

제출양식(Proposal)

IMPROVING THE IMAGE EQUALS TO CREATING ONE

I am a student of Korean Studies and Japanese studies in the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and in the following paper I would like to discuss the image of Korea that is shown in primary and secondary schooling in my country. I will add a comment about the Korean content that is presented in teaching materials in the university classes. Throughout I will also show my point of view on particular problems and possible suggestions that might show Korea to the general public—and to the students—in a better, healthier light.

In the past month, I had the opportunity to assist professor of Korean studies in Ljubljana, professor Kang Byoung Yoong. I assisted in research on Korean content in history and geography textbooks, used in Slovenian primary school and high school. The main topic of this project was to find the possible incorrect information regarding Korea and notify the publisher (or the author) about the mistake(s) and suggest what and how to correct them.

At this point, it is important to explain that the primary and secondary schooling in Slovenia is mainly focused on the Western history and its cultures. Thus, the history's main interest lies in Western European history. For example, the Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, The Holy Roman Empire, the colonies and imperialist politics and the 19th and 20th century. Consequently, the history of other cultures are listed as optional and are usually presented to students very quickly (or not at all). Among these optional choices, there is also a brief history of Japan, and China, (the Mongolian dynasty Yuan is usually mentioned in connection to its invasion of Europe).

As I could discover during the project, I realised that the textbooks do include some tiny facts about Korea, but the information is presented only when speaking about other cultures. For example, in history books there is a chapter about the Japanese imperialism and Korea is mentioned as the land that was occupied.

Similarly, geography textbooks (and the geography classes) do not include much information about Korea. The little information they do include, is usually connected to the so-called Tiger economy of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

I also talked to a few students (in primary school and high school) who told me that in primary school, in geography class, they usually study the geographical features, e.g. the rivers of Asia (mostly the rivers of India and China) and the name of the capital cities. Often, an individual or a group of students has to create a presentation about the particular country

and present it in front of the class. Unfortunately, when they graduate, most of them forget everything they learned about the subject. They describe the learning about Asia as 'brief' or they feel that they have little to no knowledge on Asia.

So in my opinion, the main problem is not how Korea is presented in these textbooks, but lies in the school system that leaves little space to include any topic regarding the Korean peninsula. The system of teaching history is linear, from the appearance of the human in the beginning of primary schooling—freshmen in high school—and the modern history in the later years—junior and senior years.

To elaborate, in history classes, Korea is usually better represented in secondary schooling (high school), particularly in the last grade, in connection to the World War II and the Japanese imperialism, and afterwards a sentence or two can be found about the Cold War and the tension between the communist and the capitalist block and what impact it had on the Korean war.

The other important issue (mostly in geography textbooks) is that the information is sometimes outdated (example: the old information on infant mortality rate, GDP), incorrect (almost always statistics considering religion—no mention of the Christianity, or simply throwing Korea in the so-called 'Religions of China' category) or missing some important facts, mostly about the Japanese-Korean history and political relations and issues regarding the territory (Dok-do (the territory dispute, it is interesting that in Slovenian Geography textbooks, Dok-do is listed as *Dok-do*, and the Japanese name, Takeshima is almost never used nor added in the brackets. Contrary, East Sea is always named as *The Sea of Japan* (Japonsko morje).

Considering this, I suggest the following solutions. One is to contact the publisher and authors and let them know of these mistakes and update them with the newest statistics, information, or perhaps suggest them some alternative possibilities. The very same solution was proposed by the AKS and the Korean embassy and thus done in the earlier mentioned project. So far, two out of four publishing companies (Modrijan and Mladinska Knjiga Založba) have replied, both positively. They complied with the suggestions, and said that they will correct the pointed-out mistakes. However, they also stressed the fact that the content of their textbooks is controlled by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport that is also in charge of the Study plan. The Study plan is the guide for the authors of the textbooks and tells them which topics to include in their learning material (the obligatory and the optional ones).

This is why it is also necessary to be aware of the issue that is the whole structure of the school system in countries similar to Slovenia, where study plans leave little place to improve

the image of Korea, because the content is close to non-existent. For this reason, the best possible suggestion seems to be to directly contact the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and encourage them to add Korea on the list of the optional topics.

That being said, I see the alternative in promoting the image of Korea outside the strict schedule of the classes. For example, social events that would last for a day or two, perhaps even a week. They might help promote the culture better than a sentence or two in a textbook. Of course, it is important to show not only the contemporary, mainstream part of Korea, but also the traditional and history one. It seems that especially with the popularity rise of the Hallyu (한류

Korean Culture Festival might be a good way to pique the interest of the curious by-passers on the street, or in a shopping mall. It could stand alone or it could be a part of a larger cultural festival that would promote the cultures of the world. Another interesting event could present the traditional Korean cuisine, and people could learn some basic facts about Korea while trying some kimbap. As for the educating primary and high school students, I would suggest something similar, perhaps setting up a thematic event where unique sides of Korean culture could be introduced to the students.

In addition to that, I would like to add that the Japanese department and the Embassy of Japan is already actively working on similar projects here in Slovenia, some are happening annually, for example the cultural event called “Japan Day”. Such events are a great opportunity to promote the culture in various ways and offer a wide spectrum of activities to the visitors.

Of course, The Embassy of Korea is also already working on similar projects (the Korean Movie Festival) that will hopefully take place in the near future and will help to show the various, colourful images of Korean film industry and Korea itself.

Admittedly, things that are stated above do not strictly belong to the category of improving the image in Korea in textbooks, but with the given situation, where students do not actively study about Korea, I believe this is the first step that might help to expand their horizon. Of course, in the countries with the long tradition of Korean studies, the plan to improve the image of Korea would be different than in the countries with the newly established Korean studies department. In the former, such events already do exist, and take place regularly, there are also some organisations that do a great job in advertising the image of Korea: I believe that creating a connection or collaboration between different countries and organizations and creating a joint event with the help of experienced staff could also be the way to go.

In the second part of the essay I would like to talk about the teaching material that is provided for the students of Korean studies and the content that could be found on the internet.

Compared to the primary and secondary schooling, the tertiary education is all about specifics, you choose the field you want to study, so there shouldn't be a problem with little or no information. Surely, the story can be quite different in the countries where the department is young and the various resources are not (yet) as rich as in the countries with the strong tradition of Korean studies.

That means there is little to no material in the language of the particular country. Or if it exists, it is usually a translation of the translation or an outdated one. Students of Korean studies in Slovenia are facing a familiar situation. Thankfully, there are resources, but they are almost always in English. The situation is of course, completely understandable and thankfully, English is the second (or third) language to virtually everyone, so it is not an issue. However, this shouldn't be an excuse to not have any learning material in your own mother language. Comparing the current situation to the situation of the Asian studies department that has a twenty year long tradition of study in Slovenia, I feel that with time and people who are willing to help and be the part of the Korean studies, the image of Korea can be created and developed also outside the four walls of the Faculty of Arts.

That being said, to create the sufficient amount of such learning material, the country needs experts and intellectuals who are familiar with Korea and its culture, but again, to have such people, you need to educate them. Nowadays, students can go to Korea easier than ever before, and return with the obtained knowledge and experience. Then they can help with developing the specific field in their home country. Naturally, many other elements affect the final outcome (some students might want to stay Korea, or search for the job outside the country), but perhaps it is better to concentrate on what is given and connect with the people who show interest and are willing to help to create the desired image.

On the other side, not only books or textbooks, but also the internet is a rich source of information. In fact, the internet is the largest source of the information, for better or for worse. Thanks to it, people can learn about the foreign cultures, they can get to know new people, learn the new language and it seems that the world is smaller and closer than ever. Instead of ignoring the power of the internet, I think it should be used to promote the desired image of Korea. There are thousands of sites that help you learn Korean, give you free access to Korean TV, give you the essential tips on travelling to Korea or tell you about the Korean mythology and legends. Indeed, they already exist, and the new ones keep popping up as the web grows bigger with each passing day. It is impossible to stop this trend, and it is also quite impossible to erase all the incorrect or negative image that might grow linearly with the positive one.

Little can be done here, what *can* be done, however, is probably already in the process. Widely speaking, internet is too big of a place to stop all the misleading information about Korea itself, and the learning sites already do exist, name a thing and it is probably already in

use. Nevertheless, it is not a bad thing, especially in the case where students are provided with little to no material. I think that in such case, internet can be the key to solution, and help expanding the horizon.

To conclude, when speaking about the ideas how to improve the image of Korea, there is no universal plan to go according to. In some countries, the learning material is within a hand's reach, but in others, the possibilities are only showing up, and every time we speak of the improving the image it actually means to create one. Perhaps this is a good thing, because what you have is a tabula rasa, and you can be the creator. However it can be a double-edged sword, because you have no established system that would provide you with the sufficient learning material or give you the guarantee that your ideas will surely succeed.

The best way to learn about the culture is not only from books, or the internet but also to be in contact with it. Being a student means you might get the chance to first-handedly experience the culture you study about. Being an average citizen means that you could go and visit a Korean culture festival. Being there, you may start with clumsy answers, the ever-so-typical 'So what exactly is the difference between the North and the South?'. Stay for a while and you may return home knowing that the Korean writing system is also the alphabet. Try some food that reminds you of your favourite local dish, and get to know something more than just the North Korean leader and Gangnam style.

Personally I see it as a two-way process. You are supposed to learn about the foreign culture, but if done correctly, you can also learn about your own. First and foremost, it is important to be aware of the fact that the culture is not a solid thing, it keeps growing and it keeps evolving. Through learning about something new, you learn the most about yourself, because learning also means connecting newly obtained information to something you are already familiar with. In the end it all results in one fact: it is difficult to completely grasp the core meaning of your own culture, much less of a foreign one, so what you *should* learn is how to respect one.

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서명(Signature)

