>
<td>11.06 3.84</td>
<td>9.29 3.46</td>
<td>10.45 4.50</td>
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<td>Factor V</td>
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<td>Achievement Orientation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11.65 3.87</td>
<td>12.24 2.68</td>
<td>10.91 3.96</td>
<td>14.80 3.68</td>
<td>4.77**ce</td>
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<td>Factor VI</td>
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<td>Administrative Orientation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13.68 3.13</td>
<td>14.28 2.39</td>
<td>13.33 3.56</td>
<td>12.32 3.35</td>
<td>1.59</td>
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Note: *p<0.05. **p<0.001. Significant Tukey pairs: a = Chinese and Japanese; b = Japanese and Vietnamese; c = Korean and Vietnamese; d = Chinese and Korean; e = Chinese and Vietnamese.

Tukey’s post hoc test for Factor II (Heritage-related) indicated that there were significant differences between the students’ motivation to choose Chinese and Japanese, Japanese and Vietnamese,
and Korean and Vietnamese. These results indicate that students who chose the Chinese or Vietnamese language were more likely to be motivated by the Heritage-related factor than the students who chose Japanese. Learners of Korean were significantly less motivated by the Heritage-related factor than learners of Vietnamese, but not statistically significantly different from learners of Chinese or Japanese. 

For Factor IV (Integrative Orientation), Tukey’s post hoc test showed that there was a significant difference between the selection of Chinese and Korean. That is, more students who chose Korean were motivated by the Integrative Orientation factor than students who chose Chinese. No significant differences from other language learners were found for the Japanese or Vietnamese classes. Tukey’s post hoc test for Factor V (Achievement Orientation) indicated that there were significant differences in the students’ motivation between those selecting Chinese and Vietnamese, and between the selection of Korean and of Vietnamese. There were no significant differences between students selecting Japanese and those selecting the other three languages. The students who chose Vietnamese were less likely to be motivated by Achievement Orientation factor than were students who chose Chinese or Korean.

Table 3 shows the rank order of motivational factors for each language group. For the students selecting Chinese, the motivation ranking (highest to lowest) is Cultural Understanding, Integrative, Achievement, Instrumental, Heritage-related, and Administrative. As motivation for Japanese selection, the order is Integrative Orientation, Cultural Understanding, Instrumental Orientation, Achievement Orientation, Administrative Orientation, and Heritage-related. For Korean, the order is Integrative Orientation, Cultural Understanding, Achievement Orientation, Instrumental Orientation, Administrative Orientation, and Heritage-related. For Vietnamese, the rank is Cultural Understanding, Integrative Orientation, Heritage-related, Instrumental Orientation, Administrative Orientation, and Achievement Orientation.
### Table 3
**Means and Rank Order of Motivational Factor**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese (n=27)</th>
<th>Japanese (n=29)</th>
<th>Korean (n=24)</th>
<th>Vietnamese (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Mean/SD)</td>
<td>(Mean/SD)</td>
<td>(Mean/SD)</td>
<td>(Mean/SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor I.</td>
<td>Factor IV.</td>
<td>Factor IV.</td>
<td>Factor I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.39/0.83)</td>
<td>(2.21/0.77)</td>
<td>(1.86/0.69)</td>
<td>(1.82/0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor IV.</td>
<td>Factor I.</td>
<td>Factor I.</td>
<td>Factor IV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.52/0.89)</td>
<td>(2.22/0.68)</td>
<td>(2.08/0.85)</td>
<td>(2.09/0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor V.</td>
<td>Factor III.</td>
<td>Factor V.</td>
<td>Factor II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.91/0.97)</td>
<td>(2.59/0.77)</td>
<td>(2.73/0.99)</td>
<td>(2.48/0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor III.</td>
<td>Factor V.</td>
<td>Factor III.</td>
<td>Factor III.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.08/1.02)</td>
<td>(3.06/0.67)</td>
<td>(3.04/1.12)</td>
<td>(2.74/0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor II.</td>
<td>Factor VI.</td>
<td>Factor VI.</td>
<td>Factor VI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.10/1.52)</td>
<td>(3.57/0.60)</td>
<td>(3.33/0.89)</td>
<td>(3.08/0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor VI.</td>
<td>Factor II</td>
<td>Factor II</td>
<td>Factor V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.42/0.78)</td>
<td>(4.27/0.75)</td>
<td>(3.46/1.51)</td>
<td>(3.70/0.92)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree.

Factor I: Cultural Understanding; Factor II: Heritage-related; Factor III: Instrumental Orientation; Factor IV: Integrative Orientation; Factor V: Achievement Orientation; Factor VI: Administrative Orientation.

Cultural Understanding (Factor I) and Integrative Orientation (Factor IV) were the two strongest motivational factors in selecting a language across all four language groups. Overall, the rank order of motivational factors of Chinese, Japanese and Korean were similar, with only minor variance in their rankings. For students in the Vietnamese class, the Heritage-related (Factor II) was the third most im-
Why College Students Want to Learn Asian Languages: 47

important factor while Achievement Orientation (Factor V) was the last.

Motivational Factors between Male and Female

No significant differences were found between male and female students regarding their motivation factors for selecting Chinese, Japanese or Vietnamese. However, a significant difference was found for the study of Korean in Factor III (Instrumental Orientation; F value=7.60, p=0.01). That is, more female students chose to learn Korean out of Instrumental Orientation than did male students.

Discussion

The findings showed that a wide variety of reasons motivated college students to begin to learn an Asian language. These reasons fell into six motivation factors: Cultural Understanding, Heritage-Related, Instrumental Orientation, Integrative Orientation, Achievement Orientation, and Administrative Orientation. Further, four additional reasons were found through the open-ended questions, which were grouped into four categories: Individual Travel Experience, Influence from Siblings, Religion, and Romance and Marriage.

The study found that there are both similarities and differences in the scores on the motivation factors across and among the four Asian language groups. No significant differences were found for Cultural Understanding (one of the two highest ranked across all four groups), Instrumental Orientation and Administrative Orientation. Significant differences were found between groups in the other three motivational factors: Heritage-Related, Integrative Orientation and Achievement Orientation.

The results of ranking the motivational categories for each group indicate that more students in Chinese or Vietnamese selected the language because it was their heritage-related language. Although information is not available for the exact number of students with heritage background of the target language in each language class, Chinese and Vietnamese classes were more likely to have attracted students with the heritage background than Japanese and Korean classes. According to the Census conducted in 2000 (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), Chinese is the largest community among
Asians in California, followed by Filipino and Vietnamese. Japanese and Korean are smaller communities compared to Chinese and Vietnamese. The size of local ethnic community may affect the result. It was also found that students in Korean have stronger Integrative Orientation motivation, compared to students in Chinese. The study also revealed that Achievement Orientation motivation seemed to be more important among Chinese and Korean learners than Vietnamese learners. As Warden and Lin (2000) pointed out, competitive educational systems in Korea, China (Mainland) and Taiwan may contribute this result in some way (e.g., a Chinese learner has a native Chinese speaker friend who valued achievement the most). However, this is only an assumption and further study is necessary to explain these results.

It should be noted that more students in Chinese or Korean classes chose the languages because of parental wishes. Students in Korean were also more influenced by their friends’ recommendation, while the students in Vietnamese were not influenced by the opinions of their parents and friends, nor were they more positively motivated by the desire to get superior grades than students in the other three groups. In other words, for more students, the selection of Vietnamese is their own selection, that is, they are self-selective and not as influenced by the opinions from their parents. In this regard, East Asian students (Chinese, Japanese and Korean) seem to be more dependent on their family and friends for their language selection process. This result is consistent with Nunn’s study (2006), which refers to Eastern Asian students’ dependency upon their families. In Nunn’s study, it was also found that Caucasian students selected a language to study more independently of parental opinion than did the East Asian students. This difference can be explained by the cultural differences in the parent-child relationship, parental attitudes toward education, or parent’s expectation of children. However, it is encouraging that the students in all language groups agree that studying an Asian language is advantageous and meaningful for their future careers.

Similarities included the fact that Cultural Understanding and Integrative Orientation are the top two motivational factors shared across all four language groups. Namely, the desire to understand language and culture, to involve oneself in the community, and to
interact with people who speak the target language were relatively strong motivations rather than choosing an Asian language for the convenience of registration. Many students may have chosen an Asian language because of the attractions of unique cultural features. For instance, video games and anime as Japanese pop culture, are examples of why some students study the Japanese language. One student wrote: “Personal interest and play Japanese video games” (Jonathan, Japanese Learner #24). Such a reason to study an Asian language was found in all four Asian language classes. Individual travel experience may also be related to the Cultural Understanding and Integrated Orientation motivation factors. For example, one respondent described her motivation to learn Japanese as: “I have been to Japan for two weeks. I am not Japanese. I want there to be more Japanese classes offered at my school.” (Katrina, Japanese Learner #15). As discussed before, a positive travel experience often becomes a motivation to study the language and culture of that country, that is, students may have developed stronger motivation to communicate and to interact with people who speak the target language.

On the other hand, Administrative Orientation, which refers to choosing a language for the convenience of registration, is a weak factor across all language groups. This makes sense, considering the limited number of courses offered. Although the number of higher educational institutions that offer these four language courses has been increasing, it is still a relatively small number, especially for Korean and Vietnamese, compared to the classes of more commonly taught languages such as Spanish and French.

In summary, motivational factors to choose Chinese, Japanese and Korean were similar, while Vietnamese showed a difference in the rank order of motivation factor from the other three language groups. Chinese, Japanese and Korean are categorized as East Asian languages and Vietnamese as Southeast Asian language based on their physical locations. These two language groups are different not only geographically, but also culturally, socially, and economically, which influence the students’ motivation to study the target language differently.
Conclusions

Understanding the motivations of students to learn an Asian language from various perspectives enables educators to construct effective pedagogical approaches and help students promote their language proficiency. It is also useful for language education policy makers to make appropriate plans. This study investigated the students’ motivations and factors that influenced selection of an Asian language class and compared the results across the Asian languages chosen by students. The study found that there were both similarities and differences in the motivation factors across the group of students choosing the four Asian languages.

No significant differences for Cultural Understanding, Instrumental Orientation and Administrative Orientation motivational factors were found between the four groups. However, Achievement Orientation, Integrative Orientation, and Heritage-Related motivations differed among Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese learners. Further, Cultural Understanding and Integrative Orientation were the top two motivational factors shared by all groups, and Administrative Orientation was a weak factor across all language groups.

Motivation to learn a foreign language has become more diverse in our changing society. For this reason, it is recommended that the survey used in this study be re-examined and updated with categories developed using data from the open-ended questions in this study to include additional reasons why members of a modern society choose to study a foreign language, such as Individual Travel Experience, Influence of Siblings, Religion, and Romance and Marriage. Future researchers are strongly recommended to explore the cultural, social and economic features of a country’s influence on students’ language selection across the language groups, especially to explore further motivational factor differences between East Asian languages and Southeastern Asian languages.

Finally, limitations of this study should be noted. The study focused on the students’ motivations for studying the first semester of one of four Asian languages that were offered at a university on the west coast of the U.S. Therefore, results may not be able to generalize to motivations for study at more advanced language levels nor at institutions in the other regions. Further, this study had a relatively
small sample for each group. More studies with a larger number of participants in different regions of the country should be encouraged.

Acknowledgements

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References


Appendix A

Motivation Survey (Chinese)

This research aims to find out why you have been learning Chinese. Your answer is strictly confidential. After being transferred to SPSS without your identity, this form will be discarded.

I. Personal Questions:
1. Your name: ______________________

2. You are: 1) male 2) female

3. Have you ever been to China? No / Yes
   If the answer is “Yes”, how long did you stay? ( ___ )

II. Motivation Survey: If you have ever taken Chinese class at college, please read the statements listed below, and from a sliding scale of 1-5 put whichever number indicates your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

I am learning Chinese because:
1. I want to communicate with Chinese friend(s). ( ___ )
2. I want to be friendly with Chinese people. ( ___ )
3. I want to enjoy Chinese songs. ( ___ )
4. I want to enjoy Chinese films, anime, TV and books. ( ___ )
5. It will be useful for my future career. ( ___ )
6. It is an easy language to start. ( ___ )
7. I want to get good marks in the tests. ( ___ )
8. I will need it as a requisite for graduation. ( ___ )
9. I studied Chinese at high school (or other school). ( ___ )
10. It happens to be one of the subjects offered at university and I don’t have any definite purpose. ( ___ )
11. I want to write Chinese articles for job in the future. ( ___ )
12. I want to read Chinese newspapers and novels for job in the future. ( )
13. I am interested in Chinese literature. ( )
14. I am interested in intercultural differences. ( )
15. I am interested in linguistic differences between Chinese and the other language. ( )
16. I want to have deeper understanding of Chinese culture. ( )
17. I am interested in Chinese language study itself. ( )
18. I want to study in China in the future. ( )
19. I want to work in China in the future. ( )
20. I want to get a job in a Chinese company. ( )
21. I simply want to challenge another language study. ( )
22. Chinese is one of the international auxiliary languages. ( )
23. My parents urge me to learn Chinese. ( )
24. My friends urge me to learn Chinese. ( )
25. I want to be superior in grades in Chinese. ( )
26. I want to travel in China. ( )
27. I want to write a letter to my Chinese friend(s). ( )
28. It will be advantageous to learn Chinese. ( )
29. I want to enhance my culture. ( )
30. I want to be considered a cultured person. ( )
31. My ancestor is Chinese, and I would like to know more about the culture and language. ( )
32. I want to communicate my parents in Chinese. ( )
33. I want to communicate my grandparents and relatives in China. ( )
34. I want to involve more in Chinese community. ( )
35. I want to involve more in Chinese-American community. ( )
36. I want to learn Chinese to develop my Chinese identity. ( )
37. Other comments:

Thank you very much for your cooperation!