

Chapter 5

Japanese Language Education in Taiwan

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1. Language Landscape in Taiwan

“Taiwan” generally refers to the island of Taiwan, which lies southwest of Okinawa Prefecture, Japan, east of Fujian Province, China, and faces the Philippines to the south across the Bashi Channel. The term also includes the surrounding smaller islands. Currently, approximately twenty-three million people live in Taiwan, and the languages spoken can be broadly divided into two categories.

The first category includes the Chinese languages, the mother tongues of the Han Chinese, who comprise over 90% of the population. There are several dialects of Chinese, but those spoken in Taiwan include Mandarin, which is based on the northern dialects of mainland China; Southern Min, commonly referred to as Taiwanese, which is based on the southern dialects of Fujian Province; and Hakka, which is mainly from Guangdong Province. The differences among these three dialects are considerable, and mutual understanding is challenging.

The second category consists of the Austronesian languages used by the Indigenous peoples. At present, the government officially recognizes 16 Indigenous ethnic groups, each with its own language. Additionally, other ethnic groups identify themselves as independent people with their own languages, although they are not officially recognized. Indigenous peoples mainly reside in the Central Mountain Range of Taiwan, its eastern side, and the outlying islands. There are also the so-called “Pingpu” or non-Han peoples who live in the western plains. The

Han migration has historically spread from the western coastal plains, leading to early contact between the Han and the Pingpu. Consequently, it is generally believed that the Pingpu were quickly “Hanized” or assimilated into Han culture. However, there is now a movement to reevaluate and revive Pingpu culture and traditions.

Currently, Taiwan and the outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu are under the effective control of the government of the Republic of China (ROC), which has designated Mandarin Chinese as the national language. However, many elderly people in local towns understand or speak only their ethnic mother tongues.

2. History of Japanese Education in Taiwan

Settlers from mainland China began migrating to Taiwan in the 16th century, and from the 17th century, the western part of the island came under the control of the Qing Dynasty of China. In 1895, following the Treaty of Shimonoseki (also known as the Treaty of Maguan), which ended the First Sino-Japanese War, the entire island and the Penghu archipelago to the west were ceded to Japan. Japan established a Governor-General’s Office in Taiwan and began its colonial rule.

During the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, Japanese was declared the national language, as in mainland Japan, and a system of teaching Japanese to non-native speakers gradually took shape. This period is considered the first time in Japanese history that systematic and institutionalized Japanese-language education was implemented overseas. Although there was considerable resistance among the local population to the imposition of the Japanese language, its spread gradually increased, reaching nearly 80% by the early 1940s. This rise in literacy was largely due to Japan’s coercive policies, but was also influenced by the multilingual nature of Taiwanese society. Prior

to Japanese rule, no group in Taiwan had Mandarin as its mother tongue, and there was no common language (*lingua franca*) to facilitate communication between the various ethnic groups. Ironically, Japanese, which was forcibly introduced as a national language, became the *lingua franca* between groups of different languages.

Under Japanese rule, there were various forms of discrimination between Japanese and non-Japanese. In primary education, separate schools were established for Japanese and non-Japanese children; the former attended elementary schools, whereas the latter attended public schools. Most of the students who attended secondary and higher education were Japanese. In accordance with Japan's old education system, Taihoku High School (equivalent to today's university preparatory courses) and Taihoku Imperial University¹ were established in Taiwan; however, these institutions were no different from schools in mainland Japan—they were Japanese-language schools for Japanese. Consequently, the few non-native Japanese speakers who had advanced to secondary or higher education acquired modern culture, thought, and technology through the Japanese language. These Taiwanese intellectuals often conducted their intellectual activities in Japanese, and it was not uncommon for them to criticize their Japanese rulers.

In 1945, Japan lost the Second World War and surrendered all its overseas territories, and the Japanese population returned to the mainland. Taiwan was incorporated into the Republic of China (ROC). The national language of the ROC was Mandarin Chinese, and it was considered necessary to promote Mandarin in Taiwan. In other words, the authorities wanted to completely replace Japanese, which had served as a *lingua franca* between various ethnic groups, with Mandarin. To this end, the Taiwan Provincial Government, the governing body of the ROC in Taiwan, adopted a policy of thoroughly eradicating Japanese,

¹ Taihoku during the Japanese era is the present-day Taipei.

which was viewed as an enemy language and an obstacle to the spread of Mandarin. The use of Japanese was banned in official documents, government offices, schools, and the media. This effectively prevented those who did not understand Mandarin from advancing in society and improving their social status.

Meanwhile, with the establishment of the Taiwan Provincial Government, people whose mother tongue was Mandarin or who had learned Mandarin (these people were referred to as “mainlanders”) poured in from the mainland. Although they were a minority, they held key positions in government and business, becoming the ruling class in Taiwan. Some of those who had lived in Taiwan since before the war and did not understand Mandarin (known as “native Taiwanese”) continued to use Japanese as a means of communication, but Japanese speakers and intellectuals from the Japanese colonial period were seen by the authorities as particularly dangerous because they could facilitate opposition to government policies.

In 1949, the Republic of China lost almost all its mainland territories, and the central government moved to Taiwan, while the People’s Republic of China was established on the mainland. In 1952, the Republic of China signed the Japan-China Peace Treaty, formally ending the state of war with Japan. Although the use of Japanese and the teaching of Japanese in public were still banned, it became necessary to strengthen ties with Japan to promote economic and trade relations and to distinguish the ROC culturally from the People’s Republic of China. Consequently, the ban on Japanese education was gradually lifted, starting with private tutoring schools known as *buxiban* 補習班 and the introduction of Japanese as a second foreign language in universities. In the 1960s, private universities started their first Japanese language programs. However, these courses were given names such as “Eastern languages 東方語” to avoid explicitly using the term “Japanese language.”

In 1972, Japan broke off diplomatic relations with the Republic of China and signed a treaty with the People's Republic of China, leading to a rise in anti-Japanese sentiment. This temporarily halted the establishment of new Japanese departments and majors at universities. Nevertheless, the demand for Japanese-speaking personnel grew as economic relations continued through private economic exchange organizations, and Japanese companies began to expand into Taiwan. From the 1980s, the names of departments with explicit reference to the Japanese language were approved, and Japanese language courses were established in national universities.

In addition, around 1986, Commercial Japanese Language Departments 商用日文科 (renamed Applied Foreign Language and Literature Departments 応用外語日文科 in 1993) were established in high-level vocational schools 高級職業学校 (equivalent to Japan's specialized secondary schools), and practical training in business Japanese began. In 1995, Japanese was officially recognized as a second foreign language in high schools.

In summary, Japanese speakers in Taiwan can be broadly divided into two groups: those who attended school during the prewar and wartime periods and acquired Japanese as a second language, and those who studied Japanese as a pure foreign language after the war. The latter can be further divided into those who studied Japanese out of necessity for business, economics, or technology, and those who grew up in an environment where the Japanese language and culture were naturally present from childhood, after the lifting of the ban on Japanese culture.

3. Current Status and Challenges of Japanese Language Education in Taiwan

Japanese language education in Taiwan is currently at a crossroads. Almost half of all Japanese learners in Taiwan were enrolled in higher

education institutions for a long time. However, with a declining birth rate leading to a steady decline in the population under the age of 18, combined with the government's emphasis on English education and the growing popularity of Korean, the number of students enrolled in Japanese language courses at universities is decreasing. Some universities have even stopped accepting new students into specialized Japanese language majors/departments. On the other hand, unlike in higher education, Japanese remains the most popular choice as a second foreign language in secondary schools. Nevertheless, various problems have been identified, such as a lack of practice in conversation and composition due to large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials tailored to specific learning goals, a shortage of qualified teachers skilled in direct instruction methods, and a lack of coordination with Japanese-language education at higher education institutions. It is crucial to address these issues and establish an environment that encourages students to pursue Japanese studies even at the university level.

4. An Account of a Japanese Language Teacher at a Local Cram School

In 2015, I began working part-time as a Japanese language teacher in Taipei. From 2016 to 2018, I taught full-time at a *buxiban* in Tainan, and from 2018 to 2019, I continued teaching at another *buxiban* in Hsinchu. What I share here is based on my personal experiences and may not be universally applicable to Japanese language education in Taiwan.

Like Japan, Taiwan has large cram schools with multiple branches and smaller local cram schools with only one or two branches. The latter, like *machi-juku* (town-based cram schools) in Japan, are flexible and responsive to students' needs, but can also appear disorganized and

improvised at times. This was the type of school where I worked.

A diverse range of people attend these local cram schools. While they are educational institutions, they also function as service-oriented businesses that aim to attract and retain as many students as possible. Consequently, they offer various Japanese language courses. Let me share some typical and memorable cases from my experience.

(1) Students in the Classroom

While *buxiban* aim to offer personalized services, they follow a basic curriculum. Most cram schools provide regular classes for beginners with no knowledge of Japanese, elementary classes for those who have learned the basic syllabaries (hiragana and katakana), and intermediate-level classes. These courses have set textbooks and schedules, and classes typically start when a minimum number of students is reached, usually on weekday evenings or Saturdays. In the evening classes I taught, most students were young working adults in their mid-20s to mid-30s, who had grown up surrounded by Japanese anime, TV shows, and music. With more free time as adults, they decided to study Japanese—a subject they had been interested in since childhood. Although their motivation was generally high, a divide often emerged between those who enjoyed the lessons and improved quickly and those who struggled and lost interest over time. Taiwan is in an environment where people are easily exposed to Japanese language, and highly motivated beginners tend to acquire new skills rapidly.

Although beginners lack grammatical knowledge, they often have fragmented information. In beginner classes, I would first introduce the sounds of Japanese by asking questions such as “Who are the famous Japanese people you know?”, “What Japanese place names do you know?”, “What food do you know?”, and “What music do you

know?” I would then teach them how to pronounce these names and have them practice them. Place names and food were easy, but when it came to famous people and music, many names that I had never heard were mentioned. This was partly because “famous people” included characters from dramas, films, and anime, which I was not always familiar with. I often found myself looking for information online after class. Owing to my Taiwanese students, I learned a lot about Japanese subculture. In the final session of the beginner class, I handed out the lyrics of a Japanese song and had everyone sing it along with the music based on the artists and songs mentioned in the first survey.

In one intermediate class, there was a student in her twenties who was studying Japanese at a graduate school. She was a fan of Japanese bands and often travelled to Japan. During conversation practice and composition exercises, she frequently used terms like “cosplay” and “*bangyaru*” (band girl), which are not typically found in textbooks or dictionaries, leaving other students confused. However, because she was clearly enjoying herself and making progress, I did not want to interrupt. Instead, I asked her to explain these terms, hoping that it would become a mutual learning experience for everyone. Nonetheless, the older students often looked puzzled, as if to say, “I still don’t understand what she’s talking about.”

In another class, there was a man in his twenties who was a very passive learner. He began learning Japanese because he liked Japanese anime and games; however, he was too shy to speak up. Even when I tried to engage him in conversation, he responded with very short phrases, usually just saying, “I play games.” As a teacher, I wanted him to speak and write more, but he was always the first to arrive in class and took his attendance seriously. Five years after I left that class, I received a message in Chinese on social media while I was in Japan. It was from the same student who had rarely spoken in class. Surprisingly,

he told me that he had continued to study Japanese and was attending a language school in Japan for a six-month course. Although he was still reserved and did not speak much, he made an effort to come alone to the station where we had arranged to meet and spend the day walking with me. I will never forget the joy I felt. It made me realize that I had been wrong to assume that he was not interested in learning or practicing Japanese, just because he did not speak much. Everyone has their own unique way of showing interest in a language.

(2) Passive Learners and the Role of Motivation

Some learners appear passive due to their reasons for attending classes. For example, some say, “My friend wants to learn, so I came along,” or “My partner is interested, so I decided to join in.” However, not all accompanying students lack motivation. In fact, there have been cases where parents who attended classes with their children made more progress than their children did. However, the accompanying students tend to be slightly less enthusiastic.

In one of my classes, there was a young couple in their twenties. Although I did not ask them directly, it seemed that the woman was interested in learning, and the man had joined at her suggestion. He often came to class without doing his homework and looked sleepy, but he was never late. The reason was simple: they rode to class together on a motorbike, with her sitting behind him. In Taiwan, where motorcycles are a common means of transport, parents, friends, and partners typically give each other lifts. Many students at private cram schools were dropped off and picked up by family or friends on motorbikes. This man not only took his partner to class but also attended every session with her. This might have been a way for them to spend time together, learning side by side twice a week. Perhaps the twice-weekly

class was like the rare reunion of Altair and Vega in Japanese folklore—two lovers separated by the Milky Way were only allowed to meet once a year, while we, the spectators, were like a flock of magpies watching from a distance.

Regardless of their reasons for attending, all students who pay tuition deserve the best possible experience. As a teacher, I always aimed to provide students with new knowledge or a positive learning experience, even if it was something small. During exercises or group work, I would have the more enthusiastic students act as role models and encourage the less motivated ones to participate. I also assigned tasks according to their abilities. However, more often than not, the girlfriend would quietly whisper the correct answers to him or subtly feed him hints like *kinou terebi wo mimashita* (yesterday I watched TV), and he would simply repeat what she said. I did not want to interfere with their relationship, but I often thought, “I wish you would try a little harder on your own.” On rare occasions, when he managed to provide a hesitant answer without her help, the classroom seemed to illuminate with a sense of achievement. On these days, I felt a sense of accomplishment that made my walk back to the teacher’s office feel lighter and brighter.

It was also common to encounter students aged 40 years and older, including some in their 50s and 60s. Some had used Japanese in their work or had been to Japan on business trips, but many had taken up Japanese as a hobby. Each person had their reasons for learning Japanese, but the widespread presence of Japanese language and culture in daily life and media in Taiwan, as well as Japan’s proximity, made it a popular choice. One student, a photographer, traveled to Japan almost every year and uploaded his photos to social media. Learners like him could be perceived as leisurely and relaxed—or, less favorably, as lacking the drive to improve. Unlike the highly motivated younger students in their twenties, who were eager to acquire new skills or pass

the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), these older students tended to take a more laid-back approach.

During a conversation practice session, I once asked about this photography enthusiasm, “Where did you go during the holidays?” She smiled nonchalantly and replied with just one word: “*nai!*” (not), even though this *nai* was grammatically incorrect for her elementary level. However, her social media profile showed that she had visited several places. When these laidback learners shared a class with more motivated younger students, it was sometimes challenging to find a suitable level of practice. However, once they reach the intermediate level, the pace naturally slows, allowing more focus on conversation and composition exercises. This way, each student could contribute according to their own pace and skill level. Such *buxiban* cram schools are supported by these “long-term leisurely hobby learners.”

In class, we often conducted small and sometimes more extensive tests to assess our students’ abilities. Naturally, the results varied, and sometimes I had to tell the students that their scores were below expectations. It is also the teacher’s responsibility if students do not achieve sufficient mastery. Even so, while it may be reasonable to say, “You have failed and need to repeat the course” at a high school or university, this approach does not work in a local cram school. Since it is a business, losing students would be problematic, and many might complain, “This is boring,” or “I only came because I wanted to be in the same class as my friends.” I generally allowed any student who wished to advance to the next class to do so, provided that they made an effort to review the materials. Ideally, they would catch up with the rest of the class by studying on their own; however, this rarely happened. If they had engaged in such study, they would not have fallen behind in the first place.

Repeating this process only widens the gap between students. This

is where the teacher's skill becomes essential. During problem-solving or pair work, I circulated around the classroom, spending more time with struggling students, giving hints, and reminding them of relevant lessons we had studied earlier. This was my way of helping them keep up with the class. These students knew that they were progressing slowly, but as long as they could participate in conversation practice and communicate with others, they continued to attend regularly and seemed happy. I realized that for many, attending a Japanese class at a *buxiban* cram school was a form of entertainment and a chance to spend time with friends, partners, or family members.

In one class, there was a student who had been with the group since the beginner level but was gradually falling behind. Still, I provided the support mentioned above, including writing detailed comments on her homework and preparing revision materials; the other students were very welcoming and inclusive. As a result, this student continued to attend classes. Approximately a year later, when I left the cram school, I documented the student's progress in detail, noting her level compared with the rest of the class. Approximately six months later, I happened to be in town and stopped at a shop where the student worked (most likely the family business). I asked, "How have you been?" She replied, "I'm no longer studying Japanese." While the change of teacher did not necessarily imply a dramatic shift in the course content or pace, it probably affected the classroom atmosphere, making it less conducive to her learning. I feel sorry and disappointed when I think about what a shame it is.

(3) Early Education in Taiwan

A diverse array of individuals attend *buxiban* cram schools. In this context, I would like to share some of the memories of the younger

students I have met. Although they are few in number, high school, junior high, and even elementary school students attend these classes. I did not have much contact with the high school students, which primarily occurred through one-on-one tutoring sessions, and many students stop attending after junior high school because Japanese is not considered relevant to university entrance exams.

Compared to high school students, there were slightly more junior high school students attending classes. Some joined regular classes, whereas others opted for private tutoring. Based on my observations, individual tutoring seems to be slightly more popular. The reasons junior high and high school students attended *buxiban* schools varied, but most seemed to supplement their elective Japanese classes. At school, Japanese classes often had 20 to 30 students, even for conversation or composition classes, and students did not have enough opportunities to practice. Additionally, due to limited class time, Taiwanese teachers often explained in Mandarin, reducing students' chances of practicing Japanese pronunciation and listening. Consequently, I often met students who could handle written questions but struggled with composition, could not hold conversations, or produced disjointed phrases. This experience gave me insight into how difficult it can be to implement secondary-level second-language education effectively.

Many junior high and high school students first joined short-term intensive courses during summer or winter holidays and then continued in regular classes. Although learning alongside adults of various ages can be a good social experience, some young students felt uncomfortable. However, when they had a "big brother" or "big sister" figure in the class, they seemed more at ease and were able to interact better. For example, one junior high school girl seemed to be withdrawn and uneasy about older male students close to her father's age. But when a woman in her twenties, who acted like her "big sister," arrived,

the girl immediately perked up and started engaging actively. Although older men are kind and supportive, young learners need someone they feel comfortable talking to and can rely on.

To the best of my knowledge, all primary school students take one-on-one lessons. Many elementary and some junior high school students choose this more expensive option because their parents want them to acquire various skills early. Similar to Japan, it is common for financially stable families in urban areas of Taiwan to send their children to cram schools. English is the top priority, followed by subjects such as math, science, programming, and other computer-related fields, and even sports such as swimming. It is not unusual for children to attend several cram schools in a single day. After school, parents or grandparents pick them up and transport them from one school to another. Some children even have their meals during the short breaks between classes. Although learning English is considered essential, Japanese is often the next choice for parents who want their children to learn an additional language. The decision to learn Japanese may come from parents or the child's own preferences.

There was a junior high school boy attending an American school. Tall and energetic, he excelled in basketball and was fluent in English but struggled with Japanese. He seemed frustrated, aware that he was forgetting things he should already know. Traditional study methods such as textbooks and notebooks did not work for him, so I took a different approach. We stood in front of the whiteboard and asked questions such as “What did you do today?” or “How did your basketball game go last week?” If he had forgotten a Japanese word, he would write the English equivalent or draw a picture, and I would add Japanese next to it while saying it aloud. This kept him engaged and allowed him to use the Japanese language. The real challenge, however, arose when I reported on my study schedule. I could not just write

“conversation practice” every time... Reporting to the school and parents was often more difficult than the lessons themselves.

School life is demanding for Taiwanese primary and junior high-school students. Primary school ends at approximately 3:30 or 4:00 p.m., and junior high school ends at approximately 5:00 p.m., after which they go straight to cram schools. Many students appear exhausted or sleepy when they arrive. They seemed to realize that Japanese was less important than their other subjects, so some would doze off, zone out, or try to skip class entirely. Others would just try to pass the time without really studying. If a student was genuinely interested in Japanese, I kept them engaged in supplementary materials and activities. However, this did not apply to those who were attending reluctantly, sent by their parents. Quiet students would follow instructions but eventually start dozing off, whereas more rebellious students throw their textbooks across the room and run around. Since my job was to get them to use Japanese, I tried to stop them by saying things like “What are you doing?” or “Running around is dangerous,” all in Japanese.

Most cram schools in Taiwan employ a direct method of teaching Japanese by using only Japanese. This approach not only helps students interact with authentic Japanese but also addresses a practical issue: most Japanese teachers at *buxiban* have no background in Chinese and cannot provide explanations in Chinese. The direct method ensures consistent teaching across schools, regardless of each teacher’s Chinese proficiency. In my case, even though I had studied Chinese and spent three years with Taiwanese researchers, I was told to pretend I did not understand Chinese. So, I would say things like “stop” or “sit down” in Japanese. However, being scolded in a foreign language does not have the same effect as scolding in one’s native tongue. Unfamiliar sounds often seem amusing to students, who may even find them entertaining. If they responded with “No!” or “That’s no fun!” At least, they were

communicating in Japanese... I tried to be satisfied with that. For *buxiban* teachers, physical endurance, patience, and the ability to let things go are essential skills.

(4) Tailored Lessons for Special Clients

Various people attend *buxiban*. Some who find group classes ineffective choose individual or small group (one or two students) lessons instead. This is common among primary, middle, and sometimes high school students, as mentioned earlier. There are a few examples of these customized lessons.

One example is a request for small classes of one to three people, covering the same content as regular classes. Reasons include inconvenient class times or dissatisfaction with the pace and content of group lessons.

Another common request is for exam preparation, such as the JLPT. Although cram schools offer exam courses, some prefer classes tailored to their level and specific needs. In such cases, teachers can use materials and experience from regular classes; therefore, minimal additional preparation is required.

There have also been requests for classes for young children. At one cram school, a parent requested private lessons for his three children—a pair of sisters and their younger brother—separate from other preschoolers. The youngest, only three, enjoyed singing Japanese songs at the beginning of each lesson. However, when I introduced written characters to the oldest sibling, who was six years old, it proved too difficult for the younger two. They could not remember the characters and did not seem to understand why they were learning another language, which led to a rapid decline in their interest. To help them recall the characters, I used a simple game, but the older siblings

struggled to engage their younger brother, who would become frustrated and end up in tears. Eventually, the youngest student stopped attending class altogether.

Some students request content not covered in the regular curriculum, such as using their own materials, help with writing, or focusing solely on conversation practice. These are bespoke lessons that are tailored to individuals. Unlike mainstream classes that maintain consistency even with changes in the teacher, these bespoke classes depend heavily on the instructor. Once you accept this request, you will be required to make a full commitment.

A student in his fifties asked me to help him learn basic Japanese conversation in just three months for a trip to Japan. He had no prior experience with Japanese, making it an almost impossible task; yet I was assigned to teach him. When I asked why he had chosen this cram school, he said that his daughter was a student there. After enquiring further, I realized that she was in one of my classes.

First, I asked him when and where he planned to travel (I recall being allowed to use Chinese in this lesson). I gathered maps and guidebooks and prepared sample dialogues, including place names and local specialties. We practiced scenarios such as travelling from the airport to a tourist spot, shopping, asking about bus stops, and visiting another location. I explained how changing words could alter sentences, and we practiced pronunciation. Although he seemed satisfied, his listening skills did not improve overnight. If he encountered unfamiliar phrases, he would be completely lost. I felt guilty as if I were failing him. After three months of practice, he left for Japan. Upon his return, he told me, “It was great. My daughter did everything for me.” That was probably for the best. He added, “Sensei, I will ask for your help again before my next trip!” However, as my contract ended, I left the cram school before his next trip. I do not know what became of the “Pre-Travel

Course” after that.

There were also many enquiries from students wishing to study in Japan. Generally, there are two methods: passing the Examination for Japanese University Admission (EJU) or taking an entrance exam for a specific university or graduate school. The EJU tests not only Japanese language skills but also subjects such as history, geography, and science at a level equivalent to that of Japanese junior high and high schools. While *buxiban* schools can cover Japanese language skills, such academic subjects are usually outside their scope. Nevertheless, cram school owners, being businessmen at heart, tend to accept such requests with phrases like, “We’ll find someone who can teach that.” Preparing students for university entrance exams is not what *buxibans* are typically designed for, yet they continue to do so for business reasons.

At the time, I felt it was a convenient advertisement for the cram school. They would say, “We have an expert with a PhD from a Japanese university!” However, having attended graduate school does not necessarily make me qualified to teach high school subjects. A veteran teacher with years of experience teaching junior high and high school students would be far more suitable. Just because I went to graduate school does not mean I know how to get into any graduate school; I only have expertise in my own field and personal experience of the admissions process. When I asked other teachers for advice, they said, “We have never dealt with cases like this, so we do not know.”

Once the cram school accepted these requests, there was no turning back. Other teachers watched me explain history or earth science with expressions that seemed to blend curiosity and pity.

It is rare for someone who graduated from a Taiwanese university to start over at a Japanese university. However, if their field of study in Taiwan differs from what they want to pursue in Japan, they must write a new research paper for the entrance exam. I would ask them to

write one, but then wonder, should I correct the Japanese language or the content for them? I was not qualified for either. Despite my efforts to consult various resources from the library, my guidance fell short of what could be considered proper dissertation support. When I asked the cram school owner, he said, “Just teach what you can. Ultimately, it is up to the student’s ability.” He was right, but this was clearly beyond what *buxiban* could offer. If it were truly about a student’s ability, we should not have been involved in the first place. I still feel uneasy about these cases. I wonder if the students had sought guidance elsewhere before coming to us. The Japanese language education in Taiwan’s secondary and higher institutions aims to strengthen the domestic education system and does not consider the option of switching to Japan. Cram schools might have attempted to fill that gap inadequately. As a member of the Japanese language education industry, I regretted that we could not fully support students who wanted to continue their Japanese studies or attend Japanese schools.

(5) Japanese Language Training as a Company Benefit

Buxiban attracts all kinds of students, including requests from companies to train employees. Such requests are rarely work-related; they are usually for Japanese lessons offered on-site to employees who wish to learn the language.

In Taiwan, it is fairly common for companies to support employee learning as a part of their benefits package. If enough employees are interested in learning Japanese, the company will ask a cram school to send a teacher to regular on-site classes. The content of these classes varies; some resemble typical *buxiban* lessons, while others are customized to the learners’ levels and interests.

I found these on-site classes to be a refreshing change in pace and

a chance to leave the staff room. At one company, employees could go wherever they liked under the guise of a “company trip.” They often shared with me the places they planned to visit in Japan. In Japan, many companies can no longer afford such trips; for those that do, they are still valued as opportunities to build team spirit. Rather than adhering to this old tradition, I thought that Japanese companies could learn from Taiwan and turn company trips into opportunities for employees to enjoy themselves freely and recharge.

(6) Teachers are Friends?

In Taiwanese cram schools, teachers and students have a close relationship. Many *buxiban* teachers are young and energetic, so students of a similar or even older age often interact with them like family or friends. Having taught in Japanese high schools and universities for nearly ten years, I was accustomed to keeping a clear boundary between “teacher” and “student.” As a result, I did not form close relationships with my students as some younger teachers did. However, one company executive that I tutored often brought me gifts and took me to high-end restaurants that I would never have gone to on my own, even after living in Taiwan for six years. Initially, I hesitated, thinking it was inappropriate for teachers to accept such hospitality. However, other teachers and cram school owners told me, “It is fine to accept such gestures of goodwill—just do not get so close that you start giving private lessons outside the school.” Gradually, I came to understand that this was how things worked in Taiwan.

One family even invited me on a two-day camping trip. I hesitated at first and was unsure about spending the night with a student’s family, but it was a warm invitation, so I decided to go. The family consisted of the three siblings I had taught. Even the youngest brother, who had

stopped attending the class, greeted me with a smile. I was relieved to see that he did not dislike me; he simply did not enjoy learning Japanese. As I talked with the father and his friends over drinks, the sisters exclaimed in surprise, “Sensei speaks Chinese!” The next morning, I played ball with the younger brother and badminton with the sisters.

The cram school I worked at was small, but it welcomed people of all ages and backgrounds, like a miniature version of Taiwan. Through this experience, I gained valuable insights into how Taiwanese society embraces diversity. I feel fortunate to have had such an experience; it was like looking through a window that perfectly framed Taiwanese society.

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