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The paradox of post-postmodernism

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Post-postmodernism is a paradox. The zeitgeist of twenty-first century ecologically resides not in a void or a predictable space. Rather, the ‘is-ness’ of being exists in a paradox—paradox refers to the irrational, mystical, contradictory juxtapositions of being in the cosmos. A paradox is engendered discursively while moving beyond a stable, dichotomous format of being as Western Enlightenment movements imply. A paradox of being debunks any binary of body-mind, self-other, or conscious-unconscious. Such denial of existential dichotomy pries open a space where a paradox resides with imagination. I argue that a paradox of being and/non-being shifts discourse in educational theory in the era of post-postmodernism. Tao Te Ching [道德經] illustrates the paradoxes of living and existence. Linguistic, metaphoric name of Tao is not Tao anymore [道可道, 非常道]. Tao exists as Tao; yet Tao does not exist as Tao (Jung, 2001). Tao itself is uid in that it shifts being, embodiment, and operations. This paradox of being/non-being and action/non-action of Tao is implemented in the non-action philosophy of wuwei [無為]: ‘No action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone’ (Chan, 1963, p. 162). A paradox of post-postmodernism embraces not-knowingness of knowing and knowingness of not-knowing. This epistemological blind spot of knowing/un-knowing becomes an open-ended space to imagine multiple approaches to interpreting who/what educational theorists are.

By living in this paradox, educational theorists revisit a label of subjectivity or action circulating in institutions. This paradox of Taoist being encourages educators to revisit a normalized usage of ‘social justice’ in theorizing a just society and education. In Taoist tradition, people do not fully experience social justice if social justice is linguistically determined and institutionalized. Paradoxically, the goal of taking a socially just action aims to remove the term of ‘social justice’ all together from our lexicon. This provocative idea challenges the reproduction of bifurcated notions of self-other, oppressed-oppressor, and subjectivity-alterity in social justice education. Donghak [Eastern Learning]—Korea’s nineteenth century indigenous religion—is an example of applying this paradox of being driven from the blurred boundaries of self-other. The ontological complexity of self-other is generated from Su-un’s (the founder) spiritual experience of god’s message, ‘my heart-mind is no other than your heart-mind’ (吾心卽汝心). This apophatic approach to God from within and without oneself explicates a non-dualistic rela-tionship of self-other (Lee, 2014). This
blurred, interwoven approach to self-other in the cosmic world challenges bifurcated approaches to self-other or subjectivity-alterity regardless if one follows critical theory or poststructuralist traditions (Wang, 2013). Self-other is interwoven interdependently with the paradox of being that thus cannot be labeled within an anthropocentric approach to human as part of cosmos or qi (Lee, 2014). Educators live in a paradoxical space of Tao and wuwei: Tao is not Tao once it is labeled. Post-postmodernism resides in this unknown space — space where multiple, unknown angles exist in creating us-ness (which is never a uniformed, exclusive format of it). Indeed, a paradox is and is not post-postmodern.