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Article

Intercultural *currere* in Asian contexts

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Abstract

On the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, this article celebrates *currere*'s transnational and global influence by exploring the intercultural trajectories of *currere* in Asian contexts, including in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. First, this article starts by elaborating several major conceptions of *currere* that are particularly related to these trajectories. Second, the article identifies and further focuses on three intertwined themes revealed in the conceptual and narrative *currere* as well as its use in teacher education across diverse traditions. These three themes are: (1) the capacity of *currere* for resisting institutional and cultural conformity; (2) the need for adapting *currere* in national, political, cultural, gendered, and transnational contexts; (3) the possibility of forming dialogical relationships with *currere* through nonduality, virtues, and relational ontology. Third, the article ends with an im/possible synthesis, proposing a situated and relational understanding of intercultural *currere*. Importantly, intercultural and international *currere* opens transformative possibilities for rethinking the interplay between curriculum, subjectivity/personhood, history, and culture in a global era marked by technological acceleration, cultural fragmentation, and shared planetary challenges.

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Introduction

Since *currere* originated 50 years ago in American curriculum studies (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, 2026), it has had a sweeping influence on the field of education not only in North America, but also globally (Deniz, 2024; Doll, 2017; le Grange, 2014; Zhang & Pinar, 2016). *Currere* has profoundly influenced international educational landscapes in many different locations, for example, *ubuntu currere* in Africa (Hlatshwayo et al., 2020; le Grange, 2019), *currere* towards decolonization (García, 2021; Knox, 2022; le Grange, 2023), and Chinese *currere* (Wang, 2020, 2024). Research on *currere* in different cultures shows varying degrees of indigenous and national influence, ranging from limited to substantial. In this article, we focus on Asian educational contexts, as both of us come from that background, and also because the cultural differences between the United States and Asia can be dramatic, sometimes opposite. We also include countries in the Middle East since there is a body of literature on the topic, even though a few countries there are transcontinental; for example, Turkey spans Asia and Europe.

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The Asian education context provides a rich and complex site for understanding the interplay of *currere* with culture, history, and subjectivity, and this is our focus here. The current literature demonstrates the use of *currere* in many Asian countries and involves an extensive range of research topics such as educational trauma and healing (Jung, 2017; Khan, 2022; Le et al., 2021), curriculum reform (Kim, 2010**;** Zhang, 2016), teacher development (Alazaz, 2019; Chen, 2016), subject learning (e.g., arts, social studies, English, STEM) (Jatuporn, 2022; Mariana, 2017; Rajbanshi, 2022), cultural and/or gendered identity (Deniz, 2024; Li & Gao, 2025), and transnational education (Bradford & Inukai, 2024; Kheang, 2022). By Asian contexts, we refer to cultural, social, political, national, intellectual, and educational orientations, and we include literature from the areas of East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and West Asia (the Middle East) where *currere* research and scholarship have emerged.

As *currere* has an explicit Western root (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), our interest is to explore to what degree the introduction of *currere* into another national and cultural context has been influenced by the local intellectual and social traditions. With the mutual embeddedness of subjectivity and culture, the landscape of *currere* in different places takes on different local shades. Implementing the four steps of *currere* in teacher education or in curriculum scholars' personal journeys in Asian contexts often suggests its contextualization in culture and history since subjective reconstruction is situated in and simultaneous with social and cultural change.

The foundational texts written by William F. Pinar, Madeleine Grumet, and Janet Miller (among others) are available in Asia. Our search has focused on conceptual, autobiographical, and qualitative studies of *currere* in the Asian context that have been published after 2010 for a contemporary view. We have searched multiple international and national databases, curriculum studies book series, and leading curriculum studies journals (see Table 1).

Table 1. Literature Search Resources

Component	Description
Databases	ProQuest Research Data Search, Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), and Wanfang Data
Journals	*Currere and Praxis*, *Currere Exchange Journal*, *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Transnational Inquiry*, *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, *Journal of Curriculum Studies, Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Pedagogies: An International Journal*
Book Series	Complicated Conversations: A Book Series of Curriculum Studies (Peter Lang) Studies in Curriculum Theory (Taylor and Francis) Lived Experience, Nonviolence, and Curriculum Studies (Emerald Publishing)

Our initial search identified 71 publications. Most of what we had found cited William F. Pinar. We also particularly searched and found 11 studies on Madeleine Grumet's feminist curriculum theory. We then examined whether these studies engaged *currere* as a substantive theoretical, methodological, or pedagogical framework, and decided not to use those that mentioned *currere* only incidentally or did not engage Asian contexts. The final literatüre included 50 studies of *currere* in Asian scholarship.

Although we also searched Chinese-language studies and included a few, the majority of publications we included are in English, which is a limitation of this study. It would require a collaborative research team to include more linguistic diversity. But we do not intend to exhaust all Asian scholarship or represent Asia as a whole. Our purpose is to understand the interactions between *currere* and Asian contexts and to reveal recurring patterns with what is available to us.

We identified several intertwined tendencies. First, an extensive range of studies in different national contexts demonstrates that *currere* has played a positive role in challenging the restraining power of local institutional hierarchy and cultural conformity. Second, the contextualization of *currere* in different family, culture, and political structures suggests adaptations and extensions, although such changes may not lead to fundamental reformulations of *currere*. Third, the conceptual understanding and praxis of *currere* form a dialogical relationship with local cultural and intellectual lineages, with some degree or a great degree of reformulating *currere* or elements of *currere*.

These multiple modes can be interwoven, so one study might display more than one layer. In this article, we first discuss several themes of *currere* formulated by Pinar and Grumet (1976, 2015, 2026) that are particularly related to the trajectories of *currere* in Asian contexts. Next, we analyze three modes of incorporating *currere:* Challenging the hierarchy of local institutions; Contextualization in different histories and cultures; and Intercultural dialogues. We conclude by positing an im/possible synthesis as a productive site from which to move forward.

Currere as a Verb, Simultaneity, and Nonlinearity

> Curriculum as a word is easily traced to the Latin, *currere*. Currere is the infinitive; it is translated "to run", as in to run a course. . . . So curriculum reconceptualized is *currere*; it is not the course to be run, or the artifacts employed in the running of the course; it is the running of the course. The course most broadly is our lives, in schools and out, and the running, is our experience of our lives. (William F. Pinar, 1976, in Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 18)

> Knowledge of the world requires knowledge of self-as-knower-of the world (Madeleine Grumet, in Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 38)

Releasing into Movement

Pinar (1994) explains that the intention of *currere* is to "release from the past, release from arrest, release into movement" (p. 45). Nowadays, the state of education "being arrested" is even more evident than before. The standardization of curriculum and assessment, the commercialization of education in a neoliberal state, outcome-based curriculum reforms, the authoritarian control of education, and aggressive competition both internally and internationally, as well as the digital and AI challenges to humanity, all play a role in educational policies, practices, and contexts locally and globally. To a great extent, releasing from arrest and existential crisis has taken on more significance than in the 1970s.

Both Pinar and Grumet (1976, 2026) argue that the unfolding of lived experience against technical instrumentality is to release the potential for transformative change. Individuals, after taking the four steps, often discover new positions that they can affirm in order to negotiate with internal and external constraints, thus increasing their inner freedom.

According to Wang's (2010) study of students' *currere* writings in teacher education, the activation of sensory memories in the regressive stage and the imaginative visualization of a future, free from the current constraints, contributed to an increased sense of subjective integration to enable life-affirmative movements (Wang, 2010). As Chen (2023), in a different study, points out,

> I believe separating the movements [in four steps] has allowed me to free myself from the past while acknowledging how my present is deeply shaped by this past and how I dream about my future will impact the actions I take. (pp. 151-152)

Thus, *currere* is not for reinforcing the given but for questioning it, not for telling simplistic stories but for encountering the complexity of reality (Miller, 2010), not for delivering programs to achieve preset outcomes but for imagining otherwise.

In *Understanding Curriculum*, a landmark synoptic curriculum text, Pinar et al. (1995) explicitly put curriculum into motion:

> Curriculum ceases to be a thing, and it is more than a process. It becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope. Curriculum is not just the site of our labor, it becomes the product of our labor, change as we are changed by it. (p. 848)

Such a curriculum is necessarily subjectively informed and socially practiced, an ongoing movement towards renewal and regeneration, despite or perhaps precisely because of the currently arrested states in American education. Engaging in *currere* enables teachers and students' capacities for transformative change, and in such a process, subjectivity and sociality are simultaneously intertwined, rather than separate.

Simultaneity of the Subjective and the Social

> The autobiographical voice was invited not only to speak in public of the experience considered private, but in the process of that speaking which served to resymbolize experience, to formulate a story and a theory that would extend the knowledge and experience of private life into the public life of communities, knowledge, and government. (Grumet, in Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 229)

While the focus of *currere* is the individual person's sense-making, the individual is always already socially situated, and individual action always already requires social engagement. Pinar (2023) states, "As an ethical, political, always intellectual undertaking, *currere* emphasizes the teacher's subjective presence in the complicated conversation that is the curriculum" (p. 3). This complicated conversation connects the private with the public in *currere* as a verb. From its earlier formulation, subjectivity in *currere* is already explicitly intersubjective, for instance, in Grumet's theatre work and bodyreading, which relies on the sharing of gestures and performance (Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Grumet, 1988).

Affirming subjectivity against cultural crises today shows "how achievement, creativity, and self-affirmation can occur even in the midst of outrageous oppression" (Pinar, 2023, p. 3). The current sense of meaninglessness and paralysis cannot be worked through only in systems and society but must be initiated and carried out through the psychic and embodied life of individuals who are socially engaged. Pinar (2015) locates Jane Addams's remarkable individuality in "the inextricable relation between subjectivity and sociality" (p. 218) and in her engagement of the world—her passionate public service—in her ongoing process of subjective repositioning.

The simultaneity of the subjective and the social does not mean the coincidence of both spheres. The difference between them is the site for the possibility of transformation for both. Both Pinar (2015) and Miller (2005) affirm the crucial role of self-difference in subjective reconstruction to emphasize that the subjective in its openness to alterity within and without exceeds social norms to host new possibilities. Pinar privileges the singularity of the individual person, although it is not a notion of the self without the social, the cultural, and the political dimensions. His notion of subjectivity is at the same time ethical, political, and spiritual, but it does not submerge the individual into the social sphere; instead, it builds an individual site for new potentiality. As Grumet (in Pinar & Grumet, 2015) explains in the quote above, entering into the public, the private brings its own knowledge and experience to extend and change the public world. Thus, the autobiographical and the social can mutually change each other. This simultaneity is accompanied by the simultaneity of the immanence and transcendence, which we discuss next.

Simultaneity of the Immanent and the Transcendent

In the original formulation of *currere* (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), Pinar distinguished between experience as activity and experience as lived—drawing attention to the phenomenological and existential concept of "one's living through of one's life" (p. 18), which contrasts one's participation in activities designed by outside experts, emphasizing one's own active making sense of one's own thoughts, emotions, and motives. From the very beginning, *currere* was formulated by Pinar as an active force of transcendence, yet which acts through immanent everyday living in its immediate, preconceptual dimension. Grumet also points to this, clearly stating that there is a "double awareness in *currere*, at once a transcendent and an immanent process, constituting meanings in subjectivity of its being in the world" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 40).

The final step in *currere*, synthesis, in its creative integration, can lead to the birth of something new in the individual person, but such a transcendence of meaning is only enabled by the lived nature of experiencing, and in such a living through, becoming attuned to what has not been said or seen or touched, yet is part of psychic, subjective, and social reality. This sense of "lived" experience is necessarily embodied, and Grumet's (1988) work on maternity as an embodied bridge for rethinking teaching and curriculum challenges the educational legacy of delivering our children to patriarchy. Here maternity is reconceptualized as productive and creative for transforming school and society.

It is worth pointing out that the conceptualization and praxis of *currere* itself is in a process of evolving. It started with phenomenology and existentialism that suggest an authentic sense of the self as the anchor, but in the 1980s, *currere* took a poststructural turn in welcoming Foucault's questioning of the human subject to destabilize the pursuit of authenticity (Pinar, 1994). Its earlier feminist foundation also took a queer turn (Miller, 2005), in mirroring difference back into queer autobiographical inquiry. The psychoanalytic foundations shifted as well with the poststructural fluidity of subjectivity, with Kristevian and Lacanian theory. While the postmodern dissolution of the subject was later critiqued by Pinar (2015), transnational *currere* or poststructural *currere* have proliferated in the field in the United States. Thus, the development of *currere* itself is a story of the simultaneity of immanence (keeping its focus on subjectivity) and transcendence (ongoing reformulation of what subjectivity means). The simultaneity of immanence and transcendence is related to the nonlinear nature of temporality in *currere* that brackets the present moment to open new possibilities in lived time.

The Nonlinear Movement of Temporality

Linear clock time is interrupted by *currere* with its focus on the lived experiencing of time. Lived time in *currere* is nonlinear as it moves across different time periods in free association within the regressive and progressive steps. The bracketing of the present time by the memory work of reentering the past and the vision work on what the future unfolds goes beyond any linear sequencing of past, present, and future. The boundary of each step in the past, the future, and the present anchors unexpected discoveries through the rigor of inner work to re/activate preconceptual experience (Wang, 2010; Wang & Flory, 2025). The temporality of the unsaid and the subconscious connects what was previously disconnected and releases the imagination towards what is not yet.

The autobiographical inquiry that has grown out of *currere* in the field of education grants freedom to not follow the four steps. Often such an inquiry tells stories through the implicit lens of the present going back to see the past. However, starting from the present concerns and interests in undertaking memory work does not sufficiently question the taken-for-granted current assumptions and thus inadequately reveals what was previously hidden. While discoveries can be made, memory has not had a chance to speak for itself. In particular, when it reinforces a simplistic notion of identity, offers a straightforward storyline, or reifies existing social identity categories (Miller, 2010; Pinar & Grumet, 2015), it can negate the transformative power of *currere*, which lies in shedding light on the unknown. The focus on subjectivity in *currere* intends to transcend social or cultural identity, which is external, to loosen up identity for new possibilities. Pinar (2023) lists "presentism" as one of the cultural crises, and Grumet (2015, in Pinar & Grumet, 2015) also distinguishes between static identity categories and subjective mobility.

Temporal movements in *currere* can be free associative or meditative, and the boundary is designed to suspend the present judgement in order to seek new potential in memory and in imagination. Sustained memory work can ignite new sparks for those who follow the four steps with *currere*'s unique temporal arrangement (Wang, 2010; Wang & Flory, 2024). The temporality of *currere* invites new ideas and connections, or in Pinar's words (2015, in Pinar & Grumet), "temporal complexity in which difference does not dissolve onto a flattened never-ending 'now,' but is stretched as it is spoken, reconstructing the present as temporally and spatially differentiated" (p. 31). Bracketing the present in order to open up its own becoming is thus enabled not by dissolving temporal, psychic, and social difference, but by engaging in alterity for reconstruction.

Currere as Intentional Resistance to Institutional and Cultural Conformity in Asian Contexts

Given this distillation of currere and moving now into the Asian context, first we must emphasize that Asia is vastly heterogeneous, and that Asian traditions are not monolithic. Asia includes dynamic intellectual, cultural, and spiritual traditions across different socio-historical-political landscapes, even within the shared traditions. For instance, Confucian morality profoundly structures educational systems in China and other East Asian countries, but Confucianism has different versions in Korea or Japan. Buddhist philosophy informs educational thought from India and Nepal to Thailand, but these are manifested in distinctive local forms. The spiritual and philosophical traditions in the Middle East and Southeast Asia are also markedly different from those in East Asia. We exert our best efforts here to discuss

currere cognizant of the pluralistic expressions of Asian indigenous traditions, while we acknowledge that identifying certain patterns runs the risk of erasing cultural or spiritual differentiation. To fully differentiate all of the diversity goes beyond the scope of this article.

Educational systems in many Asian countries have been influenced by high standardization, an examination orientation, and hierarchical structures (Kim, 2010; Zhang, 2016). Under such structural pressure, Asian scholars and practitioners intentionally take on *currere* as a form of resistance against social and political systems of conformity (Chang & Ou, 2013; Kheang, 2022). The instrumental orientation of education for political purposes, market and global competition, or reinforcing elitist structures in these contexts—shared in part by American education—can be interrupted by exploring the depth and complexity of subjectivity, providing "a strategy for students to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the service of social and self-understanding" (Pinar, 2019, p. 24).

When curriculum is decided externally, and teachers implement curriculum without the authority to change the contents, the instrumental approach often prevails. Resistance against the instrumental approach to curriculum finds resonance in Thailand, where Omsin Jatuporn (2022) struggles to reconceptualize curriculum development. He points out that the "rationality framework and the curriculum development discourse for school efficiency and effectiveness" (p. 28) is mainstream in Thai education as well as in other South Asian countries. The introduction of *currere* invites rethinking normative beliefs and leads to shifting educational praxis. Mariana (2017) discovers that "a higher self-consciousness" emerged from her first encounter with of *currere* (p. 50). She advocates *currere* in Indonesian mathematics education for teachers' professional growth and for assessing students' learning through their storied experience.

Questioning transmission teacher-centered models of teaching is also a shared trend. In Cambodia, *currere* has been used to question the legacies of rote teaching and punitive schooling to support teacher identity formation (Kheang, 2022). Qiu (2016) engages in *currere* mainly for questioning the transmissional model of teaching English in China. Against a long tradition of rote learning and teacher-centered teaching, Saudi Arabian scholar Alazzaz (2019) uses *currere* in teacher development to help teachers recognize themselves as subjects capable of self-reconstruction.

Currere re-orients teachers and students to focus on the individual person in high-pressure systems, thereby reconnecting education with "what it means to be human" (Wang, 2007). Kim's (2010, 2016) research provides an important example of how currere can contribute to a humanistic turn in education. Kim (2016) introduces *currere* to challenge Korean curricula's exclusive concern "with the observable, testable, and quantifiable" (p. 185). For instance, Kim highlights the role of Hakbeolism (shadow education), which is, as Jung (2016) explains, "a kind of social status people achieve based on a shared academic background" (p. 9); Hakbeolism has supported a focus on testing, social stratification, and discrimination. Kim (2016) further explains that today's Hakwons provide "individualized learning, teaching, curricula, and programs" (p. 181) in South Korea, but the individualization is for instrumental learning so as to fit into a hierarchical system, rather than subjective reconstruction. Through his own *currere* work, Jung (2016) critiques the negative impact of Hakbeolism that leads to psychological and spiritual arrest. He shows his path to achieving self-understanding and releasing from such arrest. Kim (2016) also points out that Confucianism has provided a

"strong drive for shadow education" in East Asian countries (p. 179), which raises critiques of an important Asian intellectual tradition. Based upon insights garnered from his personal journey, Jung (2017) used *currere* in teacher education in South Korea to engage students' traumatic memory work related to Hakbeolism and aggressive competition. He also argues that the role of the teacher educator is not to provide solutions but to give "students enough room for their own remembering, reflecting, critiquing, and understanding" (Jung, 2017, p. 131) to achieve "resolve" (Pinar, 2015, p. 180).

In the Middle East, *currere* has functioned as a critical reflection on how education is influenced by religion, culture, and dominant social structures, while developing critical thinking and curricular reconsideration (Deniz, 2024; Safari & Rashidi, 2015; Yousif & Rizco, 2019). In the Iranian teacher education context, *currere* has shown its potential for shifting teachers' attention to subjectivity and agency in dealing with social, political, and ideological constraints (Safari & Rashidi, 2015). In Turkey, *currere* has been taken up in teacher education as a response to the rise of generative AI, emphasizing the crucial role of autobiographical meaning-making and human authenticity in contrast to AI-generated knowledge (Akbaş, 2025).

Currere has also been used to examine the identity and cultural fragmentation produced by colonization. Sunnya Khan (2022) points out that in Pakistan, colonial ways of thinking and being still predominate after independence. Students are oriented into modern European worldviews, separate from their indigenous lives. There is a large disconnect between home and school, in which different languages and worldviews lead to students' "confusion, alienation, and fragmentation" (p. 2). Through regressive and progressive steps, she states, "I explore, analyze, and dialogue with my personal professional knowledge in the hopes of experiencing liberation" to envision a decolonized curriculum (p. 1).

What these studies have shown is that even when external control is strong both culturally and politically, there is still room for educators to affirm subjective construction and reconstruction. It is worth noting that an authoritarian tendency and a disregard for educators' academic freedom and students' intellectual explorations have increased in the U.S. recently, making *currere* radical in its assertion of unlearning social norms and resisting external control.

Contextualizing *Currere* in Asian Contexts

The context of a discipline—curriculum content—is related to the national situation, where the intellectual aspect is as important as the cultural aspect. Contextualized *currere* often includes both the educator's own journey of engaging in *currere* as well as using *currere* in teacher education or in the school classroom. We first discuss contextualization in general and then move to discussing gendered and transnational contextualization in particular.

The contextualization of *currere* in national situations often fosters critical awareness. Krishnasamy et al. (2018) show that informal *currere*—"*currere*-like analysis of past experiences and agency" (p. 14) can help social studies teachers in Singapore develop critical reflection of their own lived experience and citizenship education. Contextualizing Singapore as a democracy and yet with "political culturalism that situates citizenship along race-based lines" (p. 4), the research team led by Krishnasamy believes that teacher educators can use *currere* to engage teachers' growth along the lines of criticality and social justice. In *currere* style, Kafle (2022) reflects on his career as an English teacher in a university in Nepal, shifting from "cocksureness to critical self-awareness" (p. 356). The discovery of *currere* helped him negotiate a dialogue with the past, understand the limitations of the official curriculum, and open up to new forms of knowledge and curriculum dynamics.

Contextualization also happens in intellectual and cultural ways, not merely political. Liu (2017) uses autobiographical and aesthetic inquiry to study students' experiences and perspectives on their fathers' life lessons in a Chinese university, arguing that *currere* as an aesthetic and international text needs to "generate and learn from locally meaningful curricula reflecting the students' cultures, ethnicities, languages, and regions" (p. 6). Liu draws upon Confucianism and Daoism in her data analysis to demonstrate the importance of blending fatherly authority and empathy. This contextualization is more about the interpretation of the findings and less about changing *currere*; Liu calls for more research on the subject.

Turning to the Middle East, Deniz (2024) followed the four steps of *currere* to understand his journey and subjective reconstruction as an academic in Turkey. This reconstruction allows him "to reframe challenges as opportunities for growth and to develop new strategies for navigating the complex academic landscape" (p. 84). He explicitly contextualizes his experiences within broader socio-economic, national, and cultural environments of "the often rigid expectations and hierarchies within Turkish academia" (p. 82). He does not deny the institutional constraint, nor does he overcriticize it, but relies on his resilience and determination to negotiate with the system to achieve more freedom. In a later study, Deniz and Pinar (2026) conducted interviews to explore teacher agency within a centralized system of Turkey, so as to reveal "the interplay between subjective experience and institutional constraints" (p. 630). A "nuanced relational understanding" (p. 624) could re-orient Turkish teachers' subjective agency. While Deniz's conceptualization of *currere* does not change teachers' situations *per se*, his synthesis introduced new elements.

Gendered Contextualization in the Asian Context

Drawing upon Grumet's and Pinar's gendered analysis in *currere* theory, particularly Grumet's (1988, 1990) conceptions of maternity and embodiment as well as her critiques of the dichotomy between the private and the public work, scholars in China, Japan, and South Korea discuss feminist and gendered contextualization. We highlight several overlapping aspects—attending here to cultural differentiation.

First, autobiographical feminist theory challenges how the important role of gender becomes shielded or hidden in the neutrality of curriculum. In China, the majority of teachers are women, but their lived experience as women has seldom been discussed in education, nor how those lived experiences influence their educational practices (Chen, 2012a; Li & Gao, 2025). Chen (2012a) points out that "experiences such as pregnancy, childbirth, and nurturing children are not considered related to teacher studies and curriculum theory and practice. Thus, women teachers live in an alienated world" (p. 218). With gender shielded in education, students do not learn the gendered nature of social reality and thus, by default, perceive the world through a male perspective neutralized as objective and official. In Grumet's (1988), Janet Miller's (2005), and Pinar's (1994) work, gender acts as a reflective lens, one that can encourage feminist autobiographical understanding in Asian education (Chen, 2012a; Jung, 2016; Liu & He, 2012).

Second, autobiographical feminist theory challenges patriarchy not only through bringing women's experiences back into the curriculum but also through undermining the very mechanism of external control. Examining the nature of knowledge construction, Liu and He (2012) argue that control is part of a patriarchal epistemology that does not correspond with women's experience of connectedness; feminist autobiography can reveal this central mechanism. Jung-Hoon Jung (2016) also reveals such a controlling mechanism in the Korean

context. He discusses the ethics of care in Nel Noddings's work as a feminist approach, drawing upon Grumet's (1990) work regarding autobiographical openness to paradoxes and uncertainty, and Miller's (2010) caution against simplistic storytelling in teacher education to reconstruct one's subjectivity.

Third, feminist autobiographical inquiry can contribute to curriculum change. The contemporary Chinese curriculum reform intends to emphasize students' role as subjects who can develop their capacity for critical analysis and creative problem-solving. Li and Gao (2025) argue that such an emphasis implies attending to the teacher's gendered subjectivity. Chen (2012a) discusses the contradictions between objectifying students at school and caring for one's own children at home, pointing to the need for healing inner fragmentation. Infusing a gender perspective into autobiographical research would also cultivate better teacher/student intersubjective relationships, contribute to diversity and inclusion in curriculum both at the K-12 and adult education levels, and illuminate a more humane path for curriculum reform and teacher professional development (Chen, 2012a, 2012b; Li & Gao, 2025; Liu and He, 2012). Grumet (1990) asserts that *currere* is both "inner and outer, personal and public, spontaneous and considered, mind and body" (p. 322). Such an integrated approach can transform patriarchal society through bridging the rupture between private care and public teaching in Asia (Jung, 2016; Takemura, 2025; Wang, 2021).

Fourth, Grumet's (1988) insightful notion of encouraging "the most loving and creative expressions of both masculinity and femininity" (p. xix) to achieve balance and build bridges is welcomed by Asian scholars. Her insights into how women teachers deliver children to patriarchal society resonate with educational scholars from different cultures, and her reformulation of symbolic and embodied maternity and its role in education without reifying dualism is compatible with Asian nonbinary intellectual traditions. In the Chinese tradition, the role of femininity goes beyond the dualistic category of women and men (Wang, 2021). Liu's (2017) study draws upon her positive learning from her father in her study of college students' life lessons from their fathers. While her study is not oriented by feminist theory, the findings support the necessity of blending men's authority with empathy and compassion, which are often considered feminine virtues.

Naoki Takemura's (2025) own search for the male self in *currere* has cultivated his capacity for holding his "ambivalent desires for femininity" (p. 68). This entailed rethinking the male's separation from the maternal and the absent father. He arrives at a recognition of the maternal subject who has her own voice and experiences, imagining "a birth of a self in an extension of the image in which I stand with my mother side by side" (p. 192). Coupled with his *currere* of caring relationships, Takemura examines the Japanese family structure and the Ajase complex. He points out that Okonogi Keigo's Ajase complex theory, by focusing solely on the mother-child relationship, is different from classical psychoanalytic theory of a triangle relationship. "In the Japanese-style nuclear family, the marital relationship is underdeveloped" (p. 37) and the sexual division of labor is clear-cut. Aggression and ambivalence in the intensity of the mother-child relationship, without opportunity for reconciliation, can lead to men's projection of their images of motherhood onto their wives, thus reproducing a hierarchical family structure, in which the son becomes the absent father. Reflecting on his difficult journey in caring relationships, Takemura reaches a point where male self and female self become intersubjective, thus no longer reproducing gender hierarchy. Takemura's gendered analysis of masculinity in the Japanese context provides not only a useful contextualization but contributes a cross-cultural lens for understanding psychical dynamics. Such work can add a further layer of dialogical relations with *currere*.

Transnational Contextualization

A body of literature has emerged that addresses transnational contexts in which people from Asian backgrounds engage with *currere* in Western countries but as international scholars or immigrants. Such engagements involve memory work in their native contexts (Baergen & Muivah, 2025; Koo, 2018; Sondari & Phetchroj, 2023; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2020). Transnational contextualization often involves critical analysis of both native and hosting cultures. For example, three Vietnamese doctoral students in Canada and Australia incorporated *currere* to engage in multilayered dialogues and conversations for healing (Le et al., 2021). While it is clear that their experiences in Vietnam continued to shape their identities and learning trajectories in the West, including the traumatic experience of being "a gay child in [the] Vietnamese social, cultural, and political context of education" (p. 5), new experiences in a different country were imprinting difficult memories of being immigrants or of teaching refugees.

Yan Xu's (2025) *currere* writing about her cross-cultural journey from China to the U.S. also records a healing process, which helped her "reconcile a distant and complicated maternal relationship" (p. 83) in memory, grief, and writing, find the middle ground in raising her daughters in the U.S., and come to terms with herself as "a peaceful educator" (p. 93). Unlearning taken-for-granted assumptions of both cultures became integral to the process. In a Korean Canadian setting, Joo (2025) modified *currere* into a format of writing workshops, encouraging students' exploration of their "innermost thoughts and ideas" (p. 45). Although cultural contextualization is not reflected in Joo's design, it is demonstrated in some students' stream-of-consciousness journals, such as their reflection on the strong role of parents in Korean culture, which limits students' capacity to imagine the future.

In studies engaging in critical analysis of transnational contextualization, identity re-negotiation happens in an ongoing process. Rajwan Alshareefy's (2017) transnational experience in the US encourages him to question literacy education in Iraq "to unlearn, deconstruct, and reconstruct my beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies of language learning and teaching" (p. 21), while the political situation in the U.S. and Iraqi relations compel him to re-negotiate his roles and identities as never before. Chen (2023) uses *currere* to explore his intergenerational learning in a family business as a Canadian-born Chinese, a son of immigrant parents from Hong Kong. Recognizing the dynamic nature of culture, heritage, and personhood, he points out: "I am in [a] constant process of working out sometimes conflicting values and norms from my [Chinese] cultural heritage" (p. 13). Such a negotiation and renegotiation process "on the journey of becoming" (p. 19) to "full personhood" (p. 135) is complex and ever shifting. His work also points in the direction of transforming the instrumental orientation of business to an existential orientation, in which business should "give life or provide meaning to life" (p. 151).

In transnational contextualization, cultural understandings do not necessarily converge, especially when participants' immersion in different national contexts leads to diverging interpretations. Bradford and Inukai 's (2024) study is based upon seven years' collaboration. Their childhood memories of Japan and the United States and their reimagination of educational possibilities reveal that their understandings of their lived experiences as children, students, and teachers have different emphases. One is on the individual person while the other is on interconnectedness. Their understandings of intellect, emotion, and will in Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy also have different cultural connotations.

It is important to point out that the transnational context exists not only in the West but also in Asian countries and their international educational institutions. For example, in a Chinese university, Liu and Wang (2020) engage a/r/tography and *currere* to explore teacher quality in a teacher education class, but the approach is cross-cultural, as both Chinese and international students are in the class and English is the teaching language. Taking an aesthetic approach to experience life meaningfully "with others across lines of difference" (p. 107), the instructor and students create children's literature to explore desired teacher/student relationships. Making connections across differences is often significant in transnational education.

Currere in Dialogue with Asian Thought

Taking things one step further than contextualization, some Asian scholarship has initiated multi-layered dialogues with *currere*. In such interactions, ethical, moral, and spiritual cultivation in personhood, relational understanding, and recursive temporality are foregrounded. In the Asian context, in general, there is a stronger sense of the relational self. The individual person is understood as embedded in relationships with others and with the world. Seeking space for individuality happens less in a counter-cultural rebellious position as in the West but adopts multiple modes of freedom "with" or "within" (Wang, 2022, p. 5). The relationship between self and society can be mutually supportive and contributive, rather than contestatory. Antagonism as the main mode of struggle is often absent in the Asian relational philosophy and way of life (Xu, 2013).

In East Asia, the reimagining of *currere* is informed by Confucian and Daoist philosophies that center on virtue and moral cultivation (Kim, 2010; Liu, 2017; Wang, 2020; Zhang, 2016), even as Confucianism is also critiqued as fostering institutional and cultural constraints on personhood and reinforcing the examination system (Kim, 2010; Chen, 2023). Confucianism is substantially concerned with moral and ethical responsibility in human relationships. Daoism advocates a mode of education that transcends knowledge accumulation and decenters human control. Both are educational efforts focused on personal cultivation, although they advocate different sets of virtues. *Currere*'s concern with subjective freedom is considered beneficial, acting as a counteracting force to Confucian alignment with the official morality. Different from but also related to these, Buddhism emphasizes interconnectedness and spiritual awakening to transcend the ego.

Indigenization of *currere* theory and practice in the local context is one shared concern. Kim (2010) discusses uncovering indigenous knowledge rooted in Korean cultural history to foster a culturally attuned educational framework. He acknowledges the contribution of Daoism in such an initiative. Zhang (2016) points out that *currere* provides the methodological foundation for Chinese scholars to understand and revive indigenous wisdom such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism, so as to awaken cultural subjectivity. Wang (2020) reformulates such indigenization as simultaneously local, cosmopolitan, and international. Similarly, Jatuporn (2022) makes an ontological move to reshape the self in *currere* as a relational being embedded in social ethics and the cosmic web.

Wang's (2020) Chinese *currere* reveals three affinities between Chinese thought and *currere*: Mencius' innate moral knowledge and the pre-conceptual experience in *currere*, Neo-Confucian Wang Yang-Ming's investigation of the heart and the notion of working from within in *currere*, and the Daoist notion of voidness and revealing the invisible in *currere*. She also points out certain differences: "Engaging [Mencius'] pure knowing removes evil, whereas *currere* suggests that one can only become conscious of evil" (p. 86). We also argue that being

conscious of evil—the awareness itself—leads to change beyond Confucian moral judgment of what is good or bad. Wang Yang-Ming and Pinar both attend to the inward, although Wang addresses the moral aspect of removing selfish desires while Pinar addresses intellectual understanding and existential realignment. *Currere* and Daoist voidness "both make the invisible a visible existence" (p. 96). By analyzing the affinities and differences between *currere* theory and Chinese philosophy, Wang negotiates a dynamic dialogue between the two, clearly demonstrating a dialogical relationship.

In a dialogical relationship, both participants are transformed. Here we discuss three major shifts of *currere* in Asian scholarship.

Subjectivity and Culture in Nondual Relations

Currere has an element of individual subjectivity going against cultural norms. Such a mode of "against" plays a positive role in opening up alternatives to authoritarian politics and cultures. On the other hand, in Asian cultures, there is a greater emphasis on the role of cultural relationality; "culture" does not necessarily take on negative connotations because personhood and culture are embedded in each other. Culture is not just the background or the context. Individual existence is marked by relational ontology (Hershock, 2012).

Deniz and Pinar's (2026) study in Turkey with a centralized system is a good example. They posit that "institutional constraints are actively reframed as opportunities for creative practice" (p. 626) to release the potential of teachers' agency. *Currere* encourages teachers to question social and cultural conformity; however, a non-binary position of resistance versus conformity adds a new layer. We agree that negotiation with the system, rather than against the system, is important in order for teachers to seek their own space while not being pushed away by regulations. This mode of "with" rather than "against" is a subtle shift apparent in intercultural dialogues and highly informative to educators in nations with centralized political and social structures.

Pinar lists "technologization" (2023, p. xiii) or "techno-authoritarianism" (2026) as one cultural crisis that *currere* is going against, re-affirming the central role of subjectivity and "a praxis of presence" (Pinar, in Pinar & Grumet, 2026, p. 145). The newly emerging generative AI and its applications in education are a part of this technologization that threatens the existential condition of humanity. In the Asian context, however, advances in technology have been important for nation-building and modernization, so the effect of technology is double-edged. Turkish scholar Akbaş (2025) argues that "deep, subjective inquiry into the learner's educational journey" of the kind that *currere* offers is "a uniquely human capacity that generative AI cannot replicate" (p. 166). But Akbaş further strikes a middle ground, saying that "learning experiences mediated through ChatGPT could be meaningfully redesigned through the *currere* method" (p. 166).

There is still another middle way. Following Pinar's four steps, Jin Jr Shi's (2026b) "Buddhist paradoxical *currere* contemplations" starts with the fear of AI because of its "reliance on the technical at the expense of human-ness" (p. 128). However, her engagement with the classical Buddhist text, *The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra,* transcended such a fear, transforming the paradoxical relationships between and among friends, fools, and foes. In this process, "the more [the] scholar-teacher meditatively concentrates, the more one can observe the AI consciousness rising, noticing AI, and detaching from the fear of AI" (p. 138). The

liberated mind attending to the essential nature "can cautiously and steadily engage AI, so that it can be a positive friendship and not a foe that detracts a foolish humanity from its 'fruit' of bodhi" (p. 128). As AI is an expression of the mind, Buddhist meditations can monitor it as well as detach from it to move beyond its control.

Temporal Complexity

The relationship between *currere* and temporality is foundational, as *currere* is explicitly designed to engage the individual's consciousness across time (Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Wang, 2010; Wang, 2024). Pinar's (in Pinar & Grumet, 1976) four steps—regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical—constitute a temporal framework in which the past, present, and future are dynamically re-experienced rather than linearly ordered. In some studies in Asian contexts, although the four steps of *currere* are followed, temporal fluidity within each stage is limited (Deniz & Pinar, 2025; Joo, 2025), or the temporal sequence is not followed (Baergen & Muivah, 2025; Koo, 2018; Liu, 2017). Alshareefy (2017), citing Pinar (2004), states that "the regressive-progressive-analytic-synthetic does not occur in discrete temporal or conceptual units, but simultaneously" (p. 131), does not follow the four steps, opting to follow his own internal process.

This sense of simultaneity that Pinar affirms here is more consistent with the Asian context in which temporality is cyclic; analysis and synthesis do not have clear-cut boundaries. Wanying Wang (2024) proposes *currere* as "a recursive process involving seeking and discovering, re-discovering and re-seeking again and again, an endless process with no start and end" (p, 47), resonating with the cyclical cosmology of Daoism, in which "the only motion is returning" (p. 48), that is, returning to the Dao. This temporal understanding of recursive and helical movements presents *currere* as "punctuated" manifestations "where everything connects with a myriad pattern of dichotomies reconfiguring all the time" (p. 45) in the entangled convergences of past, present, and future. Wang and Flory (2024) introduce formal mindfulness practices into the steps of *currere*, highlighting the role of experiencing internal time in the fuller present moment.

Virtue Cultivation and Spiritual Transcendence

Currere in its original formulation was influenced by Zen meditative sensitivity and has continually reaffirmed its position of ethical engagement with inner and outer alterity. Some *currere* scholarship that has emerged in Asian contexts is more explicitly woven with the cultivation of virtues and spiritual transcendence. This body of literature, which is more integrative, is mainly from transnational scholars whose years of lived experiences in different cultures have deepened their understanding and enabled them to take the lead in negotiating dialogues in a give-and-take, mutual manner.

For example, as Culham and Lin (2020) argue, cultivating *Qi* in Daoism is a process of cultivating virtues, virtues that subvert the official moral norms by being aligned with naturalistic principles, such as gentleness, quietude, contemplation, non-competition, and compassion. These virtues are also spiritual in the pursuit of transcending the self to get in touch with the flow of cosmic interconnectedness. We believe the Daoist embodied, imaginative, and experiential ways of knowing, as well as its non-impositional action and being (*wuwei*), are connected to the process of *currere* (Wang, 2021). However, the Daoist focus on interdependence and nonduality that supports the grounding of personhood brackets the

language of subjectivity implicated in the subject/object split (Wang, 2004, 2021). Daoist personal cultivation does not position the cosmos as an object or background but as an essential core of the individual, enabling the virtues it advocates.

There are also intersections of Daoist and Buddhist virtues such as contemplation, compassion, and unlearning, as well as spirituality of awakening to a selfless self and transcendence. Proposing Buddhist *currere*, Jin Jr Shi's work (2023, 2026a, 2026b) integrates *currere* with Buddhist wisdom to deepen understanding, enable agency and compassion, and engage in intersubjectivity. Following the four steps of Pinar's *currere*, Shi (2026a) explores nonviolence "as *currere* in fearlessness and selflessness" (p. 227) through engaging in *the Heart Sutra*. In the regressive step, she explores the deconstruction of normalized fear of the other and fear for self; in the progressive step, she dreams of security without fear, albeit provisionally; in the analytic step, she converges fear with fearlessness as well as self with selflessness through emptiness; in the synthetic step, she puts fear-fearlessness and self-selflessness into interplay, arguing for the necessity of ongoing practice to realize that "wonder lies in the wise depths within ourselves where safety, security, and nonviolence blossoms for ourselves and others" (p. 226).

Shi's Buddhist *currere* integrates her Buddhist contemplative and compassionate inquiry with the steps and process of *currere*. Ashwani Kumar (2013) takes another path, particularly drawing upon the teachings of Indian spiritual leader Jiddu Krishnamurti, to distinguish meditative inquiry from *currere.* He suggests adding a fifth step to go beyond the limitation of self-reflexivity. Different from intellectual reflection, meditation "provides an existential entry into one's innermost recesses," encountering unconscious and dreams directly, thus enabling "existential release" of the burdened mind (p. 11). He explains:

> Two things immediately happen when such observation happens even for a few seconds: there is a pure observation of the thing as it is and the separation or conflict, which is created through the Ego between itself and the object of observation, disappears. In my view, adding a fifth step to the method of *currere*—regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical—transcendental, can steer the former in the direction of meditation. (p. 12)

Kumar insightfully points out the essential tension between the Western subject and meditative awareness. The former is based upon separation between subject and object; the latter is based on unity between observer and observed. Kumar's meditative inquiry suggests a different pathway to liberate human consciousness and transform the world. However, we think that defining *currere* only through self-reflection is limited. The first and second steps of *currere* attend to the past and the future, free associatively and meditatively without judgement. In a dialogical mode between *currere* and meditative inquiry, we think analysis and awareness can be complementary (Wang & Flory, 2024), as reflected in Shi's multiple Buddhist *currere*. Since immanence and transcendence in *currere* are simultaneous, transcendental insights can happen in all four steps (Wang, 2010).

Shi's and Kumar's work foregrounds the significant role of awakening and transcendence through a different philosophical and religious lens, enhancing the spiritual dimension of *currere*. Asian scholars' emphasis on virtue cultivation and spirituality based on interdependence and awareness provides a fertile ground for further dialogues.

Im/Possible Synthesis: Intercultural and International *Currere*

Originating in the American field of curriculum studies, *currere* has travelled across national borders and demonstrated its international influence in the Asian context. At this 50th anniversary of *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, we celebrate *currere*'s transnational and global reach and advocate furthering intercultural and international dialogues. As we approach the end of this writing, we first acknowledge that we have not included a full discussion of each nation's different contexts. The variety of different intellectual and cultural contexts in Asia makes such a synthesis here impossible. We only attempted to identify certain overlapping patterns and tendencies, while leaving this brief summary open-ended.

As we see from our discussion, the incorporation of *currere* to question the official curriculum; the contextualization of *currere* in Asian history, culture, and place; and the dialogic relationships between Asian philosophy or religion and *currere* are three major streams, but they are also intertwined. Questioning, contextualization, and dialogue are layered inquiries that are often not fully separate.

The notion of "the third space" (Wang, 2004) as intercultural dialogue to give birth to something new is evoked in some East Asian scholars and educators' efforts to blend *currere* with their cultural and educational traditions (Chen, 2016; Wang, 2020). In such efforts, intercultural dialogues not only situate *currere* in different national, cultural, and intellectual orientations; they also open the possibility of transforming *currere* in new contexts. Such international dialogue involves a critical understanding of and reformulation of what it means to engage subjectivity and personhood for individual and social transformation.

The interplay between individuality and relationality emerges as an important site for reformulation. On the one hand, *currere* plays a liberating role in contesting institutional constraints, cultural conformity, and educational uniformity through strengthening subjective understanding and individual singularity. On the other hand, the foundational role given over to relationality in Asian contexts foregrounds a holistic conception of personhood embedded in connectedness. Perhaps the key issue is less about individuality and relationality *per se*, but more about whether individuality can be embedded in underlying inner and outer connectedness, and if relationality constrains individual originality and creativity. Although the conceptions of Western subjectivity and Asian personhood are not the same (Wang, 2004, 2021, 2022), they are not in opposition either, as both support inner transformation as the fundamental site of education.

We approach the interaction between relational ontology in Asian personhood and individuality in *currere* as *one central thread*. We propose individuality and relationality as bi-foci interwoven in the same landscape to give particular shapes to moment-to-moment, situated reconstruction. In general, in the Western context, relationality needs to be more foregrounded, while in the Asian context, individuality needs to be more foregrounded, so that the complementary roles of both can play in a creative space. The psychical depth of subjectivity that might not be captured by the holism of personhood in Asian contexts needs to be reached by integrating inner and outer divisions. The relationality of personhood in selflessness that might be overshadowed by the individualism of the West can cultivate a capacity for transcending psychic and social aggression.

Certainly, differentiation in a general sense must be considered with attention to ever-shifting changes in local, national, and global situations, while global markets, authoritarianism and

monopoly, and neo-liberal policies have converged to influence different educational contexts. We need to be cautious against the reappropriations of *currere* to support outcome-based education, the instrumentality of global markets, and political control, including in Asian contexts. *Currere* is not merely a method, but an orientation to the self and to the world that calls into existence the potentiality of humanity through both questioning and reconstructing.

In addition, the different pathways, perceived at first glance, can come together at a deeper level. The notion of subjectivity in *currere*, if pursued through a Jungian perspective—in the original formulation of *currere* (Jung, 2016)—is related to individuation, in which the self becomes the Self that incorporates the collective unconsciousness. This lens of individuality comes close to the *Dao* of personal cultivation rooted in cosmic interconnectedness and the Buddhist notion of selflessness. reaching into the depths of the inner self to heal inner fragmentation.

Thus, we propose a situated and contextualized reading of intercultural and international *currere* in Asian contexts. Individuality and relationality are embedded in each other in the same fabric and are inseparable. They can also be perceived in a portrait with changeable foreground and background, where a different foreground emerges depending on the viewer's shifting angle of seeing in different situations. In this sense, a stabilized, single-angled version of intercultural *currere* does not exist. More than ever, sustaining an individual's existential fulfillment is simultaneous with the sustainability of interpersonal, intergroup, and international relations on a planet that faces an existential threat. The shared fate of humanity requires us to approach contemporary crises as relational, and yet, transforming relational dynamics requires the irreplaceable journey of *currere*, both individually and communally.

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