

Figure 6. P'yongyang, North Korea. Source: Pak, 1984: 20.

from the knowledge constructed by another class. But this only demonstrates that what constitutes Korea as a place is the diversity in the many interesting and informative stories told about it. The conversation always continues, and the absolute truth about Korea remains quite elusive.

CONCLUSION

I have successfully used the Gateways approach in my regional geography classes, and have presented the approach successfully to teacher workshops sponsored by Geographic Alliances from California to Florida. Teachers have told me time and again that successfully enticing students to move vicariously through and beyond Gateways into places, and discussing these places as they journey along, offers a memorable learning experience for them. This is mainly because the Gateways approach seeks to avoid the tedium that students often suffer from when they are immobilized in the classroom by a lecture format; that is, by having to “learn about a place, in place.” Teachers who make “mindful” choices about their Gateways are those who may be able to use this approach most successfully (Langer, 1997). To conclude with a caution: A student in a geography class that offers the Gateways approach to learning about a place is not unlike a tiger in a circus ring who, reluctant at first, is enticed to jump through the hoop and is rewarded by the experience. After all, if the tiger doesn't jump through the hoop, then the circus is over. ■

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‘Have Fun in China,’ She Said as I Left for Japan

by Roman Cybriwsky

The course I teach most often at Temple University is the “Geography of South, Southeast and East Asia.” It is an introductory level course enrolling mostly freshmen and sophomores and a total of as many as eighty to one hundred students per section. Some of the students enjoy Asia and go on to be Asian Studies majors. Others use the course as an introduction to geography and continue with other courses in that field. However, most students by far enroll because they are required to take a certain number of “international studies” courses in the university's core curriculum, and choose this particular course because it offers a convenient time slot, empty seats, and a teacher who is known for darkening the room to show slides. In other words, they do not all come because of an interest in Asian geography.

Three or four years ago, while teaching a small group of students in this course in a summer session, I departed from my usual outline and emphasized Japan much more than I normally do. I did so at the expense of other countries, but Japan is my research area and I was about to embark for Tokyo after the final exam to gather data for a particular project and do some writing. Japan was on my mind that month, the students knew it, and they knew that I was anxious to get going as soon as I finished teaching. It was a friendly class. Students offered polite comments as they turned in their finals and left the room for the last time. I will never forget one of these exchanges: one student, to whom I gave a C+ or B- in the course,

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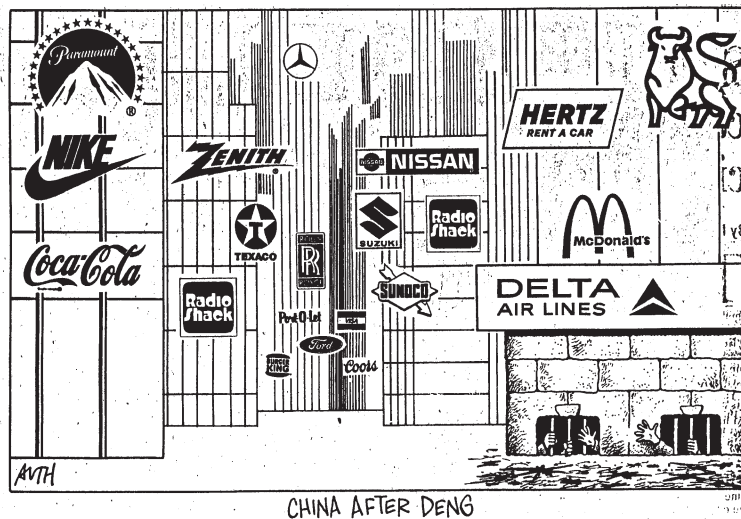
ESSAYS

wished me well as she handed me her test and said as she walked out of the room, "Have fun in China."

The reason I tell this story is to introduce the problem of geographic illiteracy among students. All of us who teach about Asia (or any other part of the world for that matter) encounter this problem constantly, as it is a common failing among students at colleges and universities all over the United States, even at elite institutions. It is also a problem in many other countries. While there are plenty of exceptions, the American public as a whole is said to be geographically illiterate, including many people who are otherwise well educated and hold responsible positions in professions. Geography is simply not taught enough in America's schools, and when it is, it is often taught badly. The result is that almost an entire nation is capable of confusing China and Japan, or making similar errors. I've seen students who had never known before my class that India and Indonesia are two different places, who had never heard of Malaysia (or think it's the name of a disease), and who think that Japan is the capital of Hong Kong.

Even more unsettling than ignorance about what is on maps is ignorance of what is happening in the world. I recently gave students a diagnostic quiz at the start of the semester and can document that only a few of them had ever heard of Timor, much less knew about the atrocities that have occurred there. Similarly, most students know nothing about Pol Pot, much less about his recent arrest and trial, Aung San Suu Kyi, or the hunger in North Korea. In fact, when I asked which Asian nation is presently (mid-1997) experiencing a famine, most students wrote nothing and more of them wrote Japan than North Korea. It is a scary thought that so many citizens of the world's most powerful nation know so little about the world.

I want to use the few paragraphs available to me to describe some of the things I do in my classes about these kinds of problems. First, I design the course to 'visit' almost all the countries I cover for at least most of one full class period, and to spend that time focusing on topics that help define the coun-



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try and its major issues and distinguish it from its neighbors. In most semesters, the first class after the start-of-semester preliminaries is about Nepal, with emphasis on fragile mountain environments, the firewood crisis, hillslope erosion, and downstream flooding. We then turn to the North India Plain, where flooding affects millions, and discuss rural poverty and overpopulation, migration to magnet cities, as well as the cultural significance of the Ganges. Sri Lanka is used to teach about plantation agriculture and recent land development projects to help small farmers.

We then travel to Southeast Asia, focusing in most semesters on ethnic problems in Malaysia, the unique character of Singapore, the impact of tourists on Bali, resource exploitation in Kalimantan, agricultural innovation in Thailand, and rich and poor neighborhoods in Bangkok, Jakarta, and Manila (I have a special interest in cities). I also introduce students to the politics of Myanmar, poverty in Laos and Cambodia, and economic reform in Vietnam.

China has more class sessions than the other countries, but we move around geographically as well, focusing one day on Hong Kong and Shenzhen, another day on the changing characters of Beijing and Shanghai, still another one on the Three Gorges Dam and the 'Great Green Wall' project, and finish with lectures about the Tibet situation and Taiwan. The class about Korea contrasts the North and the South and discusses reunification prospects. I save

Japan for the end of the course. I tell students about Tokyo's great crowds, high prices, and amazing efficiency, Japan's aging society, particularly in remote rural areas, and the problems of economic decline in old industrial districts (Ashio). I finish with a visit to the charms of historic Kyōto and a climb to the summit of Mt. Fuji, encountering in both cases Japan's familiar tensions between traditions on one side and the pressures of a changing world on the other. Thus, I structure the course to be something of

a tour of South, Southeast, and East Asia (i.e., with the exception of Tibet, Asia's non-arid lands), and highlight a limited number of selected critical issues at each stop. This gives students a mix of breadth and depth, and an appreciation of Asia's diversity.

Second, I employ the old-fashioned map quiz. I had never thought to give university students tests on basic geographic facts such as where countries are located, their capitals, biggest cities, major rivers, etc., believing that such matters belonged in high school or elementary school, and for many years of teaching did without such an approach. However, I have lost patience with students' lack of knowledge about basic geography, and such quizzes are now standard fare in my classes. They count for as much as fifteen to twenty percent of a student's final mark, depending on the semester. The quizzes are short, lasting no more than about fifteen minutes, and have twenty or twenty-five questions. I give students an outline map of Asia showing international boundaries and ask them to identify the countries I have marked A, B, C, etc., the big cities at D and E on the map, the river at F, and so on. I also ask them to indicate on the map itself where still other countries, cities and rivers are located, expecting, for example, that the dot for Shanghai be put in the right part of China, that Tokyo be located on the correct Japanese island and on the correct coast, and other similar details. Another group of questions asks students to identify the capitals of countries (why is it that most students cannot

seem to write the capital of the Philippines without using a double letter I?), India's sacred river, the location of Mt. Everest, etc.

Even though I put a lot of weight on map quizzes, I rarely teach to prepare students specifically for them. I tell the students that class time is for substantive issues and problems dealing with Asia, not for remedial place name geography, and make it their responsibility to prepare themselves. A diagnostic map quiz on the first day of class underscores the need for them to do so. I insist that they have atlases at home or wherever they study, and that they spend time both browsing them and memorizing details about 'bold print' places on the maps. They ask me to supply a list of places to learn, and I refuse.

However, to make it easier, I give the map quiz three or four times in a semester, each time with different questions (e.g., the location of Hong Kong instead of Shanghai), and count only the highest score. Students can thus measure their own progress from what is usually a terrible score on the diagnostic quiz of the first day, to steadily higher scores, often ending with a solid A on the map quiz portion of the final exam. I also give them outline maps that they can reproduce on their own for studying, as well as a reference to a useful text-cum-workbook on place name geography. Charles A. Stansfield's *Building Geographic Literacy: An Interactive Approach* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998) is the newest book of this type. The 'tour across Asia' approach that I use in organizing the semester's lectures also helps students prepare for map quizzes.

The diagnostic test is also used to highlight the problem of ignorance about important news events. A discussion when the tests are returned analyzes the overall results and has students conclude that they need to pay more attention to world news. We also discuss the weaknesses of mainstream media in the United States. Last semester (Fall 1997) we observed that Americans by the millions were being overfed a diet of details about the sex life of a disgraced sportscaster, and discussed news options that provide more substantial fare such as National Public Radio, the *Sunday New York Times*, and *AsiaWeek* on the Internet. Because most students take seriously studying what is going to be on tests, I tell them that major news stories from Asia that develop during the semester are

fair game for their midterms and finals, and remind them about this often in class. In this way I have recently called students' attention to the 'geography' behind the stubborn fires in Sumatra that have polluted the air throughout Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, and to some details about the current economic crisis in Asia. To help with study of current events, I often bring transparencies of short news items, maps and photographs from the news, and other illustrations to class for discussion. For example,

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an overhead of the political cartoon by the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Tony Auth shown here introduces the subject of China's changing economic geography (e.g., Shenzhen and Special Economic Zones), as well as its social conditions.

How are we to get students to see differences between countries (not to mention differences within countries)? I used to think the answer was with my slides. I thought that if I showed enough slides from my travels, students would see the details I see and an image of Asia's mosaic would somehow be scratched onto their brains. The 'Have fun in China' incident was a reminder of how wrong I was. Lots of slides, even good ones, are usually overwhelming, particularly when dealing with scenes that students consider exotic. I now try to discipline myself to showing fewer images, but to make more use of any single one. A new assignment in my class is to have students write expanded captions to color-copier reproductions of photographs I give them to take home. For example, a newspaper photo of attractive Indonesian female models in short skirts standing next to a shiny new 'Timor' automobile is supposed to get students to think about social and economic change in Indonesia and the political uses to national government of the name chosen for the car. Other themes I have students write about from photographs are men's work and women's work among urban migrants (transportation and hawking, respectively), western influences on Asian life and culture (I have a nice slide of a Tokyo McDonald's framed by cherry blossoms), and tropical deforestation (scenes

of logging as well as schooners unloading lumber in Jakarta harbor). Another innovation is using two slide projectors at once to have students compare and contrast geographic scenes. I took this cue from an Art History class that uses the same room and is always comparing paintings. It takes fewer slides to make a given set of points, my art historian friend explained, when using two screens at once than when using just one. So now I can put Mt. Fuji on one screen and the Great Wall on the other, and challenge my

young Marco Polos to guess which is Japan and which is China.

To summarize, I have two main objectives in my course about Asia. One, which I enjoy immensely, is to introduce students to Asia's diverse cultures, ways of living, and various social, political, and environmental problems by taking them on a long, country-by-country journey via slides, lectures, and readings. As much as possible, I connect that tour to important events in the news during that particular semester, hoping to encourage students to pay more attention to global issues and international relations.

My second objective, which I wish I did not need to pursue, is to teach remedial geography. The diagnostic quiz at the start of the semester helps focus students' attention on the problem of geographic illiteracy, while short map quizzes at various points in the semester give them the opportunity to demonstrate progress and earn points toward the final grade. I prefer not spending a lot of class time on map quiz material, but instead urge students to prepare on their own for these quizzes by studying atlases and following carefully on maps where I take them by slides and lectures. The 'Have fun in China' incident notwithstanding, I am generally happy with the results. One very enjoyable measure of success (as well as an indication of my longevity as a teacher) is the occasional postcard that comes my way from Asia from some long-graduated former student on a business trip who remembers something that I taught and how to approximate my name. ■