

*Gaining Insight into Culture through a Chinese Classical Novel:
The Story of the Stone*

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Abstract

This paper is to discuss if Chinese classical novels could help people who learn Chinese to build up knowledge of Chinese culture more comprehensively. The study aims at introducing Chinese culture to the intermediate language learners from Korea who endeavored to read *The Story of Stone* as it plays a critical part in contemporary Chinese society, but they were not proficient enough to understand classical Chinese. To be commensurate with their levels, the materials were rewritten by highly coherence readers to three articles. The course devised by ADDIE is an instructional design process to maintain the quality of teaching. This teaching purpose aimed at 5Cs, including enhancing learners' ability of communication and comprehension of culture in target language. I used DRTA(Directing Reading Thinking Activities) in the course as it could aid learners to understand the text and took in the readings of target language. Nevertheless, it could encourage students to help each other in courses and reinforce their motivations. The thinking in the target language is also boosted as Whorf (1956) pointed out that thinking is entirely linguistic; therefore, the language we use affects our thinking and our view of world (Daniel, 1995). This design of courses includes three topics of culture: family, gender and religion; learners firstly understand the Chinese culture in this novel and draw a comparison with theirs. This study adopts both quality and quantity approaches, whilst the result shows learners are satisfied and agree with our perspective that literature helps them to gain insight into culture.

Keywords: The story of the stone, teaching Chinese culture, design of teaching Chinese literature, DRTA, ADDIE

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Introduction

When it comes to language courses, the understanding of culture seems to be in the realm of language teaching; in other words, the language learners should gain insight into culture. It is reasonable that the goal of a language learner is to master a language, but the sequence appears to be the other way around, especially for their mother language when people learn their mother language, the process is strongly correlated with their culture. Locals learn their mother tongue through natural surroundings, literature or social life. As a result, sufficient understanding of culture is a cornerstone of language learning and it helps students avoid the bottlenecks.

This study aims at teaching Chinese culture and language to Korean intermediate language learners by a Chinese classical novel. The students had the fundamental understanding of Chinese and needed to gain insight into the culture more than others. To some extent, learning a language is equivalent to understanding its culture. Language is an essential tool for communication whilst culture constitutes its background. Language and culture is inseparable when teaching a second language course, as culture does not only affect people's cognitive and thinking but also language (Brown, 2007). Therefore, *The Story of the Stone* is taken as the teaching materials to equip language learners with the understanding of Chinese culture.

The objective of this study is to know if a Chinese classical novel can help students to gain in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture. *The Story of the Stone* is a nineteenth century vernacular classic, it was selected for two reasons. Firstly, the time it was published is near modern era, which means the context of this novel still plays a critical part in current Chinese society. Secondly, part of pre-modern Chinese language used in this book is still active in contemporary Chinese culture. Therefore, via studying *The Story of the Stone*, the students are trained as intermediaries for culture and language.

Regarding the study of culture, Oswalt (1970) divided culture into "Culture" and "culture". Culture includes literature, history, philosophy, politics, and so on whereas culture is the way people use to live in daily life. After a period of time people have learnt a language, they will bump into obstacles to realise a target language (Lv, 2005). Consequently, culture is not enough to support their learning, but Culture can serve as the background knowledge to students. Therefore, teachers may add more teaching materials about Culture in the courses. In the course I devised, the ratio of teaching materials for Culture to the ones for language was around two to one.

I applied Action research in the design of this study as it improved the unit after every class' practicing. Quantitative approach is integrated into qualitative research. That is to say, the quantitative data were collected from the scale, which was designed according to the Likert scale, from every class, and the qualitative resources, such as interviews, homework, and teacher's diary for instruction, were obtained as well. There were ten Korean students in this study and the information related to the research was listed as follows:

Name	The language level of Mandarin	Learn time	Mandarin in Taiwan
Student A	Intermediate	5 years	3 mouths
Student B	Intermediate	2.5 years	3mouths
Student C	Intermediate	3 years	3 mouths
Student D	Intermediate	Around 5 years	9 mouths
Student E	Intermediate	2 years	3 mouths
Student F	Intermediate	3 years	3 mouths
Student G	Beginning	3 years	9 mouths
Student H	Intermediate	2 years	3 mouths
Student I	Intermediate	3 years	3 mouths
Student J	Intermediate	2 years	3 mouths

Figure 1: The Students' information

The research is demonstrated in three parts in this paper: the course design and practice, the text design and practice, and the teaching design and practice. The structure of design and the result of practices in the classes are introduced in each part.

The Course Design and Practice

While designing the course, we aimed at teaching Chinese culture towards the 5 Cs, and this course was constructed by ADDIE (Instructional Design Process) to incorporate the design of material, class, and Action research, which formed a comprehensive process for teaching and learning. *The Story of the Stone* is a Chinese classical novel containing factors originating from its own culture and the main purpose of this course was to introduce its theme to students. When it comes to arranging the course, it referred by Grave(2007)'s the design of the course was referred as follows:

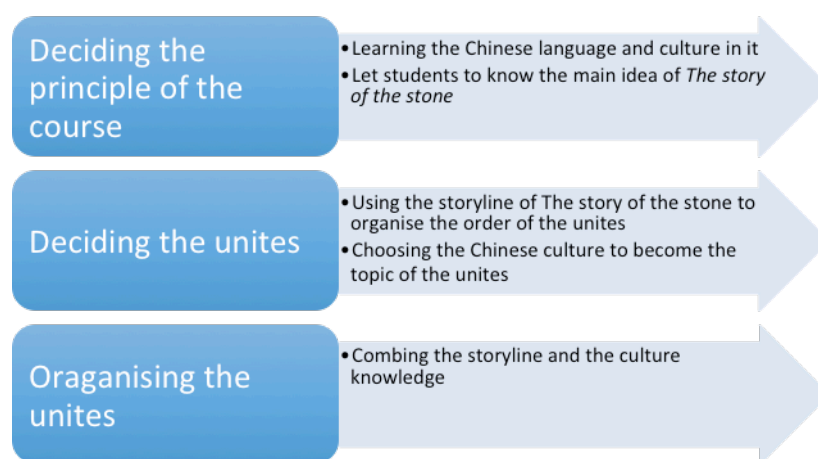


Figure 2: The aspects of the course design

To help intermediate language learners achieve the principles, this course aimed at the 5 Cs stander of American Council on The Teaching of Foreign Language(ACTFL); that is to say, students are expected to achieve five aspects in learning a second language: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities. It is worth noticing that the course highlights students' ability of communication and

knowledge of culture. Lv(2010) pointed out that in classical literature related classes, language teachers should take students' interest into account so as to prioritize the parts of culture they teach and allow the learners to make comparison of their own cultures. Moreover, teachers need to tailor the vocabulary to students' levels.

Thereby, one perspective of Chinese culture of this novel was chosen as the topic for every unit. Students learnt the background of that culture and understood its origin. Henceforth, the connection between Chinese culture and theirs was built up through discussions. Many factors were included, such as course design, units materials, teaching methods and studying methods, to cover all the bases. The main structure of this course designed by ADDIE(Branch, 2009) is Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation.

Firstly, concerning Analysis, there were ten students from Korean colleges in this course and they chose to study in Taiwan for learning language and understanding local culture. According to the preschool language test, there were B2 level students in CEFR(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment). Therefore, they knew *The Story of the Stone* is a renowned classical novel in Chinese culture but it was incomprehensible for them without the teacher's help.

Secondly, regarding Design, according to the pre-study of this course in another class, "*The Story of the Stone: Chinese Culture Teaching for Foreign Language Learners – Its Methodology*"(Lin, 2014), students replied that the 4-hour course was too short for understanding this book, so this time I extended the course to 12 hours, it included three sections and each one was 4 hours. Topics of Chinese culture and plots of this novel are linked as follows –

Unit	Name of the unit	Culture topic
1	The luminescent jade	Myth
2	Man is made of mud while woman is of water	Gender
3	Baoyu become a Buddhist monk	Religion

Figure 3: The unit names and culture topics

The story ran smoothly in these three units, and as the level of intermediate learners was considered, the original material was rewritten. The texts were accompanied with pictures, interpretations and evaluations to help learners achieve the teaching aim.

Thirdly, when it comes to Development, the three texts were checked by the other four Chinese teachers who have 3 to 8 years seniority in this field to verify the validity of the content. Their details are as follows:

Teacher	Education	Teaching period
Teacher Zeng	MA Teaching Chinese as a second language	3 years
Teacher Zhang	MA Teaching Chinese as a second language	3 years
Teacher Dai	MA Teaching Chinese as a second language	3 years
Teacher Chen	PHD Chinese Study	8 years

Figure 4: The details of the experts

Finally, regarding Implementation and Evaluation, Action research in this study was employed through planning, acting, observing and reflecting for improving the study (Lewin, 1947). After every unit, there were questionnaire with open questions for students to provide their feedback. The questionnaires were analyzed by SPSS 12 as the last step of data analysis to improve the performance of the next class. The questionnaires were compared with the qualitative information acquired from the open questions students answered as the records for teachers. In the end of the class, students were interviewed to see if they realise the course design, the related practice and asked to write a review of the book.

Question	Unit 1 Mean	Unit1 S.D.	Unit2 Mean	Unit2 S.D.	Unit 3 Mean	Unit3 S.D.	M.M	M.S.D.
I can understand this course	4.0	.94	4.4	.53	4.1	.32	4.3	.6
I can learn Chinese culture from this course	4.0	.47	4.2	.44	4.1	.57	4.1	.49
I want to learn more about The story of the Stone after this course	4.1	.74	4.6	.52	4.2	.42	4.3	.56
This course can make me have more interest about it	4.3	.95	3.9	.60	4.1	.32	4.1	.62
I want to learn more about Chinese literature after this time	4.2	.63	4.2	.44	4.2	.63	4.2	.57
I feel satisfied in this course	4.3	.48	4.1	.78	4.2	.42	4.2	.56
M.M.	4.2	.70	4.2	.55	4.2	.45	4.2	.57

Figure 5: The course satisfaction of three times practicing

Figure 5 shows that most of the students were satisfied about this course as they agreed that this course does not only enhance their command of Chinese but also help them gain the knowledge of Chinese culture:

Student D: I learnt Chinese culture in this course. I found that the ancient Chinese and Korean cultures are very similar. Although the myths are different, there are also the same concept, such as ghost, god, and karma, in both cultures.

Student C: I thought that Taiwanese students have to read *The Story of Stone* because they need to understand ancient Chinese culture. I am a Christian, so I do not believe in any mythical figures like Nvwa, a goddess who created human beings. But it's still very interesting.

-The records / minutes of interviews

Moreover, this course has boosted students' confidence in learning Chinese because they thought this novel was very difficult at first but after the course they had its background knowledge and could discuss it with locals.

The 12-hour course is appropriate as it allows students enough time to understand this novel and is not too lengthy as the principle is to introduce main ideas / theme of this novel. Through reading *The Story of the Stone*, students gained confidence in learning Mandarin, and in the culture course students were not disheartened by the difficulty of the language learning. They felt proud instead that they could study a must-read for locals and it helped them gain insight of the culture.

The Text Design and Practice

The Story of the Stone was written in classical mandarin. According to the glossary of TOFCL (Test Of Chinese as a Foreign Language), it is impossible for the intermediate level students to understand. Moreover, the purpose of this course was to teach culture and introduce this classical novel to the students who were eager to understand it but found it inaccessible, so the original texts in the novel had to be rewritten; otherwise, teachers would spend too much time on explaining words the teaching purpose was unattainable. Krashen (1982) stated that the $i+1$ is an effective way for students to learn the target language, that is to say, the "i" is the knowledge that students already had and the 1 is the new knowledge that students need to learn. In other words, too much new knowledge can be overwhelming for students and get them overloaded and discouraged.

However, the students in the pre-study wanted to know the storylines of *The Story of the Stone* in the course (Lin, 2014) as it would be helpful if they could have the texts of the novel from students' perspective. As a result, rewriting the texts coherently was a paramount task to help students of all levels understand the novel.

There were 6 texts rewritten into modern traditional Mandarin: the story text, the pictures, the vocabulary explanation with Pinyin, sentences practice, the multiple choices, and the culture topic relative writing. The first three texts were to enhance students' comprehension and the rest of them were to helping test students to test their level of understanding. Every rewritten text was checked and revised by four professional teachers. Furthermore, students took in three things by the texts: the storyline of *The Story of the Stone*; the context of Chinese culture, and its target language.

Question	Unit 1 Mean	Unit1 S.D.	Unit2 Mean	Unit2 S.D.	Unit 3 Mean	Unit3 S.D.	M.M.	M.S.D.
I can understand the text	4.1	.88	4.0	1.22	4.2	.63	4.1	.91
The story can attract me	3.9	.74	4.0	.5	3.9	.88	3.9	.71
I can understand the text more after I finish the practice questions	4.0	.82	3.6	1.13	3.9	.57	3.8	.84
I feel satisfied	3.9	.57	4.1	.60	4.4	.52	4.1	.56

about this text								
M.M.	4.0	.75	3.9	.86	4.1	.65	4.0	.75

Figure 6: The teaching materials satisfaction in the three times teaching

Figure 6 demonstrates that the text in unit 2 was a little too difficult and I adjusted the difficulty in unit 3. Consequently, the satisfaction of text increased again in unit 3. The text in unit 2 was the most popular one as most students were excited about the love story; many students replied that they liked the discussions about gender and romances between roles. They also compared the discrepant behaviours of couples between Taiwanese and Koreans. In general, the students thought the text helped them take in the story and improved their Chinese; moreover, the three units constituted a complete story while motivated students' learning.

Student J: This was my first time to learn Chinese literature and it has grown on me. I want to choose the course of Chinese novels in the future because I want to read them. I never read any Chinese novels before this class as it was simply too difficult.

Student E: I was surprised at the story It is impossible to comprehend it thoroughly, but I could imagine it when I read it.

-The records / minutes of interviews

This text allowed students to have the material for studying *The Story of the Stone* and improving the reading and writing. In the end they also applied this text was more helpful that through a teacher to learn.

The Teaching Method Design and Practice

The objective of this course was to make *The Story of the stone* a medium that helps students obtain in-depth understanding about Chinese culture. According to Liu (2000), teaching Chinese culture should abide by three principles: firstly, the target language in the class needs to be close to the culture point; secondly, for building the culture relative ability, students need to learn how to socialise and have conversations in the target society in the class; finally, teachers should choose the section of culture that students actually need and have an interest in.

As a result, there were two main teaching methods in this course: DRTA(Directing Reading Thinking Activities) and Cooperative Learning. DRTA is advantageous to understand the main text and students can accustom themselves to read target language with comprehension while Cooperative Learning is to encourage learners in helping each other in the class and boost their motivation in learning.

There are three steps in DRTA: "Predict" is the first step; before students read the text, teachers design activities such as pictures and videos. And students can use their background knowledge to speculate the questions asked while their motivation is boosted. The second step is "Read"; students can find the answer themselves that teacher asked in the first step by reading the text. The final step is "Prove"; after the reading, students can analyse the roles and the story for further discussions (Wang, 2010). Thinking is entirely linguistic (Whorf, 1956), in other words, the language we

use will affect our thought of this world (Daniel, 1995). DRTA can train students to think in the target language and they can gain insight of the culture as well.

When it comes to comparing and connecting the culture of the target language and students' own culture, Cooperative Learning can help each other and share the experience to achieve its objectives through discussions (Jonhson& Jonhson 1987). Brown (2007) also pointed out that even some students can get the positive result when they across the culture to learn and live but some of them will be maladaptive. Therefore, group discussion in the class can reduce their stress and they can use it to understand the parts they do not understand (Chen, 2011). As a result, there were four advantages of using Cooperative Learning in this class: a) students discussed and spoke in Chinese so they could gain the ability of listening and speaking, b) students can help each other to learn and adapt to Chinese culture, c) students could learn from exchanging their methods of learning, and d) students could enjoy social activities and networking.

Question	Unit 1 Mean	Unit1 S.D.	Unit2 Mean	Unit2 S.D.	Unit 3 Mean	Unit3 S.D.	M.M.	M.S.D.
Discussing with classmates is helpful for my learning	3.7	.67	3.5	.73	4.3	.48	3.8	.63
I can understand <i>The story of The Stone</i> by teacher's teaching	4.1	.32	4.2	.44	4.1	.57	4.1	.44
I can understand Chinese culture more by teacher's teaching	4.3	.48	4.1	.33	4.3	.48	4.2	.43
Teacher can notice when I need help in the class	4.0	.67	4.3	.5	4.1	.32	4.1	.5
Teacher can figure out my questions in the class	4.5	.52	4.2	.67	4.1	.32	4.3	.5
Teacher has a good attitude in the class	4.6	.51	4.6	.53	4.1	.32	4.4	.45
M.M.	4.2	.53	4.2	.53	4.2	.42	4.2	.49

Figure 7: The course satisfaction in three times teaching

I divided the students into 4 groups for discussions for Cooperative Learning in the first unit, and one of the students was not satisfied with his classmate who demonstrated his point of view to the class. Therefore, in the next unit, I let him pick the group he wanted to join and the problem was solved.

Student I: My Chinese is not proficient enough to read this novel, but I really want to know the things locals learn. The general class for Taiwanese students in school was too difficult, but through your teaching we could learn and practice.

Student H: Sometimes I could not understand the class then I asked Student B when we discussed.

-The records / minutes of interviews

Therefore, the advantages of employing DRTA and Cooperative Learning as teaching methods in this course were: a) group members using Chinese to discuss and talk in the class could improve their ability of speaking and listening, b) group members could help each other to learn, thus, their anxiety was reduced and their efficiency in learning was increased, c) students helped each to adapt the local culture, d) students learnt from each other and there was adequate peer pressure among themselves, and e) their social interaction was improved.

Conclusion

All in all, the language course is to learn the target language understand the target culture but this course is through learning the Chinese culture to learn Mandarin. I devised the teaching materials for Culture to the ones for language around two to one in this course and its effectiveness was demonstrated as students had more motivation and foundation to gain into the target culture.

Most Chinese literature is too difficult to the intermediate language learners; on the other hand, it is the period these students need more background knowledge of Chinese culture to support their learning. That is to say, they are eager to understand the related literature as the same as locals. *The Story of the Stone* is a novel can be regarded as appropriate teaching materials for Chinese culture course. It is not only a famous Chinese novel but also contained diversified perspectives on Chinese culture.

To sum up, if the teaching materials such as the literature of target language lays the foundation for culture courses, students can get an effective approach to the culture of native speakers.

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