
The Asian Century?

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The visit to India by the Chinese Buddhist scholar Xuanzang in the seventh century was novelized a millennium later in a book titled *Journey to the West*.¹ Amartya Sen notes that the title can also be translated as “Monkey,” suggesting the wonderful richness of an allegorical language.² As *Journey to the West* demonstrates, notions of West and East are constructed, and this construction is largely dependent upon where one stands. So too are notions such as “Asia” and “Europe,” which, after all, share the same land mass.

A century ago, Asia was constructed as a military menace. In his 1911 book, *The Yellow Peril, or The Orient vs. The Occident*, the evangelist G. G. Rupert foresaw a clash of civilizations, in particular, “the danger that arises to the West, from the yellow races of the East.”³ As if to underline the constructed, and thus malleable, nature of terms such as “yellow,” Rupert counted Russia in the “yellow peril.”⁴

The latest construction of Asia would see a continent that would lead this new century. This is indeed a long way from the “Yellow Peril.” Yet, the new construction of Asia raises its own set of questions and

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¹ AMARTYA SEN, *THE ARGUMENTATIVE INDIAN* 169 (2005).

² *Id.*

³ G. G. RUPERT, *THE YELLOW PERIL, OR THE ORIENT VS. THE OCCIDENT* 15 (3d ed. 1911).

⁴ *Id.*

concerns. What is the Asia imagined in this Asian Century? Does it include the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, or the non-Tiger economies? Does it include the poor villages or the remote provinces of the powerful states? What does it mean for a century to be dominated by a particular land or region? Must Africa and Latin America patiently await their turn on the world stage? Can only one country or region dominate at one time? Is international success really a zero-sum game, always at another nation's cost? Finally, what would an Asian Century mean for human rights, including women's rights and gay rights? The papers in this symposium with the open-ended title "The Asian Century?" grapple with these questions and raise others.

Before we consider the many uncertainties of the Asian Century we allegedly inhabit, it is useful to review the ambitions of the American Century that we have purportedly left behind. These ambitions were forcefully stated in the manifesto of Henry Luce, the founder and publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*, who coined the term the "American Century." Luce famously declared American leadership of the century in an essay at the dawn of the Second World War. Luce asked, "What are we fighting for?"⁵ With the American entry into the war, the domestic struggle between the isolationists and internationalists had gone decidedly to the internationalists.⁶ Luce's answer was the internationalization of American ideas — from Hollywood to Washington. Luce's vision presaged American support for human rights after the war and its forceful, if inconsistent, critique of despots during the latter half of the Twentieth Century.

Luce's question might be posed of the "Asian Century" today. What kind of global vision might an Asian Century offer? The great Indian poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore asked a similar question on the eve of the Second World War. Lecturing in China and surveying the drive for progress in both his homeland and in China, he asked, "Progress towards what, and progress for whom?"⁷ In their own ways, the papers in this symposium with the open-ended title "The Asian Century?" brilliantly explore those questions. In this Essay, I will introduce these papers by contrasting two answers about progress: that of the publisher Henry Luce and that of his contemporary, the poet Rabindranath Tagore. In so doing, I take up the implicit call of Martha

⁵ HENRY R. LUCE, *THE AMERICAN CENTURY* 16 (1941) (reprinting essay originally published in *Life* magazine on February 17, 1941).

⁶ *See id.* at 32.

⁷ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *TALKS IN CHINA* 121 (Rupa & Co. 2002) (quoting lecture given in 1924) [hereinafter *TALKS IN CHINA*].

Nussbaum's powerful keynote address for the Symposium — a call to learn from Tagore's extraordinary humanist vision.

The question mark in the title of the symposium reflects two additional anxieties. First, it seems premature to announce that a particular region will lead the world during a particular era of human history until well into that era. Even when Luce proclaimed the American Century in 1941, it was less than certain that the United States would emerge victorious, let alone strong enough to take the role of world leader for the remaining bulk of the century. It is clearly too early to proclaim the dawn of an Asian Century. Second, even if an Asian Century were to come to pass, it is worth asking whether it would be a good idea. This Essay grapples, elliptically, with that last question.

Three out of every five people in the world live in Asia — more than half of humanity.⁸ The notion of an Asian Century thus serves one unambiguously positive purpose — to bring attention to a part of humanity that has been neglected in scholarly discourse. The rapid economic development of China and India over the last two decades has made Asia more central to the international system. As we move Asia out of the periphery of scholarly discussion, we must pay attention to the complexity of Asia. The geographic entity known as Asia defies essentializing claims, instead boasting a diversity of histories and circumstances, from the skyscrapers of Shanghai to the slums of Mumbai.

My argument proceeds as follows. Part I describes the American Century as imagined by Henry Luce and also considers the century as it actually came to pass. Part II offers a contrasting vision, Tagore's humanist appeal, offered in lectures in China and Japan. Part III considers the central challenge of a putative Asian Century — to enhance the full range of human capabilities.

I. LUCE'S AMERICAN CENTURY

Luce's vision of the American Century consisted of four elements. The first element was economic: "America as the principal guarantor of the freedom of the seas" and "the dynamic leader of world trade. . . ."⁹ A second element was "an America which will send out

⁸ UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION, POPULATION AND VITAL STATISTICS REPORT 4 (2010), available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/vitstats/serATab1.pdf> (estimating that in mid-2009, Asia's population was 4,121,097,000, and world population was 6,829,360,000).

⁹ LUCE, *supra* note 5, at 36.

through the world its technical and artistic skills. Engineers, scientists, doctors, movie men, makers of entertainment, developers of airlines, builders of roads, teachers, educators.”¹⁰ The third element of the vision called for America to serve as “the Good Samaritan of the entire world.”¹¹ The final element required “a passionate devotion to great American ideals,” namely “a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of co-operation.”¹²

In Luce’s vision, the United States would seek to improve lives throughout the world, yet never stray far from American interests. Urging support for free enterprise and free trade, he counsels, for example:

Our thinking of world trade today is on ridiculously small terms. For example, we think of Asia as being worth only a few hundred millions a year to us. Actually, in the decades to come Asia will be worth to us exactly zero — or else it will be worth to us four, five, ten billions of dollars a year.¹³

As a publisher, Luce was first and foremost a businessman, who likely saw opportunity in extending his publishing empire across the world. While profoundly progressive compared with the British Century’s outright confiscation and exploitation of the colonies, Luce’s vision seemed to share the view of the rest of the world largely as a market. While America would send out its “developers of airlines” and “builders of roads,” the profits would presumably be repatriated to the United States.

Even the altruistic vision of America feeding the world focused on American exports: “Every farmer in America should be encouraged to produce all the crops he can, and all that we cannot eat . . . should forthwith be dispatched to the four quarters of the globe as a free gift, administered by a humanitarian army of Americans. . . .”¹⁴ The charity Luce envisioned depended upon American producers and American distributors, leaving room for foreigners only as the consumers. This form of foreign aid, despite its noble intentions, sometimes had an adverse effect — it undermined farmers in destitute communities, who

¹⁰ *Id.* at 37.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 38.

¹³ *Id.* at 36-37.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 38.

now faced competition from American farmers who offered their goods at an unbeatable price — free.¹⁵

Luce celebrated American internationalism in the form of “American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products. . . .”¹⁶ The reference to patented products suggests the royalty payments from abroad that will follow, continuing the trade theme in Luce’s manifesto.

The commercial heart of Luce’s vision did not escape notice at the time of Luce’s writing. Commenting on Luce’s manifesto in the book version of the manifesto, Robert Spivack warned, “Mr. Luce may be unconsciously confirming the direst prognostications of the Communists, who contend that the war is being waged merely to enhance the profits of American imperialism.”¹⁷ While it is difficult today to credit the claim that commercial interests motivated American entry into World War II, the commercialism at the heart of Luce’s vision of American engagement with the world is clear.

In a sense this self-interested aspect of Luce’s international vision is embedded within a significant strain of contemporary American scholarship on foreign relations. The realist school believes that states act internationally out of self-interest.¹⁸

Luce’s vision of the rest of the world as merely a market for American goods, or American films, or American lawyers would persist over the latter half of the twentieth century, and continues, in part, into this new century. Before he boarded a flight to India in November 2010, President Barack Obama explained his trip’s ambitions to his cabinet: “The primary purpose is to take a bunch of U.S. companies and open up markets so that we can sell in Asia, in some of the fastest-growing markets in the world, and we can create jobs here in the United States of America.”¹⁹ President Obama took

¹⁵ FRANCES MOORE LAPPÉ ET AL., *WORLD HUNGER: 12 MYTHS* 136 (1998) (arguing that U.S. food grains have undercut prices of locally produced food, harming farmers in countries where it is distributed).

¹⁶ *Id.* at 33.

¹⁷ Robert G. Spivack, *Comments on The American Century: Robert G. Spivack*, in *THE AMERICAN CENTURY*, *supra* note 5, at 72, 72.

¹⁸ JACK L. GOLDSMITH & ERIC A. POSNER, *THE LIMITS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW* 7 (2005) (“Our theory of international law assumes that states act rationally to maximize their interests.”).

¹⁹ Michael D. Shear, *Obama Recasts Asia Trip as Jobs Mission*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 5, 2010, 7:41 AM), <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/05/obama-recasts-asia-trip-as-jobs-mission>; see also James Lamont, *Obama’s Quest for an Indian Pay-off*, FIN. TIMES, Nov. 5, 2010, available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/81fd1e80-e903-11df-a1b4-00144feab49a.html>.

hundreds of American business executives to India, and proudly announced some ten billion dollars in contracts for American exports.²⁰ Shortly thereafter, the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* exhorted Chinese citizens, “SHOP, CHINA, SHOP!”²¹

All this is reminiscent of the British Century, which treated India and the colonies as captive markets for British manufacture.²² This resulted in periodic boycotts of British goods by Indian nationalists. Consider this colorful opening sentence from the *New York Times* in 1905: “Fifty thousand Bengalis Assembled at the Kali Ghat Temple have sworn by the Goddess Kali to boycott British goods as a protest against the partition of the Province of Bengal.”²³

At the same time, despite the commercial desires embedded in Luce’s vision, the United States has spent the better part of the last century being the world’s most important champion of human rights. As Harold Koh writes,

[T]he United States has been genuinely exceptional, with regard to international affairs, international law, and promotion of human rights: namely, in its exceptional global leadership and activism. To this day, the United States remains the only superpower capable, and at times willing, to commit real resources and make real sacrifices to build, sustain, and drive an international system committed to international law, democracy, and the promotion of human rights.²⁴

Having served in key roles in the State Department, Koh attests:

Every day in virtually every embassy and consulate around the world, American diplomats . . . [intervene to inquire about] political prisoners, opposition politicians, and labor leaders, even in countries that most Americans could not locate on any

²⁰ Christi Parsons & Don Lee, *In India, Obama Unveils Nearly \$10 Billion in Export Deals*, L.A. TIMES, Nov. 7, 2010, at A3.

²¹ Brook Larmer, *Shop, China, Shop*, N.Y. TIMES MAG., Nov. 30, 2010, at MM65, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/magazine/28ChinaPortfolio-t.html>.

²² See ALEX CALLINICOS, IMPERIALISM AND GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY 155 (2009) (“Free trade [including no tariffs] was an essential institutional condition of India’s role as a captive market for British industrial exports. . . .”); IAN J. KERR, ENGINES OF CHANGE 27 (2007) (“Colonial India was a captive market for British-made [railroad] engines.”).

²³ *Hindus Start Boycott Against British Goods*, N.Y. TIMES, Sep. 30, 1905, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10A12FE3F5C1A728DDDA90B94D1405B858CF1D3>.

²⁴ Harold Hongju Koh, *On American Exceptionalism*, 55 STAN. L. REV. 1479, 1487 (2003).

map. Without question, no other country takes a comparable interest or has comparable influence worldwide.²⁵

The American Century can properly be said to be a century in which the United States generally sought to exercise its leadership to promote democracy and human rights around the world. Would an Asian Century weaken or widen the reach of democracy and human rights? I turn now to Tagore's vision of internationalism.

II. TAGORE'S MESSAGE OF LOVE

Many centuries after Xuanzang, Rabindranath Tagore would repay his visit, lecturing in China in 1924 and again in 1937. Unlike Xuanzang, who was feted for bringing Indian spiritual learning to China, Tagore was criticized in some quarters for urging China to seek a spiritual path, rather than one of materialism. He told Chinese students, "I cannot . . . bring myself to believe that any nation in this world can be great and yet be materialistic."²⁶ Tagore preached instead of nurturing notions of sympathy and understanding. Tagore celebrated moral wisdom instead of the machineries of war and commerce: "it would be degradation on our part, and an insult to our ancestors, if we forgot our own moral wealth of wisdom, which is of far greater value than a system that produces endless materials and a physical power that is always on the warpath."²⁷

In her powerful keynote paper for the symposium, Martha Nussbaum tells us how Tagore sought to inculcate these same values in India. She quotes Tagore's statement, "We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy."²⁸ At his school, Tagore accordingly sought to use drama, music, and dance for the "cultivation of emotion and imagination."²⁹ This hardly meant that Tagore was an enemy of science or progress.³⁰ I return to Nussbaum's argument, drawing upon the Tagore model, in Part III below.

Coming from a land that long suffered at the hands of British traders and imperialists, Tagore proposed an internationalism led by neither

²⁵ *Id.* at 1488-89.

²⁶ TAGORE, TALKS IN CHINA, *supra* note 7, at 77.

²⁷ *Id.* at 51-52.

²⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Democracy, Education, and the Liberal Arts: Two Asian Models*, 44 UC DAVIS L. REV. 735, 747 (2011) (quoting RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *My School*, in PERSONALITY 135, 142 (1917) *reprinted in* 4 THE ENGLISH WRITINGS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE 399, 401-02 (Atlantic Pub'rs. & Distrib. 2007) (1994)).

²⁹ *Id.* at 748.

³⁰ *See infra* note 71 and accompanying text.

the merchant nor the soldier. In China, he recalls “that glorious time when India did send her messengers of love to this land, — not her merchants nor her soldiers. . . .”³¹ Here, Tagore must be recalling the monks and scholars who had passed between the two lands — men like Xuanzang.

These men were driven by a desire for learning — to bring back the treasure of scriptures or treatises from foreign lands. For Tagore, international relations should be driven by love, not exploitation. Tagore conjures a world of a humanist Pax Asiana:

I cannot but bring to your mind those days when the whole of Eastern Asia from Burma to Japan was united with India in the closest tie of friendship, the only natural tie which can exist between nations. There was a living communication of hearts, a nervous system evolved through which messages ran between us about the deepest needs of humanity. We did not stand in fear of each other, we had not to arm ourselves to keep each other in check; our relation was not that of self-interest. . . .³²

The muscular self-assurance of Luce’s American Century contrasts sharply with the humility of Tagore’s internationalism.

Where Luce seems to imagine a world that would receive American culture with open arms, Tagore imagined an Asia that cultivated its indigenous knowledge and traditions. In his Chinese lectures, as elsewhere, Tagore rejected the colonial project articulated by British historian Thomas Macaulay a century earlier: to create “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”³³ Tagore abhorred mere mimicry of the West:

Some of us, of the East, think that we should ever imitate the West. I do not believe in it. For imitation belongs to the dead mould; life never imitates, it assimilates. What the West has produced is for the West, being native to it. But we of the East cannot borrow the Western mind nor the Western temperament.³⁴

³¹ TAGORE, TALKS IN CHINA, *supra* note 7, at 46.

³² RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *Nationalism in Japan*, in NATIONALISM 47, 58 (1921) [hereinafter *Nationalism in Japan*].

³³ THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, *Minute on Indian Education*, in SPEECHES 345, 359 (Oxford 1935) (speech originally delivered in 1835).

³⁴ 3 RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *To the Youth of Hyderabad*, in THE ENGLISH WRITINGS

Imitation, Tagore observed, often entailed the rejection of one's own culture: "The old Indian pictures and other works of art were laughed at by our students in imitation of the laughter of their European schoolmasters. . . ." ³⁵ Tagore believed in the organic assimilation of others' ways, not their slavish imitation. At the same time, he studied the Indian classics, seeming here to follow in the footsteps of his father, who had published a Bengali translation of the *Rig Vedas*. He offered the metaphor of rivers washing into the ocean of a global culture: "We want to master the idiom which belongs to our own genius, the river-bed which naturally carries our own thought streams to the ocean of world culture." ³⁶

As Tagore's reference to assimilation shows, Tagore did not reject Europe, arguing that it had much to teach: "That we should borrow science from the West is right. We have a great thing to accept from the people of the West, — their treasure of intellect, which is immense and whose superiority we must acknowledge." ³⁷ Lecturing in Japan in 1916, Tagore had pressed the same point: "[W]hile trying to free our minds from the arrogant claims of Europe and to help ourselves out of the quicksands of our infatuation, we may go to the other extreme and blind ourselves with a wholesale suspicion of the West." ³⁸ Visiting Java where Hinduism had flourished, Tagore gratefully acknowledged the assistance of "[t]wo Dutch savants," who helped explain the Javanese rituals. ³⁹ Tagore recognizes that the West can teach the East about the East: "We must accept them as our gurus," he says humbly of the Dutch experts, "if we want to understand India in her wholeness." ⁴⁰

Even while criticizing Europe for "her behaviour to people whom she describes as yellow or red, brown or black," Tagore did not overlook his own society's flaws: "[T]his is a point on which we in the East have to acknowledge our guilt and own that our sin has been as great, if not greater, when we insulted humanity by treating with utter disdain and cruelty men who belonged to a particular creed, colour or caste." ⁴¹ This advice, extended to encompass additional groups such as women and gays, deserves to be heeded today.

OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE 670, 672 (Sisir Kumar Das ed., 1996).

³⁵ *Id.* at 683.

³⁶ *Id.* at 672.

³⁷ TAGORE, TALKS IN CHINA, *supra* note 7, at 51.

³⁸ TAGORE, *Nationalism in Japan*, *supra* note 32, at 87.

³⁹ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *Letters from Java*, in AN ANTHOLOGY 108, 115 (1997) (quoting letter dated 1927).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ TAGORE, *Nationalism in Japan*, *supra* note 32, at 87.

III. WORRIES, AND HOPES, FOR AN ASIAN CENTURY

Visiting India in 1988, Deng Xiaoping declared, “No genuine Asia-Pacific century or Asian century can come until China, India and other neighbouring countries are developed.”⁴² Deng is credited with popularizing the concept of an “Asian Century.” Two decades of furious economic development later, Chinese premier Wen Jiabao declared, also in a visit to India, that the “Asian Century has arrived.”⁴³ But even while economic development has lifted millions out of poverty in both countries, neither country can yet claim to be broadly developed.

In his important paper for the symposium, Tom Ginsburg lays out a central challenge: will a resurgent Asia carry us backwards into a time before human rights? Ginsburg contrasts today’s Europe, with its increasing integration and yielding of sovereignty in favor of cooperative regionalism, with the proclamations of non-interference and sovereignty from Eastern powers. Even while European states are yielding sovereignty in favor of regional governance, many Asian states are more likely to enter into international engagements without demanding internal change. The Asian states, it seems, have picked up the banner of Westphalia, consisting of an international order of sovereign states, creating a new “Eastphalia,” to borrow the clever term that Ginsburg deploys.

It is the economic realm that has been the source of the greatest concern with respect to the putative Asian Century. Will China and India seek the energy and commodity resources they need to power their economic development without concern for how those resources are extracted or who benefits from them?⁴⁴ Will they turn a blind eye to the human rights records of the regimes with which they strike economic deals? The Chinese are offering “no-strings-attached loans . . . rather than trying to meddle in other countries’ internal affairs in the manner of the World Bank and the IMF.”⁴⁵ Might Eastern

⁴² Deng Xiaoping, *A New International Order Should Be Established with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as Norms*, CHINA.ORG.CN (Dec. 21, 1988), <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/dengxiaoping/103340.htm>.

⁴³ James Lamont & Jamil Anderlini, *Wen Brings Finance to Cement India Ties*, FIN. TIMES, Dec. 15, 2010, available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0913f5d6-0864-11e0-8527-00144feabdc0.html>.

⁴⁴ See generally Patrick J. Keenan, *Curse or Cure? China, Africa, and the Effects of Unconditioned Wealth*, 27 BERKELEY J. INT’L L. 84 (2009) (arguing that China’s investments in Africa will cause harm rather than improve lives of African people).

⁴⁵ *Re-enter the Dragon*, ECONOMIST, June 3, 2010, at 89, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/16270962>.

finance supplant Western finance sufficiently to allow repressive states to ignore Western liberalization demands? Will adding India to the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council only help insulate the world's dictators from United Nations' meddling?

When he famously declared the possibility of an Asian Century in 1988, Deng Xiaoping recalled the Five Principles for Peaceful Coexistence (the *Panchsheel*, or Five Restraints, in Prime Minister Jawarhalal Nehru's formulation) that China and India embraced in the 1950s.⁴⁶ These principles commit the states to mutual respect, mutual benefit, and equality, but also, as Keith Aoki notes, to Eastphalian non-interference in each other's internal affairs.⁴⁷

Given the history of colonization, exemplified by the British Century's Opium Wars, which brutally opened Chinese markets to British imports of opium grown in India,⁴⁸ these nations' distrust of foreign meddling appears understandable. Consider Tagore's observations about British interventions based on a visit to Iraq in 1932. Tagore learned of a British air force stationed in Baghdad, which was "engaged in bombing operations on some Sheikh villages."⁴⁹ Tagore wrote, "The men, women and children done to death there meet their fate by a decree from the stratosphere of British imperialism — which finds it easy to shower death because of its distance from its individual victims."⁵⁰ We might do well to keep in mind Tagore's warning about the ability of machines to distance human beings from our atrocities and to thereby hide our own brutality from ourselves.

Tagore's experience in Iraq reminds us that even while we worry about the Asian Century, we should not be entirely naïve about Western approaches to human rights. While Harold Koh is certainly right about America's exceptional support for human rights in the postwar period, the United States and other Western powers have not always proved entirely unyielding on this point.

In his characteristically brilliant symposium contribution, Keith Aoki shows how American stewardship of the last century often

⁴⁶ See K.R. Narayanan, *The 50th Anniversary of Panchsheel*, 3 CHINESE J. INT'L L. 369, 369-71 (2004); Xiaoping, *supra* note 42.

⁴⁷ Keith Aoki, *The Yellow Pacific: Transnational Identities, Diasporic Racialization, and the Myth(s) of the "Asian Century"*, 44 UC DAVIS L. REV. 897 (2011).

⁴⁸ See 4 RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *The Death Traffic*, in THE ENGLISH WRITINGS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE 227, 229 (Nityapriya Ghosh ed., 2007).

⁴⁹ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *Journey to Persia*, in AN ANTHOLOGY, *supra* note 39, at 126, 127 (quoting essay dated 1932). Note that the construction of "Persia" has shifted during the last century, such that a visit to Iraq today would not, at least in everyday discourse in the West, be considered a "journey to Persia."

⁵⁰ *Id.*

faltered at home with respect to Asian Americans. He suggests provocatively that the last century could itself be seen as the Asian Century because that century saw the United States deal with “racialized fears of cyclic Asian military, political, economic, and cultural ascendance.”⁵¹ He masterfully traces the difficult history of Asian Americans, from school segregation to economic discrimination to, most notoriously, the Internment of Japanese-Americans. He observes that diasporas complicate the neat division of the world into Asia and America — as reflected in the history of Asian Americans.

Even into this century, the West has at times proved less than steadfast in its championing for human rights. During his recent visit to China, British Prime Minister David Cameron carefully avoided any sharp criticism of his host’s human rights record. Many believed that this omission was deliberate, as Cameron did not want to jeopardize Chinese contracts to purchase British goods.⁵² London’s *Daily Telegraph* declared Prime Minister Cameron’s course wise: “Mr Cameron was . . . right to make trade the focus of his visit.”⁵³ In the Middle East, coddling monarchs has long been a Western practice, largely to keep a steady supply of oil flowing to Western engines.⁵⁴

Tagore’s internationalism is one characterized by humility. Luce’s internationalism, on the other hand, is marked by self-assurance. That self-assurance was evident shortly after the war when the United States (after some initial hesitation) led the world in proclaiming a set of universal human rights that would be the birthright of all humanity.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Aoki, *supra* note 47, at 900.

⁵² See Simon Jenkins, *Only We Do Moral Outrage While Begging for Scraps: Cameron Says He Will Drum up Trade in China, and Tackle Human Rights*, *GUARDIAN*, Nov. 10, 2010, at 29; Joe Murphy, *Tidal Wave of Money to the East Will Hit Recovery, Cameron Warns China*, *EVENING STANDARD* (London), Nov. 10, 2010, <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23896119-david-cameron-risks-wrath-of-hosts-with-keynote-democracy-speech.do> (Prime Minister Cameron “refused to condemn his hosts in public, which would have wrecked the main aim of his tour, the biggest trade delegation ever to China, involving 43 business leaders”).

⁵³ Editorial, *The PM is Right to Focus on Trade with China*, *DAILY TELEGRAPH* (London), Nov. 10, 2010, at 23.

⁵⁴ The recent exposure of diplomatic cables via Wikileaks suggests that even while pledging itself publicly to promoting democracy in the Middle East, behind the scenes the United States government often did not press the matter. See *Never Mind Democracy*, *NEWSWEEK*, Dec. 1, 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/12/01/wikileaks-shows-how-u-s-ignored-democracy-goals-i.html>.

⁵⁵ See generally MARY ANN GLENDON, *A WORLD MADE NEW: ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS* 33 (2001) (describing key actors in Commission on Human Rights’ first session). The United States had originally resisted the inclusion of universal human rights in the United Nations Charter itself; that effort (which resulted in the Article 1 language that human rights belonged to everyone

Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the United Nations committee that would propose the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the United States was a central player in promoting human rights and democracy, even if it sometimes strayed from that task. Would an Asian Century neglect human rights in favor of principles of non-interference and sovereignty?

For Tagore, respect for other peoples did not require either aloofness or cultural relativism. Tagore sought to recognize and nurture the humanity in others. But he was willing to disturb the harmony when he thought it important to do so, as demonstrated by his lectures in both China and Japan. Tagore's own actions suggest that humility need not translate into passivity in the face of injustice. His empathy and love for the peoples of these lands required him to scold his hosts in their own country. The Japanese and the Chinese who had invited him received a trenchant critic. To the Chinese, Tagore spoke frankly: "When I was first invited to come to China, I did not know if all of you wanted a man from India. I even heard some were opposed to my coming, because it might check your special modern enthusiasm for western progress and force."⁵⁶ He objected to those Chinese who would focus on materialism to catch up to the West: "My warning is, that those who would have you rely on material force to make a strong nation, do not know history, or understand civilization either."⁵⁷ Lecturing in Japan in 1916, he warned of the imitation of Western nationalism: "where the spirit of the Western nationalism prevails, the whole people is being taught from boyhood to foster hatreds and ambitions by all kinds of means — by the manufacture of half-truths and untruths in history, by persistent misrepresentation of other races and the culture of unfavourable sentiments towards them. . . ."⁵⁸ Rejecting an entreaty from the Japanese poet Yone Noguchi to support Japanese military interventions in China in 1938, Tagore published his forceful response: "[I]n launching a ravaging war on Chinese humanity, with all the deadly methods learnt from the West, Japan is infringing every moral principle on which civilization is based."⁵⁹ Tagore leveled his criticism at Japanese men of letters for their silence in the face of these

"without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion") had been spearheaded largely by Third World nations, with support from France and the Soviet Union. *Id.* at 13.

⁵⁶ TAGORE, *TALKS IN CHINA*, *supra* note 7, at 59.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ TAGORE, *Nationalism in Japan*, *supra* note 32, at 79.

⁵⁹ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *To Yone Noguchi*, in *AN ANTHOLOGY*, *supra* note 39, at 191, 191.

atrocities: “But from Japan there has come no protest, not even from her poets.”⁶⁰

As we turn to the twenty-first century, we have two signposts about Asia’s role in the world, the first from China, and the other from India. Peter Yu’s significant contribution to the symposium seems to confirm the Eastphalia thesis. Yu examines the rise of what he calls “Sinic Trade Agreements” — bilateral free trade agreements signed by China with various countries, from New Zealand to Iceland. Yu observes important differences between Western and Eastern approaches to bilateral free trade agreements. The Sinic Trade Agreements, Yu argues, “focus more on accommodation than conversion.”⁶¹

Afra Afsharipour keenly observes the new Indian multinational corporations. India’s Tata Group is now the biggest employer in British manufacturing.⁶² She asks whether Indian multinationals such as Tata approach their foreign acquisitions differently than the Western multinationals. Like Yu, Afsharipour observes strong differences between Western and Eastern approaches. Afsharipour argues that the Indian companies’ outward acquisition strategies differ significantly from those followed historically by Western multinationals. She explains, “‘Unlike Western companies, which use M&A primarily to increase size and efficiency, emerging [multinationals] acquire firms to obtain competencies, technology, and knowledge essential to their strategy.’”⁶³

It is possible that India or China will be insufficiently concerned with people even within their borders. Lisa Pruitt shows that the economic development in India has often bypassed the people of rural India. She astutely observes that India’s increased attention on the world stage is associated with economic development in India’s cities, not with the development of the two-thirds of its population who live in rural areas.

This is part of the broader difficulty of categories such as Asia. The geographic notation of “Asia” masks the diversity of states and peoples within this large portion of humanity, as well as the diversity of experiences within the states. Parts of India are planted firmly in what

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 193.

⁶¹ Peter K. Yu, *Sinic Trade Agreements*, 44 UC DAVIS L. REV. 953, 1012 (2011).

⁶² David Cameron, British Prime Minister, Speech at Infosys in India (July 28, 2010), available at <http://ukinindia.fco.gov.uk/en/news/?view=PressR&id=22634027> (“The Tata Group is now the largest manufacturer employer in Britain.”).

⁶³ Afra Afsharipour, *Rising Multinationals: Law and the Evolution of Outbound Acquisitions by Indian Companies*, 44 UC DAVIS L. REV. 1029, 1045 (2011) (quoting Nirmalya Kumar, *How Emerging Giants Are Rewriting the Rules of M&A*, HARV. BUS. REV., May 2009, at 115, 116).

we once called the First World, while others belong to a far bleaker and desperate world. Gross national figures can hide much suffering within. Even while the gross domestic product has raced ahead in China and India, the impact on key features of people's lives has been less than desired. Life expectancy in China for a child born in 1998 was 70.1 years; a child born in 2010 was likely to fare a little better, with a life expectancy of 73.5 years.⁶⁴ Adult literacy rate among Chinese rose from 82.8% to 93.7% over the decade.⁶⁵ India showed less dramatic improvements — with life expectancy rising only marginally from 62.9 years in 1998 to 64.4 years in 2010, and adult literacy somewhat more from 55.7 percent to 62.8 percent over the decade.⁶⁶ Aggregations at the national level, of course, obscure disparities based on region, by gender, by class, etc. Life expectancy in Shanghai at the beginning of the millennium, for example, was nearly 15 years longer than that in Qinghai.⁶⁷

The challenge for Asia during this century will be to expand development to all its peoples, from the Himalayas to the Deccan Plateau, from the islands of the Pacific to the lands of the ancient Silk Road. An Asian Century concerned with economic and scientific progress and indifferent to distribution or human rights would leave much to be desired. Is this the only possibility?

Holning Lau offers a more hopeful note. He describes the significant, if inconsistent, advances for gay, lesbian, and transgender rights across Asia. In some cases, the Asian approaches might well be ahead of the West in achieving equality. He keenly observes as well how startling such advances are to a Western audience, accustomed to leading the world in progress towards justice. The reaction may reflect an attitude that Tagore spoke about in his 1916 lecture in Japan: "We have been repeatedly told, with some justification, that Asia lives in

⁶⁴ See UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2010: THE REAL WEALTH OF NATIONS: PATHWAYS TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT 144 (2010) [hereinafter "HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2010"]; UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000: HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT 158 (2000) [hereinafter "HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000"].

⁶⁵ See HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2010, *supra* note 64, at 193 (literacy figures in 2010 report are provided for period between 2005 and 2008); HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000, *supra* note 64, at 158 (providing literacy figures for 1998).

⁶⁶ See HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2010, *supra* note 64, at 145, 194 (providing life expectancy figure for 2010, and literacy figures for period between 2005 and 2008); HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000, *supra* note 64, at 159 (providing life expectancy and literacy figures for 1998).

⁶⁷ See HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000, *supra* note 64, at 153.

the past. . . . It was said of Asia that it could never move in the path of progress, its face was so inevitably turned backwards.”⁶⁸

Teemu Ruskola elegantly situates Asia in the West’s historical imagination. He observes how Asia is constructed in human history:

[W]hether China, or Asia, is located in the past (“not any more”) or in the future (“not yet”), the crucial point is that its time never seems to have been *now*: Whether declining or caught in an unending process of becoming, its moment is either already over or forever deferred.⁶⁹

Ruskola argues that this is in part because Asia is constructed as not-Europe. Ruskola continues, “Europe’s time, in contrast, is an endless succession of pure nows. Indeed, ever since Europe freed itself from the shackles of its feudal past, Europe does not simply happen to be modern: it owns modernity itself.”⁷⁰ In the Western imagination, Europe (by which Ruskola means the West, generally) and progress are nearly interchangeable.

In her compelling keynote address, Martha Nussbaum offers some Asian models for progress in education — as well as Asian models that are not as laudable. She suggests that Asia, like the world, must choose between two visions of education — a technical education focused exclusively on science and mathematics, and a broader humanist one. She observes, with due alarm, an increasing turn across the world to a technical education, with little room for humanities. She points to the diversity of indigenous traditions and current practices within Asia, and argues that the humanist ones associated with Tagore and practiced broadly in Korea today deserve wider emulation. In particular, Nussbaum celebrates Tagore’s inculcation of sympathy through the study of the humanities. She finds less useful another Asian model — associated with Singapore and China — that prizes math and science education to the detriment of the humanities.

The argument is not that math and science are less important, but that they are not exclusively important. Tagore recognized the importance of science, even going so far as to write a book, “Our Universe,” explaining the state of scientific knowledge to a Bengali audience. His description is characteristically poetic. Speaking of the formation of the earth, he writes, “[T]he earth is a planet — a torn-off

⁶⁸ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *THE MESSAGE OF INDIA TO JAPAN: A LECTURE 7* (1916).

⁶⁹ Teemu Ruskola, *Where is Asia? When is Asia? Theorizing Comparative Law and International Law*, 44 UC DAVIS L. REV. 879, 884 (2011).

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 884-85.

fragment from the sun, which, having cooled down, has lost its light."⁷¹ Having fragmented that world further into "narrow domestic walls,"⁷² we should hope, with Tagore, that the countries of the world in this young century might cooperate to take care of the planet we share.

CONCLUSION

Xuanzang's journey would take him to the great Indian university, Nalanda, in 637 C.E. There he studied for five years, engaged in spirited debates among diverse Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophies. Tagore spoke of this university in his Nobel acceptance speech. Tagore rhapsodizes that, at that time, "India had her civilization with all its splendours and wisdom and wealth."⁷³ He suggests that India did not use these treasures "for its own children only," but rather "open[ed] its gates in hospitality to all races of men. Chinese and Japanese and Persians and all different races of men, came, and they had their opportunity of gaining what was best in India, her best offering of all times and to all Humanity."⁷⁴ Luce's vision of leadership in the world imagined a world that emulated the United States. Tagore's vision expressed a shared project — such as his hope for a university where "the East and the West . . . join hands in building up a new civilization and the great culture of the future."⁷⁵

One hopes that that spirit of generous sharing and respectful engagement between cultures would become the characteristic of this new century. Perhaps rather than a century that belongs to any one people, or group of peoples, it might then belong to the people of the world, together.

Recently, the countries of the region have sought to reestablish Nalanda as a new international university in what is now the impoverished Indian state of Bihar. The governments of China, Singapore, and India have offered official support for the endeavor.⁷⁶

⁷¹ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *OUR UNIVERSE* 77 (Indu Dutt trans., 1999).

⁷² Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, in *AN ANTHOLOGY*, *supra* note 39, at 356, 356.

⁷³ 3 RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech*, in *THE ENGLISH WRITINGS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE*, *supra* note 34, at 961, 964.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.* at 965.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., *Singapore Welcomes Indian Parliament Move on Nalanda University Bill*, SING. GOV'T NEWS, Aug. 27, 2010 (noting that Singapore's Foreign Minister, George Yeo, sits on advisory board for Nalanda International University); *Don't Sensationalise Boundary Question, Wen Tells Media*, HINDU (India), Dec. 18, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article959327.ece> (noting that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao announced one million dollar contribution to Nalanda International University).

Amartya Sen, who heads the mentors group for the new Nalanda International University, describes the project as a “pan-Asian initiative.”⁷⁷ Sen expresses the vision that animated the ancient Nalanda university by quoting Xuanzang: “Who would want to [enjoy] enlightenment alone?”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Amartya Sen, Remarks at the Launch of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (Aug. 11, 2009) (video available at http://wn.com/Remarks_by_Professor_Amartya_Sen_at_the_Launch_of_the_Nalanda-Sriwijaya_Centre).

⁷⁸ Rupa Goyal, *Reviving Nalanda*, HINDU (India), May 21, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/arts/history-and-culture/article434393.ece>.