

Prompt #21: What is the relationship between knowledge and culture?

This exhibition focuses on the relationship between knowledge and culture of the knower, how culture shapes a knower's perspective and knowledge and the differing interpretations of knowledge of the knower from different cultures.

1)



This is a picture I took of the pair of chopsticks I use for lunch at school. However, it is not commonly used in Canadian schools since chopsticks usually represent Asian culture. For me, a Chinese, chopsticks are a symbol of my culture and identity.

Chinese born in a culture where using chopsticks is mandatory, are taught and practice using chopsticks frequently. Conversely, Asians born in non-Asian cultures aren't expected to naturally use chopsticks. In Western cultures, it is not necessary to learn how to use chopsticks. People can learn the methods behind chopsticks and believe that they know how to use them but they still need to interact with the material world thus use chopsticks hand-on to actually know how to use chopsticks effectively. It applies to

various scenarios as well: we need to adjust our method and pressure of holding and gripping chopsticks according to the size and texture of the objects we target.

Chopsticks are the main tools people in Asian countries use. It is a shared culture in the Asian community. Whereas in French culture or formal dining, for example. There are different forks, knives and spoons specifically for salads, entrees, seafood or main courses. Thus, culture defines the type of knowledge we have of tools and methods.

Moreover, for example, sticking chopsticks vertically into rice or any food because it is disrespectful to the dead from a Chinese perspective based on the knowledge I learnt from Chinese culture, we stick incense into a grave as a remembrance for our ancestors or past loved ones. A person from other cultures may not have this knowledge about chopsticks. Therefore, when I see someone who is not from my culture and not familiar with such knowledge of my culture stick chopsticks into rice, I feel the ethical duty to point out the disrespectful behaviour that they didn't know of.

2)



I took this picture of the doll representing an Ecuadorian devil. It reminds me of my Ecuadorian boyfriend because the doll is from him as a gift.

When I first observed this doll, I saw it oddly different from the typical doll in my Chinese perspective. Considering previous knowledge of the symbolism of dolls, I imagined it a monster. Though I was not sure of this thought, I asked my boyfriend what it represents, he told me it was a devil. He presumes it represents a battle of one with their internal demons. He explained based on his knowledge of the meaning behind the doll and that enriched my knowledge of Ecuadorian culture. Thus interactions with other knowers form and enrich knowledge.

At the same time, with this knowledge as a foundation, my interpretation of the doll deepens: two faces of the doll seem similar but slightly different in that each represents the devil in the outside world and the internal devil within a human mind. Also, when I try to explain this to others who question the symbolism of the doll, I practice the knowledge I gained from the interaction and pass on the knowledge so others can be knowers as well.

On the contrary, the justification of such interpretations could be weak since he or I is an expert on the culture. But interactions with knowers and visual presentation aid the reception of knowledge despite some knowledge formed in a culture specifically linked to particular communities of knowers.

3)



The picture I took of the bookmark contains a Chinese paper-cutting of an ox in the 12 Chinese zodiac signs. English and Chinese language are present on the bookmark. It matters to me because it is a souvenir from my dad's that also expresses one of the Chinese zodiac signs.

Shared knowledge of a common method of using bookmarks is to notice where we left off on reading a book. Though this bookmark can be a gift, a tool of the introduction of Chinese culture and traditions to my peers or a decoration.

On the back of the bookmark, a poem written in Chinese depicts a stereotypical impression of an ox: hardworking, enduring and consistent. The poem provokes a voluntary image of a working creature devoting flesh and blood to their job due to the environment I live in. This perception of an ox is a shared knowledge of Chinese culture but can vary based on the personal knowledge of an individual. However, a Western person may not have this stereotype of cattle. Meat analogues are popular in western vegetarianism where alternative protein sources are intentionally industrialized. Whereas in Chinese food culture, soya-based products are commonly found and used. In other words, culture shapes our perspective differently when crossing over the same object.

Nonetheless, language is a tool to increase knowability and familiarity of the knowledge of Chinese zodiac culture. The English language is widely spoken such that this bookmark could be understood if shown to anyone. It allows us to better understand and communicate with the globe, to share knowledge that might be specifically linked to a community.

In general, culture shapes aspects of knowledge such as perspectives, methods and tools. In this example, Chinese culture shapes the knowledge of chopsticks as tools and methods and ethical knowledge behind chopsticks. We acquire knowledge through interactions with the material world of various types of culture and other knowers from different cultures such the Ecuadorian doll; perception of images of the bookmark and cultural environment; and language aids the process of communication between knowers of cultures.

References:

Image 1: personal photo of a pair of chopsticks, September 2021

Image 2: personal photo of an Ecuadorian doll, September 2021

Image 3: personal photo of a bookmark, September 2021

(950 words)