

# THE FIVE CO-TRADITIONS OF GEOGRAPHY: AN EAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

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The regional course in geography has two unimpressive hallmarks. It is the workhorse of the social science-oriented department with enrollments consisting primarily of non-geography majors. In addition, it is frequently the most unesteemed part of the professional geographer's teaching load. Lacking prerequisites, students are drawn to the regional course because it makes few demands beyond the assimilation of a single textbook, and only moderate attention need be paid to the instructor's redundant paraphrasing of the text. The result of this unfortunate union is to convince students of history, economics, sociology and other disciplines that geography is the dull art of collecting minutiae.

The burden of this paper is to suggest that neither such performance nor such bilateral apathy need be an intrinsic part of a regional geography course. Given a willingness to instruct within a new framework, a geographer can give a regional study solid academic and geographic vitality while making manifest the varied realms of our discipline. The framework which I suggest is the five co-traditions of geography.

To Dr. William Pattison's<sup>1</sup> four traditions of geography as earth science, man and the land relationships, regionalism, and spatial analysis, Prof. William Thomas<sup>2</sup> has added a stimulating fifth tradition—geography as exploration and discovery. From this pentagonal base, Thomas and Kariel shaped an introductory course at California State College, Hayward which has effectively broken the lock-step Physical-Cultural introduction which virtually all colleges in California continue to rely upon for the primary presentation of geography. It is my contention that such a framework would be ideal for the regional geography course, facing the same paucity of geographic background in its students as does the introductory course. Both classes are characterized by students who will confine their college geography to the introductory course and at most one or two regional courses. East Asia is selected for this exercise simply because it is my region of particular concern. The format given below is fully flexible and could accommodate any regional course, as long as it was taught by a geographer who possesses a research involvement in that area.

The first lecture, by the way of introduction, would be on the Chinese script which is the basic foundation for the traditional homogeneity evidenced by the region "East Asia." Such an introduction, establishes initially China's dominance while clarifying the rationale for the inclusion of China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan as the major members of the East Asian world.

<sup>1</sup> William Pattison, "The Four Traditions of Geography," *Journal of Geography*, 1964, pp. 211-216.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert G. Kariel, *Co-traditions of Geography for an Introductory Course—A Syllabus* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Book Company, 1966), pp. 1-8.

The first of the five co-traditions to be utilized in the development of the course is emphatically not geography as earth science with its traditional outlining of the physical base of East Asia, but rather geography as exploration and discovery. The justification for this iconoclasm is that turning initial attention to the exploits of man reflects more accurately the contemporary geographic departure from, if not disdain with environmental determinism. Secondly, by dwelling first with aspects of exploration and discovery, the instructor is able to involve nongeography majors more quickly with the cultural aspects of the course, whereas immediate emphasis on dynamics of tectonics, climate, soil and physiography alarms the non-majors, tending to alienate them from the course as a whole.

Of the five lectures demonstrating this first co-tradition, the first two present hypotheses drawing from Eberhard<sup>3</sup>, Maspero<sup>4</sup>, Chang Kwang-chih<sup>5</sup>, Fairservice<sup>6</sup> and others in an attempt to reach some conclusions about the initial nature and hearth of the people of East Asia. Such a beginning not only reveals the proleptic nature of certain aspects of geographic concern, but it also suggest the breadth of the field the geographer covers in his quest for inputs for his regional whole.

The third, fourth and fifth lectures are based on historical data which are for the most part available in English (see the syllabus at the conclusion of this article). These three particular periods of East Asian history are characterized by expansion of horizons and interaction of East Asia and the Western world. Such a discussion turns the student's attention to maps in quest of both land and sea routes, as well as providing cross-cultural time or period references for people for whom this is the first exposure to things Oriental. Hence at the conclusion of the first co-tradition both locational and cultural-economic elements of the geography of East Asia have been presented to the class, with hopefully enough of the exotic to excite students' attention and an adequate reference to our own western cultural bases to facilitate the introduction of the Orient.

In geography as earth science, the first two lectures are in close alignment with Professor Joseph Spencer's lucid text, *Asia, East by South*<sup>7</sup>. This is one of the few places in the course outline where there is a direct repetition of the text, but this redundancy is purposeful. In educational jargon such paralleling is "re-enforcement", The goal is to make fully certain that

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, "Early Chinese Cultures and their Development: A New Working Hypothesis," from the Smithsonian Report for 1937 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938), pp. 513-530.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Maspero, "The Origins of the Chinese Civilization," from the Smithsonian Report for 1927 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928), pp. 433-452.

<sup>5</sup> Chang Kwang-chih, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 21-51.

<sup>6</sup> Walter A. Fairservice, Jr. *The Origins of Oriental Civilization* (New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1959), pp. 49-81.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph E. Spencer, *Asia, East by South* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1954).



these dynamics of physiography and climate are dealt with adequately to cultural landscape.

insure comprehension of subsequent interrelationships of the physical and

The third lecture is entitled "The good earth and the distinct value of transported soil." Because only a general discussion of soils occurs in the text, the particular emphasis on the quality derived from the transporting of soil whether via the medium of fluvial, aeolian or cultural mechanics weans the student away again from the text and recreates the necessary dichotomy between the readings and the lectures. An absence of such a quality can only serve to fortify the concept of redundant lectures in regional geography courses. "Toponymy and topography: their union in East Asia," directs the student once again to the map and allows detailed discussion of the way in which the people of that region have verbalized their concepts of environmental perception. Such observations at the end of the second co-tradition serve as a review mechanism as well as drawing attention again to the initial lecture on the pictographic Chinese script.

Man and the land represents the third perspective on East Asia. It introduces concepts of cultural geography to the uninitiated while giving detailed regional examples of the same to the geography major. Contrasts in ecological adaptation are presented by discussion of swidden and wet padi. In this instance the geographer is able to point out one of the most active aspects of contemporary geographic research, swidden, as well as note that its lowland counterpart, wet padi, continues to be an understudied way of life and livelihood. The agricultural village, topic of the second lecture, is primarily a discussion of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*.<sup>8</sup>

The last two lectures in this co-tradition are particularly well suited as vehicles for detailed and highly regional expressions of cultural geography. They also function well as bases for cultural distinction between the three major nations in East Asia and such tri-partite cognizance prepares the student for the lectures in the fourth co-tradition; geography as regionalism.

The criteria for the sub-regionalizing shown by the titles in this series are several. China's division is primarily a cultural phenomenon while Japan's three regions represent cleavage along more economic lines. Taiwan, with its European and Japanese colonial role, is viewed as an island with a personality quite distinct from Hainan and as such its role as much more than a microcosm is emphasized. Korea's peninsular role as a link between the continental and maritime worlds of China and Japan has produced a peculiar cultural mosaic which comprises the fourth lecture.

The final lecture on particular irredenta of East Asia brings together the minor members of the region which have played roles in gross disproportion to their physical sizes. Such singularity is a function of proximity to the giants of East Asia and the unique cultural composites created by both Asian and European colonial experiences.

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<sup>8</sup> Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: The John Day Company, 1931, and reprinted by Pocket Books, New York numerous times.)

Geography as spatial analysis serves as the final tradition by which to study East Asia. The first two lectures relate to the basic countryside-city-side dichotomy. This combination of rural and urban focus on the region points up again the prevalence of order and regularity in the facade of East Asia. Transportation and industrialization are the themes of the third and fourth lectures utilizing the tools of spatial analysis. These two lectures are particularly important in analyzing the rationale underlying the creation of massive new industrial centers in Communist China and pre-1940 Japan. In such an approach there can be full utilization of the contemporary comments geographers and others have made on the massive changes in the industrial and urban landscape since the Second World War. This adds a timely capstone to the entire discussion of East Asia.

The final lecture, prior to the conclusion, is a return to more orthodox geography as "Marginal lands and the problem of quantifying potential" is discussed. Considered are the open spaces in East Asia which have historically been either unsettled or settled in only a minimal way. The complexities in determining their actual potential and functional future is a problem which calls into play a host of geographic inquiries which range fully between the physical and cultural poles of the geographic discipline. As such, the lecture stands as an effective concluding aspects of geography as well as spatial analysis.

The reality of America's vital concern with Asia is a broad and important finalizing note for the course. The unique role of the geographer in the assessment of this concern, utilizing the varied facets of geography as a discipline, would be the closing comment for the hour and for the course.

Such a format as this has several aspects worthy of recounting in conclusion. If the lecturer finds that he is not at home with, say the discussion of the silk trade, then let him substitute the epic of Marco Polo. If tectonics seem unimportant to him, let him offer rather a lecture on some other aspect of the physical geography of his region and leave the text to deal with questions of local geologic structure. In almost any category there is potential flexibility for massive or single substitution when either the instructor feels the course needs new life or when his research turns up new excitements which he feels compelled to pass on to the class. In such a way, the course may be kept alive without the necessity for a *total* redoing in insufficient time which forces the instructor too frequently into a compromising position with a textbook.

As an important secondary benefit of such a "five co-traditions" presentation will come the realization to all concerned that geography as a discipline can offer a scholarly mix of breadth and depth. Though such enlightenment may not be necessary for persons already committed to geography, it is a certain need for the vast majority of students who elect regional courses. The class and the instructor, departing from standard and unexciting micro-regional analysis, will find the periodic change in perspective offered by the five co-traditions a stimulating and provocative flip for a regional course.

And such should be the nature of a well-structured, well-researched, and well-taught course in our discipline.

**THE FIVE CO-TRADITIONS OF GEOGRAPHY: AN EAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE**  
**A SYLLABUS**

**Introduction:**

1. The Chinese script: the basis for culture and continuity.

**Exploration and Discovery:**

2. Genesis of the Chinese: historians' search for a hearth.
3. The peopling of Korea and Japan: the search continued.
4. China and the Mediterranean: a silken bond twenty centuries long.
5. The Ming Dynasty voyages and the unextended empire.
6. Perry as the agent of the new Pacific World.

**Earth Sciences:**

7. Tectonics, geomorphology and the geometry of the East Asian landscape.
8. The dynamics of wind and water in East Asia.
9. The good earth and the distinct value of transported soils.
10. Toponymy and topography: their union in East Asia.

**Man and the Land:**

11. Swidden and wet padi: a contrast in ecological adaptation.
12. The agricultural village.
13. Handicraft industry: incipient industrialism on an agrarian base.
14. The imprint of religion on the landscape.
15. The garden in three cultures: the landscape of the poets.

**Regionalism:**

16. China north and China south.
17. Taiwan: more than a microcosm.
18. Montane, coastal rural, and urban Japan.
19. Korea: the burden of being a peninsula.
20. Irredenta: Hong Kong, the Ryukyus, Quemoy and Matsu.

**Spatial Analysis:**

21. The rural market and the ordered landscape.
22. Urban genesis and the creation of effective space.
23. Transportation networks: developmental keystone?
24. Industrialization, modernization, and the new facade for East Asia.
25. Marginal lands in East Asia: the problem of quantifying potential.

**Conclusion:**

26. East Asia and the contemporary cosmography.

**Texts:**

- Spencer, J.E., *Asia East by South*  
Fitzgerald, C.P., *A Concise History of East Asia*  
Graham, A.C., *Poems of the late T'ang*  
Buck, Pearl, S., *The Good Earth*