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Cross-cultural design (ccd) learning refletive tool based on UK and Korea’s collaborative design projects

[Authors: this will be inserted automatically]

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1. Introduction

Although considerable efforts are being made to explore and understand cross-cultural relationships as a result of globalisation today, there has been limited discussion about cross-cultural concerns in a design practice context. Previous studies on the phenomena of cross-cultural relationships and practices have focused almost exclusively on anthropology, sociology and, more recently, international business and marketing. This article, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the potential of Cross-Cultural Design (CCD) practices and defining its characteristics, therefore developing a ‘CCD learning model’ for higher education courses in order to promote culturally literate young design students and designers. Since only minimal exploration has been carried out on CCD with regards to its involvement in design practice, so there is a limitation to the academic resources that deal with this topic, CCD short course programmes were conducted over the past four years since 2011 in order to develop and test CCD learning tool. These short programmes were developed in collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London (UK), Korea Institute of Design Promotion (KIDP) and Regional Design Center (RDC), South Korea. The focus of these education programmes moved from the inspirational benefits of cross-cultural experience to the practicality and marketability of the design.

2. Research background

Culture has always been a vital ingredient in the design of products. As a result of advances in technology including “vastly increased volumes and speeds of movement and communication” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 33) as well as information, and in articulations the recent rapid development of the internet and proliferation of smart phones, the world has become much more integrated. In that regard, the term ‘globalisation’ is used everywhere. Globalisation is the process of integrating various aspects of our everyday lives such as economics and culture, from all parts of the world (Bordo, 2002; Mussa, 2003). Globalisation, by some researchers such as Richard Jenkins, the author of Social Identity (2014), is widely believed to ‘have made human life more diverse’ (Jenkins, 2014, p. 33) and offered “more experiences and elective identities” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 34) whereas others suggest that alongside diversity, globalisation brings in its train greater homogeneity (Jenkins, 2014, pp. 33-34), which merges each region or area’s unique local trait with global traits. Jenkins explains the idea of cultural homogeneity with an example of the concept ‘McDonalisation’ by George Ritzer. Global corporations like IKEA are an example of this. IKEA, a Swedish DIY flat pack furniture company, has been “pushing the concept that both the furniture and stores should be unpretentious-standardised design (Badhe, 2012)”. Consumers can visit IKEA’s stores with exactly same design and decorate their house exactly same with IKEA’s furniture anywhere in the world. George Richer (2008) defined that “globalisation is an accelerating set of processes involving flows that encompass ever-greater numbers of the world's spaces and that lead to increasing integration and interconnectivity among those spaces” (p. 1). Ritzer, in his book Globalisation for Nothing, argued that "Nothing" refers to things that are standardized and homogenous such as ‘McDonald's, Wal-Mart, Starbucks, credit cards, and the Internet (Mann, 2007, p.398)’ whereas "something" means things that are personal or local flavour such as ‘local sandwich shops, local hardware stores, family arts and crafts places, or a local breakfast café (Mann, 2007, p.398)’.

Here, what needs to be emphasised is that despite the concerns about standardisation and uniformity, academics including some like Guy Julier (2008) argue that globalisation still offers an optimistic vision for the design industry as an opportunity for renewed creativity with enhanced quality and flexibility. While cross-cultural research has had been mainly used to help the understanding of multinational culture and improve international communication and marketing, CCD as an approach could now be used to enhance not just communication but also the quality of design of products and services. Many already argue that the importance of cross-cultural design in the future continues to grow (Leong & Clark, 2003; Lin, 2007; Sohoni, 2009). As a result, design education, as well as design professionals, have to consider the cultural context of the users in order for goods and services to fully satisfy the consumer.

3. Need for a Cross-Cultural Design learning model

There is a growing need to foster awareness of cross-cultural factors amongst today’s design students, particularly because of globalisation. In order for students to have a well-rounded understanding of culture in today’s global society, it is important to provide them with more of a diverse range of culturally engaged curriculum content in their higher education experience. However, the current state of Cross-Cultural Design content reflects the ever-expanding use of the term and is mainly used with the study of marketing and business. What is required is a new way to define ‘Cross-Cultural Design’ along with finding methods to ‘incubate’ and ‘direct’ designers and design students appropriately in order to benefit from the expanding field of cross-cultural studies. At this juncture, it becomes crucial to identify factors that are critical for implementing ‘Cross-Cultural Design’ practices in order to educate future designers. Diehl and Christiaans (2006) argued that Cross-cultural studies “have been extensively applied in research in the field of cross-cultural teamwork and communications and even interface design. Existing cultural models, however, do not provide extensive information about how it can be applied in a meaningful way to design” (p.503).

Although considerable efforts are being made to explore and understand cross-cultural relationships as a result of globalisation today, there has been limited discussion about cross-cultural concerns in a design practice context. Previous studies on cross-culture have focused almost exclusively on anthropology, sociology (Diehl & Christianns, 2006, p. 503) and, more recently, international business and marketing. The textbook theorists of cross-cultural researchers such as Hofstede (1984) and Hall (1989) have focused on the sociological exploration of cross-culture but hardly touched on any specific area of design. Diehl and Christianns (2006) asserted that “…..thocus on the interaction with the material world has woken up the interest of the design disciplines to take part in these studies” (p. 503).

As previously mentioned, the cultural transmission comes in two forms; one is unstructured cross-culture, and the other is more of a form of structured Cross-Culture Design. The unstructured version is a free flow of cultural interaction throughout the history, whereas the structured version is a controlled and strategically driven cultural mixture. This thesis deals with the development of a structured approach to ‘Cross-Cultural Design (CCD)’ as a design learning methodology.

Don Norman (2010) declares that design education must change so that designers can have an understanding of (among other issues), societal and behavioural problems, and that designers should apply service design approaches in all aspects of the process so that design outcomes can do more than scrape the surface of complex social issues. If the designers of today are educated to be more culturally aware, then cross-cultural consideration becomes a universal and integral part of the design process.

Minimal exploration has been carried out on CCD with regards to its involvement in design practice, so there is a limitation to the academic resources that deal with this topic. In the thesis, four CCD short course programmes were conducted over the past four years since 2011. The programmes were developed and conducted in collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London (UK), Korea Institute of Design Promotion (KIDP) and Regional Design Center (RDC). The focus of these education programmes moved from the inspirational benefits of cross-cultural experience to the practicality and marketability of the design. As a result, a CCD learning model was proposed and developed.

The initial aim of this project was to develop an educational framework that encouraged students within higher education design programmes to become more engaged in Cross-Cultural Design, and with culture in general. In order to achieve this, this study has carried out a wide range of literature reviews, case studies, and more importantly, Cross-Cultural Design short courses over the past four years since 2011.

The findings from these various approaches, with regards to identifying the most comprehensive and effective tool to guide people within Cross-Cultural Design, will now be gathered, processed, and consolidated into a Cross-Cultural Design educational framework.

4. Understanding and defining Cross-Cultural Design (CCD)

Cross-Cultural Design is a design embracing different cultures, languages and other social contexts. In the era of globalisation, Cross-Cultural Design is initially about improving the quality of communicational understanding across cultures and make a wider appeal to an international audience from all over the world with different cultural backgrounds. Figure 1 shows a New Year’s card design from 1991 with a use of Chinese character for 羊which means ‘sheep’ to replace English character Y, for celebrating the year of the sheep.



Figure 1. Use of Chinese Character in New Year’s card 1991 (Steiner & Haas, 1995: p.25)

Developed from simple use of multi-cultural languages on the visual materials, different national cultures have been recently more actively used for advertising global brands. A recent example of Apple’s i-phone 4 TV advert in 2010, for example, has the same story telling with even the same music, however, different cultural theme for each country as seen in Figure 2. For UK’s advert, the football was the main theme that shows people wearing football uniform talking to friends whereas Korean advert shows a newly married bride with Korean traditional custom talking to her mother. The cross-cultural design is not only about language and communication but also about brining people’s different values, lifestyles and relationship for a better understanding of each other.

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Figure 2. I-phone’s multi-cultural adertisment, 2010

The Korean kitchen interior company Hansam’s kitchen design showcased in 2009 (Figure 3) was a good example of Cross-Cultural Design, which reflected the different lifestyles in design. The main concept it introduced was to combine the Western kitchen table culture with the Eastern floor-seating culture. The primary purpose of the Western table is sitting and dining, whilst the typical purpose of the Eastern table is to have tea. The cross-cultural concept is multicultural in design, creating a space for both eating and drinking tea and induces an environment for socialising cross-culturally as well.



Figure 3. Hansam cross-cultural kitchen design(Left) & ORI-OCI(Right)

Another example of a fusion between two cultures of the occidental and the oriental is ‘ORI-OCI’ by Italian designer Carlo Contin. ‘ORI-OCI’ consists of two parts; Chopsticks as the main body, which can be assembled by the user, with other parts that transform into cutlery at their choosing.

Through the case studies above, we have been able to observe and explore in greater depth how many tools and elements of design and culture interact, and what these are capable of producing and expressing in their designs. The interaction and use of such cultural interactions are not one-dimensional but is, in fact, very complex. From materials and design, nature, environmental and societal structures to lifestyle or religious factors, we were able to explore the various interaction of cultures in design. Erin Moor, a designer and ethnographer, in her article, “Cross cultural design = Living on the edge”, stated that “living on the borders (‘on the edge’) is easy to see how people of one place have integrated the customs and languages of another into their daily lives. When one lives on the border, cultural exchange or collision is inevitable. Products, services and communications more often than not, cater to people of both or many backgrounds” (Moore, 2010)

Based on the findings from case studies, the below are 5 key characteristics of Cross-Cultural Design identified in this paper;

1) Cross-cultural understanding

A good Cross-Cultural Design should derive its concept from the in-depth understanding of cultural differences including cultural concept, material, and behaviour rather than just playing with visual elements like patterns and colours. For this, historical context, tradition and customs, as well as locality of each culture, should be understood.

2) Originality

Cross-Cultural Design requires an ability to think creatively and design a quality of being unique and novel. It should be able to propose a new notion of function, form, meaning and lifestyle through design activity.

3) Practicality

Cross-Cultural Design is about the creation of a usable design for everyday life through combined cultures. It should consider various practical aspects of the design as an everyday commodity if the design can fit into cultures and be used in our daily life, can be easily made and mass-produced at a marketable price, have a clear target user, and lastly, it inspires the user for the better lifestyle.

4) Universal design

Cross-Cultural Design should produce universally understandable design with minimised cultural errors and misunderstanding. It should be able to be used in any places, and its audience should be able to understand the cultural elements and ascendancy. It also should be able to deliver universal issues or values whilst preventing any cultural misunderstanding. Furthermore, it can have cultural impact on each other’s culture either to encourage changing one culture upon the other or protecting one from the other.

5) Cultural identity

Lastly, Cross-Cultural Design should be culturally distinctive and represent the participating cultures. Cultural identity can be shown on the form, material, colour and pattern or symbol.

Figure 4. Characteristics of CCD

5. Setting up CCD learning reflection tool

To help design students and designers to conduct Cross-Cultural Design, we developed a CCD learning tool that is a form of self-reflective practice, based on Schon’s concept of reflective practice. Reflective practitioner Schön (1983, 1987) identified two types of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action was seen as a process that was spontaneous. In this regard, the practitioner employs intuition and experience to deal with the here and now. On the other hand, reflection-on-action is thinking that is retrospective and involves teachers using structured reflection to analyse their practice. Schon’s ideas were influential because he managed to amalgamate different ideas about practice, creativity, and knowledge into a coherent body of thought that could be applied as a critical strategy (Crouch & Pearce, 2012, p.44-4). However, as Killion & Todnem (1991) pointed out, Schön’s model lacks a way of “future thinking.” In order to remedy this we have developed a form of “reflection-for-action” which is a more proactive process to make a change (improvement) to future action, whereas reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action are focusing on revisiting the past for a reflective process.

As a result, here, CCD reflection tool is developed based on 2 types of reflection process; (1) Reflection-in/on-Action and (2) Reflection-for-Action. The template of the reflection tool is presented in Table 2. Reflection tool (1) Reflection-in/on-Action tool is an ‘in-project’ check list which is primary to be applied after the design outcome, but also during the design process as a guide. Reflection tool (2) The Reflection-for-Action tool is a ‘post-project’ check list, not only used to evaluate the outcomes but also to seek for solutions to make future improvement for balanced CCD. The CCD learning reflection tool uses a Pentagon-shaped radar chart method with pre-set questions to grade each criterion. The evaluation criteria are brought over from the characteristics of Cross-Cultural Design (1) Cross-cultural understanding; (2) Originality; (3) Practicality; (4) Universal design; and (5) Cultural identity.

Therefore, based on the pentagon shaped radar chart generated in the Reflection-in/on-Action tool, this tool requires students and designers to identify the weak points in their design, work out the problems, and find the solutions in the Refletion-for-Action tool (Blue colume in Table 2). This template of The CCD learning reflection tool has been tested with the following four CCD short courses since 2011.

Table 1. Brief of 4 CCD short courses since 2011

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Programme | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Title | Cross-Cultural Design of Korean and Britain | Bon Voyage | Tourism of the Ordinary | Entangled Cultures |
| Date | June 2011 - September 2011 | June 2012 - September 2012 | June 2013 - September 2013 | June 2014 - September 2014 |
| Length | 4 months | 4 months | 4 months | 4 months |
| Participants | 26 BA Design students | 28 BA, 4 MA Design students | 24 BA Design students | 20 BA Design students |
| Design Outcomes | 8 projects | 11 projects | 12 projects | 7 projects |
| Exhibition | Designersblock | TENT London | TENT London | TENT London |

Table 2. Cross-Cultural Design Reflection Tool – Example

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) Reflection in/on  (In-project check list) | | | (2) Reflection for  (Post-project check list) | |
| C:\DOCUME~1\Owner\LOCALS~1\Temp\UNI00000f6016fb.gif  Re:born Tie |  | | | C:\Users\JeeYeon\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\Pentagon-Reborn 1.jpg | |
| Criteria | This check list is to be completed as the student does the project. | | | This check list is to be completed after the project. | |
| To grasp the current state of the design outcome. | | | To identify problems and to find a way to improve it for the future. | |
| Evaluation | | | Strategy | |
| Problem | Solution |
| Cross-cultural understanding  (CCU) | Does this understand the different cultural elements? (Cultural construction concept, material practices and behaviour, not just simply combining patterns and colours). | 1 | 5 | N/A | |
| Understanding of historical context of each culture. | 1 |  |  | |
| Understanding of tradition and customs of each culture. | 1 |
| Understanding of locality of each culture. | 1 |
| Positioning motives of different cultures. | 1 |
| Originality  (O) | Newness | 1 | 5 | N/A | |
| Function | 1 |
| Form | 1 |
| Meaning | 1 |
| Lifestyle |  |
| Practicality  (P) | Fit culture: Can this be used in our daily life? | 1 | 5 | N/A | |
| Make: Can this be mass-produced? | 1 |
| Cost: Can this be produced at a marketable price? | 1 |
| User: Does it have a clear target? | 1 |
| Aspirational: Does this inspire the user for the better lifestyle? | 1 |
| Universal design  (U) | Can it be used in any places? | 1 | 3 |  |  |
| Can audience understand the cultural elements and ascendancy? | 1 |  |  |
| Does it deliver any universal issues or values? | 1 |  |  |
| Does it prevent cultural misunderstanding? | 1 | Because Korean Goreum is not well-known, audiences tend to link it to a different design of a bow tie. | Include introduction of Korean Goreum in the package. |
| Does this have any cultural impact on each other’s culture – either to encourage changing one culture upon the other or protecting one from the other? | 1 | Goreum is a unique Korean way of fastening clothes, but it is not reflected in the design. |  |
| Cultural identity  (CI) | Does it clearly represent both cultures? | 1 | 3 |  |  |
| Form | 1 |  |  |
| Material | 1 |  |  |
| Colour | 1 | Random choice of leftover fabric. | Using Korean traditional fabric with patterns and colours. |
| Pattern/symbol | 1 | Random choice of leftover fabric. |

\*1 (YES), \*\* Blue – Required to be filled by Students

A brief summary of CCD learning reflection tool of the selected design projects from four short courses are presented below.

Table 3. Summary of CCD projects with CCD learning reflection tool

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Project details | In-project check list | Post-project check list |
| 1 | H:\KDM Cross Cultural Design Exhibition 2011\KDM_CCD_동영상,사진\kdm 회원 제출사진\IMG_7117.JPG | Pin Heads  (Cross-Cultural Design of Korean and Britain, 2011)  Pinheads design motifs from both UK/Korean royal families. | C:\Users\JeeYeon\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\Summary.jpg | |
| 2 | C:\Documents and Settings\dt\Desktop\Untitled-1 copy 2 copy.jpg | Sot Dae Infuser  (Bon-Voyage, 2012)  Sharing a folk story during tea time. | C:\Users\JeeYeon\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\Summary.jpg | |
| 3 |  | Auto Veil-Well Wish  (Tourism of the ordinary, 2013)  A new types of wedding celebration. | C:\Users\JeeYeon\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\Summary.jpg | |
| 4 |  | T:Cle  (Entangled Cultures, 2014)  A guidebook transform accessories. | C:\Users\JeeYeon\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\Summary.jpg | |

6. Findings and discussions

6.1. Significance of Cross-Cultural Design as a design education method

6.1.1. Systemic educational design method

After each CCD short course, we carried out feedback sessions with participating students and teaching team in order to evaluate our CCD reflection tool. According to Jang Sanggeun, director of Gwangju Deisgn Center, who is the head organiser of their short course programme, the CCD learning reflection tool used in the CCD short courses helped students to explore culture more as designers. Many participating students also said that using CCD learning reflective tool was easy to follow and helped them to carry out systematic design process. Moreover, they found that the whole experience of following CCD learning reflective tool was not only about developing design, but also educational which taught the design aspects and cultural concerns to be considered for balanced Cross-Cultural Design.

6.1.2. Creative synergies and cultural diversities

One of the principal aims of exploring and formalising ‘Cross-Cultural Design’ as a design education method is to enrich culture and society through generating new cultural practices and the objects that support those practices. From our practical test with design students for the past 4 years proved that CCD reflective tool helps students to benefit creative synergies of differing cultural practices, objects and artefacts that emerge when multiple cultures collide and hybridise.

As we develop in an ever-expanding global society, the demand for designers to understand cultural differences is on the increase. The Cross-Cultural Design approach explores cultural differences whilst celebrating diversity by opening a dialogue between cultures through design. At the same time, ‘Cross-Cultural Design’, by respecting cultural diversity, also protects and enhances the current local cultures.

6.2. The benefits of Cross-Cultural Design education

Through Cross-Cultural Design practice, we showed that design should go beyond existing paradigms. Moreover, designers should create their own paradigm and be able to tell stories through their work. Indeed, good design is complete when people use it. Therefore, the design should be able to attend to people’s needs and desires. It should be a tool for change and not just to market and sell “lifestyle” products. As discussed throughout this thesis, the main issue with Korean design education is that it is too centred on technology, and lacks user-oriented understanding and contextual sensitivity.

Based on the findings from carrying out programmes over a five year period, particularly by comparing Korean and British culture, the benefits of Cross-Cultural Design are summarised as follows;

Figure 5. Structure of CCD’s benefit

The immediate and primary benefits are to those students and designers who receive CCD education. With the CCD method, students and designers can find new design possibilities, global design capabilities and a wider spectrum of audiences. Furthermore, they can attain self-promotion and networking skills based on cultural understanding and interaction. The secondary benefit is for educators providing the CCD education itself and for the government or related organisations supporting CCD. Educators can benefit from CCD because it helps to develop more appropriate teaching methodologies. Governments and related organisations can benefit from CCD because it can be used as a way of promoting national culture or design and improve a country’s cultural identity. Lastly, the third benefit is for the consumer, who will actually use the finished products of CCD. In this regard, CCD can offer culturally well-rounded products and services for contemporary consumers who are becoming familiar with standardised global production, or want to express their own cultural identity. Moreover, CCD can contribute to the improvement of the universality and diversity of products and services. In this light, the programmes carried out and presented in this thesis are extremely significant.

Table 4. Benefits of Cross-Cultural Design

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Receiver | Students / Designer | Developing global design capability. Self-promotion. New design possibilities. Networking and Wider spectrum of audience |
| Provider | Teaching team (Educator) | More diverse teaching methodologies |
| Supporter | Government or organisation | Promotion of national culture. Improving national cultural identity |
| End-user | Consumers | Culturally interesting products and services, Universal design |

The immediate and primary benefits are to those students and designers who receive CCD education. With the CCD method, students and designers can find new design possibilities, global design capabilities and a wider spectrum of audiences. Furthermore, they can attain self-promotion and networking skills based on cultural understanding and interaction. The secondary benefit is for educators providing the CCD education itself and for the government or related organisations supporting CCD. Educators can benefit from CCD because it helps to develop more appropriate teaching methodologies. Governments and related organisations can benefit from CCD because it can be used as a way of promoting national culture or design and improve a country’s cultural identity. Lastly, the third benefit is for the consumer, who will actually use the finished products of CCD. In this regard, CCD can offer culturally well-rounded products and services for contemporary consumers who are becoming familiar with standardised global production, or want to express their own cultural identity. Moreover, CCD can contribute to the improvement of the universality and diversity of products and services. In this light, the programmes carried out and presented in this thesis are extremely significant.

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement(s) (if any) should be in 10 pt Times regular, full justified, before references, with title in unnumbered second level heading.

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