

## ASIAN HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM

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"New Horizons in Teaching East Asian and Southeast Asian History"

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Asian studies have been neglected in the United States at all levels of education. A major reason for this neglect lies in the fact that Asians have historically been unwelcome immigrants. The willingness of the Chinese to work longer hours for less pay led to Congressional legislation in 1882 and 1892 excluding non-skilled Chinese from immigrating. Early twentieth century Japanese immigrants were also viewed as economic threats, a condition aggravated by anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States during World War II. Postwar immigration of numerous Asian groups has served to increase hostilities.

Although the establishment of Asian studies programs at some elite institutions has served to improve intercultural relationships, many American are exposed to Asia only in sixth grade world geography or high school world history.

This situation should be corrected since the nuclear age demands improved American-Asian relationships and since Asians constitute the majority of the world's population. Americans need knowledge of Asians in order to assess critically international and national foreign policy decisions.

Although a change in attitude toward Asian studies is improbable, several things can be done to promote the study of Asian history and civilization. Schools should require (or at least offer) one Asian civilization course. If this is not possible, perhaps non-credit courses could be established for interested students. Such a course should be preceded by an inventory of non-text resources such as the Asia Society and the Japan Society, and the course should be publicized. If the course is at the college level, an effort should be made to provide an outreach program to local elementary and secondary schools.

Numerous problems accompany the actual teaching of Asian history. Among these are: (a) selecting content and methodology;

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\*Eds. synopsis.

(b) determining the appropriate cultural orientation relative to the section and time period of Asia being covered; (c) avoiding western ethnocentricity, i.e., studying Asia from the vantage of western influence on it; (d) overidentifying with Asian nationalism and overemphasizing the negative aspects of colonialism; (e) using audio-visual materials intelligently; (f) recognizing and compensating for pro- or anti-communist bias; (g) understanding the religious beliefs of Asians; (h) overemphasizing a negative aspect of Asian culture or negative events not representative of the society as a whole; and (i) determining appropriate texts and supplementary materials for the students.