



## Chinese Cultural Taboos That Affect Their Language & Behavior Choices

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### Abstract

Every culture has its own taboos. Communication works better when the participants share more assumptions and knowledge about each other (Scollon & Scollon, 2000). However, in many cases, participants realize the existence of the rules associated with taboos only after they have violated them. Those who do not observe these social “rules” might face serious results, such as total embarrassment or, as Saville-Troike (1989) puts it, they may be accused of immorality and face social ostracism. This paper reports that certain verbal and non-verbal taboos among Chinese people centuries ago still affect their language and behavior choices. Two types of Chinese possible taboos in language and behavior are introduced and compared with cultures of the Koreans and Americans: (1) gift-giving taboos which are phonologically linked to the “separation” and “death” in Chinese society, and (2) verbal expressions which are linked to the twelve zodiac-animals in Chinese traditional metaphors. This research paper also tries to answer two questions related to Asian culture and history: (1) whether Koreans share more of these phonologically-linked taboos than Americans do because Korean language has very similar sounds to Chinese; and (2) whether Koreans share with Chinese people more of the zodiac-animal-linked metaphors (i.e., the rat, the bull/cow, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the sheep/lamb, the monkey, the chicken, the dog, and the pig) than Americans do because Korean people also use the same animals as a cycle of every twelve years. Data were collected in two ways: questionnaires and interviews.

**Keywords:** Taboo, Verbal and non-verbal communication, Intercultural communication, Stereotype, Zodiac cycle

### 1. Introduction

According to Kumaravadivelu (2003), culture is such a complicated concept that there is no single definition or a simple description for it. It brings to mind different images to different people. In a broad sense, it includes a wide variety of constructs such as the mental habits, personal prejudices, moral values, social customs, artistic achievements, and aesthetic preferences of particular societies. It is a relatively societal construct referring to the general view of culture as creative endeavors such as theater, dance, music, literature, and art. Here, in a narrow sense of culture, this paper looks at a relatively personal construct referring to the patterns of behavior, values, and beliefs that guide the everyday life of an individual or a group of individuals within a cultural community.

Communication works better the more the participants share assumptions and knowledge about the culture of the world. Scollon & Scollon (2000) state that “Where two people have very similar histories, backgrounds, and experiences, their communication works fairly easily because the inferences each makes about what the other means will be based on common experience and knowledge ( p. 21).” In the same light, the more the participants pay attention to the features of the other’s culture, the better their intentions go across. Therefore, culture teaching and learning should play a role in most L2 education. That is, the components (namely, cognition, affection, and behaviors) of culture should be introduced in a language classroom.

In this paper, two types of Chinese possible taboos in language and behavior are introduced and compared with cultures of the Koreans and Americans: (1) gift-giving taboos which are phonologically linked to the “separation” and “death” in Chinese society and (2) verbal expressions which are linked to the twelve zodiac-animals in Chinese traditional

metaphors. This research paper tries to answer two questions related to Asian culture and history: (1) whether Koreans share more of these phonologically-linked taboos than Americans do because Korean language has very similar sounds to Chinese; and (2) whether Koreans share with Chinese people more of the zodiac-animal-linked metaphors than Americans do because Korean people also use the same animals as a cycle of every twelve years. Data were collected in two ways: questionnaires and interviews.

## 2. Literature Review

According to a review by H. H. Stern (1992), culture teaching and learning has generally included a cognitive component, an affective component, and a behavioral component. The cognitive component relates to various forms of knowledge—geographical knowledge, knowledge about the contributions of the target culture to world civilization, and knowledge about differences in the way of life as well as an understanding of values and attitudes in the L2 community. The affective component relates to L2 learners' curiosity about and empathy for the target culture. The behavioral component relates to learners' ability to interpret culturally relevant behavior, and to conduct themselves in culturally appropriate ways.

Bonny Norton (2000), a Canadian scholar, posits that cultural identity is likely to diverge based not only on learners' national and linguistic background but also on their ethnic heritage, religious beliefs, class, age, gender, and sexual orientation. Given such a perspective, raising cultural consciousness becomes an issue not only in ESL classes where students from different nationalities come together to learn a common second language, but also in EFL classes where students may share the same national and linguistic background (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Also, Claire Kramsch (2001), a professor of German and Foreign Language Department of UC Berkeley, states that if speakers of different language do not understand one another, it is not because their language cannot be mutually translated into one another. It is because they don't share the same way of viewing and interpreting events; and they don't agree on the meaning and the value of the concepts underlying the words. In short, they don't cut up reality or categorize experience in the same manner. Understanding across languages does not depend on structural equivalences but on common conceptual system, born from the larger context of our experience. Thus, appropriate communication requires not only the sociolinguistic knowledge of the host or shared language but also knowledge of the cultural rules to contribute to the content and the process of meaningful social interaction.

People with different culture make more mistakes in drawing inferences about what the other means than people from same culture. In big cities like New York, Paris, Vancouver, Shanghai, Taipei, etc., intercultural communication and stereotyping can occur in each unique setting. In order to show certain good will or avoid misunderstanding with people of different cultures, most participants would tend to adjust their language and behavior in expressing attitudes toward others. Knowledge of prominent features of the other's culture like non-verbal and verbal taboos, seldom discussed in language textbooks or in classrooms as part of cultural instruction, is probably essential to successful communicative interaction (Shen, 1993).

### 2.1 What is a Taboo?

Captain James Cook, a British navigator and explorer, not only made many territorial discoveries in the islands of the South Pacific Ocean (cf. a lesson plan "It's bad luck", 2004, August 13). He also made a linguistic discovery: the term *taboo*. Captain Cook recorded this word in his journal of 1777 while he was in the Friendly Islands (now Tonga). The word *taboo*, which we have borrowed, comes from the Tongan *tabu*. The Tongans used *tabu* as an adjective that refers to persons or things "under prohibition, forbidden or set apart." Captain Cook, however, made it into a noun referring to the prohibition itself and a verb meaning "to make someone or something taboo."

In early contexts it was primarily used to evoke a breach of good manners. Today the word evokes either attitudes that are outdated and irrational or topics that were deemed unmentionable in the past but are now being openly discussed (Thody, 1997). To most people, it refers to "forbidden" or "to be avoided" behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal. A taboo is also an expression of disapproved behaviors in a society.

Taboos are established because people believe that such inappropriateness will bring harmful consequences to them either because this non-verbal or verbal behavior violates a code based on supernatural beliefs or it violates the moral code of the society (Wardhaugh, 1992). Once taboos are formed in a country, references to them become taboo, too (Shen, 1993). We may find that taboos occur in all kinds of environments, from ancient to modern society, and at all levels of civilization. Members of each community are psychologically and physically trained and shaped by the community to observe the "rules" closely. For example, Westerners wear black for a funeral and white for a wedding. But in the ancient Chinese weddings, a white dress was not allowed to be worn because white was for a funeral. Therefore, all individuals involved had to wear black formal costumes. Later, the color changed to red. Now under Western influence, white is the customary formal color for brides and sometimes for bridegrooms, too (Shen, 1993).

Such prohibition can be completely arbitrary with no rational explanation to back it up or it can be directly based upon commonly accepted principles. The authority behind this prohibition is often attributed to supernatural power and in the

danger inherent in the behavior itself. Thus, violating a taboo can bring bad luck and misfortune to us and our families. There are many areas of life that have taboos: food, speech, actions, numbers, colors, gifts and holidays are just a few. What may be taboo in one culture could be acceptable in another. Many cultures have food taboos. For example, the majority of Westerners abhor the idea of eating horses, dogs, or insects, whereas some Cantonese in China used to have dog meat in the winter. Some foods are prohibited for religious reasons and because they are considered “dirty,” “unnatural” or “unhealthy.” For example, Moslems will not eat pork; Hindus will not consume beef.

The reason people give for their taboos are as varied as the prohibited foods. They may cause sickness or skin disease and their consumption may be offensive to supernatural beings in various ways. Although the Chinese people have no taboo on food, they have taboos on some actions related to food. For instance, it is taboo to cut a pear among friends and relatives as the words for “cutting pear” in Chinese have the same sound as being separated. Also, one must never let two chopsticks stand in a bowl of rice, since such action looks just like standing incense sticks up in sand, which is done only as an offering to a dead person.

There are also many taboos associated with gift giving. A clock is a very nice gift in some cultures, but the Chinese have a prohibition against giving clocks as gifts, because the word clock in Mandarin has a similar sound as death. When giving gifts to a friend or associate from another culture, it’s a good idea to find out if there are any gifts to avoid so you don’t violate a taboo.

Most modern people would dismiss these taboos as “old superstitions.” Yet, these prohibitions persist because people keep passing their beliefs on to their children and grandchildren. Perhaps, the reason why taboos continue to persist is that most people are basically afraid of bad luck and bad omens. Thus, whether one believes in any taboo or not, it might be best to avoid any proscribed person, thing, or event that can bring bad luck and unhappiness to one’s life.

## *2.2 Non-Verbal and Verbal Taboos*

### *2.2.1 Non-Verbal Taboos*

Some non-verbal taboos may seem funny, but severe punishment might have come to those who failed to observe the rules in an earlier time and today as well. Accidents may also result from taboo non-verbal cues (e.g., an inappropriate gesture). For example, in 1988, in Los Angeles, an entertainer from Thailand was reported to have been convicted of the murder of a young Laotian. The entertainer was singing in an after-hours Thai cabaret when the Laotian, a patron, put his foot on a chair with the sole directed at the entertainer. When the cabaret closed, the entertainer followed the man and shot him. The reason was that among Southeast Asians, showing or directing the sole of the shoe to another person is considered a grievous insult (Axtell, 1991).

An incident also took place in Hong Kong a few years ago because of a hand signal miscommunication. A television station there took an annual picture of all the contracted entertainers before the Chinese New Year. As a joke, famous Kung-fu actor who held his fist with his middle finger stuck out on top of the head of an actress who stood in front of him. When his photo appeared in the newspapers, the station received dozens of calls from Westerners living in Hong Kong complaining about the indecent gesture. To them, when the middle finger is used, there is only one interpretation – indecency. When he applied this gesture, according to his explanation, he meant to suggest that his friend had grown horns on her head for fun. The actor refused to apologize because his gesture was not intended to be an insult as the gesture is not considered indecent in Chinese society.

As for gift-giving taboos, we need to keep in mind that in Muslim countries gifts should be presented with the right hand only because the left is considered unclean. While a bottle of wine would be a welcome gift in many countries, such a gift should be avoided in Muslim countries, which have strict religious prohibitions against alcohol. If we are invited to someone’s home, flowers for the host are usually appreciated the world over. However, in much of Europe and China, chrysanthemums are associated with funerals, and red flowers have a strong romantic connotation. These should be avoided.

Several times, when my Korean informant, Ms. Park, talked about classic words or terms used in Korean, I could figure out the exact Chinese counterparts merely from her pronunciation. This is not surprising because the cultural influences of China upon Korea over the centuries have left an indelible mark upon both the written and spoken Korean language. It is possible to trace many aspects of Korean language and culture back to ancient China. But not long ago, when Ms. Park gave me a fan as a gift, I was a little shocked.

To many Chinese people, a fan is a forbidden present because it has the identical sound as “separation.” If a person gives a fan to his or her friend, their friendship will stop or diminish from that time. Therefore, it has become a phonologically linked taboo to give friends a fan in Chinese society. Whether or not do Korean people have similar phonologically-linked taboos as the Chinese do? The first part of the questionnaire elicits data to see if there are any similarities between Chinese and Korean people on this point because of the similar language sounds.

### 2.2.2 Verbal taboos

In every language there seem to be certain “unmentionables” – words of such strong affective connotation that they cannot be used in polite discourse. Two verbal taboos are probably universal. The first of these are words that deal with excretion and sex. For example, when a woman needs to go to the toilet because “nature calls,” she will ask people where the “rest room” or “powder room” is, although she has no intention of resting or putting powder on her face. Second, in both Western and Asian cultures the fear of death carries over into fear of the words having to do with death. Many people, therefore, substitute words, such as “died” or “death” with expressions such as “passed away,” “went to his reward”, or “departed” (Hayakawa, 1982).

People generally like to hear words that bless one’s good health and long life or metaphors that generate positive descriptions of one’s personality and appearance. However, because of different cultural backgrounds, an expression in one country can cause a quite different effect in another. For example, Chinese people would feel horrified or upset if they were told before a performance to “break a leg,” an English expression used to wish one good luck.

In this paper, Chinese animal-linked taboos are compared with those of Korea because both countries have the same twelve animals (i.e., the rat, the ox, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the sheep, the monkey, the chicken, the dog, and the pig) as part of the zodiac cycle representing a unit of time. At the same time, these verbal animal-linked metaphors are also compared with the verbal expressions of American to see if there are any significant differences.

### 2.2.3 Hypotheses

As mentioned, many Chinese people are relatively superstitious to the extent that they will avoid doing anything that they believe can bring bad luck. Chinese non-verbal phonologically linked taboos are products of ancient days. They were generated from an identical sound or groups of sounds which represent evil objects, death, disasters, and other negative occurrences (Shen, 1993). Since a large portion of Korean vocabulary comes from Chinese culture, especially Confucian classics, my first hypothesis is that Korean people have most of the phonologically linked taboos Chinese people do.

A special zodiac cycle, consisting of the twelve animals (i.e., the rat, the bull/cow, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the sheep/lamb, the monkey, the chicken, the dog, and the pig), has been shared by both Chinese and Korean people for hundreds of years. One animal represents one year, and twelve years is a complete cycle. In ancient Chinese culture, most of these animals were good symbols. They were quite welcomed and respected. Nevertheless, in modern Chinese culture negative connotations are given to some of the animals. It means some of the animals have become verbal taboos in describing a person’s character or appearance.

Koreans, being so historically and geographically related to the Chinese, probably at some time in the past associated the same meanings to the twelve animals as Chinese people did. Furthermore, it seems likely that meanings would have evolved over the years as they have for the Chinese, but not necessarily in the same direction. The second part of the questionnaire is designed to examine if Chinese and Korean people still come to a consensus on which animal-linked vocabulary words are forbidden and which are acceptable to use in reference to a friend. Regarding verbal taboos, my second hypothesis is that Chinese and Koreans will share more animal-linked taboos than either shares with Americans.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Respondents

The sample for this study consisted of thirty people from different countries. Ethnicity was determined through questionnaires in which respondents provided their own label for their background. In all, there were ten Chinese people (seven from Taiwan, one from Mainland China, one from Hong Kong, and one from the US), ten Koreans (all from South Korea), and sixteen Americans (six Mexican-Americans, three German-Americans, one Italian-American, one African-American, and five Anglo-Americans). Among the ten Chinese people, aged from 25 – 38, were two males and eight females. Among the ten Koreans, aged from 28 - 40, were six males and four females. Among the sixteen Americans, aged from 20 – 58, were eight males and eight females.

### 3.2 Data collection

Data were collected in two ways: informal interviews and the questionnaire. The questionnaire was culturally determined. To focus on the characteristics of Chinese taboos, questions basically fell into two categories: (1) non-verbal phonologically linked examples of inappropriate usage, such as homonyms or expressions forbidden to certain groups within Chinese culture, and (2) verbal animal-linked metaphors and inappropriate language choices from the Chinese and Korean zodiac.

In the questionnaire, Questions one through six are non-verbal phonologically-linked taboos that Chinese people have been aware of for hundreds of years. In Questions seven through nineteen are designed to elicit what animal-linked vocabulary words would be verbal taboos among the Chinese, Korean, and American peoples (See Appendix A).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Non-verbal phonologically-linked taboos

Because Chinese people yearn to reach or be close to a state of “being blessed” and to stay away from “evil” or “bad luck” as much as possible, they create taboo situations. The phonological parts of taboos mentioned in the first six questions in the Questionnaire are examples of evil-related things: death and separation; thus, they became representative of the Chinese taboo system.

#### 4.1.1 Sounds related to “separation”

**(1) Chinese:** The fan (*shan*) and the umbrella (*san*) have very similar sounds to the word “*san*”, which means “separation” or “scattered.”

**Korean:** The fan (*son*) and the umbrella (*san*) do not sound similar to the word “*zhok*”, which also means “separation” or “scattered.”

Therefore, the Chinese and Koreans did not share this taboo.

#### Insert Question 1 about here

#### Insert Question 2 about here

The Chinese sound *san* means “to break up, to dismiss, and to dissolve.” It is a “forbidden” word among Chinese performers because their professional survival depends on a continuous succession of contracts; therefore, for them, the very notion of “breaking up” infers the destruction of their career. This tradition is carried to the extent of preventing a performer not only from voicing this particular word, but even from mentioning any term that includes the similar or identical sounds, such as “*shan*” which means fan, or “*san*” which means umbrella. Therefore, 60% of the Chinese respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly about giving a friend a fan or an umbrella as a gift. The others 40% or less had no objection to such a gift. The reason was that a beautifully painted fan can decorate the wall and an umbrella is very useful in our daily life. It is also interesting to note that, in ancient China, a fan could be given as a parting present in the hope that the traveler could use it to keep himself cool. So opinions varied here.

One hundred percent of Koreans agreed or agreed strongly to the first two questions. To Korean people, a fan (*son*) or an umbrella (*san*) is traditionally regarded as a common gift, and neither of them has similar sound to “separation” (*zhok*) as the Chinese words do, so there is no negative meaning to them.

To Americans, they would give their friend a fan as a souvenir type gift or an umbrella as a practical gift if she or he needs one. More than 80% Americans agreed or agreed strongly to the first two questions. Those who disagreed said a fan or umbrella was not a gift they would like.

**(2) Chinese:** “Cutting a pear in two halves” (*feng li*) can be another forbidden action among Chinese because it sounds exactly like *feng li*, which means “separation”.

**Korean:** “Cutting a pear in two halves” (*bun yi*) does not sound like (*bul li*), which means “separation”.

Therefore, the Chinese and Koreans did not share this taboo.

#### Insert Question 6 about here

In one Chinese opera, a fruit merchant claims that his pears will make a marriage happy. But lovers should never cut up or divide pears since the word for “pear” (*li*) is phonologically identical with the word for “separation” (*li*). For the same reasons, relatives or friends will avoid dividing pears among themselves. Therefore, 50% of the Chinese respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with doing this action. In Korea, since “cutting a pear in two halves” (*bun yi*) does not sound like (*bul li*) which means “separation”, 100% of the Koreans agreed or agreed strongly. They and the American respondents thought there was no problem with this action and that it would be seen as a gesture of friendship and generosity. Sharing is considered a good thing as it shows that one cares for another. Cutting a pear is the same as cutting any other fruit.

#### 4.1.2 Sounds related to “death”

**(1) Chinese:** The term “giving a clock” (*song zhong*) is pronounced the same as *song zhong*, which is related to “death”.

**Korean:** “giving a clock” (*song zhong*) sounds differently from the term *song young*, which is related to “death”.

Therefore, the Chinese and Koreans did not share this taboo.

#### Insert Question 3 about here

The Chinese sound for clock is *zhong*. For most Chinese, one should never give it as a present because the pronunciation of “giving a clock” (*song zhong*) to a person is the same as *song zhong*, which means to bid farewell to a dying person on his or her deathbed. That is why 70% of the Chinese respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with giving a friend a clock as a gift. The ones who agreed said they would only give it to a person their age.

One hundred percent of Koreans and Americans all agreed or agreed strongly with giving a clock to a friend. To Korean people, a clock is a traditional and popular gift for a friend when he or she starts a business. The Korean sound for “giving a clock” is “*song zhong*,” and the sound for “biding farewell to a dying person on his or her deathbed” is “*song young*.” They sound quite different.

To Americans, clocks or watches make lovely gifts and they are long lasting. Certain brands and styles would be more acceptable. One American responded that the fancier, the more appropriate. And one even said, “Can never have too many.”

**(2) Chinese:** The number 4 (*si*) and “*si*,” which means “death,” are pronounced the same.

**Korean:** The number 4 (*sa*) and “*sa*,” which means “death,” are pronounced the same.

Therefore, the Chinese and Koreans **do share** this taboo but Americans do not.

#### **Insert Question 5 about here**

The number “4” is considered a word associated with “death” to 80% of the Chinese and 90% of the Korean respondents as it has the same sound as “*si*” or “*sa*” for “death.” In most elevators or in hospitals, Chinese and Koreans would avoid using “4” to get rid of this bad connotation.

To Americans, the number 4 is perfectly all right to use in an elevator or hospital; therefore, 100% of the respondents agreed. Only the number “13” is considered bad luck in American culture. Therefore, a Chinese or Korean patient would react far more strongly to being assigned to a room or a floor in a hospital with the number four than would an American patient assigned to a “Room 13” or “floor 13.” This is the only phonologically-linked taboo that I found shared by the Chinese and Koreans.

#### 4.1.3 Sounds related to “disaster” or “accident”

**(3) Chinese:** “Turning over (*fan*) a fish” can be a forbidden action on a boat to avoid the disastrous outcome of a ship being overturned (*fan*) in the ocean.

**Korean:** “Turning over (*zhokban*) a fish” is not a forbidden action on a boat to avoid bad luck.

Therefore, the Chinese and Koreans did not share this taboo.

#### **Insert Question 4 about here**

Fifty percent of the Chinese respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with doing it. In Southern China, seamen’s families generally avoid voicing “*fan*” (a Chinese sound for “turn over”). They associate the disastrous outcome of a ship being overturned in the ocean with the action word for the concept. If fearing what one says might bring the unwanted consequence into reality, the taboo situation is established. To these families, it is also a taboo behavior to turn fish topside down after one finishes the meat on that side. They envision the fish as the ship that carries their loved ones, so turning the fish over on the dish would symbolize that the ship has capsized in the ocean.

Ninety percent of the Koreans agreed with the action because they thought it would be a way to finish a fish neatly or to see if there is more to eat. They do not associate the sound for “turn over” with the disastrous outcome of a ship being overturned in the ocean through the action word for that concept.

More than seventy percent of the Americans agreed because they thought it makes sense and would probably be easier that way, especially if the fish has a lot of bones in the middle. The rest who disagreed (less than 30%) did not understand why they would need to turn the fish over if the bones had been removed before they bought the fish in an American supermarket.

#### 4.2 Verbal animal-linked taboos

As mentioned above, Chinese and Koreans have the same twelve animals in the zodiac cycle to represent a unit of time. They are used to convey positive values in both cultures. Since Asian people have become more and more westernized in the last thirty years, some animal-linked vocabulary words in modern Chinese society have different connotations from what they did in old Chinese culture. These animals were also compared among the Chinese, Koreans and American respondents to find if there are significant differences between the East and the West. Which are verbal taboos and which are not? Data were collected in two ways: the questionnaire and interviews.

##### **(1) The rat**

The rat is the first creature in the old Chinese zodiac. It was associated with money. When people hear a rat scurrying around for food at night, it is said to be “counting money”. The term “money-rat” is a disparaging way of referring to a miser. In some old legends, rats can turn into demons—male demons usually, in contrast with the fox that turns into a female demon.

#### **Insert Question 7 about here**

Fifty percent of the Chinese respondents agreed that it is fine to say to a person's face that he or she is like a rat, but they claim that it must depend on the tone of voice, the hearer's age, and the context. The other 50% disagreed or disagreed strongly and said that rats are dirty and ugly, so it would be rude to say so.

One hundred percent of Korean respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly. Koreans think it would be rude or humiliating to say so under any circumstances because rats are mean and cunning, and they always steal rice and run away.

Ninety percent of the Americans disagreed or disagreed strongly. They think that rats are dirty, ugly and sneaky, and they carry disease. It would be an insult. However, they might say, "You look like a drowned rat" to someone caught in the rain or someone who deserves it.

## **(2) The bull/cow**

The bull/cow is the second animal in the Chinese zodiac and follows the rat. The sound *niu* is used in Chinese as a generic term covering the animals distinguished in English as ox, cow, bull, etc. To Chinese, the *niu* is the animal that draws the plough and acts as a beast of burden. Even today, many Chinese will not eat beef, believing it to be immoral to kill and eat the creature which helps them with the harvest and which therefore deserves their thanks.

### **Insert Question 8 about here**

Eighty percent of the Chinese respondents agreed with saying to a person that he or she is like a bull or cow. To them, the bull/cow (*niu*) is the best hardworking animal. Bulls are strong, and cows are cute and they offer milk. Twenty percent disagreed because they think the bull/cow is slow and very stupid.

Twenty percent of the Koreans agreed that the *niu* could be used to describe a strong man. It could be a compliment to some Koreans to imply hard work without a rest. Eighty percent of them disagreed or disagreed strongly. It refers to a person who acts very slowly or stupidly.

Thirty percent of the American respondents agreed if "bull" is used to imply 'strong', but 70% of them disagreed or disagreed strongly. To them, bulls are stubborn and might mean the person is aggressive. Likewise, cows are fat and sloppy. It would be an insult to describe women.

## **(3) The tiger**

The tiger is the third sign in the Chinese zodiac. The tiger is a symbol of courage and bravery. Nevertheless, the tiger was so much feared that its very name was taboo, and people referred to it as *da chong*, meaning "big insect" or "king of the mountains".

### **Insert Question 9 about here**

### **Insert Question 10 about here**

To Question 9, 80% of the Chinese respondents agreed with using the term "tiger" to describe a man with strength and power. Twenty percent of them disagreed because it also indicates a person's bad temper. To Question 10, 60% of the Chinese disagreed with describing a woman as a tiger because it is over exaggerating. Forty percent of them agreed with using it negatively for a woman if she is really hot-tempered.

To Question 9, 50% of the Koreans respondents agreed or agreed strongly with using the term "tiger" to describe a man being aggressive or powerful. Fifty percent disagreed or disagreed strongly because it refers to one's bad temper. On Question 10, it is interesting to note that 100% of them disagreed with using "tiger" to describe a woman even if she were disgraceful or very hot-tempered.

Seventy-five percent of the Americans agreed or agreed strongly with using it for a man as it implies strong, clever, fast, assertive, initiative, successful, or sexually powerful. It can also be an encouragement to kids as in "Go get'em, tiger." At the same time, about 80% of them agreed with using it to a woman as it implies graceful, fast, and sleek.

## **(4) The rabbit**

The rabbit/hare is the fourth creature in the Chinese zodiac. It was said to be a resident of the moon, just as a raven is of the sun. It is a symbol of longevity.

### **Insert Question 11 about here**

It seems that in this modern society, Chinese people have forgotten the implication of longevity. Nevertheless, 80% of the Chinese agreed because the rabbit is a cute animal. They are smart and fast. Twenty percent disagreed because the rabbit is too timid and too dependent.

Fifty percent of the Koreans who agreed also think the rabbit is cute, so it is appropriate to describe a person as a rabbit. The other 50% disagreed because it is only appropriate to use it to the children, not to adults.

Sixty-five percent of the Americans agreed as it means cute, soft, lovable, and fast. Sometimes people who eat little are said to “eat like a rabbit.” This is not negative in this era where thinness is “in”. The other 35% disagreed as it indicates small, weak, and timid, not very intelligent, or it could be an insult to mean the person has had too many children.

### **(5) The dragon**

The dragon is the fifth creature in the Chinese zodiac. It is one of China’s most complex and multi-tiered symbols. It is said that, like a magic animal, it could fill the space between heaven and earth.

#### **Insert Question 12 about here**

Sixty percent of the Chinese respondents agreed but they did not know why and 40% disagreed because they think it implies mean and unfriendly or sexually active.

Fifty percent of Koreans agreed as it implies “supernatural power”, or the mystery of a divine animal, or it could be a compliment to mean the person is in a good shape. The fifty percent who disagreed did not know why.

More than forty percent Americans, who agreed, expressed that it has a mysterious touch. However, it implies a person’s being too aggressive and a little thoughtless of others. Or it is used for women when it implies someone nasty, as in the term a “dragon lady.” The sixty percent who disagreed or disagreed strongly think dragons are like snakes, evil monsters that harm people. Nevertheless, Americans seldom use the term.

### **(6) The snake**

The snake is the sixth creature in the Chinese zodiac. It is regarded as clever but wicked and treacherous, and treacherous people are said to have a “snake-heart”. Formerly, snakes were objects of worship in certain religions in ancient China. Dreams about snakes are interpreted in various ways. It is lucky to dream that a snake is chasing you. In Taiwan, dreaming about a snake also means you are going to lose wealth. Some aborigines there identified the snake symbolically with the penis.

#### **Insert Question 13 about here**

The thirty percent of the Chinese respondents who agreed think that Chinese people are more tolerant of hearing this kind of comment. It depends on the context mostly. Seventy percent of the Chinese disagreed because they think the snake is evil, devious, ugly, and cold.

One hundred percent of the Koreans disagreed or disagreed strongly with this language choice because they think the snake is vicious, shrewd, creepy and cold. The snake has the worst connotation in every way in Korea.

Seventy-five percent of the Americans disagreed or disagreed strongly. The term implies that the person is sneaky, evil, dangerous, cheating, deceitful, backstabbing, and untrustworthy. The 25% who agreed strongly think the snake implies a person’s being double-faced/tongued.

### **(7) The horse**

The horse is the seventh creature in the Chinese zodiac. In Old Chinese, there were many words denoting the different sizes and colors of the horse. The fact that these words have all died out is an indicator of the declining role of the horse in recent history. In old texts, horses stood for success, speed, and loyalty.

#### **Insert Question 14 about here**

Sixty percent of the Chinese agreed if it implies hard work without a rest. Forty percent disagreed because the horse has a very long face. When the Chinese say to a person “the horse does not know its long face,” it means that the person does not know his or her own shortcomings.

One hundred percent of the Korean disagreed or disagreed strongly with describing a person as a horse. They all think it implies that a person’s face is exceedingly long, so it is an insult.

Fifty percent of the Americans agreed if it is a compliment to say that the person works hard as in a “workhorse” or he is “strong as a horse”. It can also mean someone who runs fast or who is cunning and graceful. In addition, terms like “stallion” and “stud” used for men are usually considered complimentary. The horse is often used in “You eat like a horse” to imply a healthy or big appetite, or “Stop horsing around” to imply “stop wasting time.” Fifty percent disagreed because a horse might be used to mean a big and ugly woman.

### **(8) The sheep/lamb**

The sheep is the eighth creature in the Chinese zodiac. It is the emblem of filial piety as it kneels when suckling its mother. Sheep were, on the whole, less important than the ox and horse in China.

#### **Insert Question 15 about here**

Ninety percent of the Chinese agreed because the lamb is a friendly, nice-tempered, soft animal. But it is also used to describe someone being shy and timid because they lack confidence and follow orders completely.

Forty percent of the Koreans who agreed think the lamb is pretty, pure, naïve, and innocent, so it is appropriate to describe a person as a lamb. The other 60% disagreed because the lamb is weak and stupid, and it is only appropriate to use it for females, not for males.

Sixty-five percent of the Americans agreed because the lamb is gentle, soft, kind, likable, and cuddly. When referring to a child or a female, you can use it as a term of endearment. Thirty-five percent of them disagreed because, like rabbit, it sounds weak and too gentle. Therefore, it depends on gender or age.

### (9) The monkey

The monkey is the ninth creature in the Chinese zodiac. The monkey plays a leading role in Chinese legend. Gods in Chinese mythology sometimes appeared in the guise of monkeys. A picture showing a monkey mounted on a horse is called *ma-shang feng-hou*; a homonymic reading of this title gives the meaning “May you be straight away (*ma-shang*) elevated to the rank of count (*feng-hou*).” Such a picture was a very suitable gift for an official, for example.

#### Insert Question 16 about here

Seventy percent of the Chinese agreed because the monkey is smart and agile. It also refers to one’s “thinness”. The 30% who disagreed think it is not appropriate to use it to an adult. It means he/she is too active.

Only 10% of the Koreans agreed because it may mean that the person is too quick in actions. Ninety percent disagreed because the “monkey” is associated with a funny image and is ugly, being so thin.

Thirty-five percent of the Americans agreed when it means very energetic. Children that climb everything are called monkeys. The sixty-five percent who disagreed think that monkeys are ugly, hyperactive, cunning, or primitive. It is all right to say it to a child being playful, and this can be good or bad.

### (10) The chicken

The chicken is the tenth creature in the Chinese zodiac. It was said to ward off evil: a picture of a red cock will protect the house from fire. In Old China, the cock was admired not only as a courageous bird but also as a beneficent one: he summons the hens to eat any food he finds. Again, he symbolizes reliability as he never fails to mark the passing hours. He is also a symbol of male vigor. Symbolically, a cock crowing represents the “achievement and fame” of a person.

#### Insert Question 17 about here

Fifty percent of the Chinese agreed. To some Chinese, chickens are cute and it does no harm to say it to their friends to make fun of them. Fifty percent disagreed because it may signal looseness or promiscuity. In Taiwan, some young men might call prostitutes “chickens”.

One hundred percent of the Koreans disagreed or disagreed strongly. To them, the chicken means stupidity and cowardice. It is very rude to call someone a chicken.

Thirty-five percent of the Americans agreed. Sometimes you can accuse someone who is lacking the courage to do something of being a chicken. Sixty-five percent disagreed because it implies cowardice, fear, or lack of integrity. It means the person is a wimp, which might be an invitation to fight in some cases, if it is not used playfully.

### (11) The dog

The dog is the eleventh creature in the Chinese zodiac. To the Chinese, if a dog runs toward you, it is a good sign: richness will be yours. But the dog is seen in a very different light in South and West China, especially among the minority peoples who live there. In their folktales it is the dog that brings rice to mankind. In the eastern province, Guangdong, the story of a faithful dog which saved its master’s life from fire is very popular. Another related story tells how a dog guarded its master’s belongings until it died. In Taiwan, “brother black dog” is a term for a man who runs after every woman he sees.

#### Insert Question 18 about here

Sixty percent of the Chinese people agreed because the dog is honest, faithful, and trustworthy. Forty percent of them disagreed or disagreed strongly when it implies too much obedience to authority like a servant or if it refers to a person who likes to follow a particular man or woman.

One hundred percent of the Koreans disagreed or disagreed strongly. Although Koreans like dogs very much as pets and the dog is edible in winter, they think “dog” is one of the most frequent curses in Korea. There are many bad implications in using “dog”.

Thirty-five percent of the Americans agreed. It implies one is friendly and honest or one works hard, perhaps too hard as in to work like a dog. Seventy-five percent of them disagreed because it means a low life or a person that is far from being proper. Often it implies someone without morals, especially in relation to sex. This is a slang term now for a male who has many “girlfriends” at one time, for a female who is unattractive in some way, or for a person who is not trustworthy.

**(12) The pig**

The pig is the last of the twelve creatures in the Chinese zodiac. It symbolizes virility. Pregnant women are often given a dish with pig's knuckles and peanuts boiled for a long time as it is supposed to be the most nourishing food for a mother and her unborn child. However, "eating roast pork" is a metaphor for sexual intercourse.

**Insert Question 19 about here**

Forty percent of the Chinese agreed. But it depends on the context. If someone who sleeps too much is your family or close friend, it may sound all right to him or her. Sixty percent of them disagreed or disagreed strongly because the pig is lazy and ugly.

One hundred percent of the Koreans disagreed and disagreed strongly. To them, "pig" is a term used only when making fun of others or looking down on them.

Nearly ninety percent of the Americans disagreed or disagreed strongly. It is unacceptable because it implies dirty, fat, disgusting, sloppy, gluttonous, eating too much, smelling bad, or a person with no morals. Who wants to be like a pig?

**5. Conclusion**

To the first research question, "Do Koreans share more of these phonologically-linked taboos than Americans do because Korean language has very similar sounds to Chinese?" the answer is yes. However, the Chinese and Koreans share only the taboo of number "4," which strongly associates with "death." The rest of the Chinese taboos associated with "separation" do not happen in Korean culture.

Nevertheless, when asked the question "Can you think of other things that might be forbidden or impolite gifts in your society? If so, what are they?" the Chinese and Korean respondents had quite similar answers associated with "separation":

**Chinese:** knife, handkerchief, and shoes (forbidden gifts to avoid "separation").

**Korean:** knife, handkerchief, shoes, scissors (forbidden gifts to avoid "separation"), money or underwear (impolite gifts).

To most **Americans**, anything considered making a reference to a person's imperfections, such as anything stressing diet, exercise equipment for a heavy person, deodorant, toothpaste, soap, or a day planner, sexually implicit items, such as underwear, practical joke items, and used items are not welcomed. Sausage, cheese or candy to a person who is on a diet is not appropriate. All mentioned above, none is forbidden to avoid "separation."

To the second research question, "Do Koreans share more of the zodiac-animal-linked taboos with Chinese than Americans do because Korean people also use the same animals as a cycle of every twelve years?" the answer is yes but again with only one same metaphor – "tiger" for women. Both peoples think that the term "tiger" is used negatively for hot-tempered females. On the contrary, in the eye of the Americans, female tigers are graceful, fast, and sleek which are good female qualities. Surprisingly, these Korean subjects share more animal-linked taboos with Americans than with the Chinese. The results showed that, among the twelve zodiac animals, the Chinese and Korean respondents had very different opinions of nine of the animal taboos – the rat, the bull/cow, the rabbit, the lamb, the horse, the monkey, the chicken, the dog, and the pig. Most of the Chinese, Koreans, and American respondents had similar opinions of the three of the animal terms – the tiger for man, the dragon, and the snake.

But when asked the question "Among the twelve animals above, which ones do you think would make such an impolite comparison that you would never use them?" the Chinese and Korean respondents had quite similar answers: the snake, the pig, and the rat. Americans also dislike these three terms, but four American females chose the cow as the most impolite term, which are not found in both of Chinese and Koreans response lists.

**Insert Table 1 about here**

When asked the question "Which ones do you think are impolite, but you might use them when you are angry?" four Chinese chose the pig and three chose the snake; seven Koreans chose the dog and two chose the pig; seven Americans chose the pig, six chose the dog, and five chose the snake. From here, we learn that the pig and the snake are the most likely used when one gets angry. It is interesting to find that the dog is not found in the Chinese respondents' lists, but on the top of the lists of both Koreans' and Americans'.

**Insert Table 2 about here**

When asked "Which ones do you think are impolite, but you might use them behind a person's back when you are angry?" three Chinese chose the pig and two chose the rat; four Koreans chose the dog and two the rat and the snake, and eight Americans chose the pig, seven the snake and five the dog, the cow and the chicken.

**Insert Table 3 about here**

When asked the question “Which ones would you like to hear your friends use to describe you?” Five Chinese people chose none and two chose the monkey; three Koreans chose none and three chose the rabbit, and five Americans chose the tiger and three chose none.

#### Insert Table 4 about here

Many examples of taboos abound in the different values that different people attribute to the objective world. According to the findings from the Chinese respondents, the snake is the least appropriate term to say to a person’s face. But still, 30% of them agreed with using it in certain contexts. For the other eleven zodiac animals, more than 50% of them would agree, but it depends on the speaker’s tone of voice and the hearer’s age and social status. According to the findings from the Korean and American respondents, more than 70% of them disagreed with using the rat, the bull/cow, the snake, the monkey, the chicken, the dog, and the pig to anyone. And other terms like the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the horse, and the lamb can also have bad connotations in certain situations. In order to interact with people of a different culture appropriately, one needs to adjust his/her language and behavior to others’ cultural rules for meaningful communication. Most people believe that human beings are above every other living creature in the world because human beings can be educated, cultivated, and have the ability to tell right from wrong and good from evil. To avoid cultural misunderstandings, not to choose any of the animal-linked metaphors for people is highly recommended. In fact, if we are planning to visit any country that we are not familiar with, it is wise to check websites to get some valuable tips online (e.g., [www.mvmtravel.com/news/newsdetail.asp](http://www.mvmtravel.com/news/newsdetail.asp)). Paying a little attention to the cultural differences may bring us good luck

Pondering on the importance of culture teaching and learning in L2 education, I agree with Hinkel’s approach (c.f., 2004): teachers and students should take a more reflective and ethnographic stance toward cultural content and methodology, in order to raise their awareness of intercultural issues, such as taboos in verbal and non-verbal communication. It would be a useful development if more textbooks included explicit intercultural elements and if teachers were more conscious of intercultural competence, in the way that many are now conscious of communicative competence. Developing cultural awareness means being aware of members of another cultural group: their behavior, their expectations, their perspectives, and values. It also means attempting to understand their reasons for their actions and beliefs. Ultimately, this needs to be translated into skill in communicating across cultures and about cultures. This can be encouraged by developing an ethnographic stance toward cultural learning. Using the students’ home language and culture to inform classroom activities enables students to become motivated and empowered. In addition, raising cultural consciousness in the L2 classroom will help learners to critically reflect on their own culture and view it in relation to others, thereby gaining fresh perspectives about their culture and about themselves (Kumaravadivelu 2003). Cultural consciousness thus becomes a tool for both reflection and self-renewal. Such a process of cultural self-reflection and self-renewal is not confined to learners alone. In responding to their learners’ heightened cultural awareness, teachers are also challenged to reflect on their cultural selves as deeply as they expect their learners to do.

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Question 1. It is appropriate to give a female friend **a fan** as a gift.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 5     | 3        | 2                 |
| Koreans     | 2              | 7     | 0        | 1                 |
| Americans   | 5              | 9     | 2        | 0                 |

Question 2. It is appropriate to give a friend **an umbrella** as a gift.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 4     | 4        | 2                 |
| Koreans     | 2              | 8     | 0        | 0                 |
| Americans   | 4              | 9     | 3        | 0                 |

Question 3. It is appropriate to give a friend **a clock** as a gift.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 3     | 1        | 6                 |
| Koreans     | 4              | 6     | 0        | 0                 |
| Americans   | 5              | 11    | 0        | 0                 |

Question 4. If eating fish on a boat, it is appropriate to **turn the fish over** after one finishes eating the meat on the top side.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 5     | 3        | 2                 |
| Korean      | 2              | 7     | 1        | 0                 |
| American    | 2              | 10    | 3        | 1                 |

Question 5. In your country, it is appropriate to use the number '4' in an **elevator or hospital**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 2     | 4        | 4                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 1     | 6        | 3                 |
| Americans   | 8              | 8     | 0        | 0                 |

Question 6. It is appropriate to **cut a pear in two halves and share it with a friend**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 5     | 2        | 3                 |
| Koreans     | 4              | 6     | 0        | 0                 |
| Americans   | 11             | 5     | 0        | 0                 |

Question 7. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a rat**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 5     | 3        | 2                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 1        | 9                 |
| Americans   | 2              | 0     | 6        | 8                 |

Question 8. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a bull/cow**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 8     | 2        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 2     | 7        | 1                 |
| Americans   | 1              | 3     | 8        | 4                 |

Question 9. It is appropriate to say to a man's face that he acts like **a tiger**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 8     | 2        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 1              | 4     | 3        | 2                 |
| Americans   | 4              | 8     | 3        | 1                 |

Question 10. It is appropriate to say to a woman's face that she acts like **a tiger**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 4     | 5        | 1                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 5        | 5                 |
| Americans   | 1              | 10    | 4        | 1                 |

Question 11. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a rabbit**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 1              | 7     | 2        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 1              | 4     | 3        | 2                 |
| Americans   | 1              | 9     | 5        | 1                 |

Question 12. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a dragon**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 1              | 5     | 4        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 1              | 4     | 3        | 2                 |
| Americans   | 1              | 6     | 6        | 3                 |

Question 13. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a snake**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 3     | 6        | 1                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 2        | 8                 |
| Americans   | 2              | 2     | 5        | 7                 |

Question 14. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a horse**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 6     | 4        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 7        | 3                 |
| Americans   | 2              | 6     | 6        | 2                 |

Question 15. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a lamb**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 9     | 1        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 1              | 3     | 4        | 2                 |
| Americans   | 1              | 9     | 5        | 1                 |

Question 16. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a monkey**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 7     | 3        | 0                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 1     | 6        | 3                 |
| Americans   | 2              | 4     | 6        | 4                 |

Question 17. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a chicken**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 5     | 4        | 1                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 2        | 8                 |
| Americans   | 2              | 2     | 8        | 4                 |

Question 18. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a dog**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 6     | 3        | 1                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 3        | 7                 |
| Americans   | 2              | 2     | 6        | 6                 |

Question 19. It is appropriate to say to a person's face that he/she is like **a pig**.

| Respondents | Agree strongly | Agree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Chinese     | 0              | 4     | 5        | 1                 |
| Koreans     | 0              | 0     | 3        | 7                 |
| Americans   | 1              | 1     | 6        | 8                 |

Table 1.

| Number of Respondents | No = 4     | No = 3      | No = 2                | No = 1                         |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Chinese               | Snake      | Pig, Rat    |                       |                                |
| Koreans               | Snake, Dog | Pig, Rat    |                       | Horse, Chicken, Monkey, Tiger, |
| Americans             | Cow, Pig   | Monkey, Rat | Snake, Horse, Chicken | Dog, Dragon                    |

Table 2.

| Number of Respondents | No = 4                        | No = 3 | No = 2       | No = 1                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Chinese               | Pig                           | Snake  |              | Tiger, Rat               |
| Koreans               | Dog                           |        | Pig          | Snake                    |
| Americans             | Pig, Rat, Snake, Chicken, Dog | Cow    | Monkey, Lamb | Bull-head, Dragon, Horse |

Table 3.

| Number of Respondents | No = 4                        | No = 3      | No = 2     | No = 1                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|------------|----------------------------|
| Chinese               |                               | Pig         | Rat        | Chicken                    |
| Koreans               | Dog                           |             | Rat, Snake | Tiger, Monkey              |
| Americans             | Pig, Snake, Chicken, Dog, Cow | Rat, Monkey | Lamb       | Tiger, Bull, Horse, Dragon |

Table 4.

| Number of Respondents | No = 4       | No = 3               | No = 2 | No = 1                                      |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------|---|
| Chinese               | None of them |                      | Monkey | Rabbit                                      |
| Korean                |              | Rabbit, None of them |        | Lamb, Bull, Dragon, Horse, Tiger            |
| American              | Tiger        | None of them, Dragon | Monkey | Dog, Horse, Lamb, Bull, Rabbit, All of them |

## Appendix A

## Questionnaire

Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Please read the statements below and circle the response that best matches your own. *Note: please write down any implication that comes to your mind.*

1. It is appropriate to give a female friend **a fan** as a gift.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
2. It is appropriate to give a friend **an umbrella** as a gift.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
3. It is appropriate to give a friend **a clock** as a gift.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
4. If eating fish on a boat, it is appropriate to **turn the fish over** after one finishes eating the meat on the top side.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
5. In your country, it is appropriate to use the number '4' in an **elevator or hospital**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
6. It is appropriate to **cut a pear in two halves and share it with a friend**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
7. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a rat**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
8. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a bull/cow**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
9. It is appropriate to say to **a man's face** that he acts like **a tiger**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
10. It is appropriate to say to **a woman's face** that she acts like **a tiger**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
11. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a rabbit**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
12. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a dragon**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly  
 Why?
13. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a snake**.  
 1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

14. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a horse**.

1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

15. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a lamb**.

1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

16. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a monkey**.

1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

17. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a chicken**.

1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

18. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a dog**.

1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

19. It is appropriate to say to **a person's face** that he/she is like **a pig**.

1. Agree strongly      2. Agree      3. Disagree      4. Disagree strongly

Why?

20. Among the 16 animals above, which ones do you think would make such an impolite comparison that you would never use them?

21. Which ones do you think are impolite, but you might use them when you are angry?

22. Which ones do you think are impolite, but you might use them behind a person's back when you are angry?

23. Which ones would you like to hear your friends use to describe you?

24. Can you think of anything which might be a forbidden or impolite gift in your society? If so, what is it or what are they?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.