CHAPTER 2

Friends from Afar

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Regarding the relationship between China and the world, the Chinese classical Confucians have thought long and hard about it, always maintaining an open attitude. They believe that China is a part of the world, but they hope to maintain an open dialogue with the world as well. But China has a history of more than 5000 years, and there was a closed era where China was put at the center, and as a result, it has lagged behind developing and developed countries in the world. But this situation has notably changed since the 1980s. China hopes to become a part of the world, to integrate into the world, and to develop and share the destiny of and with the world.

In the early 1980s, China began its policy of reform and opening up. In the early 1990s, the Chinese government firmly committed to a market economy. In 2001, the first year of the twenty-first century, China formally joined the World Trade Organization. These historic events all marked China’s determination to participate more and be more open to the world. In 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party

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of China summed up the nature of the development of current and contemporary social development, emphasizing that through its long-term efforts, China has entered a new era. “This new era is not only marked by the new changes taking place in all aspects of [China], but also by the historic changes in China’s relations with the world, namely, [China] is getting closer to the center of the world stage and constantly making greater contributions to mankind”, assessed Xi Jinping (2017). Meanwhile, the concept of “a community of a shared future for mankind”\(^1\) was advanced as the basic principle of international exchanges.

The cross-cultural reciprocal learning program discussed in this book involves two sister schools from China and Canada. The program, which has a history of more than a decade, first began in 2007 and officially expanded in 2013 against the backdrop of China playing a growing role on the world stage. In this context, when we engage in dialogues across borders and cultural types, new directions of thinking are opened and new questions need to be answered:

1. How should we understand ourselves from the perspective of Chinese cultural traditions?
2. In the context of contemporary globalization, what cultural position should we adopt to engage in dialogues with our international counterparts?
3. In the course of 100-year modernization of China’s education, what is the impact of past relations between China and the West and between the ancient and modern?
4. As for the current project, what are the questions asked and ideas put forward by the North American followers of Dewey’s educational thoughts including Joseph Schwab, Lee Shulman and Michael

\(^1\) A community of a shared future for mankind also means a community of common destiny. The concept first appeared in a report delivered by former Party General Secretary Hu Jintao to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012. In the report, Hu emphasized that “mankind has only one earth to live on, and countries have only one world to share” and called for the building of a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity by raising awareness about human beings sharing a community of common destiny. Hu envisioned a new type of equitable and balanced global development partnership that would stick together in times of difficulty, both sharing rights and shouldering obligations, and boosting the common interests of mankind. President Xi Jinping first proposed the concept in an international arena at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in March 2013, and raised it again in a speech to the World Economic Forum at Davos in January 2017, which “won him high credits at home and abroad”.\n
Connelly (Schwab’s students), D. Jean Clandinin and Shijing Xu (Connelly’s students), Cheryl Craig (Clandinin’s student and Clandinin’s and Connelly’s post-doc student), and by the school of Life-Practice Educolgy founded by China’s Ye Lan as well as her colleagues and students? What are the similarities and differences between the two schools?

This chapter begins with reflections on these four basic questions.

2.1 **Who Are We: Understanding Our Cultural Identity from Both Sides of Chinese Traditional Culture**

Because we share the same cultural ecology, we usually do not reflect on who we are from the perspective of cultural identity. However, when we engage in dialogue with those representing another culture, we naturally look at ourselves from the dimension of cultural identity. We think: Which culture do we belong to and what are the characteristics of this culture? What cultural identity do we usually hold when we interact with foreign cultures? The former questions are concerned with our day-to-day cultural identity, while the latter query concerns the cultural identity we project when we interact with others.

The connotation of “culture” is rich and varied, but, on the whole, it expresses a kind of lifestyle and spiritual value that has become habit, with the final result being the collective consciousness of a group of people. As such, when culture is relative to a certain group, it has two faces, both inward and outward. With these understandings in mind, we will analyze some characteristics of Chinese culture.

2.1.1 **Looking Inward: Expressions of Love and Consideration of Others**

First, Chinese culture should be understood in view of the form of its society. In the history of Western civilization, China’s transition from a primitive society to a civilized society has experienced a series of changes that broke the old clan ruling system, replacing the consanguineous (blood-relative) clan with the regional state and the political state. In China, however, historical accounts, myths, and legends of ancient China show that the ancient Chinese entered the class society by transforming
clan leaders directly into slave-owning aristocrats, and later turning family slavery into clan slavery, thus establishing “families” and “band”-style states, rather than Western-style “city-states” (Hao 1993). The reason for this is that the Chinese Neolithic age, which was based on agriculture, lasted for a long time. The organizational structure of the clan society developed fully and firmly, the blood ties were stable and strong, and were not weakened and impacted by navigation, nomadism, or other factors. Although China entered the class society and went through the changes of the economic and political systems at all levels, the social life and social structure based on the production of agricultural small families characterized by kinship rarely changed. The essence of the reform carried out in the Western Zhou Dynasty (1122–771 BC), which is of great significance in the history of Chinese social development, was to turn the clan organization into a political organization and a state system. It made a breakthrough in the clan organization and initially formed the embryonic form of the state system, yet formally the system was bound to be established and maintained in terms of the patriarchal clan. Thus, a social pattern came into being with the integration of “family and state” as well as “home and country”.

Fei Xiaotong described the structural characteristics of Chinese society that gave rise to the integration of “family and state” as a “differential pattern”:

Each family, with itself being the center, draws a circle around it, the size of which depends on how influential the power of the center is.

Unlike the members of a group standing on a planar surface, the social relations with others center around oneself, resembling ripples after a stone is thrown into water. The further the ripples are pushed out, the thinner they become. In this way, everyone has a circle with himself as the center, belonging at the same time to another circle centering around someone who is superior. (Fei 2013)

This kind of family-state structure characterizes Chinese culture as strongly ethical, since the principles of a family fundamentally make up those of ethics, and the culture that grows out of this prototype is bound to an ethical standard, reflected specifically in the characteristics we will now discuss.

First, the ethical relationship features a differentiated social order and people treat others as they expect to be treated. As far as ethical culture is
concerned, the differential society, as Fei Xiaotong suggested, is like putting the “self” in the center like a stone thrown into the water. Interpersonal relationships are similar in the differentiated social order: people treat others in the way they would like to be treated. What Confucius valued is the word “push” that occurs when water ripples are pushed outward. He said, “The superior man bends his attention to what is Essential. That being established, Tao naturally comes into being” (The Analects: On Learning). “The Essential” refers to the fundamental, while Tao refers to the principles of governing a country and being a man ([sic] woman). “Tao” has varied meanings in ancient Chinese thought. The “Tao” in “On Learning” refers to Confucius called benevolence thought or the moral ideological system with benevolence as the core and its embodiment in life. Therefore, the meaning of “establishing the Essential to effect Tao” is that when what is considered fundamental is established, the principle of governing the country and being a man will naturally come into being, which is reflected by “those who in private life behave well towards their parents and elder brothers, in public life seldom show a disposition to resist the authority of their superiors. And as for such men starting a revolution, no instance of it has ever occurred”. Extending from oneself to the home, from home to the state, and from the state to the world is like a path pushed outward circle by circle. Just as Mencius (2004) observed, “It is simply that they knew well how to carry out, so as to affect others”.

Second, reason, rather than truth, and the importance of life are valued. Admittedly, the universality of truth that should be sought in any culture falls into two categories, the extensional truth and the intentional truth. Extensional truths, on the whole, refer to the natural sciences, subject areas like mathematics, for example. They exist unaffected by people’s subjective attitude. Take a flower, for instance. How aesthetically beautiful it is, is not scientific knowledge, but a subjective judgment made by a perceiver. If we speak of botany in a scientific manner, it is scientific knowledge associated with extensional truth. Intentional truth is knowledge related to the beholder and his/her subjective senses.

The East and the West perceive these two kinds of truths differently. Chinese culture is more concerned with individuals’ true feelings of life, including joys and sorrows, partings and reunions, custom and rites, all of which are intentional truth, disregarded more often than not by Western cultures that attach more importance to the extensional truth. Chinese culture does not attach the same degree of importance to extensional truth but believes that life is a whole, with scientific knowledge only being
a part of it. If life is only understood from a scientific perspective, life is incomplete and not fully truth worthy to the Chinese way of thinking. Hence, the Chinese culture values intentional truth more. From the perspective of rational type, Liang Shuming, a representative figure of contemporary Neo-Confucianism, believes that Chinese culture stresses “reason” or “common sense”, with references to people’s behaviors, which are dynamic rather than static. Westerners place a premium on physics, namely, the laws of nature or the principles of society, which is static and cannot show the direction of life until lived. Liang explained:

In Chinese books, what is often mentioned is nothing other than sentiment and reason in the human world, such as fatherly kindness, filial piety, knowledge of shame, love of people, fairness and justice, faithfulness and honesty. In the Western books, however, what it discussed is reason in the sense of natural science, if not in the sense of social science, or in the sense of purely abstract mathematics or logic. (Liang 2005)

Reason, in Chinese people’s eyes, shows the direction of people’s action. It is often embodied in such powerful words as “I do not know how a man without truthfulness is acceptable!” “Don’t covet possessions when you see them”. “Don’t escape when you are in trouble!” Such words are abstract, not referring to anything or anyone in particular, yet they are not static but dynamic (Liang 2005).

Profound differences in perceptions of truth between Chinese and Western cultures naturally affect our sister schools’ project research. For example, we have found that, due to cultural differences, teachers’ way of persuasion and reasoning is different when handling interpersonal conflicts in classroom teaching and routines, which leads to different effects. We address these matters in Chaps. 5–8.

As earlier suggested, from the inside view of Chinese culture, the Chinese way of handling matters is distinguished by differential love, which starts with “filial piety” on the basis of blood kinship. The differential nature of such feelings is in conflict with equal love upheld in modern society. Indeed, in the history of Chinese thought, the “benevolence” advocated for by Confucius never developed into the moral principle where everyone is equal, let alone an underlying principle of law. Kinship ethics and the situation of law giving way to sentiment when the two are in conflict have long been in existence, adapting to the stability of the family system and the feudal social system in China. People’s treating others
as they expect to be treated and their differentiated love are reflected in many aspects of Chinese social life. The same is true in the education sector. That is why we refer to the embodiment of Chinese culture in contemporary school life in other chapters of this book.

### 2.1.2 Looking Outward: Harmony Without Uniformity, Loyalty Together with Consideration

Chinese culture has a unique dual nature. Inside, its way of treating others with compassion and consideration is based on blood kinship and forms close or distant interpersonal relationships. Is it then more indifferent to foreign cultures? As a matter of fact, that is not the case. Chinese culture adopts a very kind and benevolent stance toward foreign cultures.

First, Chinese traditional culture regards “harmony without uniformity” (Analects of Confucius Zilu) as the basic principle of coexistence with others. The pattern of differential order not only recognizes but also maintains the existence of differences. However, if there is too much difference, there will be a risk of conflict. How does Chinese culture deal with the conflicts between differences so as to maintain harmony in social relations?

The reason why two subjects interact and coexist for a long time would simply be that the two “are attracted to each other by common tastes”, “have a common goal”, or “are birds of a feather”. Obviously, this is a “seeking-common-ground” approach, which, however, was deemed inappropriate by early Chinese culture, as it is difficult for things to develop or last if they are carbon copies of one another. Instead, only through interactions with different ways of knowing, doing, and being can the existence of things become possible. Hence, “harmony without uniformity” became a foundational belief in Chinese culture. This view has been repeatedly confirmed in Chinese philosophy and is evident in such sayings as “Harmony begets development, while disharmony begets none” from *Guan Zi* (Liang Yunhua 2004, p. 945), “When Yin and Yang interconnect, all things grow”, a belief held by Zhuang Zi (Guo Qingfan 1961, p. 712), “All things develop when in harmony” declared Xun Zi (Wang Xianqian 1988, p. 309), “Everything comes into being with the harmony of Yin and Yang,” which is contained in the *Huai Nan Zi* (He Ning 1998, p. 44), “Development comes from the harmony of heaven and earth” (天人合一) asserted Dong Zhongshu (Su Yu 1992, p. 444), and so forth.
To understand the meaning of “harmony without uniformity”, we must first of all understand the meaning of “harmony” in Chinese culture, which is an ancient concept. The word and its related ideas appeared in early documents such as the *Book of Documents*, *Book of Songs*, and the *State Annals*. In Chinese philosophy, “harmony” is “the interaction and unity between different elements or forces, and as the possible condition for the occurrence of all things” (Yang 2001). This interpretation is based on the concept of Heaven. If perceived from the concept of Humanity, “harmony” is often perceived as a concept of value or an ethical principle of human interaction.

“Harmony”, as an ethical principle of interpersonal interaction, presupposes the recognition of diversity. Confucius once made a distinction between “harmony” and “uniformity”: “The superior man seeks harmony without uniformity, while the mean man seeks uniformity without harmony” (Confucius 2006b). “Uniformity” denotes the sameness without difference and is often built on the basis of a biased opinion, partiality, or interest, easily resulting in a clustering tendency. “Harmony”, as opposed to “uniformity”, means the recognition and tolerance of different opinions at the conceptual level, and refers to the establishment of harmonious social relations between different individuals and groups at the social structural level. Therefore, “harmony” has a dual meaning. When observed from a negative perspective, it requires the mutual understanding and communication between subjects to dissolve tension and restrain conflicts. If perceived positively, “harmony” denotes that different subjects must collaborate together with one heart and one mind. It can be seen that the so-called harmony without uniformity means harmony under the premise of acknowledging differences. Just as Mencius said, “Opportunities of time vouchsafed by Heaven are not equal to advantages of situation afforded by the Earth, and advantages of situation afforded by the Earth are not equal to the union arising from the accord of Men” (Mencius 2004). “The unity among people” is about the relationship between people who should respect and tolerate each other in order to achieve harmony and social cohesion. The resulting force will overcome the external

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2 The concept of heaven is a fundamental view regarding the origin of the world, debated around different understandings of heaven and the relationship between heaven and man.

3 Humanity here refers to the human reason, ethical relations in society, respect for human rights, care for human life, and care about the moral concept of human nature.
natural elements such as favorable time and place. Here, the value of social integration is without doubt highly valued.

Second, in Chinese traditional culture loyalty and consideration are regarded as the basic way for people to coexist. If “harmony without uniformity” is the fundamental ethical principle of coexistence suggested by Confucianism, the basic way to realize this principle is the “Way of Loyalty and Consideration”. Loyalty and consideration are considered a “way”, in that they illustrate the basic concept of Confucianism regarding how to be and treat a man, which is also the basic way of seeking and practicing benevolence. The basic thinking logic of Confucianism is this: it is considered a “virtue” to “gain” from the “way”. As such, the epitome of the Way of Heaven is the virtue of “life”, while the epitome of the Way of Humanity is the virtue of “benevolence”. Similarly the “Way of Loyalty and Consideration” refers to the way of human behavior, namely, the Way of Humanity.

In explaining “loyalty and consideration”, Zhu Xi said, “To do one’s part is to be loyal, and to be thoughtful of others is to be considerate”4 (Sishu Zhangju Jizhu四书章句集注). The Way of Loyalty and Consideration as the Way of Humanity can be divided into two parts: the Way of Loyalty and the Way of Consideration. “Loyalty” mainly means a kind of attitude and spirit characterized by such virtues as a high level of responsibility, integrity, piety, and trustworthiness. What is consideration then? Confucius said, “This is being considerate! Do unto others what you would not have them do unto you” (Confucius 2006a). That is, we should put ourselves in others’ shoes, and should not impose on others what we do not want ourselves.

Although both Loyalty and Consideration are ways to realize benevolence, in terms of their objectives, the way of loyalty is a requirement for oneself, while the Way of Consideration is a way of treating others. The former refers to one’s awareness of benevolence, and to the spirit and attitude of “self-righteousness”, “self-encouragement”, and “self-realization” upon this awareness, namely, the attitude and spirit of extreme responsibility, extreme integrity, extreme piety, and extreme trustworthiness mentioned above. The latter deals with the relationship between oneself and others on the premise of “loyal” attitudes and spirits, that is, extending from the relationship between one and oneself to the relationship between

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4 Notes on the Chapters and Sentences from the Four Books. Sishu Zhangju Jizhu四书章句集注.
oneself and others. In this sense, “loyalty” is the preparation for the consciousness of benevolence, and the spirit, state, and attitude one has afterward, while “consideration” is the concrete enactment of benevolence. Therefore, loyalty and consideration are inseparable in moral life. If there is no “willing one’s heart” (loyalty), there will be no “thinking in others’ shoes” (consideration), or there will be no correct concept of thinking in others’ shoes (such as notions based on evil thoughts). Conversely, without consideration for others, “willing one’s heart” will always be a kind of consciousness or notion only, and seeking benevolence or acting with benevolence cannot be ultimately realized.

2.2 Repositioning Contemporary Chinese Cultural Identity: A Member of a “Community of Shared Future for Mankind”

Humankind has entered “a globalized society” in the twenty-first century (Giddons 2001). Globalization, a hallmark of our time, is the basis of today’s open world and defines the fundamental direction of the twenty-first century. So the perpetual question of how can nations of the world get along in peaceful coexistence again arises. The Chinese government has been thinking about this issue since the 1990s and has put forward the concept of “a community with a shared future for mankind”, originally proposed by Hu Jintao, former general secretary of the communist party of China (CPC), and now championed by Xi Jinping, the current general secretary. The Chinese government proposed the concept with the aim of establishing a new framework for international relations to promote and improve global governance (Ding and Cheng 2017). Some analysts say it is the first major amendment to China’s foreign policy in more than 40 years, shifting from a state-centered approach to one that focuses on all mankind, with China as a member of a community with a shared future for mankind, understanding and positioning the development of China and humankind in the same framework.

Xi’s vision of a community of a shared future for mankind revolves around the following five actions: (1) building a partnership based on mutual consultation and understanding; (2) creating a security pattern through joint contribution and shared benefits; (3) seeking prospects of development that is inclusive and mutually beneficial; (4) promoting exchanges among civilizations with a respect for differences; and (5) constructing an ecosystem with green development.
The concept of “a community of shared future for mankind” is an inheritance and an advancement of the spirit of traditional Chinese culture, further specifying our basic principle and position in cultural exchanges with the world. First, we should continue to carry forward the idea of “harmony and coexistence” in traditional Chinese culture with regard to cultural integration. Since the Qin and Han dynasties, China has generally adhered to the principle of interdependence and peaceful coexistence when handling relationships with ethnic groups within its borders or with neighboring countries. Today’s world is increasingly becoming a community with a shared future, with countries sharing prosperity and common ground. We need to recognize that China and the rest of the world are all important members of this community. China needs to work actively with all parties to build this community and welcomes all countries in the world to “hitch a ride” on China’s rapid development to promote the harmonious integration of the economy and culture of different countries, including China.

Second, we should continue to live in “harmony without uniformity”. “The world is varied and colorful. Just as there cannot be only one color in the universe, there cannot be only one civilization, one social system, one development model, or one value in the world. … The diversity of nationalities, religions and civilizations should be fully respected” (Jiang 2006). As Xi has stressed:

Each civilization is unique. There is not a matter of superiority, but only a matter of difference in haecceity, characteristics and nationality. Achievements of all civilization deserve respect and cherishment. Each civilization has its own value of existence, with its own strengths and weaknesses. Civilizations are enriched by exchanges and mutual learning, which is an important driving force for the progress of human civilization and the peaceful development of the world. (Xi 2014a)

We should respect the diversity of civilizations and, on this basis, emphasize their uniqueness, equality, tolerance, and mutual learning.

Third, we should continue to treat friends from afar (Confucian expression) with Chinese traditional “benevolence”. The Chinese nation has pursued harmony and peace for centuries as an ancient society. They advocate amity, “associate with benevolent gentlemen [sic women], befriend good neighbors and promote concord among nations”, creating a unique culture characterized by “harmonization” throughout its thousand-year civilization history and advocated harmony. Such a culture “contains the
cosmological view of the Unity of Nature and Man, the international view of the concord among nations, the social view of harmony without uniformity, as well as the moral view of human heart and kindliness” (Xi 2014b). Confucius said, “Love everyone and become close with the kind-hearted”; “Isn’t it a joy to have friends come from afar”. Countries are different in size, not in superiority or inferiority. Civilizations are different in characteristics, not in being noble or lowly. To build a new global order of equity and justice, we must seek the new vision through extensive consultation and joint contribution. Similarly, the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind has made it clear that when it comes to cultural exchanges, one should be as inclusive as the vast ocean which admits hundreds of rivers. Different civilizations should communicate on an equal footing to make common progress, so that “the exchange of civilizations can become a driving force for the progress of human society and a link for maintaining world peace” (Xi 2017).

The position and principles of Chinese culture we advocate and adhere to today are consistent with the principles of cultural communication upheld in this book when partaking of the larger sister school project. For example, the collaborative nature of the Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education Between Canada and China and its guiding concept of reciprocal learning are designed as positive responses to global conditions. The world is increasingly interdependent and relations between the West and the East are active and vital. Reciprocal learning is a concept designed to foster mutual adaptation and reciprocity in education as cultures come together. Immigrant countries like Canada have a history and future in which cultural and educational adaptation and reciprocity are inevitable (Connelly et al. 2008; Xu 2006, 2011; Xu and Connelly 2010; Xu et al. 2007).

2.3 A Century’s East-West Dialogue About China’s Education and Its Contemporary Appeal

Although the cultural positions of traditional Chinese culture, such as Harmony Without Uniformity, Cosmopolitan Harmony, and the Ways of Loyalty and Consideration, generally put China in the position of having a dialogue with the world on an equal footing, everything seems in flux when it comes to China’s education. Except for some scattered discourse about traditional Confucianism, the voice of Chinese pedagogy in global
academia is relatively weak. In its dialogue with other countries, the pedagogic discourse of modern China faces “difficulties in relation, in connection, in contribution and in recognition” (Li 2018). To comprehend this challenging situation, we first need to understand the historical situation and China’s educational modernization.

Admittedly, the historical development of China’s education since the end of the nineteenth century has revolved around two relations: “Sino-foreign relations” and “tradition and modern relations”. Many scholars at home and abroad have made slightly different yet generally close divisions of this period of China’s educational history (Ye 2004; Hou 2001; Wu 2011; Deng 2011; Hayhoe 2014). We have synthesized their views and will now present five stages of China’s education from the perspective of landmark events.

The first stage is from the late Qing Dynasty to the May 4th Movement (1840–1919). China’s educational modernization originated from the failure of the First Opium War between China and Britain in 1840. Some Chinese realized that agricultural culture could not triumph over industrial civilization. With the ambition of saving the country and striving for strength, Zuo Zongtang first set up a Shipbuilding School in Fuzhou in 1866, marking the starting point of China’s educational modernization and opening up the road to modernization in China. In 1902, the Qing government promulgated the Imperial School Regulations, also known as the “Ren Yin School System” (壬寅学制), which became the first modern school system in China. With this as the starting point, China officially started its road to modernization following the mode of “introducing Western learning to the East”. At this stage from 1840 to 1901, educational works by such authors as Spencer were mainly introduced or briefly translated. From 1901 to 1915, Japanese educational works were introduced into China which are said to be mainly about German educational thought (Hou 2001; Ye 2004). These measures triggered the controversy between Chinese reformists and traditionalists at that time, focusing on issues such as “Western cultural values” and “Chinese basic values”, “Western utilitarianism” and “Confucian ethics”, and “Christianity” and “Confucianism”. A consensus was reached to adopt the strategy of addressing the controversies by selecting certain Western ideas and models while retaining the basic thoughts and values of Confucianism (Meiyao 2009; Wu 2011).

The second stage, from the May 4th Movement to the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (1919–1949), was marked by a transition from learning from Japan and Europe to the United States. Several
scholars are dedicated to pedagogical research in the Chinese educational circle. Tao Xingzhi (陶行知), Liang Shuming (梁漱溟), and Yan Yangchu (晏阳初) embarked on independent research on the reality and problems of Chinese education (Ye 2004). The mainstream influence on educational thought at that point was Dewey’s pragmatism, together with other major Western educational trends and Marxist pedagogy. Under the influence of these thoughts, there appeared a variety of developments in China’s education including school system establishment, citizenship education, universal education, rural education, and vocational education. More attention was drawn to the compilation of textbooks, teaching methodologies, intelligence tests, educational measurement, and psychological measurement in schools. In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Chinese government needed people’s loyalty to the country to assert itself as a nation. In order to resist the influence of Western democracy and equality, the national government retained the part of Confucianism aiming to cultivate people’s loyalty and patriotism (Ye 2004). Confucianism at this time was not completely eliminated, but of course went through a process of modernization. That is, Chinese intellectuals interpreted or reinterpreted traditional Confucianism according to Western or non-Confucian thought (Tan 2008).

The third stage is marked by the era of Mao Zedong (1949–1978), which occurred after the founding of New China. From the founding of the People’s Republic of China to 1957, the pedagogical thoughts of the Soviet Union such as Kailov and Makalenko became the mainstream educational thought in mainland China. Admittedly, the core of Kailov’s theory still resembles that of Herbart (Ye 2004) from Germany on which Dewey also drew. With the breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations in 1958 and the advent of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Mao Zedong’s theory assumed dominant status, with the educational function of schools becoming politicalized. Meanwhile, criticism was directed at Soviet, European, or American education thought with Confucianism nearly being denied through “destroying the four dregs of society” (old ideas, old culture, old customs, old habits) (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China 1966). Hence, the Mao era “eliminated not

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5 This is different from the opinion of some contemporary Chinese scholars that the development of educational thought in the first half of the twentieth century in China was fractured. See Ye Lan (2004).
only the remnants of Western-style education and the early emulation of the Soviet educational model, but also eliminated any trace of Confucian education” (Yang and Frick 2009).

Then came the fourth stage: the period of reform and opening up (1980–1999). This period features China’s educational recovery, prosperity, and the beginnings of independent consciousness (Ye 2004). In order to make up for the destructive influence caused by the Cultural Revolution as soon as possible, the modernization of education became a front-burner agenda item again. The first few years saw the introduction and compilation of Western educational theories as the mainstream, especially in 1983 when Deng Xiaoping put forward “Three Orientations” in education, namely, orientating toward modernization, the world and the future. At that point, countries like the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and Japan became the major sources of education theories in China’s attempt to orient itself toward the world. The consciousness of an independent Chinese pedagogy began to emerge. Chinese educators began to realize that Chinese pedagogy needs to take a path of local development and could not always be the “Sinicized” version of Western pedagogy (Lei 1984; Zhou 1997; Qu 1998, 1999; Ye 2004). Chinese scholars carried out research of meta-pedagogy theoretically, on one hand, and combined theory and practice for local exploration, on the other hand. Meanwhile, Chinese traditional culture and the challenges of contemporary rationality were also included in the research framework.

This brings us to the current century and the fifth stage: the awakening of Chinese discourse in pedagogy of the new era (2000–present). Entering the new century, Chinese society commenced an overall transformation period oriented toward globalization, and China began to think about its position in the world. Although China continued to “import” various educational theories from the West, the legitimacy and applicability of Western theories began to be questioned in the Chinese educational circle because China has its own distinct cultural traditions and unique problems6 (Hou 2001; Yi and Yang 2003; Ye 2004; Li 2004a, b; Jiang 2006;

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6 From 2001 to 2010, there were several papers on this topic. Hou Huaiyin. Basic Course of Chinese Pedagogy Development in the First Half of the Twentieth Century [J].] Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2001 (6): 1–6; Yi, Yang Changyong. Discussion on the Creation of Chinese Pedagogy School [J].] Educational Research, 2003 (4): 37–42; Ye Lan. A Review of the Century Question of Development of Chinese Pedagogy [J].] Educational Research, 2004 (7): 3–17; Li Hing Chau. Analysis on the Destiny of Chinese Pedagogy in the Context of Globalization [J].] Contemporary
Lu et al. 2007; Tian et al. 2010). In 2004, Ye Lan of East China Normal University (ECNU) argued the need to construct a school of Chinese pedagogical thought, and named the school “Life-Practice” Educology. For a while, it not only attracted the attention of Chinese educators but also the attention of international scholars. For example, in the book, *Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators*, by Ruth Hayhoe of the University of Toronto, Ye Lan was introduced as the youngest educator in contemporary China (Zhang 2008). In 2009, Shanghai’s students earned first place in the PISA exams coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which not only shocked the European and American education circles and aroused the world’s attention but also established the confidence of Chinese educational scholars.

The issue of China’s educational independence has increasingly become a focus. In 2011, Wu Zongjie of Zhejiang University published *Interpretation, Autonomy, and Transformation: Chinese Pedagogic Discourse in a Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Wu 2011), pointing out contemporary education should return to the traditional Confucian discourse system in order to break loose of the quagmire of Western technicism and instrumentalism. The modernization of Chinese education could then be restored to its original purpose. This article immediately triggered a heated discussion among internationally renowned Chinese scholars (Bai 2011; Cheng 2011; Cheng and Xu 2011; Liu 2011; Tan 2011; Deng 2011; Hayhoe 2014). In 2017, Xi Jinping championed the concept of Community of Shared Future for Mankind in the 19th CPC National Congress report, calling for a world knowledge production system different from the Western discourse system. “Chinese theory” and “Chinese experience” would coalesce the whole Chinese humanities and social science community, not be confined to the field of education. As a result, the Chinese government and universities have strengthened their efforts to globally disseminate their scholarship and committed themselves to

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introducing China’s experience. Discussion papers, projects, and conferences have become “vibrant again” (Ding and Zhou 2006).

In general, the Chinese government and scholars who have walked the road of Westernization for more than a hundred years feel that it is time for China to make its own footprint and find its own voice in the world. Until now, their voice has been almost non-existent, so it is an important issue to be in search of themselves. In this regard, one proposition is to return to Chinese traditional culture to look for uniqueness (i.e., Wu 2011), or not simply to return, but to break through (Ye 2004; Ye et al. 2019); a further proposition is to plant Chinese educational practice to carry out local research and explore the Chinese way (Ye et al. 2019). International scholars think that the Chinese and Western educational thought are polar opposites because the road of educational modernization chosen by China and the West was not voluntary or disconnected. Modern education was chosen because of industrialized societies, and today, due to the arrival of information and intelligent society, we need to go beyond the drawbacks of industrial era education. Therefore, China and the West need to walk hand-in-hand to explore common problems and contribute to the richness and innovation of world education (Cheng 2011).

Indeed, the educational dialogue between China and the West captured by the reciprocal learning project is clear. Reciprocal learning involves interaction between two parties. Through interactions as partners, we would not only learn from each other and contribute to each other but also jointly explore problems, find solutions, synthesize successful experiences, and compound successful learning so as to create new cultural and educational possibilities for everyone involved.

2.4 THE TWO CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT

In this section, we will explicate the academic pursuits and impact of two influential educational schools of thought in China and the United States in the transformation of modern society: one of which concerns the development and spread of the Dewey school of experiential philosophy in the United States and Canada and its subsequent development and inheritance of core thoughts of several generations after Dewey: Schwab, Schwab’s students, Lee Shulman and Michael Connelly, Connelly’s
student Clandinin, Clandinin’s and Connelly’s student Cheryl Craig, and so forth. Another school is the life-practice pedagogy research team. Ye Lan, the head of the research group of East China Normal University in China, is the founder of the School of “Life-Practice” Educology. Yuhua Bu, one of the leaders of the research group, was a student of Ye Lan and a core member of the School of “Life-Practice” Educology. Although these two schools came into being in two different times and spaces, there are many similarities between them.

In terms of academic origin, the university researchers who presided over the study of sister schools on both sides of Canada and China belong to Dewey’s school of empirical educational thought and Ye Lan’s School of “Life-Practice” Educology respectively. As mentioned, Michael Connelly of the University of Toronto is a student of American educator Joseph Schwab, while Xu Shijing and Yishin Khoo are students of Connelly; so, their thoughts trace Dewey’s empirical theory (Clandinin and Connelly 1992; Craig and Ross 2008). Ye Lan is the founder of the “Life-Practice” Educology as well as the head of the research group of East China Normal University. Yuhua Bu, head of another research group, is a student of Ye Lan as well as a core member of the school of Life-Practice Educology. The main ideas and pursuits of these two schools are respectively discussed below.

2.4.1 From Dewey and Schwab to Connelly and His Students: The Development of Empiricism Educational Theory

As is known, Dewey is the educational thinker who has the greatest influence on modern education in the world in the twentieth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, standing on the development point of the time when the American society was transforming from an agricultural society to a modern society, he examined the shortcomings of transmission education and transformed the empirical theory, from which he began to discuss the modern educational thought almost systematically. Since then, his educational thoughts have influenced the whole world, and have been continuously interpreted and developed. Several educational scholars involved in this project have made important contributions to the inheritance and development of Dewey’s educational thought. Starting from Dewey’s view that “education is the endless process of continuous reorganization of experience”, their breakthrough has had a great impact on
contemporary curriculum reform, teacher education, and educational research methodology, as detailed below.

First, it is worth mentioning that the American curriculum theorist Joseph Schwab (1909–1988) is an important figure in the deepening Dewey’s theory in the field of curriculum. He was the originator of *The Practical*, a program for educational improvements based on curriculum deliberations. Schwab’s concern for education as a deliberative activity connects him to John Dewey (Craig and Ross 2008). His respect for the formulations and proper uses of theories connects him to the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical, practical, and productive activities. He thought that curriculum is more than a planned document or a program of study external to teachers. It is what teachers and students live as they interact with one another, although curriculum guides, textbooks, and other materials obviously play a part (Schwab 1969, 1973; Connelly and Clandinin 1992). Schwab thought that commonplaces are interrelated curricular components encompassing learners, teachers, content, and milieus. Scholars in curriculum studies should employ commonplaces to frame curriculum development, to develop a heuristic for understanding curriculum, and to create a structure of analysis for curriculum inquiry. Joseph Schwab delineated the curriculum commonplaces to guide the process of curriculum development. He explained that when people come together to revise curriculum, they need knowledge of these fundamental elements. Schwab’s first commonplace, subject matter, means comprehension of content disciplines, their underlying systems of thought, and curriculum materials. His second commonplace, knowledge of learners, involves familiarity with students including children’s developmental abilities, their unique qualities, and their probable futures as influenced by the environment of their families and communities (rather than how education might transform their possible destinies). Schwab referred to classroom, school environments, and all outward influences on them as the third commonplace, milieu; he called for recognition of the context of learning—social structures within schools, the influence of families, and the multitude of values and attitudes stemming from the community and culture surrounding the school. The fourth commonplace, teachers, includes educators’ subject matter knowledge, their personalities—such as their flexibility or openness to new methods—and their biases or political stances. His thoughts have had a far-reaching impact in the fields of curriculum, teacher education, and educational research. Michael Connelly,
the host of our project, is one of these far-reaching influences as are Connelly’s students (Elbaz-Luwisch, Clandinin, Craig, Khoo, Xu).

As mentioned earlier, Michael Connelly was a student of Joseph Schwab. Dr. Connelly was a longtime Editor of Curriculum Inquiry and former Chair of Curriculum at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of University of Toronto (OISE/UT). He studied with Joseph Schwab at the University of Chicago and has written on science education, curriculum studies, teacher education, multiculturalism, and narrative inquiry. Dr. Connelly has deep roots in American modern educational thought, especially since Dewey and Schwab had a great impact on him. He is a prolific and creative scholar. Many of his educational theories are very influential in the world. Among his major collaborative works are The Functions of Curriculum Development (1972), Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience (1988), Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry (1990, which coined the term Narrative Inquiry), The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction (2008), Narrative Inquiry for School-based Research (2010), and the overview chapters on curriculum for the Elsevier International Encyclopedia of Education (2010) and The Routledge Companion to Education (2011). At present, Dr. Michael Connelly is Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of University of Toronto (OISE/UT). He co-directs the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Project Grant Reciprocal learning in teacher education and school education between Canada and China with Dr. Shijing Xu of the University of Windsor. Through this project, they jointly constructed the concept of “reciprocal learning in cross-culture education” as the basic principle and method to study cross-cultural reciprocal learning.

Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin advocate for Schwab’s practical view and his curriculum theory. They have drawn on the commonplaces to understand and make sense of teachers’ lived experiences in classrooms. Viewing curriculum as a fluid narrative arising from teachers’ sense of self and minded practices, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin formulated the commonplaces as a heuristic to inspire teachers’ self-reflection and articulation of their stances as curriculum makers (Clandinin and Connelly 1992). Unlike others, who placed the curriculum specialist as the expert in charge of curriculum planning, Connelly and Clandinin following in the footsteps of Schwab, viewed teachers as curriculum planners or makers and used the commonplaces as their analytic tools to develop their narratives, to understand historical trends of curriculum, and to gain insights into
contemporary controversies (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, 1992). In particular, by attending to the commonplaces, curriculum workers uncover the logic or emphasis of curriculum deliberations. Their idea of teachers as curriculum makers is of great significance. This view is critical of the traditional role of teachers as curriculum implementers. In the traditional role relationship, teachers are knowledge transferrers and technicians. Policy makers mandate changes; teachers do what they are told. Policy makers treat teachers as functionaries who are totally reliant on state and national imperatives. In this technical rational view of the teacher, fidelity to others’ directives reigns supreme (Craig 2008). But the image of teacher as curriculum maker views teachers as active agents, minded professionals, and makers of curriculum alongside students. Also, the teacher-as-curriculum-maker image works from the assumption that a classroom space exists within which teachers and students negotiate curriculum unhampered by, though not oblivious to, others’ mandates and desires (Craig and Ross 2008). Teachers desire to use the discretionary spaces in their in-classroom places to make curriculum alongside students (Boote 2006). Accordingly, the teacher’s responsibility is the organizer, planner, and arranger of the curriculum. They are no longer simply the transmitter of knowledge, but the agent of education. This echoes Schwab’s view: “only as the teacher uses the classroom as the occasion and the means to reflect upon education as a whole (ends as well as means), as the laboratory in which to translate reflections into actions and thus to test reflections, actions, and outcomes, against many criteria is he [sic] a good … teacher” (Schwab 1954/1978). Moreover, Connelly and Clandinin have also proposed other important conceptualizations such as “professional knowledge landscape” (Clandinin and Connelly 1995), “narrative inquiry” (Connelly and Clandinin 1990), and “stories to live by” (Connelly and Clandinin 1999), which have had an extensive impact in the field of education.

Following Connelly’s research tradition, his graduates (i.e., Jean Clandinin and Freema Elbaz-Luwitch) expanded and enriched this practice-oriented school of educational thought in two ways. Two former students involved in this project, one of whom is among his best students from China is Shijing Xu. Dr. Xu’s research interests focus on narrative approaches to intergenerational, bilingual, and multicultural educational issues and school-family-community connections in cross-cultural curriculum studies and teacher education. Her current research focuses on the reciprocal learning between the West and the East in a “WE consciousness”. She was the Principal Investigator (PI) of a project on circular
migration (2008–2012) and Co-PI of the Canada-China sister school network project (2009–2013) funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). She is coordinating the Pre-service Teacher Education Reciprocal Learning Program between University of Windsor and Southwest University China, which is funded by University of Windsor Strategic Priority Fund.

In North America, Cheryl J. Craig is a leading scholar. She is Jean Clandinin’s PhD student and Dr. Michael Connelly’s former Post-Doctoral Fellow. Currently, she is Professor and the Houston Endowment Endowed Chair in Urban Education in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture in the College of Education and Human Development, Texas A&M University. Her empirical research is situated at the intersection where teaching and curriculum meet. Using the narrative inquiry research method, she conducts research with pre-service and in-service teachers within school contexts. She is a prolific scholar and has put forward many important educational concepts, such as teacher knowledge communities (Craig 1995a, b, 2005a, b) the best-loved self (Craig 2013), parallel stories (Craig 1999), story constellation (Craig 2007), serial interpretation (Craig 2018; Craig et al. 2018), and so on. She is Chair of the International Advisory Board for the Canada-China Reciprocal Learning Project and since 2016 has assisted East China Normal University’s School of Life-Practice Educology.

Taken together, five generations of scholars, Dewey, Schwab, Connelly, Clandinin to Xu Shijing and Cheryl Craig, have constantly deepened and creatively developed Dewey’s empiricism educational thought. They have put forward important ideas and concepts related to curriculum reform, teacher education, science teaching, educational research methodology, and cross-cultural education. The characteristics of their educational thoughts can be summarized as follows: They (1) consider the problems of education from the perspective of modern society, (2) acknowledge the uncertainty, openness, individuality, situational and complex diversity of practice, and respect these characteristics of practice in theory, (3) recognize the primary status of teachers, who possess personal practical knowledge that truly affects teachers’ practice with children, (4) know that teachers’ professional development is based on their own experiences and that through storying and restorying teachers become further developed professionally in their knowledge communities, and (5) recognize education researchers should change their traditional attitude toward education work alongside teachers and experience their professional development through adopting narrative inquiry as their research method.
2.4.2 Ye Lan and Her Academic Team: School of “Life-Practice” Educology and “New Basic Education” Research

As mentioned, the 100-odd-year history of China’s educational modernization has taken place through the development of the relationship between China and foreign countries, and between ancient and modern. The educational thought of Japan, the United States, Germany, the former Soviet Union, and other countries have in turn affected the development of Chinese educational thought. In general, however, the mode of Chinese educational practice has not gone beyond the traditional mode of rote memory except for increasing disciplinary subject matter in the curriculum of study. At the end of the twentieth century, Chinese society is becoming more and more open and is in urgent need of novel educational ideas to lead the reform of educational practice. The school of “Life-Practice” Educology has taken shape against this background.

Born in 1941, Ye Lan came from a family of primary school teachers with her father being an art teacher at primary school. Since her childhood, she has been full of appreciation for her father’s status as a teacher. After graduating from high school, she entered the Department of Education of East China Normal University with the intention to be a good teacher. After graduating from university, she stayed in school with excellent grades and spent her first two years teaching at a primary school affiliated with East China Normal University, where she was the headteacher and Chinese teacher for one class. However, her two years of frontline teaching experience did not give her more professional self-confidence, but rather she felt that “no matter how well she learned pedagogy, she could not use it in practice”. However, when “she had a real life experience of being a primary school teacher, [she] developed a sense of the complexity of the relationship between educational theory and practice” (Ye 2002). From this life experience, she began to critically examine why Chinese educational theory is “useless” in the face of practice when she returned to East China Normal University. She found that (Ye 2002):

What is most lacking in our educational theory is the consciousness of the “human” and the study of the “human” … Pedagogy only studies how to teach students the knowledge of the external world, but does not how to develop the inner strength of students. I think this is the more important half that pedagogy must make up. I am determined to work towards adding that half. (p. 4)
Thereafter, as her understanding of theoretical issues in education became more and more clear, she resolved to explore the path of theory to practice, with the intention of “letting theory generate practice power and enrich theory with practice!” (Ye 2002).

With this ambition in mind, in 1990, she initiated the first theory-practice project, “Basic Education and Students’ Self-Education Capacity Development”, and began her first research on the direct integration of theory construction and educational practice innovation at the Waigaoqiao Free Trade Zone Experimental Primary School, Pudong, Shanghai. The study, which took three years, opened her eyes to “the enormous potential and possibilities that exist in children” and led to many of her first steps (Ye 2002), which she described as:

The first step to plunge into the torrent of China’s basic education reform with in-depth practical research; the first step to open the way for practical exploration and enrich theoretical research with practical exploration; the first step to achieve a healthy interaction between theory and practical research in education research on my part as a research individual.

When Ye Lan’s first explorations of combining theory and practice in education began to bear fruit in the early 1990s, her personal confidence began to grow and a new era of social development in China began to unfold at the same time. Sensing keenly that a new era was calling her, Ye Lan said (Ye 2002):

Since 1993, our ancient nation has accelerated its pace on the road to reform and opening up. The times are increasingly calling for new people. The growth of new people and the great renaissance of the people are directly related to the reform of basic education. At this time, I, as an educator, was driven by a sense of historical mission as a member of the nation. ... China’s educational reform can only be undertaken by Chinese educators, and it is only through the research and practice of reform that Chinese educational theory can be born, grow and mature. If we do not commit ourselves now, it is not the times that have failed us, but we have failed the times.

Ye Lan’s value lies in the fact that she is a person who believes in the rule of “words do, deeds do”. Once she realizes what is most valuable and meaningful, she will act decisively. In 1994, she launched a five-year research project named “New Basic Education” (NBE) and “Exploratory Research”, which directly combined theory and practice, with the first
experimental school being the Waigaoqiao Free Trade Zone Experimental School. NBE’s first five years of school reform research began in the areas of classroom teaching and classroom management, with the aim of recommending open classrooms and classes, giving students more autonomy in their learning and breaking the teaching delivery model. For this reason, almost every week, Ye Lan, her colleagues, and her students came to this school to listen to and evaluate lessons for five years. Gradually, there has been a significant change in the way teachers taught and practiced teaching in this school. In the last year, the NBE research results of Waigaoqiao Primary School held an on-site meeting, inviting the leaders of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, some district and county education bureau directors, and well-known local educators to the meeting. The quality of the teachers’ teaching and the level of development of the students were highly rated during this on-site meeting. This was the first five-year research phase of NBE, which was called “exploratory research”.

The results of the first five years of research were quickly disseminated. The director of the Minzhu District Education Bureau in Shanghai was so eager to change test-taking education that he invited Professor Ye Lan to conduct her second five-year research in Minzhu District. Thus, in 1999, NBE planned to conduct a larger-scale study in Minzhu District, Shanghai, called “Developmental Research”. The Minzhu District Education Bureau has since provided strong support for NBE research. First, it established the New Basic Education Institute, which allows local education researchers to participate in NBE research projects. Second, three junior high schools and six primary schools participated in the NBE study, among which Minzhu Primary School (highlighted in this book) is one of them. Third, a nine-year school was specifically renamed the “New Basic Education Experimental School”, with the intention of becoming a model school in the region. In addition, the Minzhu Bureau of Education has provided material and financial support to NBE. At the same time, Changzhou No. 2 experimental primary school is also eager to join the NBE, becoming the first NBE school outside Shanghai. The ECNU team working on the NBE research is small, with only four other colleagues besides Ye Lan, two of whom had already left for other important projects. In addition, most of the researchers involved (5–6) were Ye Lan’s PhD students. The ECNU research team is divided into four teams: Chinese, mathematics, language (English study), and class teams, each team consisting of one to two people was responsible for conducting the NBE
study with the corresponding subject teachers in nine schools in Minzhu District and one school in Changzhou City. Mentoring usually happens on Tuesdays, when each research group works together in one school to carry out research, and other schools will have two to three teachers participate in the discussion in the school of on-site research, and the school of on-site research will rotate every week. Every month, ECNU researchers hold a wrap-up meeting to share their research progress and build consensus. In this way, the project lasted for five years. By the fifth year, some changes had taken place in the ten schools, but they were not ideal. For example, ECNU researchers, while theoretically able to argue for an ideal educational model, were not very clear about the pathway from theory to practice. So, after the second five years were over, Ye Lan and the leadership at the Minzhu Bureau of Education felt that the study, while difficult, was valuable and needed a second five-year follow-up study.

From 2004 to 2009, NBE continued to conduct reform research in nine schools in Minzhu District and the Changzhou No. 2 experimental primary school, in the third phase of a five-year study called the “Transformational Study”. Ye Lan realized that the previous school reform was unsatisfactory, mainly because it was only partially carried out (classroom teaching, classroom management). She knew it was because the school was not reformed as a whole, such as the organizational structure of the school, the system, the leadership philosophy and way of that principals deeply constrained enthusiasm for teacher reform. Therefore, she argued that if school reform in contemporary China was to be truly successful, it must focus on holistic reform and must recognize that contemporary school reform in China is a transformation of modern industrialized efficiency-oriented schools and the pursuit of modern schooling must be based on the development of students. Thus, she called the third phase of NBE research a “holistic transformational reform”. In other words, in addition to teachers being the main agents of reform, the principal is also an active agent of reform, and is the first person responsible for school reform. Hence, there was a need for them to change the leadership concept themselves based on school culture, schools’ organizational structure, school system construction, and other aspects of reform. Obviously, the key to this orientation is that the principal is the person who takes the lead in the whole school reform. Once they become actively involved in school reform, the enthusiasm of teachers increases significantly. At this stage, the NBE advises principals to develop an overall five-year plan for school development and reform. Then, the NBE team listens to the
principal’s term plan at the beginning of each semester and helps to analyze problems and challenges at the end of the term. The principal then has a clearer understanding of the development of the school, and the development goals and strategies of the school become even more targeted every semester. In 2009, the quality of classroom teaching and the development of teachers in ten schools achieved remarkable results. In 2009, NBE held a nationwide on-site seminar for all ten schools, inviting education scholars, heads of the Ministry of Education and the Shanghai Education Commission, as well as principals and teachers, to assess the development status of NBE schools, which was rigorously evaluated and widely publicized in the media.

Ye Lan believed that the ten experimental schools, despite the effectiveness of their reform, were accompanied by the ECNU team along the way, and their ability to develop on their own needs to be further examined. Only if these experimental schools are able to develop on their own, after leaving the ECNU research team, will the reform be truly successful. Therefore, the ECNU team agreed with the Minzhu Education Bureau to give the experimental schools three more years to see the results of the independent development of these experimental schools, so that the NBE concept can be firmly rooted in the daily practice of the schools. Thus, the period 2009–2012 was the fourth phase of the NBE study called “Grounded Research”. At this stage, the ECNU research team simply convenes a workshop at the end of each semester in which the ten experimental schools were invited to share their developments and new experiences. Three years of grounded research shows that ten experimental schools are basically able to institutionalize the NBE concept in daily life, and during this period, the ten experimental schools produced many “famous teachers” and “famous principals”, which basically proves the success of NBE. NBE has called these successful schools “cooperative schools”.

In 2012, the Minzhu Education Bureau and the NBE team agreed that the NBE research should be disseminated and the NBE reform schools should be used as “seed schools” to reach the region. As a result, NBE started to establish 6 school ecological communities in Minzhu District, Shanghai, consisting of 1 NBE cooperative school and 10 or 12 member schools. NBE cooperative school promotes the common development of member schools. Among them, Minzhu Primary School described in this book also became a lead school in the cooperative schools and school ecological communities. By 2015, the number of NBE schools in Minzhu
District had expanded to more than 70, covering almost all primary and secondary schools in the district, with many more outstanding schools emerging. As a result, the nine-year compulsory education reform in Minzhu District of Shanghai has been basically completed and the quality of education and teaching has greatly improved. At the same time, Changzhou has expanded from one experimental school to two and then to the five districts of the city as a whole. The fifth stage is the development of “School Ecological Communities”.

Since 2015, the NBE’s influence has been growing, and its research scope has been extended to 14 regions in China, including Beijing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Yunnan, Henan, Shandong, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Sichuan, with more than 100 experimental schools and nearly 10,000 teachers participating in this reform experiment (see Fig. 2.1). The sixth phase from 2015 to the present is called the “National Regional Advancement” research phase. During this period, the first district to enter the reform, such as Shanghai and Changzhou, and other NBE districts held annual national symbiosis conferences to observe and learn from each other, forming a national symbiosis of NBE schools. Minzhu Primary School, like all NBE cooperative schools, not only interacts regularly with other schools in the district but also participates in national network of NBE school experience sharing sessions, and its influence is growing.

Fig. 2.1  NBE’s influence in China
Together, Ye Lan and her students founded the school of “Life-Practice” Educology (2004) which coheres around the educational belief that “human life is the cornerstone of education while life is the starting point of pedagogical thinking” (Ye 2004; Bu and Liu 2017).

2.5 Conclusion

In sum, the nature of society and the background of the times produced two pedagogical schools: one in the East (China), another in the West (Canada and the United States). Both were confronted with similar issues in their transitions from a traditional to a modern society. Because of the differences in traditional culture, the basis of practice, and researchers’ way of academic thinking, they have similar answers to common questions. That is, they both emphasize the openness and complexity of practice, and give educators (principals and teachers) and children more autonomy. But their differences are also multifaceted. First, the academic tradition of the United States and Canada focuses on curriculum, teachers, or teaching, not on the school as a unit of reform, while the Chinese school first considers the school as an organic whole, and then explores the factors of curriculum, teachers, teaching, and students as components of an organic whole. Second, the American and Canadian academic traditions insist that theoretical researchers are neutral in the face of practice, while the Chinese school insists on the mutual transformation and generation of theory and practice, and that theoretical researchers should be deeply involved in educational practice to form a symbiotic relationship with practice. Third, with regard to the way of thinking, although both advocate entering into practice and research practice, the American-Canadian school starts from the empirical theory, which is the way of exploring the epistemological orientation (an exception is narrative inquiry which has an ontological nature). The Chinese school, starting from life theory, is also an ontological way of inquiry. The above-mentioned differences may result from differences in cultural traditions. In other chapters in this book, we will further present educational differences between the two cultural traditions through inquiring into the state of intercultural reciprocal learning in the sister schools.

Lastly, the novel coronavirus pneumonia (COVID-19) is rampant around the world as we write this volume. China and the world are experiencing a common fate. This virus makes us realize that human destiny is tightly bound together. Before the pandemic, many great people have
realized that human destiny is closely linked and win-win cooperation is very important. The great American poet, Walt Whitman, noted that the (human) race is never separated: “every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you”. Martin Luther King similarly declared that we are “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny”. Confucius also was acutely aware of this interdependency. In fact, he opened the *Analects* by addressing foreigners as “kindred spirits” (“And is it not delightful to have men [sic] of kindred spirit come to one from afar?” [有朋自远方来, 不亦乐乎?]).

When different cultures meet, differences will first color our vision. Confucius’ advice on the attitude toward differences is “harmony in diversity, beauty and sharing”. It is precisely this attitude and principle that guided our participation in the sister school research project between China and Canada.

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