Are There Affinities between Ancient Chinese Philosophical Thought and *Currere*?

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Abstract
I address three aspects of ancient Chinese philosophical thought and Pinar’s *currere* that seem to resonate. The ancient Chinese philosophical thought that will be discussed refers mainly to that advanced by Wang Yangming, Mencius and Lao Tzu. This thought includes pure knowing (*Liangzhi*), *ge xin* (investigation of mind/heart) and voidness. In this study I examine three affinities between: 1) pure knowing and pre-conceptual, 2) *ge xin* and working from within, and 3) voidness and invisibility. Each pair of concepts, which are from Ancient Chinese philosophical thought and *currere*, respectively attend to pre-conceptual realm, adopt turning inward attitude, and notice the unnoticed. The two ideas are different in some ways, and such differences will be discussed in the paper. This study may improve the level of objectivity of *currere* by identifying the connection and showing the convergence of the two ideas; and I argue certain thoughts tend to transcend the boundary between the East and the West. The association of the two thoughts further illustrates the value of *currere*, provides a more international understanding of *currere*, and hears in a different key the soundness of *currere*.

Keywords: Wang Yangming; *Currere*; Pure knowing (*Liangzhi*); *Ge xin* (Investigation of mind); Voidness.

Introduction
In this essay I address the affinities between ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the concept of *currere*. The ancient Chinese philosophical thought that will be discussed refers mainly to that advanced by Wang Yangming, Mencius and Lao Tzu. This thought includes pure knowing (*Liangzhi*), *ge xin* (investigation of mind/heart) and voidness. Pure knowing means “innate knowledge,” or “intuitive moral knowledge”, and the concept originally comes from Mencius. *Ge xin* means the investigation of mind/heart. Wang Yangming (1964) argues that as every living thing is a manifestation of Principle (*Li*); one does not need to look outside of oneself in order to understand Principle (and therefore morality): one should consult one’s own mind/heart, wherein Principle presumably lies. Voidness (or nothingness), proposed by Lao Tzu, perceives the value of the invisible existence of the world, and acknowledges the invisible qualities of the world.

Based on phenomenological and existential approaches, Pinar proposes the autobiographical theory of *currere*, which is “a conception of curriculum that directs school knowledge to individual’s lived experience, experience understood as subjective and social, that is, as gendered, racialized, classed participants in understanding and living through the historical moment” (Pinar, 2012, p. 195). *Currere* has drawn growing attention globally over the past decade. Pacheco (2009) describes *currere* as an important landmark in the history of Curriculum...
Studies (p. 2). Chinese education scholars also show interest in the study of currere. The number of references to currere has continued to grow in China (Zhang & Zhong, 2003; Zhang & Pinar, 2015; Chen, 2009). Does currere possess affinities with certain ancient Chinese philosophical thought? I answer affirmatively. In my essay, I will explore these affinities, which include: 1) pure knowing and pre-conceptual, 2) ge xin and working from within, and 3) voidness and invisibility. In the following sections, I will explain concepts from both Chinese philosophical thought and currere and then associate them.

1. Pure Knowing and the Pre-conceptual

Pure Knowing in Chinese Philosophical Thought

In Chinese philosophical thought, “pure knowing” (Liangzhi 良知) means “innate knowledge,” or “intuitive moral knowledge.” The concept comes from Mencius. Mencius believes that it is impossible for a person to lack sympathy. For him, “If one is without the feeling of sympathy, one is not human” (Mencius, 1979, p. 6). If one really does not feel sympathy in a specific instance, that is because he has lost his original heart. However, this “loss” is more like concealment than destruction, for the heart has not totally disappeared; as Mencius claims that, whenever one seeks it, one will find it. Love for parents and respect for one’s elders is contained in the original heart that spontaneously knows humaneness and righteousness; equally, approval and disapproval are also contained in pure knowing (Lu, 2014). As Wang Yangming (1992) says: “Pure knowing is just the emotion of approval and disapproval; approval and disapproval is just like and dislike” (p. 111). Pure knowing inherently exists in people’s mind. Kim (2005) argues that pure knowing is characterized as follows: first, everyone possesses pure knowing, and there is no exception; second, pure knowing is inherent; it can never be lost since it is not something acquired by learning and can be acquired anytime if one seeks it; third, the character of pure knowing is intuitive. People can lose sight of pure knowing due to selfish human desire. But once one abandons selfish human desire, the perfect power of pure knowing is restored. Lu Xiangshan (another ancient Chinese philosopher) explains:

Pure knowing lies within human beings; although some people become mired in dissolution, pure knowing still remains undiminished and enduring [within them]. ... Truly, if they can turn back and seek after it, then, without needing to make a concerted effort, what is right and wrong, what is fine and foul, will become exceedingly clear, and they will decide for themselves what to like and dislike, what to pursue and what to abandon (cited in Tiwald & Van Norden, 2014, p. 252).

Pure knowing is, then, not scientific knowledge or comprehension and application of external ethical rules, but rather every person’s clear awareness of morals, especially through the emotion of approval and disapproval (Lu, 2014). It is moral awareness, and it arises naturally. Wang says, “To be luminous, shining, and not beclouded are manifestations of the highest good. This is the foundation of bright virtue. This is called pure knowing” (Ivanhoe, 2009, p. 163). The emotion of love is the manifestation of pure knowing as the highest good.
The Pre-conceptual in *Currere*

Pure knowing denotes moral awareness, proceeding before the conceptual (e.g., pre-conceptual). As argued by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman (1995), the method of *currere*, which stems in part from Husserlian phenomenology, also exhibits the interest in describing immediate, pre-conceptual experience. Compared to other forms of educational research, *currere* embraces this conceptual structure:

Unlike mainstream educational research which focuses upon the end products of the processes of consciousness as described by Husserl, those end products we call concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations we, in accumulative fashion, call knowledge. *Currere* seeks to slide underneath these end products and structures to the pre-conceptual experience that is their foundation (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 415).

*Currere* is committed to describing pre-conceptual experience lying underneath those end products and structures such as concepts, abstractions, and generalizations. Pre-conceptual is, in the famous phenomenological phrase, back to "the things themselves" (cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 416). As Merleau-Ponty elucidates: "To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge... and in relation to which [conceptual] schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learned before what a forest, a prairie or a river is" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: ix). For him, in short, life-worldly or pre-conceptual meaning precedes philosophical or conceptual meaning. What Merleau-Ponty calls preconceptual is equivalent to what Wang Yangming calls pure knowing (Jung, 1965).

*Currere* acts as the phenomenological epoche\(^1\) "slackening the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, cited in Grumet, 1976, p. 41). By portraying these pre-conceptual experiences, a more essential picture might be presented, and then it follows a thorough understanding of these experiences. As argued by Grumet (1976), *currere* is a phenomenological description of the subject’s present situation, one’s historical, social, physical life world (p. 33).

In order to understand the pre-conceptual in *currere*, attention to the “biographic situation” is needed first. The pre-conceptual in *currere* is closely related with the concept of “biographic situation”, which points to “where I conceptually and ontologically am now” (Pinar, 1976, p. 53). As Pinar makes explicit, biographic situation invites the self-restructuring of lived meaning that follows from past situations, meaning that contains, perhaps unarticulated, contradictions of that past and of the present as well as anticipation of possible future (2012, p. 45). To illustrate, Pinar writes, “I take a particular question, like why am I involved in the research project I am involved in? And I record, by pen or recorder, all that occurs to me, regardless how esoteric and hence unrelated the information apparently is” (1976, p. 52). The process is both pre-conceptual and conceptual. The reason why it is both pre-conceptual (ontological) and conceptual is that both views and problems derived from the situation are inherently produced by one’s conceptual apparatus or gestalt. In phenomenology the pre-conceptual precedes language, and language (or the conceptual) is derivative from “the things themselves”, what is prior to language, being.
biographic situation acknowledges the interplay between the two dimensions—
pre-conceptual and conceptual. Also, “By moving in the past, one observes how
the conceptual is only a part, however integral a part, of the biographic situation”
(Pinar, 1976, p. 61). Therefore, autobiographical writing mediates between the
two realms. “Writing from a biographic basis would capture the complex interplay
between the two dimensions of human being, but to do so…requires taking on as
it were, the role of artist and the epistemological posture of the phenomenologist”
(1976, p. 55). Pinar appears to agree that all conceptualization is a manifestation
of a pre-conceptual substratum but suggests that finding the relationship between
pre-conceptual and conceptual could become dialectical, a sort of dynamic
middle ground between a view that is “I think therefore I am” and
phenomenological “I am therefore I think.” The method of phenomenology
“promised clarity, a way of cutting through the thick, binding undergrowth that
covers the ground of daily life to reveal a clear path” (Grumet, 1988, p. 5). This
method presents a more complete and clear picture.

Pinar argues that the pre-conceptual experiential realm is usually beyond
the perceptual field due to our current condition. “In fact, it becomes severed and
inaccessible to our conscious selves rather early in our lives” (1975, p. 389). This
can be deleterious as students can blindly accept what they are told while
 disinclined to think things thoroughly.

“Given the generally rigid outer forms or outer perceptual rootedness of North
American culture, and the sometimes brutal quality of that culture, one begins early
to ignore messages from within, then forget that one is ignoring, so that one
becomes one’s image or role” (Pinar, 1975, p. 389).

Students accept or reject without thinking independently. They pursue what
they deem right or appropriate, but sometimes fails to challenge why it is right or
appropriate. As a result, the educational problem partially involves the question of
returning to that gaze inward, without immediately disrupting our public, exterior
lives.

Affinity between Pure Knowing and the Pre-conceptual

To conclude, the concept of pure knowing in Chinese philosophical thought
has affinity with the concept of pre-conceptual in currere in that both precede any
conceptual process and remains inherent in conceptualization. Pure knowing
does not even require any conceptual knowledge (Wang, 1964). Both attend to
the realm of pre-conceptual. But the concepts are different in two aspects. First,
for Wang, one’s original heart (pure knowing) will be shown when one seeks it.
Pure knowing tends to be “more pre-conceptual”. Comparatively, in currere, to
enter pre-conceptual means loosening one’s identification with ideational. Pinar
mainly uses it as a way of conducting phenomenological description. Second,
these two domains of the pre-conceptual have different focuses. Pure knowing
focuses on innate moral awareness, whereas currere includes educational
attention to social, cultural, historical, and psychologically dimensions of life.

Pure knowing can be extended continuously, as Yangming Wang (1964)
suggests. To extend one’s knowledge means to reach to the ultimate (Analect,
1914, cited in Tiwald & Van Norden, 2014, p. 248). Reaching to the ultimate is
extending to the ultimate; and “It is simply to extend fully the pure knowing of my
own mind (Tiwald & Van Norden, 2014, p. 248). Pure knowing knows whether a
thought is good or bad. How can pure knowing show itself? It is achieved by revealing original heart, and attained by clearing heart. Extending to pure knowing is to interrogate self in order to rectify self, whether the individual has forgotten the “original heart” or not. It is self-interrogation. Compared with Wang Yangming’s view, Pinar’s currere tends to focus on individuals’ experience of curriculum, an interrogation of the individual within the educational process. Curricular claims can be comprehensive and inclusive. Grumet writes that currere is “what the individual does with the curriculum, his active reconstruction of his passage through its social, intellectual, physical structures” (1976, p. 111). While interrogating one’s experience of curriculum, including goals set by the curriculum, one begins to reconstruct his own curriculum. It is an “autobiographical process of reflection and analysis in which one recalls his educational experience and examine it” (Grumet, 1976, p. 111). Curricula seeks to see more deeply and clearly; it is a carefully-devised, and temporally-situated strategy. Engaging pure knowing removes evils, whereas currere suggests that one can only become conscious of evil. To sum up, both represent a process, a process for improvement and rectification.

2. Ge xin® and Working from Within

Ge xin proposed by Wang Yangming (Investigation of mind/heart)

The concept of ge xin is closely related with that of ge wu. To understand ge xin, we need to understand the concept of ge wu. Zhu Xi, a very famous Chinese philosopher, argues that ge means “arrive at,” and wu refer to things and affairs; for Zhu Xi, ge wu means arriving at the pattern that resides in things and affairs (Shun, 2011). Wang Yangming tends to interpret it differently. For Wang, ge wu refers to the process of correcting the problematic activities of the heart/mind, and it follows from this interpretation that there is no thing (wu) outside the heart/mind for it to correct (ge) (Shun, 2011). In this article I call it ge xin in which xin means mind/heart. Ge xin refers to investigation (rectification) of mind/heart. Wang puts much greater emphasis on directly eliminating the problematic elements of the mind/heart and downplays the kind of inquiry highlighted by Zhu Xi characterized by investigation of affairs (Shun, 2011, p. 102).

A recorded episode (Wang, 1963) reveals that the attempt by Wang Yangming to discover the truth in external things (e.g., bamboos) was a total failure. Unlike what Zhu Xi (a Chinese Confucian philosopher) suggests, truth cannot be found in external things. One day Wang suddenly discovered that the “investigation of things” (ge wu 格物) did not mean the investigation of every bamboo, blade of grass, leaf or branch of a tree. Instead, truth is to be found in consciousness (as intentionality) and its activities. Wang concluded that Ge wu really means ge xin (“rectification of mind/heart”):

You know the defects of devoting oneself to external things and neglecting the internal, and becoming broad but lack essentials. Why are these defects? What I mean by the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is to extend the innate knowledge of my mind to each and every thing. The innate knowledge of my mind is the same as the Principle of Nature. When the Principle of Nature in the innate knowledge of my mind is extended to all things, all things will attain their
principle. To extend the innate knowledge of my mind is the matter of extension of knowledge, and for all things to attain their principle is the matter of the investigation of things. In these mind and principle are combined into one. As the mind and principle are combined into one, then all my humble opinions which I have just expressed and my theory that Chu His arrived at his final conclusions late in his life can be understood without discussion. (Wang, 1964, 2:8b-10a)

Wang Yangming argues that as every living thing is a manifestation of Principle, one does not need to look outside of oneself in order to understand Principle (and therefore morality) means one should consult one’s own heart (or mind) wherein Principle surely resides. Kim (2005) argues that the most apparent and significant implication of xin ji li (mind is principle) is the change of the locus of li from the external world (and the mind) to the mind. Since Principle is the basis of human nature, then it follows that anyone who understands his or her true nature understands the Principle of the universe. He holds that “Wang’s distinction between the mind in itself (xin zhi benti) and the so-called human mind (ren xin) provides one with a standard with which to distinguish between the normative state and the actual state of the self” (Kim, 2005, p. 3). For Wang, the “mind in itself” means the original state of the mind, which retains the perfect faculty of moral judgment. The “human mind” denotes the state of the mind “obscured” by selfish human desires, and thus does not realize the perfect faculty of moral judgment. As a result, one is expected to strive to recover the mind in itself since the immediate state of the mind often maintains at the level of the human mind. The only difference between the mind in itself and the human mind is whether or not the mind is clouded by selfish desire. The difference between human mind and the min in itself might be akin to what Tiwald & Van Norden argue about the virtuous and the vicious. They contend that Wang believes that the difference between the virtuous and the vicious is that the former recognize their minds form one body with everything else, while the latter, “because of the space between their own physical form and those of others, regard themselves as separate” (2014, p. 241). According to Kim (2005), our current state of mind is able to return to its original state simply by removing selfish desires. Contemplation, which Wang Yangming had practiced throughout his life, and which he frequently engaged in, was seen as a means to remove selfish desires.

Working from Within

This Ge xin is similar to the concept of working from within proposed by Pinar in the sense that they both address turning inward. In his paper “Working from Within”, Pinar quotes the abstract expressionist painter Jackson Pollock to suggest that teachers and students might work from inner sources of insight and imagination. Pinar writes: “Like some modern painters, my students and I have come to feel that we rarely need to refer to subject matter outside ourselves. We work from a different source. We work from within” (Pinar, 1972, p. 331).

In “Sanity, Madness and the School", Pinar argues that schooling contributes to the loss of self via modeling and dependence on teachers. Pinar argues that schooling numbs children to their own experience in that “the voices inside are systematically ignored, dismissed, or refuted by others. Almost inevitably, the child learns to ignore, dismiss, or refute the message from within” (1975, p. 372). It can be seen that the sheer impossibility of seclusion, of quiet in
the school, forces children to ignore themselves and eventually to empty themselves out (Pinar, 1975, p. 377). As a result, children becomes wary of solitude, often drawn away by social conformity. Pinar quotes Jung to highlight the importance of listening to the message of the self: the process of individualization as the slow imperceptible process of psychic growth depends on “the extent to which it develops appears to be subject to the extent to which the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the self” (1975, p. 372). Moreover, Pinar points out that the cognitive stress of schooling tends to make children think rather than feel. Therefore, one should listen to his or her inner message before and after thinking. As argued by Von Franz:

In order to bring the individuation process into reality, one must surrender consciously to the power of the unconscious, instead of thinking in terms of what one should do, or what is generally thought right, or what usually happens. One must simply listen, in order to learn what the inner totality - the self - wants one do here and now in a particular situation. (Von Franz, cited in Pinar, 1975, p. 373)

Pinar also notices the issue of role-playing. As he points out, "If one becomes one's role, then one cannot become oneself. One achieves thingness, but not genuine being" (1975, p. 387). Then Pinar raises the matter of multiple roles:

If I am this in that situation with these people and that in this situation with these people, and so on, then which self or selves is legitimate? Or, as Michael Novak has observed, probably prior to the general question "who am I?" is "Whose am I?" Who, under what circumstance and in what ways, influences my behavior, my thoughts, my moods? Why do these particular causal relationships exist? If much of all of these personality is in fact conditioned and, while "mine", not me, how might I begin to discover who, in fact, I am? How might one conceptualize this process of discovery, this coming to self-awareness, and communicate to others such as conceptualization? (Pinar, 1975, p. 387)

To further this point, Pinar asks that "how is one to remember? How is one to begin to focus one's attention on oneself, in a noncritical, even non-evaluative way, so that one illuminate this inner world" (1975, p. 388). In order to answer this question, inspired by Jung, Pinar (1975) describes two forms of thinking: the free-associative and the directed. First, one renders one's own educational experience into words, using the free-associative form of minding. Second, one employs one's critical faculties to "understand what principles and patterns have been operative in one's educational life, hence achieving a more profound understanding of one's own educational experience, as well as illuminating parts of the inner world and deepening one's self understanding generally" (1975, p. 389). By identifying the working principles and patterns in one's educational experience, one can understand one's educational experience profoundly. In so doing, Pinar contends that "one can focuses one's entire attention on oneself in a non-evaluative way and this free-associating can bring to the surface latent emotions and intellections, hence making more accessible the lebenswelt, the pre-conceptual" (1975, pp. 389-390). This free association provides a passage to the pre-conceptual through bringing latent emotions and intellections to light.

Free association helps one see something under the surface or capture something beyond the realm of consciousness. This enables one to gain greater access to one's current lived experience. One can become conscious of something they missed before, bring what is latent into consciousness. As Pinar
argues, “The movement toward greater awareness of the present should make the researcher more existential in his lifetime, more detached from current roles and emotions, and more able to recognize the origin of those roles and selves and to form those public expressions, i.e., his personality, according to his wishes” (1975, p. 390). Being more existential means becoming more detached from current situation and more reflective about multiple roles and selves. This is major moment or phase of the method of currere. It is not the entire method, as it is also analytic and progressive. By employing this method, Pinar contends that:

The analyst of educational experience or the educational experientialist attempts to discover what factors are operative in educational experience, what relations among what factors under what circumstances, and finally, what fundamental structures describe or explain the educative process. In a sense, these structures would represent the last stop in the realm of the conceptual, the most fundamental level of analysis possible before entering the pre-conceptual, the lebenswelt, the ineffable (1975, p. 392).

This analysis of educational experience involves, then, “working from within”. The method enables the understanding of educational experience.

Affinity between Ge xin and Working from Within

Ge xin (investigation of the mind/heart) resonates, I suggest, with “working from within”. Both Wang and Pinar address the issue of turning inward. Initiating a gaze toward the inner world can be understood as “removing selfish desires” in pure knowing in Wang’s thought and accessing “the pre-conceptual” in currere. Both processes enable one to think in solitude, to reflect on, thus being more sensitive to the external, more detached from the current situation, and more able to recognize the origins of different situations. In addition, as argued by Pinar, “If it is a matter of bringing out what is there already, and hence one form of what might legitimately be termed education, what is the nature of educational experience” (1975, p. 387). This statement is akin to the Wang Yangming’s view that the Principle already exists in the mind and one can get it if one seeks it. In addition, this is also similar to the following verse in Tao Te Ching:

To pursue learning, one increases daily
To pursue Tao one decreases daily –
Decrease and again decrease, Until one arrives at not doing.
Not nothing and yet nothing is not done. (cited in LaFargue, 1992, p. 18)

Especially, Tao Te Ching distinguishes between learning in general and cultivating or pursuing Tao--the ultimate truth. To pursue learning is to acquire more knowledge daily, while to pursue Tao is to decrease doing until one reaches at the point of not doing. It is emptying oneself day by day (clearing selfish desires, which is similar to Wang Yangming’s thought), and following the natural way, until everything can be done by itself. Education essentially helps us follow what surfaces naturally, and empty one’s desire for action and knowledge, rather than guides learners to store up knowledge for themselves. Tao implies following what the heart says, spontaneously and willingly. In other words, Tao Te Ching proposes a non-doer. Pure knowing refers to innate knowledge that is originally contained in the human heart. To follow the heart in pursuing Tao is similar to the pursuit of truth from inside (heart) in pure knowing since pure knowing originally exists in the human heart (mind), and humans do not need to seek it from
outside. As a whole, both Ge xin and “working from within” make the “inward turn”.

The major difference between Wang and Pinar is that they have different focus. Wang solely addresses moral aspect, as currere mainly focuses on cognitive or intellectual life. Wang suggests that principle originally exists in the mind, and the human being does not need to seek from outside. For Wang, the turning inward means going back to the “original heart” where the heavenly principle exists itself, a moral awareness that everyone is destined to possess. Extending to pure knowing means the constant effort to exertion necessary to purify one’s heart/mind of selfish desires. Through it we can transcend ourselves (Yao, 2003). Mind/heart is the source of perfection and the instrument for improvement. As argued by Wang:

The human being is understood to possess “innate knowledge of the good [which] need not be sought outside. If what emanates from innate knowledge is not obstructed by selfish ideas, the result will be like the saying ‘If a man gives full development to his feeling of commiserations, his humanity (ren) will be more than he can ever put into practice’. However, the ordinary man is not free from the obstruction of selfish ideas. He therefore requires the effort of the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things in order to overcome selfish ideas and restore principle. Then the mind's faculty of innate knowledge will no longer be obstructed but will be able to penetrate and operate everywhere. One's knowledge will then be extended. With knowledge extended, one's will becomes sincere” (Wang, 1964, I:8, 15).

This knowledge refers to moral knowledge though Wang does not deny empirical knowledge. For Pinar, currere mainly attends to cognitive or intellectual life: “The medium of movement in this method is to be primarily cognitive, or intellectual. This is not to say emotional dimensions are to be excluded; they, along with other dimensions of educational experience, will be rendered verbally, edited through the intellect” (Pinar, 1975, p. 389). Currere focuses on the “the broad outlines of past, present, and future, the nature of our experience, and specially our educational experience, that is the way we can understand our present in the way that allows us to move on, more learned, more evolved than before”(Pinar, 1976, p. 63). It is intellectually oriented and helps understand more, thus enable one to become more intellectually developed. The method of currere “illuminates the larger inner world of which domain assumptions are a part” (Pinar, 1976, p. 389). Pinar also points out that as one travels inward, one is able to see more of others, “I do know that as I travel inward, I tend to be freed from it, and hence more sensitive and receptive to what is external. It is as if because I can see more of self in its multidimensional manifestations, I am also able to see more of others” (1976, p. 62). For Pinar, it is to recover the ignored or neglected self, to illuminate the inner world, thus gaining a deeper understanding of one’s educational experience. In other words, currere is in service of understanding how academic study contributes to one’s understanding of life history.

3. Lao Tzu’s Voidness and Invisibility in Currere

Lao Tzu’s Voidness
The void remains one of the great themes of Taoist thought. In chapter 5 of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu describes that the space between the Heaven and Earth is like a bellows. It is empty, but gives a supply that never fails; when it is in motion, it never stops producing. Lao Tzu also directs to see the void part of a jar, with which water can be held:

With a wall all around  
A clay bowl is moulded;  
But the use of the bowl  
Will depend on the part  
Of the bowl that is void.  
Cut out windows and doors  
In the house as you build  
But the use of the house  
Will depend on the space  
In the wall that is void. (cited in LaFargue, 1992, p. 45)

Lao Tzu points out that it is where we perceive nothing (in the void - *wu*) that true efficacy lies, even though people always think that they benefit from perceptible things (the visible). The absence of perceptible qualities characterizes the *Tao* (Kaltenmark, 1969). Lao Tzu sees the invisible, perceiving the invisible qualities of the world. Song (2006) relates voidness in *Tao Te Ching* to education and highlights the value of nothing:

What we value in our education is “something,” the bigger and larger it is the better it is. We are only able to see “being” or “something,” which has name and form and is tangible. We see wheels, vessels, houses, and objects in the picture. We are not able to see the existence of “nothing” in the hub, in the pot and in the room which makes the “something” useful. In the *Tao Te Ching* “nothing” is nameless, formless, and intangible, but makes the thing of functional worth. What is of genuine worth and brings real satisfaction is “Nothing.” “Nothing” gives power and energy to “something.” However, “nothing” makes no impression on others and appears “disgraceful” like an “Uncarved Block.” It is very easy for “nothing” to be alienated or “left-out” in society.

In education we might also see and value the existence and utility of “nothing”, even though it does not have a name or form. No curriculum can ensure how students and teachers view or understand the curriculum, or on what occasions and in what way the curriculum speaks to them; however, all of those can occur during the process, in either a manifested or hidden way. The following verse in *Tao De Ching* also addresses this issue:

Always: being desireless, one sees the hidden essentials.  
Always: having desires, one sees only what is sought.

Song (2005) uses this instance (being desireless and having desire) to explain whether education should be goal-oriented or not. He argues that when teachers set specific and clear objectives, they may actually prevent learners from real learning. “It may prevent them from seeing hidden essentials and ultimate reality. It may remain only superficial teaching and learning” (Song, 2005 p. 5). When there is no goal prescribed, it allows more possibilities to emerge. The generally expected outcome may only be a part of the whole; the unexpected may help students achieve more in-depth understanding or something beyond current thinking; maybe we can call it transcendence. The prescribed goals may limit students to further explore by confining students’ attention to certain aspects. The so-called goals come from the current
conceptual framework, lying underneath certain epistemological propositions; and it is not free of certain paradigm, yet defined by limitations, boldly speaking. In short, the goals can direct processes, but also limit them. This no-goal can be understood as “voidness” in Lao Tzu’s idea, which allows students to see more possibilities. This voidness allows one to see the value of “invisible”, which is akin to a concept in currere, namely, invisibility.

Invisibility in Currere

The curriculum enterprise, at bottom, is not simply a technical, up-front, visible, manipulative enterprise performed by experts, be they teachers, planners, or politicians. Rather, all those manifest activities are eidetic: they are visible expressions of an invisible life which makes them possible. (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 421)

Visible aspects of the curriculum such as goals or learning outcome tend to become dominant, and the invisible—for example, how students experience the curriculum -- goes unnoticed or hidden. Autio (2016a) notices that education space is colonized by the growing importance of principles such as outcome control, competence orientation and external assessment and associates neoliberalism with this phenomenon. According to Autio (2016b), neoliberalism reduces all spheres of human action to the economy. Therefore, corporate logic as educational rule leads to the emphasis on learning outcome and “a sheer aggregate of instrumental skills and competences” (Autio, 2017). Neoliberalism also, as argued by Autio (2016b), intensified the detrimental grip of instrumentalism which is manifested in the relation between teaching and learnings “as a cause-effect one that is supposed to legitimize the focus on product and outcomes of learning as an index of effective teaching” (p. 12).

Instrumentalism explicitly and consciously ignores the issues of inner worlds of subjectivity on its agendas of theory and practice with its preference of behaviorist-cognitivist methodologies that obstruct dealing with invisible yet significant worlds of individual subjects (Autio, 2016b, p. 15). As summarized by Pinar:

Autio claims [American Herbartianism] reduced the complexity of education to proceduralism and instrumentality, rationalizing sequence that, in the US context, became behavioralized…Autio suggested that bureaucratic-administrative control became restated, in the United States, as the prediction of behavior. (Pinar, 2011, p. 185)

However, these invisible aspects may underlie the visible, make the visible existence. Pinar makes us aware of the issue - to notice the unnoticed. The educational process is to be reconsidered as a process inseparable from individual experience; it is not only about objectives, outcomes, implementation, or evaluation. As argued by Pinar, currere reconceptualizes curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation that highlights the individual’s experience. Curriculum concerns students. Traditional curriculum theory seems to ignore the individuals’ experience of curriculum as pointed out by Pinar et al.: “in its preoccupation with the public and the visible, with design, sequencing, implementation, evaluation, and its preoccupation with curricular materials, the curriculum field ignored the individual’s experience of those materials” (1995, p. 415). With a standard or a goal prescribed, the educational process still can be
very complex, non-linear, and non-logical. Students may hold different attitudes toward their teachers, their interest in contents may differ due to their various backgrounds, and their study may lead to learning outcomes quite different from the intended goal. Teachers also face similar complexities. They vary by class background, experience and gender, all of which can contribute to the complexity. The objective and implementation system seems to take students and teachers for granted, putting them in a situation where they are largely controlled and manipulated. As a matter of fact, teacher’s role should be creative and transformative (Autio, 2016b). Autio also points out teachers’ important role in educational change or reform: “if teachers are distracted by external measures of accountability, control and surveillance, their disenchantment and disengagement threatens to leave change and reform a hollow rhetoric” (2016b, p. 13). However, does it suggest that these aspects related with curriculum are unimportant?

Pinar argues further, “It is not that the public world - curriculum, instruction, objectives - becomes unimportant; it is that to further comprehend their roles in the educational process we must take our eyes off them for a time, and begin a lengthy, systematic search for our inner experience” (Pinar, 1975 p. 3). Currere is the individuals’ experience in an educational context. The product of currere is the autobiography of what students call their own educational experience (Pinar et al., 1995). Currere focuses on an individual biography, forsaking general structures to discover the path of experience that has led a particular person to a specific choice, place, and cognitive style. Soare (2009) argues that it is to reunite elements that students considered relevant. Hence, educational experience can mean something completely different for each student. Finally, “While these discourses are to be analyzed, interests and various lacks often hidden from the normal course of experience will come to the surface” (p. 653). Therefore, one can direct his or her process of development by “bringing the structure of experience to awareness” (Grumet, 1976, p.115) and thus one becomes more aware of how one chooses to order and interpret experience.

**Affinity between Voidness and Invisibility**

The notion of Lao Tzu’s voidness or no action (wuwei) is akin to that of invisibility in currere. Both Lao-tzu’ voidness and invisibility in currere help us see the invisible, identify the invisible, thus making the individual experience important and illuminating the invisible. They both make invisible a visible existence. Lao Tzu’s thought emphasizes the importance of void part, which uses metaphors to make it explicit. Pinar mainly highlights the hidden essentials in curriculum, and also associates it with the analysis of educational experience that attempts to discover what factors are operative in educational experience (Pinar, 1975).

**Conclusion**

The Chinese and European philosophical ideas are compared and studied not with any intention of judging which is necessarily right and which is necessarily wrong, but simply with the interest of finding what the one is in terms of the other. It is expected that before long we will see that the European philosophical ideas will be supplemented with the Chinese intuition and experience, and the Chinese
philosophical ideas will be clarified by the European logic and clear thinking. - Fung Yulan (cited in Jung, 1965, p. 612)

Here I juxtaposed and examined three aspects of ancient Chinese philosophical thought and Pinar’s currere that seem to resonate. They both acknowledge the “reciprocity of the subjectivity and objectivity in the dynamic constitution of human knowledge” (Grumet, 1976, p.36). Currere focuses on how the human subject understands his or her situation, his or her past, and current (a reconstruction of the passage) and learn from past experience, and thus through understanding oneself, one is able to see more of others and to reconsider his or her situations; whereas Wang Yangming believes that there is no principle external to mind/heart and one should consult one’s own mind/heart, wherein Principle surely resides, for anyone who understands his or her true nature understands the Principle of the universe. They both attend to pre-conceptual realm, adopt turning inward attitude, and notice the unnoticed. The two ideas are different in some ways. For example, pure knowing and currere - these two domains of the pre-conceptual have different focuses. Pure knowing focuses on innate moral awareness, whereas currere includes educational attention to social, cultural, historical, and psychologically dimensions of life. This difference shows that Chinese Confucius education have premium on moral aspects (Fang et al., 2001). Moral judgement, as argued by Autio (2016b), which remains outside the methodological grasp of behaviorism and cognitive theories, is one of the core of transformative education. This essay examines meaningful connections (e.g., consistency, continuity, inconsistency; Dey, 1999; Mathison, 1988) between currere and Chinese philosophical thought, showing convergence of two theories though they are from different cultural context (Lo, 2014). This study directs us to not only understand the convergence of Wang Yangming’s idea and currere, but also widen the horizon of our vision to the spirit in which intellectual thinking are carried out in search of the truth: “which shuns much of the traditional speculative conundrums and chimera of abstraction in the name of humanity” (Jung, 1965, p. 636). This study may improve the level of objectivity of currere; and I argue certain thoughts tend to transcend the boundary between the East and the West. The association of the two thoughts further illustrates the value of currere, gains a more international understanding of currere, and hear in a different key the soundness of currere.

Notes
1. Husserl elaborates the notion of ‘phenomenological epoché’. Through the systematic procedure of ‘phenomenological reduction’, one is thought to be able to suspend judgment regarding the general or naive philosophical belief in the existence of the external world, and thus examine phenomena as they are originally given to consciousness.
2. Ge xin means investigation of mind, proposed by Wang Yangming (an ancient Chinese philosopher). He interprets ge wu (investigation of things) as ge xin (investigation of mind/heart). James Miller argues that Wang Yangming sets the stage for the present day emphasis on Confucianism as moral and spiritual self-cultivation.
3. Here I want to express my gratitude to Prof. William Pinar for his editorial assistance for this article.
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References


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