

## Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

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### **Cross-Cultural Schooling Experiences of Chinese immigrant Families: In Search of Home in Times of Transition**

By Shijing Xu.

New York city, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Xviii+277 pp., (softcover)

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*“The men of experiment are like the ant, they only collect and use; the reasoners resemble spiders, who make cobwebs out of their own substance. But the bee takes a middle course: it gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and of the field but transforms and digests it by a power of its own.”*

*Bacon, Francis, The New Organon, 1620*

Shijing Xu's (2017) monograph *Cross-Cultural Schooling Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Families: In Search of Home in Times of Transition* is like “honey” generated by her and her collaborators. In the foreword of the monograph, Michael Connelly says, “Xu's work is not only scholarly, it is practical and compassionate” (p. ix). This book is the first in a series on Intercultural Reciprocal Learning in Chinese and Western Education. Xu's monograph was written against the backdrop of dramatic demographic changes in Canada since 1990, as the result of the increasing number of new immigrants arriving in Canada, 61.8% of which were from Asian countries, 8.6% of which were Chinese (Statistics Canada, 2016). With methodological and practical interests that seek to bridge Eastern and Western cultural and educational values, Xu conducted extensive field work to explore Chinese newcomer families' lived experiences in Canada.

Xu begins with a Series Editor introduction and a foreword followed by nine chapters. In the first chapter, Xu explores a puzzle of contrasting views about Chinese and Canadian schools and provides a background to her journey of inquiry. The second chapter details two narratives that demonstrate the importance of a sense of inquiry and thinking narratively when understanding people's diverse lived experience. In chapters three to seven, Xu introduces the narratives of five core families' lived experiences in the cross-cultural landscapes of schools in transition, each followed by Xu's critical reflections. In the eighth chapter, Xu 're-searches' the experiential richness of those family stories, adopting this term and approach from Clandinin and Connelly (2000). To achieve this, she employs the notion of 'landscapes in transition' within the interwoven frames of Confucian 'continuity of being' and Deweyian's 'continuity of knowing' to propose the need for reciprocal learning between the East and West. The ninth chapter sketches the cultural knowledge and values discussed in the previous chapters by narrating immigrant children's unseen stories in different curriculum situations within the concept of "curriculum commonplaces" (Schwab, 1971).

Through Xu's thorough, detailed, and critical analyses, the monograph provides methodological and practical considerations for cross-cultural and intercultural education. The chapters are well-connected by narrative threads with understandable and non-jargonistic language that makes the book accessible to a broader range of readers. Compared to a "streamlined" structure, Xu's work presents us with a narrative form of structure that is "something like Aristotle's formal cause or Dewey's end-in-view" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 153). Xu avoids "overspecifying and limiting" herself (p.153) in writing the narratives where end-in-view is more refined as the inquiry progresses. It is obvious that Xu's work has no clear boundary among different chapters, but her work is logically connected and full of philosophical considerations, complexities, and richness. Moreover, Xu's work also challenges the status quo (Craig, endorsements page) by giving readers and educators the opportunity to rethink the top-bottom research paradigm where rigid theories and preset rules dominate. By adopting narrative inquiry as the methodology of her study, she helps exposes unseen and untold stories within three-dimension life spaces (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The title of this monograph also reflects this methodological richness.

The subtitle of this book *In Search of Home in Times of Transition* reflects Xu's narrative conceptualization of the newcomers' lived experiences as an ongoing, three-dimensional life space (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Xu employs "schooling" instead of "educa-

tion” in the title to more accurately reflect the dissonance between immigrant children’s schooling experiences and cross-cultural and educational experiences outside of school, in contexts such as their home, which is “where the best school is and hence the best education for our children” and are “where we can harmonize Eastern learning with Western knowledge in linguistic and cultural diversities” (p. 254).

In addition to her methodological considerations, Xu’s work also presents practical implications, taking the reader beyond the discussion on the assimilation of newcomers to Canada to the role of newcomers as contributors, forming a mutual “we-ness” within communities. This is consistent with Hayhoe (1997), who suggests that the West ignores the value of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist views in East Asia, which are significant to understanding East Asian society, knowledge, and people. For Chinese schoolteachers and school administrators, this book provides an opportunity to rethink the essence of Chinese education and encourages Chinese policymakers to move beyond the role of Chinese education as an apprenticeship to the role of collaborator. Xu’s monograph provides valuable insights for Canadian schoolteachers and school administrators to better help immigrant children in their schools, while also providing alternative ways for Canadian policymakers to revisit policies related to multiculturalism.

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