

# Life-Practice Educology: A Contemporary Chinese Theory of Education

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## *Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage*

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### **Life-Practice Educology: A Contemporary Chinese Theory of Education**

By Lan Ye, translated by Lijuan Li, edited by Lianghua Liu and Yuhua Bu

Brill Press, 2020, 483 pages

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The release of Professor Lan Ye's (2020) monograph, *Life-Practice Educology: A Contemporary Chinese Theory of Education*, is critical for anyone who is interested in the current landscape of primary and secondary school education in China and comparative education. Although the book is primarily focused on Chinese context, it certainly has important international applications. As Dr. Michael Connelly states in the foreword of the monograph, "[r]ecognizing the book's breadth and historical sweep will richly reward readers with particular interests in cross-cultural education, Chinese cultural and educational history, educational similarities and differences between East and West, and more" (p. viii).

This book is an English version in a series on the study of a "Life-Practice" School that Professor Ye and her research team have been committed to for over 30 years. "Life-Practice" School, known as "生命-实践"教育学派 (shēng mìng shí jiàn jiào yù xué pài), was first officially introduced by Ye in 2004 and established based on her over 20-year personal teaching practice and her school-based research practice (Ye, 2004). This monograph includes five chapters that are arranged in three main sections: introduction, educology perspective of the "Life-Practice" School, and education perspective

of the “Life-Practice” School. In the introduction, Ye begins with a brief review of the Chinese ancient history on educational schools and the theoretical and social needs for the Chinese primary education reform. By reflecting on the formation of her academic thought, Ye elaborates the creation and the generation process of “Life-Practice School of Educology” by categorizing five development periods: the incubation period (1983-1991); the start-up period (1991-1999); the development period (1999-2004); the formation period (2004-2009); and the transcendence period (2009-present, still in process). Ye further explains how “Life-Practice School of Educology” is developed based on her over 30 years of school-based research practice and teaching practice at the East China Normal University. At the end of this section, Ye summarises that the nature of “Life-Practice” School of Educology promotes an Educology that “is of people, for people, bearing the real life of people, and the fragrance of down-to-earth practice” (p. 60).

The second section (chapters 2 and 3) focuses on answering a central question: What is educology? Ye first elaborates how Chinese modern education has been profoundly influenced by Western philosophical views, such as the work of Aristotle, Francis Bacon, Wilhelm Dilthey, William James, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget. Ye claims that the current disciplinary structure in China has been affected by Western disciplinary views; however, traditional educational philosophies that were inherited from ancient China have been overlooked by Chinese scholars. She argues that there is a need to recognize the uniqueness of Chinese values and educology, which requires breaking down the Western disciplinary views from comparison and identifying elements of Western pedagogical practices that can be effectively incorporated into Chinese education contexts. In response to the criticism of educology as an independent discipline in China, the third chapter discusses and analyzes the disciplinary structure of contemporary Chinese education. Based on this, Ye argues for an independent discipline with Chinese characteristics and proposes her perspective on “Life-Practice” School educology. Ye believes that the development of contemporary Chinese educology is inseparable from Chinese traditional philosophies and culture.

The last section (chapters 4 and 5) is the education perspective of the “Life-Practice” School. In this section, Ye aims to answer two important questions: What is education, and what is education about? In the fourth chapter, she reviews and discusses the definitions of education proposed by both Western and Eastern educators. Through the use of metaphor, she suggests that genes are the basis of educology and further explains

how life and practice play an essential role in the genetic role of education. In the fifth chapter, Ye elucidates the relationship between education and the whole life of human beings by exploring Chinese ancient philosophies, cultural tradition, and the meanings of ancient Chinese characters. For example, she states that the philosophical view of “Heaven, Earth and Man” indicated the harmonious relationship between “the nature world” and “the human world” (p. 398). Based on that, she expounds her understanding of the concept “self-consciousness of life,” which refers to “individual’s awareness to the existence status of their own life” (p. 407). Ye argues that young generations’ self-consciousness of life can be developed by teaching the knowledge of nature and society built on the spirit of Chinese traditional culture.

This book is a review and summary of Ye’s educational exploration built on her 30-year school-based research practice, and it will be of interest to multiple readers. One of the most striking features of this book is that it helps readers to develop a better understanding of ancient Chinese educational philosophies, educational tradition, and culture, as well as the contemporary Chinese society and education through a wise and knowledgeable Chinese educator’s reflective view. Ye’s “Life-Practice” School of Educology inherits Chinese traditional philosophies, and she argues that it is more appropriate for contemporary Chinese education. Based on the insights that the work offers, we recommend this book to anyone who is interested in education. As Michael Connelly suggests in the foreword of the monograph, “this book will be extraordinary, perhaps revolutionary with respect to [English readers] predispositions about China and Chinese education” (Ye, 2020, p. vii).

## References

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