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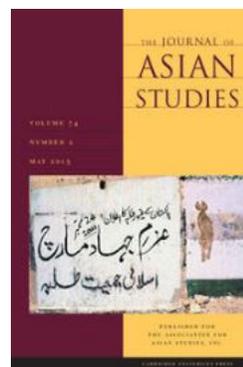
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***The Great Civilized Conversation: Education for a World Community.* By Wm. Theodore de Bary. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 432 pp. \ \$35.00 (cloth); \ \$24.00 (paper).**

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and perhaps inadvertently, illustrated by the way he is portrayed by Peter O'Toole in Bertolucci's film.

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*The Great Civilized Conversation: Education for a World Community.* By WM. THEODORE DE BARY. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 432 pp. \$35.00 (cloth); \$24.00 (paper).  
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In this work, distinguished scholar Wm. Theodore de Bary explores the aims of liberal education and the question of how classics from Western and Asian traditions might be successfully integrated within a global liberal arts curriculum.

For a broad academic audience interested in cross-cultural liberal education, part I, "Education and the Core Curriculum," will be of greatest interest. Defining liberal education as "any study that liberates man for a better life" (p. 12), de Bary recommends the study of classic works for attaining self-understanding and clarity on matters of shared human concern. Liberal studies so construed liberate us by disciplining our faculties. At the same time, they enable us "to show respect to what other human beings have valued," an "act of civility" that enables us to live richer, more responsive lives in a larger world (p. 42).

A college curriculum can grant only limited time and space to the great works of one intellectual tradition, let alone many. What kind of curriculum, then, is appropriate? According to de Bary, whose experience in Columbia's core curriculum informs his recommendations, we should begin with what is most familiar to us, and then expand outward. In the American context, for instance, such a curriculum might devote its first year to a "sympathetic and critical" appropriation of the Western tradition (p. 51). De Bary recommends expanding the curriculum in the second year. He recognizes the impossibility (and inadvisability) of a curriculum that aims to incorporate every conceivable tradition. Given their richness, depth, and influence, de Bary contends, four major Asian civilizations—the Islamic, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese—deserve special attention. Classic works from such traditions should be examined not as museum pieces, but as "part of a continuing conversation over time" (p. 36). Such works should be taught with other works from their original traditions to show "not only the range of possibilities within a given tradition but also how it has grown and developed from within" (p. 50).

In its main points, de Bary's educational program is highly appealing. While focusing on questions and themes that unite human beings, it respects difference and is open to plural specification according to varying cultural circumstances. It emphasizes the centrality of classic works, but it properly denies that only one tradition (viz., the European one) has a monopoly on producing classics. Its insight that serious engagement with the classics of other traditions can be a mode of civility is inspiring.

De Bary reasonably insists that we should not force classic works from other traditions into fitting our own, local agendas. Yet, as I understand de Bary's proposals, his curriculum apparently deemphasizes bringing classics from multiple traditions into explicit, cross-cultural dialogue (at least within the same course). On de Bary's tradition-focused (or civilization-focused) model, there is restricted space for students to consider explicitly

how, say, Buddhist or Confucian conceptions of selfhood might challenge, or be challenged by, different conceptions from very different traditions, such as Epicurean or Augustinian conceptions. De Bary is rightly concerned about “omnibus” courses that cover multiple traditions at once: he fears that they can foster tokenism (pp. 19, 50). Yet one need not construct an omnibus course just by tacking the *Mengzi* and *Bhagavad Gita* onto a selection of all-Western classics, or just by assigning a thin smattering of “representative” works from a wide range of complex traditions. Instead, one can present a collection of classics from different traditions as a selection of interesting and valuable works, and focus intelligently on exploring how these works, like some especially insightful friends, might converse with one another. Increasing globalization in higher education poses another, practical problem for de Bary’s proposal of beginning with one’s own civilization and then moving outward. When it becomes harder to take for granted that most of one’s students come from the same cultural (or civilizational) background, a more flexible model may have advantages.

The remainder of *The Great Civilized Conversation* explores other areas. Part 2, “Liberal Learning in Confucianism,” covers a wide range of East Asian intellectual history and philosophy, including the educational programs of Zhu Xi, the development of neo-Confucianism through the Ming dynasty and into Korea, and the extent to which Confucian “personalism” (de Bary’s term) has room for a robust conception of human rights. In part 3, a shorter section of “Tributes and Memoirs,” de Bary discusses certain eminent figures who have inspired his educational thinking and practice. De Bary’s discussions of Ryūsaku Tsunoda and Matteo Ricci, in particular, offer vivid sketches of teachers who unified scholarly ability, benevolent concern, and openness to the world.

*The Great Civilized Conversation* consists of previously published material. As a result, its chapters tend to repeat already established points. Further, parts 2 and 3 may be less urgent for general academic readers more concerned with big-picture educational issues than with, say, neo-Confucianism or the Chinese tradition as such. Yet even as presented here, de Bary’s timely reflections deserve our consideration.

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*The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India.* By PETER VAN DER VEER. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014. 282 pp. \$75.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).  
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Peter van der Veer, a distinguished scholar at both the Max Planck Institute in Germany and Utrecht University in the Netherlands, has written a fascinating and challenging examination of the emergence of the “modern spirit” of China and India from the nineteenth century down to today. Van der Veer’s use of the expression “modern spirit” refers primarily to his understanding of traditional China and India’s confrontation with Euro-American imperialism and the emergence and meaning of “modernity” in these Asian countries. These are, moreover, developments that have a direct bearing on China and India’s increasingly competitive participation in the interconnected global economic and cultural situation of the twenty-first century.