

Strategies for Learning About Korea: Making a Little Learning Go A Long Way

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Introduction

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Two years ago when I was asked to organize a panel on teaching about Korea for the ASIANetwork conference, I had a difficult time finding participants. Korean studies is a small field, and I am one of only a handful of Korea specialists teaching at small liberal arts institutions. This time around, having exhausted the pool of ASIANetwork Koreanists, I decided to enlist the help of my colleagues at Wittenberg as panelists. The aim of these papers is to suggest ways in which non-Korea specialists can add content on Korea to the undergraduate Asian studies curriculum.

Wittenberg has a strong East Asian studies program (we offer almost 50 different courses) and a commitment to teaching about Japan, China, AND Korea. As the university's sole Koreanist, I regularly teach one course exclusively about Korea (*Introduction to Korean Society*) and include Korean material equally in two other courses (*Women and the Family in East Asia* and *East Asian Legal Systems*) that are pan-East Asian in focus. In addition, I am the "Korean content police" at Wittenberg, trying to make sure that Korea is represented in our core courses and co-curricular events, and in as many disciplinary courses as possible, and acting as a resource on Korea for my colleagues.

When I teach about Korea, I begin by asking my students why they think it is important to learn about such a small and apparently obscure place. Most draw a blank, but with some prodding, the class eventually produces a rather long list of reasons: Korea is a good example of a Confucian state, the bridge between China and Japan, and the last outpost of the Cold War. South Korea is an economic "miracle," while the North is part of the new "Axis of Evil"; together, the two Koreas form a fascinating social science laboratory, in which to compare socialism vs. capitalism, and communism vs. democracy. Americans fought a war in Korea and today 30,000 U.S. soldiers remain on the Korean peninsula. Koreans comprise one of our fastest growing immigrant communities. Examples from Korea can successfully be used to illustrate any number of topics of current scholarly interest: post-colonial studies, the "global assembly line" and exploi-

tation of female labor (including the sex trades), civil society and the development of democracy, the Asian diaspora, and "McDonaldization" and the growth of the global marketplace, to name but a few.

If teaching about Korea is to expand, however, it will have to come about through the efforts of non-Korea specialists to add Korean content to their courses; realistically, most small liberal arts institutions are not going to hire full-time Korea specialists - at least not in the foreseeable future. As a Koreanist, I have mixed feelings about the necessity of this approach. Obviously, to enable and empower our colleagues to teach in our territory means that we ourselves lose our monopoly on how the story of Korea is told. My carpetbagging colleagues notice different things in the Korea material, find new implications, and draw comparisons I would not make. Their fresh insights can challenge the established orthodoxies of Korean studies scholarship and provide a critique of the field, in ways that are both invigorating and distressing at the same time.

Ultimately, however, I do believe that encouraging others to teach about Korea can prove rewarding for both faculty and students alike. I have learned things about Korea from my colleagues at Wittenberg. And, after all, "border crossing" is just new jargon for what those of us who stretch ourselves thin teaching at small undergraduate schools have always done: teach outside our narrow areas of disciplinary and regional expertise, in the process making new connections and thinking about the world in different ways.

Choosing and Using Texts on Korea: Frustrations of a Non-Specialist

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In the fall of 1974, I traveled to Korea with a group of Fulbright grantees and was taken aback by the number of scholars there who passionately urged American students of Japan to give Korea its due in our classes on East Asian history. From that time until 1990, when Linda Lewis, a Korean anthropologist, joined the Wittenberg faculty, I felt guilt but