

Curricular Interstices between South Korea and the U.S.:
An Autobiographical Inquiry into Decolonizing Transnational Curriculum Studies

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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June 2025

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Acknowledgements

Over the past four years of my doctoral journey, I have come to deeply realize how little I could have achieved on my own. This dissertation was made possible because of the help of many people, the good fortune of receiving that help, and the gracious guidance of God. Because of all of them, I was able to become the Ph.D. I had dreamed of becoming for so long.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Nina Asher, who guided me throughout my doctoral studies. I will never forget the day I first met her in person in the summer of 2021 at a cafe in Minneapolis. The warmth and welcome she extended to me that day remain unforgettable. Her intellectual insight, warm advice and encouragement, thorough guidance, and thoughtful care made this dissertation possible. She has been a tireless advocate, and her attentive mentorship and unwavering encouragement have played a central role in shaping who I am today as an emerging curriculum scholar. More than that, she showed me by example how I should one day guide and care for my own students.

I am also deeply thankful to my dissertation committee members—Dr. Timothy Lensmire, Dr. Mark Vagle, and Dr. Jana Lo Bello Miller—for their careful reading, generous support, and thought-provoking feedback. Their courses, conversations, and comments over the past few years helped me not only begin this dissertation project, but also bring it to completion. Through Dr. Timothy Lensmire’s course, I refined my critical perspective on education; through Dr. Mark Vagle’s teaching, I came to understand a wide range of methodological possibilities; and through Dr. Jana Lo Bello Miller’s guidance, I learned to grow into my roles as a graduate assistant and student teaching supervisor.

I owe special thanks to Dr. Seungbae Park, Professor Emeritus at Jeonju National University of Education in South Korea and my lifelong mentor who introduced me to the world of curriculum studies. Since my sophomore year in college, he has been a father-like figure, offering warm advice, heartfelt encouragement, and prayers throughout every phase of my educational journey—as a preservice teacher, an elementary school teacher, a graduate student, and an emerging curriculum scholar. Because of his influence, I dreamed of becoming a Ph.D. one day, and because of his steadfast support, I have finally been able to achieve that dream.

I am also sincerely grateful to Dr. Kyunghye So, my master’s advisor at Seoul National University in South Korea. She helped me realize how broad, rich, and dynamic the field of curriculum studies truly is. That realization drew me even more deeply into the field and became both the driving force behind my decision to pursue doctoral studies and the foundation that sustained me through the process.

I also want to thank all the friends who offered their support and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey. I especially wish to express my appreciation to my “academic siblings,” Dr. Charlene Cornwell, Dr. Yulian Fernando Segura Castillo, and Olga Natasha Hernández Villar.

Conversations with them were always joyful and intellectually stimulating, and the solidarity and empathy they offered gave me the assurance that I was engaged in work that mattered. I am also grateful to my cohort in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Because of them, I was able to endure—and even enjoy—this intellectual journey as a doctoral student.

Above all, I offer my deepest thanks to my parents, Younghoon Kim and Wolbong Cho, for their devoted love and support. It is because of my parents' love, prayers, and generous backing that I was able to come this far. As their only child, it was not easy to leave my elderly parents behind to pursue doctoral studies in the U.S. Even so, they rejoiced in my decision and never once made me feel burdened. They always said, “Don't worry about us, and just focus on your work,” and for that, I am deeply grateful.

Likewise, I would like to express heartfelt thanks to my parents-in-law, Youngsun Jeon and Hoin Kim, who have always supported me with generous love and encouragement. When my daughter, Esol, was born in the U.S. during my second year of the doctoral program, and when I stayed in South Korea, they lovingly took care of her so that I could concentrate on my work. Their care, support, and prayers helped me complete this doctoral journey with strength and peace.

I am profoundly grateful to my wife, Gain, whose unwavering love and support have never failed me. Without her love, dedication, and wisdom, this doctorate would have remained an impossible dream. Taking a leave of absence from her teaching career in South Korea to follow me to the U.S. must have been the biggest decision of her life—second only to marrying me. She lovingly cared for Esol when I was overwhelmed with work. I am deeply thankful—and also sorry—for her sacrifices and resolve. And to my daughter, Esol, you have been the wellspring of joy and happiness in my life. Your smiles and glances have given me strength to carry on, and your very presence has brought me comfort and peace. I always love you, my dearest Esol.

Above all, I give thanks to the Lord for His faithful guidance, grace, and provision throughout my doctoral journey.

Abstract

Curriculum studies provides a wide range of tools for conceptualizing, critiquing, and transforming educational ways of knowing, being, and doing, which are related to students' and teachers' identities and subjectivities (Gershon & Helfenbein, 2023; Pinar, 2019). In the era of globalization, transnational curriculum studies has emerged as a response to the global flows of cultures, ideas, and identities, reshaping how curriculum, pedagogy, and educational identities are conceptualized. It explores how local educational spaces both reflect and resist global influences, engaging with postcolonial, decolonizing discourse, highlighting the unequal flows of power and knowledge across borders and their impact on curriculum theories and practices (Durand & Asher, 2023; Miller, 2006; Moon, 2021).

Curriculum studies in South Korea has tended to draw on Western knowledge and theories from the U.S. with American curriculum studies regarded as the most influential point of reference for engaging in curriculum studies, which can be seen as part of (neo-)colonial context marked by U.S. hegemony (D. Kim, 2024; Y. C. Kim, 2010). The transnational flows of power and knowledge from the U.S. to South Korea have been intertwined with my experiences and identity constructions as a student, an educator, a citizen, and a graduate student in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S. Against this background, I address this critical issue by investigating three research questions throughout this dissertation: (1) In what ways are my identities—as a student, an educator, and a graduate student—(re)constructed at the intersections of power relations between South Korea and the U.S., curriculum studies, and postcolonialism within and across South Korea and the U.S.?; (2) In what ways is postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies relevant and significant to me as an educator and a curriculum researcher within and across South Korea and the U.S.?; and (3)

What possibilities and limitations do I encounter, engage with, and challenge in relation to postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies within and across South Korea and the U.S.? And how does this research project, in turn, inform transnational curriculum studies?

To answer these research questions, I use an autobiographical narrative inquiry to explore my own experiences regarding curriculum and curriculum studies across South Korea and the U.S. I also engage in this autobiographical research, thinking with Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory about cultural hybridity and cultural translation and Chen's (2010) idea of Asia as method to investigate my local, global, and transnational experiences from the perspectives of postcolonialism and decolonization.

In the findings, I narrate my lived experiences in relation to (neo-)colonialism and postcolonial, decolonizing possibilities, focusing on the following themes: challenges and questions on ambivalent identities as a student in South Korea; questions of race, ethnicity, and gender across South Korea and the U.S.; engagement with curriculum, curriculum questions, and curriculum studies in a transnational context; and the politics of colonial/postcolonial: decolonizing in and through curriculum studies.

Based on these findings, I discuss transnational entanglements of multicultural education and curriculum studies from the perspective of transnational Whiteness as an onto-epistemological influence. In addition, I attempt to revisit curriculum studies in transnational contexts as transcultural conversations towards disrupting the unequal flows of power and knowledge and creating new possibilities for epistemic justice. I also suggest postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing as inquiry to this end along with some implications for curriculum and instruction and for lines of future research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Wherever the researcher comes from and plans to go, they are certainly ‘framed’ in complex global geographies of power/knowledge” (Kenway & Fahey, 2009, p. 30).

Curriculum matters because it is not just about the politics of inclusion and exclusion of academic contents, but also about what teachers and students experience in their educational lives and their constructions of identities and subjectivities regarding ways of being, knowing, and doing. In this regard, curriculum studies offers “robust, wide-ranging tools for the conceptualization, construction, and critique of educational ways of beingknowingdoing” (Gershon & Helfenbein, 2023, p. 264). That is to say, curriculum is a key site in which students’ and teachers’ identities and cultural imaginaries are produced, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed (Lin, 2012; Pinar, 2019). And the same holds true for the field of curriculum studies regarding curriculum scholars’ identities, ways of being, knowing, and doing, and locations in relation to the present-day local, national, and global contexts.

As the dynamics of the local and the global has come into play with/in transnational flows and mobilities of cultures, ideas, bodies, and identities, curriculum studies has become transnational in terms of curriculum conceptualizations, pedagogical practices, and identity constructions of students, teachers, and scholars, which has made transnational curriculum studies burgeoning in curriculum theorizing. Curriculum studies in transnational contexts is concerned with how local educational spaces not just reflect, but also counter global educational trends and issues, including the entanglements of local, national, transnational, and global influences in education (Asher & Kolb, 2015). As the intersections of and the tensions between

these influences with regard to race, culture, and nation inform curriculum, pedagogy, and educational research, curriculum inquiry in local, national, and global contexts necessarily means engaging with discourses of postcolonialism, decolonization, and globalization (Durand & Asher, 2023). Transnational curriculum studies, thus, is about curriculum knowledge production and distribution across local, national, and global contexts, directing our attention to asymmetrical flows of power and knowledge across nation-state borders and their discursive and material effects on curriculum, teaching, and identities (Gough, 2004; Miller, 2006; Moon, 2021). Furthermore, as a postcolonial, decolonizing project, transnational curriculum studies seeks to decenter the West as the unquestioned frame of reference in curriculum studies and to cultivate new possibilities for engaging in collective exchange and creating a third space beyond the universalized, coherent notions of self/other, West/non-West, and White/of color, while centering the educational experiences and ways of thinking, knowing, and being of marginalized groups of people (Gough, 2023; Wang & Flory, 2021).

In this context, self-reflexive autobiographical inquiry has been suggested as one form of transnational curriculum theorizing. Miller (2014) says that it encourages us to grapple with the effects of essentialized, unitary, and standardized modes of curriculum, pedagogy, and educational research on our lived experiences and identities as students, teachers, and scholars by making it possible to interrupt, challenge, reify, and mandate our multiple, contradictory, and shifting educational 'selves'. Against this background, this dissertation research is designed to explore my lived experiences and identity constructions as a student, an educator, a graduate student in curriculum studies, and a citizen in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies based in the U.S. in relation to transnational flows and mobilities. As Wang (2006) suggests, self-reflexive autobiographical research in curriculum studies can

contribute to making a difference in the field of curriculum inquiry through unpacking and unsettling the personal because self-transformation can be made through engaging in societal reform and global change.

Statement of the Problem

Knowledge production and circulation in East Asia¹ in the present times has depended on the West, particularly the U.S., as the frame of reference for East Asia to measure itself or as the goal that it desires for (Chen, 2010). This can be understood as a legacy of Western-centric (neo-)colonialism in the modern history of East Asia including South Korea. As regards the specific context of the (neo-)colonial legacy in South Korea, there has also been the complication of different, but continued (neo-)colonialism since the early twentieth century: Japanese colonialism from 1910 to 1945; the rule of the U.S. military government from 1945 to 1948; and the U.S. political, economic, cultural, military, and academic hegemony since the Cold War era. Given this South Korean context, Watson (2007) sharply states about the remaining legacy of (neo-)colonialism within South Korean society.

The fact that Japanese colonialism was over ... at the hands of the Allied forces has only clouded the project of resistance to neocolonialism. Korea's relative economic success in a U.S.-led globalized economy has made it increasingly difficult to challenge those Western discourses of enlightenment and evolutionary modernity first utilized by Japan, or to 'disorganize' colonial hierarchies both within the state ... without (p. 186).

¹ In *Asia as method* (Chen, 2010), which is a book that provides a theoretical framework in this dissertation research, the term, East Asia, is used to embrace Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China. However, given that those countries have different histories of colonizing and/or being colonized within the East Asian context, I agree with Y. Lee's (2019) statement that "[East] Asians or each of the [East] Asian countries continue to undergo the process of being deconstructed and reconstructed, as multiple histories constitute the word '[East] Asia'" (p. 967). It means that East Asia itself should be conceived as an ongoing (re)construction based on the consideration of multiple, different historical contexts of each country in East Asia.

Japanese colonialism was replaced with the teleological mission of modernization privileging the U.S. as the representation of advancement and the neo-colonial master.

In this sociohistorical context, curriculum studies in South Korea has tended to draw on Western knowledge and theories from the U.S. According to Y. C. Kim (2005), the culture of importation—the uncritical acceptance of U.S. curriculum studies as major sources for educational discourses and practices—has been prevailing in South Korean curriculum studies, which has produced and circulated a myth that engaging in curriculum studies means studying American curriculum knowledge and theories. Moreover, I suggest elsewhere that comparative curriculum inquiry in South Korea has been oriented towards Western curriculum knowledge particularly from the U.S. due to its geohistorical and (neo-)colonial context marked by U.S. hegemony across the world (D. Kim, 2024). That is to say, the U.S. has served as the most influential point of reference for curriculum development, curriculum understanding, curriculum theorizing, and even critiques of national curriculum, curriculum policies, and curriculum practices in South Korea.

The transnational flows of power and knowledge from the U.S. to South Korea have been intertwined with my experiences, identities, and journey of life as a student, a teacher, a citizen, and a graduate student in South Korea and the U.S. Therefore, in this dissertation research, *“Curricular Interstices between South Korea and the U.S.: An Autobiographical Inquiry into Decolonizing Transnational Curriculum Studies,”* I take up postcolonial, decolonial perspectives on my autobiographical, lived experiences with education in general and curriculum studies in particular in relation to the transnational context across South Korea and the U.S. It enables me to get a more nuanced, embodied, and contextualized understanding of how I have been influenced by and involved in (de)colonizing curriculum studies as an educator and an

international doctoral student in curriculum studies currently based in the U.S. in relation to the transnational flows and mobilities between South Korea and the U.S.

Research Questions

Drawing on the field of curriculum studies in transnational contexts, I take up the following research questions related to the formation of identities and subjectivities:

1. In what ways are my identities—as a student, an educator, and a graduate student—(re)constructed at the intersections of power relations between South Korea and the U.S., curriculum studies, and postcolonialism within and across South Korea and the U.S.?
2. In what ways is postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies relevant and significant to me as an educator and a curriculum researcher within and across South Korea and the U.S.?
3. What possibilities and limitations do I encounter, engage with, and challenge in relation to postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies within and across South Korea and the U.S.? And how does this research project, in turn, inform transnational curriculum studies?

Centering on the above three research questions, I engage in this critical self-reflexive autobiographical inquiry into my lived experiences and identity constructions in relation to the transnational flows and mobilities of power and knowledge between South Korea and the U.S. with which I have been (un)knowingly enmeshed as a student, an elementary school teacher, a graduate student, and a citizen in South Korea and an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S. In what follows, I provide a brief explanation on theoretical frameworks with which I conduct this dissertation research.

Theoretical Frameworks

In answering the research questions, I relate myself to the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial, decolonial theories alongside the partial utilization of poststructuralist perspectives, which do not operate independently, but are connected to each other throughout this study. In this self-reflexive autobiographical inquiry, which is about my lived experiences and identity formations, I utilize poststructuralist perspectives just as one kind of intellectual resources in order to conceive identities as socially, historically, and discursively constructed within a specific social, cultural, political, and historical context (Butler, 2004; Davies, 1991; Strega, 2015).

In poststructuralist thinking, language matters. Language does not mirror or reflect social realities, but produces, reproduces, and transforms meanings, identities, and social realities (Fairclough, 1995; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). In addition, language is not fixed or static, but is competing discourses, and discourse is that which consists of written or spoken words configured according to certain rules set by power relations in a specific context, which defines and controls what we can think and say (Foucault, 1979, 1980). In this sense, Richardson and St. Pierre (2017) view language as “how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where one’s sense of self—one’s subjectivity—is constructed” (p. 820), which means that language constructs one’s identities in socially and contextually specific ways.

Seeing writing as a method of inquiry through the lens of poststructuralism, Richardson and St. Pierre (2017) highlight:

Specifically, poststructuralism suggests two important ideas to qualitative writers. First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions

at specific times. Second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said at once to everyone. ... writing is validated as a method of knowing (p. 821).

In line with writing as a method of inquiry, I assume autobiographical writing as a method of knowing and practicing, which can lead to postcolonial, decolonial praxis. I also acknowledge the risk of privileging the individual 'I' as a postcolonial, decolonizing subject. In this regard, poststructural perspectives can be useful in reducing the risk in this autobiographical research through a deconstructive practice that dismantles binary forms of reasoning and positions my experiences and identities as questionable, incomplete, and unfinished without dismissing the constitutive forces of social, cultural, historical, and geographical contexts (Gannon, 2006; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Shim, 2011).

What frames the collection, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative materials in this study are Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory and Kuan Hsing Chen's postcolonial and decolonial theory. Bhabha's theory is about the complexities of cultures and identities embedded within colonial discourses, pushing the boundaries of fixed, static, and universalized notions of self/other, West/non-West, and colonizer/colonized. Bhabha (1994) emphasizes that the "meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" due to their "discursive conditions of enunciation" (p. 55). In other words, cultural meanings and symbols are contextually created and situated in a particular sociopolitical, economic, and historical location. Because of its situatedness and foreign elements, any cultural meaning cannot be fully translated into another culture and language, which opens up a hybrid, in-between space where the predetermined, naturalized, and monolithic discourses of culture, nation, and identity are disrupted through cultural translation (Bhabha, 1994). In this sense, "culture, identities, and experiences are always in the process of interpretation through discursive practices and

reconstructions” (Moon, 2022, p. 32). Therefore, cultural translation is to challenge the universal concepts of culture and identity, promoting openness, hybridity, fluidity, and inclusion.

Theorizing transnational curriculum studies based on Bhabha’s idea of cultural translation, Moon (2022) says that “the notions of knowledge, curriculum, and internationalization, for example, move beyond transferring one “final” meaning between cultures/nation-states to challenging the boundaries of universalized meanings by hypothesizing emergent, myriad ways of knowing” (p. 32). Following this line of thought, I draw on Bhabha’s postcolonial theory in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the qualitative materials related to my lived experiences with multiple identities and cultures.

I also draw on Chen’s notion of *Asia as method* as the other theoretical resource, which is specific to East Asian contexts and their relationship with the U.S. Chen (2010) critiques the historical and contemporary Western-centric structure of knowledge production and circulation in East Asia. According to Chen (2010), the flows of knowledge from the West as the point of reference to East Asia as the other have inscribed the structural flow of desire towards the West, particularly the U.S., into the minds of East Asian people in terms of their subjectivities and identification. In this context, Chen (2010) suggests Asia as method as an ontological and epistemological orientation towards challenging the sociopolitical, cultural, and psychological impacts of obsession with the West on knowledge production and dissemination, cultural imaginary, and identity formation in East Asia. Thus, Asia as method is to transform East Asian ways of knowing, being, and relating to the West and even themselves within the power relations between the West, the U.S. in particular, and East Asia. In this sense, I turn to the theory of Asia as method alongside Bhabha’s postcolonial thinking mentioned above when analyzing and

interpreting the qualitative materials regarding my transnational identities and cultures across South Korea and the U.S. and power relations between the two countries.

The theoretical frameworks provide different foci in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the qualitative materials, yet they are complementarily and interactively connected to each other when I generate my own narratives on my lived experiences, identities, and their constructions. The theoretical lenses are not just epistemological resources for me to conduct this autobiographical inquiry and to draw implications for the field of curriculum studies, but also an ontological orientation towards decolonizing myself as a postcolonial subject from the onto-epistemological legacy of (neo-)colonialism. Therefore, the theoretical frameworks should be understood as deeply intertwined with the autobiographical subject's past, present, and future lives and dynamics.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters, including this introductory chapter. Following this chapter, chapter 2 addresses the existing literature on a historical and contemporary landscape of South Korean curriculum studies, critical multiculturalism and multicultural education, postcolonial and decolonial theories about culture, identity, and subjectivity, postcolonial and decolonizing curriculum studies, and transnational curriculum studies. In this literature review, it is necessary in the beginning to review the historical context of curriculum studies in South Korea regarding its relationship with American curriculum studies, which is explanatory of the location of where I was from. And then I review the significance and limitations of critical multiculturalism and multicultural education in terms of identity politics, followed by postcolonial theories, focusing especially on Homi Bhabha's ideas of cultural translation, cultural difference, and hybridity and in-betweenness and Kuan-Hsing Chen's theory

of Asia as method about the flows of power and knowledge from the West, particularly the U.S. to East Asian countries, and related preceding research on postcolonialism. I also discuss a terrain of postcolonial, decolonial curriculum studies and transnational curriculum studies that has centered on self-reflexivity.

In chapter 3, I describe a methodology and methods to which I relate myself as an autobiographical subject for this dissertation research. This chapter begins by exploring the broad description of assumptions, guidelines, and logic of a poststructurally informed autobiographical methodology. Based on these philosophical and methodological considerations, I delineate research methods for collecting and analyzing qualitative materials and for engendering my autobiographical narratives. As the three levels of philosophy, methodology, and methods are deeply interlaced with each other, each section of this chapter should be read not separately or linearly, but interactively and synthetically.

Chapter 4 is composed of my autobiographical narratives of local and global lived experiences and identity formations as a student, an educator, and a graduate student in curriculum studies in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies at a university in the U.S. The first story is about my lived experience with schooling as a student in South Korea, focusing on the aspects of multiculturalism and globalization; the second section narrates my stories of becoming a teacher in South Korea, ranging from the period of my teacher education to that of working as a teacher, in relation to multiculturalism and understanding curriculum; the third section is about my academic lives as a graduate student in curriculum studies in a master's program in South Korea; and in the last section, I tell the stories of my transnational experiences as an international doctoral student in the U.S., revolving around the narratives of working through multiple binaries and engaging in curriculum studies in local and

global contexts. This chapter seems linear and developmental, yet I traverse different locales, places, and times in each of the sections when a specific memory conjures up (an)other memories across different temporal and spatial contexts in storying and restorying my narratives.

In chapter 5, I discuss the implications of this study for postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies not just in the context of the relationship between South Korea and the U.S. in particular and between the West and the East in general, but also in working through the dichotomous categorizations of majority/minorities, the West/the East, and White/of color, in terms of postcolonial, decolonizing (autobiographical) writing as curriculum inquiry. This can be significant in cultivating new possibilities for decolonial ways of knowing and being in and through postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies. Additionally, I suggest other implications for teacher education and future research in the era of transnationalism. After that, I conclude this dissertation research by stating the significance and limitations of this study.

Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature

As the first step towards answering the research questions of this study mentioned in the introduction, I situate and contextualize the research questions into the theoretical grounds of transnational, postcolonial curriculum studies. For this, in this chapter, I review South Korean curriculum studies, multiculturalism and multicultural education in South Korea, critical multiculturalism and multicultural education, and postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies for provoking my thoughts about: 1) the relevance of critical multiculturalism and postcolonial curriculum studies in transnational contexts; and 2) the relevance of autobiographical inquiry for such critical theoretical and practical work as postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies.

To address these points, in the first section, I start with reviewing the historical context of the (re)formation of and shifts in South Korean curriculum studies in relation to the flows of curriculum theories and knowledge from the U.S. to South Korea, which is helpful in situating myself into transnational curriculum studies across South Korea and the U.S. The second section discusses key arguments of critical multiculturalism and multicultural education, followed by critiques of them that open the door for postcolonial theories to intervene in multicultural and transnational contexts of education and curriculum. In the third section, I take up postcolonial theories, specifically working with: 1) Homi Bhabha's concepts of cultural translation, cultural difference, and hybridity informed by poststructuralism; and 2) Kuan-Hsing Chen's idea of *Asia as method* grounded in the geocolonial historical relations of the West, particularly the U.S., and East Asia. And then, I look into postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies and transnational curriculum studies respectively, drawing on such critical scholars as Nina Asher, Cameron McCarthy, Janet Miller, and Seungho Moon, to name a few. In the final section, I discuss the relevance of critical self-reflexive autobiographical research for postcolonial and transnational

curriculum studies, situating myself into multiple subjective locations as a student, a teacher, and a citizen in South Korea and an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S., which is to set the stage for getting engaged in postcolonial and transnational curriculum studies through an autobiographically informed theorizing.

A Historical Context of Curriculum Studies in South Korea

As mentioned in the introduction, the U.S. has in large part historically influenced not just South Korean academia, but also South Korean culture, economy, and politics on the whole. Given the local and global contexts, in this section, I explore a brief history of South Korean curriculum studies in relation to American curriculum theories and knowledge in order to situate this study into the historical context of the power relations between South Korea and the U.S.

After the two atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan in 1945, Japan unconditionally surrendered to the U.S.-led allied forces, and Korea was officially liberated from Japanese colonization. Yet, Korea was not fully independent due to the Potsdam Declaration that decided that the southern part of Korea would be under the trusteeship of the U.S. and the northern part would be under that of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the U.S. military government controlled the southern territory of Korea for three years (1945-1948) until the establishment of the South Korean government in 1948 (Y. Lee, 2003; Moon, 2022).

During the three years of the U.S. military government period, the education system of South Korea was modernized by the military government. For instance, the 6-3-3-4 system, a six-year program for elementary school followed by three years of middle school, three years of high school, and four years of college, was modeled after the American educational system. Japanese language classes were replaced with Korean, and English language classes newly appeared in secondary schools. In this period, the American Educational Mission introduced

Deweyan progressivism, including the ideas of democracy, democratic education, and experience-centered curriculum, as a means to help implement a democratic political system in South Korea (Y. Lee, 2003; S. Park, 2017).

At that time, it was the case that pro-American intellectuals who had studied in the U.S. and could speak English collaborated with the U.S. military government and were highly influential in deciding educational policies (Y. Lee, 2003). One of the most influential intellectuals in education was Cheon-seok Oh (1901-1987), who obtained his doctorate in 1931 from Teachers College, Columbia University under the guidance of John Dewey and William Kilpatrick. He was selected by the U.S. military government and played an active role in establishing the South Korean system of education, while making an effort to introduce and enroot experience-centered curriculum for democracy in and through education in South Korea (Park & Kim, 2025).

The Republic of Korea, called South Korea, was established on July 17, 1948. However, the Korean War broke out in 1950 only two years after the new democratic government was founded. The war was stopped by a truce agreement between the United Nations and North Korea in 1953, and the two Koreas are still hostile towards each other. In the 1950's and early 1960's, the American Educational Mission to Korea was dispatched to South Korea in order to help reconstruct its education from the ashes of the Korean War. The third American Educational Mission to Korea, which stayed in South Korea from September 1945 to June 1955, published the *Curriculum Handbook for the School of Korea* under the auspices of the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency and the American-Korean Foundation. The handbook was about how to construct and implement experience-centered curriculum for South Korean students, teachers, and educational administrators, and it partly influenced the development of South

Korea's national curriculum because curriculum still meant the organization of subjects and other school activities (Y. Lee, 2003; S. Park, 2016).

Since then, South Korean curriculum studies has been continuously influenced by U.S. curriculum studies. One of the most renowned first-generation curriculum scholars in South Korea, Beom-mo Chung (1925-2022), was a former advisee of Ralph Tyler at the University of Chicago. Chung (1956) published *Curriculum*, a book based on Tyler's (1949) work, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. The book was highly influential among educational researchers and administrators in South Korea, and his students and followers became university professors and promoted Tyler's rationale for South Korean curriculum studies in the 1960s and 1970s (Y. C. Kim, 2010; Park & Kim, 2025). Moreover, Benjamin Bloom's (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* was translated into Korean in 1966, and Robert Mager's (1962) *Preparing Instructional Objectives* was in 1972. These books gained popularity among teachers and educators, and curriculum was regarded as "the means to an end extrinsically imposed, whether it was economic growth of the country or the growth of students' mental ability" (Y. Lee, 2003, p. 547). In the 1970s, Jerome Bruner's theory of the structure of knowledge was introduced and fully accepted with the translation of Bruner's book, *The Process of Education*, into Korean by Hong-woo Lee (1939-) who got a doctorate from Teachers College, Columbia University. Bruner's theories of the structure of discipline and the spiral curriculum were highly influential in the processes of reforming the South Korean national curriculum into discipline-centered curriculum in the 1970s, through which all the subjects were organized into the form of spiral curriculum in order to promote students' understanding of how concepts evolve within a certain discipline (Y. Lee, 2003).

In the 1980s, carrying on the tradition of curriculum development and research on instructional theories, non-Tylerian discourses about curriculum from the U.S. were introduced into South Korea. South Korean curriculum scholars who studied in the U.S. and Europe returned and disseminated the sociology of school curriculum, translating some of Michael Apple's books into Korean. It was from the late 1980s that William Pinar's idea of curriculum reconceptualization, "a shift in the field's fundamental mission from curriculum development to understanding curriculum" (Pinar et al., 1995, pp. 186-187), was introduced, taught, learned, circulated, and researched as an alternative way of understanding South Korean school curriculum and then as an influential "new" curriculum knowledge in South Korea, which was little wonder given that South Korean curriculum studies has been deeply influenced by shifts in American curriculum studies (Y. Lee, 2003; Y. C. Kim, 2010). The movement of curriculum reconceptualization has become trendy among some South Korean curriculum scholars since the introduction of the new curriculum knowledge from the U.S., and it was natural for them to translate Western texts into Korean. American education and curriculum scholars of books translated into Korean from the 1980s to the 2000s include, but are not limited to Apple, Bowles and Gintis, Giroux, Cherryhomes, Clandinin and Connelly, Eisner, Doll, Pinar, hooks, Kincheloe, and Van Manen, to list some (Y. C. Kim, 2010). According to Y. C. Kim (2010), the act of accepting and translating Western curriculum knowledge contributed to the accumulation and expansion of curriculum studies in South Korea, thereby leading to the (re)formation of the new South Korean curriculum studies alongside the American ideas of curriculum reconceptualization in terms of: a more diverse and complicated understanding of curriculum; qualitative research methodologies such as narrative inquiry, autobiographical inquiry, and phenomenological inquiry; and context-specific research on curriculum practice.

As discourses of post-isms such as postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and posthumanism have been introduced into Western curriculum studies, some South Korean curriculum scholars have accepted and introduced this ‘new’ trend of Western curriculum knowledge that cannot be fully subsumed under the umbrella of the ‘existing’ reconceptualist curriculum theories (So et al., 2019). In the U.S., there have been efforts for curriculum researchers to newly approach and reinterpret curriculum reconceptualists’ interests in understanding curriculum, informed by such critical theoretical lenses as postcolonialism and posthumanism, which is called “post-reconceptualization” (Malewski, 2010) as an extension of the reconceptualization of curriculum. In this context, some South Korean curriculum scholars have introduced the post-reconceptualist discourses of curriculum as a stimulus for curriculum researchers in South Korea to diversify and enrich South Korean curriculum studies and to engage in more complicated conversations about curriculum in local and global contexts (So, 2024; So et al., 2019).

However, despite these significant shifts in curriculum studies, research on curriculum development has still been thriving in South Korea due to the existence of the schooling system in general and of the national curriculum system in South Korea in particular (Y. C. Kim, 2010; So, 2024). The national curriculum and its reforms interlinked with governmental curriculum policies have been the rationale for comparative curriculum inquiry in South Korea. According to So (2017), most of the comparative research in the field of curriculum studies from 1995 to 2016 made a comparison with the U.S. and Japan, followed by the U.K., France, Germany, Australia, and Canada among other countries, which is direct evidence of a strong academic interest in Western scholarship in curriculum development and the coloniality of knowledge production and circulation in curriculum development alongside the shifts in curriculum theory informed by American curriculum studies mentioned earlier in this section (D. Kim, 2024).

Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education in South Korea

Along with the historical context of South Korean curriculum studies explored above, it deserves here to take a brief look at multiculturalism and multicultural education in South Korea because we can find out, to some extent, the historical formation of Western-centeredness entwined with nationalism within the context of South Korea through exploring South Korean multiculturalism and its influence on K-12 education (i.e., multicultural education).

South Korean Multiculturalism: Nationalism and Internal Orientalism behind Diversity

South Korea used to be deemed as a racially, ethnically, and culturally homogeneous nation with one spoken language, which is the myth of single ethnicity that has been socially, historically, and discursively constructed and imagined alongside the notions of unity and solidarity (Jo & Jung, 2017). For South Koreans, being mono-culture, mono-ethnic, and mono-lingual has been an overarching source of South Korean national identity, “Korean-ness,” pride, and togetherness. This exclusive nationalism was developed and justified for the purpose of re-establishing the nation-state after Japanese colonization and the division of the Korean peninsula (Choe, 2006).

During the period of Japanese colonization (1910-1945), Koreans were banned from speaking their language and learning their own history, being forced to relinquish their ethnic identity. Under this harsh circumstance of Japanese colonization, Koreans struggled to obtain independence from their colonizer, Japan, while developing their sense of unity and collectivism, which is what W. S. Kim (2006) calls “resistant nationalism” that all Koreans must remain in solidarity to protect their territory and cultural heritage from external threats. Shortly after the liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided into South Korea and North Korea, which were in control of the U.S. and the Soviet Union respectively. In

1948, two Koreas established their own government respectively, and two years later, in 1950, the Korean War broke out as the communist North Korea invaded South Korea. Emerging from the ashes of the war, nationalistic sentiment became much more pervasive among South Koreans as they came to think that they should pull together to rebuild the war-torn nation and make it rich and powerful against the hostile, communist North Korea (Hong & Min, 2013). In addition, during the Cold War era, the authoritarian military regime in South Korea capitalized on the nationalistic sentiment among the public in the name of anti-communism and economic development to justify, depend, and sustain their oppressive rules (Yoon, 2007). Nationalism in South Korea has functioned as an effective ideological tool for promoting social cohesion and achieving economic development, which has been part of the Korean pride (Hong & Min, 2013).

The long-held nationalistic and ethnocentric sentiment in South Korea, where historical, racial, and cultural homogeneity has been high, has been an obstacle to South Koreans' embracing foreigners and immigrants from different countries and cultures as members of South Korean society, which has made it difficult to realize equal treatment and respect for them (Hong & Halvorsen, 2014; Watson, 2010). In this context, such terms as diversity, difference, and heterogeneity have been underrated to some degree in the sociocultural lexicon of South Korea for a long time (Jo & Jung, 2017). However, due to the influx of foreign workers and brides since the 1990s, South Korea has become a multicultural society in a short period of time, which has challenged South Koreans to accept diversity and difference against the existing notion of racial, ethnic, and cultural congruity among them (Jo & Jung, 2017; Kang, 2010).

Multiculturalism in South Korea arose from the economic necessity of a labor force, not from a fundamental question of how to establish multiculturalism in South Korea. As South Korea's economy has improved and its citizens have become better-educated and economically

prosperous, more and more South Koreans have shunned the so-called 3D (difficult, dirty, and dangerous) labor-intensive and low-paying manual jobs such as factory labor, cleaning, restaurant work, and agricultural work, intensifying South Korea's dependence on migrant workers who mostly come from China, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines to fill the gap in the labor force (Lim, 2010; Olneck, 2011). And the number of migrant workers in South Korea has been steadily increasing, leading to greater ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.

Another significant group of non-ethnic residents in South Korea are marriage migrant women mostly from other Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, and the Philippines married to South Korean men in urban and rural areas, which is a type of hypergamy in a global context where women from underdeveloped or developing countries migrate to get married to men in richer countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (Hong & Min, 2013; A. E. Kim, 2009). Given the imbalance of the male-to-female ratio and the increasing number of single women avoiding marriage, it is likely that South Korea will keep facing a lack of South Korean-born brides and an increase in interethnic and interracial marriages particularly in the cases of South Korean men who have less prestigious jobs in urban and rural areas (Chang, 2017). In this context, as the number of multicultural families² in South Korea has been increasing, the number of bi-ethnic and bi-racial children from these families has been growing as well, expanding cultural and ethnic diversity in South Korea.

² The term, "multicultural family," in South Korea generally means a family consisting of members of different ethnicities, races, or cultures than ethnic South Koreans, and it includes the three categories of minority groups: families of foreigners, interethnic marriage families, and families who are North Korean refugees (Chang, 2017). Chang (2017) problematizes the distinctive use of the term because it can bring about "prejudice and discrimination by drawing a line between migrants and mainstream citizens, suggesting that children are distinguished according to their parents' countries of birth" (p. 177).

More notable regarding South Korean multiculturalism is a differentiated attitude towards foreigners and/or immigrants that has been prevalent among South Koreans. Kang (2010) problematizes the “dual ethnic bias” with the tendency to idealize Western cultures and societies, but, on the other hand, to disparage people from so-called underdeveloped, non-Western countries. In terms of internalized racism in South Korea, Kim and Jeon (2017) acerbically criticize that South Korean racists are overly friendly to White-skinned American and European immigrants and foreigners, which comes from a globalized assumption of White supremacy along with inferior complex and obsessive identification with the White-skinned. Kim and Jeon (2017) add that “there is a strong tendency for [South] Koreans to prefer the white-skinned foreigners who come from economically developed countries. ... This kind of racial discrimination based on the gross domestic product (GDP) is a so-called ‘GDP discrimination’” (p. 182-183). According to Hong and Min (2013), this differentiated treatment towards foreigners and/or immigrants is closely intertwined with nationalism as the belief that South Korea should follow the Western model to be modernized and achieve national prosperity was intensified after its liberation from Japanese colonial rule. In particular, as South Korea was under the regime of the interim U.S. military government (1945-1948) and it accepted U.S. political, social, and educational systems during that period, South Koreans, as a result, have regarded the U.S. and the West more broadly as representative of advancement and superiority and positioned themselves between the West and other Asian countries, distancing themselves from other Asian countries while at the same time desiring to be accepted by the West (Hong & Min, 2013). In this context, there has been a tendency for South Koreans to think of foreigners and/or immigrants from underdeveloped or developing non-Western countries when referring to “minorities” in their society (Hong & Min, 2013). Given this multicultural circumstance in South

Korea, J. K. Kim et al. (2018) conceptualize and contextualize “internal Orientalism” referring to “the condition and process of not only marginalizing and devaluing of minority cultures within a single nation state, but also enhancing the current hierarchical relationship between the minority and dominant cultures that naturalize the system of inequality” (p. 4-5). J. K. Kim et al. (2018) maintain regarding multiculturalism and related governmental policies in South Korea:

Even as the Korean society attempts to demonstrate an overwhelming sympathy towards migrant populations, doing so obliquely hardens the line between the citizen and ethnic minorities; renders weak subjectivity by identifying the ‘other’ as socially, economically and culturally ‘at-risk’ or vulnerable populations; and creates social-psychological opportunities for the Korean society to extend its benevolent hand as the owners and provider of cultural and material resources, thus solidifying the paternalistic relationship (p. 4).

That is to say, South Korean multiculturalism has reinforced the concept of migrants as the other in its approach, and ethnic minorities or non-Koreans have been seen as deviations from the South Korean cultural norm.

A Brief Look at South Korean Multicultural Education

In modern history in South Korea, schools played a significant role in inculcating the fabricated myth of cultural and ethnic homogeneity and the importance of national unity into the minds of future generations, as we can infer from the above literature review about South Korean multiculturalism (Hong, 2010; Hong & Min, 2013). However, due to the demographic and social changes stated above, multicultural education has received much attention from scholars, practitioners, and governmental officials since the South Korean government officially declared South Korean society as a multicultural society in 2006. Accordingly, the government has put

efforts into creating a social and educational system to accept and respect students from multicultural families as equal members of South Korea society with multicultural education policies and curriculum reforms.

As the number of students from multicultural families has increased from 109,387 in 2017 (1.91% of the total student population) to 181,178 in 2023 (3.5% of the total student population) (National Center for Multi-culture Education, 2024), national interests in multicultural education have expanded particularly in the recent national curriculum reforms to address not just race and ethnicity, but also gender, class, and religion. It means that the South Korean government has been looking for ways to respond to the social changes, while emphasizing multiculturalism as one significant aspect of K-12 education. There have been curricular attempts to reflect multiculturalism within the national curriculum (So et al., 2014). For example, statements related to the notion of cultural and ethnic homogeneity in the national curriculum and textbooks were phased out, and multicultural education has been addressed as a cross-curricular learning theme required to be taught across multiple subjects, and has also been reflected in the multiple subjects.

Despite these curricular changes, multicultural education policies and programs, which are led by the South Korean government in a top-down manner, are still largely based on assimilationist approaches with little emphasis on the experiences, cultures, and histories of racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities in South Korea (Jo & Jung, 2017; Kang, 2010; Kim & So, 2018). It means that South Korean multicultural education has been focused on supporting students from multicultural backgrounds to adapt to the mainstream culture in South Korea, which is a conservative perspective to maintain the existing power relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In such a circumstance, there have been some misconceptions of multicultural education

in South Korea. According to Chang (2017), South Korean multicultural education was confused with education for international understanding that introduces the cultures of other countries. And it was misunderstood as education only for racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities in South Korea due to the differentiated terms of multicultural education such as “educational support for minorities” and education for majority—ethnic South Korean students—as “education for multicultural understanding.”

The issue of “the politics of inclusion and exclusion” in multicultural education and related policies in South Korea has been raised. In particular, the term, “student from multicultural families” or “multicultural students,” is a socially constructed category, perpetuating the process of marginalizing the students in opposition to ethnic South Korean students (Grant & Ham, 2013; Jahng & Lee, 2013). J. Kim (2014) asserts that the direction of South Korean multicultural education can be bifurcated into two disparate trajectories: education for supporting multicultural students to adapt to South Korean society; and education for understanding diversity for the majority of students, which presumes asymmetrical power relations between students from multicultural families and unnamed ethnic South Korean students. As it implies that multicultural students should be educated to be legitimate members of South Korean society through multicultural education, the inclusion of multicultural students in multicultural education inevitably leads to the exclusion of them from the majority groups of students (Jahng & Lee, 2013; J. Kim, 2014).

As South Korea has acknowledged the significance of multiculturalism at the level of governmental policy by recognizing that global changes will shape the country’s current and future economic, social, and cultural strengths, multicultural education has been transformed to emphasize the potential competitiveness of multicultural students as international talents such as

bilingualism (Kim & Jeon, 2017; Watson, 2010). This change in multicultural education has led to the co-existence of multiple, conflicting approaches to multicultural education in the national curriculum and multicultural policies. For example, according to Kang (2021), it is of note that the recent national curriculum includes some aspects of critical multiculturalism³ that sheds light on the fluidity of cultural boundaries, the imperativeness of solidarity and cooperation, and students' participation in reducing inequalities and discrimination against minorities. However, conservative, essentialist, and neoliberal multicultural discourses⁴ are still prevalent along with pluralist multiculturalism which is most dominant in the national curriculum.

In a similar vein, S. Lee et al. (2023) problematize the uses of the term, “diversity,” in multicultural education policy documents published by the South Korean Ministry of Education from 2006 to 2020 from a poststructuralist perspective. According to their research, the three meanings of diversity demonstrate how to identify multicultural students in South Korea as objects of conditional acceptance: 1) diversity as an object to be domesticated and adapted to the South Korean mainstream society; 2) diversity as a productive and valuable resource that multicultural students (should) have and take advantage of in a global economy; and 3) diversity as ethnocultural differences of multicultural students that mainstream students should experience, learn, understand, and tolerate. Such dissonant co-existence of multiple, conflicting

³ Critical multiculturalism seeks to uncover the subtle and concealed processes of marginalization that favor dominant groups and hinder the progress of minorities, while supporting and collaborating with marginalized and subordinate groups of people (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

⁴ According to Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), conservative multiculturalism advocates for a monoculture centered around the dominant majority and views growing diversity as a threat to social harmony and stability. Essentialist multiculturalism considers cultural identity as a fixed concept, shaped by the inherent essence of each culture. And neoliberal multiculturalism is a revised form of conservative multiculturalism in response to a global market economy, which not just makes minorities' cultural, ethnic, and historical backgrounds invisible, but also positions them as individual economic subjects in a global economic competition. Last, pluralist multiculturalism emphasizes diversity over similarity, viewing diversity as inherently valuable and pursuing it for its own sake to the extent that differences are often exoticized and fetishized, failing to disrupt the structures of socioeconomic inequality and oppression.

discourses of multicultural education shows the ambivalence and conceptual and philosophical instability and/or fluidity of South Korean multiculturalism and multicultural education (Kang, 2021; S. Lee et al., 2023).

Critical Multiculturalism and Critical Multicultural Education

In this section, I discuss multiple conceptualizations of critical multiculturalism and critical multicultural education with consideration of their contextual backgrounds. After that, I situate critical multicultural education into the philosophical and theoretical realms of postmodernism and poststructuralism in terms of how multicultural education has been criticized by and engaged with postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives.

Conceptual and Contextual Grounding

Critical multiculturalism has ‘traditionally’ been conceptualized and taken up by critical education researchers worldwide in a similar manner that derives from critical pedagogy for social transformation through praxis with critical analysis and reflection on sociopolitical realities and critical actions to challenge social inequality and marginalization; that is to say, critical consciousness of institutionalized inequality (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2018; McLaren 2002). The concept of critical multiculturalism provides a framework through which to engage in a critical and structural investigation of power relations of differences that explicitly and implicitly privilege dominant groups who hold discriminatory and materialist power and of mechanisms through which minorities and their perspectives are marginalized and excluded, including but not necessarily limited to racism and ethnocentrism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010; Sloan et al., 2018). Therefore, the goal of critical multiculturalism is to dismantle the structures of oppression at all levels and empower marginalized peoples to take actions against social injustice and make their own voices heard, situating and framing culture

and identity within larger social contexts and asymmetrical power relationships (Giroux, 2018; Lea, 2010; Sloan et al., 2018; Smoke, 2013).

Critical multiculturalism has been focused more on two correlated threads of intersectionality. For one thing, it has been acknowledged that centering on just one single axis of inequities cannot adequately address the complex entanglements of social oppressions. In this sense, Asher (2007) interrogates the ways in which such intersecting forces as racism, heterosexism, capitalism, and essentialism operate to maintain the status quo by silencing and obliterating differences in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in the context of multicultural teacher education in the Deep South of the U.S. From the perspective of a Black and Latina feminist, Belle (2020) explores interlocking oppressions that Black females and Latinas have gone through in the U.S. Dei (2007) asserts that one can find all social oppressions intermeshed with one another by scrutinizing interlocking systems of oppressions. This critical and self-reflexive examination of the interrelatedness and intersectionality of oppressions can serve as a vehicle for people on the margins to take collective action to resist social injustice. Furthermore, all identities are intersectional, not based on just one single aspect (Collins & Bilge, 2020). In accordance with the intersectionality of identities, critical multiculturalism has been approached in more intricate, but dynamic ways that take into account the multilayered and non-monolithic nature of identities generated from the intersections of diverse cultural dimensions such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and so forth. In this regard, May and Sleeter (2010) frame culture and identity as “multilayered, fluid, complex, and encompassing multiple social categories, and at the same time as being continually reconstructed through participation in social situations” (p. 10). Integrating a critical awareness of the existing power structures and the intersectionality of oppressions and identities, May (2009) says:

A critical multicultural approach can thus foreground sociological understandings of identity — the multiple, complex strands and influences that make up who we *are* — alongside a critical analysis of the structural inequalities that still impact differentially on so many minority groups (p. 42, emphasis in original).

May (2015) elsewhere emphasizes discerning the ways in which multiple identities are enmeshed and, thus, are addressed simultaneously without the subordination of one aspect to the other in order to understand identity and oppression. This interdisciplinary conceptualization of critical multiculturalism allows for: a critical and cross-cultural engagement with challenging the entwined forms of social inequities; and a self-reflexive critique of who we are and how we could be implicated in the intersecting and interlocking systems of domination/oppression. Self-reflexivity pursues “an understanding of one’s own assumptions, privileges, and sources of oppression and also those of the individuals and communities with whom one is working” (Sloan et al., 2018, p. 112) through questioning one’s own histories and positionalities.

Echoing with the gists of critical multiculturalism, critical multicultural education is education for the promotion of social, racial, gender, and class equity with the creation of an empowering school environment and social structure wherein cultural and linguistic knowledges of minority students are equally respected through a radical curriculum, and students are both individually and collectively empowered to become active learners and citizens who question and try to disrupt the status quo (Banks, 2010; Freire, 1970; Grant & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2011). Particularly, due to its sociopolitically transformative distinctiveness, Nieto and Bode (2011) see critical multicultural education as “*a philosophy, a way of looking at the world*” (p. 50, emphasis in original) that should be pervasive in every corner of schooling including curriculum and physical and non-physical school environments, not merely a one-time program

or class which is by and large imbued with cultural relativism and cultural affirmation. It implies that critical multicultural education should be created through continued efforts to tackle the issues of power and (in)equality in and out of school. Therefore, critical multicultural education posits the importance of cultivating students' individual and collective agency and of considering curriculum and instruction within a larger sociopolitical, cultural, and historical context of discriminatory and exclusionary practices of schooling that have been taken for granted in everyday discourse (Liggett, 2011; McLaren, 1995; Vavrus, 2010).

Despite the circulation of the discourses of critical multicultural education in the fields of educational research and teacher education, it has been suggested that we are confronting the crisis of multicultural education in these neoliberal times. Au (2016) criticizes the current high-stakes, standardized testing as a racial project of neoliberal multiculturalism preoccupied with managing the influx of diversity for the purpose of optimizing human capital in the era of global capitalism, which results in silencing material inequalities, undermining multicultural education, and serving in the interest of White privilege. Giving attention to the discursive aspect of multiculturalism, Grant (2016) argues that neoliberal discourses (e.g., the languages of colorblindness and meritocracy) have depoliticized educational practices for promoting social justice and multicultural education by equating economic competitiveness with the common good, warning us that not all things that deal with race, class, gender, or tolerance are multicultural. In a similar vein, Bourassa (2021) problematizes the discourse of inclusion embedded within neoliberal multiculturalism in that the inclusion of some groups inevitably leads to the exclusion of others according to neoliberal values, suggesting a critical shift from a melioristic pluralism assuming that the inclusion of all knowledges is mutually beneficial to all to the politics of transfiguration that recognizes the non-neutrality of knowledge and dismantles

the coordinates of the dominant social order and epistemological norm, which resonates by and large with critical multicultural education. In view of the neoliberal ethos of vulnerability in which education may function primarily as “a production process of disposable, and therefore both competitive and vulnerable, subjects” (Brunila & Rossi, 2018, p. 288), critical multiculturalism has been increasingly relevant and redefined in multiple ways to regain and raise criticalness in and through education in the current troubled times.

Tensions and Contradictions within Critical Multicultural Education

Critical multicultural education founded on critical pedagogy has been criticized from postmodern, poststructuralist perspectives and extended to involve those perspectives in various forms. In general, one of the most often-quoted criticisms of critical pedagogy, which could hold true for critical multicultural education, is Ellsworth’s (1989) argument that the discourse of critical pedagogy is built on rationalist assumptions that teachers and students can and should engage one another as fully rational subjects, which is predicated on and made possible by the exclusion of socially constructed irrational others with no regard to the discursive formation of multiple, contradictory, partial, and fragmented subject positions. Accordingly, Ellsworth (1989) claims that poststructuralism has facilitated a deconstructive critique of the violence of rationalism against its others by focusing on how and under what condition the language use of rationalism as discursive practice has been constructed and operated in terms of the contextually-situatedness of discourses and the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Rattansi (1999) puts forward the notion of reflexive multiculturalism, while at the same time affirming a postmodern and poststructural frame that posits identities as “decentered, fragmented by contradictory discourses and by the pull of other identities” (p. 100) and its rejection to totalizing grand narratives. As May (1999) highlights the fluidity and undecidability

of identity formation along with related concepts of hybridity, creolization, and new ethnicities as a pivotal conception in critical multiculturalism, Rattansi (1999) asserts that reflexive multiculturalism should be concerned with hybrid identities, liminal spaces, and border cultures and spaces, which suggests that reflexive multicultural education is to enable students to engage with and uncover the discursive strategy of boundedness in terms of sociohistorically constructed cultures, identities, and subjectivities.

As one of the major discourses in multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching is defined as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (Gay, 2018, p. 29), assuming that racial and ethnic identity is the primary factor of cultural identity. In a similar, but further critical vein, Ladson-Billings (2021) suggests culturally relevant pedagogy as a pedagogical struggle to empower marginalized groups of students: ensuring all students’ academic achievement; developing their positive cultural identities; and promoting critical sociopolitical consciousness. The two concepts of multicultural education have contributed to generating pedagogy to meet diverse needs of students from different backgrounds and enhancing all students’ critical consciousness of racial and ethnic issues. Acknowledging these contributions, Moon (2011) revisits culturally responsive teaching, criticizing its rationale of integrating the cultural experiences and orientations of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds into teaching and learning from the perspectives of poststructuralist theories: Foucault’s notion of power through normalizing judgments that are made with bifurcated oppositions; and Butler’s concept of performativity that assumes identity as discursively and socially constructed through the reiterations of performative acts regulated by a set of social and cultural norms. According to Moon, culturally responsive teaching is oblivious to the power that

circulates through discourses in deciding what is considered normal or abnormal, rational or irrational, and proper or improper thoughts or behavior. On top of that, culturally responsive teaching does not take into consideration the dynamics of identities as performative acts controlled by prevailing discourses, which contains the seeds for their openness to unpredictable changes as “identities are performed in a complex and indeterminate structure that is fluid and contingent rather than immutable and stable (Moon, 2011, p. 97).

As can be seen in the literature above, poststructuralist theories have been utilized by education researchers who contest the normalizing/normalized and essentializing/essentialized notions of culture, identity, and subjectivity. Poststructuralist theories postulate that subjectivities—including one’s sense of oneself, one’s ways of understanding his or her relations to others and the world, and one’s (un)conscious emotions and desires—are socially, culturally, historically, and politically constituted and reconstituted in and through language and discourse each time one speaks or thinks, and subjectivities, therefore, can be deemed sites of both struggles and potential changes, rather than presupposing an unchanged, coherent essence inherent in the individual (Miller, 2010; Weedon, 1997). In particular, informed by poststructuralist theories in the context of globalization as unequal processes between the West and the non-West in terms of people, capital, resources, and knowledge, but as a blurring of traditional nation-state borders and prying open possibilities for new, hybrid transnational identities and cultural forms (Hall, 1996), postcolonial theories have drawn a good deal of attention from critical education scholars around the world who challenge any form of discursive binarism regarding culture and identity which is the outgrowth of colonialism and imperialism, and engage in both intellectual and emotional struggles as the seedbed for engendering new cultural identities.

Postcolonial Theories of Culture, Identity, and Subjectivity

Postcolonialism is a field of study that foregrounds the deep-seated colonial roots of many of the problems in these global, transnational times and deconstructs, as their aftermath, oppositional binaries between the colonizer and the colonized, between the West and the non-West, and between Whites and people of color in epistemological and ontological aspects (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Bhabha, 1994; Tikly & Bond, 2013). In particular, the concept of power/knowledge derived mainly from Foucault (1979) is of concern to many postcolonialist scholars, which is the relation of “colonization as a system of power and exploitation and colonization as a system of knowledge and representation which deeply affects the identity formation of the colonizer and the colonized” (Hickling-Hudson, 2010, p. 300). It is of importance to postcolonialist scholars that not only are forms of discourse constructed by power/knowledge, but also that the subject itself is a result of such relations of power/knowledge; that is to say, the subject is subjected and disciplined by the languages/discourses that allow the subject to perform as a recognizable agent (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1979; O’Leary, 2010). It implies that the power of language is at the same time the language of power embedded in categorizing the world and identities—the objectification of subjectivities (Chambers, 2014). For instance, Said (1978) criticizes how Western discourses of the East (i.e., Orientalism) have constructed and sustained the colonial relations between the West and the East in ways that situate the colonial subjectivities into the hierarchical categorization. And Bhabha (1994) attempts to disrupt that sort of colonial binarism through revealing inherent loopholes within the discourses themselves. Furthermore, against privileging a completely unitary self-identity, but not to the point of fully repudiating it (i.e., a temporary and provisional fixing of meaning), postcolonial theories are also in part informed by the notion of

deconstruction that challenges any foundational center from which binaries are created to grant a privilege to the first term of a binary as absolute presence and power, giving rise to continually reconstituting that which has been inscribed (Derrida, 2001; Miller, 2010). Postcolonial theories, hence, drive us to ponder over the complexities of cultures, identities, discourses/languages, and their interactions that mutually negotiate and relocate one another in the contexts of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism.

Against this backdrop, this section discusses Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory and its major concepts that extensively deal with the complexities of culture and identity and its entailing struggles with hybridity, influenced in part by Derrida's (2001) poststructural theory of deconstruction of binary thinking, which is embodied by his concept of *différance* referring to both difference and deferral of meaning leading to the continual engendering of new possibilities of meaning, culture, and identity. The section then delineates Kuan-Hsing Chen's (2010) idea of *Asia as method* as a postcolonial, decolonial approach in cultural studies particularly specific to East Asian contexts for melting away East Asian fixation on Western, particularly the U.S., knowledge and theories. And I make an attempt to (re)interpret Chen's postcolonial, decolonial theory with poststructuralist thinking in terms of cultures, identities, and subjectivities, while at the same time noting the criticism of poststructuralism that poststructuralist theories of the decentered subject may be the latest strategy of Western colonialism in that the theories came into fashion at the moment when the marginalized were struggling to make their own voices heard in the public in a politically collective way (Hartsock, 1987; Loomba, 2005).

Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory: Some Pivotal Concepts

In line with the poststructural critiques of a stable, coherent meaning of the (rational) subject who can liberate itself from constraints, Bhabha's postcolonial theory is about the

complexities and contradictions of colonial conditions, including colonial discourses informing the formation of the colonial subject, and about the revelation of inherent cracks and ruptures within the colonial discourses, producing new possibilities for transformation and resistance, along with such mutually connected concepts as cultural translation, cultural hybridity, Third Space, interstices, and cultural difference.

Cultural Translation and Cultural Hybridity in Third Space

Bhabha (1994) remarks that different cultures meet, clash, and open up in-between spaces that produce new cultural meanings, what Bhabha calls “Third Space” where people bring with them their own cultural practices, languages, and ways of thinking, knowing, and being, and encounter and interact with others, which necessarily involves cultural translation in one form or another (Bassnett, 2013). The Third Space is in-between spaces, interstices, where different cultures and identities contact and negotiate with one another and create possibilities of new cultural differences which never fall under any side of the existing dividing line between cultures and between identities in unpredictable, fluid ways. Bhabha (1994) suggests:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew (p. 55).

The meanings and symbols of cultures and identities are contextually and discursively constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in the space marked by hybridization, which moves beyond the limits of predetermined, fixed, stable, and universalized binarisms of the self/other and colonizer/colonized, and generates something different and a new space of negotiation of cultural meanings and representations (Bhabha, 1990, 1994).

In the Third Space, cultural translation is always taking place, as “the ‘original’ is never finished or completed in itself ... is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalized prior moment of being or meaning—an essence” (Bhabha, 1990; p. 210), which resonates with Walter Benjamin’s (2000) conceptualization of translation as “a somewhat *provisional* way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” (p. 76, emphasis added) away from the conventional notion of translation as a faithful reproduction of the original. According to Bassnett (2013), Bhabha demonstrates that cultural translation is ambivalent in that it occurs in a liminal space that does and does not belong to any of cultures that are contacting and conflicting with each other, opening up possibilities of articulating new cultural differences which can even be incommensurable and untranslatable. In this sense, Bhabha (1994) asserts that “cultural translation desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and ... demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation *within* minority positions” (p. 327, emphasis in original). That is to say, the taken-for-granted discourses of cultures and identities can be challenged through cultural translation; cultures and identities thus are always in the processes of translational (re)interpretation within a specific sociopolitical, cultural, and historical context.

Cultural translation in a liminal space unfolds “the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5). It points out that the Third Space has the potential to unsettle the presumed ‘essence’ or ‘original’ of the hegemonic culture, not only disrupting the binaries between the colonizer and the colonized, between the self and others, and between the West and the rest which are colonial discourses sustaining colonial power, but also constructing new forms of discourses, subjectivities, and identities. Cultural hybridity is not the third way for alleviating conflictual tensions between two

cultures, but an “ambivalent ‘turn’ of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification—a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 162), making room for marginalized knowledges to inform the dominant, colonial discourse and dismantle its authority and supremacy. In this light, Bhabha (1996) finds the possibility of emergent hybrid agency:

At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty (p. 58, emphasis in original).

The hybrid agency can emerge only when the limits and contradictions of colonial power and discourses are uncovered through negotiations between the dominant culture and minoritized cultures. In this sense, the interstitial agency is not a pre-existing one, but one that is performative in that “the subject is interpellated in action; there is no subject before or after but only *when s/he* becomes an agent” (Kapoor, 2003, p. 572). That is to say, the hybrid agency, like hybridization itself as a continued and open-ended process, not a closed category, is contingent and context-specific (Huddart, 2006). Bhabha (1990) thus makes the point that negotiation is not merely a sort of compromise, but transgression and subversion.

Bhabha’s notion of cultural hybridity involves the non-essentialist conceptualization of cultural identity and the politics of identity as well. According to Hall’s (1990) view of cultural identity, identity is “a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always

constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 222); that is, it has never a fixed essence, and is embedded within culture and history as concerned with ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’, which is “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (p. 225) in a specific context. In this vein, Shumar (2010) points out that identity may be flawed in a terminological sense from Bhabha’s postcolonial perspective due to its tinge of fixity, inspiring us to pay careful attention to the processes of hybridization. In the same spirit, Hall (1990) finds cultural identities to be seen as “the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture” (p. 226). To put it simply, identities as the points of identification are marked by discontinuity, fragmentation, dislocation, rupture, and relationality that are socially, politically, culturally, historically, and discursively created within in-between spaces.

As Loomba (2005) says that colonial identities are a matter of flux and agony in Bhabha’s eyes, hybrid identities inevitably entail emotional tensions stemming from ambivalence and ambiguity in a constant state of transition in colonial conditions. Anzaldúa (1987) inspires us to embrace ambiguity with cultures and identities which has been condemned as noisy and cacophonous by Western colonialists, but is ineluctable when multiple cultural identities encounter and interplay with one another. By extension, Anzaldúa (1987) portrays “borderland”—a Third Space—as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (p. 3). Anzaldúa (1987) brings up the notion of *mestiza* consciousness which unsettles and transgresses a dualistic boundary through embracing and negotiating variegated cultures, identities, and histories that have been repressed and misappropriated in and through colonial discourses. In postcolonial, hybridized spaces, identities are “less to be defended and rather to be disturbed and dissipated in order that other possibilities,

other horizons, other hopes can acquire cultural shape and historical force” (Chambers, 2010, p. 201).

Moving beyond Cultural Diversity towards Cultural Difference

Bhabha (1994, 1996) distinguishes between two terms, cultural diversity and cultural difference, in a linguistic and temporal sense. By “a *creation* of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural difference” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 208), Bhabha (1996) means a norm imposed by the dominant culture on other cultures, which proclaims that those other cultures are acceptable, but should be located within the dominant culture’s universal grid that recognizes their varied social and historical contexts “only eventually to transcend them and render them transparent” (p. 208). For Bhabha (1994), cultural diversity is “the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism”, giving rise to liberal senses of multiculturalism, whereas cultural difference is “the process of the *enunciation* of culture as ‘*knowledgeable*’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification” (p. 50, emphasis in original). From that point of view, liberal multiculturalism and multicultural education can be seen as an attempt to respond to and regulate the dynamic and enunciative process of articulating cultural difference in a Third Space towards such liberal norms as tolerance and pluralism that propagate cultural diversity as a social consensus.

Bhabha’s notion of cultural difference echoes for the most part with Jacques Derrida’s critique of structuralist systems by putting forward the concept of *différance* that combines the meanings of the English verbs—‘differ’ and ‘defer’—as a discursive strategy of deconstruction. Derrida (2001) uses the term in order to understand signification as depending on a deferral of meaning between the signifier and the signified and to relate the way in which signification operates to an ethical relation to the other. For Derrida (2001), there is no fixed relation between

the signifier (a written image or sound) and the signified (a concept), as any meaning—including the meaning of one’s identities—is not fixed, but constantly deferred, and continues to unfold anew. There are always additional or supplementary meanings that we cannot freely and willfully control at all, which disturbs stable and fixed binaries on which colonial discourses are built (Derrida, 2001; Hall 1996). Therefore, although meaning seems to be a fixed closure, any representation is nothing but a temporary and arbitrary fixing, failing to fully capture the referent. Furthermore, any representation—any temporary fixing of meaning—relies on a discursive context, as the signifier and its relation to the signified are always contingent on the discursive context (Butler, 2004; Miller, 2010). In the Derridian sense, deconstruction is a boundless deferral and displacement of a singular meaning, which is “not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other” (Kearney, 1984, p. 124). Derridian deconstruction thus encourages us “to challenge any notion of foundational center that creates binaries in which the first term of the binary most always indicates presence and power and, subsequently, to attempt to reconstitute that which has been previously inscribed” (Miller, 2010, p. 501). From this poststructuralist perspective, Miller (2010) views any meaning/culture/identity as contingent and temporary, opening up possibilities to create new versions of particular subjectivity. In a similar vein, Shumar (2010) asserts that Bhabha puts forward a new form of resistance in which multiculturalism should be a space of *différance* for defying and dismantling the power of language to name and categorize with regard to intermediary and indeterminable forms of cultures and identities in the processes of becoming.

Resonating with Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, Bhabha (1994) focuses on “the temporality of cultural meaning as ‘multi-accentual’, ‘discursively rearticulated’”, saying that “it is a time of the cultural sign that unsettles the liberal ethic of tolerance and the pluralist

framework of multiculturalism” (p. 254). For Bhabha (1994), cultural identification and cultural difference, as signification in the form of an arbitrary, temporary closure, are articulated in a liminal, hybrid space for “the contingent, indeterminate articulation of social ‘experience’ that is particularly important for envisaging emergent cultural identities” (p. 257). Given that a signifier has its identity not in its presumed foundational essence, but in its difference from other signifiers, Bhabha (1990, 1994) insists that cultural identities are constructed in and through the processes of alterity and otherness, placing himself in the position of liminality, one that is a generative site of the construction of cultural differences, grounded not on consensus, but on incommensurability as central to the emergent heterogeneity of the enunciative present in the Third Space. Notably, in relation to the creative, generative nature of cultural difference, Bhabha (1994) states that “my purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience” (p. 255). The process of turning the objectified others into the subjects of their own history and experience could take place only with a hybrid, interstitial agency mentioned above. In articulating and living with differences in culture and identity, the hybrid agency—a non-sovereign notion of the self—could undermine colonial authorities and their discourses by challenging the unquestioned relationships between the signified and the signifier particularly in a moment of deferral between them, while recognizing “the disjunctive, ‘borderline’ temporalities of partial, minority cultures” and identities (Bhabha, 1996, p. 56).

Therefore, Bhabha’s critical concepts of cultural translation, cultural hybridity, and cultural difference are very closely related to one another in a way that decenters the (colonial) subject assumed to have a stable identity imposed by (colonial) discourses from within the very discursive systems which have sustained fixed binaries such as the self/others, the colonizer/the

colonized, and the West/the non-West, to name a few. It can be suggested that Bhabha adds the hybrid, enunciative, and temporal layers onto cultural differences, relocating and reconstituting critical multiculturalism from a poststructuralist standpoint. Nonetheless, there have been some critiques of Bhabha's theoretical work paradoxically for its universalizing tendency derived from the fact that:

It theorizes colonial identities and colonial power relations in entirely semiotic or psychoanalytic terms, which have given us sophisticated vocabularies of subjectivity, but are not always sensitive to the ways in which subjectivities are shaped by questions of class, gender and context (Loomba, 2005, p. 150).

For this reason, Loomba (2005) suggests that we acknowledge the context-specific nature of cultural difference by focusing our attention on the contextual nuances of each aspect of the cultures that interact together within colonial encounters. In this regard, Chen's (2010) notion of Asia as method could provide us with a more nuanced, contextualized lens for understanding and criticizing (post-)colonial conditions within East Asian contexts, though not entirely understood and embraced by poststructuralist theories.

Chen's Postcolonial, Decolonial Theory of Asia as Method

Chen (2010), a Taiwanese scholar of cultural studies, educated in the U.S., gives currency to the notion of *Asia as method* as a postcolonial, decolonial strategy for undercutting the existing Western, particularly the U.S. centered structure of knowledge (re)production and dissemination throughout East Asia. As one's relationship with knowledge is not simply epistemological, but also necessarily interconnected with ontological aspects (Kenway & Fahey, 2009), the idea of Asia as method is to extend its epistemological matter of transforming the ways of knowing into the ontological realm of the ways of being and relating to others, the

world, and even oneself within the social, historical, and cultural contexts of power relations between the West—the U.S. in particular—and East Asia in these postcolonial times.

In his book, *Asia as method*, Chen (2010) does not mean by method any methodological grounding, but an onto-epistemological orientation towards examining and disrupting the sociopolitical, cultural, and psychic impacts of the (neo-)colonial obsession with the West on knowledge production, cultural imaginary, and identity/subjectivity formation in East Asian contexts (J. Park, 2016). Such a critique of the problematics of Western-centeredness provokes us to pose a challenging question of “where our thinking and theorizing come from, and what the implications of global geopolitics are for the directions of knowledge flows and the rise and decline of particular knowledges” (Kenway, 2015, p. 14). Regarding the geopolitics of knowledge flows in East Asia, which has been interwoven into the triad of colonialism, imperialism, and the Cold War, Chen (2010) criticizes the unidirectional transfer of knowledge from the West to East Asia with the former regarded as “a system of reference, an object from which to learn, a point of measurement, a goal to catch up with, an intimate enemy, and sometimes an alibi for serious discussion and action” (p. 216). In other words, the West has held the status of the sole point of reference as “an epistemological universal incorporated into the Asian local” (Kester et al., 2023), whereas East Asia has been positioned as the other in its relationship with the West.

One of the bases of Chen (2010)’s unfolding of his postcolonial, decolonial theory is the notion of cultural imaginary, which means “the cultural forms and structures of feeling” constructed by “the encounter between colonialism and local historical and cultural resources” (p. 111). Chen (2010) mentions:

Through discursive articulation, the cultural imaginary is disseminated to different social fields, shaping the imaginations of both colonizing and colonized subjects. Operating on the terrain of the popular, the cultural imaginary structures the system of ideology, links to the concrete experiences of daily life, and forms the direction and boundary of the psychological space (p. 111).

The concept of cultural imaginary makes it possible to see the intricate interlocking of the global and the local, and of the past and the present, drawing our attention to “the historical and spatial conditions of power relations” (Chen, 2010, p. 250). Furthermore, cultural imaginary also signifies “the structural flow of desire” towards the West regarding identity/subjectivity formation, which informs culture, mind, desire, and body (Chen, 2010). Therefore, the Western-centric geopolitics of knowledge production and circulation in East Asia has been sustained by the triad impacts of colonialism, imperialism, and the Cold War, and shaped the cultural imaginary of the colonial subjects and their identities and subjectivities as well.

Concerned with the geohistorical context of knowledge production and dissemination and the epistemic and psychic dominance of the West over East Asian subjectivities, Chen (2010) promotes Asia as method for decolonizing the cultural imaginary through reconstructing East Asia “as an imaginary horizon for comparison” and “multiply[ing] frames of reference in our subjectivity and world-view, so that anxiety over the West can be diluted, and productive critical work can move forward” (p. 223). As a transformative strategy for decentering the West from the sole point of reference, Chen (2010) puts forward “inter-referencing” and “critical syncretism” in order to break away from “‘West as method’ and the static self-perception generated by the incessant contrasting with the West” (Takayama, 2016, p. 28). The inter-referencing is an onto-epistemological turn towards East Asia for Asian locals to become a point

of reference for one another. Yet it does not mean that we should reject Western knowledge and experiences from the terrain of knowledge construction in East Asia, but rather it intends to relativize and provincialize the West in order for it to be considered just a part of local social formations as one cultural and epistemological resource among many others (Chen, 2010; Takayama, 2016). In this respect, Chen (2010) remarks:

The purpose of the inter-referencing approach is to avoid judging any country, region or culture as superior or inferior to any other and to tease out historical transformation within the base-entity, so that the differences can be properly explained (p. 250).

The inter-referencing is to augment “the sources of our readings to include those produced in other parts of Asia” (Chen, 2010, p. 255), and to realize the possibility of the multidirectional flows of knowledge, attempting to dismantle the binary of the West/the East (Chan et al., 2015; Wu, 2015).

The inter-referencing does not end with cultural and epistemological transformation, but leads further to ontological one in relation to our own identities and subjectivities. In this regard, Chen (2010) presents critical syncretism as a postcolonial, decolonial way for seeing the world from the perspectives of subaltern groups around the world. Chen (2010) argues:

The direction of identification put forward by a critical syncretism is outward; the intent is to become others, to actively interiorize elements of others into the subjectivity of the self so as to move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations in the form of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism, or nationalistic xenophobia ... Here “others” refers not just to racial, ethnic, and national categories but also includes class, sex and gender, and geographical positions (p. 99).

Becoming others here can be conceptualized as multiplying our ways of identifying with others, which can allow us to examine and engage with new, transformed ways of being and understanding others and ourselves.

Despite the postcolonial, decolonial turn in knowledge production in East Asia, one can pose such challenging questions as whether East Asia can be categorized as a homogenous entity in various aspects related to the ongoing, incomplete (re)construction of East Asia as an idea and whether one can distinguish and take up any credible epistemology other than one's own (Y. Lee, 2019; J. Park, 2016, 2017). On a similar note, one can bring up the plausible question of the (in)compatibility between poststructuralist criticisms of colonialism (e.g., Bhabha's postcolonial theory discussed above) and Chen's (2010) *Asia as method* that is likely to reproduce the dichotomy of the West and East Asia. However, as discourse, which is one of the major concepts in poststructuralism, is created by power relations and has constitutive, not deterministic, effects on the formation of subjectivities and identities, the poststructuralist concept of discourse does not renounce the social, the historical, and their constitutive forces (Fairclough, 1992; Shim, 2011). According to Shim (2011), structuralism and poststructuralism share common ground in that both of them consider the subject not as a natural subject, but as an effect of an underlying system, and structuralist thinking can help us pay attention to "the historical, social, and cultural systems which inform what we *do know*" (p. 754, emphasis in original). From the balanced, but tension-ridden perspective, Chen's *Asia as method* could make a significant contribution to mitigating the risk of universalizing and essentializing such poststructuralist concepts as hybridity, fluidity, and cultural translation through situating those concepts into a specific (East Asian) geographical and sociohistorical context.

Curriculum Studies in Postcolonial, Transnational Times

In this global, transnational era when ideas on curriculum and curriculum studies flow from one geographical location to another, they have no single source, and neither do they develop and become relevant through a singular process because they are constituted and reconstituted within a sociopolitical, cultural, historical, and economic context. Taking account of uneven power relations among countries bound up with the histories of colonialism, Gaztambide-Fernández and Thiessen (2012) argue that curriculum scholars engaging in internationalizing curriculum inquiry—particularly those involved in the Western academy—must be skeptical of internationalization without a critical orientation towards colonialism and its power dynamics of the flows of knowledge and ideas related to curriculum. In this light, curriculum studies in international contexts should necessarily be conceived as both postcolonial and transnational, which means the close interrelation of postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies and transnational curriculum studies. In this context, this section reviews postcolonial, decolonial curriculum studies and transnational curriculum inquiry by juxtaposing them.

Postcolonial, Decolonizing Curriculum Studies

Postcolonial curriculum scholars have interrogated pervasive colonialities—such as Western-centrism and Eurocentrism—embedded within and reiterated by curriculum and new possibilities for decolonizing curriculum in these global times of standardization, accountability, and neoliberalism (Asher, 2009a, 2010; Dimitriadis & McCarchy, 2001; Hickling-Hudson 2010; Leonardo, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2005; Paraskeva, 2016; Tikly, 2004). In epistemic terms regarding the internationalization of curriculum, Paraskeva (2016) offers the concept of “curriculum epistemicide”, which is an epistemological confrontation and negotiation in curriculum studies that happens when Western-centric curriculum knowledge and theories are

predominantly borrowed and implanted in various parts of the non-Western world without a critical stance towards colonialism, suppressing the latter's systems of curriculum knowledge production. In a similar vein, Leonardo (2018) maintains that "decolonizing the curriculum is no less than decolonizing the dominant theory of knowledge, it not knowledge itself" (p. 12), promoting not simply being critical, but also being self-critical and self-reflexive in order to eschew being caught up with Western thoughts on curriculum.

Given that one's relationship with knowledge is epistemological and ontological at once, and that curriculum is an important site wherein one's subjectivities and identities are formed and reformed, postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies includes ontological issues beyond cultural and epistemological ones at both individual and systemic levels. Asher (2009a) argues that "curriculum that relies on fixed, essentialist notions of identity and culture is framed and limited by legacies of colonialism as well as the current push toward standardization and corporatization, contributing, ultimately, to an oppressive and anti-intellectual agenda" (p. 395), attempting to disrupt the curricula of 'us' and 'them' relating to race, ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, and so forth. The monological, monocultural mode of interpreting cultures and identities in and through curriculum possibly suppresses and homogenizes diverse experiences, cultures, and identities that students from different backgrounds have been holding and (re)constructing, depriving them of their own identities, subjectivities, intellectual agency, and agentic capabilities to identify and resist social injustice (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001; McCarthy et al., 2005). Standardized curriculum is a means of imposing the dominant discourses of culture, identity, and knowledge upon students whose identities are fixed into structurally enforced categories. These simplistic discourses have been bolstered by curricular projects around the world which have sought to silence "the unpredictable noise of dialogue that is the

inexorable and interminable state of contemporary identity formation” (McCarthy et al., 2005, p. 161). Therefore, postcolonialism can serve as a critical framework for creating cracks on the apparently solid wall of monological, standardized curriculum by helping teachers and students reclaim their intellectual and interstitial agency and to more fully engage in the processes of identity constructions within multiple contexts in which they were in the past, are in the present, and will be in the future.

Postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum would repudiate all forms of the self/other binary as they have appeared in the current educational systems. Along with this line of thinking, McCarthy et al. (2005) suggest:

Thinking in postcolonial terms about the topic of difference and multiplicity in education means thinking relationally and contextually ... bringing back into educational discourses all the tensions and contradictions that we tend to suppress as we process experience and history into curricular knowledge ... for a recognition of the vital porosity that exists between and among human groups (p. 164).

As a postcolonial, decolonizing way of thinking relationally and contextually in curriculum studies, Asher (2009a) suggests a pedagogy based on critical, self-reflexive approaches that enable teachers and students to “engage difference of race, class, and culture, which they encounter within and without the classroom, and work through the intellectual and emotional struggles that emerge in the process” (p. 400). The critical, self-reflexive stance towards curriculum makes possible “the creative fusion and vitalization of those mini-narratives that every unique individual ... brings to a human encounter such as the pedagogical setting, exploring the full richness of their particularities” (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 118), which encourages them to identify and subvert the discursive and material effects of the

phenomenon of curriculum epistemicide coupled with the standardized curriculum. Particularly informed by postcolonial, feminist perspectives and their concepts of hybridity and in-betweenness, Asher (2002) articulates the concept of “hybrid consciousness” and its relevance to curriculum studies. According to Asher (2002), it refers to the awareness of hybrid identities, cultures, and representations that comes from one’s intellectual and emotional struggles to find oneself in relation to multiple, complex borders at the dynamic and unstable intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, class, and nationality within a specific sociopolitical, cultural, historical, and geographical setting. The hybrid consciousness also propels us to recognize and reveal our own implicatedness in the very oppressive structures that we are trying to transform, allowing us to relate to others and ourselves by situating both ourselves and others within the discourses of multicultural education and curriculum studies (Asher, 2002). On a similar note, driven by the postcolonial, poststructural concept of the third space (Bhabha, 1990, 1994), which I mentioned above, Wang and Flory (2021) conceive of curriculum as emerging out of a third space in relation to identities and differences on multiple levels and scales from the classroom pedagogy to the internationalization of curriculum studies. Wang and Flory (2021) suggest that curriculum scholars need to rebuild their understanding of identities and differences in the classroom as a hybrid space imbued with the complexities of incommensurable alterity in which students play with and enact multiple boundaries and welcome the unfamiliar. Likewise, concerning the international arena of curriculum inquiry, “a third space of internationalizing curriculum studies hosts both the “inter” space and the “trans” space, in which both engaging in interstitial fluid movements and going beyond the boundary of locality are necessary” (Wang & Flory, 2021, p. 8). Accordingly, curriculum studies in a third space ranging from the local to the transnational is not grounded in consensus or commonality, but rather in “difference and seeking

passage within, between, and among difference as difference keeps shying away from any fixed definition” (Wang & Flory, 2021, p. 7).

Engaging in disrupting curriculum epistemicide and provincializing Western curriculum knowledge, theories, and practices, postcolonialism can appear as a theoretical orientation towards transforming curriculum to speak to diverse perspectives, voices, and systems of knowledge production which have been left out from and neglected in curriculum and curriculum studies. And it can create new possibilities of identity (re)constructions in specific local contexts in which Western ideas are translated and (re)territorialized, informed by the cultures, histories, and politics of a specific local context that are porous to the current transnational dynamics of (neo-)colonialism.

Movements of Transnational Curriculum Studies

In the current transnational times, curriculum scholars’ task is “to wrestle with and identify what must, can, and should be attempted in a curriculum that engages the global, transnational, and local in agentic, productive, generative and forward-looking ways” and “to consider how local educational spaces reflect—and also counter—increasingly globalized societal trends and issues” (Asher & Kolb, 2015, p. 433). Based on this line of critical orientation, transnational curriculum theorists have grappled with the major question of how curriculum knowledge has been created, circulated, and represented across nation-state borders, calling attention to and problematizing the uneven circuits of curriculum knowledge among nation-states along with the unequal flows of culture and global capital across nation-states (Miller, 2006; Moon, 2021). Accordingly, curriculum conversations among nation-states can be enriched and complexified in and through transnational curriculum studies (TCS), moving away from a static, universal notion of a nation-state and its curriculum towards decentering both the

local/national and the global by foregrounding their interactions, which leads to the transformation of the local, the national, and the global at once and the creation of a third space within the field of curriculum studies (Miller, 2006; Moon, 2012; Wang, 2006).

Against this background, Gough (2004, 2023) conceptualizes TCS as a postcolonial curriculum inquiry project that decenters the West and its academia as the unquestioned, unquestionable center of global knowledge production in relation to such critical issues as social justice, human rights, democratization, race, gender, identities, and so on. In other words, TCS can be conceived as a site of inquiring into epistemic clashes, negotiations, assemblages, or suppressions taking place in the processes of knowledge translation in a postcolonial sense through which differences are produced and can be made visible as they are embedded within the local, national, and global contexts of curriculum studies (Zhao, Popkewitz, & Autio, 2022). Refusing the homogenizing effects of the internationalization of the field of curriculum studies, Gough (2003) comments:

Internationalizing curriculum inquiry might best be understood as a process of creating transnational ‘spaces’ in which scholars from different localities collaborate in reframing and decentering their own knowledge traditions and negotiate trust in each other’s contributions to their collective work. For those of us who work in Western knowledge traditions, a first step must be to represent and perform our distinctive approaches to curriculum inquiry in ways that authentically demonstrate their localness (p. 68, emphasis in original).

Such transnational spaces not just activate hybrid movements in curriculum inquiry, but also enhance negotiatory collective works to build collaborative trust through which curriculum scholars engage in negotiating their cultural, linguistic, theoretical, and geographical differences

in the worldwide field of curriculum studies. Moreover, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's well-cited idea of a nomadic subjectivity that moves across and disrupts settled signs, categories, concepts, and theories, as opposed to a sedentary point of view in the Western history and science, Gough (2007) reformulates TCS as a semiotic space that becomes "a 'rhizome space' that is more hospitable to nomadic than to sedentary thought" (p. 283, emphasis in original), which is generative of postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum inquiry that has neither a center nor periphery, but is always working in the middle, and affirms what has been left out of the Western knowledge system.

Being aware of the fact that one's relationship with knowledge is not only epistemological, but also ontological, Moon (2021) centers on identity research as one of the modes of TCS, examining how transnational forces interact with time and space to affect identities through social interactions, education, and communication and how identity works through the hybridity of subjectivities. Moon (2021) remarks that "identities are the results of the flows of novel perspectives about the similar educational concerns of knowledge, wellbeing, and equity" (p. 9), which are also open to flexibility, variations, unpredictability, and unknowingness. Considering that identities are always discursively constructed and reconstructed within particular locations, TCS is focused on the discursivity of curriculum since curriculum discursively represents racial, classed, gendered, and other texts that can be visible only within a specific sociopolitical, cultural, and historical context (Miller, 2005; Moon, 2021). That being said, although local narratives should be valued in the inexorable flows of transnationalism in the field of curriculum studies, we should be wary of the monolithic conceptions of local curriculum discourses that can reiterate binary thinking and bring about another grand narrative. Resonating with this critical point, Baker (2010) insightfully highlights:

Appeals to provincializing curriculum suggests a further necessary deconstruction of this very analytical move to provincialize, insofar as the specificity of timespace to which notions of provincializing are subtly indebted remain embedded at some level in modern geographical discourse, analytical strategies that privilege empiricism, and even contemporary appeals to nationalism (p. 223).

In the worldwide field of TCS, therefore, the notions of both the local/national and the global are seldom fixed signifiers; they are destabilized through the interactions and transactions among the local, the national, and the global, while being unceasingly co-created by one another and enunciative of differences in culture, identity, and subjectivity in the interstitial spaces among them. In this respect, transnational curriculum inquiry has a lot in common with postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies in relation to the discursive and contextual constructions of identities, though not the same as each other.

The Transnational Self in Curriculum Studies: A Postcolonial, Decolonizing Approach to Autobiography

Critical self-reflexivity has been at the heart of postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies as a powerful representational strategy for resisting the (neo-)colonial forces of fixing our beings into a standardized, immutable grid, given that a critical self-reflexive consciousness enables us to confront and challenge the internalized, institutionalized impacts of colonization on our own psyches and identities, which leads us to identify and interrupt our implicatedness in the very relations of power that we are trying to interrupt (Asher, 2009b; Nguyen & Chia, 2023; Segura Castillo, 2023). In this regard, an autobiographical work can give a narrative form to the unknown, unexplored aspects of ourselves with and through critical self-reflexivity. As Asher (2009b) says, a critical self-reflexive autobiographical work has a (re)generative, transformative

potential for writing one's own narrative which reflects the histories of both colonization and resistance to it away from an abstract, impersonal voice (Trinh, 1989). The self-narration is the act of telling stories about one's own lived experiences and social realities where the autobiographical self enacts and struggles with twofold identities as both personal and academic self, who is implicated in the very power relations that the researcher is striving against, as the academy is a site for resisting dominant discourses, while at the same time being a site of our (un)intentional implicatedness in the existing system of knowledge production and circulation (Asher, 2001; Nguyen & Chia, 2023).

When an autobiographical self is situated in border-crossings within an international, transnational space, a self-reflexive autobiographical work appears to be all the more complicated and uncertain in response to unpredictably shifting discourses within and across national borders. Situating self-reflexive autobiography in transnational curriculum studies, Wang (2006) makes the point that it aims at mobilizing and transforming the social through unsettling and unpacking the personal in that self-transformation is possible only through engaging in societal reform and global change, which concurs with writing decolonizing text(s) for "resisting re-implication ... in the perennial tensions of being othered and ourselves participating in othering" (Asher, 2009b, p. 10). When it comes to transnational curriculum studies which conceptualizes curriculum as relating to transnational flows and mobilities, Miller (2006) argues:

Conceptions of transnational flows and mobilities become visceral through embodied autobiographical inquiries that take into account shifting and rapidly changing discourses and material effects of globalization, including knowledges and identities produced at

everyday educational sites as well as within a worldwide field of curriculum studies (p. 46).

In other words, autobiographical inquiry in transnational curriculum studies is to examine how one's identities get constructed within a specific context through educational practices and curriculum in the midst of the transnational flows of educational discourses and curriculum knowledge. In a broader sense, Miller (2014) gives prominence to autobiographical research as one form of curriculum theorizing in a way that makes possible "contextualized examinations of how *difference* gets constructed and often maintained and reified into binaries that imply "normal/abnormal" ... within dominant educational discourses as well as through pedagogical processes and curriculum conceived merely as subject-matter content" (p. 25, emphasis in original); Put it differently, critical self-reflexive autobiographical work as a mode of curriculum theorizing is to analyze our lived experiences where we struggle with the homogenizing effects of curriculum as subject-matter contents on the constructions of our identities in and across specific sociopolitical, cultural, historical, spatial, and temporal contexts, continuously creating our multiple and morphing educational selves. From a poststructural perspective as a basis of the autobiographically informed curriculum theorizing, identities and experiences are discursively constructed through the interactions and interpretations of culture, language, symbol, and meaning in a specific sociopolitical, cultural, historical, and geographical context, which implies that autobiography is in the ongoing, unfinished process of shaping and negotiating multiple and even conflicting identities not for ferreting out the authentic, coherent self, but for continuously unsettling and reforming the self in a relational sense (Miller, 2005; Moon, 2022; Wang, 2006).

Against this background, it can be a part of postcolonial, transnational curriculum theorizing to tell my own narratives about my lived experiences and transnational realities in

which I have engaged as a student, a teacher (researcher), and a citizen in South Korea and an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S. As for my experiences as a student and a teacher (researcher) in South Korea, school education and the national curriculum have played a significant part in shaping and reshaping identities of teachers as well as students. Of note here is that the national curriculum—which has been affected by national and cultural histories and the global regime of knowledge—has been revised in ways that go along with the construction of hybrid identities in the current transnational circumstances, while South Koreans are grappling with identity politics between the local and the global, between individuals and communities, and between homogeneity and heterogeneity (So et al., 2012). Moreover, my transnational narrative of leaving home to become a curriculum scholar and teacher educator in the U.S. discloses and reconfirms U.S. hegemony in almost every aspect of social realities. This transnational pathway that I have been traveling to be ‘adequately’ qualified to generate curriculum knowledge as an educational researcher illustrates and even reproduces the legacies of (neo-)colonial histories embedded in the intertwined uneven societal and educational structures between South Korea and the U.S. (Rhee, 2006; Subreenduth & Rhee, 2010). As a postcolonial hybrid located in transnational contexts in relation to curriculum and curriculum studies, as Asher (2001) embodies, I have perhaps been implicate—personally and professionally—in the uneven relations of power that I am struggling to break down, given that “the academy is both a site from which I resist hegemonic discourses as well as a site of my own implicatedness in an established system of knowledge production” (p. 5). For this reason, my critical self-reflexive autobiography on the constructions and interpretations of my identities and experiences in relation to specific social and cultural histories and discourses can be part of and hopefully make a contribution to enriching the stories of postcolonial and transnational

curriculum theorizing, focusing on the border-crossing—personally and as a curriculum scholar—between South Korea and the U.S.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I explicate the methodology and methods of autobiographical inquiry informed by poststructuralist perspectives. Influenced by Miller's (2006, 2014) work on transnational curriculum inquiry and Asher's (2001, 2009b) self-reflexive work on postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies, I consider autobiographical inquiry in curriculum studies as attending to the fluidity of identities and experiences embedded in a certain discursive and material condition. As contrasted with the conventional version of autobiography that simply seeks to include and express a unitary, stable version of voice and experience, poststructurally informed autobiographical research attempts to theorize identity, memory, experience, and agency in relation to the constructions of 'selves' and the discursive and non-discursive, material contexts of identity formations (Miller, 2005, 2006). Given that the postcolonial self engenders and is also engendered within hybrid, in-between spaces beyond binary categorizations of identities, self-reflexive and poststructurally informed autobiographical research has the generative, regenerative, and transformative potential for challenging and disrupting fixed and stable identity categories and ways of knowing and being (Asher, 2009b; Miller, 2005).

Against this background, I first provide a description of methodological assumptions, guidelines, and logic that gives a direction for carrying out this self-reflexive, poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry in a systematic way, followed by the particular methods—processes and techniques—for gathering and analyzing qualitative materials. The philosophical, ontological, and epistemological concepts in postcolonialism along with poststructuralism are deeply connected to the methodological matters discussed in this section. And then, the choices regarding the how, what, when, and where of gathering qualitative materials are deeply related to the broader assumptions about systematic autobiographical inquiry and then the philosophical,

ontological, and epistemological concepts and ideas of postcolonial theories and poststructuralism in this research (Vagle, 2018). Furthermore, I add my strategies for securing the trustworthiness of this autobiographical study in the last section.

Research Methodology: Poststructurally Informed Autobiographical Inquiry

As mentioned in the introductory chapter above, I make use of poststructuralist perspectives in conceiving my identities and experiences, which are the foci of analysis in this autobiographical research, as questionable, incomplete, and becoming, even though this dissertation research is primarily based on postcolonial, decolonial theories. Poststructuralist perspectives, which inform the methodology and method of this study, urge me to deconstruct and reconstruct my identities and experiences which are contingent on normative discourses and power structures within a specific context, which can lead to a decolonial praxis (Gannon, 2006). In this regard, this section offers methodological assumptions, guidelines, and logic of autobiographical research informed by poststructuralism. It also suggests a path for carrying out systematic autobiographical inquiry into my lived experiences and identity constructions in a transnational context across South Korea and the U.S.

Autobiography, etymologically speaking, can be briefly defined as self-life writing. It is defined as a literary genre that represents an ‘authentic’ personal life story written in retrospect at a particular time about some events in an author’s life that the author finds significant for readers to understand the author’s actions, motivations, and personality (Maynes et al., 2008). Put it differently, autobiography is “a narrative construction of identity that discusses how a life came to be what it was or how the self became what it is” (J. H. Kim, 2016, p. 123). However, in the wake of poststructural and postcolonial critiques of the autonomous, fully conscious subject and the assumed transparency of language, narrative inquiry has taken into account the partial,

contextual, situated, and contradictory nature of telling stories (Hendry, 2018; Smith & Watson, 2010). In this regard, based on some poststructuralist theories, ideas, and questions, I provide an explanation of the methodology of autobiographical inquiry informed by poststructuralism, focusing on the following themes that contain assumptions and guidelines for elaborating on a method: the autobiographical self and voice; memory, remembering, and experience; and representation, autobiographical writing, and its ethical significance.

The Autobiographical Self and Voice

The concept of autobiography is predicated on the narrating self as the coherent, singular, unified, and authentic ‘I’ who is able to remember, interpret, and identify and convey the truths of his or her life story, while the narrating self is equated with the self of the narrative (Herbrechter, 2012). In this traditional approach, autobiographical inquiry is not merely an attempt to remember and interpret the past, but also to lead readers to recognize the innermost truths of individual existence that only the self can trace and access (Anderson, 2001). In other words, the conventional approach to autobiography presupposes that there already exists the ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ of the self that awaits ‘out there’ to be discovered and told, and that it can be accessed and (re)collected through self-reflection and telling a story, which assumes that an individual can be fully conscious of his or her ‘own’ self through self-reflection and his or her ‘own’ life narrating.

In contrast to these traditional viewpoints, a poststructuralist version of autobiography challenges and even refuses the idea that the subject is capable of narrating and giving a transparent, accurate account of themselves due to the “slippage born from the partiality of language” (Britzman, 2000, p. 28) and the influences of discourse on the construction of the self and his or her life narrative. In this view, there is no fixed authentic, autonomous

autobiographical self from without discourse, and no freely crafted and interpreted self-narration. The autobiographical self, as a constellation of multiple, partial, contingent, unstable, and possibly contradictory identities, is “fragmented in time, taking a particular or provisional perspective on the moving target of our past” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 61). On the other hand, Jackson and Mazzei (2008) set forth the autobiographical self as “a performative ‘I’ who uses experience not simply as a foundation for knowledge but as a concept “under erasure” to expose the undecidability of meaning, of the self, of narrative—without requiring self-identification or mastery” (p. 305, emphasis in original), considering autobiographical narrating as a performative act. Jackson and Mazzei (2008) further continue to say that the performative ‘I’ is a becoming ‘I’ who is continuously constructed and reconstructed in the processes of telling a life story without the closure of knowledge, while being bound to power relations and their subsequent discourse practices in his or her telling life stories. Therefore, the autobiographical self is implicated in its relationships with the production and understanding of his or her life stories, but also with other people and social conditions that are not easily detected—history, culture, politics, and power (Eaton, 2018; Squire et al., 2013).

Traditional qualitative research has given primacy to the notion of voice as authentic, stable, present, and self-reflective, based on the assumption that “voice makes present the truth and *reflects* the meaning of an experience that has already happened” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, p. 4, emphasis in original). It means that we can bring the meaning of an experience and the authentic self to our consciousness and access the universal truths about the experience and the self by making the voices of research participants (the researcher in autobiographical inquiry) heard and understood. Accordingly, in conventional qualitative research, there exists a voice to be heard, retrieved, liberated, and then recorded, coded, and categorized as data (Mazzei &

Jackson, 2009). However, in qualitative research informed by poststructuralism, voices are shifting and uncertain, and they have subtle, nuanced, and unexpected meanings, as the subjects of voices are fragmented and provisional, and have multiple referents that are unstable and disunified (J. H. Kim, 2016; Mazzei & Jackson, 2009).

Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia", which refers to "the multivocality of narratives and their layering of viewpoints" (Bakhtin, cited in Blakely & Hemphill, 2021, p. 117), can be useful in understanding the self in poststructurally informed autobiographical research in a way that decenters, complexifies, and contextualizes the voices of the autobiographical self. In this vein, the performative, narrating 'I' of an autobiographical text is polyvocal, an assemblage of multiple harmonious and/or conflicting voices, as the autobiographical self takes up specific multiple identities and subject positions to which the voices might be attached in the processes of becoming (Smith & Watson, 2010). That is to say, the interplay of heterogeneous voices of the self is dispersed in an autobiographical narrative, including external voices from others, as we are aware of ourselves and tell our life stories through discourses, cultural scripts available to us, in a social context to which we belong. In this context, Miller (1998) calls upon us to highlight "how the personal ... voice ... are inextricably bound up in varying social, historical and cultural influences on and constructions of the self and the truth" (p. 230). This polyvocality of the self can present complicated voices in autobiographical inquiry and generate different ways of knowing an experience.

Memory, Remembering, and Experience

An autobiographical self depends upon memory as a source for the autobiographical self to narrate the past in a way that situates and contextualizes the past experiences within the present, rather than situating the present within the past experiences. In line with poststructuralist

thinking, any memory is not waiting ‘out there’ to be remembered and discovered by an individual. Memories are discursive, contextual, and political in that “memory writing is not a veridical act that reproduces the original experience as it was lived but is necessarily always constituted from a particular time and place and discursive frame” (Gannon, 2006, p. 483). To put it simply, memories produced and provoked in autobiographical inquiry are specific to the temporal, spatial, and discursive context of telling and/or writing the memories. The autobiographical self, therefore, creates fragments of memory into complicated narratives that become the ever-changing stories of his or her life (Smith & Watson, 2010).

Remembering is a social, cultural, and historical process taking place in a particular context in relation to a narrator’s ever-moving pasts, engaging with making meaning of the pasts in the present context. Memories evoked and produced by remembering are not arranged linearly or chronologically. Remembering is an act embedded within cultural politics in that memories are deeply involved in what Smith and Watson (2010) call “the politics of remembering”; at the core of the production of knowledge about the past and the self are the questions of what is remembered, what is obscured, and who is allowed to remember.

In the same vein, from a poststructuralist perspective, experience is not a politically neutral entity restored from a memory storage, but is always already a political interpretation of the past within a very specific social, political, cultural, and historical context, mediated by memory and language (Moon, 2016; Scott, 1992; Stoller, 2009). As any particular context is politically and discursively charged, what is regarded as experience changes over time and across places. In this regard, experience is discursively constructed in the languages available to us in our everyday lives and is closely implicated in what Foucault (1980) calls a discursive regime that is embodied through power/knowledge. In other words, power relations are involved in what

counts as legitimate experience and the interpretation of the experience through language and its discursive practices for particular readers in a particular setting (Miller, 2005; Moon, 2016).

As discourse is constitutive of the subject through language and power/knowledge, as discussed in the previous section, experience is also “the very process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject owning certain identities in the social realm, identities constituted through material, cultural, economic, and psychic relations” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 31). Put it differently, it is not the autobiographical subject who ‘owns’ or ‘discovers’ a certain experience, but it is the experience that constitutes the autobiographical subject, which also means that the autobiographical self does not precede experience, just as experience is not pre-discursive, but contextual, temporal, spatial, and in-the-process-of-becoming at a particular sociopolitical, cultural, and historical moment.

In addition, influenced by Derrida’s notion of *différance* that meaning is always deferred and different, Moon (2016) makes an assertion that the very meaning of experience is always subject to being deferred and different, depending on a particular space-time in which an autobiographical researcher discusses the experience. Since experience has no fixed meaning or interpretation, Moon (2016) suggests that experience is “a creation of heterogeneous singularities and becoming, not a fixed being throughout linear time” (p. 50).

From this perspective, Jackson and Mazzei (2008) call upon autobiographical researchers to put experience under deconstruction in autobiographical texts in order to consider experience as questionable, problematic, and incomplete, rather than as a stable foundation for truth and knowledge about the self. By putting experience under deconstruction, experience needs to be continuously reinterpreted over and over again according to ever-shifting sociopolitical contexts, power relations, and conflicting discourses. Therefore, poststructurally informed

autobiographical inquiry is to ask how experience is discursively constructed and explore the ways in which power relations and discursive practices engender a certain interpretation of experience (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Miller, 2005; Moon, 2016).

Representation, Autobiographical Writing, and Its Ethical Significance

In poststructurally informed autobiographical research, the notion of experience as fully representable is disrupted by the “slippage born from the partiality of language” (Britzman, 2000, p. 28); language cannot be a mirror of experience, which means that self-representation through language in autobiography could no longer be understood as providing access to the self or the truth of the self (Smith & Watson, 2010). As both experience and language are always partial, incomplete, and non-transparent, which brings about the crisis of representation, the full representation of experience is never possible, and it is problematic to rely primarily on the linguistic form of storytelling in reporting experience in traditional qualitative research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Moon, 2016). In a similar vein, Atkinson and Mitchell (2018) argue that “the possibility of divergent interpretations and multiple narratives should be a goal of narrative research representations” (p. 181). Even though multiple forms of representation cannot guarantee approximating an experience, multiple experiments with representation can open the door for possibilities of different ways of interpreting the experience and understanding assumptions on the self, others, experience, and its representation.

In poststructuralist autobiographical inquiry, the researcher writes his or her life stories as a unstable and contradictory narrator who speaks to the multiple selves in fragmented, discontinuous ways that are informed by memories, texts, photographs, the body, and other people, blurring dichotomous boundaries between the personal and the social, the self and others, reason and emotion, and lived experiences and theories (Gannon, 2006). In this respect, Smith

and Watson (2010) argue that the complexities of autobiographical writing can create a multifaceted, polyphonic site characterized by uncertainty and indeterminacy, requiring the readers to engage with sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts, narrative tropes, and rhetorical aims within the autobiographical text. Accordingly, when we reduce our life stories or autobiographical narration to a series of events, categories, or themes, and then organize them together to compose an autobiographical narrative, we unavoidably attenuate the density and richness of cultural, political, ethical, and literary dimensions of the autobiographical narrative and end up with erasing some parts of our lived experiences by imposing a particular way of interpreting experience and its representation upon ourselves (Hendry, 2018; Smith & Watson, 2010).

The onto-epistemological issues of poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry discussed above necessarily drive us to think about ethical engagement in autobiographical research against epistemological violence inherent in the illusion of ‘valid’ knowledge affiliated with the concept of experience as stable, fixed, and monolithic. Given the ambiguity of the process of meaning-making and its situatedness, it is one of the critical ethical implications in poststructuralist qualitative research to be open to our unknowing, what is not yet known, and the possibility that our ways of knowing are partial and fragmented (Eaton, 2018; Moon, 2016). Particularly, in autobiographical writing, the autobiographical self is vulnerable to his or her own opaqueness, his or her relationality to others and social contexts, and the social, discursive norms through which the autobiographical self tells of himself or herself (Smith & Watson, 2010). In light of these multiple vulnerabilities, Smith and Watson (2010), informed by Butler’s discussion on ethical agency regarding the opaqueness of the ‘I’ to itself, make the point that agency can be achieved through our willingness to manifest and narrate our opaqueness, our fragmentation, our

limited knowing, and “the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 58). That is to say, our ethical agency as the autobiographical subject derives from our self-reflexive engagement in indeterminacy, unknowability, and multiplicity.

It is, however, not to say that the autobiographical self always remains within the condition of being vulnerable. As Kuntz (2024) says, a poststructural approach to qualitative inquiry, including autobiographical research, underlines contradictions, fissures, and breaks in history so that one can think of a future, shifting away from the current dominant assumptions of knowing and being, which makes possible “an ontological emphasis on becoming differently through an open future (how might we live differently, toward different effects?)” (p. 284). Therefore, it can be said that autobiographical narrating is always on the move, and it is a becoming and further a becoming ‘with’ others and the world.

Methods for Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Materials

Based on the above statements of poststructuralist autobiographical inquiry as a research methodology and its philosophical background, I delineate research methods for collecting and analyzing qualitative materials in this section. Given the nature of autobiographical research that the researcher is the researched, I first state about myself as an autobiographical self with my positionalities and reflection on them prior to describing methods for collecting and analyzing qualitative materials.

The Researcher and the Researched: The Autobiographical Self

In autobiographical research, the researcher becomes both the narrating subject and the object of remembrance, investigation, and contemplation at the same time in the act of narrating (Smith & Watson, 2010). In this poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry, the

dichotomy between the researcher and the researched is blurred throughout the processes of engagement in investigating the discursive constructions of identities and experiences. Given that I am the autobiographical self in this study, this section is not just to describe a certain intersectional, positional grid point of identity signifiers, but also to situate myself as a subjective being in relation to larger sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts, which allows me to be critically aware of my own subjectivities and helps the readers to better understand where certain perspectives, motivations, and values embedded within this study are produced and provoked. In this sense, this section is not only an explanation of the autobiographical self interrogated in this study, but also an initial post-reflexion⁵ statement that focuses not only on my “personal beliefs and perspectives, but also what frames my perspectives, beliefs, and perceptions” (Vagle, 2018, p. 155) which overall inform the research processes of this research.

I have usually positioned myself as a heterosexual cisgender male from a working-class family in a small rural farming area in South Korea who identifies as an education researcher, educator, and former public elementary school teacher in South Korea. Some of my identities have made me mainstream in South Korean society (e.g., heterosexuality, maleness, educatedness, and public elementary school teacher), on the other hand, however, others have minoritized me (e.g., being from a working-class family in a rural community and first-generation undergraduate/graduate student). With these multiple identities between the mainstream and social minority, I needed to be equipped with multiple modes of being and switch one way of being to another according to where I was situated. This kind of intersectional

⁵ The idea of an initial post-reflexion statement is suggested as one of the most crucial steps for post-intentional phenomenological research (Vagle, 2018). Even though this study is not post-intentional phenomenological, but autobiographical research, I appropriate post-reflexion throughout this research because I believe that it is important to revisit what frames my perspectives and interpretations in the overall processes of this poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry.

experience led me to be aware of social marginalization, while at the same time making me more and more immersed in multiple strands of binary thinking such as heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, upper-middle class/working class, and (sub)urban/rural.

Since coming to the U.S. for my doctoral studies in education and curriculum studies, my identity work has become increasingly complicated due to my skin color, ethnicity, English proficiency, and status as a non-resident alien in the U.S. On the other hand, however, I have been still an educated person as a doctoral student and educator in the U.S. In addition, my migration between South Korea and the U.S. has led me to consider shifting discursive and material effects of globalization such as global inequalities among nation-states on my experiences as an international doctoral scholar and educator, my interpretations of those experiences, and my identity constructions particularly in relation to the transnational flows of power/knowledge and transnational mobilities. More specifically, my transnational narrative of leaving home to be an education researcher reaffirms the legacies of (neo-)colonial histories embedded in the intertwined societal and educational structures between South Korea and the U.S. (Rhee, 2006; Subreenduth & Rhee, 2010).

Through the complexities of my transnational identities, I have driven myself from being trapped into fixed binaries to critically understanding power dynamics behind the binaries, tensions, and contradictions embedded within dominant discourses that shore up the asymmetries of power, while simultaneously staying focused on the politics of inclusion and exclusion. That being said, it is not to say that my international migration between the U.S. and South Korea promises by itself the validity of my autobiographical inquiry into identities within current transnational situations. Notwithstanding, my life experiences can provide me with multiple perspectives on transnationalism, cultural exchange, education, and, more specifically,

curriculum studies. I also believe that it is meaningful to explore how my identities have been discursively constructed and challenged through my interpretations of lived experiences in transnational contexts between South Korea and the U.S. One more important thing is that this initial post-reflexion statement of the autobiographical self is never fixed, but just a targeting at one aspect of my shifting identity constructions which are always in progress.

Qualitative Materials Collection

In this subsection, I explain what kinds of qualitative materials⁶ I collected and generated to write and narrate my lived experiences related to education and curriculum studies and their larger sociopolitical, cultural, historical, and geographical contexts. I, of course, acknowledge that the processes of deciding what sorts of qualitative materials to collect, collecting the qualitative materials, and analyzing them were not mutually exclusive, but recursively connected to one another throughout my autobiographical research. However, I explicate qualitative materials collection and analysis separately so that I can focus on why and how I chose certain kinds of qualitative materials for this research.

Artifacts and Documents

I collected and analyzed multiple types of artifacts and documents such as journal entries, photographs, curriculum materials, course syllabi, assignment papers, and conference papers needed to explore my identity constructions as a student, a preservice teacher, a public elementary school teacher, and a graduate student in curriculum studies in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S. And then, I utilized a body of

⁶ Denzin and Lincoln (2013) use the term, *qualitative material*, rather than *data*, and I concur with Vagle (2018) that this shift in the term aims to distance qualitative inquiry from positivistic-oriented methodologies and philosophies. I turn to their move and take the term, *qualitative material*, in this dissertation research, as memory writings and research journals in this study come from my own qualitative interpretations of empirical materials.

collected artifacts and documents as a key facilitator for writing my memories because exploring the qualitative materials could inspire me to revisit, remember, interpret, write, and narrate my lived experiences in connection with larger sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts. I also supposed that my lived experiences in education and larger social contexts were both discursively and materially constructed by those artifacts and documents in some respects (Miller, 2005; Smith & Watson, 2010).

In order to collect artifacts and documents as qualitative materials for this study, first of all, I revisited my journal entries, photographs, curriculum materials, course syllabi, assignment papers, and other written and visual texts that were accessible to me at the time of conducting this research. I gathered the following qualitative materials that called forth my memories: 1) journal entries that I occasionally wrote during my doctoral studies in the U.S.; 2) some of the photographs that I took or saved from the Internet, including Instagram photos that I posted during my doctoral studies; 3) classroom curriculum documents that I taught as a public elementary school teacher for three years in South Korea; 4) syllabi of the courses that I took for the coursework of master's program in South Korea and for that of doctoral program in the U.S. respectively; 5) assignments papers that I wrote for the coursework of master's program in South Korea and for that of doctoral program in the U.S. respectively; other written and visual texts such as some of the report cards that I received as a secondary school student in South Korea and an online news article. After collecting these kinds of artifacts and documents, I arranged them as a form of archive in a chronological manner, while keeping in mind that memories evoked and produced by the artifacts and documents were not necessarily organized linearly. And then, I took a brief note on each of the qualitative materials and explored focal points and themes that were possibly relevant to the research questions of this study. This process was to select and

engage in significant artifacts and documents that possibly produced and provoked my memory writing.

Memory Writing

I engaged in memory writing as the key process of collecting and generating qualitative materials and as a primary source of the qualitative materials for this autobiographical inquiry. Memory writing can be regarded as “a multiple, not singular, narrative, positioning the author against a specific backdrop, reflection on the lived experiences that are atypical, or representative, of a particular time and place” (Lynch, 2019, p. 15). In other words, memory writing consists in an intermingling of memories, texts, and images towards that which is meaningful for me, as well as for the reader. In particular, in terms of memories, as discussed above, memory writing is always an interpretation and construction of memories within a particular time and place, affected by the politics of remembering regarding what is remembered, forgotten, and silenced within a certain context (Gannon, 2006; Smith & Watson, 2010). For this reason, I paid particular attention to dynamic, contextual, political, historical, and material aspects of the memories about my educational experiences. In this respect, memory writing is not a repetition of facts and ideas, but “a way to ask questions and work through new associations” (Augustine, 2014, p. 750).

To construct memory writing about my lived experiences with education and curriculum studies as qualitative materials, I began writing my memories, referring to the written and visual artifacts and documents that had been selected beforehand. These artifacts and documents triggered me to recollect stories and images about anecdotes, events, facts, and conversations with others. Given the constructive nature of memory within a specific context, I engaged in memory writing in a way that included my reflexive thinking about the artifacts and documents. I

do not assume that this process of writing my memories had a preset closure. In other words, when my writing about a certain memory produced and provoked other new memories or images, I included them in a new memory writing. I also gathered additional artifacts when the new memories called upon me to revisit more artifacts. This recursive way of writing memories facilitated interrogations of my identity constructions in a broader and deeper way.

Critical Self-Reflexive Research Journals

Critical self-reflexivity is an essential aspect of poststructurally informed autobiographical research, particularly when it is approached from a postcolonial perspective. Put it another way, self-reflexivity is the process through which the researcher identifies and examines how his or her ontological and epistemological assumptions, as a result of the researcher's location in a specific context, can intervene in the overall processes of conducting research (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). In this light, critical self-reflexivity in this autobiographical study means troubling and disrupting my ontological and epistemological assumptions and my perceptions about culture, identity, the self, others, and the world through considering the power of language and discourse to examine how dominant discourses have contributed to the ways in which realities are constructed (Miller, 2005; Moon, 2022; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017).

I continued to write my critical self-reflexive research journals before, during, and after the process of this research, and I then used the research journals as integral qualitative materials. When writing the critical self-reflexive research journals throughout this autobiographical study, particularly influenced by Asher (2010), I made an attempt to consider not only how power had constructed and been constructed through dominant discourses, but also my possible implicatedness in the very relations of power/knowledge that I tried to interrupt. And then, I used

the qualitative materials as one of the main foundations on which I interrogated my lived experiences and my ‘selves’ from a poststructural perspective as part of this study.

Analysis of Qualitative Materials

From a perspective of poststructuralism, I assume qualitative materials analysis as writing that interweaves segments of the qualitative materials to produce a text in which “each piece of empirical matter [qualitative materials] may be read through the other, and meaning is not sutured to the concept but allowed to transform in connections, readings, and relations” (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 150). In this vein, writing as qualitative materials analysis is not just a repetition of ideas already constructed, but “a way to ask questions and work through new associations” (Augustine, 2014, p. 750). Unlike conventional qualitative research that follows the sequential steps of coding data, creating categories, identifying patterns, and creating themes, qualitative materials in poststructurally informed research are not coded or categorized, but put into relations with theories in multiple unexpected ways (Augustine, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). Furthermore, Tuck and Yang (2014) assert that coding, under the veil of scientific objectivity, expands the project of colonial knowledge production in the way that living things would not allow. Therefore, I used the following ways of analyzing the qualitative materials in a recursive, integrated way. Even though these analytic strategies could not be used separately throughout the research processes, I explain below each of them respectively in order to make it easier to figure out the focal analytic points that each of the strategies brought into relief in analyzing the qualitative materials.

Flirting with Qualitative Materials

Inspired by Phillips’ (1994) idea of flirtation that it keeps things in play, which is associated with Freud’s notion of free association or free-floating attention, J. H. Kim (2016)

approaches qualitative data analysis and interpretation as flirtation with qualitative data to think of methods of inquiry ‘seriously’ and ‘playfully’ at the same time. Engaging in flirting with ideas enables us to think about them in different ways by allowing us to ruminate over “what is unconvincing, uncertain, and perplexing, rendering surprises and serendipities, and of course, disappointment as well” (J. H. Kim, 2016, p. 187). Flirting with qualitative materials is an attempt to analyze the qualitative materials through harnessing the ideas of surprise and curiosity, as we cannot predetermine what will emerge from the materials until we encounter them; it allows us to conceive of ways to reach and negotiate research goals, questions, and theories with qualitative materials; it helps us to embrace less familiar possibilities; and it encourages us to play with new ideas to find and create new stories to yet come (J. H. Kim 2016; Phillips, 1994).

I took flirtation with ideas as an analytical approach throughout the processes of this autobiographical inquiry. That is to say, when dealing with the above-mentioned qualitative materials, particularly when moving from qualitative materials collection to qualitative materials analysis and interpretation, I made attempts to find from the qualitative materials what was unconvincing, uncertain, perplexing, and contradictory to me, as well as epiphanies which were surprising leaps of understanding of my lived experiences that have considerably influenced the trajectory of my life (J. H. Kim, 2016). These were reflecting the personal, the social, the cultural, and the historical at the same time. Additionally, I analyzed how each piece of the qualitative materials could be connected and disconnected to and read through the other(s) and what happened when the qualitative materials were connected to one another and to postcolonial theories and transnational curriculum studies, rather than going through a linear process of addressing the qualitative materials one by one.

Narrative Approach: Storying and Restorying

I partially carried out a narrative analysis of my lived experiences with the written and visual qualitative materials in order to create storied and restoried plots, negotiating different temporal locales and spatiality that were present in my lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that the researcher who creates a narrative text looks for patterns of meaning, narrative thread, tensions, and themes “either within or across an individual’s experience and in the social setting” (p. 132). In this light, narrative analysis was useful in creating and presenting my life stories with the use of the qualitative materials in this autobiographical inquiry. Notably, existing images as visual qualitative materials were analyzed to shed light on their social, cultural, and historical significance that needed to be constructed or deconstructed (Pauwels, 2011).

For this study, I holistically reviewed both written and visual qualitative materials in order to have a broader contextual understanding of the qualitative materials and the sociopolitical, cultural, and discursive constructions of my identities and experiences. And then, I read the qualitative materials line-by-line, while note-taking, highlighting, and capturing what resonated with me, related topics, questions, and connections that I made during the reading processes in order to look for provisional themes, patterns of meaning, and/or meaning units. After that, I reread the qualitative materials and created stories of my lived experiences with specific themes in mind, while centering on what meanings were produced and provoked from the subsequent reading and what social, cultural, political, and historical contexts my stories brought into my narratives as backgrounds. This process was not linear, but recursive and open to changes in structures and/or plots of my narratives, while engaging in negotiating different temporal and spatial contexts with/in my narratives of identity constructions. The possibilities of

changes correspond to what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest about storying and restorying:

We restory earlier experiences as we reflect on later experiences so the stories and their meaning shift and change over time. As we engage in a reflective research process, our stories are often restoried and changed as we, as teachers and/or researchers, “give back” to each other ways of seeing our stories (p. 9, emphasis in original).

In this sense, I advanced a narrative analysis of my lived experiences through several rounds of holistic and close readings, not because it validated my analysis and interpretations of my stories, but rather because it made my stories tentative and open to diverse interpretations and changes regarding the entanglement of the qualitative materials, postcolonial, decolonizing theories, and transnational curriculum studies.

Post-Reflexing: Encountering My Autobiographical Selves

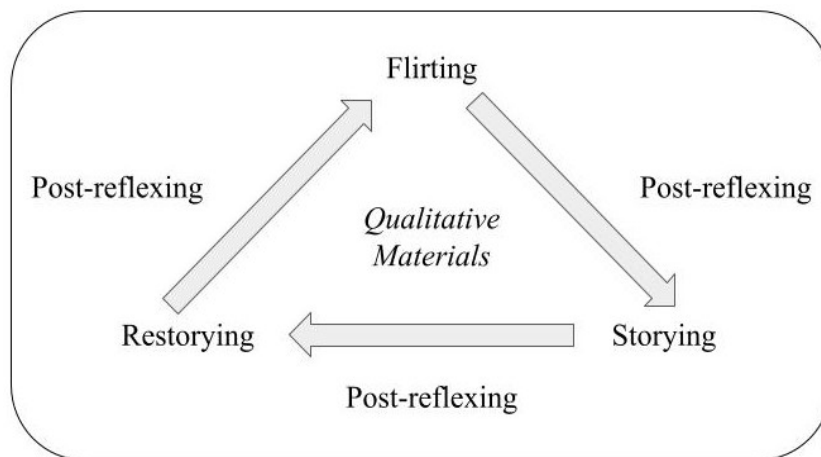
Post-reflexing is another analytical process that was implemented throughout this autobiographical inquiry. As mentioned above, post-reflexing is about seeing what frames our seeing—locating and naming our assumptions of what is normal and what surprises us (Vagle, 2018). It makes possible for an ethos of self-reflexivity to pervade the entire narrative and presumably the entire practice of autobiographical research without self-reflexivity relegated to a brief section (Lenzo, 1995). Moreover, post-reflexing is also a political and ethical practice, as the process of post-reflexing can bring about self-transformation and care for others who have been silenced and marginalized (Hong, 2019).

In this autobiographical research, I engaged in post-reflexing to explore how my knowledge, assumptions, perceptions, and beliefs played a role in producing my lived experiences and narratives of the experiences throughout the processes of storying and restorying

my lived experiences in relation to the constructions of my identities. In particular, based on the poststructuralist assumption that social realities are discursively constructed in a particular context (Derrida, 1998; Foucault, 1980; Miller, 2010), I tried to uncover how my autobiographical narratives were created, storied, and restoried with/in specific sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts; that is, I attempted to see what framed my (re)storying and, more importantly, how power was operating both in the qualitative materials and in my analysis and interpretations of the qualitative materials.

Figure 1

Visualization of Qualitative Materials Analysis



As can be seen in the visualization of qualitative materials analysis (see Figure 1), flirting with qualitative materials, storying and restorying, and post-reflexing were not mutually exclusive, but organically and interactively connected to one another throughout this autobiographical study. It was also not linear, but recursive to analyze and interpret my lived experiences and identity constructions with the qualitative materials. As it was not possible to separate ethical issues from onto-epistemological ones, I addressed these issues in parallel throughout the whole process of analysis imbued with an ethos of self-reflexivity.

Trustworthiness of the Study

I acknowledge that I could not fully and transparently describe and interpret my lived experiences and identity constructions due to the impossibility of fully knowing and representing my 'selves' and the meanings of my lived experiences that are ever-changing across various contexts, which was the reason why I approached this study from the viewpoint of poststructuralism. Even my use of multiple kinds of qualitative materials and methods could not fully capture and represent my lived experiences regarding my identity constructions because the realities that I created in this inquiry were socially and discursively constructed in a specific context (Miller, 2005). At the very best, I made an attempt to create an autobiographical narrative to be involved in complicated conversations on postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies by interrupting dominant discourses of identity, knowledge, and experience.

However, this is not to say that this autobiographical study is not plausible and authentic. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, as I mentioned above, I engaged in self-reflexive practices for me to use my critical 'I' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as the autobiographical self, focusing specifically on how my identities and experiences might affect my analysis and interpretations of the qualitative materials. The self-reflexive practices also made me cautious of the tendency for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative materials to be reduced to formalistic and/or narcissistic narratives that could appear particularly in autobiographical research. In addition, I selected three critical readers to review and provide feedback on my interpretations and findings, explaining the purpose and research questions of this study. Given that this autobiographical inquiry is about my identities and experiences as a student, a teacher, a graduate student, a South Korean Korean citizen, and an international doctoral student at a U.S.

university in transnational contexts, I chose the three critical readers who have different backgrounds and experiences: the first critical reader was an elementary school teacher in South Korea; the second critical reader was a South Korean doctoral student in education and curriculum studies at another U.S. university; and the third critical reader was an American doctoral student in curriculum and instruction at the U.S. university where I have done my doctoral studies. I received and reflected their feedback into the interpretations of my lived experiences and my narratives to the extent that it did not stray from the purpose and research questions of this dissertation research.

Chapter 4: Stories of Cultural (De)colonization from within In-between Spaces

In this chapter, I analyze my own narratives about lived experiences as a student, a preservice and in-service elementary school teacher, a graduate student in curriculum studies, and a citizen in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S. It relates to the transnational flows and mobilities of ideas, knowledge, and my selves and the cultural imaginary towards the West, particularly the U.S., as the symbol of epistemological center and supremacy. The analysis of the narratives is focused on my in-between and even contradictory experiences with cultural colonization and decolonization across South Korea and the U.S., which are socially and discursively constructed in a certain temporal and spatial context where I am at the time of (re)collecting qualitative materials and writing the narratives. Therefore, this chapter presents not only the findings emerging from the analysis of the qualitative materials, but also the unclosed stories of my ongoing identity constructions that are open to different narratives and interpretations. The analyses in this chapter are not organized chronologically. Rather, they revolve around the following themes: challenges and questions on ambivalent identities as a student in South Korea; questions of race, ethnicity, and gender; engagement with curriculum, curriculum question, and curriculum studies in a transnational context; and the politics of colonial/postcolonial: decolonizing in and through Curriculum Studies.

Challenges and Questions on Ambivalent Identities as a Student in South Korea

This section centers on self-reflexive analyses of my stories regarding the dynamics of multilayered tensions within my identity construction as a student in South Korea, including how these tensions are related to the historical, especially postcolonial context of South Korea. In this

regard, the first subsection addresses challenges and questions on the binary of collectivism and individualism that I encountered as a student; and the second subsection is about my contested identity formation around schooling experiences in relation to the historical context of South Korea.

The Binary of Collectivism and Individualism in and out of Schools

When exploring cultural differences between the West and the East and/or when explaining cultural characteristics of East Asian people compared to Western people and vice versa from an intercultural, traditional perspective, the dichotomy between East Asian collectivism and Western individualism has tended to be utilized and, at the same time, reproduced (Huat, 2010; Moon, 2011). Individualism here is a system of value that prioritizes the individual over the group to which the individual belongs, and in contrast to it, collectivism is a value system that gives priority to the interests of the group as a whole over those of the individual for the greatest happiness of the greatest number within the group (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010). Chung (2013) argues that Korean traditional collectivism originated from Confucianism that emphasized relationships, harmony, and order among people. That is why the group called ‘we’ operates as one of the main sources of an individual’s identity formation—who we are and the ways in which we are perceived in a certain context—in South Korea, which can also be seen as the product of social interactions, education, and communication—that is to say, the collective cultural identity of ‘Korean-ness’ (Moon, 2022).

In this context, a traditional sense of the collective cultural identity is embedded in my experiences as a student in a rural context having the history of agricultural tradition. In my memory writing, I remember a conversation that I had with my father about 20 years ago.

Me: Last night, Mr. Park, who lives in our neighborhood, appeared on television! The television program was about *nong-yo*, and a reporter had an interview with him.

My Father: He is over 80 years old and is a master of *nong-yo* of our province. It has been designated as an intangible cultural heritage in our province, and it is a farmer's song that has been passed down for generations.

The *nong-yo* (농요, 農謠) is a genre of Korean traditional songs that tenant farmers in pre-modern eras sang together to relieve their tired bodies and minds, increasing work efficiency. And it can be regarded as one of the things that symbolize Korean collectivist culture, given that South Korea has a long history of agricultural tradition in pre-modern times, which might operate as one source of the formation of cultural identity that remains within the static, traditional notion of Koreanness based on collectivism informed by Confucianism in East Asian contexts.

Despite the remaining collectivist cultural imaginary, to some degree, in South Korea, individualistic values have become prevailing throughout South Korea society as it went through compressed modernization in the last decades while capitalist values became more significant throughout South Korean society (Chang, 2014). Schooling is not an exception in South Korea. In particular, schools are the places in which those competing systems of value have influence on the formation of students' identities through both official and hidden curriculum. Recollecting my experience regarding a middle school ethics class, I wrote, in my memory writing, my story about being taught about Korean traditional community-oriented values and customs informed by Confucianism in the era of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910):

Mrs. Rhee: *Hyang-yak* (향약, 鄉約) is a kind of Confucian regulation that was to establish moral order and discipline people to live by helping each other in the

rural communities of the Joseon Dynasty. There were four virtues of Hyang-yak. First, *deok-up-sang-gwon* (덕업상권, 德業相勸) means encouraging each other to do good deeds. Second, *gwa-sil-sang-gyu* (과실상규, 過失相規) means that we should regulate each other so as not to commit a fault. Third, *ye-sok-sang-gyo* (예속상교, 禮俗相交) means that we should be polite when interacting with each other. And lastly, *hwan-nan-sang-hyul* (환난상휼, 患難相恤) means that we should help each other in times of difficulty. These four virtues are important, so you should know them well.

Me: Mrs. Rhee, those may be on the exam?

Mrs. Rhee: Sure, those are very important, as I said. Let's move on to the next...

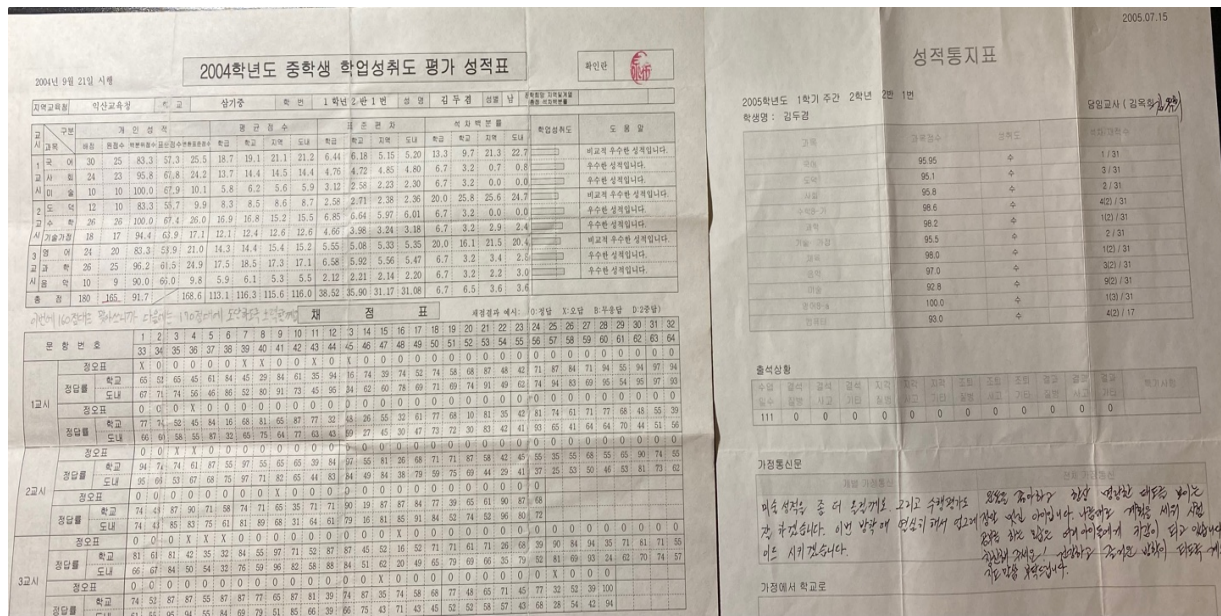
As seen in the above memory of part of my schooling experiences, such traditional community-centered values were reduced to fragmented knowledge that had to be learned and memorized to do well on exams. In the educational system where grading is based on competition among individual students and education is dominated by college entrance exams, individual students' benefit of getting higher grades is much more important than the benefit of the group and community to which they belong. In this sense, school can be seen as a contradictory place where individual students' interests are necessarily prioritized over others in the system of competition-based examination, although it aims for promoting community-oriented values at least on the surface.

In schools, in particular, individualization is not merely a matter of individual students' own interests taking precedence over those of the group in which they are involved, but rather a matter of what kind of subject they should be and become (Foucault, 1976). That is to say,

individual students should manage their learning and even themselves in a rational way that optimizes their learning and ultimately enhances their grades on exams. This kind of rationality within managing oneself culminates in the numbers on report cards, as shown in the below photo of some of my middle school report cards, which are some of the artifacts that I collected for this research.

Figure 2

My Middle School Report Cards



Under the system of fragmented curriculum, leading to fragmented learning experiences, the report cards contained information on how many points I got in each subject, raw scores, percentile scores, standard scores, and my rank in my class, school, region, and province. In addition, my teachers had their students write their reflection on their test scores in their own handwriting on a report card.

The numbers on individual students' report cards speak to them, and can inform their identity formation as a student, and it is their responsibility as a student to manage these

numbers, which has (un)intentional disciplining and controlling effects on them. In other words, individual students have to ‘audit’ themselves, and they are learning by numbers while their teachers are teaching by numbers (Taubman, 2009). The numbers not just tell individual students about their profile as a student, but they are also a predictor of their career path in the future. Becoming an auditor of one’s learning and even oneself in schools indicates that students should discipline themselves to conform to the institutional expectations and norms of teachers, schools, and society (Foucault, 1976).

In this climate of the binary of collectivism and individualism with the latter much more prevailing than the former in my educational experience as a student, cultural differences were invisible and silenced, while being subsumed into the binary of collectivism and individualism, even though the number of multicultural families was already increasing from the mid-2000s. Despite the Korean cultural concepts and practices of collectivism such as mutual aid, collectivism in modern South Korea is deeply rooted in postcolonial experiences that South Koreans had to face in the twentieth century in terms of: rebuilding the nation-state along with ethnically homogenous identity after its independence from Japanese colonization; protecting the nation-state and its people from the threat of communism, particularly, North Korea, in the Cold War era; and promoting national economic development as part of modernizing the nation-state to catch up with Japan and follow Western countries during and after the Cold War era (Hong & Min, 2013; W. S. Kim, 2006; Watson, 2007). In the light of postcolonial, nationalistic history around collectivism, it might be a natural response to the postcolonial entanglements that multicultural education in South Korea has mainly focused on assimilationist approaches in the name of social harmony, rather than foregrounding various experiences, cultures, and histories that ethnic and cultural minorities bring into the classroom (Jo & Jung, 2017; Kim & So, 2018).

In my educational experiences explored above, the collectivist system of value can be seen as politically ambivalent. It pursued a community-oriented mentality that ‘we’ should possess or recover, but on the other hand, it also silenced cultural differences that I might encounter explicitly or implicitly in my educational experiences as a student. This silence raises the question of the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’, in particular, the question, “For whom the collectivist system of value is?”, given that collectivism was just to promote social and cultural harmony, not to establish political solidarity for uncovering and disrupting the processes of marginalization that favored dominant groups and disempowered social and cultural minorities in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Individualism in schools, embodied in and through standardized testing imbued with meritocracy, can render invisible the structural inequalities that hinder the progress of marginalized groups of people. In other words, it decenters the cultures, experiences, and voices of marginalized groups of students to focus on whether an individual student lives up to—and complies with—institutionalized norms or not, as seen in my experiences with standardized testing above. It can also give rise to the view of the cultures of peripheralized students as a deficit that should be overcome through multicultural education for supporting them to adapt to the dominant culture (J. Kim, 2014). In particular, given that individualization in South Korea comes from compressed modernization in the late twentieth century (Chang, 2014), one could say that the individualistic system of value in South Korean schools is one of the manifestations of compressed modernity for keeping up with Western countries that have been considered superior to Japan, the former colonial ruler of Korea.

Both collectivism and individualism within my educational experiences as a student are historically multilayered and deeply entangled with postcolonial histories, modernization, and

(the absence of) multiculturalism in South Korea. The two systems of value are seemingly conflicting and even opposite to one another, and at the same time, both were functioning as a mechanism for serving the interests of dominant groups such as ethnic South Korean students by keeping the experiences and voices of minorities silenced in and out of schools. The two discursive constructs made my identity as a student more tense and complicated, while at the same time solidifying my identity as a cultural insider, that is, an ethnic South Korean student by leading to my performing as a student caught up with the binary of collectivism and individualism.

Education Fever as a Postcolonial Entanglement and Student Identities

My classmates were chatting during a social studies class. The teacher paused the class for a moment and said to us, “Who is chatting? You should be quiet when a teacher is talking. And you should study harder than others because you are from working-class families.” The classroom became quiet soon.

This anecdote that I recorded in my memory writing happened when I was a middle school student in South Korea. The teacher might intend to motivate his students to do well in school and further get a decent job in the future, implicitly or unknowingly disciplining the students to conform to the institutional authority in school. In this sense, schooling in South Korea has been seen as a vehicle for upward mobility to groups of people with low socioeconomic status and for maintaining the status quo to the establishment, provoking education fever⁷ among people regardless of their status and positionalities (Seth, 2002; Sorenson, 1994).

⁷ Education fever in the context of South Korea can be described as the pursuit of the highest level of academic achievement with students’ and their families’ desire for obtaining or maintaining higher socioeconomic status (Seth, 2002). Some people have applauded education fever for promoting South Korea’s economic development and

Education fever, in one sense, has to do with Confucian tradition in pre-modern Korea in terms of its emphasis on academic knowledge, rather than manual labor, advancement through education, and symbiotic relationships between parents and their children (Chae, 2007; Kim & Jung, 2021). In this vein, many parents in South Korea aspire to their children becoming a ‘better’ person through education in terms of not just one’s good character, but also, more importantly, higher socioeconomic status through academic success, as my parents told me to study hard in school to be successful. Education fever, thus, has been one of the key themes that explain South Korean education, students’ experiences in and out of school, and parents’ interventions and/or support for their children’s education (Kim & Jung, 2021).

Education fever, however, has been entangled with (post)colonial history in South Korea. Education fever emerged as a desire to overcome the caste system in the process of modernization around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, associated with social Darwinism and its assumption that knowledge is power along with the introduction of the modern school system (W. Lee, 2013; H. Park, 2018). Through the advent of Western modernity in the name of enlightenment in Korea around that time, people came to perceive education as the key instrument for societal reformation and the nationalist enterprise of building Korea as a modern nation-state in the geohistorical context where Western forces and Japanese imperialism became predominant (Dittrich & Neuhaus, 2023; Lim, 2007).

During the period of Japanese colonization, education served as an instrument for disciplining Koreans to comply with the Japanese colonial authority, discriminating against

making South Korean students world-class learners (Kim & Jung, 2021; Sorenson, 1994). On the other hand, however, it has been criticized as “education paranoia” (Kang, 2008), which has led to severe pathological phenomena such as endless competition among students toward the instrumental goal of entering a top university for moving up the social ladder and entailing excessive spending on private tutoring (S. Lee, 2018; Lim, 2007).

Korean students by limiting their access to secondary and higher education (Seth, 2012; H. Park, 2018). The repressed desire for higher status was one of the factors that ignited education fever and deepened distrust in vocational education. According to Neuhaus (2023), Koreans might consider the colonial school system as a viable option to attain modern knowledge and higher status, even though they were aware of the colonial school system as an instrument for promoting assimilation and ultimately perpetuating the Japanese colonial rule.

In the U.S. military government period after Korea's independence from Japan, the U.S. military government and pro-American intellectuals in South Korea made efforts to introduce American progressivism as a means of making democracy take root in South Korea and abolishing traditional education based on classism (S. Park, 2017). Although the educational reform did not succeed due to ideological barriers set by colonial residues such as authoritarianism and the Korean War, the combination of the democratic ideology and compulsory schooling reinforced the belief in the possibility of upward social mobility through education (Adams, 1956; Seth, 2021). The Korean War impeded the expansion of schooling, but it resulted in dismantling the customarily remaining caste system, while at the same time impoverishing, but violently equalizing people in terms of socioeconomic status (Oh, 2020). A new form of competition for higher status among people unfolded through a statist education system in the post-war period with a rank or status attached to diploma and/or other educational achievements (Dittrich & Neuhaus, 2023; Seth, 2012). Furthermore, in the Cold War era, anti-communism, combined with pro-Americanism, in South Korea precluded the possibility of diversifying the means for social mobility such as political struggles or class movements, boosting education fever as the sole possibility for attaining higher status (Lim, 2007; Oh, 2020).

Education fever in my experiences as a student alienated myself from my working-class background, urging me to identify myself with a status seeker and conformist to the existing educational structure—including the official school curriculum and even the reality of the stratified society under the veil of egalitarian ideas in education—rather than making me aware of possibilities of making a difference in and through education. Education fever has remained as a cultural and educational phenomenon that plays a key role in students' identity constructions and performing—that is, what students do in and out of their school and who they are and become, as can be seen in my experiences (Kim & Jung, 2021). Furthermore, this sociohistorical and educational construct, education fever, is also closely related to the (post)colonial history of South Korea throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries, which means that my identity formation as a student, informed by education fever, can also be seen as inevitably entangled with the sociohistorical context of (post)colonialism in South Korea.

My experiences as a student in South Korea explored in this section show how my ambivalent, conflicting identity constructions as a student were involved in the South Korean history of (post)colonialism, entwined with education fever, as well as the binary of collectivism and individualism. In the postcolonial context of nationalism, modernity, and status competition in South Korea, my student identities were constructed for not pursuing societal changes through education, but for complying with the predetermined pathways, including the official curriculum, like going with the tide, making myself oblivious to cultural differences, (post)colonial consciousness, and possibilities of other ways of being as a student in South Korea.

Questions of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

In this section, I explore my experiences related to race, ethnicity, and gender as a student and a teacher in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in the U.S. through the

lenses of critical multiculturalism and postcolonialism. I focus my analysis on internalized racial, ethnic, and gender discriminations in South Korea, my teaching experience in multicultural education in South Korea, and my positionality as an international doctoral student in the U.S., including how these themes are intertwined with one another in the postcolonial context across the two countries.

Internal Orientalism: Internalizing Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Discrimination

As South Korea has depended on migrant workers in labor-intensive, low-paying jobs mainly from Southeast Asia and China, and accepted marriage migrant women from these countries, a discriminatory gaze on foreigners and immigrants has become more distinct than ever before—that is, the tendency to be overly friendly to White-skinned American and European immigrants and foreigners while looking down on immigrants and foreigners of color from non-Western countries (Kang, 2010; Kim & Jeon, 2017). In this sociocultural context, South Koreans have tended to view only immigrants and foreigners of color as minorities (Hong & Min, 2013).

Particularly, in rural communities where cultural and ethnic homogeneity has been more valued than cultural and ethnic heterogeneity and diversity, migrant workers and marriage migrant women were outsiders hyper-visible to ‘us’, ethnic South Koreans. This socially constructed discriminatory gaze framed my perspective on them; that is, I internalized it, as can be seen in my memory writing about a marriage migrant woman in my rural hometown when I was a middle school student in South Korea:

One day, my English teacher told us that a woman from the Philippines would be teaching us English conversation in an after-school program. In her first class, I found out that she was the mother of a multicultural student in a neighboring elementary school.

My friends and I were not only curious about her, but also skeptical about her ability—more especially, qualification—to teach English. After the class, one of my classmates said to me, “Don’t you think that her English was a little strange?” And I agree with him, “Yes, it was different from the English that we know.”

This memory from my middle school years overlaps with another memory writing regarding a White Australian who served as an English for Speakers of Other Languages teaching intern in my high school:

My English teacher came into the classroom with a White man. The teacher told us that he was a student teacher from Australia who would teach English with her for a month. During that month, my classmates and I actively engaged in English classes to have a conversation with him in English. We asked a lot of questions about his country and his perception of South Korea. My friends and I treated him in a friendly and polite manner. We wanted to leave him with a good impression about South Korea.

These two anecdotes demonstrate the inferiority complex towards the West, White supremacy, and the superiority complex towards other countries that are economically less developed than South Korea. In other words, they are deeply connected to “GDP discrimination” (Kim & Jeon, 2017), which is racial and ethnic discrimination based on the gross domestic product (GDP) and the “dual ethnic bias” (Kang, 2010), the tendency to idealize Western cultures and Whiteness and look down on people of color from underdeveloped, non-Western countries and their cultures. As explored in my experiences above, such a contradictory and discriminatory view, which has been sociohistorically and discursively constructed, could inform ways of thinking about and being with others in a hierarchical way, including who I am in relation to the others in a multicultural, multiethnic society; that is, distancing ‘us’ from people

of color from underdeveloped, non-Western countries while following on White Western societies.

In fact, other Asian countries are geographically much closer to South Korea than Western countries, and most of the immigrants and foreigners in South Korea are from those Asian countries. However, the cultural imaginary of the West as ‘our’ reference point has historically been widespread in South Korea and East Asian countries more broadly (Chen, 2010). Furthermore, the cultural imaginary of the West intersects with racial hierarchy and White supremacy, which has historically been perpetuated as part of a global project for modernization. In particular, given the modern history of South Korea revolving around Japanese colonization and U.S. hegemony, Whiteness has persisted in postcolonial discourses both explicitly and implicitly within the South Korean context even after liberation from Japanese colonization. The postcolonial discourses have the (un)intentional effects of complying with global White supremacy, which shapes what is considered as the norm that we should follow in a national context (S. Y. Lee, 2025). The global White supremacy has minoritized immigrants and foreigners of color from the non-West who, as a matter of fact, account for a majority of immigrants and foreigners in number in South Korea.

As can be seen in my anecdotes, the intersection of the cultural imaginary of the West and global White supremacy has brought about “internal Orientalism” through which minority cultures are marginalized and devalued within South Korea while solidifying the existing racial and ethnic hierarchical relationship between minorities and the dominant culture that sustains the structure of inequality (J. K., Kim et al, 2018). Within the context of internal Orientalism, immigrants and foreigners of color from the non-West are considered socially, economically, and culturally ‘at-risk’ or vulnerable populations. And sympathetic and benevolent gestures towards

them can result in reinforcing the line between ethnic South Koreans as the owners and providers of cultural and material resources and racial and ethnic minorities as the beneficiary, shaping and sustaining the paternalistic relationship between the two groups of people in South Korea (J. K., Kim et al., 2018). In this sense, the anecdotes in my memory writing demonstrate a conservative approach to multiculturalism in South Korea that perceives racial and ethnic minorities as deviating from the cultural imaginary of the West as well as the dominant cultural norm.

Moreover, the paternalistic relationship between ethnic South Koreans and racial and ethnic minorities can be interconnected to the discriminatory gaze on marriage migrant women from other Asian countries in South Korea. It is based on the two social and cultural constructs: the notion of global hypergamy where women from underdeveloped or developing countries migrate to get married to men in richer countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (Hong & Min, 2013; A. E., Kim, 2009); and the patriarchal conception that men should get married and have children to continue their family line. As can be seen in my memory writing regarding the marriage migrant women, internal Orientalism intersects with gender discrimination especially against women of color from less developed countries than South Korea, which can be understood in connection with GDP discrimination as well (Kim & Jeon, 2017).

Engaging in Multicultural Education in South Korea, a Postcolonial Strong-State

South Korea has persisted in a centralized system of education through its governmental control over the national curriculum, teacher education, and teacher recruitment, to name a few, since the government establishment in 1948 after liberation from Japanese colonization and the period of the U.S. military government. In this sense, South Korea has followed the strong-state model in which the centralized state's governmental control over education is to achieve national economic and ideological goals of modernization through which many Asian countries catch up

with Japan and follow Western countries, informed by Japanese colonization and Western-centered post/neo-colonialism in Asian contexts (Lim & Apple, 2016; Watson, 2007).

In this context, multicultural education has been led by the government, the Ministry of Education, in a top-down approach in South Korea (Jo & Jung, 20147; Kim & So, 2018). For example, according to the *Support Plan for Multicultural Education* (Ministry of Education, 2019), “it is necessary to establish an educational foundation that recognizes the cultural diversity and differences of multicultural students and transforms them into a driving force for the development of our society” (p. 1). As a public elementary school teacher in South Korea, I was involved in the nationalistic project of multicultural education, as can be seen in my memory writing about a conversation with my students, one of whom was a multicultural student whose mother was a marriage migrant woman from Vietnam.

Jisoo⁸: Mr. Kim, Sunwoo can speak Vietnamese!

Me: Oh, you have learned Vietnamese from your mother, Sunwoo, haven't you?

Sunwoo: Yes.

Me: Can you introduce yourself in Vietnamese?

Sunwoo: (Introducing himself in Vietnamese)

Me: Wow, that's great! As economic trade and cultural exchange between South Korea and Vietnam have increased, we will need more bilinguals who can speak both Korean and Vietnamese. Sunwoo, you will be able to contribute to our society in the future.

This illustrative example culled from my memory writing reveals how the student's cultural and linguistic assets were reduced to a future economic value. More attention was paid to how the

⁸ All individuals' names in this dissertation are anonymized to prevent them from being identified.

student could contribute to South Korean society in the future than what he thought about his positionalities and how he lived in the school and society more broadly.

Although neoliberal, conservative, pluralistic, and critical perspectives on multicultural education have coexisted within multicultural education policies and national curriculum documents in South Korea, multicultural students' bilingualism has been discussed with a focus on developing their potential as competitive global citizens in connection with South Korea's economic advancement (Kang, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2019). In other words, cultural and linguistic diversity has been regarded as a commodity and multicultural students who embody the diversity as human resources for national economic advancement within the intersection of multicultural education, neoliberalism, and nationalism, which makes us oblivious to the oppression of cultural differences and subsequent social inequalities (Atasay, 2015; Sleeter, 2018). It can also result in depoliticizing multicultural education and undermining the foundations of a democratic citizenry (Bourassa, 2021; Brown, 2015). Within this context, I, as a public elementary school teacher, was internalizing and putting into practice such a depoliticized (or perhaps craftily politicized) discourse.

The well-intentioned, 'common-sense' discourse on multicultural education with which I was unintentionally entangled exerted its power as a (per)formative force in leading me as a public elementary school teacher to essentialize marginalized groups of students, presuming my students' and my identities as fixed. Despite the fact that the classroom was a hybrid space where a variety of cultural identities encountered, conflicted, and negotiated with one another, it was politically and psychologically burdensome for me as a public school teacher to interrupt the common sense, transcend the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', and create counter-narratives against unequal power relations in and out of school due to the complexities and

conservativeness of the positionality of public school teachers as governmental officials (Y. Lee, 2023). The “common sense cannot help but to be political, to be implicit in the injustices of our times, and thus, common sense can become intolerant, dogmatic, and insistent, especially when leveraged strategically for oppressive ends” (Kumashiro, 2020, p. 10). Underlying the common sense about multicultural education and the role of teachers in South Korea were the desire to avoid the discomfort of having to unlearn the common sense, to maintain the comfort of conforming to it, and to secure one’s position by policing the norms sociopolitically constructed. This common sense was embodied through the imposition of identities that privilege the binary of self/other, ethnic South Koreans/racial and ethnic minorities, and colonizer/colonized.

Although the depoliticized but tactically politicized common sense informed my teaching practices and identity formation as a teacher, postcolonial perspectives have allowed me to reflect on my teaching experiences in multicultural education in terms of working through binaries, as can be seen in part of a reflection paper that I wrote in the fall of 2021 as an international doctoral student in the U.S.:

One of my students was a 다문화 (*da-mun-hwa*, multicultural in English) student. His mother came from Vietnam to get married to a Korean man. All of his classmates knew about his family background, and he was categorized and labelled as a 다문화 student throughout his years in elementary school. There was a (in)visible 경계 (*gyeong-gye*, border in English) between him and his classmates and teachers, including me. He may have been on his own borderland. I should have been a border crosser for him, all of my students, and myself at the time. Now, I am on my own borderland between South Korea and the U.S. as a 유학생 (*yoo-hak-saeng*, student studying abroad or international

student in English). I am struggling with working through binaries. He might be struggling with navigating binaries too (in October, 2021).

Postcolonial perspectives on culture allowed me to work through and further disrupt binaries of self/other and colonizer/colonized, provoking a hybrid consciousness which enables us to “engage our own implicatedness in the very structures of oppression we are attempting to change” (Asher, 2002, p. 82).

In a similar vein, in my personal reflection on postcolonial studies, I wrote, “A hybrid consciousness allows us to engage with cultural differences that continuously emerge between self and other, which encourages us to move beyond and heal the chasm between “us” and “them” (in November, 2021). Given that “cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self and Other” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 52), a hybrid consciousness made it possible for me to see myself in relation to others, as can be seen in my personal reflection on postcolonial thinking regarding culture and identity. Therefore, postcolonial thinking opened the door for me to critically examine my experiences in multicultural education in South Korea from regional and global perspectives in relation to the asymmetrical power relations built on the imposition of binaries of self/other, West/non-West, and colonizer/colonized.

Being as a South Korean in the U.S.: the Racial Politics of White/of Color in a Global Context

When I first heard the news about the Murder of George Floyd in South Korea, I thought that it took place due to the abuse of the police force and anti-Black racism in the U.S. South Korean media addressed the incident as one of the main news items for several days. The media reported the scenes of looting of stores, arson, and some violent protests by Black Americans in Minneapolis with just a little attention given to the Black Lives Matter movement. When I read online news articles, most of the replies to the articles

were about criticizing Black Americans' looting, arson, and violent protests. Some people even stigmatized George Floyd because of his criminal records. Few South Koreans wanted to know more about racial discriminations that people of color were facing in the U.S. (in October, 2022).

Writing my personal reflection on racial issues in education as a South Korean doctoral student in the U.S., I recollected my memory of the Murder of George Floyd being reported in South Korea. In South Korea where racial and ethnic homogeneity was highly valued for nationalistic purposes in the postcolonial times, racial and ethnic issues were not so much addressed as widely in the U.S. (Kang, 2021). In this context, because I lived as an 'insider' in terms of race and ethnicity in South Korea and/or because I had no experience living in a multiracial, multiethnic foreign country before, I thought that racial and ethnic issues in the U.S. had little to do with me when I was in South Korea. However, as can be seen in my personal reflection above, anti-Black racism was widespread in South Korea, which is a manifestation of global Whiteness (Ha, 2012). As White supremacy has become globalized, anti-Black racism has become transnational, which means that the cultural imaginary of the U.S., which has been prevalent not just in South Korea but also other East Asian countries such as Japan and Taiwan, has also been intertwined with global Whiteness (Chen, 2010; Moosavi, 2022).

Part of my memory writing demonstrates racial and ethnic issues that I was facing in local and global contexts:

When it was confirmed that I would move to Minneapolis for my doctoral studies, my parents and friends expressed their worry about racism in the U.S. They knew Minneapolis only as the city where the Murder of George Floyd happened through South Korean news media. My parents even thought that Black Americans made up the bulk of

the population in Minneapolis. To make matters worse, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent rise of anti-Asian racism, including hate crimes such as the Atlanta spa shooting in 2021, occurred when I was preparing to move to the U.S. This allowed me to be more aware of racial/ethnic issues in local and global contexts than ever before.

In this context of racial violence, hostility, and discrimination in relation to anti-Black racism and yellow peril discourses (An & Rodríguez, 2021), the racial and ethnic aspect of my identities as a person of color and South Korean has become most visible among others in the U.S., which is not just one of the social constructs but also expressed and embodied through my appearance. In other words, my racial and ethnic identity as a person of color and East Asian/South Korean have been most conspicuous among other constructs of my identities because it is most seemingly distinguishable from others and South Korea was perceived as racially and ethnically homogenous for a long period of time.

I experienced internalizing my identity as a person of color and East Asian/South Korean through racialization based on the deep-seated, predetermined categories of race and ethnicity in the U.S. particularly through the dichotomous opposition of White/of color and the homogenization of East Asians/South Koreans. On the other hand, however, the racial and ethnic signifiers attached to myself in the U.S.—a person of color and East Asian/South Korean—have enabled me to understand my identities in relation to other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. It has also encouraged me to imagine solidarity with other racial and ethnic groups of people against racial and ethnic discriminations, while struggling to be cautious lest it reproduced and redeployed monolithism in an attempt to embrace marginalized identities by reasserting their and my identities in the form of the others (Rhee, 2009). As can be seen in my personal reflections that I wrote for my doctoral coursework, postcolonial studies along with my experiences with

being racialized in the U.S. has shaped and sharpened my view on (subaltern) identity themes such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and their intersectionality. It can also be extended into “critical syncretism” through which “to actively interiorize elements of others into the subjectivity of the self so as to move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations in the form of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism, or nationalistic xenophobia” (Chen, 2010, p. 99).

My thinking about racial and ethnic identity—the identities of differences and the differences of identities more broadly—as constructed in a certain social, cultural, political, and historical context has become more complicated and critical through my postcolonial reading and writing. This is because different identities cannot be explained through or fit into any single representation of cultural differences, which are socially constructed. For instance, engaging with Trinh’s (1989) postcolonial, decolonizing text, I recalled Bhabha’s (1994) argument and wrote in my personal reflection, “Difference is that which is continuously emerging from the in-betweenness, which means that there can never be fixed differences and identities in an absolute sense.” And I added, “The potential of engaging with differences lies in its deconstructing the binary between us and them, between me and you, and between White and people of color, and at its core is telling stories to recreate and regenerate our own lives, protecting from losing our own selves” (in February, 2023).

As aforementioned about the conventional notion of a boundary between nation-states, it may be impossible to entirely transcend the fixed categories of racial and ethnic groups in institutionalized contexts. That being said, postcolonialism and critical multiculturalism have facilitated my critical consciousness of how racial and ethnic otherness has been historically, culturally, and politically constructed across different racial and ethnic groups in local and global

contexts. Furthermore, postcolonial, decolonizing perspectives have revealed to me that the frame of who constitutes ‘us’ and ‘them’ respectively can vary according to the shifting political context of our differences (Moon, 2021). And it has also provoked me to understand my own and others’ racial and ethnic identities not as something given or imposed, but something that can be situated in relation to others. Rather than leading to color-blindness, such a frame has allowed me to understand White supremacy, anti-Black racism, and Asian Hate as regards larger sociopolitical and discursive contexts.

According to my personal reflections and memory writings, I have felt an unresolved tension between identifying myself as East Asian/South Korean by distinguishing myself from others and seeing myself and others as I am and they are. Nevertheless, I have been struggling with the question of where I was, am, and will be with whom so as to understand who I am within the current shifting and fluctuating dynamics of racial and ethnic identity politics, which has been especially informed by my postcolonial, decolonizing reading and writing.

Engagement with Curriculum, Curriculum Questions, and Curriculum Studies in a Transnational Context

In this section, I examine my experiences with engaging in curriculum studies, which has been based on the U.S.-originated, U.S.-centric curriculum theories and knowledge, as a preservice teacher in elementary teacher education and a graduate student in South Korea from the perspective of postcolonialism and global Whiteness. Following this, I explore my experiences with working through the national curriculum as an elementary school teacher and how practicing the national curriculum can be understood in relation to postcolonial relations between South Korea and the West. The two subsections address my experiences in curriculum studies and curricular practice respectively, but those experiences can be interwoven and

understood together in terms of not just the connection between theory and practice, but also of the postcolonial context of South Korea.

Understanding Curriculum through the Transpacific Frames of Reference

The overarching question in the field of curriculum studies, “What and whose knowledge is of most worth?”, is of great significance not just in school curriculum but also in teacher education and even curriculum studies itself particularly relating to the transnational flows of curriculum theories and knowledge. As explored earlier, South Korean curriculum studies, like other academic disciplines, has so heavily been influenced by American curriculum studies that it has historically been U.S.-centric and framed through the lens of the U.S. systems of education knowledge (Y. C. Kim, 2005, 2010; Y. Lee, 2003). In this regard, my experiences of being introduced into and engaging in curriculum studies in South Korea affected the constructions of my identities and cultural imaginary about the U.S. as a (preservice) teacher and a graduate student situated in the South Korean systems of educational knowledge.

Engaging in Curriculum Studies in South Korea: U.S.-Centric Citational Practices

A course on curriculum studies in my elementary teacher education program in South Korea broadly covered American curriculum history and ideologies from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, according to the syllabus of the course I took and my memory writing. It ranged from curriculum development to curriculum understanding/reconceptualization, following the historical path of the American systems of curriculum knowledge. Some of the American curriculum knowledge covered in the course has historically had a substantial impact on national curriculum design and reforms such as Tyler rationale, Bloom’s taxonomy, Dewey’s child/experience-centered curriculum, and Bruner’s spiral curriculum, to name a few. In particular, most of the American curriculum knowledge and theories from the late 19th to 20th

century I came to know through the course were produced and disseminated primarily by White scholars such as Franklin Bobbit, Ralph Tyler, Benjamin Bloom, John Dewey, William Kilpatrick, George Counts, Harald Rugg, William Pinar, and Michael Apple, just to list a handful of them. Their ideas on curriculum took a position of the canon as ‘official’, valuable knowledge in South Korean curriculum studies. As a preservice teacher, I accepted American curriculum knowledge and its history, including curriculum reconceptualization that sought to understand curriculum in more critical and diverse ways, as the frame of reference for understanding and evaluating curriculum and curricular practices in the South Korean context.

It may be natural to discuss American curriculum studies because various experiments with and discussions on curriculum were abundantly carried out within the U.S. highly decentralized education system (So, 2024). In addition, we, South Koreans, can take the late-mover advantage of avoiding the mistakes made by the early movers, learning about various perspectives on understanding and theorizing curriculum. However, the U.S. systems of curriculum knowledge have served as the sole point of reference for engaging in curriculum studies in South Korea (Y. C. Kim, 2005, 2010). Such transpacific curriculum knowledge operated as a framework for me to understand and critique my experiences with the school curriculum I went through as a student and the national curriculum I was to teach as a teacher in South Korea. For example, as part of my assignment papers for courses in the elementary teacher education program, I made a reference to William Pinar’s idea on *currere* for criticizing my school experiences as a student and to Tyler rationale for coming up with ideas on how to wipe out students’ creativity. My reference to American curriculum knowledge has continued, which can be interpreted as an example of the dominant influence of the U.S. in the fields of curriculum studies and teacher education in South Korea.

Those memories of being introduced to curriculum studies intersect with my personal reflection that I wrote about Herbert Kliebard's book, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* (2004) as an international doctoral student in the U.S.:

I was aware that Herbert Kliebard, as a curriculum historian, criticized the ahistorical nature and value-neutrality of the traditional perspective on curriculum, and that his book was widely read in the field of curriculum studies. I felt familiar with many of the terms, historical events, and names in the book, as I had already heard about them multiple times in South Korea, while feeling a sense of bitterness, "Oh, how much have we South Korean depended on American curriculum studies?"

Although South Korea and the U.S. are distant from one another across the Pacific, South Korea has formed a dependent, yet hierarchical relationship with the U.S. around curriculum and educational knowledge within the changing geopolitical and ideological landscape regarding the Cold War, post/neo-colonialism, and global Whiteness (S. Y. Lee, 2025).

The U.S.-centric politics of inclusion and exclusion in curriculum knowledge continued and was intensified in a graduate degree program in South Korea where I was as a master's student. According to the syllabi of courses I took for a master's degree, it was required for graduate students to read research articles and books published in the Western academia, primarily the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., so that they could learn about 'advanced', '(potentially) influential' educational knowledge before (un)critically accepting them and/or applying them to the South Korean context.

On the other hand, however, it should be acknowledged that critical approaches to curriculum and teacher education could be inspired by knowledge and ideas from the West. As a matter of fact, South Korean curriculum studies has moved beyond translating and/or

recontextualizing U.S. curriculum knowledge towards the creative production of local knowledge based on South Korean contexts, and American curriculum studies, especially the reconceptualist movement, has played an important role in transforming the notion of what constitutes curriculum and curriculum inquiry in South Korea (Y. C. Kim, 2010). For example, it opened the way for me to critically examine the national curriculum, South Korean multicultural education, and my own experiences with them.

Nevertheless, as a graduate student who just entered the field of curriculum studies in South Korea, I accepted American curriculum knowledge and theories as the generalized, universalized, and even better reference frame for understanding curriculum and curricular practices in South Korea, as can be seen in my personal reflection writing and assignment papers where I was thinking with and citing the names of U.S., Canadian, or European educational researchers and their ideas. This citational practice instilled in my mind the assumption that engaging in curriculum studies was nothing less than accepting the flows of curriculum knowledge from the West, particularly the U.S., and adapting it into South Korean contexts, which was the process of building my ‘epistemic affinity’ with American curriculum studies. As Gershon and Helfenbein (2023) contend, curriculum studies matters as a critical tool for these troubled times where students are reduced to scores on assessments and public education is in crisis, but where we relate to curriculum studies equally matters particularly given the transnational, yet asymmetrical flows of curriculum theories and knowledge.

American Progressivism in South Korea: U.S. Educational Imperialism

“We are teaching not subjects, but students.” And “the quality of education cannot exceed that of teachers, and the quality of teachers cannot exceed that of their relationship with

their students.” This rhetoric of child-centered education, based on pedagogical progressivism⁹, became universalized in elementary (teacher) education, and it has been accepted as the norm for defining the professional identity of teachers without profound historical reflection. In my years of elementary teacher education in South Korea, American progressivism provided the norm of curricular practices in relation to establishing elementary school teachers’ professionalism and constructing teacher identities.

In the context of American teacher education, Labaree (2004) suggests the inextricably interconnected relationship between the professionalism of teachers and teacher educators and pedagogical progressivism, saying that “progressivism provides a wonderful combination of noble aims and scientific methods, which corresponds to the two defining characteristics of a true profession, high ideals of public service, and clinically effective methods” (p. 160). For similar reasons, a rhetoric of pedagogical progressivism has taken hold in South Korean teacher education and educational reforms (S. Y. Lee, 2025; S. Park, 2017). For example, as an educational reform, the Innovation School Movement began to emerge and spread across South Korea in the 2010s when I was a preservice teacher. Based on the ideas of pedagogical progressivism, it aimed to transform the existing schools into more enjoyable and democratic spaces under the banner of transitioning from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness, from textbook-centeredness to activity-centeredness, from one-size-fits-all approaches to individualized ones, and from norm-referenced assessments to growth-referenced ones.

⁹ According to Labaree (2004), pedagogical progressivism in American curriculum history was “to base instruction on the needs, interests, and developmental stage of the child; to develop a curriculum that focused on teaching students the skills they need in order to learn any subject instead of one focused on transmitting particular bodies of knowledge; to promote discovery and self-directed learning by the student through active engagement; to have students work on projects that express student purposes and that integrate the disciplines around socially relevant themes; and to promote values of community, cooperation, tolerance, justice, and democratic equality” (p. 145).

South Korean educational reforms advocating such values of pedagogical progressivism have been intertwined with the history of the introduction of American progressivism to South Korea after liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. In this regard, I had a chance to talk with a professor of curriculum studies who was playing a role in the Innovation School Movement in my province. In my memory writing, I wrote that he had said:

Such progressive education movements had already existed even in the 1940s and 1950s, and South Korean educators studying in the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s had endeavored to reform schools with the experience-centered curriculum ideology, informed by John Dewey, soon after liberation from Japanese colonization.

In actuality, in the postcolonial context of South Korea after the end of Japanese colonization, American progressivism, represented by John Dewey, was introduced to South Korea as a powerful ideological means to help establish a new democratic political and educational systems and to break away from the totalitarian and authoritarian education during Japanese colonization (S. Park, 2017). Furthermore, in terms of geopolitics, experience-centered education, which was in vogue not just in the U.S., but also around the world at that time, received much attention as a means of moving away from exclusive nationalism and strengthening international ties with other countries, there being a perception that in order to win the competition with Japan, a former colonial power, it was imperative to follow Western ideologies and theories particularly originating from the U.S., which South Koreans thought had proven to be superior to Japan (G. Lee, 2017). After the Korean War, American Education Missions were dispatched to South Korea four times over the post-war ten years to support (re)building South Korean education. The third American Education Mission (from September 1956 to June 1955) proposed that school curriculum should be reformed into an experience-centered curriculum, publishing a

book, *Curriculum Handbook for the School of Korea* (American Education Team, 1955). This historical fact shows that the introduction and spread of American progressivism in South Korea has been entangled with the U.S. and Japan historically and geopolitically.

American progressivism was difficult to fully implement in the postcolonial South Korean context due to various social, political, economic and cultural constraints, including the grammar of schooling around that time (Park & Kim, 2025). However, the curriculum ideology has been alive, functioning as a normative discourse that has shored up the mission of elementary education and informed part of my identities as a (prospective) elementary school teacher. Put it differently, both in the U.S. and South Korea, elementary teacher education has had a romanticized relationship with pedagogical progressivism. Some people could say that the introduction and dissemination of American curriculum theories including progressivism has not been a one-sided colonial imposition, but reflected South Korean educators' efforts of adopting and adapting American curriculum knowledge in consideration of the South Korean context (Y. C. Kim, 2010). However, the continued citational practices of U.S.-centric democracy, humanism, and progressive education within educational reform discourses have naturalized and perpetuated "white-centric norms of educational knowledge, which have been globalized as general educational theory while carrying US-based epistemic standards and their unquestioned white-centric assumptions across the Pacific" (S. Y. Lee, 2025, p. 30). Therefore, it can be said that the democratizing mission of South Korean elementary teacher education and the rhetoric of progressive education underpinning the professionalism of teachers and teacher educators owe a certain amount of debt to American curriculum studies.

In this respect, American progressivism, which has served as an old episteme for new educational reforms in South Korea, reminds of "debt imperialism" (J. Kim, 2022), through

which the U.S. occupiers imposed a metaphorical ‘debt’ on South Korea for its independence from Japanese colonization and the U.S. military government after Imperial Japan’s defeat in the Second World War. Exploring my memories about the experiences as a (preservice) elementary school teacher in South Korea, it can be said that the U.S.-centric citational practices of teacher educators and educational scholars—regardless of whether or not they were about progressive education—led me to think that I would need to get a doctoral degree in the U.S. if I wanted to become an educational researcher or even if I pursued a doctorate in South Korea, I would have to engage with American educational knowledge for its application to the South Korean context.

Working through the National Curriculum as Entangled with (Neo-)colonial Relations

My identities as a teacher and citizen in South Korea were constructed and negotiated with/in the government’s education policy, social expectations of public elementary school teachers, and my past experiences in the institutional context of schooling. Curriculum had an important role in shaping my thought about who I was and who I should be as a public elementary school teacher in South Korea. This is because curriculum was a guidepost for what and how I should teach my students, a space where my students and I met each other and created individual and collective experiences.

However, curriculum almost always meant the national curriculum within the South Korean education system which has followed the strong state model that controls education as a means of reaching the economic and ideological goals of a nation-state (Lim & Apple, 2016). According to my curriculum documents on which I based my lessons in the elementary classroom, I was an implementer of the national curriculum, teaching with subject-by-subject achievement standards, examples of teaching methods presented in the national curriculum, and textbooks made according to the national curriculum. The track on which students had to run was

prescribed, and each student ran or walked at a different pace. I supported some of my students who were ‘lagging behind’ to try to complete the set track. That being said, there were times when I reconstructed the national curriculum in a way that took into account my students’ background and the contexts of national curriculum implementation, which was so-called “mutual adaptation” (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). The national curriculum represented the South Korean government’s authority, on the other hand, however, it also operated as a discursive tool that shaped my positionality as a public elementary school teacher who did not possess a political means of freeing myself from the decisions externally imposed by the government (Y. Lee, 2023).

As I can see in the syllabi and reflection on my experiences, the authority of the national curriculum was highly valued in my teacher education program in South Korea. Most of the method courses were focused on how to implement the prescribed curriculum in the classroom, and most of the assignments were about reconstructing textbook contents, selecting and organizing learning activities according to the national curriculum, and devising assessment methods. It seemed as if they followed the Tyler rationale that described a series of steps towards organizing curriculum from a supposedly ‘value-neutral’ standpoint, evading ideological controversies related to curriculum; that is, what to teach and learn in schools.

As mentioned before, as a (preservice) teacher, I was attracted to the rhetoric of pedagogical progressivism. However, as Labaree (2004) says that “under these [bureaucratic] circumstances, it is no surprise that teachers were more likely to adopt some rhetoric from pedagogical progressivism and to inject some token activity and movement into their classroom” (p. 154), I assumed my students’ experiences as one of the auxiliary resources to keep them interested in my lesson, not as the kernel of the lesson, with/in the framework of the

predetermined national curriculum. Meanwhile, the controversies over the curricular question, “What knowledge is of most worth?”, seemed like an empty story to me as a teacher implementing the national curriculum. In a nutshell, while being attached to American progressivism, my head and hands were caught up in the national curriculum.

It is of importance to note here that the national curriculum is a social construct/contract, a product created within a specific social, political, cultural, economic, and historical context of South Korea. In the strong state model of Asian countries such as South Korea, the governmental control of the national curriculum is closely tied to the national economic developmental plans (Lim & Apple, 2016). Particularly, national economic development in South Korea means that South Korea should follow the developmental path of advanced countries in the West in order to catch up with Japan, the former colonizer. The strong state model implies not just the enduring effects of historical colonial relations, but also the cultural imperative embedded in the Asian context in which the state, as a moral guardian, leads education to form a collective national identity (Lim & Apple, 2016). In this regard, education has been mobilized as a strategic tool for economic development and ideological control in South Korea since its liberation from Japanese colonization and the U.S. military government period, and the national curriculum has been at the core of such strategic deployment of education (So, Kim, & Lee, 2012).

Given the instrumental perspective on the national curriculum as a means of national development, the implication of ‘advancement’ within the national curriculum policy and development has been to follow advanced countries in the West (Jang, 2020). Put it in more detail, the revisions and reforms of the national curriculum in South Korea have stemmed from differences from and comparisons with some Western countries, which have perpetuated the status of the West as the sole point of reference, Western-centric power relations, and ‘our’

inferior complex (Jang, 2020). In fact, the 2015 national curriculum that I implemented as a teacher was founded on a competency-based approach to curriculum, and South Korean curriculum researchers involved in the development of the national curriculum referred to international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Western countries such as the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., to name a few, to ensure that South Korea would not fall behind (J. H. Kim, 2021). It indicates that the fear of falling behind in global competition is deeply rooted in such comparative curriculum inquiry and the national curriculum in South Korea (So, 2017).

As Paraskeva (2016) says, the epistemic suicide of other forms of knowledge, “curriculum epistemicide,” can be intensified due to the uncritical borrowing Western-centric curriculum knowledge and practices. On the other hand, however, imported ideas and theories can lead to the possibility of translation and variation in a specific context on the part of the recipient of them, rather than unilateral transmission of fixed discourses and messages (J. H. Kim, 2021). Even so, one could say that the epistemological influence of the West is intertwined with collective national identity as a South Korean in relation to globalization, development, and advancement as the rationale for justifying national curriculum reforms and making comparison with the West as the frame of reference behind teachers’ implementation of the national curriculum (D. Kim, 2024).

The meanings and values inherent in or created through the national curriculum are likely to form collective reasoning and emotions about globalization, advancement, and individual success in the Western-centric context (Jang, 2020). In this sense, as a public elementary school teacher and governmental officer who implemented the national curriculum, I might be playing a part in reproducing such collective reasoning and emotions, thereby being involved in the

Western-centric power dynamics surrounding the development of the national curriculum in South Korea. This is because the act of referencing is not done to bring about meaningful change, but rather to pretend to do so while actually maintaining the status quo (Waldow, 2012).

The Politics of Colonial/Postcolonial: Decolonizing in and through Curriculum Studies

This section is about the politics of (post)colonialism between South Korea and the U.S. embedded in my experiences as a citizen and graduate student in South Korea and as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies in the U.S., exploring the processes of decolonization within and through transnational curriculum studies. In this context, I examine my epistemic identity journey as a curriculum researcher and doctoral student across the two countries.

(Re)creating (Neo-)colonial Imaginary in Local, National, and Global Contexts

As far as I remember, my first experience regarding U.S. supremacy was a visit to the U.S. Air Base in my province in South Korea in the late 1990s, escorted by my aunt whose husband was a White American and military officer in the U.S. I could encounter American industrial products that were considered superior to South Korean ones in a PX there. As I was a young kid at that time, I had no idea about why there were U.S. military bases in South Korea, and I never thought to ask about it. There might be many complicated reasons regarding international politics, modern history, and national security that led to the stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea as an ally since the armistice agreement of Korea. To me as a young kid, however, the U.S. Air Base was just a new place where I could get American products and snacks.

Figure 3

An Entrance of the U.S. Air Base in Kunsan, South Korea



Given that South Korea hosts the largest U.S. military garrison in the world, South Korean education has been bound up with “educational imperialism”, which was instituted by the U.S. in the Cold War era to cultivate the ‘right’ kinds of people through education across the world (S. Y. Lee, 2025, p. 33). In this vein, my memory about the U.S. Air Base above is not just about the formation of the cultural imaginary of U.S. supremacy, but also can have a bearing on epistemological imperialism in education and educational research in South Korea.

Gravitating towards the U.S. as the Center of Knowledge Production: Epistemic Affinity with the U.S. as (Neo-)Colonial Imaginary

Paradoxically, both U.S-centric curriculum studies and a new understanding of curriculum open to change I experienced in my graduate studies in South Korea encouraged me to continue engaging in curriculum studies in the U.S. by stepping away from the institutionalized context of South Korean education. This can be understood as a manifestation of my epistemic affinity with American curriculum studies that was already formed in South Korea. I came across an online newspaper article that covered statistical data on South Koreans who earned a doctorate from overseas universities in all academic disciplines from 1943 to 2006. Even though the newspaper article was published almost 20 years ago, the current trend is similar to that of the time except that there are not as many people pursuing a doctoral degree in Japan these days as there were in the 20th century, and that there are currently much more people pursuing their doctorate abroad than there were in the last century.

Figure 4

Top 20 Universities out of South Korea from which South Koreans Received a Doctorate from 1943 to April 19, 2006

박사학위 취득 상위20개 대학
기간: 1943년~2006년 4월 19일

대학	박사학위 취득자 수(명)
1 도쿄대	832
오스틴 텍사스대	629
텍사스A&M대	538
매디슨 위스콘신대	504
어배나-샘페인 일리노이대	455
오하이오주립대	447
미시간대	362
도호쿠(東北)대	353
미네소타대	329
교토(京都)대	328
11 펜실베이니아주립대	324
퍼듀대	321
오사카(大阪)대	321
규슈(九州)대	314
아이오와대	287
도쿄공업대	287
미시간주립대	282
쓰쿠바(筑波)대	254
플로리다대	253
뉴욕주립대	247

(From Dong, J. & Yoon, W. (2006, April 24). 30,000 Doctors from Overseas since Independence from Imperial Japan... Where Did They Get Their Doctorate?. *The Dong-A Ilbo*.

<https://www.donga.com/news/amp/all/20060424/8299229/1>)

University of Tokyo, University of Texas at Austin, University of Wisconsin at Madison, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, The Ohio State University, University of Michigan, Tohoku University, University of Minnesota, and Kyoto University (from top 1 to 10).

According to the article, South Koreans who pursued doctoral studies left for the U.S. or Japan in general from 1943 to 2006, and about 70 percent of those who obtained a doctorate in educational studies overseas during that period studied in the U.S. (The Dong-A Ilbo, 2006, April 24). Therefore, the transnational flow of scholars from South Korea to the U.S. and back to the former and the resulting flow of knowledge from the U.S. to South Korea have been

prevalent in South Korea. As I had (un)wittingly formed epistemic affinity with American curriculum knowledge—regardless of whether it was for traditional, critical, or deconstructive studies—through graduate studies, I was also involved in those transnational flows informed by asymmetrical power relations between the two countries.

The entanglement of my personal experiences and the social, political, cultural, and historical condition of power relations between South Korea and the U.S. shaped my cultural imaginary that represented “the structural flow of desire” (Chen, 2010, p. 225) towards the U.S. Chen (2010) suggests that “the cultural imaginary structures the system of ideology, links to the concrete experiences of daily life, and forms the direction and boundary of the psychological space” (p. 111). In this vein, such U.S.-oriented cultural imaginary played a critical role in constructing my subjectivity, identity, and psyche, all of which are about “culture and mind, desire and body” (Chen, 2010, p. x) in relation to the South Korean geohistorical context of knowledge production and circulation and the entailing cultural and epistemological dominance of the U.S. in particular and the West generally in South Korea.

Ironically, complicated conversations on curriculum taking place in the U.S., which has been critical of traditional, institutionalized curriculum studies centering on curriculum development, gave me the impression that American curriculum studies was characterized by openness to diversity and democracy in which new perspectives were accepted and marginalized voices could be heard, including the potential for postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies. At the crossroads of my emergent postcolonial, decolonizing thinking and the South Korean sociohistorical context of (post-)colonialism, I came to recognize my conflicting positionalities as a (de)colonial subject, which I continue to struggle with afterward. This ambivalence, in

Bhabha's (1994) line of thought, could be interpreted as the hybridity of resistance to and desire for (neo-)colonial power embedded in the psyche of myself as a (de)colonized subject.

Becoming an International Doctoral Student in the U.S. as a Transnational, (De)colonial Subject

Landing in the U.S., I had to learn to attach myself as a South Korean, non-resident alien, and international doctoral student to the predefined constructs of identities. The normalized term, an international (doctoral) student, depoliticized myself as an outsider who should go back to South Korea in the future, indicating that just as a South Korea, not Korean 'American', I should shy away from making a critical voice on U.S. domestic sociopolitical issues, as if I was just a visitor to the U.S. and such social justice issues were limited to the domestic context. In relation to my depoliticized, disempowered position, I have sometimes asked myself whether I am qualified to initiate conversations on social injustice within the U.S. with my students and teacher candidates as a graduate instructor and student teaching supervisor.

My experiences with interacting with others and engaging with discourses of postcolonialism and decolonization demystified the notion that the U.S. is a monolithic space occupied by 'authentic' insiders. Regarding this, I wrote in my memory writing in reference to my personal reflection that I had made for a critical multicultural education-related course:

At first, it seemed to me that there was an unerasable borderline between myself as an international student and Americans and between myself as a South Korean and other racial and ethnic groups of people. One day, one of my classmates, who was White American, said that she had felt emotional affinity with her African American friends from working-class families because she was from a working-class background too. This quotidian but significant comment made the ostensibly indelible borderline gradually

blurred, allowing me to envision possibilities for transnational solidarity from within the hybrid space.

Through this kind of experience and reflection, I could recognize the socially, politically, and historically constructed aspects of the cultural border of self/other and us/them and the possibilities of border-crossing.

However, as Rhee (2009) says, while we are living in a hybrid, transnational space, most of us are aware that it is impossible to ultimately transcend established categories of cultures and nation-states in our institutionalized everyday lives. And she adds that “there are these categories waiting for me to travel into, reflecting my defined positionalities in a particular institutionalized world” (p. 163). In a similar vein, although I was encouraged to confront the complexities of postcolonialism and decolonization in education through coursework, books, articles, and conversations with others, most of writings turned to the binary opposition of the West/non-West as an international doctoral student in curriculum studies from South Korea who have been based in a U.S. university. As Chen (2010) says, the presence of the U.S. in my subjectivities is quite deep. Nonetheless, the perspectives of postcolonialism and decolonization allowed me to position myself as a (de)colonial subject in the sociohistorical context across South Korea and the U.S., disrupting the predetermined, normalized, and conventional notions of national border and identity through actual and dynamic interactions with others and postcolonial theories.

Engaging with Postcolonial, Decolonizing Curriculum Studies from within South Korea

As a graduate student in a master’s degree program in South Korea, I first encountered postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum theories through a handbook published in the U.S., *Curriculum Studies Handbook: The Nest Moment* (Malewski, 2010). The handbook was full of post-discourses and theories about curriculum that were new to me. As Malewski (2010) puts it,

it seemed like “an unruly text, a chaotic collection that offers few guideposts by which to find one’s way” (p. xiv). As I became used to its dissonances around curriculum, I found myself increasingly open to a variety of new understandings of curriculum through personal reflections. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) says, “it is tension and contradiction that give vitality to the inherent cacophony that characterizes contemporary conversations within (and about) curriculum studies” (pp. 250-251).

As someone from a working-class family, a public elementary school teacher and governmental officer, a South Korean, and an able-bodied person, I was drawn to the discourses of postcolonialism and decolonization mainly because of my personal and social experiences of living across the boundaries of mainstream/non-mainstream and of local/global more broadly. Given that postcolonialism is to dismantle the binaries of the West/non-West, White/of color, and colonizer/colonized, and to bring to light the unique experiences of individuals as counter-narratives and cultural differences that cannot be reduced to the existing systems of categorization (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Bhabha, 1994), it challenged me to intellectually and emotionally struggle with the binaries. In this regard, I wrote in my personal reflection at that time that the following quote from Asher’s (2010) essay resonated with me as a teacher and graduate student in curriculum studies:

A pedagogy that draws on critical, self-reflexive approaches and autobiography can allow students and teachers to engage differences of race, class, and culture, which they encounter within and without the classroom, and work through the intellectual and emotional struggles that emerge in the process (p. 400).

After reading the essay, I also wrote the following personal reflection:

For me, curriculum is a critical currere. It is about understanding what an individual experiences and what it means in a specific sociocultural context, that is in the public world. ... The onto-epistemological inquiry into multiple selves must reveal the specificity of an individual's experiences that intersect with one another at various levels and points. While it is still questionable whether this critical approach can bring us liberation amid the sociocultural constraints that bind our selves in local and global contexts, it is at least meaningful in that it can expose the onto-epistemological tensions and dilemmas of our marginalized/privileged selves — that is, the contradictions between what is visible and invisible, what is said and not said, and it can also make them understandable to myself and others (in December, 2017).

Furthermore, based on postcolonial, decolonizing transition in my understanding of curriculum, I could reflect on curriculum history particularly after reading texts written by Baker (2009) and Hendry (2011), key aspects of which were founded on postcolonialism and decolonization in American curriculum history:

The history of American curriculum studies that I have learned so far has been centered mainly on White men. The narratives of other marginalized groups have been silenced by the dominant narrative in the field of curriculum history. Perhaps the same goes for the history of Korean curriculum studies, which has revolved around changes in the national curriculum. Therefore, reading the absences of marginalized people in curriculum history will be an effort to understand my knowledge of curriculum history as incomplete and to uncover the assumptions and conditions that created such historical absences (in April, 2018).

As I have explored so far, postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum studies led me to be aware of epistemological inequalities that occurred in my lives within and outside of the classroom, and to focus on struggling with the binaries that entailed inequalities. It also challenged me to cross the boundaries of existing and new curriculum studies, to differently look at curricular practices and phenomena in the South Korean context, and to be onto-epistemologically itinerant.

On the other hand, however, this alternative, diversified engagement in curriculum studies, including postcolonial, decolonizing thinking, was stimulated by the ideas of difference, multiplicity, and deconstruction from the Western academia. Western knowledge and theories have ironically still been regarded as a legitimate frame of reference in identifying and disrupting epistemic colonialism and inequality and resulting contradictions and tensions around curriculum and curriculum inquiry in South Korea. Therefore, there has been the paradox of referring to Western knowledge particularly from the U.S. in order to build a critical perspective on the dichotomies of the West/non-West and White/of color, for example.

It should also be acknowledged that not all Western theories and frameworks are ‘the master’s tools.’ However, as a graduate student in curriculum studies in South Korea, I accepted the post-discourses on curriculum such as postcolonialism as an implicit message about what kind of inquiry I should engage in as a scholar to participate in international conversations on curriculum and what theories and knowledge I should have epistemic affinity with for understanding and critiquing curriculum.

Moving towards Transnational Curriculum Studies as Cultural Translation

For me as an international doctoral student, curriculum studies as complicated conversation within transnational contexts is to engage in “cultural translation” in Bhabha’s

(1994) sense. In particular, from the perspective of postcolonialism and decolonization, cultural translation challenges the imposition of universalized and predetermined notions of curriculum on ‘us’ and ‘them’, views the meaning of curriculum as complex, temporal/temporary, and contextual, and reinterprets the concept and meaning of curriculum, which leads to openness, fluidity, and inclusion within curriculum theorizing and further our identity constructions (Moon, 2022). In this context, this subsection addresses an exploration of my experiences with curriculum studies as cultural translation and how my subjectivities have been formed within and through such experiences. The first narrative is based on my personal reflections that I wrote while taking courses related to comparative education and postcolonialism/decolonization in education respectively, and the second is about a reflection on my experience with making a presentation about Korean epistemology with my South Korean academic colleague at an academic conference in the U.S.

My Epistemic Journey in Curriculum Studies towards Cultural Translation and Decolonial, Relational Ethics

Engaging in curriculum studies in a transnational context across South Korea and the U.S. has challenged me to understand others and, through this, to transform myself into someone positioned in an in-between space with them. In this respect, Gaztambide-Fernández and Thiessen (2012) says that “curriculum scholars have been actively engaged in intellectual processes that have always been “international,” and that have drawn on the power of the flows of ideas” (p. 10, emphasis in original). In fact, the transnational intellectual processes are to engage with others and differences in global contexts, which also marks the field of comparative education (Ninnes & Burnett, 2004). According to Bereday (1964), comparative education is to build “self-knowledge born of the awareness of others” (p. 6), which promotes transforming our

subjectivities through understanding others and further resonates with transnational, postcolonial curriculum studies as well.

However, according to So (2017), most curriculum scholars in South Korea have conducted comparative research for drawing implications for national curriculum policies and practices by examining national or state official curriculum policies and/or textbooks of such ‘advanced’ countries in the West such as the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Germany, and Australia. And I had an epistemic affinity with this tradition of comparative studies regarding curriculum in South Korea. Of course, it is not that this line of inquiry is unimportant. As long as there is an official curriculum, such comparative education research will continue to be conducted in the future. However, as I have engaged in the discourses of postcolonialism and decolonization, my comparative perspective on curriculum studies in a transnational context has gone through epistemological and ontological challenges.

While my ‘old’ episteme of comparative curriculum inquiry was predicated on the objectification of curriculum policy and practice for a descriptive comparison, I have come to comparison in terms of relationships with others through engaging in alternative, indigenous epistemological stances primarily based on decolonization—for example, Ubuntu¹⁰—beyond the Western-centric orientation. Focusing on relationality that centers ways of knowing and being based on collective and interactive relationships with others, my epistemic attention has been drawn to the conceptualization of comparative education in curriculum studies as understanding how I am related to others in transnational contexts. This onto-epistemological value has led me to consider ethical aspects of comparative curriculum studies.

¹⁰ Ubuntu is an African-origin value system that “embraces oneness of humanity, a collectivity, community and set of cultural practices and spiritual values that seek respect and dignity for all humanity” (Goduka, 2000, as cited in Assié-Lumumba, 2017, p. 2).

Postcolonial, decolonizing discourses in education have connected myself with the imperative to understand and engage in contexts where a certain curricular phenomenon takes place within the flows of power and knowledge, rather than descriptive comparison for curriculum policy that is likely to only transmit and disseminate ‘best’ practices from the West, reinforcing the existing epistemological hierarchy of knowledge production between the Global West and East and between the Global North and South.

It should be noted that comparative curriculum inquiry can serve multiple different purposes such as ameliorating curriculum policy and practices through a borrowing of ‘best’ examples from other countries and comparing the results of international large-scale assessments. Given the sweeping flows of globalization driven by the West, I have come to think that comparative curriculum studies can make heard the voices of marginalized groups of people who have been subjected to the Western-driven unilateral flows of epistemes about education and curriculum which I might have been implicated in. In this sense, a comparative perspective in curriculum studies to me is for acknowledging and promoting epistemological and ontological diversity within and across diverse contexts around the world.

According to Vavrus and Bartlett (2012), epistemological diversity makes a point of “the view that theories of knowledge and knowledge production ... occur within and are shaped by cultural, social, economic, and political contexts” (p. 639). As a South Korean doctoral student in curriculum studies, I have had to struggle with how comparative curriculum studies in the context of South Korea’s centralized educational system can move beyond institutional purposes towards embracing and embodying critical, decolonial goals in conjunction with the value of epistemological diversity in local, national, and global contexts.

Furthermore, this line of thought has aroused my ontological reflection on who I am and am becoming, how I am connected to others, how I am implicated in the (de)coloniality of education, which is a situated understanding of myself as a curriculum researcher in a transnational context. My ontological belief formed through my personal reflections is that when I encounter others through any forms of contact such as books, articles, news, and in-person meetings, I can be transformed reflexively and sometimes unwittingly, as I did so through my readings about postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum and my encounters with my colleagues, friends, advisor, and other scholars. In this respect, my epistemic journey in curriculum studies explicitly and implicitly entails my onto-epistemological shifts.

As mentioned above, I engaged in the flows of curriculum epistemes from the West in general and the U.S. in particular to South Korea in the name of comparative curriculum studies, which could be related to isomorphism and convergence in curriculum theories and practices. However, from a postcolonial perspective of cultural translation, this process of comparison is not linear or unidirectional, but complicated. There can be conflicts and negotiations between homogenizing forces and de-territorializing/re-territorializing ones within those processes, as I experienced the impossibility of translating some terms and phrases in English into Korean when reading and/or conducting research. As a local actor, I thus needed to reinterpret the terms and phrases based on my cross-contextual understanding between the U.S. and South Korea.

As such, local actors' agency from within the conflicts and negotiations can open the door for possibilities of resistance to epistemic violence occurring within globalized essentializing hegemony, offering insights into postcolonialism and decolonization as a critical foundation for (comparative) curriculum studies in a transnational context. I have had to continue

this unending onto-epistemological navigation to interweave (comparative) curriculum studies, postcolonialism, and decolonization as cultural translation.

Making Multiple Voices Heard towards Transcultural Conversations

An international academic conference is a great place particularly for marginalized scholars and practitioners to write back and talk back to the academic, cultural, and political ‘colonizer’ with their own indigenous and ‘authentic’ voices. In terms of this (de)coloniality, the Bergamo Conference was of profound significance to me. With my South Korean co-presenter, I participated in presenting a Korean ethico-onto-epistemology for qualitative research in education to an audience of curriculum scholars who have engaged in the (post-)reconceptualist movement of curriculum theorizing within the U.S. under the title of “*Relational Embodiment and Entanglement in Educational Research: The Korean Cultural Practice of Inyeon*”, which was informed by Indigenous scholars’ call for decolonizing research methodologies in education (Patel, 2015; Smith, 2021). We, as South Koreans, felt a sense of empathy and affinity that was difficult to clearly articulate in words about the relational ontologies that post-qualitative methodologies pursue, which considers the subject as constituted within entangled relationships with others (Carlson, 2021; Lather, 2016). In addition, what resonated with our critical stance at that time were a critique of the lack of concern with non-Western and non-White onto-epistemologies based on the entanglement and indeterminacy of relationships with others in post-qualitative methodologies (Wells, 2020) and Indigenous scholars’ call for decolonizing methodologies that centers our being and lived experiences away from Western-centric perspectives. Against this backdrop, we introduced the concept of “*inyeon*” as a cultural thinking broadly embodied among South Korean people, which is originally rooted in Korean Buddhist

philosophy on relationships among human beings and their connections with non-human beings, in relation to (post-)qualitative research methodologies in education.

The philosophical and cultural notion of inyeon is grounded in a Buddhist perspective on causality, which implies that any phenomenon arises in a way that is interdependent on other phenomena (Kang, 2009). In other words, it means that a thing exists interdependently with other things and cannot be reduced to the thing itself. Since this Korean onto-epistemological thinking of interbeing has (in)visibly influenced our worldviews and even everyday lives, we were able to empathize with the assumptions embedded in post-qualitative methodologies without difficulty. That being said, our presentation was not merely to introduce ‘unique’ Korean onto-epistemology to non-Korean audience in the conference room; but it was to engage in a complicated conversation on post-qualitative research in education generally and curriculum studies in particular so that our ways of being and thinking would not be objectified as merely ethnic, but equally valued as a philosophical foundation for post-qualitative research in curriculum studies.

Despite the theoretical significance of our presentation, my co-presenter and I experienced several challenges. First, we had difficulty in translating and delivering the nuanced meanings of the Korean onto-epistemological concept into English. To overcome this challenge, we tried to share our own experiences and stories related to the concept in our own voices, which was an attempt to participate in transnational curriculum studies by sharing the ‘authentic’ voices of the two South Korean educational researchers. We were also cautious that we might reinforce fixed approaches to the Korean onto-epistemological practice by using fixed binaries of the colonizer/the colonized and the West/the East in the name of decolonizing qualitative methodologies. To reduce, if not eliminate, this concern, we emphasized that our presentation

was to be a transcultural conversation intended to make a contribution to enriching the discussions on post-qualitative research in education, while cautioning against the instrumentalization and misappropriation of non-Western concepts.

We were engaging in an intellectual process that turned to the power of the transnational flows of cultural concepts and practices. According to Gaztambide-Fernández and Thiessen (2012), to think of internationalization in terms of the flows of ideas is “to recognize that it is not yet another “original” idea from the English-speaking academy, but that it has always been around, fomenting the flows of ideas, connecting multiple points of origin, and giving rise to new beginnings” (p. 10, emphasis in original). Our ambivalent positionalities as South Koreans whose scholarship has been developed in the U.S. has positioned us as bearers of the ‘unique’ Korean cultural concept, but they have also allowed us to engage in the transcultural conversation on post-qualitative methodologies in education, thereby identifying ourselves as transnational and transcultural beings who have been entangled with the flows of cultural ideas. This new form of identity would be neither Western-centric universalism nor blind ethnocentrism.

Introducing and engaging in local, indigenous knowledges is crucial not only for facilitating transcultural conversations about curriculum issues and concerns in local and global contexts, but also for promoting dynamic, fluid, and shifting sets of centers regarding ontological and epistemological diversity. And it can also provide one of the ways to mitigate cultural and epistemological (neo-)colonialism—epistemicide—apparent in academia (Moon, 2022; Paraskeva, 2016).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This dissertation research examines my lived experiences with engaging in and/or being involved in education, multiculturalism, curriculum studies, and transnationalism in the contexts of South Korea and the U.S. both respectively and interrelatedly from the perspectives of postcolonialism and decolonization. As can be seen in the findings in Chapter 4, these are entangled with one another and embedded in the racial, epistemic, and geopolitical architectures of (neo-)colonialism across local, national, and global contexts. In this chapter, I discuss the findings, suggesting some implications for curriculum and instruction and for future lines of research in the field of (transnational) curriculum studies.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss the findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to my research questions, existing literature, and theoretical frameworks. In particular, I focus on the following discussion themes: 1) how multicultural education and curriculum studies have been entangled with the racial, epistemic, and geopolitical aspects of (neo-)colonialism; 2) how curriculum studies can be (re)imagined as transcultural conversation in transnational contexts; and 3) how postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing can be positioned as a line of curriculum inquiry in transnational contexts.

Transnational Entanglements of Multicultural Education and Curriculum Studies

In this study, I have examined the transnational, (neo-)colonial entanglements of multicultural education and curriculum studies, arguing that these are not merely pedagogical or policy concerns, but deeply embedded within the racial, epistemic, and geopolitical dynamics of (neo-)colonialism. Through a postcolonial, decolonizing lens, this study sheds light on how educational discourses and practices—especially those labeled as “multicultural” or “global”—

have been shaped by colonial experiences, U.S. supremacy, and the enduring structures of global Whiteness.

While multicultural education has often been assumed as an inclusive, humanistic, and globally-minded framework, it frequently functions as a conduit for racialized neoliberalism and colonial legacies, reinforcing the fixed and sometimes binary notions of identity (McCarthy et al., 2005; May & Sleeter, 2010). In the context of South Korea, multicultural education emerges not as a challenge to ethno-nationalism or inequalities in local and global contexts, which can be considered some of the colonial legacies, but as a means of managing racial/ethnic and cultural differences within a national developmentalist framework (Hong & Min, 2013; J. K. Kim et al., 2018). The multicultural turn is deeply entangled with the nation's desire to assert itself as a modern, global actor through mimetic relations with the West in general and the U.S. in particular and the internalization of Orientalism, which are some of the manifestations of transnational Whiteness.

Transnational Whiteness in the South Korean context is not simply about the valorization of White bodies, but rather the ascendancy of White epistemologies and institutional norms across cultural and educational domains (S. Y. Lee, 2025). This (in)visible racial formation has operated as a universal standard against which global modernity, cultural imaginary, and educational reforms are engendered and measured in postcolonial contexts. For example, in the field of education, S. Y. Lee (2025) problematizes the paradox of postcolonial educational reforms in South Korea, which aimed to decolonize national education from the legacies of Japanese colonization, but ended up recolonizing educational knowledge structure with U.S.-centric epistemologies that indisputably (up)hold a White-centric gaze on education—"a perspective that adopts racial hierarchies and privileges whiteness as the universal standards on education"

(p. 30). As such, transnational Whiteness has contributed to the symbolic and material elevation of Whiteness as aspirational in education, educational research, and identity constructions as students, teachers, and educational researchers across the Pacific.

In this context, postcolonial, decolonizing perspectives offer valuable insights into unpacking the invisibility of colonial legacies, including Whiteness, as a normative standard within South Korean multicultural education and curriculum studies. In particular, Whiteness has often been presumed as a universalized standard of modernity and global education (Leonardo, 2009; Ahmed, 2007). Yet its operations are evident in how cultural others are racialized and stratified: immigrants and foreigners of color from non-Western countries are marked as either victims needing assimilation or burdens requiring management in South Korea.

This racialized assumption of multicultural education in South Korea undermines its purported aims of inclusion and equity. Instead, it reproduces a form of conservative multiculturalism whereby cultural diversity is tolerated only to the extent that it conforms to dominant norms. In the field of curriculum studies, this reinforces what Smith (2021) terms, the “colonizing gaze” of Western knowledge systems, positioning South Korean educational researchers as both consumers and conduits of Western-centric curriculum theories and knowledge. Nevertheless, I find postcolonial, decolonizing perspectives on education powerful in questioning the racial and epistemic underpinnings of multicultural education and curriculum studies in this dissertation research. These counter-discourses align with the calls of decolonial theorists like Tuck and Yang (2012) who advocate for epistemic justice, challenging the racial and epistemic foundations of multicultural education and curriculum studies and centering non-Western philosophies and histories.

The South Korean case thus complicates the assumption that multiculturalism travels globally as a human, liberal project and the citational practices of Western knowledge in curriculum studies. As this dissertation demonstrates, both multicultural education and curriculum studies in South Korea are entangled with local histories of colonialism, nationalism, and globalization. The analysis of transnational entanglements of multicultural education and curriculum studies that structure desire, policy, cultural imaginary, and identity across the Pacific can offer a powerful lens for understanding how curriculum becomes a terrain of both domination and contestation.

Therefore, reimagining curriculum through a decolonial, transnational framework necessitates confronting not only the histories of colonialism, but also the affective and institutional dissemination of Whiteness as a global norm. For curriculum studies to advance epistemic justice within transnational contexts, it should disinvest from the epistemic privilege of the West and, instead, cultivate relational, pluralistic, and historically grounded approaches that center the voices and knowledge of the Global South, the Global East, Indigenous communities, and racialized migrants. These decolonial efforts are not just academic, but also ethical, political, and deeply humanistic.

For example, educational researchers can unpack how multicultural education is often shaped and circulated transnationally in relation to Western liberal frameworks, Whiteness, and neoliberal rationalities. In addition, it is significant to build the processes of coalitional knowledge production and practices across oppressed or historically marginalized communities towards 'relational' curriculum and curriculum studies. It means not simply the coexistence of multiple kinds of knowledge, but the systemic reconfiguration of educational structures to allow them to thrive in dialogue about curriculum issues.

Curriculum Studies in Transnational Contexts as Transcultural Conversations

Curriculum studies in transnational spaces should be reimagined as transcultural conversations—dialogues that traverse not just national boundaries, but also epistemological and affective terrains. In particular, transcultural conversations require us to critically engage with the power-laden flows of knowledge that shape discourses on curriculum and identity formations of students, teachers, and educational researchers in South Korea, a nation marked by its colonial modern history, Cold War entanglements, and ongoing implicatedness in global neoliberalism (Chen, 2010).

Educational reforms in South Korea have been influenced by a desire to modernize and follow ‘advanced’ Western countries, referencing Western—especially the U.S.—educational knowledge (Jang, 2020). From the postcolonial educational reforms to recent efforts for progressive education, the landscape of curriculum reforms and curriculum studies in South Korea has frequently been shaped by the U.S.-centric systems of educational knowledge such as Dewey’s progressivism (S. Y. Lee, 2025). While such transnational flows of knowledge may appear cosmopolitan, they are likely to reinforce asymmetric power relations where Western knowledge is treated as universal and other systems of knowledge as peripheral (Andreotti, 2011; Chen, 2010; Subedi, 2013).

The conceptualization of curriculum studies as transcultural conversation provides other ways of thinking about theoretical and pedagogical alternatives. For example, these conversations are not about how South Korea can better imitate global standards, but how South Korean educational scholars can participate in meaningful, reciprocal knowledge production that resists the unidirectional flows of ideas. In this sense, Moon (2022) suggests attending to local, indigenous knowledge as a crucial way of mitigating cultural and epistemological colonialism

apparent in academia, promoting transcultural conversations about curriculum concerns. As Japanese colonization and U.S. military and cultural hegemony during the Cold War have created not just the cultural imaginary of the West, but also a palimpsest of curriculum concerns that continue to define notions and legitimacy of knowledge in South Korea, central to the transcultural approach to curriculum studies is an awareness of the (neo-)colonial legacies embedded in educational discourses and reforms, including transnational Whiteness within South Korean education (S. Y. Lee, 2025). Making such necessary changes is likely to bring about complexities and even contradictory tensions within curriculum studies as transcultural conversation. That being said, these curricular complexities and tensions can engender dialogical and hybrid spaces whereby epistemic hierarchies can be dismantled.

The case of South Korea also provides a space for reimagining curriculum as a dialogical and hybrid process. For example, the rise of multicultural education in South Korea—though often assimilationist and instrumental—signals an awareness of the limitations of racial and ethnic homogeneity and an emerging space for engaging with otherness and alterity. However, without a transcultural, decolonial lens, such efforts risk reproducing neoliberal multiculturalism—the inclusion of differences only insofar as they do not disrupt dominant norms of racial and ethnic homogeneity or global neoliberal competitiveness, rather than fostering epistemic plurality (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Transcultural curriculum studies should move beyond surface-level inclusion towards epistemological pluralism—a recognition of multiple ways of knowing, being, and relating with others. It should make space for minoritized experiences, diasporic imaginations, and local, indigenous forms of knowledge that challenge both Western universalism and ethno-nationalism,

which requires transforming how curriculum is conceptualized, who is involved in its theoretical and practical development, and whose lives and knowledge it is accountable to.

Ultimately, postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies should embrace a relational, historical, and ethical orientation—one that focuses on local, situated struggles over knowledge production and circulation, while recognizing their entanglements with broader global dynamics. In the transpacific context, this entails confronting enduring (neo-)colonial legacies, unsettling racialized hierarchies of knowledge, and reimagining curriculum as a contested, yet generative space for shared inquiry, care, and transformation.

Curriculum as transcultural conversation does not offer definitive solutions to cultural and epistemic colonialism, but rather gestures towards a praxis of hope—one that invites intellectual movements across national and cultural borders in pursuit of more just, equitable, and plural educational futures. At this moment, such work should begin where we are: for example, through critical self-reflection on curriculum and curriculum studies, community-based engagement with curriculum thinking and design, collaborative actions towards making peripheralized voices heard, and transnational solidarities against epistemic and cultural colonialism within the field of curriculum studies. Each level holds both possibilities and limitations, but together they can chart a dynamic and unfinished curriculum studies of decolonial becoming.

Postcolonial, Decolonizing Autobiographical Writing as Inquiry

Postcolonial, decolonizing methodologies necessitates a profound rethinking of the modes of knowledge production (Smith, 2021). One of the transformative approaches to decolonizing methodologies is autobiographical writing. It serves as both self-reflexive and collective inquiry, engaging individuals in the critical examination of the social, cultural,

political, and historical structures that shape knowledge and their identities. In postcolonial contexts, autobiographical writing is particularly significant because it provides an opportunity to reclaim and reinterpret experiences and narratives that have been marginalized, erased, or distorted by (neo-)colonial forces. It also allows individuals to center their lived experiences as legitimate forms of knowledge, offering a means of resistance to the dominant systems of (educational) knowledge that have often privileged Western-centric ways of knowing.

At the core of postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum theories is the idea of decolonizing epistemologies by challenging the coloniality of knowledge production and dissemination—the deeply entrenched belief that Western forms of knowledge are universal and superior to others (Paraskeva, 2016). As such, colonialism has not merely involved the domination of land and resources, but also the imposition of Western epistemological frameworks that continue to shape the systems of educational knowledge, leading to the suppression of local, Indigenous, and non-Western knowledge systems (S. Y. Lee, 2025; Paraskeva, 2016). In this context, autobiographical writing allows individuals from these communities worldwide to reclaim their own stories and validate their knowledge, challenging the longstanding dominance of (neo-)colonial epistemologies.

Postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing serves as a theoretical and practical tool for reclaiming narrative authority over one's own identities and histories, a concept that resonates with bell hooks' (1994) conceptualization of writing as resistance. She argues that writing can be a means of resistance to the dominant powers that seek to define and fix identity and knowledge. This aligns with the postcolonial, decolonial critique of educational systems that have historically excluded the experiences and voices of colonized peoples. In a similar vein, Lorde (1984) emphasizes the importance of the personal as political, asserting that our personal

stories are deeply entwined with the political struggles that we face in society. In this sense, autobiographical writing becomes an act of both personal and political resistance to (neo-)colonial forces.

In postcolonial curriculum studies in transnational contexts, autobiographical writing also facilitates epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007). Epistemic justice involves recognizing and correcting the marginalization of certain ways of knowing. Autobiographical writing allows individuals to center their lived experiences, thus asserting the legitimacy of their knowledge and offering an avenue for epistemic reclamation, which is critical in the context of (neo-)colonialism where the systems of educational knowledge often continue to devalue local cultural practices and histories. Autobiographical writing can serve as a space where individuals can question the hierarchies that privilege Western knowledge and theories.

Furthermore, autobiographical writing as inquiry becomes a way to engage with transnational Whiteness (Y. C. Kim 2005). The legacies of (neo-)colonialism often manifest in the privileging of Western knowledge systems, and the process of decolonization requires dismantling global racialized hierarchies that continue to shape educational and social practices. Global Whiteness is closely related to the ways in which Western (and particularly European and North American) knowledge systems, values, and ideals are treated as the global standard, marginalizing non-Western forms of knowing and being (S. Y. Lee, 2025; Leonardo, 2009). In this regard, autobiographical writing as inquiry can provide a means for individuals to reflect on their position within those racialized global structures and to challenge the cultural dominance that peripheralizes non-Western peoples.

In the field of curriculum studies, self-reflexive writing as inquiry can engender an epistemological foundation for counteracting dominant discourses within curriculum studies

through a rewriting of one's own histories and identities that moves away from any pre-defined identity categories. Therefore, postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing as curriculum inquiry leads to a transformative methodology for rethinking the systems of curriculum knowledge in transnational contexts. It empowers individuals to engage critically with their own positionalities within the transnational educational and curricular landscape, not dismissing Western knowledge but contesting hierarchical knowledge structures in curriculum studies. By legitimating lived experiences and local epistemologies, autobiographical writing can support educational and epistemic justice in transnational contexts, leading to decolonial agency that challenges racialized, (neo-)colonial forces that shape educational systems and creates possibilities for a more equitable educational future.

Implications

In this section, I put forward some implications of this autobiographical inquiry into postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies for the field of curriculum studies. For this, I suggest implications for curriculum and instruction and for future lines of research respectively, although these implications are not isolated, but can and should be synergistically interrelated to one another.

Implications for Curriculum and Instruction

Integrating postcolonial and decolonizing perspectives into curriculum and instruction opens transformative possibilities for rethinking curriculum and instruction beyond dominant, standardized frameworks. Such work challenges the historical, social, and racialized structures embedded in schooling and centers epistemic justice as a guiding principle. By foregrounding students' voices and lived experiences, educators can cultivate classrooms that are not only more

inclusive, but also more attuned to the uneven histories and ongoing transnational entanglements that shape knowledge production and educational opportunities.

As hooks (1994) suggests, education is not simply a process of knowledge transmission, but a practice of freedom where students critically engage with their identities, histories, and aspirations. Valuing students' narratives enables a shift from passive knowledge reception to active, relational learning where students become co-constructors of knowledge, enhancing their epistemic and emotional investment in and connection with curriculum. This challenges conventional models that often render some students' experiences invisible or hypervisible, creating a space for multiple forms of knowing and being to emerge and thrive.

The principle of epistemic justice underscores the need to recognize and validate diverse forms of knowledge that have historically been peripheralized (Fricker, 2007). In teaching practices, it can translate into an educational practice that values diverse epistemologies such as those rooted in community-based knowledge, oral traditions, and lived experiences. In this sense, Smith (2021) highlights the role of Indigenous storytelling in the process of decolonization, arguing that narrative forms are crucial for restoring the knowledge systems suppressed by colonial educational structures. In addition, autobiographical writing, by its nature, invites students and teachers to connect their personal narratives with broader local and global contexts, thus facilitating a space for epistemic reclamation and the inclusion of knowledge that has long been marginalized from the classroom.

Educators can also engage in such practices by incorporating culturally responsive teaching that legitimates students' lived experiences and knowledge. For instance, lessons might incorporate multivocal perspectives, inviting students to explore and compare how different communities have experienced and understood the same historical events—thereby ensuring that

their ways of knowing are not only heard, but also valued as legitimate and important and foregrounding the complexities of power, memory, and place in transnational contexts. Furthermore, from a poststructural, postcolonial perspective, culturally responsive teaching can shift from treating culture as a pre-existing, bounded entity to engaging with how students perform and negotiate their identities in relation to shifting discourses and power structures. This requires teachers to remain attuned to the fluid, contingent nature of identity and to foster pedagogical spaces that allow for the emergence of multiple, and at times contradictory, subjectivities, rather than merely affirming static cultural categories.

Beyond the individual and classroom levels, these approaches to curriculum and instruction gesture towards the need for systemic and transnational shifts in how curriculum is conceptualized and practiced. For instance, a decolonial pedagogy rooted in autobiographical inquiry can foster solidarity across national and cultural borders by rendering visible the shared effects of (neo-)colonialism and globalization on education. This invites a reimagining of curriculum as transnational, transcultural conversation—one that is responsive to local struggles while attentive to the global structures of oppression and possibility.

As Bhabha (1994) suggests, such work creates a third space—a dynamic, hybrid space where cultural differences are not fixed or hierarchized, but are continuously negotiated and regenerated. In this way, classrooms and teacher education programs can become communities of critical inquiry into curriculum, fostering critical collective reflection, coalition building, and transformative actions for epistemic justice. Ultimately, postcolonial, decolonizing curriculum is not only about the inclusion of differences; it is about rethinking the very terms of curricular engagement in ways that imagine justice across multiple scales—personally, locally, institutionally, and transnationally.

Implications for Future Research

This dissertation research foregrounds the entangled dynamics of (neo-)colonialism, multicultural education, and curriculum studies across transpacific contexts. Through a postcolonial, decolonizing lens, it has also emphasized the significance of autobiographical writing as a methodological and pedagogical intervention. However, much remains to be explored to deepen our understanding of curriculum as a key site of power, memory, and resistance. The following research directions suggest some areas for future research that can extend the theoretical and practical implications of this study.

First, one line of future research can expand the analysis of (neo-)colonial entanglements in curriculum and curriculum studies across diverse transnational and geopolitical settings. While this dissertation research draws from the South Korean case, similar patterns of colonial residue and epistemic marginalization can be found in educational systems across other parts of the world. In this respect, comparative research can be conducted to analyze how historical and contemporary forms of epistemic colonialism shape curriculum policy, curriculum studies, teaching practices, and educational subjectivities in specific local contexts, while also tracing the transnational flows of neoliberalism, Whiteness, and Western-centric epistemic authority (Moon, 2022; Takayama et al., 2017).

Building on critical curriculum scholars such as Andreotti (2011) and Pinar (2019), curriculum studies has been further theorized as a field of study which is capable of international critique, while being attentive to how (neo-)colonial power continues to operate unevenly across transnational educational landscapes. Such research can disrupt the Western-centric framing of educational “excellence,” “modernity,” and “global citizenship” by centering subjugated knowledge, counter-narratives, and localized forms of resistance.

Second, the potential of postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing as both a mode of research and curriculum inquiry remains as a generative space for future research. It could examine how this form of engaged writing can be mobilized not only as an introspective practice, but also as a critical, epistemological intervention into knowledge production and identity formations. Decolonial researchers such as Tuck and Yang (2012) and Smith (2021) argue that decolonizing research methodologies must challenge the very assumptions of who can know, what counts as (legitimate) knowledge, and how knowledge is produced and circulated.

This line of research could also ask the following questions about the pedagogical and sociopolitical functions of postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing in curriculum studies: how do personal narratives disrupt (neo-)colonial knowledge hierarchies?; how might they serve as archives of cultural memory/imaginary and resistance?; how do they enable researchers and educators to grapple with complicity, privilege, and historicity in curriculum work? In addition, it might be necessary to continue to experiment with autoethnographic, poetic, and multimodal approaches that can bring postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing into dialogue with other epistemologies, particularly those rooted in peripheralized traditions around the world. Furthermore, introducing local, indigenous knowledge into the field of (transnational) curriculum studies can be one of the most important ways for promoting transcultural conversation about curriculum inquiry (Moon, 2022). However, it does not mean leaning into essentialist approaches to curriculum studies, which risks repeating ethno-nationalism through education and educational research. Rather, transcultural approaches to curriculum studies are based on multiplying the sources of our readings to include those produced in historically and intellectually marginalized parts of the world, provincializing Western knowledge and theories (Chen, 2010).

Last, the transnational nature of Whiteness as a globalizing (epistemic) force requires more theorization in transnational, postcolonial curriculum studies. While global Whiteness manifests through cultural idealization and material aspirations, its operations are often invisible and normalized within educational reforms and institutions (S. Y. Lee, 2025; Leonardo, 2009). Therefore, future research could explore how Whiteness circulates transnationally—as both a colonial remnant and a contemporary epistemic standard—and how educational actors internalize or contest its power.

Building on S. Y. Lee (2025) and Leonardo (2009), future research could also investigate how Whiteness is constructed, performed, and institutionalized within curriculum development, educational reforms, teacher education, and teaching practices. It might also explore how local actors participate in reproducing or resisting Whiteness-centric norms in educational research and reforms, contributing to the emerging discourse of transnational Whiteness (S. Y. Lee, 2025). By interrogating Whiteness as mobile, affective, and colonial logic, researchers can contribute to a more critical understanding of how racialized power relations persist and mutate within transnational contexts around curriculum studies.

Future lines of research need to continue to explore the complicated intersections of postcolonialism, curriculum, race, and identity across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Comparative, theoretically rigorous, methodologically innovative studies will be critical for deepening the field's understanding of how educational knowledge is shaped and circulated, informed by the histories of cultural and epistemological domination and the possibilities of intellectual resistance. In this sense, postcolonial, decolonizing autobiographical writing as inquiry could create a fertile avenue for disrupting dominant epistemologies and reimagining curriculum as a space of relationality, reflection, and transformation.

Concluding Remarks

In this dissertation research, I have explored how my identities have been (re)constructed as a student, a teacher, an educational researcher, and an international doctoral student in curriculum studies across the Pacific, South Korea and the U.S., in relation to transnational curriculum studies from the perspectives of postcolonialism and decolonization. Through this critical self-reflexive autobiographical exploration, my understanding of transnational, postcolonial curriculum studies has shifted and deepened as I looked into the transnational, transpacific flows of the systems of educational knowledge and Whiteness and how they have informed my identity constructions around educational phenomena across the Pacific. I hope that the shared narratives about my ‘selves’ and the analyses of each story can provoke different ideas and emotions in the readers for further engagement with the autobiographical narratives and related issues around transnational, postcolonial curriculum studies.

Overall, I observed that my identity formations around education and curriculum studies have been closely and continuously entangled with Western-centric cultural imaginary, the transnational flows of knowledge, and transnational Whiteness. Despite these (neo-)colonial legacies within transnational contexts, I could find possibilities for transcultural conversations on curriculum concerns based on postcolonialism and decolonization, mitigating the epistemic and cultural colonialism within my cultural imaginary as well as within academia and creating in-between spaces and narratives where we could find other possibilities for this intellectual project.

Furthermore, this autobiographical inquiry into transnational, postcolonial curriculum studies aligns directly with the claim that the discourses of cultural and epistemological diversity should take place in larger sociopolitical discussions, and that unequal political relations among nations should be understood within transnational contexts (Moon, 2022). Therefore, it can be

said that an understanding of identity formation in curriculum studies should take place within transnational contexts, given that curriculum studies involves intellectual processes that have always been “international” in terms of the power of the flows of ideas (Gaztambide-Fernández & Thiessen, 2012). In this sense, this dissertation research is not just an attempt at a nuanced understanding of identity constructions around curriculum and curriculum studies, but also can make a contribution to enriching postcolonial, transnational curriculum studies.

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