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Reconstructing Neo-Confucianism,
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A Critical Discussion of Hongyu Wang's
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Hongyu Wang, (2004), *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home: Curriculum in a Third Space*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 202pp, \$29.95.

This article evaluates Hongyu Wang's work from the basis of critical cultural studies. The pros and cons are analyzed in the article. Wang's work contributes to making a neat research about one of the important themes in cultural studies—identity. Her work also shows the case of relating theories and practices. Wang wisely employs her personal experiences to help readers to understand an always-in-the-making self (Thayer-Bacon, 2000) through an interdisciplinary approach which crosses the boundaries of philosophy, psychology, gender studies, and curriculum studies. She uses the metaphor of journey to cross boundaries of Eastern and Western values and to explore the identity issue and to establish an idealistic space—the third space—as a solution to struggling with identity issues. She uses poetic language to explain her ideas to readers.

I offer a general feedback about Wang's work. Wang uses the first chapter to bring to light the main issue of the book—identity. She is skilled at using metaphor to explain her ideas. She uses images of mother and self to represent Chinese culture and American culture. Then, in chapters 2 and 3, she uses Foucault's and Confucius' work to analyze identity issues from the standpoint of philosophy. She points out that Foucault's work focuses more on the Western individuality and the self as suppressing the other. Confucius' description of identity issue emphasizes more the Eastern relational self as combining self and other. Wang sets up the platform to bring about the issue of the third space through discussing the Western and Eastern

values about the self issue. In chapter 4, she uses Julia Kristeva's work to analyze the identity issue from the feminist and psychological perspectives. She criticizes the hegemony of patriarchy by talking about the dichotomy of semiotic and symbolic identities. In chapter 5, she makes a case for bringing many factors together, including the philosophical self, psychic transformation, crossing cultural and gender lines; in order to deeply and vividly showing the image of the third space. Later, in chapter 6, as the beginning of the book, she uses her personal experiences again, completing the circle and relating her concept of the third space into curriculum studies.

However, I will discuss several issues that arise in *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home: Curriculum in a Third Space*—Neo-Confucianism, the need for language studies, and the definition of the third space. I first discuss the perspective of Neo-Confucianism. In chapter 3, Wang says that

...the development of Confucianism into Neo-Confucianism in the context of the institutionalization of Confucianism and how the evolution suppressed the transformative potential of Confucian personal cultivation in its communal and cosmic relatedness. (p. 55)

Wang makes a comparison about the classic Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. She recommends the traditional classic Confucianism and claims that it successfully explains the definition of self-cultivation. But she claims that Neo-Confucianism prevents the individual freedom and self-transformation involving with the gender issue and the hierarchy in society. Classic Confucianism addresses the perspective on the connection between education and society by discussing what Confucius saw as the relationship between the individual and society. Confucius claims that people are the foundation of society, and education is the means by which it can be transformed into a harmonious society. I guess that Wang thinks Neo-Confucianism suppresses self-transformation because it is not educating the people into the harmony but educating people into the conformity. Wang claims that women's inequality and strict hierarchy system are more addressed specifically in the Neo-Confucianism. She criticizes Zhu Xi, the representative of Neo-Confucianism, who equals "human desires" with "selfish desires" and "materialistic desires" and also thinks that human desires are against "clean human nature" (p. 67). I think that her views have ignored the positive influence of Neo-Confucianism. I think that human nature is spiritual and born; human desire is materialistic and developed in the real life practices. As one of given ethnical principles, Neo-Confucianism emphasizes on "Li" [the rituals and ceremonies] in the hierarchy society. I think that right attitudes are developed in the everyday spiritual practicing and historical contexts. Then the people are trained to develop creative responses to the common good rather than private interests all the time. Through this way, the self-transformation of the people is aroused but not suppressed.

Second, I think that Wang needs to explore more about the language studies issue in chapter 4. Wang uses Julia Kristina's work to discuss the dichotomy of

gender issue by relating language studies. She uses Chinese language as the example to show readers the separation of semiotic/maternal and the symbolic/paternal (p. 88). In Wang's definition of "the third space" it is an open space of crossing Western and Eastern culture values. I suggest that English and French languages should be brought into discussion to broaden readers' understanding of gender issues in the scope of linguistics. For example, there are critiques about gender biases of vocabularies in the English language by the feminist scholars. Many everyday English vocabularies like "salesman, postman, fireman..." seem not to provide the equal space for the vocational possibility for the female. To make her views of points more convincing, Wang is suggested to make an analysis of English and French languages.

Third, I want to talk more about the term "the third space." Related to the key theme of the book, I suggest more elucidation and interpretation of Homi Bhabha's views in Wang's work to help readers with the definition of the third space. Bhabha uses the term to explain the definition of multiculturalism politics but he does not mention the case of gender differentiation. Bhabha also elucidates the idea of the third space as not only one open and dynamic system but also one crossing historical boundary. Bhabha defines:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 37)

Wang walks further and extends his ideas by relating to gender issues. But she does not talk enough about the historical journey factor. She also does not make readers quite understand where sources ideas of "the third space" come from by lightly mentioning Homi Bhabha's views.

Fourth, I want to discuss the value of the book. Wang convinces readers of the necessity to read her book by starting with her autobiography. She uses her autobiography to be the clue of crossing the Eastern/Western values and relating her female identity to discuss the self/other issues, and also shows the case of relating curriculum theories to practices. But I suggest that more original creative ideas are discussed in the book. Wang's work seems to be more close to a synthesis of interpretation of other people's works. More applications of explaining the term of "the third space" are needed. From the general organization, I argue that there are too much theoretic writings but a lack of "how to" in curriculum studies praxes.

In conclusion, Wang's contributions are significant in presenting the term "the third space" in curriculum studies for a multifaceted consideration including culture, gender, and geographical locals. However, I suggest that chorological factors should be included in the book for helping readers understand the key theme. More real-case applications, instructions, and advices are also needed in the book.

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