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Lunar New Year and Coca-Cola

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Lunar New Year and Coca-Cola

Abstract

“Happy New Year!”

It’s a bit late for that, isn’t it? It’s already February.

Ironically, I was informed of the Lunar New Year by my beloved American friend, who seemed more excited to celebrate the Year of the Horse than I was. And then came the Toilet Paper Times, inviting students to the Attic to honor the holiday with Asian food and cultural exchange. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Korea, Lunar New Year, traditions, ethnicity, Coca-Cola

Disciplines

Asian American Studies | Asian Studies | International and Area Studies | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

Comments

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SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

LUNAR NEW YEAR AND COCA-COLA

February 5, 2014

“Happy New Year!”

It’s a bit late for that, isn’t it? It’s already February.

Ironically, I was informed of the Lunar New Year by my beloved American friend, who seemed more excited to celebrate the Year of the Horse than I was. And then came the Toilet Paper Times, inviting students to the Attic to honor the holiday with Asian food and cultural exchange.

To be honest, though, I could not have been more aloof about the celebration. Despite the fact I am from Korea—one of the Asian countries that puts on an extravagant celebration for the Lunar New Year—greeting the “lunar version,” or [Seollal](#), for the fifth year away from home diminished my excitement. So, amidst the hectic school work and chaos, the Attic party simply slipped my mind—what an uneventful way to spend *the* biggest holiday in Korea.

But, I guess there is free lunch for being an Asian in America. A quarter-Korean friend of mine was kind enough to bring me some [galbi](#), a marinated beef with special Korean sauce, and [kimchi](#), as I would have had if I were in Korea. I decided to share the food with some of my friends that have never tried it before. Yes, galbi was a rarity, but it wasn’t impossible for me to get some if I indeed craved it. Sneakily carrying the food into Servo, I presented the cuisine to my friends, and to my great surprise, the food was gone in a second. And for the first time, I realized that I have never really tried to share or explain the Lunar New Year, or anything of Korea, to my non-Asian friends.

My first year in the States, I remember asking high school friends in excitement to “make me American.” The year before that, while temporarily living in China, I had always wished I was Chinese, or at least a Chinese-Korean, so I could better acclimate to the community.

In the process, however, I have completely neglected my own culture and heritage, mindlessly pursuing what appeared to be the “majority,” or the “dominant culture.” In my unfledged mind, in order to fit into the culture I dwelled in, I had to abandon everything that was originally “me.”



So to a younger- and ignorant-version of me, [Coca-Cola](#) was wrong.

I wasn't American. And if I were to live in a foreign country in the pursuit of accustoming myself to the culture and of mastering the language, then of course *America the Beautiful* should have been sung in English rather than in multiple languages.

Sadly, it is through my Chinese and American friends that I have learned about my own culture, such as Korean soap-operas and K-pop. I was busy hiding the smell of kimchi, perfecting my English pronunciation and writing, and insisting on my English name rather than bothering to correct people's mispronunciation of my Korean name.

However, simply rewriting who I am wasn't the way to accept or be accepted by another culture. Immersing myself into a culture and language wasn't about emptying a flowerpot before planting more seeds in it. Instead, it was about making sure it had enough soil and pebbles to ensure other plants could grow in it as well. Without the soil and pebbles, not to mention the flowerpot itself, there was no room for more seeds to be planted.

In other words, there was not only nothing wrong with being who I was, but I needed to have a self-identity.

Moreover, if I don't speak up, would people ever know that the Chinese New Year is a misnomer, and the proper term is actually the "Lunar New Year"? And that there are different Asian countries that celebrate different Lunar New Years besides China ([Chūnjié](#), or "Spring Festival"), such as Korea (*Seolla*), Vietnam ([Tết](#)), Tibet ([Losar](#)), as well as the fact that Japanese don't celebrate the Lunar New Year, contrary to the popular belief?

What about the people who genuinely believe Coca-Cola should [#speakamerican](#) instead of "illegal," "immigrant," and "terrorist" languages? Who will educate the ignorant to embrace the multicultural and multiracial makeup of the United States?

Ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is not patriotism, either.

I learned the hard way that it is okay to be who I am, instead of completely reprogramming myself; I want more people to say "Happy (Lunar) New Year" in late January or February; I want people to feel comfortable talking about their own culture and eating their traditional dish in public.

We are not merely hardware that can insert different software into the body.

Although I have not had Coke in years, I would gladly and proudly make a toast for Coca-Cola and the Lunar New Year.

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Editor

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