

Koichi Hagimoto

*Associate Professor of Spanish
Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA*



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Statement

When I came to the U.S. from Japan to attend Soka University of America, it never occurred to me that I would end up studying Spanish for the rest of my life. However, thanks to the amazing education I received at Soka and my transformative study abroad experience in Argentina, I discovered my lifelong passion for Spanish and Latin American literature and culture. During my time as a Ph.D. student at the University of Pittsburgh, I wrote a dissertation comparing the nineteenth-century anticolonial literature of Cuba and the Philippines, focusing on the writings of José Martí and José Rizal. Today, as a Spanish professor who came from Asia and who has lived in Latin America, I use my classroom as a platform not only to advocate the importance of Spanish from a global perspective, but also to raise awareness about the forgotten history of Asian presence in Latin America.

At Wellesley College I take enormous pleasure in teaching all levels of Spanish courses, from Elementary Spanish to upper-level seminars. My teaching philosophy revolves around the goal of helping students cultivate a new sense of the world by exposing them to, and challenging them with, an unfamiliar language. In order to achieve this goal, I teach all my classes entirely in Spanish. Not surprisingly, this presents a major challenge for elementary and intermediate levels. Students may initially feel nervous or frustrated in the target language, but I always make sure to tell them, based on my own experience, that mistakes are not only inevitable but also welcome. Despite the many challenges posed by the pandemic this year, I tried to use the virtual space to create a positive environment in which students were given opportunities to practice and build confidence in Spanish through pair activities, group discussions, and cultural presentations.

One of my signature courses is a seminar called “Asia in Latin America: Literary and Cultural Connections.” This class stands out as a landmark in my teaching career because of its uniqueness; in fact, I believe this topic is rarely taught in American universities. We discuss a wide range of topics, including the transcultural art of colonial Latin America, the significance of the Philippines as a “Hispanic” country, the literary representation of Asia during *modernismo*, the history of Chinese indentured workers in Cuba, the cultural production of Japanese immigrants in Peru, and the influence of K-pop in Latin America. By examining how Asian communities contributed to the creation of modern Latin America, my students also gain a deeper, more critical understanding of the reality of racial diversity in the region.

The mission of AATSP is to promote the study and teaching of the Spanish and Portuguese languages and cultures. In 2021, I believe that our role as language teachers to inspire hope and possibility among young people is more pressing than ever. Together with my fellow AATSP members, I remain committed to offering language instruction that allows students to see beyond today’s world and envision a brighter future in which they can thrive with their new skills in Spanish and Portuguese.

Bio

Koichi Hagimoto is Associate Professor of Spanish at Wellesley College. His research interests are centered on Transpacific Studies, through which he explores diverse aspects of the literary and cultural relationship between Asia and Latin America. He is the author of *Between Empires: Martí, Rizal and the Intercolonial Alliance* (2013). He has also edited a volume, *Trans-Pacific Encounters: Asia and the Hispanic World* (2016), and has co-edited (with Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger and Kim Beauchesne) a special number for *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* (2018) on the influence of Asia in Latin American literature.

At Wellesley Koichi teaches a wide range of courses, including Elementary and Intermediate Spanish, Introduction to Hispanic Studies, Introduction to Latin American Studies (in English), Hispanic Caribbean Literature and Culture, Making of Modern Latin American Culture, Nineteenth-Century Latin American Literature and Culture, Seminar on Cuban Literature and Culture, Seminar on Asia in Latin America, and Wintersession Travel Program in Cuba. He is a recipient of the Pinanski Teaching Prize (2012) and the Apgar Award for Teaching Excellence (2019).