

# A study on the factors influencing the changes in the scale of Japanese students studying abroad since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan

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**Abstract:** In 2017, China has become Asia's largest study destination country, but at the same time, the number of international students from Japan has been decreasing year by year. Understanding the factors that influence Japanese students' choice of study abroad destination is critical to understanding the reasons for this trend. This article takes Japanese international students as the research objects, starting from the development of the number of Japanese international students since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan, and focusing on analyzing the reasons behind the decrease in the number of Japanese international students. It has been found that Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations, study-abroad policies, Sino-Japanese trade relations, costs of studying abroad, expected benefits, rankings of Chinese universities, number of institutions, number of Confucius Institutes and courses, and total exports of Chinese cultural products are important factors affecting the changes in the number of Japanese students studying abroad. This study also provides suggestions to promote the growth of Japanese students studying abroad, and improve the quality and efficiency of China's overseas education.

**Key words:** international students from Japan; normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan; influencing factors

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## 1 Introduction

Since 1972, the number of international student from Japan in China have fluctuated through phases: inception, growth, and recent decrease. Factors like politics, economics, education, and culture influence this trend differently from academic and non-academic students. The decline prompts actions to strengthen diplomatic ties, leverage economic platforms, enhance educational quality, expand cultural exchanges, and foster collaboration among stakeholders for a better experience of studying abroad in China.

## 2 The scale development of Japanese students studying in China since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan

On September 29, 1972, the Chinese and Japanese governments signed the *Sino-Japanese Joint Statement*, ending the long-term unequal relationship and marking the normalization of relations between the two countries. In the following six years, the two countries signed a number of cooperation agreements in politics, economy, education, culture and other

aspects, including the *Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship* signed in 1978, which opened a new chapter. According to the *History of Chinese Education* after 1945 and data from the Ministry of Education, changes in the number of Japanese international students can be divided into four stages: the embryonic period, the growth period, the fluctuation period and the decline period.

The first stage was the embryonic period from 1972 to 1978. The two countries signed the *Sino-Japanese Joint Statement* in 1972. However, due to factors such as the international situation and political instability, the number of Japanese students studying abroad is extremely limited. Only 36 international students in the world come to study in China.

The second stage was the growth period from 1979 to 2002. During this period, the number of Japanese students studying abroad continued to increase, from 67 to 16,084, with an average annual growth rate of approximately 1,039.39%. Although the number increased, during this period, the proportion of Japanese students studying abroad dropped from 28.60% to 18.75%, and dropped from the largest source country to second place, with South Korea ranking first.

The third stage was fluctuation period. During this period, due to factors such as SARS, the number of Japanese students studying abroad fluctuated. The number dropped sharply in 2003, rebounded to 19,059 in 2004, and then continued to decrease to 15,409.

The fourth stage was the decline period from 2012 to 2018. The number of international students in Japan reached its peak in 2012. However, as Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated, the number of international students decreased year by year. In 2018, there were only 14,230 students left, a decrease of 462 students compared with 2001.

Overall, these stages show different changes in the number of Japanese international students, from an initial scarcity to a gradual increase, and then to subsequent fluctuations and gradual decreases.

### **3 Analysis of factors influencing changes in the scale of Japanese students studying in China**

#### 3.1 Selection of influencing factors

Selecting influencing factors is an important part of research. In order to comprehensively explore the influencing factors of changes in the scale of Japanese international students, this research selected three different types of Japanese international students as explained variables, namely Japanese academic students in China, non-academic graduate students and government scholarship students studying abroad. We will start from these three perspectives to conduct an empirical comparative analysis of the influencing factors and their effect sizes.

In terms of the selection of explanatory variables, we comprehensively considered the ten factors that influence study-abroad decisions proposed by the OECD in *Education at a Glance 2008*, such as the immigration policy of the studying country, tuition and prices, evaluation of educational institutions, study-abroad policies of the sending country, etc [1]. Based on the push-pull theory, this article classifies these factors into main categories, and selects corresponding proxy variables based on the particularity of the internationalization of higher education in China.

The article first attributes the study-abroad immigration policy and the government support policy of credit exchange between educational institutions in China and Japan as political factors. Japanese preferential policies for studying in China and flexibility in credit transfer have promoted the expansion of international students, while China's loose immigration policies and credit transfer policies have attracted more Japanese students. The article uses the "China-Foreign Relations Index" and "Chinese Government Scholarship" from the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University as proxy variables for political factor analysis [2][3].

Secondly, the article classifies Sino-Japanese trade relations, China's low tuition and prices, and employment prospects as economic factors. The development of bilateral economic and trade relations can promote educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries and has a certain impact on the decision-making of studying abroad. The

article selects the total amount of imported and exported goods between China and Japan, China's consumer price index and the amount of Japanese foreign direct investment in China as proxy variables for economic factors to reflect international students' considerations about employment opportunities.

In addition, the article classifies the academic evaluation of specific educational institutions and educational programs, and university admission standards into educational factors. Given that the academic evaluation is related to study-abroad policies, the article uses the average number of universities in the top 500 in China in the World University Rankings as a proxy variable to measure the quality of higher education in various countries around the world, and also uses the number of institutions in China that accept international students as a measure of university admissions standards and proxy variable for stringency.

Finally, the article classifies the language of instruction, the geography and historical relationship between China and the students' country of origin as socio-cultural factors. Cultural differences will affect the cost of studying abroad [4]. The article uses the proportion of Japanese Confucius Institutes and classrooms in the global total as the proxy variable for cross-cultural adaptability. At the same time, the total amount of cultural commodities exported from China to Japan is used as the proxy variable for the spread and recognition of Chinese culture.

### 3.2 Analysis of influencing factors

First, for political factors, the study used the Sino-Japanese relations index and the number of Chinese government scholarship students. There is a certain correlation between Sino-Japan political relations and the scale of Japanese students studying in China, but the changes are not the same. The changes in the number of Chinese government scholarship students are somewhat similar to the number of Japanese students studying in China, but the proportion is on a downward trend, and the relationship between the two needs to be explored in depth [5].

Secondly, economic factors include the total amount of imported and exported goods between China and Japan and the Chinese consumer price index. The trend of changes in the total import and export volume and the scale of Japanese students studying in China are similar, but the correlation is not obvious, and the consumer price index is more closely related to the scale of international students, especially those with academic qualifications and Chinese government scholarship students.

Thirdly, the education factor examines the international rankings of Chinese universities and the number of Chinese institutions accepting international students. The international rankings of Chinese universities have a positive correlation with the changing trend of the scale of Japanese international students in China, but the growth rate is faster, and the number of institutions accepting international students affects the changes in the scale of Japanese international students to a certain extent.

Finally, in terms of culture, the number of Confucius Institutes in Japan has gradually slowed down after rapid growth in recent years. Although the number has grown slowly, its relative global proportion has been declining year by year. This trend is similar to the change trend in the number of Japanese international students in China, and academic and non-academic students, but the increase and decrease rates are different. Further research is needed on their correlation. On the other hand, the number of copyrights for Chinese cultural products in Japan has been consistent with the number of Japanese students studying in China over a period of time, showing a trend of increase and decrease.

## 4 Conclusions and suggestions

### 4.1 Conclusions

The article's empirical research draws several conclusions: First, since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan in 1972, the number of Japanese students studying in China has gone through four stages of

development. It is currently in a declining period and is expected to continue to shrink. Secondly, the influencing factors are diverse, mainly economic, political, cultural and educational factors. Among them, the influencing factors are different for different types of international students. For example, for international students with academic qualifications, the main factors are the China's consumer price index among economic factors, the Sino-Japanese relations index among political factors, the export copyright of Chinese cultural products among cultural factors, and the number of institutions in China accepting international students among educational factors. For Chinese government scholarship students and non-academic international students, the influencing factors are slightly different, including specific economic, political and educational factors.

#### 4.2 Suggestions

Political level: emphasizing the firm good-neighbor policy and the guidance of Sino-Japanese relations, enhancing understanding and recognition between the two countries through educational exchanges, and improving the quality of bilateral relations.

Economic level: advocating the use of economy to promote education, using the APEC platform to promote economic ties, and providing diversified paths for overseas education.

Educational level: improving the quality of education in Chinese universities, optimizing the Chinese government scholarship program, attracting more high-quality Japanese students to study in China, and reversing the "trade deficit" between Chinese and Japanese international students.

Cultural level: encouraging the expansion of the export of Chinese cultural products, strengthening cultural exchanges between the two countries, promoting the development of China's cultural industry, and enhancing China's international cultural influence.

Social level: It is recommended to improve the cooperation mechanism between governments, enterprises and schools, improve the educational experience of international students in China, establish a more complete service system for international students, and increase the participation of social forces.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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