

Culture of the East Asian World
Headstart/First Semester Asian I School

Volume I
Selected Aspects of East Asian
Religion/Culture
Units 1-11

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Defense Language Institute
Foreign Language Center

Acknowledgments

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Preface

This preface outlines objectives for Culture of the East Asian World. Throughout this study, readers should recognize the following:

- **Importance of Area** Underlying all discussion is the premise that East Asia is important to vital national interests of the United States.
- **Sensitivity** In dealing with the region, military intelligence linguists must demonstrate discretion, tactfulness, and grace.
- **Variety** Though bound by common, uniting principles and beliefs, cultures and religions of East Asia possess great variety.
- **Resources Available** Listed at the conclusion of each module are resources, many of which are readily available, that provide deeper insight and awareness.

Each unit begins with overall objectives of that section of study. A vocabulary list follows every narrative. Included are review quizzes, designed to enhance learning of unit objectives. Sources used in the narrative and resources for further study are then stated.



Maps are a part of Unit 12 (Vol. II). Hopefully, students will use these tools to familiarize themselves with East Asia, providing a context for their language study.

Highlighted portions offer readers an opportunity to skim and capture extremely important information at a quick glance.

The text is in two volumes. Volume I includes Units 1-11. Volume II is made of Unit 12, an Answer Key and Glossary. Pronunciation guides are located on the inside back cover of each volume.

Culture of the East Asian World acknowledges China's dominant role in the region. It treats aspects of Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese Religions (Confucian Thought, Taoism, and Folk) and Islam. Not all aspects of the text apply to other-than-Chinese language students.

Readers select and choose as appropriate to their specific area. For example, Thai linguists would be wise to focus on the Hindu and Buddhist sections; Tagalong on Islam (plus the treatment of Christianity in the Philippine country study); Japanese on Buddhist and Chinese religions; Vietnamese on Hindu, Buddhist and Chinese religions.



Introduction

I. The intent of this cultural/religious overview of East Asia is to

1. Provide a context, a schema, a broad knowledge of the East Asian world. The projected audience is Asian I students and the faculty who instruct these students.

2. Address content Final Learning Objectives (FLOs) This work treats the basic, commonly understood themes of the following FLOs:

- a. Holidays/Observances
- b. Customs
- c. Religious Groups
- d. Ethnic/Racial Groups
- e. Gender Issues
- f. Conflicts

The goal is establishment of a "level playing field" where students and faculty can possess competency in a common cultural literacy for East Asia. In addition, this project introduces entry level military intelligence personnel to critical elements of the East Asian intelligence picture.

3. Facilitate Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center instruction. The finished product of this study is an interactive, computerized, programmed instruction text. Hopefully, language department chairs and team leaders in the Asian I School will integrate this study into their first semester culture content portions of instruction.

At a minimum, this tool will serve students awaiting entry into Asian I languages (Headstart and casual status students) and new instructors.



II. The content is not free of bias. Six underlying principles guide presentations.

1. China's overall impact upon the region To consider the East Asian region is to recognize the historical and present-day influence of China in the area. In the words of Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, "China's history, culture, traditions, size, economic dynamism, and self-image all impel it to..." resume its preeminent role in East Asia. (See The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, pp. 169, 229.) Thus the extensive treatment given Chinese culture in Volume I.

2. Broad understanding of the term "religions." This text treats as "religions" Hinduism, some Chinese folk and philosophic practice and Buddhist thought and practice. In doing so, it applies the following definition of religion.

"Religion is an individual's or a society's response to/search for that which it/they think(s)/feel(s) is ultimately real, truly true, articulated in myth, acted out in ritual, expressed in symbols, engendering (and being engendered by) powerful sentiments (an ethos) and usually embodied in institutions."

-- Dr. Charles Ryerson, Princeton Theological Seminary, Syllabus, HR 345 Hinduism, Spring 1996.

3. Context Students and faculty cannot adequately understand specific aspects of one country or ethnic group without awareness of broader links to the East Asian world. This study makes a step in providing such linkage.

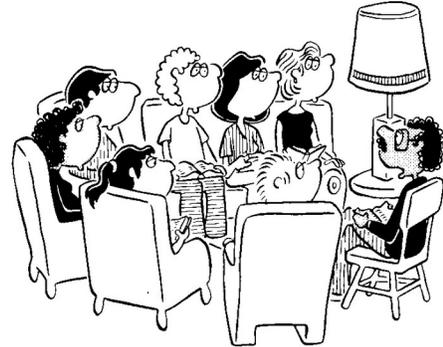
4. Respect The treatment of Hinduism, Chinese religions, Buddhism and Islam found within this text seeks to be positive, affirming, and peace enhancing.

The goal is to get inside of and see the world through the eyes of those who practice the given religion. An objective, empathetic, somewhat detached treatment of East Asian religions is the aim. The author stays away from apologetic, polemical stances concerning the faiths presented.



5. Perspective This text draws upon printed, academic and popular accounts as sources of information. Much material is from secondary rather than primary language texts. Thus, the perspective may be skewed, treating East Asian culture and religion from a more refined, educated light. Thus, the "soil and blood," passionate, firsthand, emotionally-earnest, ground level views of issues treated may not be present.

6. Resources Through use of this guide, students and faculty have a springboard to further personal/group study and analysis. The aim is discernment in use of the huge amounts of material available on the subject of East Asian culture/religion.



III. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)

BLUFs--the underlying objectives for each module--follow. Readers will grow in their understanding of...

Unit 1. Cultural Awareness

- Importance of sensitivity by military intelligence linguists to cultures of East Asia
- Cultural awareness advantages inherently possessed by military personnel

Unit 2. Historical Overview

- Long-lasting effects of over 4,500 years of history within the East Asian region
- Close historical ties between Hindu, Buddhist and Chinese religious thought and practice
- Unique Muslim impact on Southeast Asia

Unit 3. Foundational Beliefs

A. Hinduism

- Extreme duration of concept of time within Hindu thought
 - Variety of Hindu paths leading to salvation

B. Buddhism

- Major schools of Buddhist thought--Theravada and Mahayana (Pure Land, Zen and Tantra)
- Decentralized, diversified nature of Buddhist practice

C. Chinese Religions

- Pervading influence of Chinese folk religious practice
- Syncretistic nature of Chinese religious practice

D. Islam

- Presence of pre-Islamic expression within present-day Muslim faith and practice within Southeast Asia
- Common beliefs held by most Muslims

Unit 4. Gestures and Taboos

- Foundational principles to apply when interacting with a new culture
 - Importance of manners and customs to cultural understanding

Unit 5. Holidays and Observances

- Distinctive Chinese religions, Buddhist and Muslim religious/cultural holidays and observances
 - Significance of holidays and observances for tactical, operational and strategic military missions

Unit 6. Religion and East Asian Politics

- Long lasting influence of Confucian thought and practice on East Asian political expressions
- Unique Buddhist and Muslim influence in Southeast Asian politics

Unit 7. U.S. Relations--East Asian Cultures

- Principles of United States foreign policy within East Asia
- Importance and complexity of engaging China
 - Role and growing impact of ASEAN in the region

Unit 8. Fundamentalisms

- Resurgence of religious expression throughout the East Asian world
 - Impact of militant Muslim fundamentalist thought and practice in the region

Unit 9. Religious Texts--Societal Implications

A. Hindu Texts

- Flexibility, four stages and goals of Hindu religious life
 - Paths leading to liberation

B. Buddhist Texts

- Importance of compassion, meditation and achieving good merit within Buddhist practice
 - Impact of the Sangha on Theravadan Buddhist expression

C. Chinese Texts

- Importance of community and family within Confucian ethics
 - Taoist ideal of following the natural course of things (wu-wei)

D. Islamic Texts

- Ethical practices and views toward violence within Islamic thought
 - Importance of internal motivation within Islam

Unit 10. Gender Issues

- Unique East Asian Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Muslim and Christian perspectives concerning women
 - Impact of prostitution on U.S. Armed Forces and East Asian cultures

Unit 11. Resources

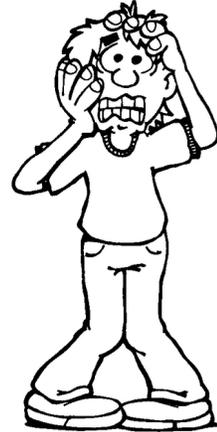
- Book, periodical, audio-visual, and electronic (World Wide Web) resources available for further study
 - Necessity of discernment in dealing with the overwhelming amount of information available on East Asian cultures/religions

Unit 12. Country Area Studies

- Overview of (1) China, (2) Japan, (3) Thailand, (4) Vietnam, (5) Philippines, (6) the Korean Peninsula, (7) assorted countries--Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and Mongolia, (8) Southeast Asia--Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and (9) the Indonesian archipelago--Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore
- Distinctive religious practices within the region
- Country locations
- General and commonly understood treatment of the following Final Learning Objectives (FLOs) for each country:
 1. Holidays/Observances
 2. Customs
 3. Religious Groups
 4. Ethnic/Racial Groups
 5. Gender Issues
 6. Conflicts

IV. Selected Aspects of Policy--Religion in the Classroom

1. Introduction Few subjects engender more controversy than does religion. In the laboratory of the DLIFLC classroom, this is also the case. Objective treatment of our own or another's religious point of view is inhibited due, in part, to the following.



a. Professional-personal dichotomy. Many of us feel our expressed religious views must be included in all that we do. The intensely personal nature of religious thought and practice cannot be excluded from "who we are." How can we divorce from us that which is dearest, namely our religious belief and practice? In the structured environment of the classroom, we feel we cannot exclude our personal perspectives, assumptions and understandings. Yet, impartiality and fairness is often impeded by such a perspective.

b. Personal histories. Many of us come from backgrounds where our "personal stories" include instances of harassment, persecution, and ill-treatment, all because of one religious persuasion or another. It is difficult to be somewhat objective when we possess such heritages.

c. Faith traditions. Some of us come from aggressive, assertive, and zealous faiths wherein evangelism is a central tenant of our practice. Consequently, it may be hard to maintain sensitivity to other points of view.

d. Perceptions of America. We may think freedom of religion entitles us to brandish our beliefs to whomever we can. Difficulties in church/state understandings can muddle our views.



America is governed however, by the rule of law, the written word, the Constitution. This standard entitles all United States citizens to freely exercise their own faith and practice. It requires sensitivity and impartiality to instruct within the confines of the Department of Defense classroom.

e. Student views. Often due to immaturity, restricted background or rigidity in mindset, students project misconceptions, prejudices, stereotypes and insensitivities into the classroom. Remaining courteous and civil in the face of such inaccuracies can become burdensome.

f. 2/2/2 pressures. We do not want to take time away from the ultimate goal, producing trained linguists in our target languages. Some see treatments of culture/religion as detracting from this overall objective.

g. "Safe" position. Due to all the controversy engendered by religion, some think the best position is to ignore its consideration altogether. Such treatment does a disservice to our students. In most cultures of the world, religion is fused with culture, language and world view.

h. Curriculum. Dated texts, seemingly inaccurate or incomplete treatments of religions of an area cause agitation and upset. If we try to create our own culture content presentations, sorting through the huge amounts of religious information available creates understanding barriers.

2. Policy As mandated by the National Security Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency, Final Learning Objectives (FLOs) for DLIFLC students include areas pertaining to culture as affected by religion. Due however, to the potentially controversial nature of religion/culture, the easiest course of action often is to ignore or neglect these critical areas. Such disregard does disservice to our students.



As we embark upon the 21st century, the religious dimensions of culture are crucial to understanding the geopolitical framework in which DLIFLC students perform their mission. The following policy clarifies and implements guidance when dealing with the potentially controversial subject of the religious dimensions of culture.

a. Caution and Care Instructors and curriculum developers must utilize caution and care when handling the religious dimensions of culture as applied to target language instruction. The goal is a balanced, fair treatment of the religious dimensions of the culture studied. Treating all sides justly; showing no more favor to one side than another; taking steps to curtail views promoting selfish personal advantage; and not being swayed by personal or cultural biases describe traits instructors and staff personnel must possess when handling the religious dimensions of culture as applied to language learning.

b. Audio-Visual Aids Training materials used in the classroom must be selected, reviewed and handled with prudence and responsibility.

c. Objectivity Instructors and curriculum developers strive for accurate, objective, factual, and unbiased presentations of the often many sided issues of religion/culture. Departments must exercise painstaking care, which focuses upon developing sensitivity, when treating the multifaceted dimensions of culture/religion.

d. Teach, not Preach Instructors and curriculum developers are educators. Understanding of the other's point of view, rather than conversion to a differing religious viewpoint, is the aim.

In the classroom, proselytizing activity easily leads to harassment, unfair treatment of another's beliefs, and a denial of equal opportunity for all. Slanderous, demeaning, disparaging remarks and attitudes have no place. Demonizing techniques, displaying stereotyped, prejudicial notions are uncalled for. Advocating conspiratorial schemes of religious/political movements is improper. Promoting harmful untruths about another's religious point of view often creates a climate of bigotry and unrest.



e. Specific Applications Within the structured classroom, the following counsel, gleaned from guidance of the DLIFLC Staff Judge Advocate, applies.

(1) Objectivity The general rule concerning religion in the classroom is NO proselytizing, NO evangelizing and NO personal opinions. All that should happen in a structured classroom environment is objective instruction of the religious aspects of whatever culture is studied.

(2) Impartiality Instructors must neither editorialize when discussing religion nor communicate opinions non-verbally (rolling eyes, shaking head.) Students should come away from the class having no idea what the instructor personally thinks about the religious practices of the culture studied.

(3) Neutrality If somehow a student makes known his or her personal beliefs, the instructor should steer the discussion away from these personal beliefs and attitudes. Educators must do everything in their power to ensure the student does not feel as if his or her personal beliefs were criticized, discouraged, encouraged or applauded.



f. Student Responsibility Students as well have a responsibility in ensuring that a wholesome climate for learning exists. Prejudiced views, biased questioning, belittling attitudes and stereotyped treatments of the religious persuasions of others have no place--whether by students or faculty--within the DLIFLC classroom setting.

3. References

a. Potentially Controversial Topics in the DLI Foreign Language Curriculum, DLIFLC Command Policy 5-93, 20 APR 1993

b. Professional Code of Ethics, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

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