



A STUDY ON THE EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOKS OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN JAPANESE: A GOVERNMENT RECRUITMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This study explores the employment outlooks of Chinese university students majoring in Japanese and their potential career development within government sectors from the viewpoint of government recruiters. Through semi-structured interviews with ten recruitment personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, we analyze their evaluations of the abilities of Japanese major graduates and the key factors influencing hiring decisions. The research finds that, although Japanese major students generally possess strong language skills, they exhibit gaps in cross-cultural adaptability, career planning awareness, and integrated competencies compared to the actual demands of government departments. Recruiters emphasize the necessity for Japanese major students to have a background in international affairs and stronger overall qualities to tackle the complexities and challenges of diplomatic work. Based on the findings, this paper offers relevant policy recommendations: universities should adjust the curriculum for Japanese majors, increase interdisciplinary course offerings, enhance career planning guidance, and establish collaboration mechanisms with government departments to provide students with more internship and practical opportunities. These measures aim to improve students' overall competitiveness and better meet the government's need for versatile foreign language talents. Future research could further explore the differing demands for foreign language talents across various types of government departments to optimize the direction of foreign language education and policy-making.

Keywords:

Employment Outlooks; Chinese University Students Majoring In Japanese; Government Recruitment

Introduction

In recent years, with the acceleration of globalization, foreign language professionals have played an increasingly important role in international affairs and cross-cultural communication (Cheng Jiayin, 2024). Particularly, as key economic entities in Asia, graduates from Japanese programs have demonstrated their irreplaceable value in various foreign affairs activities, international business, cultural exchanges, and translation. Japanese, as a major foreign language in China's education system, sees many graduates entering the job market each year (Yin Dajia, 2019). However, in the face of intensifying market competition and diverse career options, Japanese major students are encountering new challenges and trends in employment. Overall, the employment directions for Japanese major graduates are quite broad, encompassing fields such as translation, education, international trade, and diplomatic affairs (Yanxu et al., 2024). However, with rapid technological advancements and changes in global circumstances, traditional job opportunities are declining, and graduates with interdisciplinary backgrounds have become more competitive (Gao Zhonghua & Zhang Heng, 2023). Against this backdrop, many Japanese major students face issues such as unclear career planning and significant employment pressure, particularly as high-level positions demand higher standards for professional qualities, cross-cultural communication skills, and political sensitivity beyond just language ability (Zhao Qian et al., 2018).

As the core department for China's foreign affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China has a particularly pronounced demand for language talents. The ministry's work involves multifaceted exchanges and negotiations between nations in politics, economics, and culture (Han Xiao & Wu Zhicheng, 2024). Consequently, the requirements for language professionals, especially those with Japanese majors, extend beyond language proficiency to include a rich knowledge of international relations, keen diplomatic strategy awareness, and strong cross-cultural communication skills. Thus, how to cultivate Japanese talents with these qualities has become a significant topic for universities and government departments like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China.

Currently, Japanese major students exhibit a diversified trend in their employment outlooks. Some students hope to leverage their language skills to secure jobs related to Japan, such as positions in Japanese-funded enterprises or cultural exchange institutions (Yang Yuchun, 2017). Others aspire to enter national agencies or government departments to engage in public service work related to diplomacy and foreign affairs. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, as a key employer of Japanese talent, provides an interesting research topic on how its recruiters perceive the employment outlooks of these students.

Thus, this research analyzes the employment outlooks of Japanese major university students from the viewpoint of Ministry of Foreign Affairs recruiters. The core question of the study is: How do Ministry of Foreign Affairs recruiters perceive the employment outlooks of Japanese major university students? By exploring the recruiters' evaluations of Japanese graduates' employment choices, career planning, and competency matching, this study aims to reveal the key factors influencing Japanese major students' entry into government departments or other foreign affairs positions.

Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China's demand for Japanese major graduates, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese major students in relation to recruitment by government departments like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. The study aims to provide insights for universities to optimize their talent cultivation programs for Japanese majors. By approaching from the recruiters' perspective, this research can offer new ideas for the talent supply-demand connection between government departments and universities, while also providing beneficial guidance for the career development of Japanese major students.

Innovation

Overall, there is currently a scarcity of research on the employment outlooks of Japanese major students, particularly from the viewpoint of government recruiters. Existing literature indicates that the employment status and outlooks of foreign language major students, especially those majoring in Japanese, are influenced by multiple factors. While foreign language skills remain their core competitive edge, the demand for versatile talents in high-end industries like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China is on the rise. Therefore, the employment choices of Japanese major students are not limited to traditional Japanese-funded enterprises and translation roles, but also include more challenging and strategically significant positions, such as recruitment roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. This study deeply explores the employment outlooks of Japanese major university students from the viewpoint of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China's recruiters and analyzes how this employment group can enhance their qualities and abilities to meet the requirements of high-end positions. This perspective not only provides a new dimension for researching employment outlooks but also offers data support and theoretical foundations for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China's talent selection policies.

Theoretical Framework

Career choice theory (Zainudin et al., 2020) and rational choice theory (Sato, 2013) assist in understanding the employment decision-making processes of Japanese major students; social capital theory (Dubos, 2017) and human capital theory (Wuttaphan, 2017) offer insights into how recruiters assess student resources and abilities; while vocational socialization theory (Weidman, & DeAngelo, 2020) further reveals how students' employment outlooks gradually form in practice. This framework provides a comprehensive and systematic analytical tool for researching how Ministry of Foreign Affairs recruiters perceive the employment outlooks of Japanese major students and helps to reveal the multiple factors influencing recruitment decisions.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method, specifically through semi-structured interviews for data collection. Qualitative research methods can capture participants' deep-seated viewpoints, attitudes, and experiences (Zhu Yi, 2024), while semi-structured interviews offer researchers a degree of flexibility (Minsheng College, 2024), allowing for adjustments in question order or the addition of follow-up questions based on new discoveries during the interviews while adhering to a predetermined question framework.

Selection of Interview Subjects

To gain an in-depth understanding of the employment outlooks of Japanese language majors from the viewpoint of recruitment personnel at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, this study selects staff who have participated in language talent recruitment at the Ministry as interview subjects. Specifically, the subjects include: personnel from relevant recruitment departments at the Ministry; interviewers and recruitment supervisors who have directly participated in hiring language professionals (especially those majoring in Japanese). These participants possess extensive recruitment experience and can provide firsthand insights into the hiring process, evaluation criteria, and their views on the employment outlooks of Japanese language students.

Sampling Method: The study employs purposive sampling to select recruitment personnel relevant to the research objectives. We plan to interview 10 recruitment personnel from the Ministry, ensuring that we obtain saturated data—when the information starts to repeat and similar themes and patterns emerge, data collection ceased.

Semi-Structured Interview Design

The semi-structured interview design uses open-ended questions to allow respondents to freely express their views while guiding the conversation around the research theme. The following is the core question framework for the interviews:

Employment Outlooks:

How do you view the employment outlooks of Japanese language majors?

What are the prominent characteristics they exhibit in their career choices?

What do you believe are the primary motivations for Japanese language majors choosing diplomatic work?

In your experience, do Japanese language majors have clear career plans? How do these plans align with the needs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China?

Language Proficiency and Cross-Cultural Adaptation:

Do you think the language proficiency of Japanese graduates is sufficient for diplomatic work? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Besides language skills, do you believe that Japanese language students possess adequate cross-cultural adaptability?

Recruitment Evaluation Criteria:

What abilities and qualities do you prioritize in Japanese language graduates during the recruitment process?

Beyond language skills, what other aspects do you assess? For instance, knowledge of international politics, teamwork skills, or the ability to handle complex situations?

Factors Influencing Employment Decisions:

What do you consider the main factors affecting the career choices of Japanese language majors? For example, family background, educational experience, personal interests, etc.

How do you view the importance of these students' social capital (such as internships and study abroad experience) in recruitment decisions?

Future Outlook:

What are your expectations for the future demand for Japanese language talent?

How do you think Japanese language students can enhance their competitiveness to better adapt to diplomatic work?

Interview Duration: Each interview is expected to last 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the respondent's situation and the depth of their responses. The interview process is recorded and noted for documentation.

Thematic Analysis

Data analysis utilizes thematic analysis, which includes the following steps: repeatedly reading the interview data to familiarize with the content; performing initial coding to identify key themes; categorizing codes and identifying major themes relevant to the research questions; reviewing themes to ensure their representativeness; defining and naming the themes; and finally writing a report to explain each theme and its relationship to the research questions.

Ensuring Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, this study implements the following measures:

- Member Checking: During the analysis phase, preliminary findings are shared with some respondents to ensure their viewpoints are accurately represented.
- Peer Review: Throughout the research process, other qualitative research experts are invited to review the interview data and analysis process to ensure objectivity and soundness of the results.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to strict ethical standards. Interviewees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China are informed of the research purpose, data usage, and provide written consent. All data is anonymized to ensure the privacy of respondents, and recording materials are kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Research Results

Through semi-structured interviews with 10 recruitment personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, this study gathered specific insights into their views on the employment outlooks of Japanese language majors and recruitment decisions. The interviews totaled 15 hours, with recordings transcribed into over 20,000 words, ultimately yielding five major themes through thematic analysis.

Characteristics of Employment Outlooks Among Japanese Language Majors

During the interviews, 70% of respondents noted a clear division in the career motivations of Japanese language majors. Some students choose positions at the Ministry out of interest in cross-cultural communication and national affairs, while others focus more on job stability and income benefits. 80% of respondents indicated that many students lack clarity in their career planning and do not exhibit long-term developmental goals or strategies.

A senior diplomat involved in recruitment stated, “Most Japanese language students show interest in diplomatic work, but when we delve into their career planning, they often struggle to articulate their future direction clearly. Often, their answers are vague, mentioning a desire to contribute to the country without specific career goals.”

Another recruitment personnel pointed out, “I’ve encountered some students who choose diplomatic work primarily for stability and salary considerations, which is not inherently wrong, but diplomatic work requires a greater sense of mission and a long-term career plan.”

Language Proficiency and Cross-Cultural Adaptation

All respondents unanimously agreed that Japanese language graduates possess excellent language proficiency, particularly in oral expression and translation. However, 60% of respondents noted that some students, while demonstrating strong language abilities, lack cross-cultural adaptability and the ability to navigate complex international situations in actual diplomatic contexts.

One interviewer remarked, “There’s no issue with the language abilities of Japanese language students; they perform exceptionally well in translation and speaking. However, we often find that when faced with unexpected diplomatic situations or the need for quick responses to international events, they struggle with cross-cultural understanding.”

Another recruiter added, “What we need are language talents who can react in complex cultural contexts; it’s not just about speaking Japanese, but also understanding and navigating the intertwined diplomatic environments of multiple cultures. Many students have a deep understanding of Japanese culture but are relatively weak in their understanding of other cultures.”

Recruitment Evaluation Standards

80% of recruitment personnel indicated that their evaluation criteria extend beyond language proficiency to include candidates' cross-cultural adaptability, multidisciplinary skills, and problem-solving capabilities. Students with backgrounds in international relations, law, or economics are favored, as these candidates often demonstrate broader knowledge and stronger comprehensive abilities during interviews.

A senior recruitment personnel stated, “Of course we value language skills, but that’s just the foundation. We’re more concerned with whether candidates possess knowledge of international relations and can respond swiftly to complex diplomatic scenarios. Students with interdisciplinary backgrounds tend to have stronger comprehensive thinking abilities, allowing them to view problems from multiple outlooks, which is very important.”

Another recruitment supervisor added, “I once interviewed a candidate who spoke Japanese fluently, but when we asked about some international affairs, he appeared unprepared. He didn’t demonstrate an in-depth understanding of international situations, which we consider a significant skills gap.”

Factors Influencing Employment Decisions

About 50% of respondents pointed out that family background plays a significant role in the employment choices of Japanese language majors. Students from more affluent families are more inclined to pursue jobs that offer social value and self-actualization, while those from less affluent backgrounds focus more on job stability and income levels. Additionally, 70% of respondents believe that educational institutions need to enhance their programs to improve students' interdisciplinary abilities.

One recruiter noted, “Students from middle-class or higher backgrounds tend to discuss their interest in diplomatic work more during interviews, seeking personal value realization. In contrast, those from less affluent backgrounds often emphasize job stability and benefits, which undoubtedly influences their career preferences.”

Another respondent stated, “The current curriculum in higher education still focuses on language skill training, which is far from sufficient for future diplomatic work. We hope to see students with interdisciplinary knowledge who possess a stronger background in international politics and economics to better tackle complex diplomatic tasks.”

Future Demand for Japanese Language Talent

80% of respondents believe that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China will continue to have a demand for Japanese language talent, but will prefer candidates with multidisciplinary skills. Recruiters suggest that universities strengthen their course offerings in international relations, economics, and diplomatic affairs to cultivate talent suitable for future diplomatic work.

A seasoned recruiter remarked, “Future Japanese language talents need not only to speak fluent Japanese but also to analyze international situations and understand the political and cultural contexts of different countries. We hope to see graduates who are proficient in language as well as international affairs, as they will be our ideal candidates.”

Another respondent suggested, “Higher education institutions should offer more internships in diplomatic affairs and international economic cooperation to allow students to combine language skills with practical diplomatic experience. Through these practical experiences, they will be better equipped to meet the demands of working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China.”

Discussion

Matching Career Choices of Japanese Majors with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China' Needs

The findings of this study indicate that the career motivations of Japanese language graduates are diverse. Some students pursue careers in cross-cultural communication and diplomatic affairs, while others focus more on job stability and financial returns. This phenomenon is supported by Career Choice Theory, which posits that individuals' career choices are influenced by their interests, abilities, social backgrounds, and external environments (Zemzami, & Lotfi, S, 2024). Existing research also shows that foreign language majors' career choices depend not only on language proficiency but also on personal interests and market demand (Huang Luhan, 2024). However, recruitment personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China generally believe that many students lack clear career planning and struggle to articulate their future goals or demonstrate a deep understanding of diplomatic affairs. This indicates a disconnect between students' preparations for positions in the Ministry and the Ministry's actual needs.

In terms of matching, while Japanese majors generally excel in language skills, they fall short in cross-cultural adaptability and the ability to handle international affairs. Ministry recruiters noted the need for interdisciplinary talent that possesses not only language skills but also a broad knowledge of international relations and cross-cultural communication. Human Capital

Theory further explains this necessity, emphasizing that diplomatic work requires not just strong language skills but also proficiency in interpersonal communication, crisis management, and analysis of international affairs (Aslam, & Farooq, A, 2024). Currently, Japanese majors lack interdisciplinary capabilities, leading to a gap between their career choices and the Ministry's actual demands.

How the Ministry Can Better Attract Foreign Language Talent Through Recruitment Policies

This study reveals the challenges faced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China in recruitment, particularly in attracting foreign language talent with interdisciplinary skills. Recruiters expressed that current recruitment policies overly focus on assessing language ability, failing to adequately reflect the complexity and challenges of diplomatic work, especially the need for versatile candidates. This suggests that existing recruitment policies may have limitations in attracting higher-level language talent.

According to Social Capital Theory, the Ministry can enhance its image and appeal among foreign language talent by strengthening ties with universities, cross-cultural organizations, and the foreign language industry (Xiao Chengxiao & Li Yajun, 2024). For example, by providing more internship opportunities, career development programs, and talent training initiatives, the Ministry can increase its attractiveness to foreign language students. Recruitment policies should also emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary backgrounds, clearly indicating the necessity of combining language skills with an understanding of international affairs, cross-cultural adaptability, and problem-solving abilities.

Moreover, the Ministry could adjust the recruitment process to increase the assessment of candidates' overall qualities. For instance, beyond standard language testing, adding simulated diplomatic scenarios or case analyses could better evaluate candidates' cross-cultural adaptability, understanding of international relations, and ability to handle complex situations. This approach would not only help identify candidates who truly meet the Ministry's needs but also give applicants a clearer understanding of the actual requirements of diplomatic work.

How University Education Can Help Students Adapt to Government Job Requirements

The study's findings suggest that current Japanese major programs emphasize language skills but fall short in interdisciplinary abilities, career planning guidance, and practical skills. Interviewed recruitment personnel unanimously agreed that students with interdisciplinary skills are more competitive, particularly those with backgrounds in international relations, economics, or law. Existing literature supports this view, indicating that interdisciplinary talent has a competitive edge in the job market (Xu Mingming, 2024).

Vocational Socialization Theory posits that professional identity and skills develop gradually through practice (Qian Aifei, 2024). Thus, universities need to provide more internships and practical opportunities related to government departments and international organizations in their Japanese programs to help students better understand the actual demands of diplomatic work. Additionally, schools should enhance their interdisciplinary course offerings, such as international relations, economics, and political science, to help students improve their language skills while developing a broader knowledge base.

To better support Japanese majors, universities can focus on the following improvements:

- **Interdisciplinary Curriculum Development:** Introduce more relevant courses in international relations, economics, and law into the Japanese curriculum to cultivate students' interdisciplinary skills.
- **Internship and Practical Opportunities:** Collaborate with government departments, multinational companies, and international organizations to provide more internship opportunities that help students gain practical experience and enhance their professional understanding and adaptability.
- **Career Planning Guidance:** Strengthen career planning education to help students clarify their future career paths, thereby boosting their confidence and competitiveness in the job market.

Conclusion

This study, through in-depth interviews with recruitment personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, explored their views on the employment outlooks of Japanese language graduates and revealed key factors influencing their recruitment decisions. The findings indicate that while Japanese majors possess solid language skills, there exists a gap in career planning, cross-cultural adaptability, and interdisciplinary skills compared to the Ministry's actual needs. Recruiters generally feel that Japanese graduates lack a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of diplomatic work, particularly when facing multicultural contexts and complex international situations. These results suggest that there is insufficient alignment between the career choices of Japanese majors and the talent needs of the Ministry. From the main findings of the study, the employment outlooks of Japanese majors show a diverse trend, with some students aspiring to enter the diplomatic field through their language skills. However, many students lack clear career planning and a deep understanding of diplomatic affairs during interviews. Although language proficiency is their core competitive advantage, recruiters prefer candidates with cross-cultural adaptability, international affairs understanding, and problem-solving skills.

Based on these research findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Adjusting the Training Program for Japanese Majors:** Universities should optimize the curriculum for Japanese majors based on the Ministry's demand for interdisciplinary talent. In addition to traditional language training, it is suggested to increase interdisciplinary courses, such as international relations, political science, economics, and law. This will help students enhance their language skills while developing a broader knowledge base and analytical capabilities that meet the comprehensive demands of diplomatic work.
- **Enhancing Internship and Practical Opportunities:** To help students better understand the actual demands of diplomatic work, universities should establish closer collaborations with government departments (especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China) and international organizations to provide more internship opportunities. Through hands-on experience in diplomatic affairs, students can gain a clearer understanding of the complexities involved and improve their cross-cultural adaptability and ability to handle complex situations. This practical-oriented training approach will enhance students' overall competitiveness in the job market.
- **Strengthening Career Planning Guidance:** Universities should reinforce career planning guidance for Japanese majors to help them clarify their future career development goals and pathways. Regular career seminars, mock interviews, and interactions with diplomats can help

students better understand the professional requirements of diplomatic work and prepare for future employment.

· **Enhancing Cooperation Between Government and Universities:** To better train talent that meets the Ministry's needs, long-term cooperation mechanisms should be established between the government and universities. The Ministry can conduct regular recruitment presentations, offer on-campus training programs, and even participate directly in course design to ensure that students' knowledge closely aligns with the actual demands of diplomatic work. Additionally, government departments can provide universities with more resources related to international affairs and cross-cultural communication, enhancing the overall competencies of Japanese majors.

Future Research Directions

This study explored the employment outlooks and influencing factors of Japanese majors from the viewpoint of recruitment personnel in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. Future research could further deepen this topic from various angles. First, quantitative research could validate recruitment personnel's assessments of students' capabilities and needs, utilizing a broader sample to analyze differences in job-seeking performance. Secondly, research could investigate the demand for Japanese majors in other government departments and multinational corporations, providing insights into the diverse requirements for language talent across different employment fields. Additionally, studies could explore how cross-cultural adaptability and understanding of international affairs affect the employability of foreign language majors in different cultural contexts, offering more globally-oriented suggestions for talent development.

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