

Va, Pensiero

It has come to our attention that one man's demand for respect from a remote village of the Middle East can be rapidly turned into an international call to terminate the ill practices of the old regime. The very core of this revolution is a simple communication system, Facebook. The increase in online social networking endows the modern age with broad freedom of speech. With this powerful cyber-tool, the rising generation can organize its opinion and choose its own way to ensure its dignity. Nothing is unthinkable or improbable anymore.

Regarding internet infrastructure, the current US President has remarked that South Koreans have greater access than many of his own nation's people. According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, our internet connection speed is the fastest in the world, followed by Hong Kong and Japan. It is this writer's opinion that South Koreans can be classified as "early adopters." We are truly fond of the brand-new.

However, South Korea is currently drawn into the vortex of an old-fashioned dispute. The dental education system is the issue. As long as they have existed, South Korean dental schools have followed a 6-year curriculum and have admitted students directly from high school. After finishing the program of study, students have usually earned the title DDS. Dental school graduates at that time were young enough to be full of vigor.

Around 2002, the South Korean government authorities brought ongoing pressure on the dental schools to import the 4-year curriculum used in some other countries and to admit university graduates as dental school freshman. Their rationale was that the intellectual level of dentistry would be promoted by following a plan of study analogous to the other professions, such as law and medicine. This does not seem to be what has happened over the past ten years. Fundamentally, this new government imposed 4-4 system has deprived both students and educators of their rights of choice.

In late 2010, the faculty members of each dental school in South Korea voted on whether to capitulate to the government-imposed curriculum in exchange for funding and resources, or to determine their own school's plan of study but lose financial support. Now is time for the Korean Ministry of Education to respect the binding vote of each individual school no matter what their decision is. Unless the authorities have taken proper measures, we shall be demanding respect online and be willing to chant "*Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate*" sooner or later.

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