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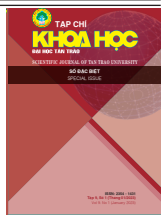

"THE OLD NEW CRITICAL": A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW ON KRITIKA, NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION, AND PHILIPPINE K TO 12 CURRICULA IN 21ST CENTURY LITERATURE FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Jan Marvin A. Goh
University of Santo Tomas, Philippines
Email address: jagoh@ust.edu.ph
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Abstract:

This article reflects on literary and humanities education in the current Philippine K to 12 senior high school literature curricula, through tracing the position of Philippine literary theory and criticism, or Kritika, in its objectives. It seeks to problematize whether its presence or absence is symptomatic to the "disastrous neoliberal" architecture of contemporary Philippine humanities education. While this study relates the literature subject to Martha Nussbaum's claim that "the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought" are indeed "losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit and skills suited to profit-making", this paper also locates her idea through Constantino's "miseducation of Filipino people" with the aim of decolonizing from the educational ethos that was never intended to promote democracy, freedom, and equality. Toward that objective, locating Philippine Kritika in the literature education is essential since it speaks to Isagani R. Cruz's concept of "the other Other of Western literary theory", which describes the education that Filipinos have inherited as impoverished because of its "ignorance of half of the world's literary texts and theories." The poverty it brought via colonialist hegemony is "unconsciously shared by Philippine literary thought" as evidenced by New Criticism being "the ruling paradigm in Philippine literary circles today" despite the emergence of newer critics and recent positions in Philippine postcolonial studies.

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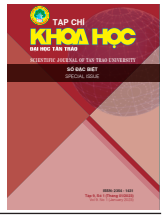

"PHÊ BÌNH XƯA VÀ NAY": MỘT GÓC NHÌN HỒI TƯỞNG VỀ KRITIKA, GIÁO DỤC TÂN TỰ DO VÀ CHƯƠNG TRÌNH GIẢNG DẠY TỪ MẪU GIÁO ĐẾN LỚP 12 CỦA PHILIPPINE TRONG VĂN HỌC THẾ KỶ 21 DÀNH CHO CÁC TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG

Jan Marvin A. Goh,
Trường Đại học Santo Tomas, Philippines
Đại chỉ email: jagoh@ust.edu.ph
DOI: 10.51453/2354-1431/2022/860

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Tóm tắt

Bài viết phản ánh về giáo dục văn học và nhân văn trong chương trình văn học phổ thông hiện tại của Philippines từ bậc mầm non đến lớp 12, thông qua việc xác định vi trí của lý thuyết và phê bình văn học Philippines, hay Kritika, trong các mục tiêu của chương trình. Bằng cách đặt giả thiết liệu sự hiện diện hay vắng mặt của các lý thuyết có phải là dấu hiệu của cấu trúc "chủ nghĩa tân tự do thảm khốc" trong nền giáo dục nhân văn Philippines đương đại hay không. Nghiên cứu này liên quan đến chủ đề văn học với tuyên bố của Martha Nussbaum "khía cạnh giàu trí tưởng tượng, sáng tạo và khía cạnh của tư duy phê phán nghiêm túc" thực sự đang mất dần vị thế khi các quốc gia thích theo đuổi lợi nhuận ngắn hạn và các kỹ năng phù hợp với việc tạo ra lợi nhuận. Bài báo cũng thể hiện ý tưởng về "sự ngược đãi người dân Philippines" của Constantino với mục đích phi thực dân hóa khỏi các đặc tính giáo dục vốn không bao giờ nhằm thúc đẩy nền dân chủ, tự do và bình đẳng. Với mục tiêu đó, việc xác định vị trí của Kritika Philippine trong giáo dục văn học là điều cần thiết vì nó nói lên khái niệm "sự khác biệt của lý thuyết văn học phương Tây" của Isagani R. Cruz, mô tả nền giáo dục mà người Philippines được thừa hưởng là nghèo nàn vì sự thiếu hiểu biết và biết nửa vời về các tác phẩm và lý thuyết văn học của thế giới. Sự nghèo nàn mà nó mang lại thông qua quyền bá chủ của chủ nghĩa thực dân được "tư tưởng văn học Philippines chia sẻ một cách vô thức" bằng chứng là Chủ nghĩa Phê bình Mới là "mô hình thống trị trong giới văn học Philippines ngày nay" bất chấp sự xuất hiện của các nhà phê bình văn học mới hơn và vị trí của họ gần đây trong các nghiên cứu về hậu thuộc địa của Philippines.

1. "No Child Left Behind": Classes in Times of Covid-19

This essay is written in August, where Coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) was reported to have affected 161,253 and killed 2665 Filipinos (Worldometers.info, 2020), not including the unreported cases and backlogs from the hospitals around the country. The decision of Department of Education (DepEd) to pursue blended

learning, begin the school year (2020-2021), and open the classes in October (Aguilar, 2020) for 22.9 million enrolled Filipino students (Ronda, 2020) has taken its course through Republic Act No. 11480 signed by President Rodrigo Duterte, notwithstanding the rising daily cases of COVID-19, its potential to become the new epicenter for the coronavirus pandemic in Southeast Asia (CSIS, 2020), and various public outcries in the form of protests and online petitions from the public (Magsambol, 2020).

For the Education Secretary, delaying the resumption of school year would be harmful to children. They risk being left behind by their counterparts in Southeast Asia (Ronda, 2020). She cited the decision of Vietnam to begin their classes on May (Malipot, 2020). Last May 25, President Rodrigo Duterte's public address has shown his stance on the opening of classes, and I quote, "It's useless to be talking about opening of classes. Para sa akin, bakuna muna (For me, there has to be a vaccine first)" (Tomacruz, 2020). Even the President shows his reservations in the early opening of face-to-face classes. Despite of these dominant narratives which propel and/or interrupt the opening of online classes this October, one might think of unsaid narratives which appear to take precedence over the safety and accessibility of the more financially and medically vulnerable students: the economic narrative, in the guise of "no student left behind" credo. This narrative has taken precedence within the neoliberal structure of K to 12 education system. To echo Martha Nussbaum's (2010, p. 6) frustration, there are "too few questions" asked about the direction of education "given that economic growth is so eagerly sought by all nations."

2. Humanities in Crisis, K to 12, and Neoliberal Education

This neoliberal education structure in the Philippines, according to San Juan (2016, p. 81-82), would "permit its citizens to gain enough skills to work abroad even without college degree." It follows that the "optimization" of K to 12 curriculum will "intensify the export of semi-skilled laborers and professionals to developed economies." This structure complements the need of Philippines to export human resources in the era of globalization and dependency to stronger markets, since their remittances amount to 10% of Philippines's overall GDP (Lichauco, 2005). "Unrelated" subjects to the propagation of the students' technical and specialized skills have been recalibrated, reduced or even abolished in some universities.

Most of these affected subjects in both Secondary and Tertiary level are related to the discipline of humanities; in particular, Filipino Literature and Language, and Philippine History, which San Juan (2016, p. 82) asserts as subjects "vital to critical pedagogy in a post-colonial or neocolonial set-up." This structure has instituted "technicalization" and "apparent dehumanization in the core curriculum for the senior high school/junior college level by wiping out academic space for a number of vital Humanities and Social Sciences subjects which were formerly mandatory" (San Juan, 2016, p. 95). And by extension, it benefits "the welfare of few elite clans and corporations that monopolize the country's land" as they serve as "partners of transnational corporations and their local subsidiaries" (San Juan, 2016, p. 85). By initially presenting these observations and assertions, one can have a distant view on the ongoing crisis in Philippine humanities education under the K to 12 education from a larger perspective, or from what the article of Preston (2015, as cited in De Chavez & Varadharajan, 2019) describes as "the remorseless and nightmarish logic of the markets."

These descriptions of neoliberal education in the Philippines have appealed to "a crisis of massive proportions and grave social significance" that Nussbaum (2010, p. 1) explained in her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. As nations "thirst for national profit", humanities and arts subjects become the casualty. These subjects, which teach students critical thinking, are "necessary for independent action and for intelligent resistance to the power of blind tradition and authority", through "learning to imagine the situation of others" which ultimately cultivates their "inner eyes", a skill essential for a "successful democracy" (O'Brien, 2010, as cited in Nussbaum, 2010). This democracy hangs in the balance if this trend of devaluing the humanities and arts continue. She added,[…] nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements. (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 2)

De Chavez and Varadharajan (2019, p. 1-4) have found the need to form an "alternative critique that does not confuse democracy with nor concedes with oligarchy" by looking at the crisis of humanities from the below, or from the realm of the popular, outside the academic culture. Their approach on reflecting the discussion between humanities and democracy speaks to the need to re-evaluate and reframe the idea of Nussbaum's (2010) argument that the "democracy needs humanities" into "humanities need democracy" by discoursing it to Ranciere's (1991, p. 138) "radical version of democratic equality." It views equality as a "point of departure" and "not an end to attain." Their objective is to locate the need to hear the ethical demand of "ordinary voices", away from the "regimes of power that regulate the distributions of the sensible" and to represent a "yet to be realized organization of the social, a democratic community yet to come" (De Chavez and Varadharajan, 2019, p. 3).

The top-down approach presented by San Juan is one way of looking at the crisis of humanities in the Philippine K to 12 education system in Senior High School and locating its apparent devaluation of humanities in the discourse of Nussbaum. While this paper appears to echo De Chavez and Varadharajan's (2019) reading on how the reading of Raffy Lerma's photographs of extra-judicial killings are "policed" by the politics of the President Rodrigo Duterte's intensive drug-war narratives, this paper insists on looking at another artefact that is inside or within academia which directly affects the way how secondary school teachers teach humanities. This paper also offers a bottom-up approach that is attentive to the specificities of humanities educators and education under the K to 12 system, setting off from the concept of Spivak (2012, p.2, as cited in De Chavez & Varadharajan, 2019) that "there can be no global formula" for understanding the nature of an aesthetic education which speaks to the space of the "singular and the unverifiable" since "Globalization can never happen to the sensory equipment of the experiencing being except insofar as it always was implicit in its vanishing outlines." These "vanishing outlines" of our "sensory equipment" in humanistic and critical education shall be traced through investigating the location of Philippine literary theory and criticism, which would be referred into this essay as *Kritika,* written in the objectives of literature curriculum of a subject called *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* as it seeks to expand the initial findings of Goh and Samarita's (2018) repositioning of the timeliness and criticality of literary education. The ethos of critical humanities education is essentially connected to the approaches of selecting the materials to be read and interpreting the literary text. Why focus on Kritika in the first place? Reading Kritika in the literature curriculum is an avenue where one can analyze the existing position of the institutions who wrote and distributed it as a cultural artifact.

It seeks to connect to Nussbaum's (2010, p. 2) observation, or from what Baruchello (2012, p. 104) calls as "the cry for help of a committed proponent of human freedom", regarding how ''the humanistic aspects of science and social science—the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought" are "losing ground." In a global scale, she explains, "nations prefer to pursue short-term profit and skills suited to profit-making" instead of producing citizens who possess the power to think critically and question those who "police" how the "distribution of the sensible" (Ranciere, 1998, p. 28) is going to be interpreted and reread through the curriculum. Birell (2008) believes that there are possible potential redistributions of the sensible which are tied to the concept of democracy, since it has the potential to become complicit to the politics of those who can alter the perception and signification of both the visible and invisible, changing the ways in which texts are going to be selected, read, interpreted, and taught in a narrative environment.

3. Kritika in Literature Curriculum

The term Kritika is the term used by Isagani R. Cruz, a renowned Filipino critic, in referring to the "distinct but interrelated areas of theory, metacriticism, close reading, and even book reviews." Cruz's task of critically reading Philippine literature in 1984 was one of the first series of attempts in "evolving Philippine poetics toward a more rigorous critical practice" by attempting to "clear the (ontological) ground" (Bayot, 1996a, p. v-vi) of inscribed worldviews that are foreign to Philippine literary tradition. He especially refers to those theories and perspectives that critics and writers have unconsciously (or even unwittingly) adapted but have not properly contextualized to the strong "socially conscious/realist tradition" of Philippine Literature (Ordoñez, 1996). His endeavor is complemented by his article's thesis in teaching the humanities after the 1986

People Power Revolution, a milestone in achieving the well-sought Philippine democracy from the previous dictatorial regime. According to him, "because a change has already occurred in the government, in the society, and this age of ours, there is also a need for a change in our approach to the teaching of the subjects that constitute the humanities... there must be a politicizing of the (literary) studies" (Cruz, 1987, p. 163, as cited in Bayot, 1996b, p. 43-44).

Cruz's theoretical pursuit toward a more political, postcolonial dimension of Philippine critical thought has been strongly articulated in his essay *The other other: Towards a postcolonial poetics,* where he found "his habitat of Philippine Kritika in Critical Condition, perpetually s/citing it(s)-Self as 'the other Other'" (Bayot, 2010, p. 1). The inconclusive/ Philippine literary theory then has become "the other Other" of Western literary theory, arguing that (1) "Western literary thought is impoverished because of its ignorance of half the world's literary texts and theories; and (2) Philippine literary thought...through colonialist hegemony, now unconsciously shares this poverty" (Cruz, 1996, p. 132) as evidenced by believing that New Criticism is the "ruling paradigm in Philippine literary circles today" (Cruz, 2003, p. 152-153). Are these observations true in the contemporary Senior high school Philippine literature education? Is our contemporary literary education "Critical"? To which extent does it manifest in the objectives of a senior high school literature curriculum? To answer these questions, this paper will locate the traces of Kritika within the six (6) criteria of 21st century literature curriculum. Treated as a cultural text, the curriculum will undergo close reading, echoing the rationale of Jonathan Culler (1997, p. 46-47) in doing Cultural Studies, in which a reader "treats cultural artefacts as 'texts' to be read rather than as objects that are simply there to be counted."

4. The 21st Century Literature Curriculum

The curriculum, or learning guide, of the subject *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* is composed of six (6) criteria: (1) general description, (2) course description, (3) content, (4) content standard, (5) performance standard, and (6) learning competencies. The general description reads: "This course aims to engage students in appreciation and critical study of 21st century literature from the Philippines and the world encompassing their various dimensions, genres, elements, structures, contexts, and traditions." Initially, this description appears to truly embrace the "critical" and "creative" aspect of the subject. However, as one reads the curriculum as a text, its version of "critical" and "creative" is already outdated, to echo Cruz's (2003, p. 153) observation. The next paragraph explains the curriculum based on the common approaches it offers to the teachers.

There are three (3) major observations that are evident in the reading: (1) the curriculum centers greatly on the following modes of reading the supposedly contemporary text: New Criticism (EN12Lit-Id-25, EN12Lit-Ie-27, EN12Lit-IIb-32, EN12Lit-IIe-27), old historicism which is also known as geographic (EN12Lit-Ia-21, EN12Lit-Ie-29, EN12Lit-IIc-29, EN12Lit-IId-25), comparing genres (EN12Lit-Id-25, EN12Lit-IIb-32, EN12Lit-IId-25), historical (EN12Lit-Ib-22, EN12Lit-Ie-30, EN12Lit-IIf-28, EN12Lit-IIg-35), auto/biographical (EN12Lit-Ic-23, EN12Lit-IIf-28), sociological (EN12Lit-Ie-28, EN12Lit-IIf-28), and identifying if a text is literary or non-literary (EN12Lit-Id-26, EN12Lit-IIe-34, EN12Lit-IIh-36); (2) the activities are focused on either writing a close analysis using these modes or doing an adaptation of the text using the students' multimedia skills (EN12Lit-Ie-31.1,2,3 and EN12Lit-IIij-31.1,2,3); and lastly, (3) their definition of "critical" is linked to New Criticism, pre-critical and impressionistic approaches. What do these observations say on the way how Department of Education frames the learning guide which would be used to teach adolescent Filipino students (ages 15-18)? Should it be considered as a symptom of a bigger crisis in humanities under the context of neoliberal literary education in the Philippines? What alternatives are being offered?

5. "Critical" Complicity in the Curriculum

While Ranciere's (1998) "distribution of the sensible" is centered on the relationship between arts and politics, his concept—of "cutting" and "redistribution" in constructing the "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of the speech and noise"—configures the way how the politics of 21st century literature curriculum under k to 12 can be read as a cultural text. Ranciere (2004, p. 12-13) further explains that "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" not in a canvass

of painters nor in the images of photographers but in the widely distributed learning guide: the curriculum for contemporary literature subject. In the case of this curriculum, much of the "formalist heresy" (Cruz, 1990, p.27-34), which neutralizes "the central role of literature in national struggle for economic and political independence", have been included while the traces of the "postcolonial" approaches which view the context of the "native struggles against foreign imperialists and colonizers" and treats literature as a text which is "not confined to the Western canonical genres" are excluded. Cruz (1990, p. 72) continues to explain that "literature in a country with widespread poverty and bureaucratic corruption never shirks its responsibility of telling the truth." Its potential to "contribute or, conversely, to obstruct, national economic, political, and cultural liberation" must be considered by literature teachers in both public and private senior high school institutions. By "cutting" the traces of "politics" in the way how the term "critical" is "redistributed" and inscribed in the criteria of curriculum, this cultural text serves as an avenue where the teaching of literature is de-politicized, hence, turning the attention of teachers and students to the "beauty" and "appreciation of form" of texts away from the more critical issues which literature reflects and subverts in contemporary Philippines. The term "critical" as used in the curriculum appears to be complicit in terms of maintaining the highly textual, depoliticized, more appreciative, and pre-critical approaches in the curriculum.

From this observation, the institution's framing of 21st century literature curriculum is seen as a symptom of the emergence and eventual victory of neoliberal education which favors the students' technical skills (memorization of the names of the writers, identification of the figurative languages used, and through efficiently skimming and scanning for a certain information, etc.) instead of utilizing the space of literature curriculum towards expanding the nationalist consciousness and distinct critical traditions from various local literary traditions and local critics. The traces of Philippine kritika and kritikos (critics) must then be presented and read initially in the curriculum before strengthening our participation in the more generalist and more globalist ethos of *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* as taught by teachers and as learned by Filipino students. Teaching contemporary literature must also consider various key terms in the curricula from Philippine critical tradition that explains its variations, subversions, and "disjunctions between Western theory of literature and Philippine literary productions" (Bayot, 1996, p. 51), as positioned in the wider discourse of global literary and humanities education. The learning guide must be written in a more specific way but it must also be highly contextualized in the postcolonial discourse of Philippine kritika.

Constantino's (1970) observation echoes its significance at this point. Filipinos became "miseducated" under the "cutting" and "redistribution" brought by the education system from the previous colonial regimes to influence the Filipino mind in becoming "subservient to that of the master" as "we were not taught to view them objectively, seeing their virtues as well as their faults." He offers his local readers to "[…] think of ourselves, of our salvation, of our future. And unless we prepare the minds of the young for this endeavor, we shall always be a pathetic people" (Constantino, 1970, p. 16). This educational ethos which he referred to was never intended to promote democracy, freedom, and equality but to maintain the hegemony by monitoring our educational landscape. It follows that the challenge of re-colonizing the curriculum that "instills the concept of "national identity", "cultural consciousness", and "patriotism" should be understood as a challenge posed by Cruz to Filipino scholars and kritiko to prepare a strong ground for subsequent acts to redefine the world of literature according to Filipinos" (Bayot, 1996, p. 58).

The previous challenge mentioned should not be seen as a concept which is limited only for Philippine literature and kritika, but also in teaching humanities related subjects from the perspective of postcolonial humanities education in Philippines. Looking at the traces of kritika in the curriculum is only an initial step in understanding the larger dynamics of literary and humanities education in the neoliberal K to 12 schemes. This envisioning of recolonizing the consciousness also needs to be realistic since "the whole issue that surrounds the curriculum is entangled with the political question of relations of power" (Bayot, 1996, p. 57), which is more problematic in the context of 21st century neoliberal education because of the way how the learning guides frame the criteria and objectives of the remaining humanities subjects.

This study remains inconclusive. There are more curricula under the humanities education of k to 12 that warrants analyses. More researches are needed from the perspectives of teachers who are teaching various allied disciplines of humanities. Administrators in K to 12 institutions must also investigate the policies, their framing of learning guides, and complicities in the selection of strategies and instructional materials for humanities education. The budget for humanities related trainings, workshops, conferences, and research funding must be reconsidered. And lastly, A global Fightback is imperative, and it can only be feasible if broad-based movements against neoliberalism within both core and peripheral countries carry on with their triple tasks of arousing, organizing, and mobilizing peoples in ever-expanding, ever-deepening networks of resistance that will not only smash the neoliberal order into smithereens but will also pave the way for the restoration of public control over the world's resources, education, economy, and its hopefully bright future, where the greatest dream is realized: the elimination of man's exploitation of man (San Juan, 2016, p. 99).

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