

英語と中国の科目選択：ソフトパワーが及ぼす影響

English or Chinese: Does Soft Power Influence the Choice?

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SUACでは、2015年度入学生から卒業するために英語または中国語を8単位以上取得する必要がある。これまで、2015年度から2017年度の春学期まで英語と中国語の履修傾向データを分析し、英語または中国語を選択する学生の割合に著しい変化があったかどうかを見てきた。本研究では、2017年度春に両言語を履修する学生を対象にして行ったアンケートと、一部の学生に対して実施したインタビューの回答を分析する。この調査は、部分的に2016年11月のアメリカ大統領選挙が英語を選択する学生数に変化をもたらしたかどうか、もし変化があるとするなら、なぜをそうなったのかを見るために行った。本稿では、ソフトパワーの概念を議論した上で、調査の回答に基づき、まず、どの程度ソフトパワーが英語と中国語の学習に対する態度に影響を及ぼしたのか、そして最終的に履修数に影響を与えたのかについて議論する。結果として、ソフトパワーが両方の言語を履修しようとする学生の気持ちに正の影響を与えている可能性はあるが、大統領選挙は英語クラスの履修数に有意な影響を与えなかったことが示唆される。

The authors used mixed methods to analyze the recent enrollment trends in English and Chinese at a small liberal arts university at which students are required to earn a minimum of eight credits in either English or Chinese to graduate. Enrollment data from 2015 through the spring semester of 2017 were analyzed to determine if there have been any marked changes in the percentage of students choosing to study either English or Chinese. Surveys given to students studying both languages in spring 2017 and responses to interviews are also analyzed. The research was undertaken partly to determine if the presidential election of November 2016 led to any changes in numbers of students choosing English and, if so, why. The concept of soft power is discussed and survey responses are used as a starting point for a discussion of the extent to which soft power has an effect on attitudes toward the study of English and Chinese, and, ultimately, if they affected enrollment numbers. Results suggest that soft power may have a positive effect on the desire of students to take both languages but that the November 2016 presidential election in the United States did not have a significant effect, positive or negative, on enrollment numbers in English classes.

Introduction

Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (hereinafter "SUAC") is a small, prefectural university of about 1,500 students located in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, Japan. SUAC has a Faculty of Design and a Faculty of Cultural Policy with departments of Cultural Policy, Art Management and International Culture. SUAC's relatively small size and lack of name recognition outside the prefecture can make it something of a challenge to attract the ever-shrinking number of Japanese students. In promoting itself to high schools, potential students and to local employers, SUAC features its English & Chinese Language Education Center and its English and Chinese language programs prominently. The university purposefully markets itself as a smaller, regional school strong in foreign language education. A new curriculum was established at SUAC in 2015 which requires all incoming freshmen to earn a minimum of eight credits in either English or Chinese to graduate. While it is possible for students to take both

languages simultaneously, they are not required to do so and the vast majority choose to study only one language.

This research project utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing the recent trends in enrollment of students in English and Chinese classes from the 2015 academic year through the spring semester of 2017. The researchers, two full-time native English-speaking teachers, hypothesized that the dramatic events of November 2016 in the United States may have had some effect on enrollment numbers in English and Chinese from April 2017. This paper analyzes the most recent enrollment numbers and compares them to the previous two years. Also, survey data gathered from students studying either English or Chinese in spring 2017 regarding their reasons for choosing that language are analyzed. Finally, interviews were also conducted with a representative sample of students to follow-up on their reasons for studying English or Chinese. These data are considered in an attempt

to determine if recent events in the US have had any immediate effect, either positive or negative, on the desire of students to study either English or Chinese at a provincial Japanese university.

Soft Power

Power is often described as the ability to affect others to get what you want them to do. As former President of the United States, Barack Obama put it: “real power means you can get what you want without having to be violent” (Goldberg, 2016). Traditionally, attraction, or getting others to do what you wanted has involved hard power, which is generally some kind of brute force (i.e., military force) or coercion through persuasion using some kind of reward, like money. Recently, the idea of “soft power,” the ability to attract someone or something by methods other than coercion, payments or brute force to shape or influence them, has become popular. Joseph Nye coined the term soft power and claims it arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideas and policies (Nye, 2004). Put more simply, it is essentially a country’s cultural appeal, its foreign policies and its political values all wrapped into an invisible and amorphous force that are capable of influencing both individuals and countries in various ways. Soft power can be wielded not just by states, but also by all actors in international politics, such as NGOs or international institutions (Nye, 2004). Soft power has the potential to affect world opinion in many ways with the digital revolution in full swing and the transfer of culture happening at the speed of a smartphone keystroke.

The United States has consistently scored near the very top of soft power rankings for many years and in fact was ranked number one in the 2016 rankings (Portland Communications, 2016). One likely reason is that the US has always been a highly coveted study abroad destination for students around the world due to the quality of its world-class universities. The US has more universities in the global top 200 than any other country in the world and it attracts far more international students than any other country. Education is an important part of the cultural component of soft power and, given the prevalence of study abroad and the importance of institutions of higher education, it is understandable that this would play a role in boosting the US up the soft power league table. As Nye points out, soft power is not the same

as influence or the ability to persuade someone, it is the ability to attract, or ones’ attractive power (Nye, 2004). The ability of US institutions of higher education, who conduct themselves in English, to attract foreign students may certainly be one reason many students choose to study English.

The idea of measuring power has and will always have great appeal in the world. However, it is not always easy to quantify power, especially with regard to the concept of soft power, being so qualitative. Portland Communications measures soft power via, “a composite index that combines both objective metrics of countries’ soft power resources and subjective international polling data (Portland Communications, 2016).” The polling serves as one data point and the indices they use include Digital, Education, Culture, Enterprise, Engagement and Government.

Overgaard (n.d.), attempted to study and measure soft power by measuring how much culture a state emits outside its borders, a country’s Freedom House’s freedom rating, and the number of internet users in a country. There may never be a perfect method for measuring soft power but the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideas and foreign policies are common themes in all credible rankings.

Reliable, possibly even conservative, estimates indicate that well over one billion people are currently learning English worldwide (British Council, 2013). With the status of English as the de facto lingua franca of both business and academia this trend is unlikely to change anytime soon. However, some believe that the changes in the American political order since November 2016, President Trump’s frequent controversial pronouncements and the dramatic changes in the foreign policies and positions of the US have already damaged America’s soft power abroad (Rugh, n.d.).

Foreign leaders in particular are apprehensive about the evolving foreign policies of the current US administration (Rugh, n.d.). The president has criticized NATO and the United Nations numerous times (Parker, 2016). He has also gone against the wishes of virtually the entire world on climate change by signaling his intention to withdraw the US from the 2015 Paris Agreement. Regarding this decision, the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, commented that he

is deeply disappointed (Todd, Murray & Dann, 2017). This has caused opinions of Canadians to change, from over 60% during the Obama administration holding a positive view of the US to a 35 year low of about 40%. Also, over 80% of Canadians thought Obama was doing the right thing regarding world affairs, while only 22% of Canadians think Trump is doing the right thing (Dale, 2017). Also, a few days after a contentious G7 meeting in Taormina, Italy, German President Angela Merkel stated that, "The times when we could completely rely on others are, to an extent, over. This is what I have experienced in the last few days (2017)." A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center has concluded that the US president and his policies "are broadly unpopular around the globe" (BBC, 2017). All of the above indicate that the political ideas and policies, two of Nye's three components of soft power, of the United States have already created strong negative reactions in many parts of the world. This shift in opinions against President Trump and, by extension, the United States, is an indication that the soft power of the United States may decline, if it has not already.

These unique circumstances offer an opportunity to see if there has been any impact, positive or negative, on the number of students choosing to study English at a provincial university in a nondescript part of Japan. This study will endeavor to find out if the election of Donald Trump as president has had any effect on the soft power of the US and if it has affected the choices university students made regarding what foreign language they study.

Methodology

Enrollment data for both English and Chinese courses from 2015 to 2017 were collected and analyzed. Also, surveys were administered in a random selection of both English and Chinese classes in the spring semester 2017. A total of 189 students, 152 taking English and 37 taking Chinese, completed the survey which was administered in class using Google Forms. Many of the survey questions were five point Likert-scale type while others offered a list of answer choices prepared by the researchers. Finally, a number of students were interviewed and asked questions regarding their study of both English and Chinese.

The enrollment data, the survey results and the interview transcripts were analyzed and compared across departments with the goal of determining student attitudes toward the study of both English and Chinese and if views of the US have changed since November 2016.

Results & Discussion

The quantitative data (Table 1) indicate that, in 2015 and 2016, the first two years in which the eight credit foreign language requirement applied, the overwhelming majority of students chose to study English. In 2015, out of a total intake of 366 students, 315, or 86% of the incoming freshman, chose to study English. 51 students, 14%, enrolled in Chinese. In 2016, there were 363 new students and 291, 80%, selected English for their foreign language while 72, 20%, chose Chinese. In 2017, there were again 366 new freshmen and the breakdown was identical to 2015. 313, or 86%, selected English while 53, 14%, decided to study Chinese.

Table 1

English & Chinese Course Enrollment						
	2015		2016		2017	
English	315	86%	291	80%	313	86%
Chinese	51	14%	72	20%	53	14%
Total Students	366	100%	363	100%	366	100%

These numbers indicate quite clearly that there has not been a drop-off in English enrollment over the past three years. Also, the November 2016 presidential election in the United States has had no discernible negative effect on enrollment in English classes to the benefit of Chinese.

Regarding the survey, 189 students, 152 taking English and 37 taking Chinese, responded. Survey questions included, "Did the presidential election in November 2016 affect your decision about which foreign language to take?," "The new US President Trump makes me want to study English even more than before," and, "the new US President Trump makes me want to study English less than before." An open-ended question asked students if and how their impression of the United States changed after the November 2016 election. It was hoped that this question would elicit reflective responses from students.

When asked why they are taking English, 66% of Cultural Policy majors, 77% of Art Management majors and 75% of Design majors reported that they are doing so "for the credits." This contrasted dramatically with International Culture students, only 8% of whom responded that they are taking English "for the credits."

When it comes to Chinese, only 10% of Cultural Policy majors reported they are taking it simply "for the credits" while 67% of Art Management majors noted that as their reason for choosing Chinese. 33% of Design majors responded that they are taking Chinese "for the credits." Interestingly, not one International Culture major currently taking a Chinese class cited "for the credits" as the reason they are taking Chinese.

The high number of Art Management majors who cited "for the credits" as the reason for taking both languages suggests many of those students

simply want to get the language requirement out of the way.

In contrast, 80% of International Culture majors said they chose English because they like it. This is dramatically higher than the 19% of Cultural Policy students, 10% of Art Management students and 16% of Design students who reported that they took English because they like it.

In one respect, these results make sense as the Department of International Culture is sometimes seen as an informal proxy for an English department. On the other hand, the very name "International Culture" implies a global viewpoint and when students in that department taking Chinese were asked why, only 40% answered "because they like China and Chinese." Granted, this number was higher than any other department as 20% of Cultural Policy majors, 33% of Art Management majors and 0% of Design majors reported they are taking Chinese because they like it.

While results suggest many Art Management students just want to get their foreign language requirements out of the way, 33% of those majors taking Chinese said they are doing so because they like China and Chinese. Art Management was the only department in which a higher "like" response for Chinese than English was found. This contrasts with only 10% of Art Management students who reported they are taking English because they like it.

In response to the question asking whether the presidential election in the United States in November 2016 affected their decision about which foreign language to take, the percentage of students taking English and Chinese responding "disagree" or "strongly disagree" can be seen respectively in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Did the presidential election in the United States in November 2016 affect your decision about which foreign language to take?				
Students taking English	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
"disagree" or strongly disagree	78%	88%	87%	82%

Table 3

Did the presidential election in the United States in November 2016 affect your decision about which foreign language to take?				
Students taking Chinese	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or strongly disagree”	100%	86%	100%	100%

These numbers strongly suggest that the presidential election in the United States in November 2016 had little or no effect on student choice of foreign language. Students intending to select Chinese may understandably be unaffected by political events in the US. However, the numbers for students enrolled in English are almost equally high implying the election had little

or no effect on students’ decisions.

In regard to a question asking if the new US President makes them want to study English more than before, those taking English who answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree” can be seen respectively in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Does the new US President makes you want to study English more than before?				
Students taking English	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or strongly disagree”	56%	68%	69%	64%

Table 5

Does the new US President makes you want to study English <i>more</i> than before?				
Students taking Chinese	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or strongly disagree”	60%	27%	100%	67%

The high numbers of students across the board, with the exception of International Culture majors taking Chinese, reporting that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the idea that new US President makes them want to study English more than before could indicate that the dramatic political and policy changes in the United States have had no effect on their intention to study the language. It could be that students see presidential elections in the US as ephemeral political events which have no long-term effect,

either positive or negative, on their desire or motivation to study English. On the other hand, the results could also conceivably be interpreted as support for the idea that the recent changes in the US may have dampened the appeal of English.

However, the opposite question, asking students if the new US President makes them want to study English less than before was also posed. Those taking English who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” can be seen in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6

Does the new US President makes you want to study English <i>less</i> than before?				
Students taking English	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“agree” or “strongly agree”	13%	0%	0%	0%

Table 7

Does the new US President makes you want to study English <i>less</i> than before?				
Students taking Chinese	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“agree” or “strongly agree”	0%	0%	0%	0%

These two questions, when looked at together, indicate that, in fact, the political changes in the US since November 2016, have not had a discernible effect on student desire to study English.

For students enrolled in English classes, responses of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to the question, “I am less likely to visit the United States now that Trump is the president” can be seen in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8

Are you less likely to visit the United States now that Trump is the president?				
Students taking English	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or “strongly disagree”	69%	60%	82%	71%

Table 9

Are you less likely to visit the United States now that Trump is the president?				
Students taking Chinese	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or “strongly disagree”	40%	67%	100%	67%

With the exception of Cultural Policy majors taking Chinese, high numbers of students asserted that they were no less likely to visit the United States under the current president. It seems clear there is little or no connection between our students’ desire to visit the US and whoever the current occupant of the White House is. This could be seen as an indication of the staying power of American soft power which, as we know,

consistently ranks near the top of the soft power league table.

In response to a question asking students if their impression of the United States changed as a result of the November 2016 presidential election, those taking English and Chinese who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” were as follows:

Table 10

Has your impression of the United States changed as a result of the November 2016 presidential election?				
Students taking English	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or “strongly disagree”	75%	52%	51%	61%

Table 11

Has your impression of the United States changed as a result of the November 2016 presidential election?				
Students taking Chinese	Cultural Policy	International Culture	Art Management	Design
“disagree” or “strongly disagree”	70%	73%	67%	44%

While these responses suggest that student impressions of the US have indeed been affected by the November 2016 election, the numbers alone do not indicate if that change in feeling about the US was positive or negative. However, an open-ended follow-up question, asking for comments about how exactly their impression of the United States changed, make it clear that the direction of that change was overwhelmingly negative.

A Cultural Policy student taking English commented that, "The US seems white-people centered now." Another student noted, "I used to think the US was a calm and reasonable country, but I don't think so anymore." Still another student worried that, "The diplomatic situation is likely to deteriorate."

A student from the International Culture department noted, "America will probably have a bad influence on the world." This comment seems Another flatly stated, "The US now has an image of racism." Similarly, another commented, "Americans have become more extremist." Most comments were in a similar vein but the opinion of a small minority of students can be reflected in the comment of one who noted that, "Nothing has changed in terms of my feelings about America or English."

A particularly revealing comment from an Art Management major was the following:

"When Obama was president my impression was of a peaceful country that was open to immigrants and open at the top. However, with Trump as president my impression is of a scary and confused country."

Another Art Management student referenced personal safety in noting that, "I'm even more scared than before to go to America" while still another offered a what seems a particularly articulate analysis, "As globalization progresses it seems that Americans are trying to figure out and re-establish their identity."

A Design major observed that, "America has become more extremist" as another lamented that, "It's a pity that so many people supported him for president." Still another noted that, "America went from good to scary." However, one student commented that, "My opinion has not really changed."

Even though some students did make it clear that their opinion of the US has not changed, the great majority of comments, 85% (152 out of a total of 178), were deemed to be negative by both researchers.

Interviews with students elicited a variety of interesting responses that could indicate a possible connection to the soft power of the US and students' choice in language study. In response to a question asking if they thought there would be more opportunities for them if they studied English instead of Chinese one student replied she thought that, "Yes, because America has a strong influence around the world." Another student made a similar comment, "We have motivation to learn English, but maybe Chinese is difficult to have motivation, China has a bad image in Japan so many of us are not interested in studying Chinese."

Perhaps the clearest indication of the value of cultural soft power was seen in a common response to a question asking what influenced students' decision to study English. Many students said they wanted to listen to pop music, watch foreign movies and TV shows and possibly work abroad in the future. One representative comment was, "The reason I wanted to study English was because I like Western pop music. I liked Avril Lavigne and I wanted to understand the words in her songs." Responses like these reflect the positive soft power influence of the English-speaking world and, by extension, the United States even though, ironically, Avril Lavigne is Canadian. One International Culture student similarly noted that, "I study English because I like watching American TV dramas and I want to understand them without subtitles."

Another student evinced a desire to interact with people from various parts of the world when talking about her reasons for studying English, "English is not only for business people or government officials. If we know English, we can communicate with tourists and people from all over the world and expand our world." This implies that the English-speaking community is a desirable thing to be a part of and that many benefits are likely to accrue to anyone who can communicate in English. Some students made comments about the appeal of life overseas, "I went to Australia on a school trip and I loved the lifestyle. This made me want to study English more."

Reflecting a possible indirect effect of the soft power influence of the English-speaking world, one student noted a more pragmatic reason for studying English, "There are more people studying English than Chinese both in Japan and worldwide. English is still much more useful and will continue to be in the future." Another student mentioned the upcoming Summer Olympics in Japan and noted that, "English will be much more useful than Chinese at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020."

Conclusion

Using the concept of soft power as a framing point, this study has attempted to determine if the US presidential election in November 2016 had any effect on enrollment trends in English and Chinese classes at a small Japanese university. It also endeavored to find out if that event precipitated any effect on the soft power appeal of the United States.

Enrollment numbers suggest that the appeal of the United States has largely been unaffected by the events of November 2016. The percentage of students taking English has remained remarkably steady for the past three years. Of course, students choose to take English for any number of reasons that have nothing at all to do with the soft power of the US. Possible reasons for taking English rather than Chinese could include a sense that it will be less difficult than Chinese and easier to get the required graduation credits, a greater familiarity with the language from having studied it in junior and senior high school and the fact that their friends are taking English. Survey results do, in fact, suggest that a significant number of students simply want the graduation credits and think English will be an easier way to get them than Chinese. However, the robust percentages continuing to study English can be interpreted as suggesting that politically apathetic Japanese students see presidential elections in the US as fleeting events that have no long-term effect on their interest in studying the language.

In contrast to enrollment numbers, questionnaire and interview results both tell a slightly different story and suggest that the soft power appeal of the US may indeed be headed for a decline. Even so, it does not necessarily follow that fewer students will study English because of a less positive view of the United States. Although it sometimes seems so, especially to non-Americans, the US is not a monolithic

representative of the English-speaking world. Students very often study English because of an affinity with another aspect of that world. As some of the interviewee comments indicated, the appeal of a Canadian or British pop star, the Australian lifestyle or a love of Irish literature are just a few of many other possible reasons someone may choose to study English. Ultimately, for the moment at least, the value of English in a future career and the soft power appeal of the worldwide English community seem to far outweigh any possible decline in the image of one country.

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