

**American college students' stereotypes  
in Korean culture teaching:  
Using culture portfolio projects**

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# The content-driven approach

- Teaching second language (L2) culture can be either content- or process-driven.
- The content-driven approach refers to explicit instruction of L2 cultural information. In this approach, the focus is on the target cultural contents rather than the process.
- Teachers are primary information givers of target cultural contents to the class, whereas students are passive recipients of the information.
- The target information may include cultural products that are tangible (e.g., buildings, clothes, and foods) and invisible (e.g., dances and rituals) as well as cultural practices (e.g., traditional and contemporary value systems or thought patterns).

# The process-driven approach

- The process-driven approach focuses on students' active participation in cultural learning processes.
- In this approach, teachers are not only information providers but also facilitators, whereas students are not passive information receivers but also active participants who construct their own learning.
- Instead of unilaterally receiving the target contents from teachers, students are encouraged to learn through critical thinking.
- The process-driven approach employs various self-discovery learning tasks, such as individual or group culture portfolio projects, interview assignments, and internet-mediated activities.
- In these activities, students come up with their ideas or opinions, next receive relevant cultural information from the teachers, and then finally personalize the learning contents.

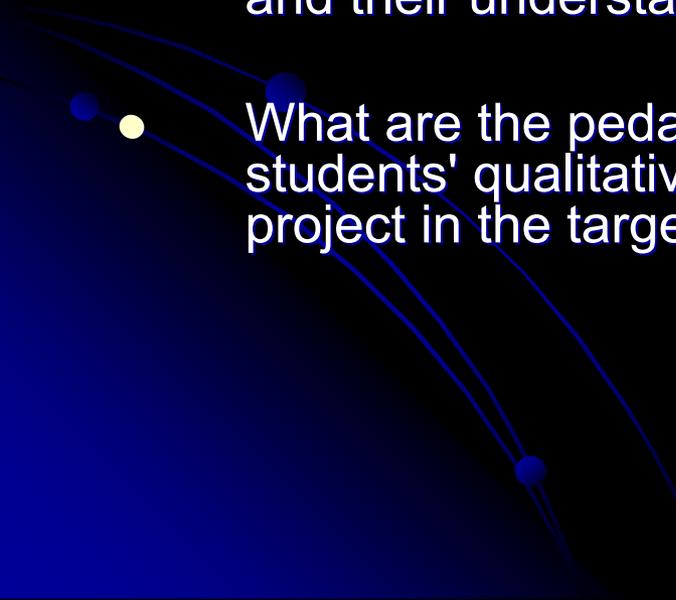
# Subjects of EAK170

- Twenty seven students of EAK170 (Korea: Its culture and heritage) participated at the study.
- EAK170 is a survey course that is designed to introduce students to important elements of Korean culture and history.
- EAK 170 is a general education course that fulfills the "Regions Beyond Europe" requirement. At the same time, it is one of the East Asian Studies major courses, and consequently, the class consists of the East Asian studies major as well as non-major students.
- Introducing the fundamentals of Korean culture in interdisciplinary and comparative approaches, this course also attempts to discuss contrasts between American and Korean cultural patterns and expectations.
- Films, videos, and other multimedia materials are used in conjunction with lectures and class discussions to promote students' understanding of the basics of Korean culture and history.

# Rationale

- Although stereotypes are often viewed as negative in intercultural communications, they can be valuable resources for helping L2 instructors to design, implement, and evaluate L2 culture teaching curricula.
- The instructional implications of stereotypes on L2 culture learning and teaching have been well researched in previous L2 studies
- Using students' stereotypes in L2 culture, L2 instructors can raise students' cross-cultural awareness by having them consider whether their pre-perceptions about a target culture are valid (Ortuno, 1991).
- Most of L2 studies have dealt with major European languages and cultures (e.g., Spanish and German), while the number of studies that investigate its pedagogical application in less commonly taught languages or cultures such as Korean has been scarce.

# Research questions

- How does the project help the students gain insights on a particular aspect of Korean culture and encourage them to evaluate their own stereotypical impressions of Korean culture?
  - How does the project develop students' open attitudes toward the Korean culture?
  - How does the project raise students' cross-cultural awareness and their understanding of the dynamic nature of culture?
  - What are the pedagogical implications of the project based on students' qualitative reactions regarding the effectiveness of the project in the target culture learning?
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# Lit. reviews: Open attitudes in culture learning

- Learning culture is a process where learners recognize that there are different cultural viewpoints, learn to accept the differences, and integrate the target cultural perspective positively into their own (Paige, 1993).
- Open and positive affective stances toward a target culture stimulate students' curiosity and motivation in learning differences and similarities between their L1 and L2 cultures (Kramsch and Nelson, 1996)
- One of the most effective ways to foster openness toward a target culture is to assist students in acknowledging and comprehending the origins (e.g., the role of their L1 cultural backgrounds in forming biased cultural viewpoints) and dangers of stereotyping (Moorjani and Field, 1988; Galloway, 1992).

# Lit. reviews: portfolio

- Effective culture learning and teaching occur when foreign language students personalize their own learning process (Kramsch, 1993).
- Constructivist theories offer theoretical underpinnings for consolidating an interactive culture project into L2 culture teaching. Constructivist advocates believe that language learning is grounded in L2 students' previous experiences.
- The benefits of implementing an individual culture project are well evidenced in previous studies.
- For instance, Barro, Byram, Grimm, Morgan, and Roberts (1993) and Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) report the positive effects of teaching L2 culture through assigning interview projects; students have to conduct a series of interviews with native speakers of the target language to enhance their L2 culture understanding.

# Procedures

- In the beginning of the semester, the students completed a pre-project questionnaire in which they commented on their own definitions of culture and their previous experiences and/or images about the Korean culture and people. ‘
- Based on their personal impressions of the Korean culture, they developed their own project hypothesis, which they set out to investigate throughout the portfolio project.
- To affirm or disprove their hypothesis, the students collected data through library research, on-line research, and/or informal interviews with Korean native speakers.
- The students also kept records of what they felt and learned during the process. In addition, they reported how their understanding of the target culture had expanded and how their stereotypes were reshaped over the semester.
- All the information gathered during the semester constituted an integral part of their portfolio, which they had to submit for a grade by the end of semester.
- At the end of the term, they completed a post-project questionnaire regarding the project. Students' written (e.g., pre- and post-project questionnaires) and spoken reports (e.g., classroom presentation) as well as the researcher's notes during the process were used for qualitative analysis.

# students' definitions of culture

- As shown in the following examples, students displayed individual differences in their definitions of culture:
- *"Culture is a country's traditions, beliefs, holidays, and history"; "Culture may be represented by traditional clothes, language and social life"; "They are parts of life that make a group of people different from others"; "Culture is a person's background"; " Culture is your family heritage"; "It is a collection of customs and language"; "Culture is constantly changing"; "Something that applies to everyone, such as music, food, art, media, and religion"; "A society's ways of doing things, form fundamentals like building and cooking through communication to abstract thought"; "Culture is a view of the world"; "A person's background and how the past influences how people live today."*

# Some of their stereotypes

- Stereotypes about the Korean people and culture were also diverse in topic, reflecting individual interests
- *"Koreans respect a superior but disregard the poor"; "Koreans love expensive brands"; "Koreans strive for the best for their family"; "Koreans are hard working people"; "Koreans are generally conservative in marriage and careers"; "Koreans are fiercely independent"; "They work hard especially for their children and always think about their past"; "Koreans are health-conscious people"; "The Korean culture consists of strong family values, traditions, respect and hierarchy"; "I see Korean people as uniform; Kimchi? Koreans love spicy food and have bad tempers"; "Koreans are looked down upon in Asia and worldwide Koreans are generally not respected"; "The Korean language sounds choppy"; "Confucianism. That is what I've read about Korea"; "The Koreans respect and are proud of their culture"; "The Korean society has very ancient roots, but also at the forefront of modern civilization"; "DMZ (demilitarized zone)"; "North Korea is an axis of evil"; "Koreans are group-oriented people. They always do things together"; "Koreans sing well, and their comic cartoons, video games, songs and drama are popular"; "The Koreans value family as an important aspect of who they are"; "Koreans are very angry about their past."*

# An example of a culture project

- Support in L1 environment: (Personal experience)
  - - Korean foods including kimchi served in local Korean restaurants are in general spicy.
- Contradiction in L1 context: (Interview with Korean native speakers)
  - - Most Korean international students report that they don't eat kimchi daily, and some reported that they don't even like kimchi.
- Support in printed and visual media from Korean context: (Online research and interview with Americans who traveled to Korea)
  - - Internet sites that introduce and/or market the sale of kimchi confirm that kimchi are indeed spicy since garlic and red pepper are primary ingredients.
  - - American students who traveled to Korea (e.g., exchange students) comment that Korean foods are in general spicy.

# Example of a culture project (continued)

- Contradiction in media from Korean context
  - - Many Korean children do enjoy western food such as pizza and hamburgers.
  - - There are types of kimchi that are not spicy at all.
- Native informant input
  - - In general Koreans like spicy food, and kimchi is one of the most important Korean side dishes. But, not every Korean likes kimchi or spicy Korean food, and this is particularly true for young kids and teenagers.
- Reflection-revision
  - - Although kimchi is the most popular dish, not every Korean likes it. It all depends on individual tastes.
- Connection to own culture
  - - Some Americans like spicy food too (e.g., kimchi, spicy Mexican food).
  - - Kimchi is a popular dish for many Japanese in Japan.

**Response to Question 6: “Do you think that the project improved your learning of Korean culture?”**

**(%) (N= raw score)**

**Reasons**

**Number of students**

My original hypothesis was inappropriate 28.6 (6)

People tend to overgeneralize a target culture 19.0 (4)

I could adopt an insider’s viewpoint 14.3 (3)

It raised awareness of my own learning process 9.5 (2)

I learned how challenging it is to study a L2 culture 4.8 (1)

**Positive responses total 76.2 (16)**

Personal difficulties in finding a hypothesis 14.3 (3)

Preference for explicit lecture over the project 9.5 (2)

**Negative or lukewarm responses total 23.8 (5)**

**TOTAL 100.0 (21)**

# Response to Question 7:

## “comment on what you learned

- Learned much factual information about Korean culture (e.g., family relationships, religions, foods, traditions, gender roles etc.).
- Realized the dangers and origin of various stereotypes.
- Developing and maintaining stereotypes is common, when encountering a foreign culture.
- Koreans and Americans are not much different after all.
- Not all stereotypes are wrong, but the important thing is to have an open and flexible attitude toward alien culture and people.
- Cultural knowledge is hard to learn unless you take initiatives to explore it further.
- Meeting and talking to someone from Korea can be a valuable experience.

## Response to Question 8: “Did you like the project?”

(%) (N= raw score)

Number of students

### Reasons

Personally relevant and meaningful

33.3 (7)

Learning culture through a self discovery

19.0 (4)

The nature of the project topics (e.g., realistic)

9.5 (2)

Enjoying the interaction with native speakers

9.5 (2)

Taking multi-perspectives

9.5 (2)

Understanding both L1 and L2 cultural values

4.8 (1)

**Positive responses total**

**85.7 (18)**

No response

14.3 (3)

**TOTAL**

**100.0 (21)**

# For question 9, "Any suggestions to improve the project if you were to do it again?"

- Professor should provide students with more sample sources to start with.
- Professor should give a thorough on-line demonstration regarding how to use relevant web-sites.
- Students should be given an option of conducting the project in a pair or group rather than just individually.
- Professor should give more in-class preparation time.
- Professor should spend more time and effort in explaining how to write rationales and how to organize and present the portfolio.

# Concluding remarks

- One difficulty of conducting the project was that while most students learned to develop and choose their own hypotheses, there were still a few students who displayed a lack of research ability in deciding a hypothesis for themselves.
- Six students relied only on on-line and library research, avoiding interactions with Korean native speakers. They attributed this inability to make the best possible use of the project to their introverted personalities and a lack of time outside of class.
- Studies on Korean culture instruction have focused on teaching cultural content, whereas the studies that concern teaching process-driven skills (e.g., affective stances, positive attitudes, and the ability to empathize with a target culture) have often been ignored
- This study attests to the value of L2 and culture teachers re-evaluating students' stereotypes and reconsidering pedagogical implications of those stereotypes in culture teaching.

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