

Moon Hyoung-jin, Nam Jong-ho,
Kim Yong-deog
Korea

New Measures for the Improvement of History Education for Chinese Students in South Korea*

Abstract

The objective of this research was to find a more effective method for the teaching of history to Chinese students studying in South Korean universities. Questionnaire surveys and interviews were conducted to investigate those students' level of knowledge and perceptions of Korean history. Then, in history classes, four teaching methods (comparative-historical, audiovisual, history and language, and rote memorization) were applied over two weeks. Before the treatment, Chinese students said that they liked the audiovisual teaching method the most, but after taking the classes, they preferred the teaching method comparing Korean and Chinese histories. Besides the finding that the comparative method was the most popular, the responses also showed that it was the most effective one in teaching history to Chinese students.

Keywords: *Chinese students, history knowledge, history teaching methods, Korean history*

Introduction

The number of Chinese students of university age studying in South Korea has been rapidly increasing in recent years. Only 33,650 Chinese students were study-

* This paper was supported by the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2014.

ing in Korea in 2007, but this number had increased to 55,025 by 2009 and 60,935 by 2011 (Korean Educational Development Institute, 2012). These increases can be attributed to the *hallyu* or “Korean cultural wave” and to the popularity of K-pop (Korean pop music) in China. As of 2013, Chinese students accounted for 72.5% of the total number of foreign students studying in Korea (Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea, 2012).

Chinese students studying in Korea can expect that they will need some basic contextual knowledge of a social-scientific kind when learning the Korean language and that background knowledge about Korean history in particular will help them communicate better with the Koreans and understand both Korean society and the Korean language. Despite this need, Korean history education has not been offered systematically to these students. As a result, some 80% of Chinese students in one study expressed the opinion that Korean history was not interesting (Moon, 2013). They thought that Korean history textbooks were very subjective, meaning that history education tended to be offered from the Korean perspective only, failing to consider the viewpoints of adjacent countries. Due to such perceptions, Chinese students may devalue and lose interest in learning about Korean culture as a whole, and their learning may be less effective as a result. For these reasons, it is urgent that Korean history education for Chinese (and other foreign) students be improved.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the teaching method that most effectively increases these students’ learning in Korean history by reducing conflicts between their prior knowledge acquired from their history lessons and cultural background in their own country and Korean history as taught in South Korea. According to previous studies (Moon, 2011), Chinese students tend to experience cultural conflicts in internalizing knowledge about Korea. This can be attributed to a discrepancy between the students’ prior knowledge and the education that they receive in Korea. Given these points, what kind of teaching method will be best able to offer a balanced form of history education for these students and contribute to reducing such conflicts? This study was conducted to determine this, and to find effective approaches to Korean history education for Chinese students.

Several studies have been conducted on this topic in relation to various education areas and methods. They have mainly focused on methods of teaching Korean as a second language (Oh & Gyo, 2011) and the cultural and audiovisual educational methods (Lee, 2004). A few studies have been conducted in the context of history education (Moon, 2011; 2012), but this area of investigation is still at the beginning stage. Despite some insights garnered by previous studies, they share the limitation that they have not presented analytical data showing what

kind of educational method was the most effective. To resolve this limitation, the presented study was conducted with the goal of identifying the most effective educational method for Chinese students of Korean history based on the analysis of data collected from an actual educational setting.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. Four teaching methods were implemented in different classroom settings to determine which was the most effective for Chinese students in each of the four years of undergraduate study in Korean universities.

Methodology

Data was gathered on two different occasions using two approaches: (1) a questionnaire survey and a qualitative investigation were conducted over one month, November 2013; and (2) after this primary investigation, lectures were offered to students using four teaching methods (comparative-historical, audiovisual, history and language, and rote memorization) over two weeks during December 2013. The goal was to identify any change in students' preferred teaching methods.

The rationale for this approach was to overcome the limitations of survey research alone. In other words, this study assumes that students' preferred educational method as found by the analysis of survey results is more likely based on their past experiences, and therefore it is difficult to assert that such a teaching method is the most effective. Accordingly, after implementing four teaching methods over two weeks, this study asked students once again which teaching method they preferred the most.

A total of 200 Chinese students studying in universities in Seoul were selected for this study. To investigate the students' preferences regarding teaching methods, 50 students were selected from each academic year (first, second, third, and fourth). However, 20 subjects who did not answer all the items in the questionnaire or those who chose the same alternative consistently were excluded from the analysis, and so, ultimately, data obtained from 180 students were analyzed.

In the quantitative investigation, nine items were used to get a sense of the students' knowledge of Korean history in general, the effectiveness of the Korean history education they had experienced, and their preferred teaching methods. For the qualitative investigation, six items assessed the students' opinions on these matters, yielding four preferred teaching methods. Each of these was used to teach the students over two weeks, after which the students' preferred teaching method was again investigated.

Analysis: Chinese students' knowledge of Korean history

Given the preponderance of Chinese students in Korean universities, how Korean history education should be offered to these students is a pressing question, but before optimum methods can be identified, a picture of Chinese students' general perceptions and knowledge of Korean history are needed. We investigated them through a survey.

Table 1. Chinese students' general perceptions of Korean history ($n=180$)

Question	① Very Much	② Some- what	③ Not Much	④ Little
1. Korea was subordinate to China in ancient times.	58%	32%	10%	-
2. China influenced Korea in ancient times.	56%	38%	6%	-
3. Korea and China were closely related to each other historically.	60%	32%	8%	-
4. Your level of knowledge about Korean history is high.	8%	10%	65%	17%
5. There is a discrepancy between education in Korea and China in teaching the same historical facts.	38%	43%	19%	-
6. There is a discrepancy between Korean and Chinese history textbooks in describing the same historical facts.	32%	45%	20%	3%
7. How much do you enjoy Korean history classes?	3%	17%	55%	25%

Table 1 shows that Chinese students tend to look at Korean history from the perspective of Chinese history (Kim & Jeong, 2004; Yu, 2005). Nearly 90% of the respondents thought that China had influenced Korea greatly in ancient times (94%) and that Korea and China had been closely related historically (92%). Some 90% of the respondents thought Korea had been subordinate to China in ancient times, and thus perceived the relationship between Korea and China as hierarchical rather than equal. This perception is attributable to the Chinese worldview, which asserts that China is in the center of East Asia and that the surrounding countries are influenced by it (Oh, 2001; Park, 2003).

In terms of the perceptions of Korean history education, the respondents thought that there was a discrepancy between Korean and Chinese history textbooks (77%) and teachers (81%) describing the same historical facts. They experienced mental conflict accepting Korean history due to this perceived discrepancy (National History Compilation Committee, 2007; Renmin Educational Publisher History Office, 2004). As a result, the number of students who thought Korean history classes were not interesting (80%) was higher than the number of those

who thought they were interesting (20%). These are possible reasons for the low understanding of Korean history (demonstrated below).

To investigate the students' understanding of Korean history in depth, 48 students were selected for individual interviews. They were asked to express their opinions about Question 6 and the reasons for their opinions.

Table 2. Interviews on Korean history in general ($n=48$).

Question	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer
1. How long a history does Korea have?	15%	85%
2. How long did each Korean dynasty last on average?	30%	70%
3. What was Korea's original religion?	30%	70%
4. What was the name of the war between Korea and the Qing Dynasty?	58%	42%
5. What was the March 1st Independence Movement?	53%	47%
6. What was the Anti-American Pro-North Korean War?	65%	35%

As seen in Table 2, the Chinese students' knowledge about Korean history was found to be very low. In Question 1, the proportion of the students who answered correctly by replying "5,000 years" was only 15%, while the proportion of students who answered incorrectly by replying "4,000 years" or "3,000 years" was 85%. Similar trends were found in Question 2: only 30% of the students correctly answered "500 years," while 70% answered incorrectly, choosing "300 years." This may be because the longest-lasting Chinese dynasty was around 300 years; the respondents may have applied their Chinese preconceptions to Korean history. Last, in Question 3, the proportion of the students who correctly answered "shamanism" (30%) was lower than the proportion of those who incorrectly answered "Confucianism" (34%) or "Buddhism" (32%), hinting again that their Sinocentrism had skewed their perspective on Korean history (Sim, 1997; Lee, 2005).

These findings show that the Chinese students in Korea tend to understand Korean history based on their prior knowledge acquired in China and they lack understanding of or exposure to the Korean perspective on Chinese history (Shin, 2005). However, the remaining answers indicate that the students did demonstrate a reasonably high understanding of the aspects of Korean history covered in detail in Chinese history textbooks. For instance, in Question 4, 58% of the students knew the name of the war between the Korean Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) and the Chinese (strictly speaking, Manchu) Qing Dynasty (1636–1912). In Questions 5 and 6, respectively, regarding the March 1st Independence Movement (against

the Japanese occupation of Korea) and the Korean War, more than half of the respondents also gave correct answers. The term “Anti-American Pro-North Korean War,” which is used in Chinese history textbooks to reflect that China helped North Korea in its fight against the United States, again reflects a Chinese perspective.

Next, quantitative and qualitative investigations were conducted to explore more effective teaching methods for the Chinese students of Korean history. Table 3 shows the results of this investigation on four such methods: a *comparative-historical teaching method* (CHTM), an *audiovisual teaching method* (AVTM); a *history and language teaching method* (HLTM); and a *rote memorization teaching method* (RMTM).

Table 3. Which teaching method was most effective for you? ($n=180$).

Category	%
CHTM	30%
AVTM	38%
HLTM	27%
RMTM	5%

As seen in Table 3, the respondents preferred the AVTM (38%) and the CHTM (30%) and did not prefer the RMTM. In other words, the students understood Korean history and culture through the lens of their prior knowledge acquired in China; also, they liked vivid audiovisual materials (Moon, 2013). Table 4 shows the respondents’ preferences regarding the teaching methods broken down by year.

Table 4. Which teaching method did you like most? ($n=180$).

Category	First-Year Students	Second-Year Students	Third-Year Students	Fourth-Year Students
CHTM	19%	32%	33%	35%
AVTM	34%	43%	38%	33%
HLTM	37%	17%	25%	27%
RMTM	10%	8%	4%	4%

The first-year students liked the HLTM most, possibly because this teaching method helped improve their communication ability, whereas the second- and third-year students preferred the AVTM, which perhaps stimulated their interest in Korean history. These contrasting results are likely attributable to the fact that the second- and third-year students were relatively confident in communicating in

Korean and thus preferred a teaching method that incorporated language education as well. In contrast, the fourth-year students preferred the CHTM, which can highlight similarities and dissimilarities in views of history and history education between countries, perhaps reflecting a desire to accommodate Korean attitudes and reducing cultural conflicts between the two countries.

Results: The most effective teaching method

To determine which of the four teaching methods was most effective and to investigate changes in the Chinese students' preferences for the methods after exposure to them, each method was used in a single two-hour class for the students of each academic year. For example, for the CHTM, a lecture was offered on each of the following four topics: (1) the *Imjinweran* or Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592, as described in Korean and Chinese history textbooks (Choi & Moon, 2006); (2) the Donhak movement, a literary movement against European disciplines in East Asia; (3) the March 1st Independence Movement; and (4) the Korean War. For the AVTM, videos were presented on (1) Gyeongbokgung (a palace of the Joseon) and Zijincheng (a palace of the Qing); (2) a war between Goguryeo (a dynasty in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula) and the Sui Dynasty (in China); (3) the Opium War and Byeongin Yangyo (the French invasion of Joseon in 1864); and (4) the Byeongja-Horan War (the Qing invasion of Joseon in 1626) and Crown Prince Sohyun (Joseon's prince, who was taken hostage to the Qing capital, Beijing). After the videos were viewed, their learning effects were evaluated. For the HLTM, the areas of politics (specifically, political structures), economy (land systems), society (changes in social classes), and culture (initiation ceremonies) were selected. Finally, for the RMTM, the ancient dynasties of Korea were divided into four periods: the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE–918 CE), the Goryeo Period (918–1392 CE), the Joseon Period (1392–1910), and the Japanese Occupation Period (during which Japan occupied Joseon/Korea, 1910–1945), and the characteristics of each dynasty and the life of the people within them were described. Thus, for a total of 32 hours over two weeks, four teaching methods were used in teaching Korean history. Afterwards, the students were asked which method was most effective.

Table 5. Which teaching method was most effective for you? ($n=180$).

Category	%	
	Before the Study	After the Study
CHTM	30%	41%
AVTM	38%	30%
HLTM	27%	26%
RMTM	5%	3%

What is interesting here is that the students' opinions on which teaching method was most effective changed as a result of the treatment. Beforehand, the students had chosen the AVTM as the most effective method (38%) for understanding Korean history, while afterwards they chose the CHTM as most effective (41%) and the AVTM as second most effective (30%).

Table 6. Which teaching method did you like most? ($n=180$).

Category	First-Year Students		Second-Year Students		Third-Year Students		Fourth-Year Students	
	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a
	CHTM	19%	30%	32%	45%	33%	42%	35%
AVTM	34%	23%	43%	30%	38%	34%	33%	32%
HLTM	37%	42%	17%	22%	25%	20%	27%	19%
RMTM	10%	5%	8%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%

Note: b = before the study, a = after the study

A similar change to that found in the students' views of the most effective teaching method was also found in their preference regarding the teaching methods. Among the first-year students, the HLTM was preferred (42%), as before the study. However, the initial second choice, AVTM, was reduced from 34% to 23%, whereas the CHTM increased from 19% to 30%, i.e., 11%, bringing it into second place and constituting a larger increase than that for the HLTM (5%). Both the second- and third-year students saw bigger changes: before the treatment, they liked the AVTM most (second-year students: 43%; third-year students: 38%). Afterward, they preferred the CHTM (second-year students: 45%; third-year students: 42%). Thus, while the AVTM appears to stimulate these students' interest to some degree, the CHTM seems most effective in helping them understand both Korean and Chinese history. The fourth-year students also preferred the CHTM on the posttest, with a rise of 11% to 46% from 35% before the study.

Thus, the results of this study show that the comparative teaching method, which compares the histories of two countries from both countries' perspectives, was found to be most effective in helping the students understand the history of neighboring countries, with which they may have had conflicts in the past, and thereby it seems to raise hope for reducing cultural conflicts between countries.

According to the qualitative investigation, the Chinese students tended to express an adverse reaction to the Korean history teaching method that emphasizes the superiority of Korean history, as their prior knowledge acquired in China had led them to different beliefs. However, after being taught with the use of the CHTM, they became aware of discrepancies in the versions of Korean history taught in Korea and in China, and as a result their understanding of Korean history was enhanced. These positive outcomes may have contributed to reducing mental conflict regarding class material among the respondents and facilitated their acquisition of the knowledge of Korean history. To find out more about the effects of the CHTM, this study therefore asked the students why they preferred this method.

Table 7. Why do you like the comparative teaching method most? ($n=180$).

Category	%
The method helps me see discrepancies	21%
The method can reduce cultural conflicts	35%
The method helps me see history objectively	38%
The method broadens my viewpoint	6%

Table 7 shows that the respondents thought that the CHTM helped them understand history more objectively rather than seeing it from a subjective perspective that reflected national ideology; in this way, it expanded their viewpoint to accommodate the perspectives of other countries. In summary, the comparative teaching method seems to have led to positive outcomes for these Chinese students' understanding of Korean history.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to identify more effective teaching methods for improving Chinese students' knowledge of Korean history, after a survey investigating the respondents' knowledge of Korean history (and showing gaps in it) and their preferred teaching methods. After the students (of all academic years)

had had two weeks of lectures using each of the four teaching methods, an investigation was conducted to find out (on the basis of pre- and post-data) which teaching method the students preferred and which they felt was the most effective in helping them understand Korean history.

The results showed that the AVTM (for second- and third-year students), the HLTM (first-year students), and the CHTM (fourth-year students) were initially preferred. However, after two weeks, the second- and fourth-year groups preferred the CHTM; the first-year students also showed an increased preference for the CHTM, although the HLTM remained their favorite. This seems to indicate that the CHTM was most effective in helping these Chinese students to understand Korean history and accommodate the Korean viewpoint. As discussed above, history textbooks tend to describe a country's own history from a self-centered perspective, and history education also tends to emphasize the superiority of "native" history. These approaches may lead to the delivery of conflicting information from the perspective of foreign students. This phenomenon can be observed more often in countries that have or have had antagonistic relationships. Thus, the results of this study also imply that discretion should be used when teaching Korean history to non-Korean students, particularly from the countries in the same cultural sphere as Korea, which may have their own long-established perspectives on historical events.

In ancient times, China and Korea sometimes had a cooperative relationship and sometimes a relationship of conflict, even war. As a result, each country's ways of recording and telling this history have come to emphasize its own superiority, which may hamper students from the other country (or third countries) from accommodating the history at issue. According to this study, the CHTM holds the most promise out of several teaching methods in helping Chinese students accommodate the Korean view on history.

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