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An Analysis of the Impact of Different Socioeconomic and Political Conditions on Education

The philosophies and norms of a society mold the nature of its institutions. Education systems are an institutionalization of humanity's natural tendency to pursue knowledge and self-improvement. Hence, school policy, pedagogy, curriculum, values, and goals are subject to the influence of societal values. Children, with their pliable and developing minds, are in turn subject to immense psychological conditioning from school. Thus, school is a hub where society can instill its values and secure adherence to its practices. That is, education produces a desired societal outcome. There exist a multitude of socioeconomic and political systems where these dynamics can be observed. Namely, America, China, and Finland represent three major distinct blocs in economic and political ideology. The United States is a well-established global superpower that, both domestically and internationally, imposes a regime of neoliberal capitalism. Under neoliberalism, private interests govern political and economic policies. A neoliberal society is characterized by the privatization of goods and services, government deregulation, austerity (less public spending and a weak welfare state), and an emphasis on individual responsibility, all for the ends of ever-growing profits. Internationally, the US has consistently taken efforts to impose its regime on other nations, staging numerous coups and controlling the flow of financial aid from global organizations like the International Monetary Fund, only giving aid to countries once they adopt neoliberal policies (Martinez 2). Meanwhile, China is an up-and-coming superpower that follows a state capitalist model. Much of the

economy in China is made up of state-owned enterprises, all of which are under the central authority of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC). This entity acts as a large shareholder, dictating business policies. Managerial positions in state-owned businesses are often held by major Communist Party leaders. These officials supervise major private enterprises, ensuring that all policies and actions are of interest to the Chinese state. Further regulation of private entities occurs through the distribution of capital to non-state organizations on part of state-controlled capital firms, which is performed as the government sees fit (Lin 699-700 and Pearson 209-210). State-owned enterprises have grown in size, making China fill the second highest number of spots on the Fortune Global 500 list of the largest corporations globally (Lin 699). Lastly, Finland is a social democracy. Social democracy can be thought of as a version of capitalism where the private industry is held on a tight leash. The rich and large private conglomerates are heavily taxed. A major proportion of funding goes to comprehensive welfare programs and fundamental public services such as education and healthcare. In terms of labor, workers are guaranteed a myriad of benefits and strong unions (Anderson 13-14). With corporations highly regulated and public rights elevated, financial and political capital are more horizontally structured. The distinctions among American, Chinese, and Finnish society beg the question of which model best educates students. Undoubtedly, among the three nations, Finnish social democracy does the best job of forging knowledgeable, politically free, and economically secure citizens.

The most important prerequisite in understanding how these three societies influence their respective education systems is understanding how they influence their society, because society influences education. For the United States, the American neoliberal order is synonymous with inequality, exploitation, and an overall lack of wellbeing, which sets a grim

tone for analyzing the quality of its educational system. At a fundamental level, there exists an ideological tension between democracy and capitalism. In a society where material assets are concentrated in the hands of an elite few and used to propagate policies favorable to their interests, equality in political power, a core component of democracy, is virtually impossible to attain, with the rest of society lacking the material wealth necessary to exert their will on policies. The forces of capitalism directly impede democracy. Conversely, in *Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Education Goals*, Labaree attempts to describe how democracy inhibits capitalism, writing, “restricting... economic freedom in the name of equality infringes on individual liberty, without which democracy can turn into the dictatorship of the majority” (Labaree 41). This assertion is a classic argument in defense of capitalism, where it is presupposed that economic freedom, specifically for private entities, is a prerequisite to individual liberty. This erroneously equates the worth of private actors with individual human beings. By this logic, government restrictions on both private sector greenhouse gas emissions and individuals’ freedom of speech are both violations of individual liberties. However, whereas one of these violations infringes upon a basic human right, the other infringes upon the right to take actions that infringe upon human rights. Indeed, much like the government, the private sector can control and violate individual liberties. Both economically and managerially, workers are at the mercy of their bosses. Corporate control of news and politics infringes on the individual right to free press and political opinion. Having a job is tied to survival. As such, the individual and the private actor are two separate entities, and the “dictatorship of the majority” that suppresses the individual is in fact one that is beholden to private interests. In clarifying the difference between individual and private rights, it has been made clear that neoliberal society nurses exploitative and pervasive structures.

These findings are contrary to the popular viewpoint of capitalism as a benevolent system with no alternatives that leads to universal “peace” and “prosperity.” Indeed, many view it as the best gift humanity has ever been given. In an article from Medium, a proponent of capitalism argues, “There has never been a war between two capitalist democracies... free trade enriches both the American poor and the global poor” (Loeb). The former claim is downright false, as both World Wars involved powers that operated under some type of capitalist model. More broadly, capitalism demands an extreme greed for resources at all costs. This was a major factor that motivated colonial pursuits. These motivations are still pursued in the neocolonial era, which has not only led to numerous armed conflicts, but the propagation of highly oppressive regimes in other countries. For example, in 1973, to protect American mining interests, Salvador Allende, who had instituted popular socialist reforms, was violently ousted and replaced by Pinochet and his brutal dictatorship (Monbiot). Many other similar coups, some as recent as 2019, like in Bolivia, have occurred throughout the Third World for similar reasons. Not only is neoliberalism bellicose, but these examples, with their involvement of the imposition of neoliberal will via imperialism, strongly demonstrate that it is undemocratic. Additionally, the latter claim is a sort of argument about trickle-down economics, the idea that economic growth, which, in a capitalist system, means corporate profits, somehow trickles down to the working class. However, if the goal is for the private industry to constantly increase its level of capital, what reason is there for the general public to receive a slice of the cake? If trickle-down economics is a real-life phenomena, why has economic inequality worsened over the past few decades? The simple truth is that the pie has gotten bigger and everyone’s piece of it has gotten smaller.

Another common pro-neoliberal argument is that neoliberalism encourages and rewards “hard work.” A recent study analyzing its effects on individual well-being argues that

“self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-reliance” are promoted (Card 363). “Self-” being a common prefix among these three purported virtues shows how deeply individualism is baked into capitalist ideology. With their connections to growth and ability, these virtues reflect the rhetoric of “individual responsibility,” the idea that everyone must fend for themselves and themselves alone. This logic inherently fosters a sense of unhealthy competition. With competition being the name of the game, for the working class, systemic factors explaining their situation are disregarded in favor of assertions of “inadequacy” and “laziness” and a need to “work harder.” Of course, this ignores how the concentration of wealth has perpetuated centuries of systemic oppression against marginalized groups in the United States. This allows the rich to erroneously believe and claim that they have meritoriously achieved their position, and take every step to defend their privilege (Monbiot). From these competitive conditions arise feelings of loneliness and alienation, which hinder individual mental, emotional, and physical health (Becker 947). This only adds an emotional charge to neoliberalism’s material damage. Taken together, it is highly evident from observing the mechanisms of American neoliberalism that a pervasive society of lonely, exploited, exhausted, and ultimately unfree citizens is created. This serves as an incredibly grave forewarning for the analysis of education under American neoliberalism.

Whereas American neoliberalism is unjust via corporate control of affairs, Chinese state capitalism is unjust via government control of enterprise permeating into the affairs of the citizenry, although it has allowed the nation to develop substantially, painting a slightly less grim picture for education. Under state capitalism, workers still lie at the base of the pyramid, subject to the same conditions as in neoliberal capitalism, including wage labor, poor conditions, austerity, and the like, but the apex where all capital is sent is the state. Moreover, state capitalism is inherently totalitarian. Since all economic activity is of interest to the state, this one,

central entity of society, and since this centralized state regulates economic activity, this easily allows for totalitarian governance to emerge. If the state has all the economic power, then it has all the political power. Therefore, it follows that the citizenry must be kept poor and under submission so that the state may maintain its wealth and power. In *State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations*, Pollock explains why this is the case, stating, “A rise in the standard of living... would imply more leisure time, more professional skill, and more opportunity for critical thinking, out of which a revolutionary spirit might develop” (Pollock 220). A revolution would bring about the end of the privilege high-ranking state and private officials currently possess. It is from this desire to hold on to power that results in many of the human rights violations seen in China. Indeed, China is notorious for its repression of freedom of expression, violent crackdown on any form of dissent, and unjust legal system (Freedom House). Although many sources that denounce China act sanctimonious about the supposed comparative morality of the United States (including Freedom House), it is true that China’s society is oppressive to its people.

Additionally, as China has gained global strength due to the growth of its state-owned enterprises, global tensions have increased. For example, various Chinese companies are being banned from working in the West, and the United States-led Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has excluded China as an investor (Pearson 212-213). While these policy actions clearly implicate the West as the aggressor, it is nonetheless clear that state capitalism is helping China develop internationally. Oppressive as it is, state capitalism must have some functional merits if the well-established neoliberal order is trying to contain its success. With ever-increasing amounts of capital, as economic planning progresses, the state will have more resources to devote to all sectors of the economy, including education. By contrast,

trickle-down economics does not ensure such a transfer of capital. State capitalism is putting China on an upwards trajectory, whereas the United States, already a well-established superpower, is growing stale under neoliberalism. This indicates that state capitalism is perhaps somewhat superior to neoliberalism. Hence, while state capitalism is oppressive, since it is helping China develop, the implications for Chinese education seem to be a little less morose.

Of all three societies, the popular appeal and maximization of well-being brought about by the policies and norms of Finnish social democracy makes it seem that education would bode best here, however, social democracy's framework is unsustainable, ultimately degrading into neoliberal capitalism. Many of the conditions of a social democracy, including greater public spending, a larger government, strong labor unions, and employee benefits, lead to greater life satisfaction among the citizenry. This is because these initiatives are able to stifle the mechanics of a traditional neoliberal society, reducing inequality and poverty and restraining corporate malpractice. A heavily graduated tax code redistributes wealth horizontally, facilitating social mobility and tackling societal inequality (Anderson 54-56). Society is structured more justly and equitably, and most notably, people are happier (Radcliff), which makes sense. If a government is spending most of its resources on services and policies that are of the public interest, the society created will be one that serves the public. If well-served, people will be happier. Serving the public means ensuring everyone's livelihoods, access to basic human rights, and the ability to grow and succeed in life, and Finland and other social democracies effectively achieve that.

As truly beneficial as these prospects may seem, the architecture of social democracy that enables these policies rests on unstable ground. Social democracy does not eliminate the private industry, it merely regulates it. This system is meant to act as a sort of intermediate between socialism and capitalism, having strong regulatory policies and a secure welfare network while

still allowing private enterprise to operate. Indeed, considerable profiteering still occurs under social democracy, so there still exists a hierarchy where capitalists possess an advantage, albeit a much smaller one. The capitalist class still has enough power to push the government away from social democracy and pull it towards a neoliberal regime. Under the social democratic compromise, a lot of the expenditures associated with welfare programs and public services can be paid for due to significant corporate investment in the economy. This can easily be stifled by capital strikes, where private entities decide to no longer invest in these initiatives. Indeed, a Jacobin article points out that “Private capital simply refuses to invest in... goods needed to overcome radical inequality” (Schwartz). Of course, why would they invest? It would not be good for business. Since eliminating inequality and similarly anti-corporate goals are a major part of the social democracy project, a project that hinges on corporate funds, it is destined to fail. This is exactly what happened in earlier experiments. For example, the United States and much of the West itself adhered to a framework of social democracy after World War II. However, by the late 1970s, due to repeated capital strikes on various public spending initiatives, and overall corporate pushback, corporations and their neoliberal policies were able to seize control over society. This culminated in the ascension of figures like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to power, and the subsequent establishment of the current neoliberal order (Schwartz). However, on balance, beyond the significant caveat that social democracy is predestined to revert into neoliberalism, the benefits offered by social democracy bodes well for the Finnish education system.

With thorough context of each of the three case studies’ political and economic systems provided, the next task is to use these findings to contextualize each of their education systems. For the United States, in a society devoted to profit at all costs, education is the means through

which American hierarchy, competition, and exceptionalism are perpetuated. A major purported purpose of American education is to prepare students for getting a job and being members of the market economy. In *Public Goods, Private Goods*, Labaree describes this as “social efficiency,” a means by which students are adapted to “the requirements of a hierarchical social structure and the demands of the occupational marketplace” (Labaree 46). Since capitalism manufactures a hierarchy of employers and employees and ties individual livelihood to having a job, it follows that the education system prepares students for these conditions. There exists a sort of manufactured consent for these educational goals. This is because schools preparing students to be workers under neoliberalism and thereby maintaining the neoliberal order is portrayed as practical, pragmatic, and stabilizing. Such (supposed) pragmatism is comforting. In making job attainment the goal of education, this adds another layer into the fundamental neoliberal order. Now, not only is one’s job tied to their livelihood, but their education is in turn tied to their job. However, since competition and wealth accumulation results in a hierarchy, this necessitates that there is a hierarchy in the education system as well, and that there are mechanisms that produce it. By default, the systemic inequality produced and perpetuated by capitalism allows for the quality and level of education to be stratified by socioeconomic level. As a direct result of capitalist conditions, those of affluent backgrounds have better chances and financial means of attaining a higher level of education than those of a poorer, less privileged background. This translates to a gap in occupational opportunities, and in turn, a continued hierarchy. Therefore, the educational system is designed to perpetuate the neoliberal hierarchy.

This is accompanied by the perpetuation of competition. In a hierarchy where there are haves and have-nots, it is natural that everyone shall vie to be at the top. Thus, the educational landscape is rife with competition. The educational hierarchy acts as a template from which all

students compete to earn the best grades and construct the best portfolio so that they may gain access to the best educational and by extension socioeconomic opportunities. In the process, the intellectual fruit education offers is erased, as it is turned into a commodity exchangeable for status (Labaree 51-55). Both competition and erasure of intellect in the educational system perpetuate neoliberal society. If, from a young age, students are incentivized to compete, then, as adult individuals and private actors, they shall also compete. After all, capitalism involves competition among private entities for the greatest profit margins, and among individuals for the greatest material status. What better way to ensure this game continues than to force members to participate in it from a young age? This competition then results in winners and losers, reinforcing the hierarchy that promotes this competition to begin with. Additionally, since learning for the sake of learning is not valued in a capitalist society, thinking critically beyond the passive absorption of information is not encouraged (Saunders). This serves the interests of the capitalist elite. A public less predisposed to critical thinking is less likely to understand the underlying structures of society that perpetuate the systemic inequality that the elite thrive off of at the expense of everyone else. Consequently, the neoliberal order would have lower chances of being disrupted. Furthermore, excessive use of standardized testing hampers creativity, which inhibits academic performance, exacerbating these dynamics (Pllana 137). The limitations on creativity and intellectuality also reinforce global American hegemony. Neoliberalism and the United States are inseparable. Thus, since the education system forces students to passively accept neoliberalism, it forces them to accept the socioeconomic and political order of the United States. This approval makes the citizenry unconsciously accept any actions America undertakes, including neocolonial measures that perpetuate and expand American hegemony abroad. Since everyone supports neoliberalism, they support the United States. Since they support America, the

government and its neocolonial agenda is legitimized. Therefore, it is clear that American education is designed to perpetuate multiple aspects of the neoliberal order.

For China, in a society where the government exercises totalitarian authority via the control of all vectors of the economy, education is the means through which the Chinese economy is grown and state control over society is continued. Whereas neoliberalism more indirectly forces its students to accept its ideology, state capitalism takes a more direct approach. In China, the government has required schools to incorporate education programs that promote the ideology of the Communist Party. The political ideology of teachers and the content of their classes is heavily monitored, and those expressing ideas critical of the Communist Party are punished (Freedom House). These more direct methods of control are a logical extension of the top-down economy of state-capitalism. If the government forces private enterprise to produce and distribute goods in a way that maximizes the wealth of the state, then it follows that it will also force schools to promote its ideology so as to legitimize the state. Any authoritarian government will control their institutions with an iron fist, including education. With extensive monitoring systems in place at schools, from a young age, students will grow accustomed to abiding by the restrictions of the government, producing docile workers and corporate figures the government can control. The lack of creativity in the Chinese educational system serves as an additional indicator of producing a compliant public. In *Creativity in Modern Education*, Pllana describes the sterile nature of Chinese education, explaining, “Students have long hours in schools, and they spend many hours doing homework... studying long hours does not contribute to creativity” (Pllana 138). It is definitely true that creativity is stifled in the Chinese education system, but studying long hours does not inherently diminish creativity. Large amounts of studying exposes one to a large amount of information. With more knowledge under one’s belt,

one has more knowledge to apply, meaning one's creative capabilities expand. Rather, creativity is repressed through the authoritarian control of the ideology presented in the Chinese classroom. Adjacent to long study hours is the high expectations placed on students to perform well academically. Academic performance is tied to honor (Liu 51). This, too, is an imprint of state capitalist ideology. Since the government expects optimal performance from the private actors and citizens it manages, Chinese schools prepare students for those responsibilities by expecting the highest quality performance in school. This further reinforces state capitalism, as a culture of hard work and dedication is fostered among the populous. The state can take hold of this drive as it commands its citizens, maximizing its financial and political returns. In turn, this helps augment Chinese influence internally and globally.

Taken together, one might argue that China's education system is less just than the United States. On the basis of some metrics, this may be true, but in fact, compared to the United States, education in China is more horizontally structured. A meta-analysis of the impact of socioeconomic status on educational outcomes found that these two variables are only moderately correlated, and that too only for certain subjects. Strikingly, despite the overall trend of greater inequality that state capitalism has brought about by concentrating capital in the hands of the state, the Chinese government has taken a variety of initiatives to reduce inequality in education outcomes. These include increased and restructured funding, free resources, tuition exemptions, and more (Liu 67-68). Indeed, compared to neoliberalism, state capitalism does not place as much importance on having a hierarchy. Under neoliberalism, since private entities compete with each other, and there is a more concrete exploitative relationship between employer and employee, it is more given to imprinting a hierarchy within society. By contrast, under state capitalism, all economic activity just has to be of service to the state, and the state

regulates it to be that way, so there is not much emphasis on competition. As a result, the hierarchy, while still incredibly pervasive, is only meant to serve the state, making it a lot less cut-throat. With a less severe hierarchy, it would follow that educational outcomes are a little bit more horizontal. In that sense, state capitalism produces an education system superior to neoliberalism. However, beyond that caveat, it is evident that Chinese state capitalism produces an education system that perpetuates the omnipotence of the state.

For Finland, in a society where a stronger emphasis on the collective well-being is placed, education is the means through which academically successful, economically prepared, and politically free citizens are produced. Above all else, Finland's education policy emphasizes equal access for all regardless of their background. There are no tuition-charging institutions. Teachers are better educators because they are treated with dignity, being well paid and respected. There is little standardized testing, as it is understood that there are better metrics for measuring student progress (Partanen). Many of these conditions are a result of social democratic policy. In a society where private actors are forced to stand on level ground with the citizenry, it makes sense that the most fundamental goal in education is equality, and that education is shielded from the private industry. It follows that funding is allocated based on need, not performance on standardized tests, which in Neoliberal America, typically acts as a device that perpetuates systemic inequality. Notably, unlike America and China, Finland encourages its students to be creative from a young age. In an *Atlantic* article praising Finland's education system, it is described, "Compared with... long hours of exhaustive cramming and rote memorization... Finnish schools assign less homework and engage children in more creative play" (Partanen). The lack of creativity and mechanical studying that characterize and serve American neoliberalism and Chinese state capitalism are nowhere to be found in Finnish social

democracy. Since the working class does not have to toil in order to survive, intensive labor is not important. Therefore, from a young age, students are not buried under loads of homework. Since social democracy demands no obedience to a state or private apparatus, students are allowed to be more creative. Allowing for creativity actually leads students to grow into more academically and economically successful adults (Pillana 138 and Partanen). Indeed, findings show that Finland's education system has resulted in economic growth and social mobility (Anderson 50-55). Greater creativity also allows for more intellectual freedom, meaning students can explore ideas more in depth. Case in point, the median age in post-secondary education in Finland is higher than that of the US (Anderson 51). More people are able to grow intellectually, and thus better operate within and help society politically, economically, and socially. This is reflective of social democracy's permittance of its citizens to go about their personal lives in a relatively free manner.

However, Anderson also argues that social democracy leads individuals to excessively indulge in leisurely activities. He specifically writes that providing universal education is a "very costly, even unfair subsidy" (Anderson 153). A system that ensures that every child has access to the highest quality education possible is the antithesis of "unfair." It is only unfair to the private industry, who wants a fair system that allows them to stratify education and make it unfair. Cost is not an issue as the rich and private industry are heavily taxed. Indeed, the criticism that social democracy encourages excessive leisure is a reflection of the workaholic culture that characterizes American neoliberalism (and Chinese state capitalism). It is a good thing that social democracy allows more people free time. There is more to life beyond work. Of course, that does not help the bottom line of corporate conglomerates, so it is understandable that a capitalist would find fault with this argument. If anything, the real vulnerability of Finland's education

system is that since it lies on the unstable foundation of social democracy, a system that can easily collapse into neoliberalism, its current virtuous form might not last. Either way, Finnish social democracy creates an educational system that results in a well-informed and politically and economically free public.

With a considerable understanding of the American, Chinese, and Finnish societies and their relationship to education attained, these dynamics are placed in the context of the most recent PISA scores as a means of measuring which system best propagates academic success, and from analyzing what these scores mean, it is clear that Finland is the winner. For context, PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, is an international test in reading, math, and science provided by the OECD. It is a widely accepted metric used to compare educational success among different nations. PISA claims to be unlike other standardized tests that encourage memorization. By contrast, it claims to force students to extrapolate on what they know (Schleicher 3). Of course, such claims are at best dubious. Even if they were to be accepted, much like how no single test truly indicates a student's intelligence, no single test truly indicates anything about a nation's educational system. However, there is no other less flawed method that is widely accepted for comparing academic performance internationally. Results from the most recent PISA exams in 2018 show that, among all three categories, China scored highest, followed by Finland, and then the United States (Schleicher 6-8). At face value, this would seem to prove that China has the best education system in terms of academic success. However, as discussed, China places an importance on high academic performance for honor, not for learning the content, students are given avalanches of advanced work, and on top of that, the education system is subject to fairly direct state control. With these factors at play, of course students perform well. However, they do not learn well, as after they have performed well, they

can recycle what they learn. Similar dynamics hold true for the United States. However, America fares worse because the crushing of intellectual activity that neoliberalism incentivizes in the education system acts as a weight that holds American students back in overall success. Combined with the shallowness involved in studying for the sake of a good exam score, it makes sense that the US scored the worst out of all three nations. Meanwhile, since the Finnish education system incentivizes creativity and allows students to grow intellectually, it makes sense that they would do well. Of course, since there is no tunnel vision on being the best academically as there is with China, they might not be number one, but since Finland's education system encourages learning for the sake of learning, Finnish students learn the best out of all of the three nations. Therefore, simple analysis of each nation's PISA scores via the connection to their respective education systems easily shows the superiority of the Finnish education system when it comes to producing the most academically successful pupils.

Given what has been observed of the three nations and their education systems, in analyzing each system's ability to forge politically and economically free citizens, Finland once again shows that it is the superior option. During the International Conference on Western Democracy and Eastern Europe: Political, Economic and Social Changes in October 1991, one speaker offered the following insights as a means of parameterizing education's ability to produce free citizens. Multiple standard school responsibilities, such as critical thinking, an understanding of society, among others were mentioned. More notably, it was argued that education ought to "provide students with the skills they need to function as citizens in democratic communities and in a market economy. But, in addition... to help each student learn how to participate with others to build a better world..." (Branson). All of these goals are agreeable, with the exception of preparing students to be members of the market economy. As

discussed, this needlessly causes unhealthy competition among students, stifles their intellectual capabilities, and stratifies education, which impedes upon the other goals that were stated.

Now, let the findings for each nation's society and education system be judged using these metrics. The American and Chinese models are both incredibly hierarchical, and as a result, lead to education systems that are meant to perpetuate their respective socioeconomic systems. Under the former system, the intellectuality of students is shut down, in favor of monotonously following a school-to-job hierarchy that encourages competition, perpetuates systemic oppression, and manufactures consent for the hegemony of American neoliberalism. Under the latter system, the state directly controls student thought by mandating curricula that exclusively contain narratives favorable to the Chinese state. As in the United States, creativity is not emphasized, and students are expected to perform with the utmost academic excellence. Although slightly less hierarchical than America, all of these practices mold obedient, loyal, dedicated, and hardworking citizens and private actors that the Communist Party can control to maximize its wealth and power both domestically and internationally. No student can be a member of democratic society if they are forced to accept the status quo without having any say in altering it. If the universal fate of the student is to end up a cog in the neoliberal or state capitalist machine, both of which assert their hegemony at the expense of domestic, global, and overall wellbeing, then they cannot create a better world. Moreover, since both systems oppress the student, basic capabilities such as critical thinking and other academic skills are inhibited. Therefore, it is profoundly clear that the American and Chinese systems fail to produce students that are politically and economically free. After all, what incentive do they have?

By contrast, Finland's education system produces students that can be considered economically and politically free. Everyone has access to high quality education from preschool

to PhD, which prevents competition among students and leads to longer educational careers. Coupled with the encouragement Finnish students are given to be creative and exercise their intellect, this results in Finns developing better academic skills and growing up into economically successful adults. Along with a robust labor system favorable to workers and a generous welfare state, Finnish education virtually guarantees its citizens economic security. Finland's education system places a greater importance on learning to attain knowledge, not to perpetuate an unjust hierarchy. This expands intellectuality among students. With greater insights in their tool box, as adults, Finns have a greater capacity to build a better, more democratic society. Therefore, Finnish society, should it not degrade from social democracy into neoliberalism, successfully produces economically and politically free students.

Between American, Chinese, and Finnish societies, Finland's regime of social democracy results in the best educational system with regards to producing academically successful and politically and economically free citizens. This has been made clear through analyzing each country's political and socioeconomic systems, connecting them to their respective models of education, and using the findings from this process to contextualize PISA scores and make ultimate judgements about each system's ability to produce politically and economically free citizens. All nations ought to take note of the immense benefits of Finnish education, and thereby Finnish society, and seek to emulate its attributes.

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