
Democracy, Education, and the Liberal Arts: Two Asian Models

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[H]istory has come to a stage when the moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the . . . commercial man, the man of limited purpose. This process, aided by the wonderful progress in science, is assuming gigantic proportion and power, causing the upset of man's moral balance, obscuring his human side under the shadow of soul-less organization.

Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (1917)¹

The economic success of several Asian nations has led American leaders to call for emulation of Asia's educational achievements. President Obama, for example, invokes Singapore, saying, that Singapore and other Asian nations influenced by that model "[are] spending less time teaching things that don't matter, and more time teaching things that do. They are preparing their students not only for

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¹ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *Nationalism in the West*, in NATIONALISM 1, 16 (MacMillan and Co. 1921) (1917).

high school or college, but for a career. We are not.”² Columnist Nicholas Kristof often praises China, writing (on the eve of the Beijing Olympics) that “[t]oday, it’s the athletic surge that dazzles us, but China will leave a similar outside footprint in the arts, in business, in science, in education” — implying his strong approval of China’s educational practices even in an article in which he decries the Chinese government’s ferocious opposition to political dissent, as evidenced by the sentencing of two women in their late seventies to labor camp because they applied to hold a legal protest during the Olympics.³ Asia, it seems, is all the rage, and the U.S. is strongly urged to emulate Asian educational achievements, no matter what their relationship to democratic debate and democratic autonomy.

The nations of Asia, however, exemplify two antithetical models of education, with utterly different consequences for citizenship and democratic self-government. One model is represented in India by the thought and practice of the great Indian poet, philosopher, and educator Rabindranath Tagore and numerous other educational experimenters, and in Korea by a longstanding liberal arts tradition of undergraduate education and significant strands of contemporary university practice. This model focuses on empowering thoughtful and unsubmissive citizens through the liberal arts, critical thinking, and the cultivation of imagination and sympathy. Another model, prevalent in both Singapore and China, and in most of contemporary India’s government schooling, discourages critical engagement and focuses on the mastery of technical skills, skills that seem suited to generating short-term economic growth. Tagore, lecturing in Japan in 1917, argued that the technical model was actually not Asian at all, but a borrowing from Western capitalism, with its demand for limitless economic growth.⁴ That contention seems to me to be historically plausible in some respects; but history is less important to me here than a normative inquiry: which model shall we prefer? (Two similarly warring models are found in Western educational traditions

² President Barack Obama, Remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on a Complete and Competitive American Education (March 10, 2009), *available at* http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-the-President-to-the-United-States-Hispanic-Chamber-of-Commerce/.

³ Nicholas D. Kristof, Op-Ed., *China’s Rise Goes Beyond Gold Medals*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 21, 2008, at A23; *see also* NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF & SHERYL WUDUNN, HALF THE SKY: TURNING OPPRESSION INTO OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN WORLDWIDE 167-69, 207-09 (2009).

⁴ *See* RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *Nationalism in Japan*, in NATIONALISM, *supra* note 1, at 47, 71-73 (arguing that Japan’s authentic tradition is one of spiritual sympathy, and that Western science and Western capitalism go hand in hand).

as well, and the history of educational reform shows much conversation and borrowing in both directions.)

I shall argue that the liberal arts model is of critical importance for democracy in both Asia and the United States: it is the example of Tagore, not the Singapore success story, that we should all be imitating. Asia watchers need to understand the distinction between the two models, and the strong link between the Tagore/Korea model and effective democracy.

I. TWO MODELS OF EDUCATION, TWO TYPES OF CITIZENSHIP

The profit motive suggests to most concerned politicians that science and technology are of crucial importance for the future health of their nations. We should have no objection to good scientific and technical education, and I certainly do not suggest that nations should stop trying to improve in this regard. My concern is that other abilities, equally crucial, are at risk of getting lost in the competitive flurry, abilities crucial to the health of any democracy internally, and to the creation of a decent world culture and a robust type of global citizenship, capable of constructively addressing the world's most pressing problems. These abilities are associated with the humanities and the arts: the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a "citizen of the world"; and, finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person.

Let us suppose that we are thinking not simply of producing young people who can perform skilled jobs that contribute to national success in business and industry. Let us assume for the sake of our argument that we are also trying to produce young people who can function effectively as democratic citizens, sustaining democracy's vigor and stability and contributing, as well, to a global conversation about pressing problems that require cooperative multi-national solutions. What do we need to build, in both schools and universities, if that sort of citizen is our goal?⁵ Put very schematically, three abilities seem to be pivotal. Each must be cultivated at all levels of education in age-appropriate ways.

⁵ This is a long discussion. I laid out my view about undergraduate liberal arts curricula in MARTHA NUSSBAUM, *CULTIVATING HUMANITY: A CLASSIC DEFENSE OF REFORM IN LIBERAL EDUCATION* (1997) [hereinafter *CULTIVATING HUMANITY*]. A more up-to-date version, focusing on schools as well as colleges and universities, is MARTHA NUSSBAUM, *NOT FOR PROFIT: WHY DEMOCRACY NEEDS THE HUMANITIES* (2010) [hereinafter *NOT FOR PROFIT*]. The discussion in this section is a compressed version of the argument in these two books.

The first is the capacity for Socratic self-criticism and critical thought about one's own traditions. As Socrates argues, democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves, rather than deferring to authority, who can reason together about their choices rather than simply trade claims and counter-claims.⁶

Critical thinking is particularly crucial for good citizenship in a society that needs to come to grips with the presence of people who differ by ethnicity, caste, and religion — both within one's own borders and in the larger world of nations with whom we must establish a reasoned dialogue. We will only have a chance at an adequate dialogue across cultural boundaries if young citizens know how to engage in dialogue and deliberation in the first place. And they will only know how to do those things if they learn how to examine themselves and to think about the reasons why they are inclined to support one thing rather than another — rather than, as so often happens, seeing political debate as simply a way of boasting, or getting an advantage for their own side. When politicians bring simplistic propaganda their way, as politicians in every country have a way of doing, young people will only have a hope of preserving independence and holding the politicians accountable if they know how to think critically about what they hear, testing its logic and imagining alternatives to it.

Students exposed to instruction in critical thinking learn, at the same time, a new attitude to those who disagree with them, an attitude increasingly foreign in modern nations ruled by a culture of sound bites and competitive denigration. Consider the case of Billy Tucker, a nineteen-year-old student at Bentley, a U.S. business college that required all students to take a series of "liberal arts" courses, including one in philosophy.⁷ Interestingly enough, his instructor, Krishna Mallick, was an Indian-American originally from Kolkata. Mallick, whom I've since come to know, is familiar with Tagore's educational ideal and is a fine practitioner of it — so her interest in Socrates was highly bicultural.

Students in Mallick's class began by learning about the life and death of Socrates; Tucker was strangely moved by that man who was willing to give up life itself for the pursuit of the argument. Then they

⁶ See the discussion of Socrates in NUSSBAUM, *CULTIVATING HUMANITY*, *supra* note 5, at 15, 20-28, with detailed references to Plato's dialogues.

⁷ See *id.* at 17. This is taken from my interview notes of my interview with Tucker in 1996 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I did not use all of these details in the book, but have used them in many subsequent lectures about the book, with his permission. (I interviewed Tucker for my book *CULTIVATING HUMANITY*.)

learned a little formal logic, and Tucker was delighted to find that he got a high score on a logic test: he had never before thought he could do well in something abstract and intellectual. Next they analyzed political speeches and editorials, looking for logical flaws.⁸ Finally, in the last phase of the course, they did research for debates on issues of the day. Tucker was surprised to discover that he was being asked to argue against the death penalty, although he actually favors it. He had never understood, he said, that one could produce arguments for a position that one does not hold oneself. He told me that this experience gave him a new attitude towards political discussion: now he's more inclined to respect the opposing position, and to be curious about the arguments on both sides, and what the two sides might share, rather than seeing the discussion as simply a way of making boasts and assertions. We can see how this humanizes the political "other," making the mind see that opposing form as a rational being who may share at least some thoughts with one's own group.

The idea that one will take responsibility for one's own reasoning, and exchange ideas with others in an atmosphere of mutual respect for reason, is essential to the peaceful resolution of differences, both within a nation and in a world increasingly polarized by ethnic and religious conflict. Tucker was already a high school graduate, but it is possible, and essential, to encourage critical thinking from the very beginning of a child's education.

Critical thinking is a discipline that can be taught as part of a school's curriculum, but it will not be well taught unless it informs the entire spirit of a school's pedagogy. Teachers must treat each child as an individual whose powers of mind are unfolding and who is expected to make an active and creative contribution to classroom discussion. If one really respects critical thinking, then one respects children's voices in planning the activities of the day and the curriculum itself.

Let us now consider the relevance of this ability to the current state of modern pluralistic democracies surrounded by a powerful global marketplace. First of all, even if we were just aiming at economic success, leading corporate executives understand very well the importance of creating a corporate culture in which critical voices are not silenced, a culture of both individuality and accountability. Leading U.S. business educators to whom I've spoken say that they trace some of our biggest disasters — the failures of certain phases of the NASA space shuttle program, the even more disastrous failure of

⁸ *See id.*

Enron and WorldCom — to a culture of yes-people, where critical ideas were never articulated. As we'll see, such observations have moved Singapore and China to take up a version of the Socratic ideal, if not a very robust one.⁹

But our goal, I have said, is not simply economic growth, so let us now turn to political culture. As much psychological research demonstrates, human beings are prone to be subservient to both authority and peer pressure;¹⁰ to produce a healthy political culture we need to counteract these tendencies, producing a culture of individual dissent.¹¹ Solomon Asch found that when even one person in his study group stood up for the truth, others followed, so that one critical voice can have large consequences.¹² By emphasizing each person's active voice, we also promote a culture of accountability. When people see their ideas as their own responsibility, they are more likely to see their deeds as their own responsibility. That was essentially the point Tagore made in my epigraph from *Nationalism*, when he insisted that the bureaucratization of social life and the relentless machine-like character of modern states had deadened people's moral imaginations, leading them to acquiesce in atrocities with no twinge of conscience.¹³ Independence of thought, he added, is crucial if the world is not to be led headlong toward destruction. In his lecture in Japan in 1917, he spoke of a "gradual suicide through shrinkage of the soul,"¹⁴ and observed that people more and more permit themselves to be used as parts in a giant machine, to carry out the projects of national power. Only a robustly critical public culture could possibly stop this baneful trend.¹⁵

The second key ability of the modern democratic citizen is the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation and

⁹ See *infra* Part IV.

¹⁰ On obedience to authority, the classic experiments are those by Stanley Milgram. See STANLEY MILGRAM, *OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY: AN EXPERIMENTAL VIEW* 113-15, 123-34 (Harper 1983). For a variety of perspectives on Milgram's findings, see *OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY: CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE MILGRAM PARADIGM* (Thomas Blass ed., 1999). On peer pressure, see Solomon Asch, *Effects of Group Pressure Upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgments*, in HAROLD GUETZKOW, *GROUPS, LEADERSHIP, AND MEN* (1951); and Solomon Asch, *Opinions and Social Pressure*, *SCI. AM.*, Oct. 1955, at 31-35.

¹¹ See, for example, NUSSBAUM, *NOT FOR PROFIT*, *supra* note 5, at 47-77.

¹² Asch, *supra* note 10, at 31-35.

¹³ See TAGORE, *Nationalism in the West*, *supra* note 1, at 27.

¹⁴ TAGORE, *Nationalism in Japan*, *supra* note 4, at 77.

¹⁵ See RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *Nationalism in India*, in *NATIONALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 95, 100-14.

world, understanding something of the history and character of the diverse groups that inhabit them. Knowledge is no guarantee of good behavior, but ignorance is a virtual guarantee of bad behavior. Simple cultural and religious stereotypes abound in our world, for example, the facile equation of Islam with terrorism.¹⁶ The first way to begin combating these is to make sure that from a very early age students learn a different relation to the world. They should gradually come to understand both the differences that impede sympathy between groups and nations and the shared human needs and interests that make understanding essential, if common problems are to be solved.

This understanding of the world will promote a healthy political culture only if it is itself infused by searching critical thinking, thinking that focuses, *inter alia*, on differences of power and opportunity. Teachers will present history with an eye to thinking critically about these differences. At the same time, the traditions and religions of major groups in one's own culture, and in the world, will be taught with a view to promoting respect for one's fellow world citizens as equals — equally entitled to social and economic opportunity.

In curricular terms, these ideas suggest that all young citizens — in an age-appropriate way at different levels — should learn the rudiments of world history and should get a rich and non-stereotypical understanding of the major world religions. Then, probably during the liberal arts portion of college and university education, citizens should learn how to inquire in more depth into at least one unfamiliar tradition, thereby acquiring tools that can later be used elsewhere. At the same time, they ought to learn about the major traditions, majority and minority, within their own nation, focusing on an understanding of how differences of religion, race, and gender have been associated with differential life-opportunities. Everyone, finally, should learn at least one foreign language well: seeing that another group of intelligent human beings has cut up the world differently, and that all translation is interpretation, gives a young person an essential lesson in cultural humility.

The third ability of the citizen, closely related to the first two, is what I would call the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to

¹⁶ See, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *Veiled Threats?*, THE OPINIONATOR, N.Y. TIMES, July 11, 2010, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/11/veiled-threats/>; see also Martha Nussbaum, *Beyond the Veil: A Response*, THE OPINIONATOR, N.Y. TIMES, July 15, 2010, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/15/beyond-the-veil-a-response/>.

understand the emotions, wishes, and desires that someone so placed might have. The cultivation of sympathy has been a key part of the best modern ideas of progressive education, in both Western and non-Western nations. The moral imagination, always under siege from fear and narcissism, is apt to become obtuse if not energetically refined and cultivated through the development of sympathy and concern. Learning to see another human being not as a thing but as a full person is not an automatic achievement: it must be promoted by an education that refines the ability to think about what the inner life of another may be like — to understand why one can never fully grasp that inner world, and why every person is always to a certain extent dark to every other.

Instruction in literature and the arts can cultivate sympathy in many ways, through engagement with many different works of literature, music, fine art, and dance. But teachers must think about what the student's particular blind spots are likely to be, and choose texts in consequence. For all societies at all times have their particular blind spots, groups within their culture and also groups abroad that are especially likely to be dealt with ignorantly and obtusely. Works of art can be chosen to promote criticism of this obtuseness, and a more adequate vision of the unseen. Ralph Ellison, in a later essay about his great novel *Invisible Man*, wrote that a novel such as his could be “a raft of hope, perception and entertainment” on which American culture could “negotiate the snags and whirlpools” that stand between us and our democratic ideal.¹⁷ His novel, of course, takes the “inner eyes” of the white reader as its theme and its target.¹⁸ The hero is invisible to white society, but he tells us that this invisibility is an imaginative and educational failing on their part, not a biological accident on his.¹⁹ Through the imagination we are able to have a kind of insight into the experience of another group or person that it is very difficult to attain in daily life — particularly when our world has constructed sharp separations between groups, and suspicions that make any encounter difficult.

So we need to cultivate our students' “inner eyes,” and this means carefully crafted instruction in the arts and humanities, which will bring students into contact with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and cross-cultural experience and understanding. This artistic instruction can and should be linked to the “citizen of the world” instruction, because works of art are frequently an invaluable way of beginning to

¹⁷ RALPH ELLISON, *INVISIBLE MAN*, at xix (1982) (introduction added in 1981).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

understand the achievements and sufferings of a culture different from one's own.

I have said that each of these abilities needs to be cultivated throughout the educational process in an age-appropriate way. But most of the world's nations lack structures to include these forms of teaching at the college-university level. Entering to read a single subject, students do not have common liberal arts courses, and therefore lack a common preparation for citizenship and life. Someone might argue that this level of democratic education is superfluous: if things have been done well earlier, there is no need for a liberal arts structure at the college/university level.

Of course things do not always go well earlier, and the more openings concerned educators have to reach young people, the better. Sometimes university faculty, protected by strong norms of academic freedom, may be in a better position to teach controversial subjects (e.g., world religion) than their high school counterparts. But even if things went as well as they possibly could at the lower level, the first two years of college/university education are still crucial in producing the sort of world citizen we need. At this age, students are living away from home — or, if they are not, they are at least somewhat more independent of their parents. (Usually they have at least some financial independence as well.) They can dare to take stands on political matters that go against parental values. (There is a reason why college campuses have traditionally been hotbeds of dissent and rebellion.) Supported by a surrounding peer culture, college students can engage in forms of debate and political mobilization that would be difficult if not impossible for high school students. At the same time, they are more sophisticated intellectually, able to learn things in each of my three areas that could not be taught successfully in high school, such as the refined analysis of a Platonic argument and the history and structure of the global economy. They can also participate in programs involving travel and hands-on learning, which complement curricular efforts, though they certainly do not replace them.

For all these reasons, then, we may conclude that the liberal arts portion of college and university education supplies valuable ingredients for citizenship that cannot be replaced by a combination of broad-based secondary school education with a narrower single-subject education at the university level. Nations that do not incorporate such a component have reason to build one. (And the presence of that element also ensures that secondary school education does not become prematurely narrow.)

II. INDIA: TAGOREAN CRITICAL INDEPENDENCE, EXPANDED SYMPATHY

Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, was one of those rare people who have world-class gifts in many different areas.²⁰ He won the Prize for his poetry, but he was also a superb novelist, short-story writer, and playwright.²¹ More remarkable, he was a painter whose work is valued more highly with the passing years and a composer who wrote more than two thousand songs, which are immensely loved in Bengali culture today — including songs later adopted as the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh. He was also a choreographer whose work was studied by founders of modern dance such as Isadora Duncan (whose dance idiom also influenced his), and whose dance dramas were eagerly sought out by European and American dancers, who spent time at his school. Tagore was also an impressive philosopher, whose book *Nationalism* (1921) is a major contribution to thought about the modern state, and whose *The Religion of Man* (1930) argues that humanity can make progress only by cultivating its capacity for a more inclusive sympathy, and that this capacity can be cultivated only by an education that emphasizes global learning, the arts, and Socratic self-criticism. All these aspects of Tagore's genius made their way into the plan and daily life of his school. It was, perhaps above all, the school of a poet and artist — someone who understood how central the arts all are to the whole development of the personality.²²

Tagore hated every school he ever attended, and he left them all as quickly as possible.²³ What he hated was rote learning and the treatment of the pupil as a passive vessel of received cultural values.²⁴ Tagore's novels, stories, and dramas are obsessed with the need to challenge the past, to be alive to a wide range of possibilities, to take personal responsibility for one's own thought. He once expressed his views about rote learning in an allegory about traditional education called "The Parrot's Training."²⁵

²⁰ I discuss Tagore's career and ideas at greater length in MARTHA NUSSBAUM, *THE CLASH WITHIN: DEMOCRACY, RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE, AND INDIA'S FUTURE* 80 (2007) [hereinafter *THE CLASH WITHIN*].

²¹ *Id.* at 83.

²² See KATHLEEN M. O'CONNELL, *RABINDRANATH TAGORE: THE POET AS EDUCATOR* 104-49 (Visva Bharati ed, 2002).

²³ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *MY REMINISCENCES* 30-35 (1917).

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Translated in RABINDRANATH TAGORE: *AN ANTHOLOGY* 327-30 (Kristina Dutta & Andrew Robinson eds., 1998).

A certain Raja has a beautiful bird. He becomes convinced that his parrot needs to be educated. So he summons wise people from all over his empire. They argue endlessly about methodology and especially about textbooks. “‘Textbooks can never be too many for our purpose!’”²⁶ they say. The bird gets a beautiful school building: a golden cage. The learned teachers show the Raja the impressive method of instruction they have devised. “The method was so stupendous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison.” And so, “With text-book in one hand and baton in the other, the pundits [learned teachers] gave the poor bird what may fittingly be called lessons!”²⁷

One day the bird dies. Nobody notices for quite some time. The Raja’s nephews come to report the fact:

The nephews said, “Sire, the bird’s education has been completed.”

“Does it hop?” the Raja enquired.

“Never!” said the nephews.

“Does it fly?”

“No.”

“Bring me the bird,” said the Raja.

The bird was brought to him The Raja poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled.

Outside the window, the murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded *asoka* leaves made the April morning wistful.²⁸

The students of Tagore’s school at Santiniketan had no such sad fate. Their entire education nourished the ability to think for oneself and to become a dynamic participant in cultural and political choice, rather than simply a follower of tradition. (Tagore was particularly sensitive to the unequal burden dead customs imposed upon women.) The school, founded in 1905, was in many ways highly unconventional. Almost all classes were held outside. The arts were woven through the whole curriculum, and gifted artists and writers flocked to the school to take part in the experiment. But Socratic

²⁶ *Id.* at 327.

²⁷ *Id.* at 330.

²⁸ *Id.*

questioning was front and center, both in the curriculum and in the school's pedagogy. Students were encouraged to deliberate about decisions that governed their daily life and to take the initiative in organizing meetings. Syllabi described the school, repeatedly, as a self-governing community in which children were encouraged to seek intellectual self-reliance and freedom. In one syllabus, Tagore wrote:

The mind will receive its impressions . . . by full freedom given for inquiry and experience and at the same time will be stimulated to think for itself . . . Our mind does not gain true freedom by acquiring materials for knowledge and possessing other people's ideas but by forming its own standards of judgment and producing its own thoughts.²⁹

Accounts of his practice report that he repeatedly put problems before the students and elicited answers from them by questioning, in Socratic fashion.³⁰

Another device Tagore used to stimulate Socratic questioning was role-playing, as children were invited to step outside their own point of view and inhabit that of another person.³¹ This exercise gave them the freedom to experiment with other intellectual positions and to understand them from within. Here we begin to see the close link Tagore forged between Socratic questioning and imaginative empathy: arguing in Socratic fashion requires the ability to understand other positions from within, and that understanding often provides new incentives to challenge tradition in a Socratic way.

This brings us to the most remarkable feature of Tagore's experiment: his use of the arts to empower and to stimulate imagination. A gifted composer, playwright, and choreographer, Tagore used elaborate theatrical productions, mingling drama, music, and dance, to get children to explore different roles with the full participation of their bodies, taking up unfamiliar stances and gestures.³² Dance was a key part of the school for both boys and girls, since Tagore understood that exploration of the unfamiliar requires the willingness to put aside bodily stiffness and shame, to inhabit a role. This was a key part of Tagore's program for the cultivation of sympathy. (In a lecture entitled "My School," he remarked: "We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by

²⁹ See NUSSBAUM, NOT FOR PROFIT, *supra* note 5, at 71 (citing O'CONNELL, *supra* note 22).

³⁰ See *id.*, at 47-120.

³¹ See O'CONNELL, *supra* note 22, at 147.

³² *Id.*

sympathy. . . . But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed.”³³)

Women were his particular concern, since he saw that women were typically brought up to be ashamed of their bodies and unable to move freely, particularly in the presence of men. A lifelong advocate of women’s freedom and equality, he saw that simply telling girls to move more freely would be unlikely to overcome years of repression, but giving them precisely choreographed moves to perform, leaping from here to there, would be a more successful incentive to freedom. (Tagore’s sister-in-law invented the blouse that is ubiquitously worn, today, with the sari, since he asked her to devise something that would allow women to move freely without fearing that their sari would expose their bodies in an inappropriate way.³⁴) At the same time, men, too, explored challenging roles in dance, under the aegis of Tagore, a great dancer as well as a famous choreographer, and known for his sinuous and androgynous movements. Explicit themes of gender equality were common in the dramas.

Amita Sen, the mother of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, was a pupil in the school from her earliest childhood days, since her father, a well-known expert on the history of Hindu religion, went there as a teacher near the school’s beginning.³⁵ A small child playing in the garden near Tagore’s window, she inspired his well-known poem “Chota mai,” in which he describes how a little girl disturbed his work. Later, as a young bride, she inspired another well-known poem about a young woman “stepping into the waters of life, unafraid.” In between, she was a pupil in the school and proved to be one of its most talented dancers, so she took on leading roles in those dance-dramas. Later, she wrote two books about the school; one, *Joy In All Work*, has been translated into English, and describes Tagore’s activity as dancer and choreographer.³⁶

Amita Sen understood that the purpose of Tagore’s dance-dramas was not just the production of some fine artworks. It was the cultivation of emotion and imagination in his pupils. Her detailed account of the role that theater and dance played in the school shows how all the “regular” education in Santiniketan, the education that

³³ 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).

³⁴ RABINDRANATH TAGORE: AN ANTHOLOGY, *supra* note 25, at 84.

³⁵ AMITA SEN, *JOY IN ALL WORK* (Bookfront Publ’n Forum 1999) (translating Ananda Sarbakaje).

³⁶ *Id.*

enabled these students to perform very well in standard examinations, was infused with passion, creativity, and delight because of the way in which education was combined with dance and song.

His dance was a dance of emotion. The playful clouds in the sky, the shivering of the wind in the leaves, light glistening on the grass, moonlight flooding the earth, the blossoming and fading of flowers, the murmur of dry leaves — the pulsing of joy in a man's heart, or the pangs of sorrow, are all expressed in this expressive dance's movements and expressions.³⁷

We should bear in mind that we hear the voice of an older woman recalling her childhood experience. How extraordinary that the emotions and the poetry of the child live on so vigorously in the woman, and what a tribute this is to the capacity of this sort of education for a kind of enlivening of the personality that continues on in one's life when all specific learned facts are forgotten. Of course, as her book makes clear, this could not be done by simply leaving children on their own to play around: instruction in the arts requires discipline and ambition if it is to stretch and extend the capacities for both empathy and expression.

Tagore's artistry was always organically linked to the other aspects of his educational program. He stressed world citizenship throughout the curriculum as well as in his non-curricular work. A writer of over two thousand songs, immensely popular even today, he wrote the music and words to the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh. *Jana Gana Mana*, India's national anthem, to the notorious discontent of the Hindu Right, emphasizes the diversity of India's people and the richness that comes of diversity, insisting that the principle of the nation's unity is not ethnicity or geography, but a common allegiance to the moral law. Other songs stress critical independence. Let me quote one that is especially beloved, and which embodies well the spirit of Tagore's critical, dissent-oriented *Religion of Humanity*.³⁸

If no one answers your call, then walk on alone.
Walk alone, walk alone, walk on alone.
If no one says a thing, oh you unlucky soul,

³⁷ *Id.* at 35.

³⁸ I cite from the new excellent translation of Tagore's songs by Kalpana Bardhan, in *OF LOVE, NATURE, AND DEVOTION: SELECTED SONGS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE* 305-07 (2008). I have not followed all of Bardhan's use of spacing and indentation, valuable to give a sense of the rhythm of the original, but only if one is familiar with her system.

If faces are turned away, if all go on fearing –
Then opening up your heart,
You speak up what's on your mind, you speak up alone.

If they all turn back, oh you unlucky soul,
If, at the time of taking the deep dark path, no one cares –
Then the thorns that are on the way,
Oh you, trampling those with bloodied feet, you tramp on
alone.

If a lamp no one shows, oh you unlucky soul,
If in a rainstorm on a dark night they bolt their doors —
Then in the flame of thunder
Lighting your own ribs, go on burning alone.

Think of young children growing up on that song, and you'll see a spirit of dissent and challenge that strengthens the backbone of India's democracy even to the present day.

Tagore's example had national influence to some extent, but it is also important to emphasize that he was far from being the only experimental educator in India in the early twentieth century. A very similar progressive elementary school was set up in connection with Jamia Millia Islamia, a liberal university founded by Muslims who believed that their own Quranic tradition mandated Socratic learning.³⁹ All these experiments are closely connected to reforms of traditional laws and customs regarding women and children, such as raising the age of consent to marriage, giving women access to higher education, and, ultimately, giving them full citizenship in the new nation. Such reform movements existed in many regions. Nor is the spirit of dissent that Tagore so beautifully articulated something exclusively Tagorean, or exclusively Bengali even: as Tagore himself insisted in *The Religion of Man* — and as Amartya Sen has recently reemphasized in *The Argumentative Indian* — there are many elements in Indian traditions, both Hindu and Muslim, that evince a similar love of contestation and argument.⁴⁰

It is also important to emphasize that Tagore, while developing some deep-rooted Indian ideas, was also part of a worldwide movement for Socratic and arts-oriented education. His work

³⁹ See Martha Nussbaum, *Land of my Dreams: Islamic Liberalism Under Fire in India*, BOSTON REVIEW, March/April 2009, at 10-14.

⁴⁰ AMARTYA SEN, *THE ARGUMENTATIVE INDIAN: WRITINGS ON INDIAN HISTORY, CULTURE AND IDENTITY* 12 (2005).

paralleled that of John Dewey in the U.S.⁴¹ Though the two men probably did not meet, it is almost certain that they would have known of one another's experiments, all the more since Leonard Elmhirst spent long periods of time in Santiniketan and founded Britain's Dartington Hall school in imitation of Tagore's model.⁴² Artists and teachers of many types (including students of Isadora Duncan and other dance artists) were back and forth between the U.S. and Santiniketan. Maria Montessori also corresponded with Tagore and drew attention to similarities between her goals and his.⁴³ On his side, Tagore was clearly aware of earlier European writings about education, such as Rousseau's *Emile* and the work of Pestalozzi and Froebel.⁴⁴ Tagore's approach was in a sense universalist, and yet it required each person to pursue their goal using their own characteristic traditions and achievements. Thus, in his cosmopolitan work, *The Religion of Man*, he proposes that the Baul tradition of Bengal (a dissident musical-poetic-religious tradition) can make a distinctive contribution to a humanist project that is also nourished by the ideas of European thinkers such as Auguste Comte.⁴⁵ So our entire idea of an "Asian Century" needs to be complicated by the fact of syncretism and borrowing between Indian and Euro-American traditions.

Unfortunately, in today's India, the Tagore model exerts little influence. Tagore's once-distinguished liberal arts university, Visva-Bharati, has become a government university like every other, with no distinctive methods or curricular ideas.⁴⁶ For quite a long time, the dominant mode of education in schools throughout India has been one of rote learning and regurgitation, in which left and right argue only about the content of the textbooks to be memorized, and almost nobody is talking about enlivening pedagogy.⁴⁷ The current regime of

⁴¹ See NUSSBAUM, NOT FOR PROFIT, *supra* note 5, at 64.

⁴² See L.K. ELMHIRST, RABINDRANATH TAGORE, PIONEER IN EDUCATION: ESSAYS AND EXCHANGES BETWEEN RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND L.K. ELMHIRST 60 (1961).

⁴³ See O'CONNELL, *supra* note 22 at 232-35 for the details of this correspondence.

⁴⁴ NUSSBAUM, NOT FOR PROFIT, *supra* note 5, at 57-62.

⁴⁵ RABINDRANATH TAGORE, THE RELIGION OF MAN (1931) *reprinted in* THE ENGLISH WRITINGS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE: A MISCELLANY 83, 89 (Sisir Kumar Das ed., 1996).

⁴⁶ See Anandarup Ray, *Rediscovering Santiniketan*, in A COMMON CONCERN: REDISCOVERING TAGORE'S VISVA-BHARATI (Tan Lee ed., Thema 2006).

⁴⁷ See NUSSBAUM, THE CLASH WITHIN, *supra* note 20, at 264-72 (providing analysis of numerous textbooks). An exception is the educator Krishna Kumar, promoted to chair the National Council on Educational Research and Training (NCERT) under the Congress government. *Id.* at 276. His excellent book PREJUDICE AND PRIDE: SCHOOL HISTORIES OF THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN 77-78 (2001) makes an

university admissions, which relies entirely on test scores in national examinations, strongly discourages Socratic teaching.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the humanities and arts have long been disfavored. The pinnacle of a student's achievement is admission to the prestigious IITs, Institutes of Technology and Management, and Tagore's Santiniketan school, which still focuses on the arts, is little coveted by ambitious parents.⁴⁹ India's new education minister, Kapil Sibal, is bent on massive increases in higher education, including participation by foreign universities.⁵⁰ However, University of Chicago, which proposes to establish an Institute for Advanced Study to fund collaborative research projects involving younger Indian scholars with a particular focus on the Humanities and Social Sciences,⁵¹ is highly atypical because what the government is eagerly seeking out is technological development.⁵² One can hope that the Tagore tradition will enjoy a revival, but the signs are far from encouraging.

III. KOREA: A HUMANISTIC TRADITION, INCREASING ITS REACH

There is one nation in Asia where the values of liberal arts education are advancing rather than retreating. This is Korea, the only nation I know other than the U.S. where a broad-based undergraduate liberal arts education is a common phenomenon, and also the only one in which law is (now) a postgraduate degree, following undergraduate preparation, often in the liberal arts.⁵³ The factors explaining this distinctive educational culture are complicated, and a brief survey like this one can only sketch some of them.⁵⁴

eloquent case for a focus on critical thinking and student involvement.

⁴⁸ NUSSBAUM, *THE CLASH WITHIN*, *supra* note 20, at 300.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ Conversation with Kapil Sibal, in Chicago, Ill. (December, 2009).

⁵¹ AD HOC COMM. ON INDIA, UNIV. OF CHI., A PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN NEW DELHI 5-6 (2010), available at <http://provost.uchicago.edu/pdfs/Final%20Report%20Ad%20Hoc%20Committee%20on%20India%2031Jan2010.pdf>.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Assembly Okays Shift to Law Schools from State Bar Exam*, HANKYOREH, July 4, 2007, available at http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/220297.html.

⁵⁴ Sources cited in this section include: Soon-Won Kang, *Democracy and Human Rights Education in South Korea*, 38 COMP. EDUC. 315-25 (2002); Sunwoong Kim & Ju-Ho Lee, *Changing Facets of Korean Higher Education: Market Competition and the Role of the State*, 52 HIGHER EDUC. 557-87 (2006) [hereinafter *Changing Facets*]; Young-Ihm Kwon, *A Comparative Analysis of Preschool Education in Korea and England*, 39 COMP. EDUC. 479-91 (2003); Sungho Lee, *The Emergence of the Modern University in Korea*, 18 HIGHER EDUCATION 87-116 (1989) [hereinafter *Emergence*]; GWANG-JO KIM, *HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN SOUTH KOREA: POLICY RESPONSES TO A CHANGING WORLD* 2-21

Korea has a spectacular record in the expansion of access to education at all levels. At present more than 95% of eighteen-year-olds graduate from secondary education, and more than 70% advance to higher education, giving Korea one of the highest enrollment rates in higher education in the world.⁵⁵ Primary education is universal, and the government has democratized access to quality primary and secondary institutions. Starting in the 1960s, a system of random assignments replaced competitive entrance tests that wealthy parents could “game” by giving their children expensive private tutoring.⁵⁶ So Korea has not only expanded access rapidly, but has done so in a way that promotes something like equal access. Higher education is still selective, and some institutions remain much more prestigious than others. Nonetheless, the proliferation of privately financed institutions has meant that in Korea, as in the U.S., the marketplace for higher education offers a wide array of diverse options (institutions large and small, state and private, religious and secular). The deregulation policy that Korea instituted in 1995 has meant freewheeling competition and an increased supply of institutions.⁵⁷ Problems that remain include lack of preparation for the decline in student numbers, in an aging population, and a lack of quality control.⁵⁸ In terms of the percentage of GNP, Korea spends the highest on education among all OECD countries (2.51%).⁵⁹ The amount financed by private sources is by far the highest of OECD countries: the public’s share of higher education

(2005), http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/166112/Session_1_Dr_Kim.pdf [hereinafter HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM]; HYE-JUNG LEE, HIGHER EDUCATION IN KOREA 3-24 (2009), http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/resources/education/ed2020_docs/Korea.pdf [hereinafter HIGHER EDUCATION IN KOREA]; JUNG NA & MUGYEONG MOON, KOREAN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL INSTITUTE, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA 12-31 (2003), <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/57/27856763.pdf>; ORG. FOR ECON. COOP. AND DEV., OECD COUNTRY NOTE: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA, 9-19 (2004), <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/43/33689774.pdf> [hereinafter OECD COUNTRY NOTE]. I also profited from many conversations with faculty, students, and administrators during a tour of a group of universities in Korea in August 2008. I am especially grateful to a long e-mail discussion by Sanghyuk Park, a Professor of Philosophy at Keimyung University who was my translator and primary host during my visit to Korea in 2008, and who wrote me extensively by e-mail in June 2010.

⁵⁵ See Kim & Lee, *Changing Facets*, *supra* note 54, at 557.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 560-63.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 564-65.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 573; see also KIM, HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM, *supra* note 54, at 13, 29-30, 40; LEE, HIGHER EDUCATION IN KOREA, *supra* note 54, at 28, 31-34, 41-42.

⁵⁹ See Kim & Lee, *Changing Facets*, *supra* note 54, at 5, 72, tbl.4; see also KIM, HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM, *supra* note 54, at 11; LEE, HIGHER EDUCATION IN KOREA, *supra* note 54, at 5.

is just 16.7%, sharply below the OECD average of 77%.⁶⁰ These data show us already that South Korea is a unique experiment: rapid expansion of education at all levels, heavily relying on private market forces, but guided by a committed democratic ideology.

Developments in Korea need to be understood historically, since there is a complex interplay between a longstanding Confucian tradition and a sequence of colonial interventions.⁶¹ Since the fourteenth century at least, Korea had a longstanding Confucian tradition, based on the study of history, philosophy, and poetry.⁶² Sanghyuk Park describes the rationale animating this humanistic education:

Aristocrats were expected to be literati and government officials. Literati are supposed to be knowledgeable of liberal arts, which include philosophy (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism), history and literature (especially poetry). Government officials (especially governors of towns and provinces) do the functions of administrators and judges. To be good judges and administrators, they are supposed to understand what human beings are, what they want, what human relations are, etc. To understand these kinds of human affairs, they are supposed to learn liberal arts.⁶³

Park also points out that the highest level of the civil service examination was the composition of a good poem.⁶⁴ Obviously this system was aimed only at a male elite, but it forms the basis for today's commitment to the liberal arts.

To understand how Korea came to define modern nationhood in terms of a liberal arts education, it is important, next, to consider its experiences of foreign domination. The period of Japan's domination was basically one of oppression and exclusion, as it limited Koreans to low-level vocations and only Japanese language was allowed in the schools.⁶⁵ Thus, the proud Confucian tradition was humbled and dismantled — for a time. Subsequently, the nation has reacted by

⁶⁰ See Kim & Lee, *Changing Facets*, *supra* note 54, at 571-72; see also KIM, HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM, *supra* note 54, at 16.

⁶¹ See Lee, *Emergence*, *supra* note 54, at 87-89; see also Kang, *supra* note 54, at 316-17.

⁶² See Lee, *Emergence*, *supra* note 54, at 87-88; see also Kang, *supra* note 54, at 316-17.

⁶³ E-mail from Sanghyuk Park to Martha Nussbaum (June 9, 2010).

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ See Kim & Lee, *Changing Facets*, *supra* note 54, at 581; see also KIM, HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM, *supra* note 54, at 96-97; Kang, *supra* note 54, at 317.

proudly asserting a distinctive educational culture — Confucian in its roots, but democratic in a way that the medieval Confucian tradition was not.⁶⁶ In part, this democratization began in illegal village schools during the Japanese occupation, which emphasized ideas of liberation that included women and lower classes.⁶⁷

In the reaction against Japanese influence and the recuperation and reshaping of tradition, American influence played a role that was on balance positive and pro-Korean. This influence began early, indeed during the Japanese occupation, with the advent of Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century, and many private educational institutions in Korea still have a Christian character.⁶⁸ The American influence (according to scholar Sungho Lee) included: (1) a democratic idea of education; (2) the idea of equal opportunity for education; (3) the idea of education for women; (4) modern curricula and educational methods, including critical and scientific thinking; and (5) the idea that a nation ought to have a coherent institutional model of higher education.⁶⁹ The American missionaries, remaining in Korea during the Japanese occupation, encouraged resistance to Japanese domination and the formation of a distinctively Korean type of education that traced its roots to Confucianism.⁷⁰ The influence of U.S. ideas was strengthened by resistance to what was associated with Japan.⁷¹ Much later, during the period of U.S. military occupation in the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. made an effort to support the expansion of education in Korea and to send educators and students to the U.S. to study so they could eventually build a national education system on their return.⁷²

Thus a productive synergy between Confucian nationalism and American progressive education has emerged. The result has been the widely democratized, pluralistic, and market-driven education system that obtains today. And today it is still extremely fashionable for young Koreans to be sent to the U.S. for high school, college, graduate education, or all three. Thus the cooperation between Korea and the U.S. continues — although Koreans understand their system as having

⁶⁶ See Kang, *supra* note 54, at 319-21.

⁶⁷ See *id.* at 317.

⁶⁸ One that I visited in 2008 was Keimyung University in Daegu, a high-quality liberal arts institution, where students of all religions are encouraged, but religious exercises are still mandatory. I owe my information about this University to Sanghyuk Park and other faculty with whom I spoke on my visit, and to many students as well.

⁶⁹ See Lee, *Emergence*, *supra* note 54, at 90.

⁷⁰ See *id.* at 96.

⁷¹ See *id.* at 97.

⁷² See *id.* at 98.

roots in an indigenous understanding of Confucianism that Americans simply fostered and did not create.

Like the U.S., Korea has a system that is so pluralistic that generalization is difficult. We can, however, still attempt a general outline. In preschool and elementary school, a vigorous humanism dominates. The national preschool guidelines emphasize child-centered learning and insist on the centrality of story-telling, play, and the cultivation of imagination and sympathy through the arts.⁷³ Approaches are based on “individual children’s needs and interests and respect for the differences between individual children.”⁷⁴ Similarly, the Korean Educational Developmental Institute describes prevalent policies that emphasize expression of thoughts and feelings and the opportunity to “develop basic habits of daily life and the ability to live harmoniously with others.”⁷⁵ Large class size does not always permit the complete fulfillment of these goals.⁷⁶ Even in the difficult area of special education, Korean preschools and elementary schools emphasize the stimulation of curiosity and artistic expression.⁷⁷

As I have already remarked, government aggressively universalized secondary education in the modern era, with anti-elitist policies of random assignment and a focus on educating women. By now, curricular content strongly emphasizes ideas of democracy and equal human rights, including discussions of historical injustices perpetrated by both Japan and the U.S.⁷⁸ Although the focus on competitive examinations for university entrance at times disrupts the cultivation of independent democratic citizenship, one can still say that democratic and human rights values have begun “to bloom in schools.”⁷⁹ And despite the widespread perception that some universities are much more prestigious than others (with Seoul National University being at the top of the pyramid), the tremendous diversity of institutions of higher learning provides a niche for everyone, basically, who wants to attend, mitigating the baneful effects of this competition.⁸⁰

⁷³ See Kwon, *supra* note 54, at 487-88.

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 481.

⁷⁵ NA & MOON, *supra* note 54, at 65.

⁷⁶ See Kwon, *supra* note 54, at 490.

⁷⁷ OECD COUNTRY NOTE, *supra* note 54, at 18-20.

⁷⁸ See Kang, *supra* note 54, at 320.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at 320-21.

⁸⁰ See Lee, *Emergence*, *supra* note 54, at 107.

At the university level, many different types of degree programs are available, but the idea of liberal arts education is very popular at both the famous universities (for example, Seoul National University and Korea University) and at many smaller and private institutions all over the country.⁸¹ Given that the older Confucian tradition was somewhat authoritarian, with a pedagogy closely linked to fixed examinations, it is crucial to ask about pedagogy in the modern Korean university. My experience as a visitor to Seoul National University, Korea University, and the private Christian Keimyung University was that students were very active, enthusiastically pressing the visiting lecturer with questions in much the manner of good undergraduate liberal arts institutions in the U.S. Sanghyuk Park, who got his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Kansas and who can therefore speak knowledgeably about issues of comparative pedagogy, writes this:

Certainly, a top-down authoritarian approach is not our standard. We try to encourage students to develop their own analytic skills and imaginative skills. But unfortunately, I cannot say that all Korean universities follow this standard. Certainly some top-notch universities such as Seoul National University and Korea University follow this standard. But some middle- or low-notch universities pay more attention to job earning skills. Even though I can't say that this approach is a top-down authoritarian approach, I can't say that they try to develop analytic and imaginative abilities.⁸²

In other words, Korean universities face the same tensions that U.S. universities are currently facing. It is significant, however, that the most prestigious universities are squarely in the liberal arts camp, and their dedication to liberal arts education is in no way weakening.⁸³

Indeed, so far from being swallowed up by the demand for profitability in the global market, the liberal arts have recently been strengthened in Korea through a revamping of legal education. In most nations of the world, law is a first subject: students enter university and read law, often with a rather narrow curriculum uninformed by interdisciplinary approaches. In the U.S., thanks to our undergraduate liberal arts model, law, like medicine, is a second degree: students only apply to law school after attaining a B.A. with some other major subject, and whatever basic liberal arts education

⁸¹ *Id.* at 106-07, 110.

⁸² E-mail from Sanghyuk Park, *supra* note 63.

⁸³ *Id.*

their institution offers and requires. Humanities majors are very common for law students, as are social science majors.

As a result of legislation passed in 2007, Korea is now shifting over to the U.S. system, with legal education becoming a postgraduate degree following a four-year undergraduate (usually liberal arts) preparation preceding it.⁸⁴ Korea's premier law school, at Seoul National University, has just changed over to the U.S. model, something that can be expected to have a major impact on the way other law schools implement the legislation.⁸⁵ The discussions that led to the reform are closely related to the ideas that animated Korea's early Confucian tradition. Before the reform, it was possible to become a judge without a college degree of any kind, or even without a high school diploma: one just had to pass the relevant examination and undertake a two-year training program.⁸⁶ There was widespread discontent with this system:

[M]any citizens feel that some judges are not educated enough or some judges do not know what educated general citizens should know. Because of these problems, people do not easily accept the verdicts of judges, and appeal to higher courts. So the credibility of the court system was doubted and expenses for trials went up.⁸⁷

Once policy makers decided that some type of reform was needed, the next step was to decide what judges should know, and the position that prevailed was that a judge "should have not only analytic ability but also deep understanding of human affairs. So they concluded that liberal arts and basic social sciences were the best preparations for good judges."⁸⁸ (Presumably much the same holds for the training of lawyers, although the demand for reform seems to have begun from a public dissatisfaction with judges.)

Korea presents a fascinating phenomenon: a humanistic tradition that is not weakening, but that is actually becoming stronger. How has this come about? I believe much in Korea's current situation is due to its strong association between the humanities and nationalism: the humanistic Confucian tradition is seen as what the Japanese tried to destroy, and what proud Koreans reasserted. These days, comparison

⁸⁴ See *Assembly Okays Shift*, *supra* note 53.

⁸⁵ I discussed these changes in conversations with law faculty and administrators at Seoul National University in August 2008.

⁸⁶ E-mail from Sanghyuk Park, *supra* note 63.

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

with China no doubt fuels the determination to proclaim pride in freedom of thought and creativity of expression. Other nations could do worse than to emulate the Korean model. Korea, meanwhile, is preoccupied with being, and remaining, itself.

IV. THE SINGAPORE/CHINA MODEL: TEACH TO THE TEST, DON'T ASK QUESTIONS

The Asian models that most nations of the world actually admire and emulate are very different from Tagore's humanistic endeavors in India and the liberal arts tradition in Korea. Fans of Asia allude to Singapore and China, largely because they perform well on standardized tests in math and science.⁸⁹ Let's look at those two nations, then, to see what they might offer us. As we shall see, neither promotes or even permits robust critical debate about political matters; nor is the enhancement of the sympathetic imagination or global perspective-taking featured in the educational system. Instead, the focus is largely on testable achievements in math and science; where citizenship training and moral education are on offer, they are taught in a dogmatic manner, so as to reinforce orthodoxy.⁹⁰

Both nations, interestingly enough, have discovered that their traditions of dogmatism, rote learning, and student passivity are counterproductive even from the perspective of achievement in business and industry: both have therefore recently introduced reforms that we might call Tagorean in spirit. Those reforms emphasize problem-solving, student creativity, and, at the university level, a new interest in the arts and humanities. Nonetheless, even where such reforms are really implemented (evidence suggests that changes are merely superficial), they do not touch the essentially dogmatic and fear-ridden character of both teaching and learning on political matters.⁹¹

Before we launch into the account of these nations, two caveats must be entered. First, many studies that are available focus on policy rather than implementation, and thus do not really help us see what is happening on the ground. The studies that do go behind official

⁸⁹ See, e.g., *Obama Pushes Math, Science Education*, CNN, Nov. 4, 2009, available at http://articles.cnn.com/2009-11-23/politics/obama.science_1_science-education-math-and-science-president-obama?_s=PM:POLITICS (discussing differences between how Asian nations and United States value education in science and math).

⁹⁰ See Lu Jie & Gao Desheng, *New Directions in the Moral Education Curriculum in Chinese Primary Schools*, 33 J. MORAL EDU. 495, 496-510 (2004).

⁹¹ See for example, my discussion of Singapore, *infra* text accompanying notes 122-54.

statements find large discrepancies between theory and practice.⁹² Second, restrictions on criticism of the government that the literature documents likely extend, as well, to at least some foreign scholars, given that they want their research permits continued and continued hospitality for their visits. Even in India, a nation that strongly and zealously protects freedom of speech and inquiry, foreign scholars have been subject to sudden denials of research visas for work that goes against the government line.⁹³ Whether for this reason or because of starry-eyed naiveté, people make some very bizarre comparisons: thus, Mao's determination to reeducate dissidents by sending them to work on farms during the Cultural Revolution is compared to John Dewey's method of teaching students through practical projects!⁹⁴ But of course the former was a means of suppressing dissident intellectuals, the latter a part of a program of building independent citizens. Thus, we should look skeptically at what we are told.

China had an era of progressive ferment in education. In 1905, the Confucian imperial civil service examination system ceased to exist, and the curriculum shifted to focus on the study of modern social science and other more contemporary disciplines.⁹⁵ A visit to China by John Dewey in 1919 prompted a focus on active student participation; other aspects of Dewey's approach inspired widespread emulation.⁹⁶ Tagore visited China several times in the 1920s, to both widespread acclaim and some controversy.⁹⁷

⁹² See *infra* text accompanying notes 99-107, 115-19, 123-55.

⁹³ This was particularly true under the BJP-led coalition government, and particularly for work in archaeology that disputed key BJP ideas, such as the age of the Vedas and the presence of a Hindu temple beneath the disputed mosque at Ayodhya. But there is no reason to suppose that these dangers are past with the ascendancy of the Congress.

⁹⁴ XU DI, A COMPARISON OF THE EDUCATIONAL IDEAS AND PRACTICES OF JOHN DEWEY AND MAO ZEDONG IN CHINA 103-08 (1992).

⁹⁵ Tanja Carmel Sargent, *Revolutionizing Ritual Interaction in the Classroom: Constructing the Chinese Renaissance of the Twenty-First Century*, 35 MODERN CHINA 634-35 (2009).

⁹⁶ See Mei Wu Hoyt, *John Dewey's Legacy to China and the Problems in Chinese Society*, 3 TRANSNAT'L CURRICULUM INQUIRY 12, 12, 19-21 (2006), available at <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/tci/article/viewFile/22/44>.

⁹⁷ An excellent summary, with many further references, is in SISIR KUMAR DAS, *The Controversial Guest: Tagore in China*, 29 CHINA REP. (1993), available at <http://chr.sagepub.com/content/29/3/237.full.pdf+html>. The main subject of controversy was Tagore's contrast between Asian and Western civilizations. It appears that some of his hosts wanted him to map out a strategy for Asia to surpass the West in conventional terms of power and mastery, and found disappointing his focus on inwardness and humanistic understanding. On the whole, however, he was welcomed with great enthusiasm.

After Mao's rise to power, however, the new regime discarded all this. Mao installed a highly uniform system that focused on scientific education to achieve economic progress.⁹⁸ Then, during the Great Leap Forward, Mao changed his stance toward education altogether, condemning teachers as elitists who needed to be "reeducated" (sent to labor camps and farms).⁹⁹ At the end of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping once again asserted the importance of education, but once again emphasized the sciences, conceived as tools of economic progress.¹⁰⁰

From that time until 2001, a centralized curriculum, uniform for the nation as a whole and focused on achieving testable results in areas pertinent to economic progress prevailed.¹⁰¹ Studies of both reading and math education show that drilling and rote learning were the primary techniques.¹⁰² Alternative interpretations and answers diverging from the expected "correct" answer were not accepted.

In 2001, however, the Chinese Ministry of Education changed its guidelines from rote memorization to a "New Curriculum," apparently prompted by the thought that the goals of the nation — success in business and industry, economic growth — would be best served by a system that placed more emphasis on analysis, active problem-solving, and curiosity. The new guidelines state:

Change the overemphasis on transmission learning in the implementation of curriculum, and the emphasis on rote memorization and mechanical drill. Promote instead students' active participation, their desire to investigate, and eagerness to use their hands. Develop students' ability to collect and process information and to analyze and solve problems. Cultivate also the capacities for cooperation and communication.¹⁰³

One did not expect, nor was it the government's intention, that the entire system would change overnight. Instead, the government instituted "pilot programs" to try out the "New Curriculum."

⁹⁸ Sargent, *supra* note 95, at 635.

⁹⁹ *Id.* at 636.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* at 636-37.

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 637-38; see also Ma Yun-peng et al., *Chinese Primary School Mathematics Teachers Working in a Centralized Curriculum System: A Case Study of Two Primary Schools in North-East China*, 36 COMPARE: J. OF COMP. EDUC. 198 (2006); Xinchun Wu et al., *Reading Instruction in China*, 31 J. CURRICULUM STUD. 575-77 (1999).

¹⁰² See Wu et al., *supra* note 101, at 574-77, 585; see also Yun-peng et al., *supra* note 101, at 204, 210.

¹⁰³ Sargent, *supra* note 95, at 633.

Apparently these pilot studies are ongoing, because Sargent's empirical study, published in 2009, contrasts a school that is part of a pilot study using the new techniques with a more traditional school. Another empirical study by Charles Teddlie and Shujie Liu, published in 2008, finds that the dominant norm still involves:

- (1) an emphasis on discipline
- (2) a hierarchical system in the classroom
- (3) widespread "teaching to the test," attributable to the importance of test scores in determining teacher evaluations and even teacher salary.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, a study of mathematics teaching by Ma Yun-peng, Lam Chi-chung, and Wong Ngai-Ying, published in 2006, finds that teacher incentives produce a uniform focus on teaching to the test, neglecting everything else.¹⁰⁵ Overall, these authors summarize, "there has been very little change in the nature of the curriculum development system."¹⁰⁶

In addition to these general issues, recent studies of Chinese education point to two problematic tendencies.¹⁰⁷ One tendency is to devalue minority languages in a way that stigmatizes minority identities as connected to lack of intelligence.¹⁰⁸ All children in government schools are taught in Mandarin; bilingualism is nonexistent.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, in the Uyghur Autonomous Region, Uyghur children learn from textbooks that depict Uyghur language negatively and connect it to both powerlessness and stupidity.¹¹⁰ This stigmatization apparently extends from language to ethnic identity: children learn that adopting a Chinese identity — through success in rote memorization — is the way to show "intelligence and ambition."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Charles Teddlie & Shujie Liu, *Examining Teacher Effectiveness Within Differentially Effective Primary Schools in the People's Republic of China*, 19 SCH. EFFECTIVENESS & SCH. IMPROVEMENT 387-407 (2008).

¹⁰⁵ Yun-peng et al., *supra* note 101, at 203-04.

¹⁰⁶ *Id.* 198.

¹⁰⁷ See Linda T.H. Tsung & Ken Cruickshank, *Mother Tongue and Bilingual Minority Education in China*, 12 J. OF BILINGUAL EDUC. & BILINGUALISM 549, 556-59 (2009); Yun-peng et al., *supra* note 101, at 209.

¹⁰⁸ See Tsung & Cruickshank, *supra* note 107, at 556-58.

¹⁰⁹ *See id.*

¹¹⁰ *See id.*

¹¹¹ *Id.*

A second problem is an overemphasis on cultivation of the most talented. The “math Olympiad,” a public competition, attracts a great deal of emphasis, because teachers and schools are evaluated in accordance with performance on this advanced test as well as the standard test.¹¹² This leads to a focus on the most talented students, who receive extra time and more challenging lessons, and to a corresponding neglect of other students.¹¹³ From the point of view of a concerted focus on national economic success, this focus is efficient. From the point of view of democracy, which includes the idea that all citizens are worthy of equal respect and all are to be active and effective participants in national life, it is a problematic focus indeed.

So far we have been discussing the teaching of politically innocuous subjects, such as reading, mathematics, and science. It is glaringly obvious that dissenting political debate is not encouraged or even permitted in Chinese schools; nor is the temperament of the Socratic questioner cultivated or approved. As the minority example shows, the imaginative ability to inhabit multiple perspectives is also devalued. But let us look more closely at how moral values are actually taught in Chinese schools.¹¹⁴ A recent study confirms what we would expect.¹¹⁵ The typical pattern is for the teacher to read students a standard text that contains a story that points to a specific moral.¹¹⁶ The children then memorize the moral.¹¹⁷ This method has not always proven effective: children tend to forget the moral, because it is not firmly connected to their daily lives. Recently, therefore, there have been attempts to use anecdotes from daily lives or recent events as source materials for textbooks, rather than theoretical and historical examples.¹¹⁸ But note that the teacher still has to teach from a national textbook — daily life does not mean the children’s own daily lives. And the method of drill and memorization remains absolutely central — the whole point of the “reform” was to make memorization more effective.

China has recently proclaimed its love for Tagore. Plans for movies, statues, books, and films abound. A new project of translating his complete works in twenty-eight volumes is in progress in a government-run publishing house.¹¹⁹ On May 30, 2010, a new statue

¹¹² See Yun-peng et al., *supra* note 101, at 208.

¹¹³ See *id.* at 209.

¹¹⁴ Jie & Desheng, *supra* note 90, at 496-510.

¹¹⁵ See *id.*

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at 497.

¹¹⁷ *Id.*

¹¹⁸ *Id.* at 498.

¹¹⁹ See Saibal Dasgupta, *China Gets Ready to Declare Love for Tagore*, *TIMES OF*

of the poet made its debut in Shanghai by Indian President Pratibha Patil. Gautam Pal sculpted the new sculpture, which weighs 125 kilograms and stands at the junction of Mao Ming Road and Nanchang Road in the gleaming business hub of the city.¹²⁰ It remains to be seen, however, whether this symbolic reverence will be translated into meaningful practice. China has also honored Gandhi with a statue.¹²¹

Like China, Singapore has reformed education, apparently in the direction of what we might call Tagorean values — apparently prompted, like China, by the needs of a global business culture that requires creativity, problem solving, and flexibility.¹²² The changes, however, appear to be more nominal than real.¹²³ Moreover, they certainly do not extend to the teaching of citizenship or political values, where a dogmatic approach prevails. Even at the university level, instructors and students alike live in fear of criticizing authority.¹²⁴

Singapore, lauded by President Obama for its test score achievements, reformed its educational policy in 2003–2004, allegedly moving away from rote learning and didacticism and toward a more child-centered approach.¹²⁵ In early primary education, the Ministry of Education announced an attempt to move away from an approach that put “children through repetitious exercises and worksheets” toward a more child-centered approach.¹²⁶ In language that resonates with the formulations of Tagore (and Tagore’s Euro-American allies, such as Froebel in Germany, Pestalozzi in Switzerland, and Bronson Alcott and, later, John Dewey in the U.S.), the ministry speaks of the “integration of learning activities in the areas of aesthetics and creative

INDIA, Apr. 19, 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/5829786.cms>.

¹²⁰ See Saibal Dasgupta, *Patil Unveils Tagore Bust in Shanghai*, *TIMES OF INDIA*, May 31, 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/5991565.cms>; *Prez Patil Unveils Tagore’s Statue in Shanghai*, *ZEE NEWS*, May 30, 2010, <http://www.zeenews.com/news/630259.html>.

¹²¹ See Dasgupta, *supra* note 119.

¹²² See Jeanne M. Wolf & Wendy Bokhorst-Heng, *Policies of Promise and Practices of Limit: Singapore’s Literacy Education Policy Landscape and Its Impact on One School Programme*, 7 *EDUC. RES. FOR POL’Y & PRAC.* 151, 160-62 (2008).

¹²³ *Id.* at 161-62; see Jasmine B-Y Sim & Murray Print, *Citizenship Education in Singapore: Controlling or Empowering Teacher Understanding and Practice?*, 35 *OXFORD REV. OF EDUC.* 705, 721 (2009).

¹²⁴ Martha Ann Overland, *A Pandora’s Box in Singapore*, 53 *CHRON. OF HIGHER EDUC.*, June 22, 2007, at A38.

¹²⁵ Tan Ching Ting, *Policy Developments in Pre-School Education in Singapore: A Focus on the Key Reforms of Kindergarten Education*, 1 *INT’L J. CHILD CARE & EDUC. POL’Y* 35, 39 (2007).

¹²⁶ *Id.*

expression, environmental awareness, . . . and self and social awareness.”¹²⁷ The ministry conceded that what preceded this change was rote learning. It is quite unclear to what extent this approach is being implemented.

Such changes have been recommended for later years as well. The motto “teach less, learn more” has become a catchphrase for a development in which children are seen as “proactive agents” rather than mere passive receptacles.¹²⁸ Students are to “work collaboratively to solve problems, do authentic tasks and construct their own meaning.”¹²⁹ Teachers are “co-learners with their students, instead of providers of solutions.”¹³⁰

Nonetheless, observers who have studied the practice of education in Singapore independently conclude that little change has actually taken place. Pak Tee Ng states that the culture of rote learning and memorization has proven difficult to eradicate, and students are often taught with a single goal in view: “to perform in examinations.”¹³¹ And Jeanne M. Wolf and Wendy Bokhorst-Heng, after an in-depth study of one school, conclude that the traditional exam-oriented focus remains dominant:

The Research findings further suggest little integrated learning and a pedagogy that is predominantly teacher-centered, often relying on rote learning. With limited rationale provided to students for language instruction (apart from an overt exam-driven agenda), independent learning opportunities are limited. There is also little input from students¹³²

Even in a class where the teacher claimed to facilitate discussion and engage students, the authors found that there was little student-led discussion.¹³³ Teachers relied heavily on worksheets, usually abstract and decontextualized.¹³⁴ Teachers asked questions and students responded; student-initiated questioning was “minimal.”¹³⁵

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ Pak Tee Ng, *Educational Reform in Singapore: From Quantity to Quality*, 7 EDUC. RES. FOR POL’Y & PRAC. 5, 7 (2008).

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 9.

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ *Id.* at 9-10.

¹³² Wolf & Bokhorst-Heng, *supra* note 122, at 156-57.

¹³³ *Id.*

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 159.

¹³⁵ *Id.*

That is what is happening in unthreatening areas such as language-learning. In citizenship education, even the norm has not really been reformed, and a dogmatic practice of rote learning rules the roost.¹³⁶ In this area as well, distinctions exist between more conservative teachers and more “person-oriented” teachers, with the former overwhelmingly outnumbering the latter.¹³⁷ What is perhaps even more significant, however, is that both types of teachers taught students that there is a single right answer for every political question.¹³⁸

Conservative teachers “adopted a highly controlled approach in teaching citizenship education that was teacher-centered and didactic.”¹³⁹ Typically the teacher would present a problem, identify the correct arguments, and show how these coincided with the government’s decisions.¹⁴⁰ Afterwards, students are “drilled and grilled” for correct answers, with the teacher as authority figure.¹⁴¹ The message is: “listen to me, you won’t go wrong, . . . and you will pass.”¹⁴²

By contrast, progressive teachers used group discussion to analyze problems, discussing issues in greater depth. Nevertheless, the end result was always to justify the government’s decision. While teachers listened more to different perspectives, the conclusion was always predetermined: certain things are more correct for Singapore, and these are the things the government has chosen. “Citizenship education was practised as persuading students towards an acceptance of the status quo.”¹⁴³ The authors conclude, “[T]he degree to which interpretation occurs reflects the tightness of control exerted by education systems and political forces.”¹⁴⁴

At the university level, we see the same picture: a highly public effort to introduce more flexible and creative modes of education, confronted by rigid limits concerning what can be questioned.¹⁴⁵ Thus, Singapore Management University offers a course called “Creative

¹³⁶ Sim & Print, *supra* note 123, at 718.

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 716-17.

¹³⁸ *Id.* at 713.

¹³⁹ *Id.*

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

¹⁴¹ *Id.*

¹⁴² *Id.*

¹⁴³ *Id.*

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 717. I take this, and not the official concluding section, to be the real conclusion of the authors’ argument. The authors, one of whom is an Assistant Professor in Singapore, append a sunny conclusion praising Singapore’s “engaged and passionate citizenship educators,” a conclusion that nothing presented in the article has supported. One can conjecture some of the reasons for this way of writing.

¹⁴⁵ Overland, *supra* note 124.

Thinking” with an instructor who denounces rote learning, telling students that the point of the class is “to undo the damage that twelve years of schooling has done to you.”¹⁴⁶ Universities appear to be modeling their curricula on those of American universities, in order to foster innovation. These institutions offer themselves as Socratic practitioners of active critical thinking, and they copiously perform the arts, including design, drama, music, and film.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, all of this quasi-Tagorean coexists with tight limitations on criticism. As Daniel A. Bell, who taught Political Science at Singapore in the 1990s, comments from outside, “They have this model to be a more intellectually vibrant center, but there are restrictions on how much you can comment on local politics and the performance of particular leaders. This creates a restraint.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the government frequently uses its power to initiate libel actions against academics who criticize its actions, thus creating a climate of fear in which people are careful to stop well short of where the real boundary of dissent might be.¹⁴⁹ Alarming examples of government retaliation are numerous, and those attacked have either had to pay large fines or, in some cases, to flee the country.¹⁵⁰ High-profile cases create an atmosphere of self-censorship. One professor of communications reports that when she introduced a discussion of one of these cases in class, two hundred students simply froze. In general she says, “I can feel the fear in the room You can cut it with a knife.”¹⁵¹ She is planning to leave Singapore shortly. Most other faculty express satisfaction with the current regime, saying that it promotes social harmony.¹⁵²

Although foreign universities report no limitations in their narrowly focused business and engineering programs, this is hardly surprising. It remains to be seen what will become of programs in more sensitive areas, such as a film program initiated in Singapore by NYU’s Tisch School. How can such a program “operate freely under a system in which students who make political films can be jailed for two years and fined \$65,000?”¹⁵³ NYU’s agreement with the government stipulates complete freedom to make and show films within the

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

¹⁵¹ *Id.*

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ *Id.*

confines of the campus. Outside the campus, student films and their makers are at risk.¹⁵⁴

In short, those who see China and Singapore as models for the U.S. should understand two things very clearly. First, even from the point of view of these nations' own limited goals — primarily, economic growth and international economic influence — their traditional systems are faulty. The focus on rote learning and memorization disserves economic goals, in the view of leading Chinese and Singaporean educators, who are now borrowing a half a page out of the book of the international progressive education movement and attempting to inject student activity, student questioning, and an emphasis on active problem solving, though with limited success, given the difficulty of change in entrenched national bureaucracies. Second, the goals of these two nations' education systems do not include empowering and shaping effective democratic citizens, capable of active debate and participation in the shaping of the national agenda. Indeed, such ideas of citizen agency are strongly disvalued. Thus, to the extent that a nation wants to remain a thriving democracy with active effective citizens, it has strong reasons not to emulate China and Singapore.

V. CONTEMPORARY CONFUSION: PRAISING THE WRONG THINGS

Where is the U.S. looking for models in this “Asian Century”? In colleges and universities, the liberal arts model is still dominant, although even in those settings there are signs of strain.¹⁵⁵ By contrast, the abilities of democratic citizenship are losing ground in the most crucial years of children's lives, the years known as K through twelve. Here, the demands of the global market have made educators increasingly focus on scientific and technical proficiency as *the* key abilities, and the humanities and the arts are increasingly perceived as useless frills, which we can prune away to make sure our nation remains competitive. To the extent that these areas are the focus of national discussion, they are recast as technical abilities themselves, to be tested by quantitative multiple-choice examinations, and the imaginative and critical abilities that lie at their core are typically left aside.

National testing (under the “No Child Left Behind” Act) has already contributed to these pernicious developments, as national testing

¹⁵⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵⁵ See NUSSBAUM, NOT FOR PROFIT, *supra* note 5, at 17-18; Drew Faust, *The University's Crisis of Purpose*, N.Y. TIMES BOOK REV., Sept. 9, 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/books/review/Faust-t.html>.

usually does: for critical thinking and sympathetic imagining are not testable by quantitative multiple choice exams, and the skills involved in world citizenship are very poorly tested in such ways.¹⁵⁶ (Consider how world history can be assessed on a standardized test: all that I have said about learning to assess evidence, criticize a historical narrative, and think critically about differences among narratives would have to be omitted.) “Teaching to the test,” which increasingly dominates public school classrooms, produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization. The creativity and individuality that marks the best humanistic teaching and learning has a hard time finding room to unfold. When testing determines a school’s entire future, forms of student-teaching exchange that don’t have a payoff on tests are likely to be squeezed out.

Part of the issue here is content, and part is pedagogy. Curricular content has shifted, away from material that focuses on enlivening imagination and training the critical faculties, toward material that is directly relevant to test preparation. Along with the shift in content has come an even more baneful shift in pedagogy: away from teaching that seeks to promote questioning and individual responsibility toward force-feeding for good exam results.

The “No Child Left Behind” Act was prompted by a real problem: we have tremendous inequalities in our schools. Some children get vastly greater educational opportunities than others. What should we do, if we think that we need national assessment in order to promote greater educational equality, but reject the current form of national assessment for the reasons I have given? It is not at all impossible to create a nuanced, qualitative form of national assessment in these areas. Indeed, the U.S. had the ingredients of one in previous years and an excellent recent book about accountability, Richard Rothstein’s *Grading Education: Getting Accountability Right*, proposes a multilayered state and federal program that tests a variety of cognitive and behavioral outcomes in a far more sophisticated way than NCLB, focusing in particular on skills needed for good citizenship.¹⁵⁷ This sensible and well-argued book is an excellent starting point for a really helpful national debate about accountability. The only problem is that this sort of testing will be much more expensive than the standardized

¹⁵⁶ See No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 20 U.S.C.).

¹⁵⁷ RICHARD ROTHSTEIN, REBECCA JACOBSEN & TAMARA WILDER, *GRADING EDUCATION: GETTING ACCOUNTABILITY RIGHT* 41-43, 143-56, 158-59 (2008). Chapter six provides a survey of the earlier assessment model, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in the 1950s and 60s.

type, and we will have to devote a lot of attention to recruiting a competent bunch of assessors and paying them well, something that nobody currently seems willing even to discuss.

The Obama Administration has a chance to change our nation's current modus operandi and to promote a richer conception of education and, if desired, a richer, more qualitative conception of testing. President Obama's own personal values would seem to lead toward supporting such changes: he is famous for his interest in hearing and sifting the arguments on all sides of an issue, and he declares his great interest in "empathy" as a characteristic pertinent to an office as high as that of Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.¹⁵⁸ His own education clearly had the characteristics I have been praising here: it produced a person who knows how to think critically, who thinks with rich information about a wide range of world situations, who repeatedly displays a robust ability to imagine the predicaments of many types of people — and its corollary, the ability to think reflectively about oneself and one's own life story. Very likely, Barack Obama's home life contributed a great deal to that process, but his schools must have done their part. And we know that when the time came for college, he attended two institutions famous for their commitment to the liberal arts model: Occidental, a fine liberal arts college, and Columbia University, where the undergraduate humanities curriculum is well known for its comprehensiveness¹⁵⁹ and for the engaged, enterprising teaching with which material is presented.

Nonetheless, so far at least, President Obama has not given any signals of support for the humanities or a reform of national education efforts in a liberal arts direction. His choice for Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, inspires no confidence, because as head of the Chicago Public Schools Duncan presided over a rapid decline in humanities and arts funding.¹⁶⁰ And the indications are that rather than decreasing the focus on national testing of the sort pioneered under "No Child Left Behind," the administration plans to expand it.¹⁶¹ In his speeches on education, the President rightly emphasizes the issue of equality, talking about the importance of making all Americans capable of

¹⁵⁸ Peter Slevin, *Obama Makes Empathy a Requirement for Court*, WASH. POST, May 13, 2009, at A03.

¹⁵⁹ See Ashanti M. Alvarez, *Undergraduate Education Conference Homes in on New Curriculum*, RUTGERS FOCUS, Oct. 24, 2007, <http://news.rutgers.edu/focus/issue.2007-10-23.8686249131/article.2007-10-24.0996864536>.

¹⁶⁰ Nick Anderson, *Education Secretary Arne Duncan's Legacy as Chicago School's Chief Questioned*, WASH. POST, Dec. 29, 2009, at A1.

¹⁶¹ NUSSBAUM, NOT FOR PROFIT, *supra* note 5, at 137.

pursuing “the American Dream.”¹⁶² But the pursuit of a dream requires dreamers: educated minds who can think critically about alternatives and imagine a large goal — preferably not just the goal of personal or even national enrichment, but goals involving human dignity and democratic debate.

Instead of that large and generous goal, however, President Obama has so far focused on individual income and national economic progress, arguing that the sort of education we need is the sort that serves those two goals. “[E]conomic progress and educational achievement have always gone hand in hand in America,” he insists.¹⁶³ We should judge any new idea in education by how well it “works” — presumably with reference to those goals.¹⁶⁴ He defends early childhood interventions by saying, “For every dollar we invest in these programs, we get nearly \$10 back in reduced welfare rolls, fewer health costs, and less crime.”¹⁶⁵ Never in this entire lengthy speech does he mention the democratic goals I have emphasized. And when he mentions critical thinking — once — it is in the context of what businesses need for profitability: we need, he says, to develop tests that measure “whether they possess 21st century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking, entrepreneurship and creativity.”¹⁶⁶ This one gesture toward the humanities — in a speech largely devoted to the praise of science and technology — is clearly a narrow allusion to the role of certain skills in business advancement. And the proposed assessment — a strengthened form of NCLB — shows very clearly that the humanistic parts of the sentence are not the core of the proposal.

Even more problematic, President Obama repeatedly praises nations of the Far East, for example Singapore, which, in his view, has advanced beyond us in technology and science education.¹⁶⁷ And he praises such nations in an ominous manner: “They are spending less time teaching things that don’t matter, and more time teaching things that do. They are preparing their students not only for high school or college, but for a career. We are not.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, “things that matter” is taken to be equivalent to “things that prepare for a career.”¹⁶⁹ A life of rich significance and respectful, attentive

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ Obama, *supra* note 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Id.*

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ *Id.*

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

¹⁶⁸ *Id.*

¹⁶⁹ *Id.*

citizenship is nowhere mentioned among the goals worth spending time on. In the context of his speech as a whole, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the “things that don’t matter” include many of the things that this Article has defended as essential to the health of democracy.¹⁷⁰

The U.S. system of public education contains huge inequalities. It is tempting to think that national testing offers a solution to this problem. Nonetheless, one does not solve the problem of unequal opportunity through a type of testing that virtually ensures that no child has the opportunity to get a stimulating education or adequate preparation for citizenship.

It is time to take off the rose-colored glasses. Singapore and China are terrible models of education for any nation that aspires to remain a pluralistic democracy. India has remained one by the skin of its teeth and no thanks to its system of public education, although in India’s case the ubiquitous option of private schooling and the wide range of low-cost private schools available transform the dismal situation to at least some extent, and India’s robustly critical political culture has endured despite the deadening influence of her government schools.

If we turn to Asia, let us praise what deserves praise: the humanistic aspects of the Confucian tradition, which surely need to be enlivened by a critical pedagogy, but which can be so enlivened, as the evidence of Korea indicates, producing critical humanistic liberal arts education that feeds into a robust political culture. Above all, let us praise the vision of Tagore and other like-minded Indian educators, who understood that all nations are always under threat from the forces of conformity and bureaucratic obtuseness, and who understood that the only reliable weapon that humanity can use to defend itself against that obtuseness is a cultivated imagination.

I can best summarize my wish for the future of education in Asia, and in her many admirers around the world, by quoting, as I end this Article, a poem of Tagore’s addressed to his country:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by
narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the
dreary desert sand of dead habit;

¹⁷⁰ See *id.*

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening
thought and action —
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country
awake.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ RABINDRATH TAGORE, *GITANJALI* (1913), as reprinted in *A TAGORE READER* 294, 300 (Amiya Chakravarty ed., Beacon Press 1961).