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Unveiling Successful Leadership: A Case Study of High-Performing Primary School Principals in Urban Southwest China

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BA (English Language Literature)

MA (Interpreting and Translation)

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Abstract

This doctoral study investigates the intricate dynamics of educational leadership within the context of high-performing schools in urban Southwest China. Adopting a bounded realism ontology and a constructivist epistemological stance, the research examines the leadership mindsets, practices, and impacts of successful principals at Churchill Primary School (pseudonym) in the Riverside District of Chengdu. The study utilizes a case study methodology, integrating semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation to collect and analyze data.

The research identifies common leadership traits among the principals, emphasizing a strong sense of mission, moral values, and adherence to democratic principles. Furthermore, the study reveals shared patterns in the leadership model at Churchill Primary School, highlighting the impact of moral vision, systemic thinking, and democratic values on school operations and management. Also, the study evaluates the applicability of existing leadership models and proposes a “Full Spectrum Leadership” model that outlines the characteristics and capabilities of a comprehensive leader. It also emphasizes the need for modifications to established 20th-century leadership models to address the complexities of 21st-century educational environments.

The research acknowledges limitations, including the employment of a single-case study methodology and the potential for researcher subjectivity. The study’s quality was preserved as the researcher actively managed challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other misfortunes while ensuring valid and reliable data collection and analysis.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into effective educational leadership within the unique cultural and societal context of urban Southwest China. The findings contribute to the current discourse on educational leadership and offer recommendations for future research and practice in the field.

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

Printed Name: _____Xipeng Liu_____

Signature: _____

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The significance of China's education system in global academic and practical discourse has surged since the early 2000s, mirroring the country's remarkable economic expansion (OECD, 2015). Over the past decade, China's education sector at both basic and higher levels has achieved remarkable progress, evidenced by notable accomplishments, including PISA performance and university innovation (OECD, 2015). The World Bank (2017) highlights China's commendable achievements in cultivating a skilled workforce and sustaining competitiveness amid the dynamic landscape of the industrial revolution and global competition.

This educational advancement has spurred an increasing academic interest in understanding the intricacies of educational leadership within the Chinese context. Historically, research on Chinese educational leadership was relatively limited in Western academic circles. However, the past decade has witnessed a substantial rise in studies examining the unique characteristics and challenges of school leadership in China (Li & Walker, 2018; Zhou & Walker, 2022; Ling & Hallinger, 2021). This growing body of literature has begun to explore the diverse practices of Chinese school administrators and their influence on school effectiveness (Day, Sammons, & Ko, 2020; Hallinger, 2020).

Recent studies, such as those by Ling and Hallinger (2021) and Walker and Qian (2022), have delved into how cultural factors, such as collectivism and Confucian values, shape leadership practices in Chinese schools. These studies highlight the importance of principal leadership in fostering teacher professional development and improving school effectiveness. They also underscore the need for further research to fully understand the complexities of educational leadership in the Chinese context (Li & Walker, 2021; Wang & Cheng, 2020).

Walker (2010) asserts that Chinese school leaders exhibit distinct traits compared to their Western counterparts, largely due to the interplay between Chinese culture, political structures, and a society oriented toward academic credentials. These distinct traits include a strong emphasis on collectivism and harmony, in contrast to the individualism often found in Western leadership models (Walker, 2010; Dimmock & Walker, 2010; Zhang & Tan, 2021). Chinese school leaders typically prioritize the maintenance of stability and order within the school community, guided by a hierarchical leadership style that respects authority and seniority. Additionally, they emphasize moral and ethical values in decision-making, reflecting the influence of Confucian principles. The societal focus on academic achievement and success is another hallmark, as education is viewed as a key pathway to social mobility and contributing to the greater good of society.

An emerging trend in Chinese educational leadership is the integration of technology, particularly in the use of big data and real-time analytics to enhance school management. Shen (2014) provides an analysis of how real-time data, such as student attendance records, academic performance, and behavioral patterns, can be monitored to manage campus stress. This data gives school leaders access to real-time dashboards, which help identify high-stress periods or locations within the school environment. Leadership teams use this data to make informed decisions, such as adjusting school schedules, enhancing mental health resources, or offering personalized support to students.

For example, a sudden spike in absenteeism or behavioral issues might signal high levels of student stress. In response, school leaders can implement immediate interventions, such as scheduling counseling sessions or adjusting academic workloads. This proactive approach allows leaders to reduce stress factors before they escalate, ensuring students maintain both mental well-being and academic performance.

While this data-driven approach offers significant benefits, such as precise interventions and enhanced well-being, there are some concerns about privacy and the potential for over-reliance on data to overshadow human interaction in stress management (Slade & Prinsloo, 2013; Willis, 2014). Nonetheless, when thoughtfully integrated, big data and real-time campus stress management systems contribute significantly to the holistic well-being of students and staff (West, 2012).

The influence of cultural, social, and political contexts on Chinese educational leadership has been a recurring theme in recent research. Walker (2010) and Sun (2013) have argued that Chinese school leaders exhibit distinct traits compared to their Western counterparts, largely due to the interplay between Chinese culture, political structures, and a society oriented toward academic credentials. These distinct traits include a strong emphasis on collectivism and harmony, in contrast to the individualism often found in Western leadership models (Dimmock & Walker, 2010; Zhang & Tan, 2021). Chinese school leaders typically prioritize the maintenance of stability and order within the school community, guided by a hierarchical leadership style that respects authority and seniority. Additionally, they emphasize moral and ethical values in decision-making, reflecting the influence of Confucian principles. The societal focus on academic achievement and success is another hallmark, as education is viewed as a key pathway to social mobility and contributing to the greater good of society.

Studies on transformational leadership within Chinese schools, such as those by Liu and Liu (2022) and Li (2022), further demonstrate the adaptation of Western leadership models to fit the Chinese context. These studies reveal how Chinese principals incorporate elements of transformational leadership, such as fostering teacher leadership and collective teacher efficacy, into their practices to enhance school performance.

The growing interest in instructional leadership practices among Chinese school principals is another important development in recent literature (Li & Walker, 2018; Zhou & Walker, 2022). This body of work emphasizes the crucial role of principals in shaping instructional practices within schools and their impact on student outcomes (Wu & Shen, 2020; Zhang & Liu, 2022).

This study builds upon these recent advancements in Chinese educational leadership research by examining the leadership mindsets, practices, and impacts of successful principals in high-performing primary schools in urban Southwest China. By exploring the unique leadership dynamics within this specific context, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on educational leadership, providing insights that are relevant both within China and globally (Hallinger, 2020; Walker, 2022).

Notably, primary and middle schools situated in southwestern China have made significant strides in learning outcomes, teaching effectiveness, and management quality over the past decade (MOE, 2014). The quality of education within the nine-year compulsory education sector in this region, once lagging behind eastern and coastal areas, has now converged (MOE, 2014). Additionally, a report by China's National Center of Schooling Development Program (2016) underscores the commendable performance of primary and middle schools, particularly those located in urban areas of southwestern China. The performance indicators of these schools approach those of first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. These advancements can be attributed not only to pedagogical enhancements but also to improvements in school management and leadership (Wang & Li, 2016). However, despite local education authorities recognizing the pivotal role of principals in these accomplishments, research on educational leadership in southwestern China remains limited.

This study on principal leadership within the urban context of southwestern China assumes crucial significance in shedding light on the distinct attributes characterizing Chinese educational leadership. It also presents an opportunity to assess the applicability of existing leadership models developed primarily in Western contexts to the unique dimensions of Chinese culture, society, and education. Furthermore, this research endeavors to address a research gap by exploring the attributes that define effective school leadership and investigating its impact on school performance in the context of nine-year compulsory schools in southwestern China.

The insights gleaned from this research can significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of successful school leadership strategies employed by principals in high-performing Chinese schools. The ensuing findings can provide inspiration and guidance for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on a global scale, offering them the chance to learn from the effective leadership approaches adopted by Chinese principals. This cross-cultural exchange of insights has the potential to enrich prevailing leadership theories, advance educational management practices, and foster collaboration and innovation within the broader sphere of educational leadership.

In the short term, the outcomes of this study hold promise in fostering the growth and evaluation of principal leadership in the region, benefiting both Chinese school leaders and policymakers. Over the long term, the knowledge acquired from this research can serve as a

valuable resource for researchers internationally, aiding in the refinement and expansion of existing theories and models of educational leadership.

1.2 Aims of Study and Research Questions

The central focus of this study is to explore the leadership traits of successful principals in specific high-performing primary schools located in urban regions of Southwest China. The study aims to analyze the principals' leadership mindsets, practices, impacts, and manifested traits within the context of educational leadership. To accomplish this, the study has formulated three major sets of research questions that explore different dimensions of principal leadership:

- **Research Questions:**

1. What constitutes the leadership mindset of principals, and how does it reflect their leadership traits?
2. What are the leadership practices employed by principals, and how do these practices demonstrate their leadership traits?
3. What is the impact of principals' leadership on their schools, and how does it reflect specific leadership patterns?

The research is guided by the premise that understanding the dynamics of school leadership in urban Southwest China will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of educational leadership in diverse cultural and contextual settings. This study aims to uncover valuable insights that not only advance theoretical frameworks, but also inform practical strategies for effective educational leadership. By addressing these research questions, the study aims to foster further cross-cultural dialogue, inspire innovation, and contribute to the development of educational leadership research and practice.

To address the research questions, this study took a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, involving in-depth qualitative analysis and a thorough examination of the contextual nuances within the educational landscape of urban Southwest China. This study encompassed a rigorous process of data collection, which included conducting interviews with principals, observing leadership practices, distinguishing principals' practices gaps, and understanding the shared traits of principals. Moreover, the study aimed to capture the complexities of principals' leadership mindsets and practices by exploring their personal experiences, perspectives, decision-making processes, and other factors that might influence their leadership. Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of the underlying dynamics was developed through a systematic review of the relevant literature on educational leadership models. For further insight into the research methodology, please consult the methodology chapter for a more extensive analysis on the research design, data collection procedures, and analysis frameworks.

1.3 Significance of This Study

The central focus of this study is to explore the leadership characteristics and practices of successful principals in specific high-performing primary schools located in urban regions of Southwest China. This study seeks to assess both the personal traits of these principals and the adaptability and transferability of established leadership models, including transformational and distributed leadership, within the Chinese educational context.

Leadership Traits vs. Leadership Models: Personal leadership traits, such as visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and charisma, are relatively stable characteristics that form the foundation of a principal's leadership style. These traits influence how leaders approach challenges, motivate staff, and create a conducive learning environment. While leadership traits are integral to a leader's personal effectiveness, leadership models such as transformational and distributed leadership represent broader frameworks for how leaders enact their roles in guiding their schools.

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leadership is associated with key leadership behaviors such as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and

individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Principals who demonstrate transformational leadership are able to inspire and motivate their followers, encourage creative thinking, and attend to the individual needs of teachers and students. In this study, the traits of successful principals—such as visionary thinking and emotional intelligence—are explored through the lens of transformational leadership, demonstrating how these stable personal characteristics support transformational behaviors like fostering innovation and professional development in high-performing schools.

Distributed Leadership: Distributed leadership, on the other hand, focuses on the collaborative and collective nature of leadership, where leadership responsibilities are shared across various individuals and teams within the school (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Principals who excel in distributed leadership often exhibit traits like inclusiveness, empowerment, and strong collaborative skills. These traits enable them to cultivate shared decision-making and foster leadership capacity among their staff. While the trait of inclusiveness is a personal characteristic, the practice of distributing leadership across a team reflects a dynamic leadership approach that adapts to the needs of the school.

Interaction Between Traits and Leadership Models: By examining the personal traits of principals in relation to these leadership models, this study highlights the interconnected nature of leadership traits and leadership approaches. Leadership models such as transformational and distributed leadership do not function in isolation from the leader's personal traits. For instance, a principal with a strong visionary trait may excel in transformational leadership, as their personal vision enables them to inspire staff and create a shared sense of purpose. Similarly, a principal's ethical decision-making trait may support distributed leadership by fostering trust and fairness in the delegation of responsibilities and decision-making.

In high-performing schools, principals who demonstrate both transformational and distributed leadership traits are often more successful in promoting school improvement and enhancing student outcomes. Their ability to inspire, empower, and collaborate with others allows them to align their personal leadership traits with broader leadership approaches, thereby achieving common goals and sustaining school excellence.

This research not only contributes to the advancement of educational leadership theory and practice in China but also provides valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers worldwide. By exploring the leadership mindsets, practices, impacts, and traits of successful principals in high-performing primary schools in urban Southwest China, this study aims to enhance our understanding of effective leadership in educational settings and its broader implications for educational equity and quality.

1.3.1 Exploring Applicability and Transferability of Existing Models

Educational leadership models, particularly transformational and instructional leadership, have their origins in Western contexts. Originating within Western pedagogical frameworks and educational systems, these models have had a significant influence on leadership practices globally (Bass, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Nevertheless, the application of these Western-originated models to educational leadership in a unique context such as China presents an intriguing proposition. China's educational landscape is characterized by distinctive teaching philosophies, leadership strategies, and a society that values academic credentials. This study seeks to assess the adaptability and transferability of established models, including transformational and distributed leadership, to the Chinese educational milieu. In doing so, it contributes to expanding the scope of modern educational leadership theories by incorporating Chinese perspectives and recent research findings into established models (Dimmock & Walker, 2010; Walker, 2010).

1.3.2 Advancing Existing Leadership Models

Major educational models such as transformational, instructional, transactional, moral, and cultural leadership were conceptualized and extensively studied in the late 20th century (Eergiovanni, 2009; Green, 2017). However, the evolving challenges facing 21st-century schools have exposed the limitations of these models in addressing multifaceted issues (Chen & Gao, 2019). Despite efforts to refine theoretical frameworks over the past two decades, these models have not integrated interdisciplinary and technological approaches that have emerged as effective tools for educational leaders. For example, the potential of AI-based curriculum development or big data-based assessment of teaching and learning has received limited attention even in contemporary discourse.

Given the profound social, political, economic, technological, and educational changes of the 21st century, it is imperative that existing models of leadership be updated to meet current demands. The transformation of education in response to globalization, technology, and skill development necessitates a reevaluation of leadership models. Existing theories may not comprehensively address these contemporary dynamics, underscoring the urgency for new perspectives on effective educational leadership.

1.3.3 Bridging the Gap in Chinese Leadership Literature

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature on Chinese educational leadership. However, there is a noticeable gap in studies focusing on high-performing primary and middle school principals in both Chinese and English academic discourse. As a result, the distinctive features, characteristics, and trends exhibited by these school leaders remain poorly understood and deserve thorough investigation. Adding to the novelty is the dearth of research on school leadership in the southwestern region of China, particularly through the lens of transformational and distributed leadership. Previous research has predominantly focused on regions known for exceptional educational quality, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Jiangsu, which often lead in PISA scores (Zhou, 2017). In contrast, the study of school leadership in southwestern China remains limited (Wang & Li, 2016; MOE, 2014).

Conducting a study to examine the practices, mindsets, and strategies of school leaders in southwest China aims to fill this existing gap in the literature.

1.3.4 Enhancing Principal Leadership in Southwest China

The findings of this research provide insights into school management challenges and effective leadership approaches in Southwest China. These insights, along with discussions of successful school management, accomplished principals, and adaptive leadership models, can inspire education authorities and policymakers in the region to gain new perspectives on school performance.

In addition, the findings and recommendations from this research provide long-term benefits to school leaders, teachers, students, and families by offering valuable guidance on school management. Similarly, the successful leadership narratives and findings presented in this study can serve as a source of inspiration for other schools in the region seeking to make remarkable progress.

1.3.5 Democratizing Educational Leadership Research and Practice

A notable aspect of educational leadership research is the prevalence of Western models and theories. These analytical frameworks have been extensively applied to the study of school leadership in various contexts, often without questioning their validity, applicability, and effectiveness in non-Western settings (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Walker, 2010). This study aims to democratize the definitions, norms, and perspectives within educational management and leadership research.

By introducing Chinese viewpoints, cases, and potential effective leadership patterns, this research contributes to a more inclusive and diverse landscape of educational leadership research. It encourages researchers, policymakers, and practitioners worldwide to reevaluate established notions and strategies by incorporating a broader range of cultural and contextual viewpoints.

1.3.6 Imparting Lessons for Developing Countries

Conducted in China, a developing and third world country, this research has particular relevance for educational leadership researchers and practitioners in similar contexts. Many public primary schools in developing countries face challenges such as larger student populations than their Western counterparts and limited resources (Chapman, Muijs, Reynolds, & Sammons, 2003). The cases of effective principalship presented in this study offer valuable lessons and inspiration for schools in these regions to develop and improve their leadership strategies.

By examining cases of effective principalship in such resource-constrained settings, this study provides inspiration and guidance to educational leadership researchers, policymakers, and practitioners worldwide. The leadership patterns and strategies uncovered in this

research can potentially be adapted to different contexts and offer innovative solutions for schools seeking improvement in developing countries.

Thus, this study, conducted in a developing country context, China, contributes to the practice of educational leadership and management, creating opportunities for positive change beyond the immediate research setting.

1.4 Overview of the Modern Chinese Basic Education System

In this section, the researcher provides a necessary overview of the historical evolution of China's basic education system, shedding light on the developmental trajectory that has led to the current Chinese educational landscape. This context is critical in illuminating the backdrop against which the study of principal leadership in high-performing schools unfolds. By tracing the trajectory of educational reforms and policy shifts, the researcher aims to illuminate the underlying forces that have shaped school leadership practices in the unique Chinese context.

1.4.1 Early Post-Revolutionary Era (1950-1966): Shaping the Educational Landscape

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the education system underwent a profound reform. This era's focus on centralized education and socialist principles not only laid the foundation for the educational structure, but also introduced the first leadership paradigms. These early leaders faced the challenge of shaping a nascent education system and cultivating a sense of purpose and direction in schools amidst a changing political and social landscape.

In 1949, the National People's Congress (NPC) was entrusted with the task of designing a national education system. The first Five-Year Plan on Education, enacted by the NPC with socialist goals in mind, was designed to establish a centralized education system and set the framework for education in China from 1950 to 1955. Drawing from Soviet influences, China adopted a comparable educational hierarchy and philosophy that the Communist Party found laudable (Wu, 2006).

During the early years of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union played a significant role in shaping the educational landscape of the country. Chinese educational policymakers looked to the Soviet Union as a model for building a socialist education system. The Soviet influence was particularly evident in the hierarchical structure and philosophical foundations of Chinese education (Pepper, 1996; Ginsburg, 1991).

Under Soviet influence, China adopted a centralized educational hierarchy and philosophy that emphasized the role of education in serving the state and promoting socialist ideals (Pepper, 1996; Ginsburg, 1991). Educational institutions were expected to produce citizens who were loyal to the Communist Party and the socialist cause. The curriculum emphasized Marxist ideology and scientific socialism, reflecting the Soviet model of education (Ginsburg, 1991).

However, over time, the influence of the Soviet Union on Chinese education began to diminish, particularly after the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s. The ideological and political rift between China and the Soviet Union led to a gradual distancing from Soviet educational practices. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Mao Zedong's emphasis on revolutionary education further reduced Soviet influence, as the focus shifted towards aligning education with Maoist principles and promoting proletarian values (Holz, 2007).

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's education system underwent significant reforms aimed at modernization and economic development. The 1980s and 1990s saw a move towards incorporating global educational practices and increasing openness to Western influences, which further diminished the remnants of Soviet influence (Zhao, 2013). These reforms included a shift towards market-oriented education policies, decentralization of educational administration, and the introduction of more diverse and flexible curricula.

In summary, while Soviet influence was substantial in the early years of the People's Republic of China, it gradually diminished due to political changes, internal reforms, and increasing exposure to global educational trends. Today, the Chinese education system reflects a complex blend of historical influences, domestic priorities, and international practices.

The 1950-1955 period, encapsulated by the first five-year plan for education, was instrumental in ushering in reforms to modernize the educational apparatus. During this period, the architecture of modern schooling took shape, delineated as five years of primary education, followed by three years each of lower and upper secondary education, culminating in a four-year stint of higher education. In the early 1950s, China faced widespread poverty and illiteracy. The population was around 540 million, with a staggering 80% illiteracy rate, particularly among women. Only about 20% of children were enrolled in primary school, and there were only 117,000 students in higher education (MOE, 2019).

By 1954, a significant transformation occurred in the Chinese education system as local education authorities nationalized all private and church-affiliated schools, thereby completing the socialist education system reform (Wu, 2006). This reform replaced the diverse spectrum of educational providers with a unified national system grounded in socialist principles. Concurrently, the Ministry of Education introduced the “Secondary Education Quality Improvement and Development Law” in the same year. This law aimed to elevate the standards of secondary education by establishing model schools as exemplars for their counterparts in the region (MOE, 2012).

In the following decades, model schools emerged as entities with considerable influence over the allocation of educational resources, resulting in a lopsided allocation for over forty years.

Model schools, known as “重点学校” in Chinese, play a pivotal role in the Chinese education system. These schools are selected based on stringent criteria encompassing academic performance, teaching quality, and overall management. They are designed to serve as benchmarks for educational excellence and models for other schools to emulate. The primary differences between model schools and ordinary schools include the level of resources, teacher qualifications, and the quality of facilities. Model schools typically have better access to funding, more experienced teachers, and superior infrastructure compared to ordinary schools.

The allocation of educational resources is influenced by policies set by the central and local governments. Model schools are often recipients of these resources due to their exemplary status. However, their influence extends beyond mere reception; they play a role in setting educational standards and practices that other schools strive to follow. This preferential treatment, while aimed at raising overall educational standards, has led to disparities in resource allocation, with model schools receiving a larger share of resources compared to ordinary schools.

The establishment of model schools can be traced back to the 1950s when the government initiated efforts to create exemplary institutions that could drive educational improvement across the nation. These schools were meant to showcase best practices and innovations in education, serving as reference points for other schools. The significant investment in model schools was intended to elevate the quality of education and demonstrate the potential for excellence within the Chinese educational framework (Huang, 2001; Li & Shao, 2015).

However, this focus on model schools has also contributed to a lopsided allocation of resources. While model schools benefit from substantial support, ordinary schools often struggle with limited funding and resources. This has implications for educational equity, as students in model schools have access to better opportunities compared to their peers in ordinary schools. To address this imbalance, recent policies have aimed at more equitable resource distribution and support for underprivileged schools to ensure all students have access to quality education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019).

Over subsequent decades, model schools emerged as influential entities in resource allocation within the education sector, leading to a skewed distribution of resources for over forty years. Jia (2008) characterizes these model schools as “monopolies” that receive preferential treatment and funding, thus widening the gap between model and ordinary schools. Consequently, there has been a surge in demand among parents and students to secure admission to model schools, intensifying competition in the education landscape.

In both 1950s and early 1960s, China's education system underwent a dramatic transformation, moving from widespread poverty and illiteracy to significant advances in access and quality (Bray, 2013). The government prioritized education, leading to the establishment of a national education system and a focus on socialist principles. A

nationwide literacy campaign was implemented during the decade, resulting in a significant reduction in illiteracy rates (Yang, 2013). School enrollment rates, especially for girls, increased significantly, with the net enrollment rate for primary school children rising from 49.2 percent to 67.4 percent (MOE, 2019). There was remarkable growth in higher education, with the number of students increasing from 117,000 to 2.28 million by the end of the 1950s, and the gross enrollment rate rising from 1.56 percent to 2.7 percent (Huang, 2001). Government spending on education also increased sharply, indicating a strong commitment to educational development.

The table below contains data on China's school enrollment statistics in 1952 and 1965, taken from the MOE's publicly published Education Yearbook. The 1952 National Education Yearbook was the earliest published government report on education statistics (MOE, 1986). The table shows a significant increase in enrollment between 1952 and 1965, reflecting the efforts and policies implemented in the early years of the People's Republic of China. The expansion of higher education from 191,000 to 674,000 and the substantial growth of secondary education from 2,734,000 to 14,501,000 indicate broader access to education at various levels. The increase in the number of senior high schools, both regular and vocational, underscores the emphasis on preparing students for higher education and vocational training.

Stage of Schooling	Year	
	1952	1965
Higher Education	191,000	674,000
Total Secondary Education	2,734,000	14,501,000
Total Senior High School	504,000	6,471,000
Regular Senior High School	260,000	1,308,000
Vocational Senior High School	244,000	5,163,000
Junior High School	2,230,000	8,030,000
Primary School	51,100,000	1,162,090,000
Pre-school	424,000	1,713,000

Number of Students at All Stages of Schooling in China, Year 1952 and Year 1965 (MOE, 1986)

1.4.2 Cultural Revolution and Challenges (1966-1976): Disruption, Decline, and Development

The Cultural Revolution marked a disruptive period in Chinese education. School leaders faced unprecedented challenges as they sought to maintain educational stability in the midst of ideological turbulence. This period demonstrates the resilience of leadership in adapting to adverse conditions, while also highlighting the profound impact of external factors on the leadership landscape.

During the Cultural Revolution in China, there was a significant expansion of schools, particularly in Hubei Province, where the number of middle schools increased from 875 in 1965 to 17,949 in 1976, a 20.5-fold increase. Similarly, the number of high schools in the province increased from 147 to 4,029 during the same period, a 27.4-fold increase (MOE, 1986).

This expansion corresponded to a significant increase in enrollment at all levels of education nationwide. From 1965 to 1976, the number of elementary school students increased by 29.1%, while the number of middle school students increased by 6.25 times and the number of junior high school students increased by 5.4 times (MOE, 1986). In addition, the number of high school students increased significantly, reaching 11.3 times the original number.

Rural education was a focus during this period, with the proportion of rural students among middle school students increasing from 33.7% in 1965 to 75.2% in 1976. Similarly, the proportion of rural students among high school students increased from 9.0% to 62.3% during the same period (MOE, 2009). However, government spending on education fluctuated throughout the Cultural Revolution (Zhao, 2009). The percentage of national financial expenditure on education was 6.36% in 1966, dropping to a low of 4.24% in 1970. Subsequently, education spending was listed separately in the national financial budget beginning in 1972, resulting in an increase to 6.29% in 1976, a level similar to that of 1965 (MOE, 1986). In 1976, the number of primary school students in China reached 14.624 million, with an enrollment rate of 94%. In addition, the number of higher education students was 2.28 million, with a higher education enrollment rate of 1.78% (MOE, 1986).

The Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 to 1976, brought profound turmoil to the national education system. Secondary school students were either sent to the countryside to be “re-educated” by economically disadvantaged peasants or involved in anti-capitalist campaigns (Wu, 2006). With the rise of the “spirit of proletarian rebellion,” both educational and legal structures were undermined, rendering formal education seemingly futile. The Cultural Revolution catalyzed a virtual standstill in the education system, as schools remained devoid of teachers and students, and instead became embroiled in ideological clashes and confrontations. Despite a shift in the educational outlook after 1976, the quality of education experienced a noticeable decline (MOE, 2012).

The post-Cultural Revolution era, beginning in 1976, marked a shift in the Communist Party’s emphasis from “class struggle” to economic progress. In 1977, Deng Xiaoping, General Secretary of the Communist Party, announced this shift in emphasis in a major speech in Shenzhen, heralding the beginning of the “reform and opening up” policy. Deng emphasized the critical importance of economic development, which depended on a knowledgeable and educated workforce (Wu, 2006).

However, the education system, hampered by ten years of disruption, faced challenges in fulfilling Deng’s vision in terms of both quantity and quality. Therefore, in 1977, the Ministry of Education reintroduced the college entrance examination, which had been suspended during the Cultural Revolution, and guaranteed job placement for all college graduates, regardless of their field of study. This move was intended to motivate students to pursue higher education (Zhang, 2007). Even high school graduates were guaranteed jobs in state-owned enterprises. This change had a positive effect on the public’s perception of education (Yang, 2017).

1.4.3 Exam-Centric Approach and Equal Access (1977-1980s): Striving for Equity

The shift to a test-centered admission process influenced the dynamics of school leadership, creating a competitive environment that required strategic leadership to optimize student outcomes. School leaders in this era were tasked not only with maintaining academic excellence, but also with ensuring equitable access to a quality education. The focus on equitable access added a layer of complexity to the leadership role as leaders navigated the intersection of policy, parental aspirations, and educational equity.

By the early 1980s, graduates of prestigious high schools and colleges were set for rewarding careers in state-owned enterprises and factories. Despite intense competition, the desire to attend these elite schools and colleges persisted. In response, the Ministry of Education mandated that all high schools and colleges adopt an exam-based admission process to promote educational equity (Zhang, 2007). This exam-based admissions process gained popularity in the 1980s and early 1990s. The goal was to provide equal educational opportunities to all potential candidates for model schools and colleges.

Nevertheless, the implementation of this exam-oriented framework led to divergent educational outcomes due to quality differences between model and ordinary schools (Wu, 2006). In addition, candidates were allowed only one attempt at the college and secondary school entrance exams, making each test a determining factor. For many families, failure was equivalent to an unaffordable prospect, adding to the pressures associated with admission to prestigious institutions. The implementation of the one-child policy in the 1980s added to the complexity (Wu, 2006). As a result, the test-centered educational model was criticized for the excessive stress and competition it imposed on both students and parents.

Between 1976 and 1986, parental school choice in primary and secondary education was constrained by the government's efforts to promote educational uniformity. However, as the focus shifted to economic growth, the emphasis on educational efficiency increased. Exam-based admissions attempted to give all candidates equal access to model schools, but this approach exacerbated the pressure on students. In this context, Deng Xiaoping's 1988 announcement of the importance of knowledge as the "first productive force" took on significance (MOE, 2012). Following a decade of reform and economic expansion, China experienced impressive sustained annual GDP growth of more than 10%. As the standard of living improved, urban families, especially those in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, yearned for improved quality of education, especially in model schools.

In 1986, the Ministry of Education responded to the increasing pressure on students, particularly in primary schools, by abolishing entrance examinations for lower secondary and primary schools. The policy mandated that all school-age students be directed to the nearest school in their respective local education zones (MOE, 2012). While this decision

was intended to alleviate exam-related stress, it inadvertently led to inequalities in schooling quality, favoring families living near model schools. Notably, the impact was not limited to the immediate residential area. Families with greater social, economic, and cultural capital took advantage of the opportunity to secure enrollment through various means, including living near the preferred institution. As a result, an opportunity for school choice emerged, primarily for those with enhanced social leverage.

Below is a table showing China's statistics in 1980 and 1985, less than a decade after the end of the "Cultural Revolution". Data from the 1980 and 1985 Chinese Education Yearbooks show a slight increase in higher education enrollment from 1,144,000 to 1,703,000 (MOE, 1986). However, there was a significant decrease in total secondary enrollment, mainly due to a decline in enrollment in regular senior high schools. Enrollment in vocational senior high schools increased during this period. Junior high school enrollment also declined, suggesting a shift in priorities or demographics. Primary school enrollment remained relatively stable, while preschool enrollment increased, indicating a growing emphasis on early childhood education.

Stage of Schooling	Year	
	1980	1985
Higher Education	1,144,000	1,703,000
Total Secondary Education	57,478,000	51,667,000
Total Senior High School	12,095,000	12,019,000
Regular Senior High School	9,698,000	7,411,000
Vocational Senior High School	2,397,000	4,608,000
Junior High School	45,383,000	39,687,000
Primary School	146,270,000	133,702,000
Pre-school	11,508,000	14,797,000

Number of Students at All Stages of Schooling in China, Year 1980 and Year 1985 (MOE, 1986)

1.4.4 Towards Equity and Quality (1990s): Policy Shifts and Reform

The 1990s witnessed a concerted effort to balance quality and equity in education. School leaders found themselves at the nexus of educational reform as they grappled with the challenges of expanding access while maintaining educational standards. This era shows the evolution of leadership roles in addressing resource allocation, educational equity, and the ethical dimensions of school choice.

In the early 1990s, the quest for educational equality in urban primary schools was complicated by parental choices. The phenomenon of corruption infiltrated the field of “school choice,” with parental social capital significantly influencing the trajectory (Zhang, 2007). Within Beijing, for example, bribing admissions officers and principals was a means by which many parents secured placements for their children in model schools outside the catchment. The term “guanxi,” which refers to intricate social relationships and networks, frequently appeared in media discussions and served as a description of the parental tactics used to bypass admissions protocols (Wu, 2006). This “backdoor” approach to school selection was attributed to the opacity of school admissions and the regulatory framework established by local education authorities. Schools also exploited gaps to admit students from outside their designated districts to increase enrollment.

The model school scenario remained largely unchanged even after the abolition of entrance examinations for primary and lower secondary schools. The introduction of parental capital into the system added a layer of complexity, requiring the negotiation of equity concerns against a backdrop of corruption. Despite efforts to reduce the exam-related burden on students, the top-down design of the national education system led to competition among students for higher test scores. Ordinary middle school graduates found it difficult to gain admission to model high schools because of the obvious educational inequality, which limited their academic performance. Conversely, model middle school graduates achieved higher test scores and benefited from increased access to superior educational resources (Wu, 2006; Zhang, 2007).

In 1994, the National People’s Congress enacted the “Outline of Education Reform” to address inequalities and inequities in the compulsory education system. The reform acknowledged the existence of imbalances and identified limited access to high-quality educational resources and the lack of transparent supervision mechanisms as fundamental problems (MOE, 2012). The reform also endorsed the participation of private or non-state

providers in the national education system. Although the Communist Party of China (CPC) recognized the potential of market mechanisms to optimize the allocation of educational resources, Wu (2006) argues that ideological reservations prevented the CPC from embracing a fully market-driven education model. In particular, this marked an emblematic struggle between a market-oriented approach and the socialist underpinnings of the CPC.

Although the Ministry of Education recognized the negative impact of the “model school frenzy” in 1994 and made efforts to address the disbursement of educational resources, achieving true equality remained a formidable task. In 1995, the National People’s Congress enacted the “Education Law of the People’s Republic of China,” marking a pivotal point in legislative history by emphasizing educational equity in its eleventh article (MOE, 2015). This was the first time that educational equity had been incorporated into a legislative framework. The prioritization of “equity” over “quality” in the law, as interpreted by Wu (2006), signaled a resolute national strategy to improve equity. Zhu Kaixuan, the former Minister of Education, articulated the need to address inequalities in the education system, especially for students from economically disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds (MOE, 2015).

In the following years, after 1995, a hybrid admissions model was gradually introduced in populous urban centers. This approach harmonized exam-based and school-district-based admissions to facilitate equitable access to education in urban zones influenced by parental financial and social capital (Wu, 2006). By reintroducing entrance exams, students from low-income families, who are often financially constrained by “additional school selection fees,” were given a better chance of enrolling in model schools. At the same time, strict controls were imposed on student residency and school recruitment procedures to combat prior unregulated admissions.

From 1995 to 2005, there were three major shifts in national education policy, each designed to strengthen equity in access to education and address different aspects of inequity and efficiency. The first shift, in 1995, focused on refining transparency in school regulations and admissions. In 1997, the Ministry of Education promulgated “Views on the Management of the Work of Arbitrary Charges in Primary and Secondary Schools,” which explicitly prohibited any form of school selection fees or compensation for “special” admissions (Jia, 2008).

As a result, access to model schools was restricted for students outside the designated catchment area, with only those with excellent entrance exam scores able to secure enrollment. However, most local education authorities stipulated that no more than 30 percent of students could be admitted by examination, leaving a substantial 70 percent from the immediate neighborhood (Zhang, 2007). Despite the strict regulations, families continued to find ways to enroll their children in better schools, often by renting or buying houses near the institutions of their choice. In addition, the reintroduction of entrance exams increased the academic burden on primary and secondary students seeking admission to elite schools.

The year 1998 marked the beginning of the second wave of education reform, when the State Council issued the “Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Essential Quality-oriented Schooling in an All-Around Way”. This decision introduced the concept of “essential quality-oriented schooling”, which aims to promote holistic characteristics including ethical values, physical and psychological well-being, personality, and comprehensive competencies (MOE, 2012). This transition aimed to mitigate the negative effects—such as intense competition and increased stress—associated with the exam-centered educational approach of the 1990s (Zhang, 2007). As a result, the complicated issue of school choice took on a more multifaceted dimension.

The following table (CNBF, 200) provides statistical data on the status of education in China for some years in the 1980s and 1990s. The chart includes data on the number of schools, teacher-student ratios, enrollment rates, and graduation rates for students of different ages. With continued investment from the Chinese government, both basic and higher education in China saw a sustained increase in access rates from the 1980s to the 1990s.

Basic Statistics on Education 1985 - 1998

Item	1985	1990	1995	1997	1998
Number of Schools					
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	1,016	1,075	1,054	1,020	1,022
Secondary Schools	104,848	100,777	95,216	92,832	92,071
# Specialized Secondary Schools	3,557	3,982	4,049	4,143	4,109
Regular Secondary Schools	93,221	87,631	81,020	78,642	77,888

Primary Schools	832,309	766,072	668,685	628,840	60,9626
Number of Full-time Teachers (10 000 persons)					
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	34.4	39.5	40.1	40.5	40.7
Secondary Schools	296.7	349.2	388.3	418.6	431.2
# Specialized Secondary Schools	17.4	23.4	25.7	27.6	27.9
Regular Secondary Schools	265.2	303.3	333.4	358.7	369.7
Primary Schools	537.7	558.2	566.4	579.4	581.9
New Student Enrollment (10 000 persons)					
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	61.9	60.9	92.6	100	108.4
Secondary Schools	1,789.8	1,815.8	2,354.1	2,501.5	2,705.4
# Specialized Secondary Schools	66.8	73	138.1	162.1	166.8
Regular Secondary Schools	1,606.9	1,619.6	2,025.9	2,128.2	2,321
Primary Schools	2,298.2	2,064	2,531.8	2,462	2,201.4
Student Enrollment (10 000 persons)					
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	170.3	206.3	290.6	317.4	340.9
Secondary Schools	5,092.6	5,105.4	6,191.5	6,995.2	7,340.7
# Specialized Secondary Schools	157.1	224.4	372.2	465.4	498.1
Regular Secondary Schools	4,706	4,586	5,371	6,017.9	6,301
Primary Schools	13,370.2	12,241.4	13,195.2	1,3995.4	13,953.8
Graduates (10 000 persons)					
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	31.6	61.4	80.5	82.9	83
Secondary Schools	1,279.1	1,497.5	1,636.9	1,929.8	2,124.1
# Specialized Secondary Schools	42.9	66.1	83.9	115.7	129.3
Regular Secondary Schools	1,194.9	1,342.1	1429	1664	1832
Primary Schools	1,999.9	1,863.1	1,961.5	1,960.1	2,117.4
Student-teacher Ratio					
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	5	5.2	7.2	7.8	8.4
Secondary Schools	17.2	14.6	15.9	16.7	17
Primary Schools	24.9	21.9	23.3	24.2	24
Total Expenditures for Education (100 million yuan)					
			1,878.0	2,531.7	
# Government Expenditures for Education			1,411.5	1,862.5	
# Budgetary Expenditures for Education			1,028.4	1,357.7	

(Basic Statistics on Education 1985 – 1998, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2000)

The urban schools emerged as crucibles for experimental pedagogical approaches, with model institutions adopting transformative measures to curb the excesses of academic intensity. These measures, which ranged from eliminating end-of-term exams to reducing homework loads, were supposed to provide students with additional time and space to develop well-rounded skills (Wu, 2006). In practice, however, many model schools circumvented the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and continued to prioritize test-driven education in order to maintain their reputations for high academic achievement. This paradox led to criticism of local education authorities for their perceived inaction (Zhang, 2007).

While the philosophy of “quality-oriented schooling” gained traction during the reform, model schools initially resisted its implementation (Wu, 2006). The selective nature of admissions to secondary and higher education exacerbated the “Matthew Effect,” reinforcing the advantages of model school students, who were better prepared academically, while hindering the prospects of students from ordinary schools. A survey in 2000 underscored the difficulty of persuading parents to give up their aspirations for model schooling, as school choice became an issue that went beyond mere equity and merged with academic performance (Zhang, 2007).

Stage of Schooling	Year	
	2010	2023
Higher Education	2,063,000	71,891,000
Total Secondary Education	52,386,000	83,220,200
Total Senior High School	13,699,000	25,103,700
Regular Senior High School	7,173,000	10,497,100
Vocational Senior High School	6,526,000	14,175,100
Junior High School	38,687,000	58,116,500
Primary School	122,414,000	135,470,000
Pre-school	19,722,000	23,262,600

Number of Students at All Stages of Schooling in China, Year 2010 and Year 2023 (MOE, 2011; 2024)

1.4.5 Ongoing Journey: Balancing Excellence and Access (2000s - present)

In the 21st century, school leadership responds to the ongoing quest for educational equity and quality. The delicate balance between promoting academic excellence and ensuring universal access presents complex challenges for leaders. The nuanced interplay between policy aspirations, local circumstances, and socioeconomic factors shapes the leadership landscape. Leaders in this era are tasked with translating policy intentions into actionable strategies that balance the aspirations of students, parents, and educators while contributing to the broader discourse on global educational equity.

In 2001, the State Council and the National People's Congress introduced the "Outline for Education Reform in the 21st Century," which represented the second wave of policy transformation. This outline placed the utmost importance on improving the overall quality of education in order to address disparities (MOE, 2012). In the years that followed, dedicated efforts were made to restore educational equity. In 2002, education authorities awarded titles such as "provincial model school" or "municipal model school" to urban institutions. At the same time, restrictions on exam-based admissions were introduced, limiting the percentage of students admitted by exam to 15 percent of the total student body. To further promote equity, a lottery system was introduced in populous urban areas to ensure equal opportunities for students to enroll in both model and standard schools within their administrative catchment areas.

However, the introduction of the lottery system only partially addressed the issue of resource allocation and did not fully address the core issue of equitable educational outcomes (Zhang, 2007). In 2003, the Ministry of Education initiated an effort to optimize resource allocation by instructing local governments to reduce the monopolies of model schools, thereby facilitating the free circulation of educational resources. The initiative facilitated the exchange of experienced teachers and school administrators between model and regular schools to improve the overall quality of education. This exchange program received positive feedback from students and parents alike, with discernible improvements in the educational standards of regular schools (EDOSP, 2007).

In 2006, the Ministry of Education expanded its exchange program to include school-to-school partnerships, moving beyond the traditional teacher-to-teacher model. This new

initiative aimed to foster collaboration between private investors and public institutions in establishing new schools, known as “Minban Schools” (民办学校 in Chinese). Admission to these schools was determined through exams, admission fees, or a lottery system. Minban schools, which are privately funded but government-run, play a crucial role in China’s education system.

Minban schools receive government funding, but they also charge tuition fees to students, which can sometimes be higher than those of public schools due to the additional resources and facilities they offer (MOE, 2019). While these schools benefit from substantial government support, the higher tuition fees are intended to cover the costs of enhanced facilities, specialized programs, and additional resources that these schools provide. However, there has been ongoing criticism regarding the equity of the compulsory education system, as private investors often recruit experienced teachers from model schools, perpetuating competition among educational institutions (Wu, 2006).

Regarding administrative autonomy, Minban schools have a certain degree of freedom in selecting their leaders and teachers based on qualifications and expertise, which can contribute to the overall quality of education offered. This autonomy allows them to attract talented educators who are committed to the school’s vision. Despite this autonomy, Minban schools are still classified as government-run schools and operate under the supervision and regulations of the government’s education authorities (Wu, 2006). The government establishes guidelines and standards that Minban schools must follow to ensure that they meet the required educational benchmarks. Although parents may pay higher tuition fees for Minban schools, they offer additional resources and facilities that can enhance the educational experience for students (Park & Shi, 2019; Wang, 2017).

In summary, Minban schools represent a hybrid model in the Chinese education system, characterized by private sector investment and public sector management. They cannot be strictly classified as either private or fully government-run schools. Their dual nature allows them to operate under the framework of public education while enjoying the flexibility typically associated with private institutions. This unique model aims to combine the strengths of both private investment and public education to enhance educational outcomes and provide diverse learning opportunities for students.

From 2000 to 2006, China's education system underwent a profound transformation, marked by changes in the distribution and quality of educational resources. Three major policy shifts sought to balance equity and efficiency (Wu, 2006). Although academic criteria remained unchanged, the gap between first- and second-tier schools in urban areas narrowed. However, the development of educational quality in rural areas lagged behind, requiring increased investment to improve education for the children of rural migrant workers, especially in infrastructure and teacher recruitment. Despite the establishment of government-run schools for this population in 2008, the quality of education in these institutions remains unequal compared to other urban public schools (MOE, 2015).

In 2009, China launched the "National Medium and Long-Term Plan for Education Reform and Development (2010 to 2020)," which outlines key strategies, goals, and initiatives for upgrading the national education system and improving its quality and effectiveness (MOE, 2009). Subsequently, throughout the 2010s, there was a noticeable convergence in quality between rural and urban schools, as well as between model and standard schools. During this period, local education authorities adopted an intensive approach to promote "balanced" educational progress, with an emphasis on restoring regional equity and fairness in education (Zhou & Sun, 2017).

Among the nationally implemented measures to address the disparities in educational quality between regions, the principal and teacher exchange program emerged as a major initiative. This initiative involved the transfer of accomplished principals and experienced teachers from high-performing schools within a district to struggling, underserved, and low-performing schools. The overall goal was to facilitate transformation and provide training in effective pedagogy, learning methods, and administrative practices to the faculties of the targeted institutions. At the same time, administrators and teachers from low-performing schools, mostly in underdeveloped areas, were placed in high-performing institutions. This facilitated direct exposure to successful approaches to addressing school problems and improving the quality of schooling (Chen, 2012; Chen & Wang, 2018).

The journey towards educational equity and quality, however, remains ongoing. The interplay between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities, coupled with socio-economic factors, has created a complex tapestry that shapes the experiences of students, parents, and educators. As the Chinese government continues to navigate the delicate

equilibrium between fostering excellence and ensuring access for all, further exploration of the nuanced dynamics within the education system is essential. The subsequent parts of this section explore how these policies and reforms have impacted stakeholders at various levels, ultimately providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted modern Chinese basic education system. Through this exploration, the dissertation aims to contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and quality, providing insights that resonate not only within China but also on a global scale.

The following table is taken from the 2011 and 2024 yearbooks published by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The data from the 2010 to 2023 Chinese Education Yearbooks show a significant increase in higher education enrollment, from 2,063,000 to 71,891,000. There has also been a notable increase in total secondary school enrollment, from 52,386,000 to 83,220,200. This growth is particularly pronounced in junior high school and vocational senior high school enrollments. Primary school enrollment has remained relatively stable, while preschool enrollment has grown moderately.

Stage of Schooling	Year	
	2010	2023
Higher Education	31,050,000	47,631,900
Total Secondary Education	99,566,700	93,457,800
Total Senior High School	46,773,400	41,020,900
Regular Senior High School	24,273,400	28,036,300
Vocational Senior High School	22,385,000	12,984,600
Junior High School	52,793,300	52,436,900
Primary School	99,407,000	108,000,000
Pre-school	29,766,700	23,262,600

Number of Students at All Stages of Schooling in China, Year 1980 and Year 1985 (MOE, 1991; 2000)

Compared with data from the 1980s and 1990s, the most striking difference is the massive increase in enrollment in higher education, reflecting China's efforts to expand access to tertiary education. In addition, while total enrollment in secondary education has increased, the composition has shifted, with a greater emphasis on vocational high schools. This may

indicate a response to evolving economic needs and a focus on skills development. Overall, the data suggest a continued commitment to expanding and diversifying China's education system to meet the needs of a changing society and economy.

In conclusion, the modern Chinese basic education system has undergone profound transformations since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From the establishment of a centralized education system in the early years, to the challenges of the Cultural Revolution, to the subsequent shifts toward economic progress, the educational landscape has evolved. However, the journey towards equity and quality in education is not yet complete. The interplay between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities, coupled with socioeconomic factors, has created a complex context that shapes the experiences of students, parents, and educators. While China's education system initially struggled with imbalances between model and ordinary schools, the government's strategic interventions to promote equity and improve quality have led to significant progress. Through the reform policies of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the nation has moved toward a more balanced distribution of educational resources and opportunities.

Furthermore, the evolution of China's basic education system has been not only a journey of policy change, but also a story of leadership adaptation. Each phase has forged distinct leadership paradigms, from guiding schools through policy upheavals to balancing excellence and access. Recognizing these nuanced shifts provides a lens through which to analyze contemporary principal leadership in high-performing schools. By understanding the historical context, we can gain insight into the mindsets, practices, traits, and impacts facing principals in today's educational landscape.

1.5 School Leaders in the Study

This section focuses on the profile of school leaders, specifically principals, vice-principals, and senior assistant principals, in the context of high-performing public schools operating within the nine-year compulsory education system in urban areas of southwest China, specifically Chengdu City or Chongqing Municipality.

The rationale for selecting principals from this region is threefold. First, previous cases have revealed instances of distributed and transformational leadership among certain principals, providing a robust pool of subjects for this study. Second, the distinctive leadership practices and strategies exhibited by these principals embody uniquely Chinese characteristics. This distinctiveness provides an opportunity to examine Chinese school leadership against the backdrop of Western leadership concepts and indigenous values. Finally, the presence of high-performing schools and the cooperation of local education authorities in this area offer practical advantages for data collection and access to key resources.

Figure 1.1 below visually depicts the typical hierarchical structure of a public middle school in urban Southwest China, which typically enrolls 1,500 students. Each grade is organized into ten classes, and the school's administrative team consists of approximately 30 members. This includes a principal, three vice principals, and 20 department or office managers. The principal and three vice principals have the authority to make decisions regarding curriculum design, staff hiring, student discipline, and school goal setting.

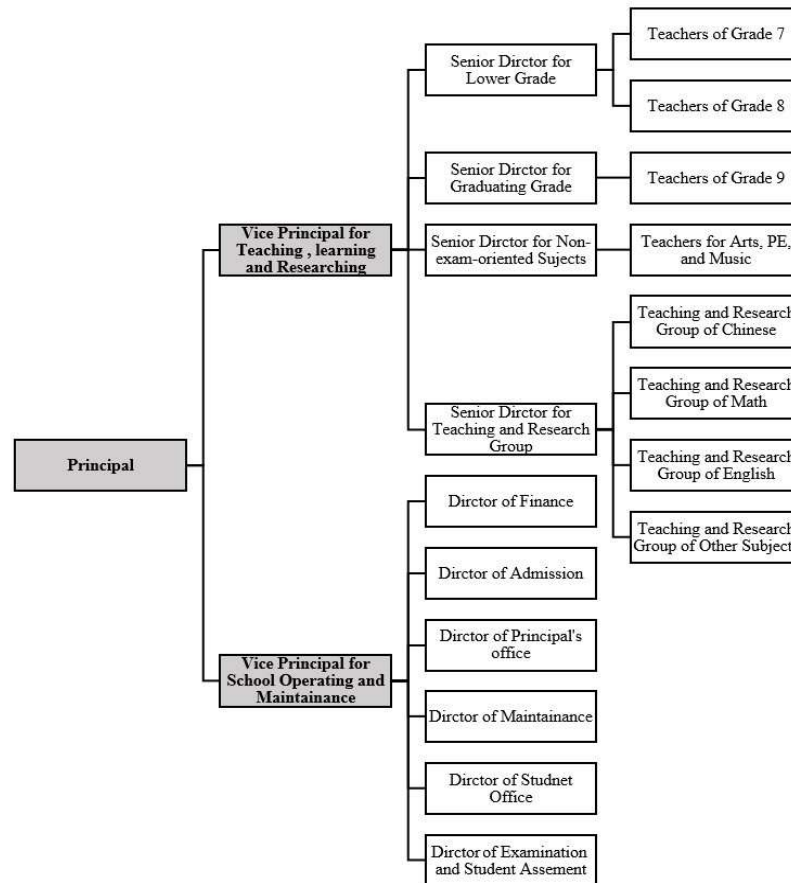


Figure 1.1 A Typical Hierarchical Structure of a Public Middle School

The detailed profiles of the school and school leadership team examined in this study are presented and reviewed in Chapter IV, which includes a description of the principals' career and professional development trajectories and experiences, as well as the history, performance, and design of the target high-performing school in urban areas of southwest China.

The appointment of the CPC party chief at a school may not always be held by the head of the school. Understanding the relationship between political membership, school leadership, and the roles and responsibilities of deputy leaders can be complex due to the vast, diverse, and rapidly changing nature of China's education system. It is essential to provide clear explanations to Western audiences about the unique setting of school leadership teams in China, particularly in urban Southwest China.

In state-funded schools, the principal is typically appointed by the local education authorities in consultation with the Communist Party. The selection process involves evaluating candidates based on their professional qualifications, leadership experience, and political reliability. The principal's responsibilities include overseeing academic programs, managing staff, and ensuring the implementation of government policies. However, the role of the Communist Party Branch Secretary, who may not always be the principal, adds another layer of leadership. This individual is responsible for maintaining party discipline and promoting party values within the school.

In larger schools, such as those with over 1500 students, a third vice principal or even more vice-principal may be appointed to handle specific administrative tasks such as student affairs, infrastructure management, or community relations. Their responsibilities are distinct from those of the principal and the other vice principals, who may focus on academic affairs or school operations.

In Chapter IV, additional explanatory content has been included to instruct readers on how school leaders are selected, elected, and appointed. Chapters V and VI further elaborate on the appointment and development of school leaders in urban Southwest China, including their duties, responsibilities, moral standards, and professional guidelines. These chapters help establish a connection between the theoretical framework and the practical implementation of educational leadership in the context of high-performing primary schools in China.

1.6 High-performing Schools in this Study

In the context of this study, the term “successful principal” refers to an educational administrator who demonstrates exceptional performance in school management, overall student achievement, and parent satisfaction. In the Chinese education system, local education authorities (LEAs), including district/municipal education committees or county education bureaus, conduct periodic evaluations of schools, principals, and teachers. These evaluations cover a range of factors, including teacher performance, student achievement, and parent satisfaction. The resulting scores provide a basis for analysis and ranking. The results of the evaluations are then shared with provincial education departments and the

schools evaluated. In response, schools are tasked with addressing identified administrative and pedagogical concerns. At the same time, school leaders take responsibility for developing and implementing improvement strategies. Subsequent inspections validate the effective implementation of these strategies.

Although the specific benchmarks for categorizing high-performing schools may vary regionally, institutions positioned in the upper echelon of rankings formulated through school performance assessments are typically recognized as high-performing by LEAs. Conversely, in this study, low-performing schools are characterized as institutions that rank near the bottom of school performance assessment rankings, indicating that they are struggling. (Figure 1.2 is a sample of LEA's school assessment plan)

LEA's School Performance Assessment	
Participants	Areas of Assessment
School Staff	Teaching staff's performance evaluation
	Non-teaching staff's performance evaluation
	Awards and recognitions
	Budget management
	Risk control and crisis management
	Teaching staff's performance evaluation
Students	Quality and quantity of extracurricular programs
	Graduation rate
	Dropout rate
	Psychological and mental well-being
	Discipline and moral education
	Ranking in benchmarking tests
	Student competition achievements
Quality and quantity of extracurricular programs	
Parents	Satisfactory of schooling quality
	Satisfaction of students' wellbeing

Figure 1.2 LEA's School Assessment Plan (Orally Informed by a Riverside LEA Official)

In this research, high-performing schools were defined as the top 20% of schools according to a comprehensive school performance assessment. This assessment, compiled by local education authorities (LEAs) and government-sponsored educational research institutions such as universities and regional institutes of educational science, is published in an internal government document. The assessment considers various criteria, including students' academic performance (summative test results of subjects such as Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Science), physical and psychological development and well-being (sports performance, body measurement scales and health checks, and mental health checks), parental satisfaction survey (children's well-being, study performance, comprehensive campus life experience, etc.), the completion status of school goals and targets, instructional performance (teaching and learning quality, innovation and influence), school specialization exploration (special school-based projects), among others.

According to the latest data published by authorities in the Southwest China region, the city of Chengdu boasts 636 primary schools, accommodating 222,900 students, and supported by 70,000 full-time teachers (CEB, 2024). In the Municipality of Chongqing, there are 2,754 primary schools, with an enrollment of 2,030,863 students and a teaching staff of 133,256 (CMBS, 2024).

1.7 Schooling Performance in China's Southwest Urban Areas

This research is focused on the central cities of Southwest China, specifically Chengdu and Chongqing municipality. These urban centers hold significant socio-economic and cultural prominence within the region. The selection of this geographical area is guided by two primary considerations. Firstly, it offers access to pertinent case studies of principal leadership and successful school improvement. Secondly, the region's school management competence is indicative of the national average standard of school management in China (Zhang, 2007).

Historically, the quality of education, including school management, in southwest China has been at a moderately lower level since the 1990s compared to regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong. The latter areas have benefited from rapid socioeconomic development and abundant educational resources (Chu, 2003). Nevertheless, in the early

2000s, the government embarked on initiatives to improve and modernize the basic aspects of schools in this region (MOE, 2010). Significant investments were made in the “hardware” aspects of education, which include infrastructure and facilities. As a result, Southwest China, particularly Chongqing and Chengdu, has achieved a significantly higher level of national development. However, the “software” dimensions, including school management and pedagogy, remained at the national average. As a result, in the 2010s, local education authorities and schools in this area prioritized improving the management skills of school principals and implementing professional development programs for teachers.

In 2011, China’s central government introduced a series of education reforms aimed at improving the quality and equity of education nationwide. Chongqing and Chengdu were designated as “education reform pilot zones” (MOE, 2010). Similarly, in 2019, the Ministry of Education highly praised the improvement in the quality of schooling in southwest China, suggesting that education reforms in the region had been fruitful (MOE, 2020). This designation entrusted regional education authorities with the task of promoting innovative and effective pedagogical and management approaches in schools to improve the quality of education. In recent years, as exchanges and competition among schools have increased, many principals from high-performing institutions have sought tailored and effective management strategies to ensure improved educational outcomes.

The candidate schools selected for this study are in the central cities of Southwest China, namely Chengdu and Chongqing. These cities have initiated pilot school management reforms and made significant progress since the Chinese Ministry of Education promulgated the new “Principal Standards for Compulsory Education Schools” (MOE, 2013) and “Management Standards for Compulsory Education Schools” (MOE, 2017). Recent studies consider these achievements as representative and provide valuable insights for school reform in other regions of China (Guo & Xu, 2018; Kang & Liu, 2022; Luo & Xu, 2018; Song et al., 2020; Wang & Li, 2016). Therefore, conducting the study in the central cities of Southwest China was essential to explore the leadership elements behind high-performing schools and successful principals in this region.

Given the dynamic and rapid development of school quality in Southwest China’s primary education, the researcher suggests that it is essential to explore the successful principals in high-performing primary or secondary schools to understand the effectiveness of school

leadership, as well as the common traits of these school leaders. Also, by exploring their leadership mindset, practices, and impact on the school, a possible leadership pattern or model originating from the Chinese context would be revealed, contributing to the international research community of educational management and leadership.

1.8 Conclusion

This introductory chapter lays the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of successful principal leadership in the specific context of high-performing schools in urban areas of Southwest China. The chapter begins by outlining the aim and rationale of this study, which is to understand the complex leadership dynamics in schools that demonstrate exceptional performance and unique characteristics.

This study seeks to shed light on leadership mindsets, practices, impacts, and traits that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture and educational settings, thus providing an opportunity to contrast and expand upon Western leadership concepts. The selected region of Southwest China provides an appropriate setting due to the presence of high-performing schools, a collaborative environment with local education authorities, and access to critical resources.

In addition, this chapter provides a historical overview of the development of the modern Chinese education system, tracing the transition from the post-revolutionary emphasis on centralized education to the exam-centered approach and the eventual pursuit of educational equity. These transitions influenced the role and practices of school leaders as they adapted to the evolving educational landscape.

Subsequent chapters explore the profiles, strategies, and impacts of principals in high-performing schools. By examining these facets within the Chinese education system, this study aims to contribute to the global discourse on educational leadership. The following sections provide a comprehensive analysis of the leadership mindsets, practices, challenges, and outcomes that define the critical role of principals in achieving educational excellence in the unique Chinese schooling context.

In conclusion, this introductory chapter serves as the foundation upon which this study constructs its investigation into the complexities of principal leadership in high-performing schools in urban Southwest China. By contextualizing the study within the historical evolution of the Chinese education system, this research seeks to uncover insights that transcend regional boundaries and contribute to the broader conversation on educational leadership studies and practices.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter conducts a thorough and comprehensive review of the literature covering educational management and leadership research, Chinese educational management and practice, and related studies. In addition, this review includes a careful evaluation of selected studies with the aim of identifying critical research gaps.

In this thesis, the term ‘Western’ is used to refer broadly to developed countries in Europe and North America. This categorization is not based on a binary Western versus Eastern world narrative but is used to distinguish between international leadership research, which includes research written in English and published in international journals, and China’s domestic research. The categorization of literature into these two types is based on the origin of the research theory, model, or paradigm, rather than the nationality of the researcher. For example, international educational leadership research may also include work by researchers with Chinese identity, but the research theory, model, or paradigm is originated in Western research societies. This definition aligns with sources such as Britannica, which defines Western literature as the literary works produced in Europe and North America, and the Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies, which discusses the Western literary canon shaped by European and North American cultural and historical contexts (Britannica, n.d.; Marx & Lazarus, 2004; Gray, 2001).

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to educational management and leadership models originating in the Western world. Since this study operates within the field of educational management and leadership, leadership models are adopted as the theoretical foundation. Within this section, other facets of leadership research are explored, including leadership traits, school culture, and school improvement. These explorations contribute significantly to the scope of this study.

In Chapter II, the following section provides a chronological overview of the development of contemporary Chinese educational management, accompanied by a rigorous review of educational management and leadership research in the modern Chinese context. This

section places particular emphasis on principal leadership and its profound impact on school development. By examining effective principals, identifying potential leadership patterns, and illuminating their interplay with school challenges, growth, and performance, this study seeks to capture the multifaceted dimensions inherent in this central dimension.

The final section summarizes the comprehensive and critical analysis of the literature reviewed in this chapter. This structured approach strengthens the construction of a coherent and polished academic discourse, ultimately contributing to a profound and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter at hand.

The literature review was conducted meticulously and comprehensively to identify relevant and significant works in the field of educational management and leadership. Extensive searches were performed across a variety of academic databases, including JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Educational Research Abstracts (ERA), and the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). This approach facilitated the comprehensive collection of scholarly articles, books, and academic journals related to educational management and leadership. Essential search terms such as “educational models and leadership,” “school management in China,” and “principal leadership effectiveness” were strategically employed to ensure the inclusion of important and contemporary literature.

The literature review incorporates references from both international and Chinese domestic researchers and publications. The Chinese domestic literature is sourced from top peer-reviewed academic indexes such as the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI), the Chinese Science Citation Database (CSCD), and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. This comprehensive approach ensures a thorough understanding of the localized context of distributed leadership in Chinese schools, as well as the broader, international perspectives.

Additionally, a comprehensive analysis of the selected literature was undertaken to identify the principal theoretical foundations, research methodologies, and key findings. This review, coupled with a thorough evaluation to ensure that all scholarly articles had undergone peer review and complied with ethical guidelines, was essential in identifying gaps and establishing the research framework. The criteria for inclusion were meticulously defined to

guarantee the relevance and significance of the literature selected for this review. Through this rigorous and comprehensive approach, the literature review provided a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the scholarly landscape in the realm of educational management and leadership.

2.1 The Review of Educational Management and Leadership Research

This section provides a comprehensive and critical examination of research related to educational management and educational leadership. This analysis is divided into five subsections. The first subsection focuses on educational management and leadership as the primary focus of this study and will be thoroughly reviewed. Following this, the second and third subsections involve an in-depth and critical examination of the primary theoretical perspectives of this study, specifically distributed leadership and transformational leadership. The fourth subsection highlights school culture and leadership models, addressing both the cultural phenomena of schools and the leadership associated with them, as outlined in this paper. The final subsection presents research that is relevant to critical elements of this research, including leadership traits, school culture, and leadership impact on school performance.

2.1.1 Overview of Educational Management and Leadership Research

Educational leadership has evolved into a dynamic discipline that synthesizes principles and methodologies from diverse fields such as business, organizational behavior, anthropology, and other social sciences (Hoy & Miskel, 2007). This section provides a comprehensive exploration of the landscape of educational leadership research, including foundational principles, historical trajectory, and evolving significance within educational contexts.

Defining educational leadership is a sophisticated endeavor that encompasses a wide range of roles, functions, methodologies, mindsets, and dispositions assigned to individuals or

groups with administrative or managerial responsibilities within educational institutions (Yukl, 2002). It goes beyond management and embodies guidance, influence, and responsibility for educational environments. A critical perspective is crucial to grasping its multifaceted nature, encompassing visionary leadership, strategic decision-making, empowering teams, and fostering a conducive environment for learning and growth.

Moreover, the nature of educational leadership transcends management; it serves as the conduit through which educational institutions achieve transformative change and sustainable growth (Bush, 2008; 2013). The historical trajectory of educational leadership research outlines the evolution from rudimentary definitions to a nuanced understanding that encompasses contextual nuances, organizational dynamics, and the impact of leadership on educational outcomes. The perspectives of diverse scholars contribute to a holistic understanding of the multifaceted nature of educational leadership (Leithwood, 2006).

The historical trajectory underscores its evolution across contexts. Yukl's (2002) visualization of leadership as a powerful force guiding nations toward prosperity resonates with leadership's contemporary transcendence of traditional boundaries. Leithwood's (2006) assertion that school leadership rivals classroom instruction in influencing students highlights the critical role of leadership in shaping educational outcomes. Bush's identification of principals as central decision makers underscores the transformative role of leaders within educational institutions (2008). This historical review reveals the evolving definition and significance of leadership and shapes the ongoing discourse.

As challenges and demands from society, educational institutions, and families have evolved, leadership paradigms have adapted to meet different needs. The 21st century emphasis on innovation and adaptability has influenced leadership models that recognize the importance of cultivating a culture of learning and continuous improvement (Bolam & McMahon, 2004). This shift resonates with Dimmock's (1999) suggestion that effective school leaders must balance higher-order tasks that enhance performance with routine maintenance tasks. The trajectory of leadership research marked by these transitions reflects the evolving landscape of educational leadership and its integral role in shaping the future of education.

The evolution of leadership frameworks and paradigms reflects the complex nature of educational leadership. Early research, epitomized by the trait approach (Stogdill, 1948, as

cited in Bass, 1990), sought to identify the traits of leaders. Later, the field recognized the contextual nature of leadership, as evidenced by interdisciplinary research of the 1970s that produced multiple definitions and perspectives (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). This shift marked a transition from linear, hierarchical notions of leadership to more relational, adaptive models that considered cultural and organizational contexts (Bryman, 2007).

The terminological debates surrounding educational management, leadership, and administration have prompted profound inquiries into their distinctive contours. Cuban's (1998) assertion that leadership is associated with change-oriented efforts and management with maintenance invites a nuanced examination within educational landscapes. Dimmock's (1999) distinction between the higher-order tasks of leadership and the routine maintenance of management invites reflection on balance. Regional differences in terminology, as discussed by Bush (2002), reveal cultural nuances that shape leadership perceptions and practices. Bush's (2003) contrast between value-based leadership and management's focus on implementation adds to the ongoing discourse. These terminological debates require critical inquiry that recognizes the intricate interplay of practice and theory in educational leadership.

In today's educational landscape, the significance of educational leaders is increasingly recognized (Yukl, 2002). Principals are under scrutiny as student achievement declines (Hoy & Miskel, 2007). While some critics may exaggerate their impact, these leaders skillfully navigate a landscape characterized by constant change and evolving educational paradigms (Hoy & Miskel, 2007). This intricate interplay between theory and practice constitutes the core of contemporary educational leadership research, requiring a critical reevaluation of existing paradigms, theories, and practices to address the educational challenges of the 21st century.

2.1.2 Distributed leadership Model

The Distributed Leadership Model is a central theoretical framework employed in this study to explore the mindset, practices, characteristics, effects, and possible patterns of principal leadership. This section provides a holistic review of the model, including critical perspectives to highlight research gaps that could be bridged by this study.

The distributed leadership model has emerged as the normatively preferred paradigm in the 21st century, replacing collegiality as the preferred approach (Bush, 2011). Scholars and practitioners alike have turned to this model as one of the most influential ideas in educational leadership in recent years (Harris, 2010). However, while the distributed leadership approach is promising, it requires rigorous theoretical and practical examination to fully understand its nuances, effectiveness, and limitations.

Harris (2014) emphasizes that distributed leadership focuses on drawing on expertise wherever it exists in an organization, regardless of formal position or role. The model underscores collaboration and cooperation as a means of leadership, departing from traditional notions that focus on singular hierarchical authority. According to Harris (2014, P. 13), “Distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization, rather than seeking it only through formal position or role.” Although this philosophy seeks to harness collective wisdom, it confronts challenges when leaders are disinclined to share power or perceive it as a threat to their authority (Harris, 2004; Harris, 2005, p. 12). This challenge underscores the need for nuanced implementation strategies that address leadership dynamics at various organizational levels.

While successful leadership often depends on the adoption of collaborative and cooperative approaches, Harris (2004) emphasizes that some leaders resist sharing their authority, fearing that the dispersion of power might undermine their positions. This sentiment raises the challenge of reconciling formal and distributed leadership, with Harris (2005, p. 18) asserting that harmony between the two forms is not guaranteed. Nevertheless, certain Chinese primary and middle schools have effectively operationalized distributed leadership through collective leadership and accountability mechanisms (Li & Leithwood, 2017; Li & Cheng, 2018). These institutions have streamlined communication channels and reduced bureaucratic hurdles. They have also established dynamic, collective problem-solving mechanisms to mitigate risks and facilitate reform (Li & Cheng, 2018).

The formulation of the distributed leadership model itself is worth examining. It is underpinned by the notion that leadership is not confined to hierarchical positions, but rather is a collective endeavor that draws on expertise from a variety of sources. As Spillane (2006) explains that distributed leadership includes the sharing of influence and authority

throughout the organization, involving individuals who are not necessarily in formal leadership posts. This model posits that leadership can emerge from multiple sources, transcending formal roles and allowing individuals to contribute their unique insights and skills. Such a distributed leadership model emphasizes shared responsibility, collaboration, and empowerment of all stakeholders, which is consistent with contemporary calls for participatory decision making in educational institutions (Harris, 2014).

Criticisms of the distributed leadership model have also emerged. Some scholars contend that the successful implementation of the model is heavily influenced by organizational culture and context (Harris, 2008). In addition, Harris (2011, p. 84) raises concerns about the potential diffusion of accountability in distributed leadership settings, where attributing outcomes to specific individuals or groups could become challenging. The effectiveness of distributed leadership could be hampered if leaders lack the requisite skills to navigate complex collaborations and if organizations lack mechanisms to facilitate distributed decision-making (Leithwood et al., 2006).

The implications of the distributed leadership model extend beyond its conceptualization and into educational practice. When implemented effectively, distributed leadership has been linked to improved school culture, increased teacher collaboration, and higher student achievement (Harris & Muijs, 2003). This model is consistent with the shift toward more inclusive, democratic, and participatory approaches to educational management (Gronn, 2002). In addition, the model recognizes that expertise and leadership potential are distributed throughout the organization, allowing for a more holistic and comprehensive approach to problem-solving and decision-making (Harris, 2009).

However, despite the significant attention the distributed leadership model has received, significant gaps and critiques remain unaddressed. A critical review reveals that the existing literature only lightly addresses the explicit patterns of distributed progression, evaluation standards for leadership distribution processes and outcomes, and the core content that constitutes effective and meaningful leadership distribution (James & McCormick, 2009; Harris, 2005, 2014). These key features mentioned above remind the researcher of a significant gap in understanding the complexities of the model.

The lack of a visualized model to illustrate the process and mechanism of the distribution of leadership in educational leadership studies is notable. Existing literature, including works by Spillane (2006), Leithwood et al. (2009), and Tian et al. (2016), does not provide a clear visualized diagram that can help explain what substances are distributed and in what way the “leadership matter” is distributed. These works offer descriptions that are often obscure, fuzzy, and ambiguous.

For example, Spillane (2006) includes no visualization of the model in his work and provides a metaphor implying the ambiguity and dispute that remain in distributed leadership studies: “Perhaps distributed leadership is just another case of old wine in new bottles” (p. 144). Similarly, on page 144, Spillane (2006) stated, “What matters for instructional improvement and student achievement is not that leadership is distributed, but how it is distributed. Descriptive theory building is essential before causal links between distributed leadership, instructional improvement, and student outcomes can be established.”

Likewise, in Kenneth Leithwood et al.’s work (2009) “Distributed leadership: Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence,” the conceptualization, patterns, practices, and impact are reviewed, but no explicit diagram or visualized presentation of leadership distribution pattern is given to illustrate the process and the possible shared nature of school leaders’ practiced distributed leadership, which leads to positive changes in schools. However, Alma Harris in this book (in Leithwood et al., 2009, p. 183) admits the importance of exploring the patterns, process, and contexts of leadership distribution.

In Meng Tian, Mika Risku, and Kaija Collin’s work (2016) “A meta-analysis of distributed leadership from 2002 to 2013: Theory development, empirical evidence and future research focus,” the researcher reviewed existing research paradigms of distributed leadership in the scope of education studies and proposed two possible “two main scopes for future studies” (Tian et al., 2016, p. 159): “The first one comprises perceiving leadership as a resource from the organizational perspective. This approach seems to have dominated studies on distributed leadership. The second one aims to examine leadership from the viewpoint of the individual as an agency.” However, the exploration of the process and the visualized pattern or model of school-level distributed leadership is not the focus of this work.

In summary, the literature reviewed in this thesis emphasizes the significance of deepening and developing the understanding of distributed leadership in the scope of educational leadership studies. As hypothesized, a more perceptible distributed leadership pattern and model would contribute to addressing the ambiguities of educational distributed leadership research and would inspire both practitioners and researchers to reflect and map the shared features of distributed leadership leading to positive school change.

It is worth noting that the distributed leadership model had its origins in Western social, cultural, and educational contexts. Although Hallinger & Heck (2005) claim that cultural differences could affect the applicability of distributed leadership, it remains uncertain whether it can be effectively applied to non-Western systems, and research on how leadership distribution manifests in non-Western settings is still limited. Similarly, studies (Lei & Munby, 2008; Xu & Murphy, 2014; Li & Leithwood, 2017; Li & Cheng, 2018; Zhao & Mo, 2020) conducted in the Chinese context have adopted the definition of distributed leadership that originated in the West, with limited regard to its localization in Chinese culture, and inadequate attention given to the social, cultural, political, economic, and educational elements that could influence this model. This under-researched aspect raises concerns about the universality of the model and the necessity of its adaptation in various cultural and educational environments.

In conclusion, although the distributed leadership model offers a potential replacement for conventional hierarchical leadership, these critiques highlight the intricacies and deficiencies present in the model. This study aims to fill the gaps by examining the intricate facets of leadership distribution, developing a graphical model, addressing the model's stagnant nature, and exploring its appropriateness beyond Western frameworks.

2.1.3 Transformational Leadership Model

The Transformational Leadership Model serves as the theoretical framework for this study, guiding the exploration of complexities in principal leadership, including mindsets, practices, traits, impact, and patterns. This section provides a thorough review of the model, critically evaluating its dimensions and identifying the relevant research gaps that this study seeks to address.

The transformational leadership model is positioned within the wider context of comprehensive leadership models and showcases an inherent adaptability to the ever-evolving global landscape (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). It manifests through four pivotal dimensions- idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003) (See Figure 2.1). These dimensions are intricately interwoven to shape leadership behaviors.

Four “I” s of Transformational Leadership	
Type	Features
Idealized Influence	Refers to a friendly, trustworthy, and respectful atmosphere created by leaders for subordinates.
Inspirational Motivation	Adjusts group members’ expectations and enhances their confidence in the organization’s capability.
Intellectual Stimulation	Brings new approaches to problem-observing and problem-solving mechanisms.
Individualized Consideration	Understands the needs, weaknesses, and strengths of group members, facilitating comprehensive development in the long run.

Figure 2.1 the Four “I” s of Transformational from Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam’s work (2003)

The concept of idealized influence is at the heart of the transformational leadership model. This dimension establishes a foundation of trust, respect, and dependability that triggers profound change, as seen in transformative organizational reform (Avolio, 1994). Leaders who embody idealized influence motivate followers to adopt a collective vision and align their aspirations with the organization’s mission. By modeling ethical behavior and demonstrating unwavering commitment, leaders foster loyalty and commitment. According to Avolio (1994), the model also emphasizes inspirational motivation, which allows leaders to reset group members’ expectations and increase their confidence in the organization’s capabilities. Leaders express a compelling vision that inspires enthusiasm and commitment in their followers. They instill a sense of purpose and enthusiasm that motivates followers to strive for excellence. At the same time, leaders who promote intellectual stimulation act as

catalysts for innovative problem-solving mechanisms that foster innovation (Bass & Avolio, 1994). These leaders encourage creativity and critical thinking by challenging the status quo. Transformational leaders create an environment for inventive solutions and continuous progress by facilitating open dialogue and embracing diverse viewpoints.

In addition, leaders who embrace individual consideration should recognize the unique needs and strengths of group members in order to foster their holistic growth and development (Avolio, 1994). Authentic leaders demonstrate caring and empathy by providing tailored support and guidance. This dimension can enhance followers' sense of belonging and significance within the organizational context.

Transformational leadership has been studied extensively since the 1980s, often using the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) methodology. In the 1990s, however, the applicability of the MLQ was met with skepticism due to its contextual complexity and vague scoring criteria (Antonakis et al., 2003). However, empirical evidence underscores the model's effectiveness by showing that transformational leaders typically outperform transactional leaders in fostering group commitment and maximizing efficiency (Yukl, 1999).

The implications of the transformational leadership model in educational contexts are significant. In "*Successful Principal Leadership in Times of Change*," Day and Leithwood (2007) provide an international perspective on effective principal leadership in times of change. The work acknowledges the difficulties of implementing transformational leadership in constantly evolving educational environments. In their publication, "*Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions*," Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) provide a thorough analysis of leadership theories and research that provides a broader context for understanding transformational leadership's place in the spectrum of leadership approaches. The examination of various leadership theories and their implications for practice revealed transformational leadership as a dynamic and effective approach that focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve exceptional outcomes. Transformational leadership is positioned within the spectrum of leadership approaches as a style that emphasizes charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, contrasting with more transactional and laissez-faire approaches. Avolio et al. (2009) shed light on the significance of transformational leadership in contemporary leadership studies and its application in diverse organizational contexts.

Several studies have expanded the scope of the transformational leadership model. For example, Shamir and Eilam (2005) used life stories to explore the development of authentic leadership, a concept closely related to the charismatic and inspirational attributes emphasized in transformational leadership. Leithwood and Sun (2012) conducted a meta-analytic review of unpublished research in their study *The Nature and Effects of Transformational School Leadership*. This study provides refined insights into the effects of transformational leadership in school contexts and reveals its potential influence on organizational outcomes.

While acknowledging the strengths of the model, it is important to address its limitations. A comprehensive analysis of the transformational leadership model highlights the need for careful examination. Bush (2010) points out that novice leaders may find it challenging to implement transformational leadership due to its complex nature. Furthermore, Bush (2010) states that the successful implementation of transformational leadership by school leaders depends on the use of internal school resources. However, the implementation of this leadership model may be limited in some schools due to insufficient resources.

Gronn (2011) argues that the transformational leadership model places excessive emphasis on individual leaders and neglects collective leadership and collaborative decision-making. According to Gronn (2011), the transformational leadership model places excessive emphasis on individual leaders and neglects collective leadership and collaborative decision making. Gronn's critique (2011) highlights a common perception in literature that transformational leadership, while effective in inspiring and motivating followers, may not fully address the complexities of leadership in collaborative environments. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the role of the leader in articulating a compelling vision, fostering a sense of purpose, and empowering followers to achieve high levels of performance. However, Gronn (2011) argues that the transformational leadership model tends to idealize individual leaders as heroic figures, potentially overlooking the importance of distributed leadership and shared decision-making processes.

Moreover, various studies have shown that the practical workings of schools and the complex nature of leadership contexts can challenge the implementation of this leadership model. For example, Northouse (2018) suggests that prioritizing the charismatic and

inspirational attributes of school leaders may not effectively promote the development of a school's organizational culture, motivation, and innovation.

Furthermore, the cultural nuances and applicability of the model have not received sufficient attention. It may be difficult and uncertain to translate such a model from a Western system to a non-Western cultural setting, including its processes and outcomes, unless localization and adaptation work is done beforehand (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). The universal applicability of the model across different cultural and contextual landscapes makes it necessary to evaluate it. Leadership practices and the reception of transformational leadership behaviors (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008) are significantly influenced by cultural nuances. Thus, culturally sensitive adaptations are needed, as strategies that are successful in Western educational systems may not be seamlessly adapted to non-Western cultural settings. Likewise, other scholars have echoed similar sentiments regarding the need for culturally sensitive leadership models. For example, Hofstede (2001) argues that leadership effectiveness is deeply influenced by cultural dimensions such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. Bass and Riggio (2006) suggest that transformational leadership effectiveness may vary across cultures due to differences in cultural values and expectations. They argue that leaders need to adapt their leadership styles to fit the cultural context to be effective.

Besides, research that examines school leadership through a transformational lens has not adequately addressed the diverse social, cultural, economic, and political intricacies of the Chinese education system, nor has it comprehensively addressed the unique characteristics of school leaders. For example, studies by Li and Zhao (2015) and Zhang and Zhai (2016) examine the impact of transformational leadership on principals, teachers, and students. However, these studies adopt a model based on the Western sociocultural and educational context and do not explore its applicability in a non-Western paradigm.

Although Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Flynn (2023) acknowledge that cultural factors may influence the effectiveness of leadership and that transformational leadership may strengthen organizational commitment and increase teacher satisfaction, there is limited discourse on the local manifestation of the model, its characteristics, or the reasons for departures from the original framework. Nguyen et al. (2023) suggests that a new area that requires further investigation is the impact of cultural values and norms on the

implementation of transformational leadership behaviors in East Asian societies. For instance, in collectivist cultures, such as those prevalent in many East Asian societies, there may be a greater emphasis on group harmony and consensus-building. This cultural orientation could influence the way transformational leaders in these contexts engage with followers and foster change within their organizations.

Furthermore, other analyses of transformational leadership in China (Liu, 2018; Li & Zheng, 2022) provide a broader and more contextually nuanced perspective. These studies emphasize the application of transformational leadership in Chinese educational settings, while also critically addressing its adaptability, evolution, and relevance in the current social and cultural milieu of China. They highlight the challenges and limitations that the transformational leadership model, originally developed in Western contexts, may face when applied in a vastly different cultural and societal setting like China.

Liu (2018) delves into the evolution of transformational leadership research in China from 2005 to 2015, examining the factors that influence its success in Chinese schools. The study provides insights into the adaptability and viability of the model in the Chinese educational context over time. Similarly, Li and Zheng (2022) review empirical research on transformational school leadership in China from 2010 to 2019, offering a detailed analysis of how cultural and contextual factors shape leadership practices in Chinese schools. Their work contributes to understanding the effects of leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, and its long-term relevance in the rapidly evolving Chinese educational landscape. By questioning the adaptability and viability of transformational leadership as a research tool in a social and cultural milieu different from its original context, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of leadership practices in Chinese schools.

In addition to the works of Liu (2018) and Li & Zheng (2022), further literature sheds light on the evolving discourse on educational management and leadership in China. Li, Zhao, & Begley (2015) examine the dimensions of transformational leadership and their impact on employee creativity in Chinese educational institutions, providing insights into how leadership influences innovation and organizational commitment. Similarly, Zhang, Jia, & Gu (2014) investigate transformational leadership during crisis situations in China, exploring its role in shaping leadership responses and organizational resilience. Their work

offers valuable insights into the role of principals and leaders in enhancing educational outcomes and navigating challenges. Additionally, Sun, Chen, & Zhang (2017) provide a comprehensive analysis of the antecedents of transformational leadership, offering historical insights into the evolution of leadership studies in the Chinese educational context.

These works, in conjunction with the existing literature, provide a rich foundation for understanding the complexities of leadership in Chinese schools and offer valuable insights into the applicability and evolution of leadership models in diverse cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the transformational leadership model undoubtedly reveals effective leadership dynamics. However, its complexity and adaptability to different settings require careful study. The purpose of this research is to explore the complexities, limitations, and potential adaptations of the model in accordance with the evolving educational leadership landscape in non-Western schooling contexts. Furthermore, the researcher seeks to fill the acknowledged research gap by examining the less explored aspects of the model and its applications in 21st century China. By shedding light on the nuances of the model, this study seeks to provide a foundation for enriching educational leadership practices and cultivating effective school leadership.

2.1.4 Cultural Leadership Models

While not the primary theoretical lens in this study, cultural leadership models have inspired and influenced the formulation of this research. They offer valuable insights into organizational dynamics, particularly within educational settings, and remain a practical research instrument for exploring school leadership with cultural elements or influence. The significance of cultural leadership models lies in their ability to illuminate the subtle yet influential aspects of organizational dynamics.

Cultural leadership models emphasize the informal dimensions of organizations, including the values, beliefs, and norms embraced by individuals within the organization. According to Bush (2011), these dimensions collectively shape shared organizational meanings and find expression through symbols and rituals rather than the structural aspects of an organization.

The rising significance of cultural models within educational leadership research has been particularly evident since the 1990s. This escalating interest, as underscored by Walker (2010), reflects an intensified focus on comprehending cultural elements in the educational sphere. Likewise, Harris (1992) emphasizes the growing adoption of cultural approaches in educational studies. The mounting popularity of cultural perspectives can be attributed to two principal factors, as asserted by Bush (2010). Firstly, conventional leadership models predominantly center on the technical aspects of institutions, often neglecting intangible elements such as school values and other nuanced forms of influence. Secondly, these formal models inadequately address schools' aspirations for excellence, where cultural models prove invaluable in comprehending and elucidating the effective functioning of educators and other school constituents.

Cultural leadership within education can be broadly categorized into two perspectives: societal culture and organizational culture. Organizational culture, the latter perspective, encompasses a broader scope compared to the former. It extends to applications on a larger scale, encompassing nations, societies, religious entities, and ethnic groups (Walker, 2010). Nevertheless, Dimmock and Walker (2002) caution against the indiscriminate application of cultural approaches to educational systems and institutions, emphasizing the need to avoid "decontextualized paradigms" and "Anglo-American paradigms". Other advocates, including Southworth (2007) and Bush, Qiang, and Fang (1998), underscore concerns related to a "western-centered ideology".

Within societal culture, Dimmock and Walker (2002) identify seven dimensions, each represented as a continuum: power-distributed and concentrated, group-oriented and self-oriented, consideration and aggression, proactivism and fatalism, generative and replicative, limited relationship and holistic relationship, and male influence and female influence. The applicability of these dimensions extends beyond Western contexts; Bush and Qiang's (2000) study on Chinese leadership during the 1990s demonstrates their relevance in comprehending non-Western educational systems. However, certain aspects of Bush and Qiang's (2002) findings no longer encompass the features of contemporary education in China. Notably, the evolution of modern leadership concepts and educational reforms has led to changes in leadership formulation and distribution. This is evident in high-performing primary and middle schools in Shanghai and Jiangsu, participating in PISA tests, which advocate for leadership distribution mechanisms. Similarly, features highlighted by Bush,

Qiang, and Li (1998), such as patriarchal dominance in schools, have undergone transformation. For instance, the number of female principals in Chengdu's primary schools now approaches parity with male counterparts.

Organizational culture, as advocated by Bush (2011), encapsulates four key features: a focus on the values and beliefs of organizational members, the development of shared norms and meanings, expression through rituals and ceremonies supporting and celebrating these norms, and the presence of heroes and heroines as bearers of organizational values. Similarly, Walker (2010) asserts that while school leaders and staff contribute to shaping or creating a new culture, they are simultaneously influenced by it.

Bush (2011) outlines four dimensions for interpreting organizational culture in schools: goals, structure, environment, and leadership. The pursuit of goals mirrors a school's values and beliefs, the school's structure manifests its culture physically, the environment is the source of the organization's values and beliefs, and leaders translate organizational culture into actions. Despite offering novel perspectives for analyzing school leadership, the cultural model has faced criticism for its inherent vagueness and ambiguity (Morgan in Bush, 2011; Bush, 2011).

In conclusion, while the cultural leadership models are not directly employed as the primary theoretical framework in this study, they have undeniably contributed to the underlying inspiration and formation of this research. The importance of these models lies in their ability to shed light on the subtle yet influential aspects of organizational dynamics, particularly in the context of education. The adoption of cultural lenses in educational leadership research has gained momentum over the past few decades as scholars seek to better understand the complicated interplay of cultural elements within educational systems.

This growing interest stems from the recognition that traditional leadership paradigms often overlook the intangible dimensions of institutions, such as shared values and beliefs, which are instrumental in shaping the educational environment. Previous research has indeed extensively examined the implications of principals' mindsets on various aspects of school functioning, including teacher and student development, as well as school culture and innovation. For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) discuss the role of trust in schools and how it influences leadership practices and organizational culture. Deal and Peterson (2016)

emphasize the importance of school culture in shaping organizational outcomes and how leaders can influence culture through their mindsets and actions. Additionally, Schein (2010) highlights the impact of organizational culture on leadership practices, underscoring the need for leaders to shape culture intentionally. Fullan (2014) explores how principals' mindsets and actions can influence school culture and innovation, emphasizing the role of the principal in driving school improvement. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) examine the relationship between leadership practices and student outcomes, including the impact of leadership on school culture and innovation. However, the extent to which these studies explicitly incorporate the intangible dimensions of institutions, such as shared values and beliefs, into their inquiries may vary.

2.1.5 Leadership Mindset, Practice, Trait, and School Culture

The theoretical perspectives of this study are grounded in distributed leadership and transformational leadership models. However, the researcher acknowledges that other theories, models, paradigms, and research topics within educational management and leadership studies have also shaped and inspired the formulation of this study. These include theories related to research on leadership mindset, practices, traits, impact and the school's organizational culture. Therefore, a retrospective review of these theories, concepts, or research that have influenced the educational management and leadership fields is necessary.

- **The leadership Mindset**

In this study, the researcher aims to explore the leadership mindset of successful principals in high-achieving schools in China's compulsory education system, its impact, and its underlying characteristics. The study conceptualizes leadership mindset as a multifaceted entity that encompasses a principal's beliefs, philosophies, thoughts, concepts, and viewpoints. Using methods such as interviews and observations, the study gathers factual information and phenomena relevant to principals' leadership mindsets, and then documents, analyzes, and examines the collected data.

Previous research has extensively examined the implications of principals' mindsets and their impact on teacher and student development, as well as school culture and innovation. For example, Leithwood et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on school leadership and found that principals' behaviors and attitudes significantly influence teacher motivation and student achievement. Sergiovanni (2001) emphasizes the importance of principals' values and beliefs in shaping school culture and fostering innovation. Hallinger and Heck (2010) discuss how principals' leadership practices, including their mindsets, can impact teacher development and student learning outcomes. Day et al. (2011) highlights the role of principals in creating a positive school climate and promoting innovation through their leadership practices. These studies collectively demonstrate the significant impact of principals' mindsets on various aspects of school functioning.

Additionally, Tursty and Sergiovanni (1966) conducted foundational work on the role of principals' beliefs and values in shaping school leadership practices. Miskel et al. (1983) explored the relationship between principals' attitudes and school effectiveness, highlighting the importance of principals' mindsets in driving positive outcomes. Anderson and Iwanicki (1984) focused on the emotional aspects of leadership, emphasizing the role of principals' emotional intelligence in shaping school culture. Olson (2014) examined the role of principals' cognitive frames in decision-making, highlighting how these frames influence school innovation.

Furthermore, research has investigated the impact of principals' mindsets on teacher and student development. Kottamp and Mulhern (1987) explored how principals' beliefs about teaching and learning influence teacher development and student outcomes. Eaker and Fullan (2010) focused on the role of principals' beliefs in fostering teacher collaboration and professional growth. Goldberg (2015) examined the relationship between principals' leadership styles and teacher motivation, highlighting the importance of principals' mindsets in creating a positive school environment. Pinder (1984, 1988) explored principals' role as instructional leaders, emphasizing how their beliefs about teaching and learning impact student achievement. Reitzug (2018) examined the role of principals' beliefs in shaping school culture, particularly in diverse school settings. Robinson (2011) studied the relationship between principals' leadership practices and student achievement, highlighting the influence of principals' mindsets on school effectiveness. Reilly and Jones (2019) investigated how principals' beliefs about leadership influence their decision-making

processes, emphasizing the importance of principals' mindsets in driving school improvement efforts.

However, many of these studies, particularly those conducted by Tursty & Sergiovanni (1966); Miskel et al., (1983); Anderson & Iwanicki (1984); Olson (2014); Fullan (2014); Lambert (2016); Kottamp & Mulhern (1987); Eaker & Fullan (2010); Goldberg (2015); Pinder (1984, 1988); Reitzug (2018); Robinson (2011); and Reilly & Jones (2019), have been conducted in Western school settings and have focused primarily on specific perspectives, positions, or attitudes, rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of leadership mindsets as a complex whole.

Since the 2010s, research on leadership mindsets has gained increasing attention in the Chinese context, especially in school systems. The predominant focus has been on leaders' growth mindsets and principals' growth mindsets in relation to school development (Zeng, 2015) and their influence on teachers and students (Yang & Huang, 2017; Li & Jiang, 2019; Wang & Hallinger, 2015). In "*Principal leadership and teacher professionalism*," Gu and Zhang (2017) argue the constructive role of principal leadership mindset in fostering the sustainable development and professional development of educators in "*The mediating effect of teachers' professional learning communities in China*." In "*Mindsets and school leadership: A study of Chinese middle school principals*," Guo and Sun (2016) briefly review research on Chinese principals' leadership mindsets from the late 20th to early 21st centuries, suggesting a burgeoning state of the field and advocating for more attention to Chinese principals' leadership mindsets. Other studies examining principals' leadership mindsets (Li & Wang, 2018; Zheng, Li & Liu, 2016) explore aspects of principals' and educators' identities and professional beliefs.

However, despite the growth in this area, these studies have limitations, particularly in terms of in-depth analysis of mindset components and a lack of critical perspectives, especially when considering the application of Western leadership mindset concepts to the Chinese context. This gap underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of leadership mindsets, considering the influence of cultural values, norms, and historical contexts on leadership beliefs and behaviors.

In comparing Chinese and Western leadership mindsets, it is important to note that while the Chinese leadership mindset is often characterized by values of harmony, collectivism, and the importance of relationships (Guanxi) (Li & Lin, 2011), the Western leadership mindset may emphasize individualism, innovation, and autonomy (Warner, 2016). However, these are generalizations and may not apply to all leaders within these cultural contexts. Studies have shown that within China, there is diversity in leadership mindsets based on factors like personal experiences and organizational context (Cheng & Walker, 2008). Similarly, Western leaders may exhibit a range of mindsets influenced by various factors beyond culture (Ng & Walker, 2018).

It is essential to approach the study of leadership mindsets with a nuanced understanding that recognizes both the commonalities and differences across cultures. By doing so, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of leadership behaviors and practices in diverse cultural contexts, which is crucial for fostering effective leadership in education systems worldwide.

Furthermore, a review of the literature underscores that existing studies in the fields of educational research and educational management have a relatively undeveloped understanding of leadership mindsets compared to findings in other disciplines. Dweck's (2006) work in *"The New Psychology of Success"* systematically illuminates the critical role of leadership mindset within a social organization. Dweck highlights the dichotomy between fixed and growth leadership mindsets and their impact on individual development and success. Irvine and Witter (2011) analyze authentic leadership from an organizational behavior perspective, emphasizing its potential to facilitate successful reform. This study recognizes the importance of leadership mindsets in driving change and success within organizations and their multifaceted impact on leaders and followers. Similar discussions from diverse disciplinary perspectives such as social psychology (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and sociology (Mumford et al., 2000) explore the complex nature of leadership mindsets and their effects on organizations, individuals, and leaders.

In summary, current educational research on leadership mindsets remains relatively rudimentary, especially in the context of Chinese education, where research is limited. Although there is some research on the leadership mindsets of Chinese school principals, a comprehensive exploration of their intricate meanings and underlying characteristics is still

lacking. This study aims to comprehensively explore leadership mindsets from different perspectives, thus filling the gaps in relevant research areas.

● **The Leadership Practices**

In this study, the researcher focuses on examining the impact of principals' leadership practices on schools and their constituents, with a specific emphasis on the Chinese context, particularly in Chengdu and Chongqing. These effects encompass the core responsibilities of principals, including the management of school affairs, teachers, student well-being, and the complex interplay between the school, families, and broader societal dynamics. Within this study, these influences are used as a lens to reflect upon and analyze principals' leadership practices and their shared leadership traits, aiming to uncover their correlations with school development trajectories and the attainment of principals' career success. Consequently, a retrospective review of research on leadership practices within educational institutions and its implications for various stakeholders within the school environment emerges as a pressing need.

Numerous empirical studies have illuminated the influence of principal leadership on schools and their stakeholders in specific contexts (Yukl, 1994; Hallinger, 2003; Waters, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Within the framework of instructional leadership, Hallinger (2003) focuses on how principals facilitate pedagogical development within schools by delineating institutional missions, orchestrating instructional designs, and cultivating a conducive learning environment. Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) provide a comprehensive analysis that evaluates the four categories of leadership practices proposed by Leithwood and Sun (Leithwood & Sun, 2009 in Leithwood et al., 2010): school climate, teacher attitudes, leadership characteristics and practices, and student achievement. Their review provides additional empirical evidence for these four types of practices and strongly asserts that principals' leadership practices have a significant impact in catalyzing school metamorphosis and progress. In parallel, Finnigan and Stewart (2009), through corroborative research, conclusively affirm the pivotal significance of principals' leadership practices in improving the performance of underperforming schools.

During the literature review, the researcher identified studies that used the above four or similar frameworks to examine principal leadership practices and their impact on teacher and student achievement. However, these studies have largely focused on Western societal and school contexts. Similarly, while research on principal leadership practices has examined the impact of principal leadership practices on school performance and teacher efficacy (Malford, 2007, 2008; Robinson, 2009) and student achievement (Day et al., 2008; Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008), these widely cited studies have been conducted exclusively in Western contexts.

At the same time, despite growing attention to the manifestation and impact of principal leadership practices in Chinese school contexts (Lai et al., 2015; Walker & Qian, 2015; Hou & Zhang, 2019; Shen, 2018; Zhang et al., 2022), research on leadership practices within the Chinese education system remains inadequate (Cheng & Wang, 2017; Qu & Day, 2007; Li & Hallinger, 2013, 2016; Lou, 2015; Walker & Qian, 2015; Yu & Leithwood, 2018). Furthermore, the suitability of leadership practice research frameworks derived from Western contexts for conducting appropriate research on school leadership practices in non-Western systems also needs to be considered (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Day et al., 2011; Ubben et al., 2017).

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to conduct research that is grounded in the Chinese school context to examine principals' leadership practices, the inherent characteristics of these practices, and the models of leadership practices that facilitate school and member development. This research attempts to address existing research gaps, explore principal leadership practices in the Chinese context, and illuminate their significance in relation to Western-based studies of principal leadership practices.

To comprehensively understand the dynamics of leadership practice in Chinese schools, it is essential to examine the broader societal and cultural contexts that shape leadership behaviors and practices. Studies have highlighted the influence of traditional Chinese cultural values, such as Confucianism, on leadership styles and practices in Chinese schools (Walker & Qian, 2018; Wang & Cheng, 2021). These values emphasize the importance of harmony, collectivism, and hierarchy, which can manifest in leadership approaches that prioritize consensus-building, teamwork, and respect for authority. Moreover, the political landscape in China, characterized by the influence of the Communist Party, greatly impacts

school leadership. The Party's guidance of educational policies and practices, along with its influence on leadership culture and succession practices, underscores the intricate relationship between politics and education in China (Dimmock, 2018; Yang, 2011). Understanding these contextual factors is essential for understanding the nuances of leadership practices in Chinese schools and their implications for school development and student outcomes.

Research on the relationship between schools and local authorities examines the collaboration and communication mechanisms between them, including formal and informal channels. Li and Zhang (2010) study this relationship, focusing on how local governments influence school management and decision-making. Their research highlights the negotiation process between school leaders and local authorities to effectively meet the needs of schools and communities. Cheng and Chan (2018) complement this by exploring the impact of educational change in East Asia on educational leaders, emphasizing the challenges school leaders face in navigating evolving educational policies and practices in these regions.

Navigating national and local education policies is another crucial aspect of leadership practice. Mok (2013) discuss the decentralization and centralization of educational governance in China, highlighting the impact on education financing and the challenges faced by school leaders in interpreting and implementing national policies while addressing local needs. This aligns with the work of Cheng and Chan (2018), who emphasize the importance of effective leadership strategies in response to educational changes in East Asia.

Leaders' statutory responsibilities are also vital in leadership practice. Zheng and Wu (2019) explore the roles and responsibilities of Chinese school principals in the new era, providing insights into how school leaders fulfill their roles in curriculum development, teacher management, student welfare, and community engagement. Dimmock (2018) further enhance this understanding by examining leadership succession and leadership culture in Chinese schools, offering valuable insights into leadership development pathways and the overall quality of school leadership.

The division of leadership responsibilities between the principal and the Party Branch Secretary is a unique aspect of leadership practice in Chinese schools. Dimmock (2018)

discusses the intricate dynamics of leadership succession and leadership culture in Chinese schools, shedding light on the division of leadership responsibilities between the principal and the Party Branch Secretary. He highlights the significant influence of the Communist Party on school leadership, emphasizing the Party's role in shaping leadership culture and succession practices. This aligns with the broader context of Chinese education, where the Communist Party plays a central role in guiding educational policies and practices. This discussion is further supported by Yang (2011), who provides a comprehensive overview of educational leadership in China, including the influence of the Communist Party on school leadership and educational policies. Additionally, studies such as those by Tsang (2000), Huang et al. (2015), and He (2023) discuss the historical development of education in China and the role of the Communist Party in shaping educational policies and practices. These studies contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the influence of the Communist Party on school leadership practices in China.

This discussion is further supported by Yang (2011), who provides a comprehensive overview of educational leadership in China, including the influence of the Communist Party on school leadership and educational policies. Additionally, studies (Tsang, 2000; Huang et al, 2015; He, 2023) discusses the historical development of education in China and the role of the Communist Party in shaping educational policies and practices. These studies contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the influence of the Communist Party on school leadership practices in China.

Balancing school-based management with centralized education governance is a key challenge for school leaders in China. Mok (2013) examines the impact of decentralized management on the administrative system in China's schools, shedding light on the strategies used by school leaders to maintain autonomy while meeting national standards. Zhou and Li (2020) complement this by exploring school leaders' implementation of national educational policy in China, providing insights into how schools balance autonomy with centralized oversight.

Additionally, research by Walker and Qian (2018) on school leadership in China provides valuable insights into the complexities and challenges faced by school leaders, highlighting the need for further research to enhance our understanding of leadership practices in these regions. Hallinger and Bryant (2013) discuss the challenges and opportunities of educational

leadership in China, emphasizing the importance of cultural factors in shaping leadership practices. Cheng and Cheung (2003) explore the impact of educational reforms on school leadership in China, providing insights into the evolving role of school leaders in response to changing educational policies and practices. These studies contribute to a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices in the Chinese educational context, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by school leaders.

● **The Leadership Traits**

In this study, leadership traits are defined as the innate qualities, characteristics, and behaviors exhibited by school leaders that influence their effectiveness and impact on school outcomes. These traits encompass a range of personal attributes, such as integrity, empathy, resilience, and visionary thinking, that are believed to contribute to effective leadership (Northouse, 2018).

Focusing on the traits of principals in high-performing schools, this study raises questions about understanding the leadership traits exemplified by their leadership mindsets and practices. The revelations about these traits could reveal their implications for both principals and broader school development, thereby providing insightful knowledge for subsequent research and practical school leadership implementation.

In the period prior to the 21st century, influential theories in educational management and leadership have largely focused on effective leaders, their traits, behaviors, and leadership styles. This body of research constitutes what is academically termed early leadership trait theories (Collins, 2001; Bryk, 2010; Green, 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Senge, 2006; Sergiovanni & Green, 2015). Leadership personality and trait studies in the 1940s were primarily concerned with distinguishing successful from unsuccessful leaders based on personality characteristics, while also exploring the contextual role of these characteristics (Stogdill, 1948). At the same time, however, early leadership trait theories were criticized for their ambiguous conclusions and the challenge of accurately identifying successful leaders based on specific traits alone (Gibbs, 1954). This overemphasis on the impact of a single trait on successful leadership was contextually challenging and inappropriate in a variety of circumstances, particularly in the rapidly evolving and complex educational landscape (Gibbs, 1954; Gardner, 1993; Dafit, 1999; Collins, 2001).

In contemporary educational management and leadership research, scholars have placed increased emphasis on how the characteristics, personalities, and traits of school leaders influence school effectiveness (Bass, 2005; Black, 2010; Collins, 2001). Similarly, studies examining the personal characteristics of school leaders (Collins, 2001; Marzano et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Nanus, 1995), the personality types required to promote effective work among school leaders (ISLLC, 2008), the exploration of leaders' beliefs and values (Fullan, 2002; Perkins, 1995; Reavis, 2008; Schulte & Howal, 2005), and the examination of leaders' ethical dimensions (Fullan, 1999; Goodlad, 1998; Sergiovanni & Green, 2015) have emerged in the 21st century. These studies extensively highlight aspects such as vision, knowledge, communication skills, commitment to fairness and justice, ethical credibility, responsibility, and sense of mission in school leaders (Zaccaro & Bader, 2004; Green, 2017; Day et al., 2011).

The researcher acknowledges that studies of leadership traits, both early and contemporary, as well as studies of leadership traits within educational institutions, have predominantly emerged within Western social and educational contexts. In this sense, Green (2017) has offered a thought-provoking perspective, pointing out that the direct transplantation of paradigms or theories originating in Western societies to non-Western contexts can lead to uncertainties in the conclusions drawn with regard to school leadership. With a growing body of evidence highlighting the differential influence of cultural backgrounds on leaders and their leadership practices, it has become imperative to consider the social and cultural settings in which leaders operate when examining leadership characteristics (Green, 2010; 2017). The present study gives equal emphasis to the characteristics of effective principals and exceptional school leaders, which justifies a comprehensive exploration, revelation, and analysis of both shared characteristics and individual traits, ethical qualities, and professional ethics.

Even if there may be commonalities in the leadership traits exhibited by school leaders across different cultural contexts, the expression and significance of these traits can vary based on cultural values, norms, and organizational contexts. Therefore, the focus of this study is not on determining whether school leaders in Western and non-Western societies display inherently different traits, but on understanding how these traits are perceived,

enacted, and valued within the unique cultural and organizational contexts of high-performing schools in Southwest China.

The Trait Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Distributed Leadership perspectives offer valuable frameworks for understanding leadership traits and behaviors. The Trait Theory emphasizes individual leaders' characteristics and their impact on leadership effectiveness. In contrast, Transformational Leadership theory focuses on the leader-follower relationship and how leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve common goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Distributed Leadership views leadership as a collective property, distributed among individuals within an organization, rather than solely residing in the leader (Spillane et al., 2004).

While these perspectives emphasize different aspects of leadership—individual characteristics, leader-follower relationships, and collective leadership—they are interconnected and may influence each other. These perspectives overlap, as all three engage with leaders' morality, characteristics, ideals, vision, and conceptions, which are connected to principals' traits and dispositions. The research design takes a holistic approach to understanding leadership in the studied context.

The examination of leadership traits and possible shared traits in this study is conducted through qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations, to gain a deep understanding of how these traits manifest in the leadership mindsets and practices of principals in high-performing schools in Southwest urban China. Through qualitative data collection and analysis, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced interactions between individual traits, relational dynamics, and collective leadership practices, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of leadership in high-performing schools in Southwest China.

Overall, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of leadership traits in high-performing schools in Southwest China, considering the complexities of leadership in a non-Western context. By examining leadership traits from multiple perspectives and considering the cultural and contextual factors that influence leadership, this study aims to contribute to the broader literature on educational leadership and provide insights for leadership practice in diverse cultural settings.

● **The Leadership and School Culture**

This section is dedicated to reviewing literature on “leadership and school culture” within the scope of educational leadership studies. It aims to explore the intricate relationship between leadership practices and school culture, highlighting how leadership behaviors and organizational culture intersect and influence each other within educational settings.

Organizational culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape the behavior and interactions of individuals within an organization (Schein, 1990). School culture, as a subset of organizational culture, refers specifically to the values, beliefs, and norms that characterize a school’s unique identity and influence its members’ behaviors and practices (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

On the other hand, cultural leadership models represent a broader area of study within educational and leadership research. These models focus on understanding how cultural contexts influence leadership practices and effectiveness. Cultural leadership models emphasize the importance of adapting leadership approaches to fit the cultural contexts in which leaders operate, recognizing that effective leadership is not universal but contingent on cultural norms and values (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hofstede, 2001).

The distinction between the research of cultural leadership models and the research of leadership and school culture lies in their focus and scope. While the research of cultural leadership models emphasizes broader cultural contexts and their influence on leadership practices, the research of leadership and school culture delves specifically into the unique cultural dynamics within educational settings, highlighting the interplay between leadership practices and school culture. Both areas of research are essential for understanding effective leadership in diverse cultural contexts and educational environments.

As mentioned above, this research clearly focuses on the leadership mindsets, practices, and traits of principals and their impact on educational institutions. At the same time, it would uncover potential leadership models that can promote effective school operation and development. However, this study inherently involves aspects intrinsic to schools, including organizational culture and the cultural context of the school. Factors such as organizational culture and context are of paramount importance in the study of school leadership. In the

1930s and 1940s, scholars systematically studied organizations and their internal cultures (Mayo, 1945; Barnard, 1938; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Over time, research on organizational culture in the second half of the 20th century progressively emphasized values (Ouchi, 1981), traits (Selznick, 1957), ideologies (Minzberg, 1989), and meaningful systems within organizations (Robbins, 1998). These paradigms have shaped the study of school culture (Ouchi, 1981; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Peter & Waterman, 1982). However, perspectives derived from the study of corporate and business organizational culture have been criticized for their lack of empirical support and for being limited to philosophical and rhetorical levels of analysis (Cusick, 1987; Marion, 2002).

Simultaneously, some research on school culture has deviated from patterns observed in research on corporate and business organizational culture by focusing on the distinctive contexts, issues, and interpersonal dynamics inherent in educational settings (Deal & Denny, 1982; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; 1999). Notably, these studies have not only provided conceptual frameworks for analyzing school cultures (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Deal, 1985), but have also converged discussions of school leadership and organizational culture. However, Bates (1987) emphasizes that organizational culture and leadership culture should not be conflated within educational institutions, stressing that school culture defies encapsulation into a single or distinctive type.

Around the beginning of the 21st century, research on school leadership and school culture has evolved, with increased attention to school effectiveness and related culture (Rossman et al., 1988; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Bandura, 1993, 1997). Meanwhile, specific investigations have deconstructed school culture through semiotic analysis, exploring its symbolic dimensions (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cunningham & Gresso, 1993). Other research has examined the interplay between school culture and interpersonal dynamics (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, 2003), trust and collaboration between leaders and subordinates (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), and the promotion of organizational coherence (Zand, 1997), as well as the cultivation of trusting cultures that facilitate teachers' professional growth and students' academic progress (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard, 2001, 2002).

In this context, the present study proposes that research conducted in the first half of the 20th century on the interplay between school leaders and organizational culture has provided

significant inspiration for this study. This includes a thorough examination of the relationship between school leaders and school culture, as well as an exploration of the impact of school leaders on school culture and its components. At the same time, the study recognizes that, similar to the critical review of theoretical models and paradigms mentioned earlier, theories developed and propagated in the previous century need to be examined for their relevance in the context of Chinese school leadership research in the 21st century. On the other hand, the study can serve as a mechanism to validate the applicability of these organizational culture theories in non-Western and 21st century societal contexts and shed light on their validity and characteristics in different cultural settings.

2.1.6 Cultural Diversity and Its Impact on Educational Leadership Studies

In this thesis, the researcher uses the term ‘Western’ to refer broadly to developed countries in Europe and North America. This categorization is not based on a binary Western versus Eastern world narrative but is used to distinguish between international leadership research, which includes research written in English and published in international journals, and China’s domestic research. It is important to note that the categorization of literature into these two types is based on the origin of the research theory, model, or paradigm, rather than the nationality of the researcher. For example, international educational leadership research may also include work by researchers with Chinese identity, but the research theory, model, or paradigm is originated in Western research societies.

Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge the considerable diversity within both Western and non-Western cultures. Theorization of leadership approaches requires ongoing contributions from scholars drawing from diverse cultural perspectives to enrich the theory. Scholars and practitioners alike acknowledge the significance of local contexts in shaping leadership practices. For instance, Walker and Dimmock (2002) highlight the influence of cultural and historical factors on leadership practices in China. They argue that the local context plays a crucial role in shaping leadership theories and practices. Similarly, Yin (2013) explores the concept of instructional leadership in Chinese secondary schools, demonstrating how cultural factors impact leadership practices.

Additionally, empirical studies such as Yin (2014) provide evidence of the relationship between principal leadership and teacher motivation in high-performing schools in Beijing, illustrating the importance of understanding local contexts in educational leadership. Dimmock and Walker (2005) compare educational leadership practices in East Asian countries, emphasizing the cultural nuances that influence leadership behaviors. Cheng and Chen (2018) present a theoretical framework for leadership in education, focusing on quality and equity, with a case study from Singapore that illustrates the application of the framework in a non-Western context.

To further explore the significance of local contexts and the translation of theory into practice, recent literature has examined the local manifestations of leadership models in non-Western contexts. Crawford (2014) discusses the cultural factors influencing the effectiveness of principals' school leadership, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of leadership in different cultural settings. Marsh and Kelly (2011) provide insights into educational leadership in China, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural nuances in leadership practices. Gunter, Hall, and Apple (2012) discuss the challenges and opportunities of leading schools in an era of globalization, highlighting the need for leaders to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. Similarly, Zeng (2018) explores the changing landscape of educational leadership in East Asia, emphasizing the need for leaders to understand and navigate cultural complexities. Kau and Cheng (2013) provide an international perspective on educational leadership and management in East Asia, highlighting the diversity of leadership practices in the region.

In conclusion, it is crucial to recognize and incorporate diverse perspectives and local contexts in leadership theories and practices, as this enriches our understanding and application of leadership approaches in different cultural settings.

2.2 The Review of Educational Management and leadership in China

In the previous section, the researcher examined research on theories and models relevant to this study within the framework of Western society, culture, and educational systems. In this

section, the researcher uses a chronological approach to examine the development of educational management and leadership research in China from the 20th century to the present. This section is divided into four subsections, each of which comprehensively evaluates research progress during different time periods: the early 1900s to the 1940s, the 1950s to the 1970s, the 1980s to the 1990s, and the period from 2000 to the present.

While the research history of modern Chinese educational management can be traced back to the early 20th century, the history of educational leadership, a sub-discipline within education, is comparatively shorter in China (Wang, 2017). Therefore, tracing the historical development of modern (or contemporary) educational leadership studies in China contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This retrospective review is particularly valuable for readers unfamiliar with the Chinese education system or educational management and leadership studies.

As mentioned above, this section consists of four subsections, which are arranged chronologically to explore the “four stages (Wang, 2010)” of Chinese educational leadership research.

The first part of this section describes the “first phase” of Chinese educational management research prior to the 1950s (Wang, 2010). During this period, the overarching theme was “Westernization” (Sun, 2009; Wang, 2010; Wang, 2017; Xu, 2011), which refers to the assimilation of Western ontological and methodological paradigms into Chinese academia. The second segment examines the “second stage,” commonly referred to as the “modernization stage,” which encompasses educational administration and management research from the 1950s to the late 1970s. The “professionalization stage” (Sun, 2009; Wang, 2017; Xu, 2011) constitutes the third stage, which spans from the late 1980s to the 1990s. The “fourth stage,” located in the 2000s, is referred to as the “internationalization” or “fusion” stage (Liang & Zhang, 2007; Xu, 2011), in which international perspectives and interdisciplinary methodologies became an integral part of school management and leadership studies in China (Wang, 2017).

2.2.1 Research on Educational Management in China: 1900s to 1940s

This section examines the emergence and development of research on Chinese educational management from the early 20th century, following the introduction of the modern schooling system in China. The introduction of the modern school system dates back to the early 1900s. In 1904, during the Qing Dynasty, the imperial government abolished the Keju (imperial examination system) and promoted the introduction of the modern (Western) schooling system (Sun, 2009). As a result, modern primary and middle schools were established under the jurisdiction of local governments.

In 1912, China's central government, established by the Kuomintang Party following the Xinhai Revolution that overthrew the Qing imperial government in 1911, fully adopted the Western schooling system, marking the modernization of Chinese education (Gao, 2009; Sun, 2009). This period also marked the beginning of research on modern Chinese education, including educational management and related subfields (Wang, 2017). In the same year, the Ministry of Education called on scholars from higher education institutions and local education authorities to collaborate on research covering a variety of topics, including pedagogy, management, and policy in the field of education (Wang, 2017).

In the 1910s, efforts were made by researchers and local education authorities (Wang, 2017). Some works on educational administration and school management appeared, which included discussions on the methods, outcomes, problems, and implications of adopting Western school management practices to adapt Chinese schools. However, the outbreak of civil war disrupted these government-led research efforts (Liu, 2008). In the 1920s, the escalating civil war resulted in the central government losing control over various regions. As a result, government-sponsored research in education management came to a halt, resulting in a lack of publications and archives (Wang, 2006).

However, despite a decline in government-sponsored research, some independent scholars, namely Xingzhi Tao (1928 in Sun, 2013), Heqin Chen (1926 in Sun, 2013), and Baichuan Liu (1926 in Sun, 2013), conducted studies on Western school management techniques and possible models for present-day Chinese school management. Following the end of the civil war, the government resumed its funding of educational research (Wang, 2006).

In the early 1930s, publications regarding modern educational administration and school management were increasing. These works discussed important subjects, such as defining

principals' responsibilities and schools' mission (Wang, 2017). In his work "*Educational Administration in China*," Chen (1932, in Sun 2013) analyzed the social, cultural, and spiritual functions of principals, highlighting their influence on promoting professionalism. Liu's noteworthy contributions to school administration and educational reform in rural China can be observed in publications such as "*A Journal of a Primary School Principal*" (1933) and "*Primary School Principals and Teachers*" (1935) (Liu, 1933, 1935 cited in Sun, 2013). During the 1930s, after three decades of implementing the modern school system in China, research shifted to adapting the Western model to meet the requirements of Chinese teachers and students (Wang, 2017).

In 1937, the Japanese invasion sparked the beginning of the Second World War in China, ultimately having a profound impact on Chinese society and academia. Xu and Ran (2015) examine the impact of the Japanese invasion in their book "*Chinese Educational Research During the Japanese Invasion*," calculating the academic toll caused by the Japanese invasion. Observing the cessation of Chinese educational research by the end of 1939, Xu and Ran (2015) attribute this to the lack of resources of the retreating Chinese government. This initiative occurred even though valuable research archives and records were destroyed or confiscated per the order of the Imperial Japanese government.

In 1945, excavations of the National Archives ruins in postwar China, where the Ministry of Education had stored its research files (Xu & Ran, 2015), revealed evidence that scholars from allied countries, including the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom, participated in a wartime educational assistance initiative. The program aimed to enhance teaching and management practices in schools with limited resources, sustaining educational quality.

Despite the challenges presented by wartime conditions, a few independent researchers (Xue, 1939; Lin, 1945) were able to publish works that examined the effects of modern educational administration and management. These works explored various perspectives of Chinese school management such as Confucianism and colonialism. They discussed the unique characteristics of Chinese school management and administration from a variety of perspectives, including Confucianism and colonialism. Lin's works "*Problems in Chinese Educational Reform*" (1941) and "*Path to Chinese Educational Reform*" (1945) emphasize the importance of adjusting Western school management strategies to meet the needs of

Chinese educators and students. Similarly, Liu warned educational authorities in his 1948 book *“Problems in National Educational Administration”* that the earlier westernization of educational administration and school management had been insufficient because the western schooling system had not been successfully localized. Hu (2014) observed that during that time, Chinese authorities had only a superficial understanding of “the western way,” resulting in a replication of formalities instead of the essence of Western education.

In conclusion, research on Chinese educational administration and school management started in the 1910s, in parallel with the introduction of the modern schooling system in the 1900s. Despite the challenging circumstances that Chinese scholars faced in the first half of the 20th century, they succeeded in conducting research, which analyzed the methodologies, impacts, and implications of westernized school management. These efforts laid the foundation for modern research on school management in China.

2.2.2 Research on Educational Management in China: 1950s to 1970s

This section examines educational management research in China during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, which followed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and the subsequent adoption of the socialist schooling system. This period is known as the “modernization stage” of Chinese educational management studies and is the second stage (Gao, 2009; Sun, 2009; Xu, 2011; Wang, 2010; Wang, 2017). While the analysis of Chinese school management using Western research approaches was introduced in the 1900s, research efforts were impeded by ongoing domestic conflicts and cross-national hostilities (Wang, 2010). Nevertheless, during the 1950s, a period of relative peace in China led to the revitalization of educational management research (Wang, 2017).

In 1946, a civil war broke out between the Communist Party of China (“CPC”) and the Nationalist Party (“KMT”) one year after the end of World War II, as both parties competed for authority over China. The CPC’s 1949 triumph resulted in the founding of the central government of the People’s Republic of China in Beijing, marking the beginning of China’s socialist political system. The same year the National People’s Congress (NPC), China’s supreme legislative body, convened and institutionalized the pursuit of socialist reform in all

public services in its first Five-Year Plan. Education, as a vital public service, took precedence among the central government's priorities (Gao, 2009).

- **The Influence of the Soviet Union (1950s)**

In the 1950s, China looked to the Soviet Union as a model for educational development. Soviet educational philosophy and pedagogy, emphasizing a strong centralized system and the promotion of technical education, influenced the early educational management strategies in China. This phase was marked by efforts to modernize and standardize the education system, aligning it with socialist principles and industrialization goals.

The early 1950s marked the commencement of various socialist education reform projects. Consequently, the modern socialist schooling system in China was developed using the Soviet Union model to address high illiteracy rates through the implementation of eight years of mandatory education (Gao, 2009; Sun, 2009).

By the mid-1950s, local educational authorities acquired or transformed private and religious schools, resulting in the central government's ownership and support of all educational institutions (Huang, 2003). By the end of the 1950s, significant challenges emerged despite the fulfillment of the primary mission of socialist schooling. Although there was an increase in student enrollment, faculty, and schools, concerns persisted regarding educational quality improvement (Zhao, 1997). Liu (1997) similarly attributed the shortcomings to the "Learn from the Soviet Union Movement." As China was part of the "Socialist faction," its government was deeply influenced by the ideology of the Soviet Union, which also affected the field of education (Yang & Yong, 1999). Liu (1997, p. 10) noted that "China created a comprehensive modern education system simply by transplanting educational laws, systems, and approaches from the Soviet Union but overlooked their disadvantages" (Liu, 1997, p. 10).

Since the early 1960s, issues related to teaching, learning, and management in primary and secondary schools became a central concern of the education ministry (Feng, 2016). As a result, researchers and practitioners were tasked with examining the origins and manifestations of these schooling challenges (Yang & Yong, 1999). School management

studies emerged in the early 1960s through the collaboration of researchers from normal universities and local education authorities (Xie, 2005).

During this period, educationalists from the Soviet Union significantly influenced China's educational landscape (Zhao, 1997). The works of Makarenko, Vygotsky, Kaiipob, and Sukhomlynsky received considerable recognition from Chinese researchers. As a result, assessments of Chinese teachers, principals, and schools were conducted within the "Soviet framework" (Lin, 2004). For example, Kaiipob's teaching principles and scientific pedagogy were used to evaluate school principals and teachers (Wang, 2007). Similarly, Sukhomlynsky's works on teaching and management, such as "*Conversations with Young Principals*" and "*100 Pieces of Advice for Teachers*," became textbooks for principals and teachers (Xu, 2019).

● **The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and Its Impact on Educational Management**

The Cultural Revolution, starting in 1966, had a profound impact on educational management in China. This turbulent period saw the radical transformation of the education system, with an emphasis on ideological purity and revolutionary fervor. Schools became battlegrounds for political struggles, leading to the disruption of traditional educational practices and management structures. Despite the significant research attempts conducted in the early 1960s, collecting research files and data from this period is difficult due to the "Cultural Revolution," an anti-intellectual movement from 1966 to 1976 that disrupted both educational order and research activities (Huang, 2003; Chen, 2005).

Feng (2016) noted that educational research was temporarily halted, and the curriculum for primary and secondary students focused on "socialist revolution and class struggle." School principals were viewed as "anti-revolutionary figures" because they had managerial power, similar to that of capitalists. Fortunately, this movement ended in 1976 with the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, China embarked on structural political and social reforms under the "reform and opening up" policy, revitalizing education and educational research (Sun, 2009). The Chinese government relaxed ideological restrictions on academia and

encouraged scholars to engage in international academic discourse (Gao, 2009). In the late 1970s, with the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan, a wide range of Western educational theories and ideas entered Chinese academia, including the field of school management studies (Gao, 2009; Sun, 2009).

- **Revitalization of the Education System (Late 1970s)**

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, the late 1970s witnessed a period of revitalization and reform in the education system. China shifted its focus towards rebuilding and modernizing education, with an emphasis on scientific and technological advancement. This phase marked a departure from the tumultuous Cultural Revolution era towards a more stable and progressive approach to educational management.

In 1977, the monthly journal “*Primary and Middle School Management*,” China’s first academic journal devoted to primary and middle school management, was established. At the same time, the works of Takayuki Ogino were translated by scholars at East China Normal University and systematically introduced to Chinese educationalists, marking the beginning of Chinese academia’s alignment with global developments in educational management (Sun, 2009). Gao (2009) contends that while research capacity in the East and West continued to differ significantly in the 1970s, greater Sino-American and Sino-European academic exchanges led to a better understanding of modern educational administration and school management. Wang and Chen (2010) assert that although Chinese educational management research was somewhat cut off from the international community for more than a decade, few scholars observed the “conceptual shifts in educational management” with an increased emphasis on school leadership.

In summary, the period from the 1950s to the 1970s in China was characterized by distinct phases in educational management. While the early 1950s saw the influence of Soviet educational models and efforts towards modernization, the Cultural Revolution brought about radical changes and disruptions to the education system. The late 1970s marked a

period of reform and revitalization, laying the foundation for the modern Chinese education system.

2.2.3 Research on Educational Management and Leadership in China: 1980s to 1990s

This subsection examines educational management research in the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by a deeper internationalization and professionalization of Chinese academia.

● Educational Management and Leadership Research in China: 1980s

The study of educational leadership in China during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s underwent a profound evolution, driven by changing academic landscapes, societal transformations, and comprehensive educational reforms. This comprehensive literature review reviews key findings from a variety of studies, providing insights into the multifaceted dimensions of educational leadership during these transformative periods.

The 1980s marked a pivotal period of reform and opening up in China, affecting various sectors, including education. The dynamic interplay between socioeconomic changes and educational dynamics prompted scholars to explore leadership practices in this evolving context. A recurring theme in these studies is the complex fusion of traditional cultural values and modern leadership requirements.

Despite the systematic introduction of the modern (Western) discipline of educational management to China in the late 1970s, a distinct leadership perspective remained unfamiliar to most Chinese scholars at the time (Zhao, 2009). The early 1980s, however, ushered in a transformative phase characterized by increased internationalization within Chinese academia and robust cross-country academic exchanges, particularly with Western countries. This transformation reshaped the landscape of educational management. Scholars in the field began to notice a disconnect between contemporary educational management theories and practical applications (Xu, 2011). Furthermore, Sun's seminal work, *"30 Years of Chinese Educational Management: Achievements, Characteristics, and Problems"* (2009), underscores the aspiration of Chinese educational researchers to follow the Western path.

Sun (2009) emphasizes that the dominant motif in Chinese educational management in the 1980s was the “introduction of Western knowledge into China”.

Liu (1985) and Wu (1989) explain the cultural dimensions of leadership in China, highlighting the enduring influence of Confucian principles on leadership practices. These studies illuminate how time-honored values such as authority, hierarchy, and collectivism permeate leadership roles and behaviors within the educational context. The educational reforms of the era increased the emphasis on principals as leaders. Zhang’s (1987) research illuminates the evolving responsibilities and challenges faced by principals during the transition to a decentralized educational framework. This study contributes to the understanding of how leadership roles were harmonized with the evolving policy landscape.

In addition, Wang and Li’s (1983) research explores the connection between principal leadership and teacher motivation, underscoring the profound influence of leadership on educators’ mindsets and performance. These findings underscore the central role of principals in fostering an environment conducive to motivation. Early research on leadership development and training is evident in Chen’s (1982) study of leadership training programs. The research evaluates the effectiveness of such programs in cultivating leadership skills and underscores the importance of equipping leaders with the necessary capacities.

● **Educational Management and Leadership Research in China: 1990s**

The 1990s witnessed transformative educational reforms in China, which prompted a dedicated exploration of the evolving role of educational leaders. Against the background of these changes, cultural heritage and contemporary leadership practices continued to play a critical role in shaping the educational landscape (Sun, 2013).

Chen (1997) and Xu (1999) examine the influence of cultural norms on educational leadership and highlight the distinctiveness of Chinese leadership practices, which are shaped by Confucian values of authority, hierarchy, and collective harmony. These studies highlight the role of principals as ethical mentors and authoritative figures within the school community. The importance of principal development and preparation is reinforced in Li and Cheng’s (1996) study, which emphasizes the role of leadership training programs in

preparing principals for the evolving educational terrain. This study underscores the power of professional development to increase leadership effectiveness.

Research by Wang and Liu (1998) highlights the evolving role of principals as instructional leaders who actively shape teaching and learning paradigms in schools. This emphasis on instructional leadership demonstrates the evolving expectations of principals in promoting effective pedagogy. Research on the relationship between leadership and school effectiveness has been particularly important during this period. Studies by Zhang and Zhao (1995) and Huang (1999) examined the influence of principal leadership on student outcomes and school performance, enriching our understanding of the impact of leadership on educational quality. Also, in the 1990s, decentralization of decision-making in education became a central concern. Wu and He's (1994) research examines the challenges and prospects of decentralization for principals, shedding light on the role of leadership in decision-making processes.

This period also witnessed an increased focus on international perspectives in educational leadership. Liu and Walker's (1996) research explored the infusion of Western leadership concepts into Chinese educational leadership practices, highlighting the complex interplay between global trends and local contexts. Challenges in leadership development and implementation persist. Studies by Yang and Sun (1992) and Li (1999) underscored the barriers to effective leadership development and advocated for mitigating the constraints within the Chinese educational system.

The 1990s witnessed a burgeoning research volume on educational leadership and management. This impetus motivated educational authorities in certain Western countries to initiate school reforms aimed at improving the quality of education through strengthened leadership and management (Bush, 2006). As a result, initiatives and policies aimed at strengthening educational leadership and management were introduced in schools in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). At the same time, the insight of Chinese educational researchers was captured by research confirming the central role of principals (Liang & Zhang, 2007).

The field of educational management experienced rapid growth in the 1990s (Zhao, 2009). The rapid increase in studies was driven by researchers, practitioners, and educational

authorities who were eager to unravel the impact of school leadership on students, teachers, parents, leaders, and communities in China and its international counterparts. Empirical evidence from both successful and less successful schools supported the centrality of school leadership (Qiu, 2007; Li & Hallinger, 2016). Meanwhile, there is leadership research that demonstrates the intertwined nature of leadership studies and practical school management (Huang, 2003).

Since the early 1980s, the majority of Chinese educational researchers have considered leadership as a “dimension of management”. However, only a few case studies focusing on school leadership have been published, while the formulation of leadership models and management patterns has remained sparse. Significantly, the formal recognition of educational leadership as a distinct field within the social sciences in China did not occur until the late 1990s (Huang, 2003; Sun, 2006, 2013).

In summary, the literature review of educational leadership research in China during the transformative decades of the 1980s and 1990s highlights the dynamic interplay between cultural legacies, educational policies, and leadership modalities. These eras witnessed the emergence of research on the roles, responsibilities, and development of educational leaders in an era of change. Findings from studies conducted during these periods provide a foundation for understanding the evolving trajectory of leadership in Chinese educational institutions. In addition, this extensive literature provides valuable directions for future research, policy development, and practice improvement.

2.2.4 Research on Educational Management and Leadership in China: 2000s to Present

This subsection explores studies of educational management and leadership in the Chinese context from the 2000s to the present. Over the past two decades, Western scholars’ discourse has primarily dominated the landscape of educational leadership research, exerting significant influence on the prevailing paradigms and concepts within the field (Walker & Qian, 2015). Sugure (2005) further highlights the remarkable prevalence of Western influence, particularly within the “Anglo-American axis.” This influence is evidenced by influential empirical and theoretical contributions, as well as renowned scholars in the field

of educational leadership from Western spheres. Since the 1990s, however, the influence of international literature has gradually increased (Walker & Dimmock, 2002).

The study of educational leadership in China in the 2000s has received increasing attention from researchers seeking to understand the dynamic evolution of leadership roles against the background of educational reforms and societal changes (Walker & Qian, 2014). The 2000s witnessed a significant period of educational reform in China, characterized by an increased emphasis on improving school leadership, teacher development, and student outcomes (Hallinger, 2014). In addressing the challenges of this changing landscape, researchers have sought to unravel the intricate complexities faced by educational leaders. A persistent theme in these studies underscores the significant influence of cultural and historical contexts on leadership practices (Hallinger et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2012; Walker & Qian, 2014).

Cross-cultural analyses and comparative perspectives on educational leadership contribute significantly to a deeper understanding, as exemplified in studies by Chen (2015) and Yan (2014). These studies underscore the characteristics of Chinese leadership practices, particularly in contrast to Western paradigms, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural contexts in leadership research. This cultural lens illuminates the profound importance of Confucian values and highlights the central role of principals as beacons of authority and guidance. The importance of leadership succession is particularly evident in the research conducted by Walker and Qian (2018). Their examination of leadership transitions in Chinese universities underscores the critical importance of strategic succession planning and the cultivation of robust leadership pipelines. This finding resonates with the broader discourse that encompasses the cultivation of sustainable leadership development within the Chinese educational landscape.

The study of leadership roles and practices, particularly those of teacher leaders, emerges as a prominent theme in Dai's (2017) study. The research emphasizes the burgeoning recognition of teacher leadership as a catalyst for improving school performance, signifying a transition to distributed leadership paradigms. Accordingly, He and Chen (2019) explore the evolving theories and practices of school leadership, shedding light on the shift from traditional hierarchical models to more collaborative and participatory frameworks.

Within the dynamic context of educational reform, Zhang and He's (2013) study highlights the focus on professional learning for school leaders. The research highlights the imperative of continuous learning and development for leaders, especially in light of policy changes and evolving educational contexts. These findings underscore the growing recognition of the need for continuous capacity building among educational leaders.

The interplay between policy guidance and principal leadership is examined meticulously by Wu and Ren (2015), revealing the intricate dynamics that govern the relationship between policy mandates and leadership behaviors. The research highlights the indispensability of policy coherence in aligning leadership practices with overarching educational goals. In addition, Wang's (2016) study highlights the role of distributed leadership in driving school improvement and adapting to reform initiatives. Cheng (2017) and Li (2012) provide international perspectives on educational leadership, highlighting the global trends shaping leadership practices in China. These studies underscore the intrinsic value of cross-cultural insights and the potential for knowledge transfer in the field of leadership development.

However, challenges remain. Gu and Day's (2013) and Li and Walker's (2010, 2012) studies highlighted barriers to teacher leadership and stressed the necessity of tackling constraints embedded in the Chinese educational context. These challenges range from cultural norms to policy constraints that limit the full realization of teacher leadership potential.

In conclusion, the literature on educational leadership research in China since the 2000s reveals the complex interplay between cultural heritage, policy reforms, and global influences. This era has witnessed a transition to collaborative and distributed leadership paradigms, reflecting the evolving needs of educational institutions and the broader educational landscape. While significant progress has been made, the literature also reveals ongoing challenges that require sustained research endeavors and targeted interventions. The exploration of educational leadership in China in the 2000s serves as a source of valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers committed to enhancing leadership effectiveness and promoting educational excellence.

2.3 The Critical Review of Existing Research on Educational Management and Leadership

This section offers a comprehensive critical review of the historical trajectory of educational management and leadership research, both within the Chinese context and on an international scale. The examination spans from the early 20th century to the present day, aiming to discern gaps, trends, and evolving paradigms within the realm of educational leadership.

2.3.1 Critical Review of Research on Education Management and Leadership in China

This subsection provides a critical review of the historical development of educational management and leadership research in China from the early twentieth century to the present. Through a comprehensive analysis of research trends across different time periods, this review highlights significant observations and identifies gaps, limitations, and areas for future research in the field of educational leadership in the Chinese context.

In the early twentieth century, Chinese educational leadership research demonstrated efforts to assimilate Western models into Chinese contexts. However, there is a noticeable gap resulting from a lack of rigorous investigation into the differences inherent in Chinese and Western societies. The assimilation of Western management techniques has occurred without a careful evaluation of their congruence with China's unique cultural, social, and political milieu. Academic discourse focused primarily on the adoption of Western methodologies, with relatively little emphasis on questioning their appropriateness. This oversight created a gap in the critical assessment of the fit between Western theories and China's specific setting.

A further divide is evident regarding indigenous Chinese models or theories of educational management. The research landscape continues to be dominated by Western theoretical frameworks, underscoring the lack of efforts to develop, validate, and refine Chinese models adapted to the specific needs of Chinese educational institutions. The lack of indigenous

theoretical underpinnings has perpetuated constraints on the advancement of educational management research.

Furthermore, much of the research, theories, and findings in literature originated in the 20th century. However, as the 21st century ushered in transformative social changes, increased globalization, and rapid technological advancements, a noticeable gap emerged. The literature revealed a distinct lack of research efforts focused on updating or adapting existing models to the contemporary educational landscape. The failure to address the evolving realities of the 21st century raises pertinent questions about the relevance and applicability of these models within the context of modern educational leadership practices.

This study takes a strategic stance in addressing these identified gaps and limitations. By critically evaluating the suitability of existing models within the Chinese educational milieu of the 21st century, this study aims to explore their relevance to the socio-cultural and technological intricacies of the contemporary era. Furthermore, the research seeks to catalyze the development or adaptation of models that can effectively address the demands of contemporary school management and accommodate evolving societal dynamics. In addition, this research seeks to delve into the practices of high-performing Chinese school leaders, with the overarching goal of uncovering indigenous leadership patterns that serve as a bridge between theoretical constructs and pragmatic implementation.

2.3.2 Critical Review of Research on Educational Management and Leadership in the Western World

In this subsection, a comprehensive critical analysis is undertaken to explore the evolution of educational management and leadership research in the Western world. This examination encompasses the emergence of early educational management theories to the current landscape, with a critical focus on identifying gaps, trends, and evolving paradigms within the field.

The historical development of educational management and leadership research in the Western world initially revolved around the establishment of principles of organizational management, drawing inspiration from business and industrial management theories. In

particular, scholars such as Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol laid the groundwork for these emerging theories by advocating scientific management and administrative principles, respectively. These contributions laid the initial groundwork for understanding organizational efficiency and hierarchical structures in educational institutions.

The mid-20th century witnessed the growth of leadership theories aimed at understanding leadership behaviors, styles, and effectiveness in educational contexts. Prominent among these were trait, behavioral, and contingency theories. However, it is crucial to emphasize that while these theories have significantly influenced Western discourse on educational leadership, a critical examination reveals their limited consideration of contextual nuances and cultural variations that potentially impact leadership dynamics.

As the educational landscape continued to evolve, so did the paradigms of educational management and leadership research. The beginning of the 21st century brought a profound shift toward more inclusive and distributed leadership models. This shift was marked by a growing recognition of the role of teachers and diverse stakeholders as leaders within educational institutions. In addition, an increased emphasis on instructional leadership underscored the importance of pedagogical expertise within the leadership repertoire.

Despite the advances and refinements in Western educational management and leadership research, certain gaps remain. A critical review reveals a limited exploration of the socio-cultural, economic, and political influences on leadership practices. The applicability of Western models to diverse global contexts, including non-Western educational systems, remains a compelling question.

Furthermore, even as the discourse evolves to include collaborative and distributed leadership models, further research is needed to determine the extent of practical implementation and the barriers to its realization. One important aspect that emerges is the relatively unexplored impact of digitalization and technology on leadership practices, which calls for a contemporary perspective in line with the digital age.

In an era characterized by rapid globalization and cross-cultural interactions, the lack of cross-cultural analysis and comparative studies in Western educational management and leadership research is notable. Moreover, as societal norms and educational structures

continue to change, the discipline is poised for studies that critically evaluate how leadership models adapt to changing educational paradigms, shifting student demographics, and evolving definitions of teaching and learning in the digital age.

This study underscores that while Western educational management and leadership research has evolved significantly, there remains a call for increased critical analysis and inquiry. The current context calls for research that not only acknowledges the complexity of cross-cultural contexts, but also actively questions the compatibility of established theories with the demands of an increasingly networked and technologically driven educational environment. By fostering such efforts, the field of educational leadership and management can seek to enrich its perspectives and insights and contribute significantly to the global discourse on educational leadership and management.

Chapter 3 Methodology

In this chapter, the researcher explains the methodology of the study, which includes the philosophical foundations of social science, research design, validity, reliability, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

This chapter comprises eight subsections. The first subsection provides an overview of the fundamental philosophical components of scientific research. The next subsection justifies the adoption of bounded relativism as an ontological foundation in this study. In the third subsection, the researcher explains the rationale for adopting constructionism as the chosen epistemological framework. The fourth subsection establishes interpretivism as the underlying theoretical perspective for this study. The fifth subsection provides the justification for employing a qualitative case study as the chosen research method. In the sixth subsection, the study addresses the five core elements proposed by Yin (2018) for effective case study research. The seventh subsection outlines the strategies used to ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. Finally, the concluding subsection addresses the ethical considerations guiding this researcher's efforts.

3.1 The Philosophical Foundations of Scientific Research

In this section, the researcher discusses the philosophical foundations of the study, providing an overview of the principles of scientific research and rationale for implementing a specific philosophical perspective.

As this leadership study falls within the scope of social science, the inclusion of a philosophical discourse of social science is crucial for readers to comprehend the metaphysical concepts and theoretical perspectives underpinning this research. Additionally, to meet the rigorous standards of scientific research, the researcher discusses the ontology, epistemology, and theoretical perspectives adopted in the study, presenting, and explaining the key elements within the “scaffolded” structure of social science (see Figure 3.1).

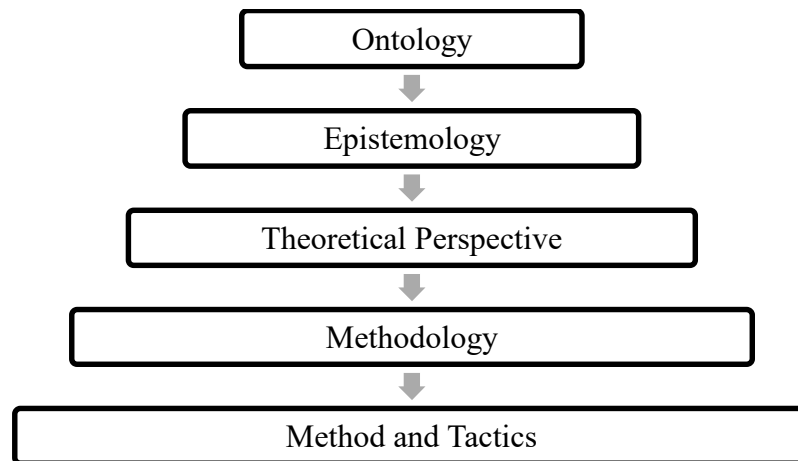


Figure 3.1: The “Scaffolded” Structure of Philosophical Discourse in Social Science

Following the philosophical discourse of social science, the researcher provides a detailed illustration of the research design, encompassing the research questions, study propositions, case selection, data generation, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

In the realm of science, both within social and natural contexts, philosophy serves as the foundation for human discovery behaviors (Rosenberg, 1995). As explained by Spirkin (1983), philosophy provides principles for theoretical thinking, guidance for cognition, reflection for self-awareness, and methods for acquiring knowledge. While the classification of fundamental elements of social science philosophy remains a disputed topic, it is commonly acknowledged that two pillars or branches of philosophy, namely “Ontology” and “Epistemology,” form its core (Giddens, 1987; Martin & McIntyre, 1994).

Social scientists recognize the former as “the study of being,” dealing with truth, existence, and reality, while the latter is known as “the study of knowledge,” focusing on the validity, scope, general basis, and acquisition of knowledge (Hollis, 1994; Rosenberg, 1995; Kincaid, 2012). From ontology and epistemology, which are considered “the root of scientific research,” arise theoretical perspectives that offer guidance, views, and approaches to understanding the world (Spirkin, 1983; Guba, 1990; Moon & Blackman, 2014). These theoretical perspectives assist researchers in developing a philosophical stance, contextualizing logic, and criteria, and informing the methodology.

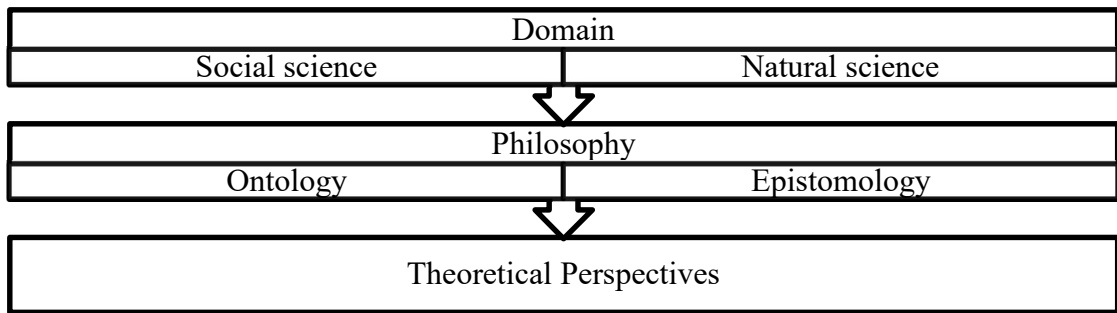


Figure 3.2: The Philosophical Hierarchy of Science

Compared to natural science, the philosophy of social science, including its principles and elements, tends to be more ambiguous and vaguer due to the diversified interpretations and multifaceted nature of social science concepts (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Cunliffe, 2011; Tang, 2011). Consequently, some researchers from the natural science domain (Mascia et al., 2003; Newing, 2010) suggest that adopting a “scientific approach” from the natural sciences can help both researchers and users of research comprehend certain social research’s hypothesis, design, conduct, analysis, and outcomes adequately.

Since the early 20th century, various social science disciplines have been significantly influenced by natural science principles, philosophical perspectives, and methodologies, both in theory and practice (Newing, 2010). For example, Frederick Taylor’s work “*Principles of Scientific Management*” (Taylor, 1911, cited in Combe, 2014) published in 1911, is considered a “milestone” in modern management research, with introduction of concepts, principles, and guidelines from natural science, marking the scientification process of management research (Combe, 2014).

In the latter half of the 20th century, adopting a “scientific” approach became embraced by social science researchers who sought to incorporate outlooks and approaches from the natural sciences into their social research, driven by the growing influence of multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Kuhn’s publication “*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*” (1962) argues that paradigm shifts in science, both in the natural and social contexts, are inevitable and lead to new paradigms, refreshing previous scientific perspectives and redirecting research pathways (Kuhn, 1962).

Kuhn’s philosophy reflects the scientification progress of sociological research since the 1960s, when a series of interdisciplinary and theory-borrowing studies were conducted in

Western contexts (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Miskel and Hoy (2010) suggest that many philosophical and theoretical concepts in “educational management and leadership” today have their roots in modern management research from the 1970s. Sergiovanni et al. (2008) note attempts to borrow theories from management, leading to “paradigm shifts” and the formulation of new paradigms to explain and explore changing facts, theories, and concepts in the dynamic context of schools.

In conclusion, it is necessary for this researcher to clarify the ontological epistemological and theoretical perspectives employed in this study to meet the fundamental requirements of scientific research, respond to the scientification progress of sociology, and map the conceptual shift in modern educational leadership studies. With the chosen ontological position and epistemological lens, the researcher can establish a legitimate methodology with an optimal method.

3.2 The Ontological Stance: Bounded Relativism

In this section, this researcher discusses the ontologies within the scope of social science, providing an overview of their core concepts, applications, and impacts. Later, the rationale for selecting bounded relativism as the ontological position for this educational leadership study is articulated.

Ontology, often described as the “study of being,” forms an essential aspect of scientific inquiry, focusing on the truth and facts of existence. It encompasses four main positions on the ontological continuum: realism, internal realism, relativism, and nominalism (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Colline, 1983; Putnam, 1987; Cunliffe, 2001) (See figure 3.3).

Four Positions of Ontology				
	Realism	Internal Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Truth	Single truth	Acknowledges the existence of truth, but it may be	Accepts the existence of multiple truths	Truth, is often seen as a product of

		ambiguous or subjective		human convention or agreement
Facts	Holds that facts exist independently of observers and can be objectively disclosed	Views facts as concrete but potentially inaccessible directly, influenced by perspective	Asserts that facts are interpreted based on the observer's perspective or context	Descriptions or labels humans apply to concrete objects or experiences

Figure 3.3 Continuum of the Ontological Positions

In the realm of science, philosophical debates primarily revolve around realism and relativism (Feyerabend, 1981; Morton, 1996; Jonson & Gary, 2010), with less attention given to internal realism and nominalism due to their limited applicability, mainly in the study of inanimate or intangible objects (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Cooper & Burrell, 1988). Realist and relativist ontological positions are more widely applicable to research on living or non-living entities (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Realism asserts the existence of only one truth, independent of human observation (Feyerabend, 1981). In contrast, relativism suggests that multiple truths may exist, as the understanding and perception of any phenomenon depend on observers' viewpoints (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Nominalism, while denying the independent existence of abstract entities, recognizes the existence of concrete entities and considers abstract entities to be mere names or linguistic conventions used to describe or categorize concrete objects and experiences (Latour & Woolgar, 1979).

Nuances exist in the categorization of ontological positions between social science and natural science, owing to the interpretability of research subjects and the applicability of research methods (Bhaskar, 1977; Blaikie, 2007). However, research in social science, particularly studies involving human subjects or societal topics, has been criticized by natural scientists for being "subjective" in handling interactions with subjects and interpreting data (Giddens, 1987; Chalmers, 1988). Crotty (1998) challenged the "realist-centered" dogmatism of natural science, as it is impossible to perfectly map individuals' minds. Similarly, Collins (1983) and Archer (1998) criticized the "supremacy of ontological

realism,” arguing that the realities of society, history, and culture are difficult to capture due to their ever-changing nature.

Conceptual Categories of the Ontological Reality				
Realism: One reality exists			Relativism: More than one reality	
Naïve Realism	Structural Realism	Critical Realism	Bounded/Cultural Relativism	Relativism
Reality can be known by using a proper method	Reality can be mapped by a scientific theory, but uncertainties in reality remain	Reality exists but can only be revealed by conducting a broad critical examination	Reality can be shared in a bounded group, but a different group may have a different reality	Reality can only exist in the mentality of human beings

Figure 3.4 Conceptual Categories of the Ontological Reality

Figure 3.4 above shows different conceptual categories of realism and relativism. Naïve realism indicates that one true reality exists, and human perception of the physical world is not mediated by the perception of other entities (Fisher, 2010; Brewer, 2010). Structural realism, introduced into contemporary philosophy of science by John Worrall in 1989, acknowledges that true reality can be identified, but the essence of reality might vary (Worrall, 1989; Landry et al., 2012). Another type of realism, critical realism, formulated in the 1980s, merges the notions from transcendental realism and critical naturalism, insisting that reality is unobservable and unconnected with any human cognition or conception (Bhaskar, 1979; Rutzou, 2018).

On the other side of the ontological spectrum, different types of relativism also view the nature of reality differently. Although relativists tend to argue that realities are “local and specific constructed and co-constructed” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 193), their definitions of individual differ. For example, Moon and Blackman (2014, p. 1170) propose the concept of bounded relativism, which believes that “one shared reality exists within a bounded group, but across groups different realities exist.” The groups can refer to different cultures or

different moral groups (e.g., anthropocentrism and ecocentrism). On the other hand, relativism believes that a shared reality does not exist. Rather, each individual constructs his or her own reality.

By reviewing various ontological perspectives, it is evident that diverse and potentially conflicting notions of reality exist (Crotty, 1998). This study embraces the ontological stance of bounded/cultural relativism, acknowledging the capacity of principals (school leaders) in China, as a cultural group, to collectively share a unique reality regarding leadership, distinct from their counterparts in Western contexts (Blaikie, 2007). This choice is grounded in the recognition that principals, operating within a specific cultural context, have the capacity to shape and perceive distinct realities through their daily leadership practices. These realities may encompass values and effects that diverge not only from each other but also from those observed in Western contexts (Cohen et al, 2018).

Bounded relativism allows for the exploration of diverse “truths” within a group of school principals. In this context, a “bounded group” refers to principals who share similar leadership practices, mindsets, and cultural influences, which collectively define their approach to leadership within their specific school setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study acknowledges that principals who are less successful in their roles may operate under different assumptions or constraints, which could place them within a different bounded group. Thus, the definition of ‘a bounded group’ in this study is fluid, recognizing that within the broader cultural context, variations in leadership success and approach may create distinct sub-groups among principals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

While embracing bounded relativism as the ontological lens, it is important to acknowledge potential limitations. The subjectivity inherent in the constructionist approach might lead to diverse interpretations of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, as a novice researcher, this study might be influenced by the researcher’s biases. To mitigate these potential biases, robust data analysis methods and multiple perspectives were employed, including checking the alignment between school leaders’ claims, actions, and the factual leadership impact verified and documented by the researcher, to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Regarding constructivism and interpretivism, this study considers them as different but complementary levels within the research approach (Crotty, 1998). While some researchers may use these terms interchangeably, this study acknowledges the differing perspectives and aims to demonstrate how these approaches can work together in this context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach is based on the understanding that there are alternative points of view within the academic community (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Through this study, the aim is to delineate and reconstruct the mindset, practices, and impacts of successful principals. This research also provides an opportunity to validate, reflect on, and potentially advance existing leadership models or propose new theoretical innovations to elucidate the intricacies of effective leadership. By adopting bounded relativism as the ontological stance, this study seeks to enhance the understanding of effective educational leadership within the particular cultural and societal context of high-performing schools in urban Southwest China, which is the focus of investigation.

3.3 The Epistemological Lens: Constructionism

Ontology and epistemology are foundational elements of philosophical inquiry in research, often intertwining rather than existing in isolation. An ontological position shapes an epistemological stance. Like the ontological spectrum, a variety of epistemological perspectives exist. First, objectivism is closely associated with realism (Crotty, 1998). Objectivists posit that “reality exists independent, or outside, of the individual mind” (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1171) and that an objective truth, empirically verifiable and unaffected by social factors, can be discovered (Crotty, 1998).

On the other end of the spectrum, subjectivism plays a role. Subjectivism contends that knowledge is “always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21). For subjectivists, the meaning is “imposed on the object by the subject” rather than emerging from the interaction between subject and object (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Subjectivism aligns closely with ontological relativism, as both positions center on the individual and explore how personal experiences shape one’s perception of reality.

For this study, the epistemological position of constructionism has been selected, aligning well with the chosen ontological stance of bounded relativism. Constructionism rejects the notion that objective truth awaits discovery. Instead, “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). In the context of educational leadership, constructionists believe that meaning is constructed, and different individuals may interpret the same phenomenon in various ways. The construction of meaning and the understanding of the world depend on one’s social, cultural, and historical background (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

While embracing constructionism as the epistemological lens, this researcher is aware of potential limitations. The subjectivity inherent in the constructionist approach might lead to diverse interpretations of data. Moreover, as a novice researcher, this study may be influenced by the researcher’s biases. To address these potential concerns, robust data analysis methods and multiple perspectives were employed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. This included cross-referencing school leaders’ claims, actions, and the factual leadership impact verified and documented by the researcher.

To reveal the leadership mindset, practices, impact, and corresponding traits manifested by successful principals at a specific high-performing school in China’s nine-year compulsory education system, this study adopted a constructionist epistemological perspective. Constructionism aligns well with the chosen ontological stance of bounded relativism, emphasizing the contextual understanding of a defined problem and exploring the interplay between subject and object.

By understanding the school setting, the leadership team’s dynamics, and their interaction with the school context, this study aimed to gain insights into the multifaceted reality of effective school leadership. Constructionism was deemed suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the social construction of meaning in the context of educational leadership. This choice of epistemology is informed by its relevance to the research questions and the potential to shed light on the complexities of leadership practices and their impact in the specific educational setting under investigation.

3.4 The Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

In the preceding sections, the researcher identified the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study. As mentioned earlier, the chosen ontological position and epistemological lens inform the philosophical perspective that guides the researcher's methodology and research practices. In this section, the rationale behind the selection of the theoretical perspective will be elucidated, considering the integration of philosophical foundation and methodological applicability.

According to Crotty (1998, p. 66), a theoretical perspective refers to "the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology." In other words, it encompasses a set of assumptions that shape the research approach. Like ontology and epistemology, there exists a spectrum of theoretical perspectives. Moon and Blackman (2014) depict this spectrum, ranging from deductive knowledge acquisition to inductive knowledge acquisition.

On the deductive end, knowledge is more objective and generalizable, with experimental research design being the primary method for knowledge production. Researchers adhering to this perspective often adopt a positivist theoretical framework, which posits that objects have inherent meanings independent of any consciousness, and knowledge can only be accurate when gained through objective scientific methods (Crotty, 1998).

On the inductive end, knowledge is considered more value-laden and contextually unique. Under this perspective, naturalistic research design is the primary means of knowledge acquisition, and the focus is on understanding observed phenomenon. Researchers embracing this perspective may adopt an interpretive approach. While positivism seeks to identify one true knowledge, the interpretive approach seeks "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).

Since this study falls within the realm of social science, adopting the bounded relativist and constructionist position, the theoretical perspective should lie on the inductive side of the spectrum and embrace an interpretive approach. According to Schwandt (2000, p. 191), from an interpretivist standpoint, "what distinguishes human (social) action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful." As Schwandt (2000)

summarizes, to comprehend social action, the interpreter should consider it meaningful, respect and stay faithful to the actors' life worlds, and acknowledge the role of human subjectivity in knowledge and action. To achieve such understanding, the interpreter should not only focus on the particular action but also seek to grasp the entire context in which the action takes place (Outhwaite, 1986). This concept aligns with the notion of a "hermeneutic circle," which suggests that the interpreter should move "from the text to the historical and social circumstances of the researcher, attempting to reconstruct the world in which the text came to be and to situate the text within it – and back again" (Crotty, 1998, p. 95).

In this study, the researcher uses an interpretive approach to understand principals' leadership mindsets, practices, and impacts. Adopting an interpretive case study allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the rich and complex experiences of the school principals and their leadership practices. Through in-depth exploration of individual cases, this approach sought to uncover the unique and contextually situated "truths" that exist within each principal's leadership journey.

The interpretive case study is a valuable theoretical perspective for this study as it enables the researcher to capture the nuanced perspectives of the principals and interpret their experiences in their own words and actions. By contextualizing their leadership within the specific school setting and cultural milieu, a comprehensive understanding of effective educational leadership in the Chinese nine-year compulsory education system can be attained. Moreover, the interpretive lens offered an opportunity to identify commonalities and differences among the principals, which can contribute to refining existing leadership theories or proposing new theoretical innovations.

In this way, the theoretical perspective of interpretive case study complements the ontological stance of bounded relativism and the epistemological lens of constructionism, forming a cohesive and comprehensive approach to exploring educational leadership and its realities within the selected context.

3.5 The Methodological Approach: Qualitative Case Study

After establishing the broad theoretical perspective, this section highlights the methodology used in this study, which adopts a case study approach. This method proves to be highly valuable in achieving a deep understanding of complex phenomena within real-world contexts (Bakker, 2012, p. 487). This study seeks to capture the multifaceted reality of educational leadership within a high-performing school in China's nine-year compulsory education system. Using a case study design, this research explored the leadership mindset, practices, impact, and traits of the principal, resulting in a comprehensive and nuanced analysis.

A case study serves as a learning process and a culmination of that learning (Stake, 1994, p. 237). This study focused on a particular school and its principals, exploring the intricacies and distinctiveness of their leadership practices. The case study approach takes a holistic perspective, encompassing the broader context in which principals operate, as well as the complexities of their daily interactions. The study aims to comprehend the case in its real-world context (Yin, 2018, p. 15), which necessitates a consideration of the dynamic interplay between the leadership actions of principals and the societal, cultural, and political influences that shape their practices.

The adoption of an interpretive case study aligns harmoniously with the research's philosophical foundation and objectives. Interpretivism underscores the significance of comprehending the subjective meanings attributed to social actions, enabling a profound exploration of human experiences and perspectives (Schwandt, 2000). This approach resonates perfectly with the study's aim to comprehend the principals' leadership mindset, practices, and impact within the cultural and societal milieu of China's compulsory education system.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the principals' leadership, this study employed semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations as the primary data collection methods. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight the value of semi-structured interviews in fostering open-ended discussions, unearthing principals' beliefs, approaches, and reflections on effective educational leadership. Through these interviews, the researcher gained access to the principals' perspectives and the meanings they attached to their leadership practices. Semi-structured interviews fostered open-ended discussions with the principals, unearthing their beliefs, approaches, and reflections on effective educational leadership.

Likewise, the non-participant observations, as advocated by Creswell and Poth (2017), played a complementary role, granting the researcher first-hand insights into the principals' daily operations. By shadowing the principals during administrative meetings and their regular activities, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of their leadership practices, interactions with staff, and decision-making processes. These observations presented a unique opportunity to identify potential discrepancies between what the principals espoused and enacted, thereby enriching the understanding of their leadership practices.

The data collected from semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations employ thematic analysis. This approach involved identifying key themes and patterns within the data, contributing to a comprehensive narrative that illuminated the principals' mindsets and practices. The interpretive nature of this analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of the meanings attached to leadership actions, shedding light on the principals' underlying motives and values.

However, like any research methodology, the interpretive case study approach has inherent limitations. The study's findings may not be readily generalizable to other contexts due to the focus on a specific high-performing school and its principals. Nevertheless, the emphasis on in-depth exploration and context-specific understanding aligns with the study's goals, prioritizing the richness of insights over broad generalization.

To minimize potential subjectivity, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process. Reflexivity involves recognizing the researcher's position and potential biases stemming from their social, cultural, and educational background, as well as personal life and work experiences. This practice enhances the transparency and rigor of the research.

Overall, by embracing an interpretive case study as the methodological approach, this researcher sought to gain profound insights into the principal's leadership mindset, practices, and impact. Through a holistic exploration of the realities of educational leadership within a specific cultural and societal context, this study aims to contribute significantly to the broader understanding of effective educational leadership within China's compulsory education system.

3.6 The Research Design of This Study

In the preceding sections, this researcher has explicated the chosen ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology for this study. All these elements were selected to meet the rigorous standards of scientific research and to effectively explore principal leadership within the Chinese education context. In this section, the researcher further elaborates on the specific design of the case study employed in this research.

According to Yin (2018, p. 27), the design of a case study research should encompass five key components: “a case study’s questions, its propositions, its case(s), the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings.” To be more specific, the design should address the definition of research questions, the identification of study propositions, the selection of cases, the generation of data, and the analysis of data. In the following subsections, this researcher will discuss each of these components in relation to the current study.

- **Pilot Study**

The author conducted a pilot study to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the research design, data collection methods, and instruments before full-scale implementation. The pilot study aimed to identify and address potential issues or challenges that could arise during the main study, ensuring its smooth execution and validity. Additionally, it served to collect information about the school and the local education area, providing valuable background knowledge for both the researcher and readers unfamiliar with the Chinese schooling system.

Firstly, three short interviews were conducted with officials from the Local Education Authority (LEA), including individuals selected based on their roles within the education bureau offices and research divisions. These officials were identified due to their direct involvement in the targeted school and local educational settings, ensuring they could provide valuable insights relevant to the study.

Secondly, the research design was undertaken in a school that did not participate in the main research. Two interviews were conducted with Head Principal Suie of CHP to assess the validity and effectiveness of the methodology, ensuring that it could be successfully implemented in different school settings.

During the pilot study, these interviews were also conducted to validate the effectiveness of the interview protocols and questions in eliciting relevant and insightful responses from the participants. The responses from these interviews were instrumental in refining the research focus and validating the methodology. The insights gathered provided a deeper understanding of the local educational context and leadership practices, which were crucial in shaping the main study's direction and ensuring the reliability of the data collection process.

Furthermore, the insights and perspectives gathered from the interviews during the pilot study provided valuable preliminary data that contributed to the overall depth and richness of the findings in the thesis. These initial findings helped shape the direction of the main study and provided a foundation for further exploration and analysis.

The outcomes of the pilot study indicated the effectiveness of the research design in generating and collecting research data. However, the study also highlighted the need to manage time more effectively while shadowing the principals' daily agendas and arrangements. It underscored the importance of familiarizing oneself with the layout of the school and the positions of different rooms, as well as the necessity of contacting and communicating with principals effectively. Additionally, the pilot study emphasized the importance of refining techniques for taking field notes and phrasing interview questions more concisely.

Based on the pilot study's findings, several adjustments were made to the research instruments. For example, interview questions were refined to better capture nuanced responses, and the observation schedules were modified to ensure more comprehensive data collection during the main study. These modifications were crucial in enhancing the overall reliability and validity of the research process.

The pilot study was included and approved in the ethics application, adhering strictly to the University's guidelines for good research conduct, BERA's ethics guidelines, and the laws and regulations in both the UK and China.

3.6.1 Research Questions

The central focus of this study is to explore the leadership qualities of successful principals in specific high-performing primary or middle schools located in a specific urban area in southwest China. The study aimed to analyze the principals' leadership mindsets, practices, impacts, and manifested traits within the context of educational leadership. To accomplish this, three major sets of research questions were formulated to probe different dimensions of principal leadership:

1. What constitutes the leadership mindset of principals, and how does it reflect their leadership traits?
2. What are the leadership practices employed by principals, and how do these practices demonstrate their leadership traits?
3. What is the impact of principals' leadership on their schools, and how does it reflect specific leadership patterns?

These three sets of questions served as the guiding framework for investigating the dynamics of leadership within the identified school, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the pivotal role principals play in achieving high performance within the educational context.

3.6.2 Study Proposition

As suggested by Yin (2018), a case study requires well-defined research questions to outline the areas of interest and study propositions to guide the investigation process. Yin (2018, p. 27) describes a proposition as an idea that "directs attention to something that should be

examined within the scope of the study.” It reflects the theoretical concepts being reviewed and helps to identify the cases and relevant information to be collected.

In this chapter, the researcher identifies three major theoretical themes relevant to this research: principal leadership, school performance, and educational leadership models. To further refine the study propositions, this researcher formulated the following:

- Proposition on Principal Leadership: Successful principals at the identified high-performing school in urban region of Southwest China would demonstrate a distinctive leadership mindset that reflected their leadership traits and beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines.
- Proposition on School Performance: The leadership practices employed by successful principals could significantly influence the overall performance of their schools, contributing to academic achievements, teachers’ continuous professional development, comprehensive student development, and trust between families and communities.
- Proposition on Educational Leadership Models: The effective leadership patterns exhibited by successful principals align with specific educational leadership models or theories, providing insights into the applicability and effectiveness of different leadership approaches within the Chinese educational context.

These study propositions serve as guiding principles for examining the data and findings collected during the case study. By focusing on these key areas, this research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics and their influence on high performance within the specific educational setting under study. Additionally, the propositions provided a structured framework that ensured the data collection methods and analysis remained consistent with the overarching research objectives. This alignment not only enhanced the coherence of the research process but also ensured that the insights drawn from the data directly addressed the core themes of leadership effectiveness and school performance in the context of high-achieving educational institutions.

3.6.3 Case Selection

The case selection process is a critical component of the research design, as it defines the unit of analysis and directly impacts the validity of the findings (Yin, 2018). In this study, the decision to adopt a single-case study design was driven by the need for an in-depth exploration of the leadership practices and mindsets of school principals within the specific context of high-performing schools in urban Southwest China.

Initially, a purposeful selection strategy was employed to identify the top 20% of schools based on a comprehensive performance assessment conducted by local education authorities (LEAs) and other government-sponsored research institutions. The definition of high-performing schools in this study is provided in the Introduction (Pp. 30-32). This assessment considered various criteria, including academic performance, student well-being, parental satisfaction, and instructional quality, among others. The purpose of this initial selection was to ensure that the study focused on schools that exemplify high performance within the targeted region. Access to this performance data was granted through formal research channels and with the necessary permissions from the relevant LEAs.

Given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including restrictions on travel and access to multiple research sites, the original plan for a multiple-case study was deemed impractical. Consequently, the research design was adjusted to focus on an in-depth single-case study. This decision was further justified by the goal of achieving theoretical saturation through a detailed examination of one representative case, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices within a specific context (Stake, 1995). While this single case may not be fully representative of all high-performing schools, it serves as a valuable example that offers rich insights into the complexities of leadership within similar contexts.

The use of random selection, facilitated by the online tool “Research Randomizer,” served to enhance the objectivity and rigor of the case selection process. The revision clarifies that only one school was selected for the in-depth study, ensuring consistency in the explanation. By randomly selecting one school from the pool of top-performing institutions, the study aimed to minimize potential researcher bias and ensure that the selected case was

representative of the broader population of high-performing schools in the region (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Also, this approach aligns with good practices in qualitative research, where the goal is to provide rich, contextualized insights rather than broad generalizations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In terms of the depth of analysis, a larger case size might offer breadth, the depth of analysis achieved in a single case study allows for a more detailed understanding of the intricate relationships between leadership behaviors, school culture, and academic outcomes. This in-depth focus is crucial for uncovering nuanced insights that might be overlooked in a broader, multi-case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In conclusion, the combination of purposeful and random selection strategies, along with the focus on a single case, is designed to provide a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of leadership practices in high-performing schools. By carefully justifying these methodological choices, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the complexities of educational leadership in urban Southwest China.

3.6.4 Data Generation

In this research, data were generated and collected through the strategic use of semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations designed to validate the alignment of principals' practices with their articulated mindsets. By exploring the interplay between leadership mindsets and their characteristic traits, and by assessing their impact on leadership practices, the study sought to reveal the congruence between stated beliefs and actual behaviors. This validation process provided profound insights into the harmony between a leader's intentions and their practical expressions.

As previously stated, a pilot study was conducted, which included interviews with LEA officials to gain insights into the local education area. This included aspects such as cross-school competition, parental needs, and resourcing and funding policies. Additionally, the pilot study aimed to familiarize non-Chinese researchers and academics with the basic settings of the Chinese schooling system. The insights and perspectives gained from the pilot study were instrumental in validating the effectiveness of the interview protocols and questions, ensuring they elicited relevant and insightful responses from the participants.

These initial findings not only guided the main study's direction but also laid a foundation for deeper exploration and analysis.

The study involved only the head principal and seven vice principals (including two senior directors who served as de facto vice principals) at Churchill Primary School. The school operates on three campuses and has a total of over 3200 students and 200 faculty members.

● **The Semi-structured Interview**

To gain in-depth insight into principals' leadership styles, this study utilized two key methods for data generation: semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. As noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in facilitating in-depth conversations that reveal the core values, strategies, and insights that principals hold regarding successful educational leadership. These interviews provided the researcher with a window into the thought processes and interpretations of leadership actions of the principals themselves. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed for an exploration of the principals' philosophies and reflections on effective school management.

The interviews were categorized into three distinct stages: pre-observation, during observation, and post-observation. Each stage served a unique research purpose. The pre-observation stage captured foundational information about the school and the contextual setting of the leadership team, providing essential clues for subsequent observations. The during-observation stage captured principals' personal insights into specific leadership actions, coupled with explanations of nuanced observations related to leadership mindsets, practices, or impacts. The post-observation stage revisited targeted inquiries about leadership mindsets and practices, confirmed the consistency of principals' statements, and addressed any lingering questions.

The Three Stages of Interview Process		
Interview	Settings	Themes
	Aim	1. Mutual Introduction and Engagement

Pre- Observation	Establishing Research Foundation and Connection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Confirmation of Principal's Availability 3. Addressing Principal's Research-related Queries 4. School Introduction and Management Team Overview 5. Setting Goals for the New Term and Reviewing Last Academic Year 6. Identifying School's Success Factors 7. Identifying Ongoing Challenges 8. Articulating Performance Expectations and Objectives
	Duration	
	60 Minutes	
	Frequency	
	Once Only with Each Principal	
During- Observation	Aim	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recap of Recent School Matters 2. Discussion on Observed Phenomena 3. Weekly Review of School Management and Performance 4. Addressing Current School Issues 5. Approaches to Problem-Solving and Decision-Making 6. Reflecting on Leadership Patterns 7. Planning for Upcoming Week and Events 8. Addressing Research-related or General Queries
	Exploring Principals' Leadership Mindsets and Practices	
	Duration	
	60 Minutes	
	Frequency	
	Twice a Week	
Post- Observation	Aim	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussion on Recent School Developments 2. Evaluation of Teaching, Learning, and Management Quality 3. Assessment of Management Team's Performance 4. Review of Semester's Progress and Unresolved Challenges 5. Principal's Reflection on Management Strategies 6. Evaluating Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses
	Gain Principals Review and Reflection of Leadership Impact	
	Duration	

	60 Minutes	7. Planning for Enhancements in School Management and Pedagogy
	Frequency	
	Once Only with Each Principal	

Figure 3.5 the Three Stages of Interview Process

- **Clarification of “During Observation Interview”**

The term “during observation interview” refers to interviews that were scheduled during the on-campus observation phase, a period dedicated to shadowing the principals as they carried out their daily work. These interviews did not interrupt or interfere with the principals’ ongoing activities but were arranged at times when the principals were available and willing to engage in the interview process. As a result, the observations and interviews adhered to the principles of non-participant observation, maintaining the integrity of the research design. The interviews were conducted in a non-intrusive manner, ensuring that the principal’s regular activities were not affected by the presence of the researcher. This approach guaranteed that the data collected during these interviews was reliable and that the non-participant nature of the observation remained intact.

In this study, the interviews conducted during the on-campus observations phase were carefully structured to be consistent with the principles of non-participant observation. Although these interviews involved interaction with the principal during his or her daily time on campus, they were conducted in a one-on-one setting, typically in a private office or meeting room, without initiating contact with others or engaging in campus activities. This approach ensured that the interviews maintained a non-intrusive nature, focusing solely on the principals’ perspectives and experiences without influencing their behavior or the school environment. Therefore, these interviews can be considered part of the non-participant observation process, as they adhered to the principles of observation without direct participation in school activities.

Based on the detailed records of the research field log, the total interview hours conducted during the study were as follows: Pre-observation interviews accounted for 16 hours in total, divided equally across two terms (8 hours per term). During the observation phase,

interviews totaled 75 hours, with 10 hours dedicated specifically to interviews with the head principal and 65 hours with vice-principals working across the three different campuses. Post-observation interviews, similar to the pre-observation phase, amounted to 16 hours in total (8 hours per term). The researcher aimed to structure each interview session to last approximately one hour, ensuring focused discussions while maintaining consistency and depth across the interviews. This approach allowed for comprehensive data collection without overwhelming the participants.

- **The Non-participant Observation**

As the researcher presented in section 3.5 (Pp. 96-97), non-participant observations, as supported by Creswell and Poth (2017), served as a vital counterpart to the interviews, offering direct observations of the principals' routine management activities. By closely following the principals through their daily administrative tasks and meetings, the researcher was able to gain a more profound grasp of their leadership behaviors, interactions with faculty, and the decision-making procedures they employed. This observational component was instrumental in revealing any inconsistencies between the leaders' stated leadership philosophies and their actual conduct, thus providing a fuller picture of their leadership in practice.

These study propositions serve as guiding principles for examining the data and findings collected during the case study. By focusing on these key areas, this research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics and their influence on high performance within the specific educational setting under study. Additionally, the propositions provided a structured framework that ensured the data collection methods and analysis remained consistent with the overarching research objectives. This alignment not only enhanced the coherence of the research process but also ensured that the insights drawn from the data directly addressed the core themes of leadership effectiveness and school performance in the context of high-achieving educational institutions.

Based on the documented research field log, the researcher spent 172 days at Churchill Primary School to follow, observe, and document the leadership team's daily work. This

included 87 days on the main campus (C1, Grade 1 - Grade 3 students), 52 days on C2 (Grade 5 and 6), and 33 days on C3 (Grade 4 students).

- **Impact of Arrangement on Trustworthiness**

The arrangement where either the researcher or the school leaders determined which leadership practices could be observed had a significant impact on the trustworthiness of the findings. When school leaders led the observations, there was a greater likelihood of capturing authentic, everyday leadership practices, providing a more holistic view of their roles. In contrast, researcher-led observations might introduce bias, as the researcher's interpretation and selection of observed behaviors could be influenced by preconceived notions or research objectives. However, by ensuring a non-invasive approach and aligning with the principles of non-participant observation, this study aimed to mitigate potential biases and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

The overall structure for managing the collected data adhered to the principles of thematic analysis. Leadership mindsets were systematically deconstructed into three focal dimensions: leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines. The first dimension encompassed educational visions and missions. The second dimension delved into principals' conceptualizations of leadership, leaders, and the broader implications of their leadership roles. The third dimension highlighted their aspirations, unwavering commitments, and the inherent constraints of their positions as school leaders.

Similarly, the deconstruction of leadership practices unfolded in a tripartite manner: setting, routine, and impact. The setting dimension revealed leadership objectives, conduct guidelines, and mechanisms of accountability. The routine of managerial leadership practices encompassed responsibilities such as school management, faculty administration, professional development, student growth, and the cultivation of relationships with families and stakeholders. The examination of the impact of leadership practices was meticulous, aiming to comprehend the multifaceted effects principals exert on teaching, learning, management, the school's constituents, and its broader influence on the community, social entities, and larger patterns.

This rigorous deconstruction of leadership mindsets and practices ensured a comprehensive exploration of the foundational aspects within a principal's leadership realm: their thoughts, expressions, and actions. By holistically assessing these dimensions, the study aimed to unearth shared attributes, conceptual differentiations, and prevailing leadership patterns among principals. Subsequent discussions on these findings, contextualized within the framework of educational leadership research, aspired to illuminate their relevance for both academic researchers and practitioners engaged in the field of educational leadership.

In conclusion, the data generation approach, which combined semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations, relied on established techniques commonly employed in qualitative case studies within the social sciences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017). These two approaches were designed to work in tandem, enhancing each other's effectiveness. Observations allowed the researcher to identify, note, and capture significant leadership behaviors, which then served as discussion points during interviews to delve into the principals' thought processes and gain insights into their leadership actions. Conversely, the insights gained from interviews guided the researcher's focus during on-campus observations, highlighting aspects of leadership conduct that warranted closer examination.

3.6.5 Data Analysis

This section outlines the systematic approach to data analysis within the context of the case study, aligning with Yin's five key elements of case study research (2018). The primary goal of this phase is to conduct a comprehensive exploration of leadership dynamics within the selected school, encompassing the leadership mindsets, practices, impacts, and traits of principals. The overarching objective is to unveil potential leadership patterns that underlie successful schools.

The data analysis process initiates with a meticulous examination of collected data, comprising explicitly articulated mindsets, practices, and consequential impacts of principals. Inspired by established research (Leithwood & Riech, 2003; Marks et al., 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hallinger & Wang, 2015), this study categorizes principal leadership into two dimensions: leadership mindsets and leadership practices. Within these

dimensions lie intricate sets of beliefs, conceptions, guiding principles, configurations, routines, and profound effects of actions, creating a comprehensive framework that unravels the intricate interplay between a principal's intentions and tangible outcomes.

Huberman and Miles (1998, p. 188) emphasize within-case analysis involving two levels of understanding: descriptive and explanatory. In this study, the descriptive level addresses the “what” and “how” of leadership phenomena by meticulously gathering evidence from real cases. The explanatory level delves into the “why,” providing a comprehensive rationale for identified patterns and behaviors.

To attain these understanding levels, the research methodology fuses semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations on campus. This integration offers a multidimensional perspective on principals' leadership mindsets, practices, impacts, and traits. This dynamic approach provides an authentic window into leadership enactment while enabling real-time exploration of observed phenomena. This methodological integration untangles educational leadership characteristics, elucidating the drivers of school success.

As aforementioned, semi-structured interviews deeply probe principals' leadership mindsets. Three sub-dimensions—leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines—form the basis for comprehensive understanding. These researcher-defined perspectives are transformed into distinct interview themes, shaping the interviews with principals.

Additionally, subthemes within each theme capture the intricate facets of leadership mindsets. Importantly, prior research in educational leadership, including studies (Leithwood & Riech, 2003; Marks et al., 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hallinger & Wang, 2015), lacks a systematic framework for categorizing leadership mindsets, practices, and impacts. Thus, the innovative introduction of interview themes and sub-themes significantly contributes to addressing this gap. Notably, this approach not only fills the research void but also inspires similar studies aiming to systematically understand school leaders' mindsets. Figure 3.6 visually presents key interview themes and expected domains of principal responses. (The detailed interview topic, timeline, and sample interview log can be found in the appendix.)

The Interview Themes for Semi-Structured Interviews with Principals		
Theme	Sub-themes	Open-ended Interview Topics
Leadership Belief	Educational Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do principals perceive the essence of education? b. What educational goals are principals striving to achieve for their school? c. How does the school's vision manifest in principals' roles and within the school community?
	Educational Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What interpretations do principals have of the mission of schooling? b. How does principals' leadership align with the school's mission? c. How does principals' leadership reflect the influence of the school's mission?
Leadership Conception	Leadership Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do principals conceptualize the nature of effective leadership? b. What informs principals' understanding of leadership? c. How do principals formulate their personal concept of leadership?
	Leadership Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. In what ways do principals perceive their leadership to have an impact? b. How do principals bring about meaningful changes within their school through their leadership? c. How do principals assess and reflect upon the impact of their leadership initiatives?

Leadership Guideline	Content, Formulation, and Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What principles or guidelines do principals adhere to in their leadership roles? b. How do principals frame and formulate their leadership guidelines? c. What notable impact have principals' leadership guidelines had within the school environment?
Leadership Mindset	Similarities and Divergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What common aspects define the leadership mindset among principals? b. Can principals identify specific traits that are manifested in their leadership approach? c. What implications do these leadership traits hold for principals' roles and for the school as a whole?

Figure 3.6 the Interview Themes for Semi-Structured Interviews with Principals

As mentioned earlier, this study, a qualitative endeavor integrating interview and observation methods, uses observation to collect complementary data, revealing authentic leadership practices and corroborating alignment between interview-discussed mindsets and practical manifestations. To explore leadership practices comprehensively and uncover underlying traits and patterns, three thematic areas are strategically investigated during on-campus observations. These areas are subdivided for precision (see Figure 3.7).

These three themes include: leadership practices setting, routine, and impact. The first focuses on articulating leadership goals, aligning with guidelines for conduct, and accountability mechanisms. The second explores daily operational routines, encompassing strategic planning, task execution, faculty management, student-family interactions, and community engagement. Each facet is observed, recorded, and analyzed in depth. The third probes the impact of leadership practices, including challenges and successes. (The detailed observation scheme, plan, timeline, and sample observation log can be found in the appendix.)

Key Aspects for Non-participant Observation on Campus

Themes	Sub-Themes	Focus of Observation
Practice Setting	Leadership Goals	<p>a. What are the short-, medium-, and long-term goals of the school leadership team?</p> <p>b. How do principals understand these goals?</p>
	Conduct Guideline	<p>a. What is the guideline for principals' leadership practices?</p> <p>b. How are the conduct guidelines framed by principals?</p>
	Accountability Mechanism	<p>a. What is the accountability mechanism for principals' leadership conduct?</p> <p>b. How are the principals' practices held accountable?</p>
Practice Routine	Pre-task Routine	<p>a. What are the principals' practices of goal setting, path planning, and decision making for school tasks?</p> <p>b. How do principals perform their pre-task execution practices?</p>
	During-task Routine	<p>a. What are the principals' practices of task implementation, supervision, and evaluation?</p> <p>b. How do principals perform during- and post-task practices?</p>
	Faculty Management and Development	<p>a. What are the principals' leadership practices for faculty management and development?</p> <p>b. How are faculty influenced by principals' leadership practices?</p>
	Student and Family Management	<p>a. What are the principals' leadership practices for student and family management and support?</p> <p>b. How are students and families influenced by principals' leadership practices?</p>
	Social Relations and	<p>a. What are the principals' leadership practices for student and family management and support?</p> <p>b. How do principals realize and promote the school's social responsibility?</p>

	Public Engagement	c. How principals utilize social resources to promote the development of school?
Practice	Achievement	a. What is the positive impact brought by principals' leadership practices? b. How principals' leadership practices promote the school's development and school members well-being?
Impact	Challenges in Practice	a. What are the challenges experienced by principals during their leadership practices? b. What is the negative impact brought by principals' leadership practices.

Figure 3.7 Key Aspects for Non-participant Observation

Analyzing interview and observation data addresses Huberman and Miles' (1998) framework by investigating the “what” and “how” () The integration of interview and observation methods enables observation, validation, exploration, and revelation of interplay between leadership mindsets and practices. The study aims to explore alignment, mindset influence on practices, and practice effects on mindsets. During observation, discussions with principals are guided by observed phenomena, related to leadership perspectives, practices, effects, and characteristics. This approach addresses descriptive and explanatory questions, revealing common characteristics and latent leadership patterns.

By carefully analyzing leadership mindsets and practices, the interrelationship between these facets is illuminated. Findings synthesize with theoretical frameworks, comprehensively exploring complexities. In the discussion, the dynamic interplay linking mindsets and practices is explored. The goal is to uncover overarching characteristics and leadership paradigms contributing to school effectiveness and leaders' careers. Finally, findings connect to leadership models, examining their applicability and suggesting paradigm shifts. The study signifies implications for contemporary educational leadership research.

3.7 The Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness of this Study

This section emphasizes the paramount significance of validity, reliability, and trustworthiness within the qualitative case study framework employed in this research. The convergence of these elements substantiates both the theoretical and practical importance of this study. Validity concerns the accuracy of the phenomena presented, thereby influencing the reliability of research findings (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Huberman & Miles, 1991; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Gilbert, 2001; Stake, 2001; Creswell, 2018) within the realm of qualitative research. Conversely, research reliability emphasizes the coherence of data, findings, interpretations, and conclusions, which affects the replicability and credibility of research findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Maxwell, 2005, 2013; Patton, 2015). A rigorous set of measures is meticulously embedded in the research design and conduct to vigilantly safeguard these critical aspects.

- **Ensuring Validity and Reliability**

In a concerted effort to ensure the validity and reliability of this study, an ongoing process of data validation is maintained. This comprehensive approach involves verifying the content of interviews and observations with research participants. In this way, the authenticity and effectiveness of the information collected is assured and reinforced against unintentional influences arising from the researcher's underlying perspectives. This strategy is consistent with Gribb's (2007) assertion that participant validation enhances the validity and credibility of research. At the conclusion of interviews and observations, the shared research data, including interview transcripts and records of principals' actions and statements, are revisited with the specific participants, the principals, strengthening the alignment between the researcher's documentation and objective realities.

- **Mitigating Subjectivity and Enhancing Credibility**

In this study, the researcher employs an interpretive qualitative case study approach, as discussed in Section 3.5. Given the inherent subjectivity in interpretivism, particular attention was paid to minimizing personal bias throughout the research process. Strategies such as maintaining an apolitical stance, conducting member checking, and engaging in peer debriefing were implemented to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

The researcher's personal and political stances were carefully considered throughout the study to mitigate potential biases. The researcher identifies as neutral in political matters and maintains a professional commitment to objectivity in academic work. To mitigate any influence these stances might have on the research, the researcher employed a reflective practice, regularly examining personal beliefs and their potential impact on the study. Additionally, efforts to remain detached from personal political ideologies were made to avoid any skewing of the research findings.

Regarding the observation and documentation of principals' leadership behaviors, the researcher's intent was to accurately record and analyze observed behaviors without imposing predetermined conclusions. To ensure this, the researcher remained committed to faithfully capturing the data collected through observations and interviews, thereby ensuring careful interpretation.

Efforts to mitigate personal biases were guided by a commitment to research integrity, which emphasizes the importance of avoiding forming opinions based solely on personal beliefs or imagination. Instead, the researcher relied on evidence-based analysis to draw conclusions, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research findings.

By explicitly acknowledging and addressing the researcher's personal and political stances, alongside the measures taken to mitigate potential biases, this revision ensures a more robust and transparent research process.

- **Strengthening Trustworthiness through Triangulation**

To further enhance the trustworthiness of this research, the study utilizes the "triangulation" method. By carefully comparing data from different sources and generation methods, the

alignment between research data and conclusions is validated (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This comprehensive approach involves the rigorous comparison and validation of multiple data sources that include researcher observations, interviews with various principals, and institutional records accessed by the researcher. As a result, this careful triangulation approach strengthens the integrity and reliability of the study's data.

- **Ethical Supervision and Institutional Validation**

While scholars such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Polit and Beck (2014) suggest third-party review mechanisms for research credibility, this study refrains from such an approach due to ethical considerations surrounding the anonymity of the schools and principals. However, the study maintains a robust ethical and academic supervision to ensure the integrity of the research. This commitment extends beyond the researcher to include research participants, supervisors, and the ethics committee. This collective vigilance plays a critical role in enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

Finally, the careful integration of these strategies by the researcher underpins the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study and its results, which solidifies the study's contribution to the educational research community.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This section outlines the measures taken to safeguard the welfare of participants, ensure ethical conduct of research, and implement robust data management practices. The researcher planned data generation and storage strategies to mitigate potential risks to participants and the wider public. To anchor this research within ethical guidelines, strict adherence to the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2018) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018) framework is paramount. In addition, the researcher remains vigilant in adhering to the legal regulations of the specific research regions.

Educational research serves the purpose of understanding the multifaceted dimensions of educational activities from the perspectives of different stakeholders, including learners, educators, policymakers, and the public. Given the case study approach used to explore various educational phenomena involving interactions with human and non-human subjects, a conscientious approach to human participant involvement and data management is crucial. Consequently, this study places great emphasis on treating participants with compassion, safeguarding their privacy, and adhering to ethical research protocols to protect their interests. Upholding the identity, dignity, social status, and overall well-being of each participant is a core principle, and all human participant data are meticulously and legally documented and archived to prevent data leakage or misuse.

The research includes interviews with principals from Churchill Primary School. In addition, close observation of daily school operations, with a focus on principals and their leadership, is a key aspect. In strict adherence to BERA's 2018 Guidelines, all participants are treated impartially, sensitively, and with unwavering respect. Prior to participation, participants are thoroughly informed about the research process and asked for their voluntary, informed consent. This process takes into account the unique context of the research setting of schools and Local Educational Authorities (LEAs). Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and this autonomy is respected without question. If a participant feels uncomfortable during an interview or observation, the researcher promptly stops the activity and seeks alternative approaches.

The research process, particularly interviews, is carefully managed to guard against potential risks and to reduce the stress on respondents. The physical presence of the researcher during observations and interviews could inadvertently cause discomfort among principals due to a perceived sense of scrutiny. Therefore, the researcher strives to maintain an atmosphere of amiability and non-intrusiveness that encourages candid feedback and reactions. Interview transcripts and recorded leadership instances are shared with participants, allowing them the opportunity to review and, if necessary, revise their statements or even withdraw from the research. Participants' time constraints are taken into account, and efforts are made to arrange observation and interview schedules that are least disruptive to their duties.

Ethical considerations extend to privacy and data management, which are fundamental to this study. Throughout the research, institutional and participant identities remain anonymous and confidential. Personal identifiers, such as names and affiliations, do not appear in interviews or observations. Strict adherence to legal guidelines for data storage and use, in accordance with GDPR and the University of Glasgow's Code of Good Research Conduct, is essential. Participants are informed of the where, why, and how of data storage and which parties have access to it. Data collected for this research, including audio recordings and transcripts, is reserved solely for the purposes of this research project.

In terms of ethical review and approval, the research proposal has been thoroughly ethically reviewed and approved by the appropriate ethics committee at the University of Glasgow. This provides an additional layer of oversight and underscores adherence to ethical standards.

The focus of this study is on Churchill Primary School, located in the Riverside District of Chengdu, a central city in Southwest China. The school is part of the Chinese public education system, specifically within the nine-year compulsory education system, covering primary and middle schools. The choice of this school as the single case study site was based on its status as a high-performing school, ranking in the top 20% based on comprehensive school performance assessments conducted by local education authorities.

The selection of Churchill Primary School allows for an in-depth exploration of the leadership dynamics within a high-performing school context in urban Southwest China. This study does not include data collection from other schools or regions, and all research activities, including interviews and observations, were conducted solely at Churchill Primary School.

The semi-structured interviews in Chinese aim to explore principals' understanding and self-reflection of successful leadership. This includes their leadership mindsets, practices, and impact. The ideas and insights shared by the principals reveal shared leadership traits and possible leadership patterns that drive school development. A strategic timeline of interviews was developed that included pre-observation, observation, and post-observation stages. Each interview, which is expected to last 30-60 minutes, is carefully recorded with audio devices to ensure precise documentation.

Non-participant observation takes place in the campus environment, including meeting rooms, offices, and auditoriums, the sites of daily school management. Careful field notes and monologue recordings comprehensively document leadership practices, highlighting any intriguing or distinctive observations. These field notes enhance in-depth interviews with participants and enrich the evidence base of the research. The duration of each on-campus observation phase for each school is estimated to be approximately four weeks, allowing ample time for a comprehensive examination of daily school operations.

The data analysis process involves an examination of the targeted school cases of principal leadership using within-case synthesis and thematic analysis. Beginning with a comprehensive within-case synthesis, data from non-participant observations are subjected to interpretive analysis, categorizing and coding principals' school leadership activities. Simultaneously, data generated from semi-structured interviews are subjected to thematic analysis, revealing embedded themes. These themes form the basis for principal-centered narratives, each of which addresses specific research questions. Upon completion of the within-case studies, the researcher provides a synthesis that integrates principals' leadership mindsets, documented primarily through interviews, with leadership practices, recorded mostly through on-site observations, to promote a holistic understanding of school leadership patterns, shared leadership characteristics, and the uniqueness of Chinese educational leadership.

Readers interested in accessing background information on specific school leaders involved in this study may submit a formal request to the researcher. Following thorough risk assessments, the researcher would provide profiles of specific school leaders with their identities concealed or any information that could potentially lead to their identification.

Chapter 4 Profile of Churchill Primary School and Leadership Team

This chapter presents a profile of Churchill Primary School and its leadership team. This profile provides essential contextual insights to facilitate a deeper understanding and examination of the leadership mindset, practices, and impact within the focus primary school.

The chapter comprises two sections. The first section starts with an overview of Churchill Primary School (CHP), the case study site, to provide the reader with a foundational and contextual understanding. At the same time, this study offers a detailed examination of the educational context that underpins the institution's remarkable achievements, while also posing challenges to CHP's administrative leadership team. Additionally, the school's administrative structure, which consists of sanctioned values, mission, vision, and guidelines, serves as a point of reference against which the leadership team's interpretation can be compared. The second section outlines the layout of leadership positions, defines the responsibilities of leadership team members, and offers a comprehensive perspective of the school's administrative leadership.

4.1 Profiles of Churchill Primary School

In this section, the research provides a brief introduction to the Churchill Primary School, including the basic information, settings, performances, values, and guidelines, with some background knowledge of the local schooling system relevant to this study also included.

The documents concerning school performance and rankings presented in this section are internal documents from local government agencies and education administrative departments. During the researcher's efforts to establish a relationship with schools and local education agencies, relevant officials and department heads shared or displayed these materials, thereby granting the researcher permission to use the information provided. For those seeking comprehensive data, a formal request should be made to the researcher. The researcher would assist in contacting and facilitating efforts with local government and

educational entities to streamline the data retrieval process, while ensuring the utmost adherence to information security protocols and research ethics guidelines.

4.1.1 A Brief Introduction to the Churchill Primary

To maintain ethical research standards, the researcher refers to the primary school under study as “Churchill Primary (CHP)” while protecting its identity. This measure extends to concealing elements that could potentially reveal the school’s affiliation with a regional supervisory body, notable awards, and distinctive campus events. Therefore, this chapter uses the designation “Riverside District Education Bureau” or “Riverside LEA” to represent the administrative entity that oversees Churchill Primary.

The following information is drawn primarily from CHP and Riverside LEA archival records, as well as interviews with principals and LEA officials conducted during the pilot study with the permission of CHP and Riverside LEA leadership. The accuracy of historical records and policy documents cited in interviews was verified. Temporal details in this section have been adjusted to protect the anonymity of the school and its leadership. Similarly, the figures presented do not include exact numbers of teachers and students, but instead use rounded figures. In addition, data on primary school rankings and categorizations were obtained from municipal and district LEAs, which categorize internal documents for school evaluation purposes only. The researcher’s access to these data depended on the condition that all identifiable information regarding school and LEA names be masked.

Churchill Primary School (CHP), established in the early 1990s through the joint efforts of the Riverside District Government and the Education Bureau, was envisioned as a model school for the district, with the capacity to accommodate over 1,000 students simultaneously. In the Chinese educational context, a “model school” refers to a high-performing institution that is recognized by the city-level education authority and overseen by the district education authority and serves as an example of quality teaching and learning for average or low-performing schools (Morgan et al., 2017).

In the third year of its funding, like other newly funded schools, the Riverside LEA categorized CHP as “Tier-II (average-performing or new schools).” In the late-1990s, with

fiscal investment, professional assistance, and social support from the local government, regional higher education institutions, and nearby communities respectively, CHP had moved onto a fast-developing tract and been upgraded to “Tier-I (relatively high-performing and top 15%-25% in the school comprehensive performance league table)” in the late 1990s.

Development of Churchill Primary School in the 1990s			
Year	199X	199X+3	199X+5
School Ranking	N/A	Top 35%	Top 20%
School Title	District Level Tier-II	District Level Tier-II	District Level Tier-I
Number of Principals	2	3	3
Number of Teachers	20	55	70
Number of Students	140	440	890
Number of Classes	3	9	18

In the early years of the 21st century, CHP’s elevation to model school status was a significant accomplishment that was supported by the Riverside LEA and CHP’s leadership. To be considered for the model school recognition program, which is overseen by local LEAs and state agencies, candidate schools must consistently maintain their premier status for three consecutive years before being recommended by county LEAs. The Riverside LEA emphasized that only the top 15 percent of district-level ranked schools are eligible to participate in the model school recognition program. After earning the model school designation, CHP consistently ranked in the top 10% at the district level.

Development of Churchill Primary School in the 2000s			
Year	2000	200X	200X+5
School Ranking	District Top 5%	City Top 10%	City Top 10%
School Title	District Level Tier-I	City Level Model School	City Level Model School
Number of Principals	3	4	4
Number of Teachers	80	85	90
Number of Students	920	960	1050
Number of Classes	18	18	18

Since the 2000s, China's economic boom has spurred urbanization and migration from rural to urban areas. As a result, this demographic shift driven by economic growth and urban expansion put pressure on China's educational landscape (Teng & Liang, 2012). The migration of families to central urban areas led to a significant increase in the school-age population, challenging the capacity of local schools (Fan & Li, 2016). Officials from the Riverside LEA indicated that schools in the urban catchment area of Chengdu City were also facing overcrowding issues, with CHP enrolling nearly double its designed capacity of students. As a result, the Riverside district government and LEA decided to build a new campus nearby to accommodate the growing demand.

In the early 2010s, the newly constructed campus became operational, providing CHP with thirty additional classrooms to help alleviate the strain caused by the burgeoning student population. This facilitated the relocation of all staff and students to the new campus, improving teaching and learning conditions. However, the rate of enrollment growth exceeded local government and Riverside LEA projections, forcing CHP to retain its original campus and operate on two campuses by the mid-2010s.

At the same time, urban planning changes in the early 2010s resulted in a shared catchment area between CHP and another local primary school, Windmill Primary, a Tier II school. To mitigate the impact of increased competition for school choice and to ensure equitable education provision, the Riverside local government and LEA decided to merge Windmill Primary with CHP, effectively addressing CHP's challenge of rapidly increasing school-age enrolment.

By 2019, CHP's enrollment had again exceeded its capacity, prompting Riverside LEA to repurpose a local nursing school as CHP's third campus (C3) and relocate all fourth-grade students to this site.

Development of Churchill Primary School in the 2010s			
Year	2010	2012	2017
School Ranking	City Top 5%	City Top 10%	City Top 10%

School Title	City Level Model School	City Level Model School	City Level Model School
Number of Principals	4	4	5
Number of Teachers	90	150	190
Number of Students	1120	1800	2900
Number of Classes	18	48	64
Number of Campuses	1	2	2

As of 2021, CHP operates on three campuses to serve its 3200 students and 220 teachers. First, second and third graders occupy the newly constructed main campus (C1), while fourth graders are exclusively located on a smaller campus (C3), formerly a nursing school. Fifth and sixth graders share CHP's original campus (C2).

Churchill Primary School (2021)	
School Ranking	City Top 5%
School Title	City Level Model School
Number of Principals	6
Number of Teachers	220
Number of Students	3200
Number of Classes	84
Number of Campuses	3

CHP's history has been marked by rapid development, unstoppable student enrollment growth, an esteemed reputation, and rigorous LEA evaluations. These aspects have had both positive and negative impacts on school leaders, educators, students, and families. Findings from this section inform interviews with principals to illuminate their perspectives on the interplay between principal leadership and school development.

4.1.2 The Performance and Ranking of Churchill Primary

Authorized by Riverside LEA officials and CHP principals, the researcher gained access to documents related to school performance and evaluation policies for this study. Information

was obtained from the Riverside LEA, the CHP leadership team, and CHP historical records, with all identifiers skillfully concealed.

Churchill Primary School attained “Tier I” status in the late 1990s, about five years after its founding, ranking in the top 15% to 25% of Riverside district primary schools for three consecutive years. An assistant director of the Riverside LEA noted that CHP remarkably achieved “Tier I” recognition within a decade, making it the first school in the district to do so. The Riverside Educational Bureau provided a historic policy document outlining the criteria for assessing and categorizing schools. To achieve Tier I status, a school must demonstrate proficiency in multiple dimensions, including student achievement, teacher professionalism, parent satisfaction, and quality of school management, maintaining performance in each dimension at no less than 25% of the school’s ranking for three consecutive years.

In this policy framework, student performance includes academic achievement, holistic well-being, social skills, and moral education. Teacher professionalism covers teaching quality, participation in school-based research, and commitment to student well-being. Parental satisfaction measures alignment with the educational environment, while school management success is gauged by goal attainment and effective incident resolution or prevention.

With permission from the Riverside LEA and CHP, selected data on CHP’s performance from the Riverside LEA’s School Performance Report relevant to this study are provided below. Authenticated and reviewed by district inspectors and researchers from a local educational research institute, this report evaluated, quantified, and compared the performance of over 65 primary schools in the Riverside district. It included metrics such as student achievement, teacher professionalism, parental satisfaction, and school administration quality. The report, containing sensitive government information and confidential school data, had its rankings intentionally obscured per instructions from CHP and the Riverside LEA. Additionally, the detailed grading guidelines, standards, and methodologies were not disclosed to prevent any potential information breaches.

Figure 4.1, below, highlights CHP’s operational performance in four areas compared to other school categories in 199X-the year CHP achieved Tier I status. This chart illustrates CHP’s

robust and competitive performance across the board. CHP's scores exceeded the Tier I average in each criterion, falling only slightly behind the model schools. An assistant director in the Riverside LEA praised CHP's performance, noting that its developmental progress in the 1990s was "frog-leaping-a rarity, as Tier II schools typically take more than a decade to make similar progress.

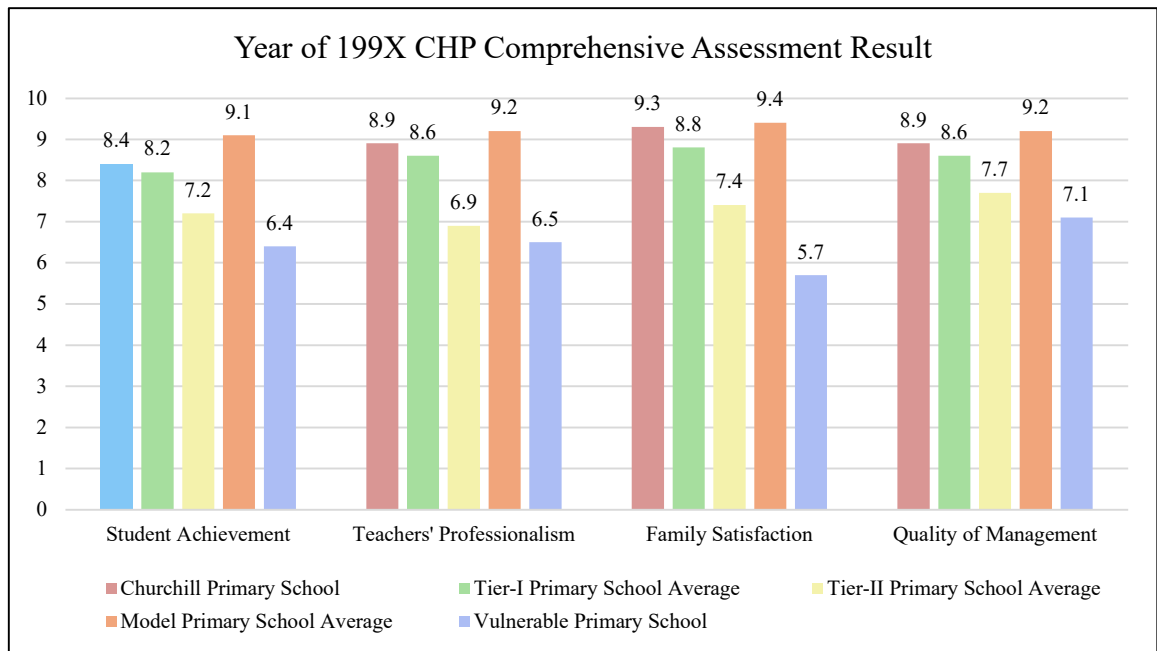


Figure 4.1 School Assessment Report for CHP issued by the Riverside LEA

In the early 2000s, CHP cemented its reputation by earning Model School status just five years after achieving Tier I status. This designation was rigorous, reserved for the top 15 percent of high-performing schools in the rankings. In addition, candidate schools were required to maintain their high-performing status for three years before being evaluated by the city's Department of Education.

The CHP director shared with the researcher a 200X school evaluation report that outlined the Chengdu Municipal LEA's model school selection guidelines and evaluation results. The guidelines highlighted key criteria such as comprehensive student development, exceptional teaching, educational research performance, cultural and value enrichment, social skills cultivation, and student well-being. Emphasis was also placed on family and community satisfaction.

In addition to operational excellence, the LEA focused on successful curriculum reforms and innovative strategies to improve school effectiveness. In addition, the LEA emphasized the school’s social responsibility practices and building mutually beneficial relationships with families.

Figure 4.2 (below) illustrates CHP’s performance in 200X, when it was awarded the title of Model School by the Chengdu LEA. Data from the LEA’s annual school performance evaluation report showed that CHP’s scores were slightly below average in two of seven aspects: “nurturing culture and values” and “exploring students’ potential”. In contrast, CHP’s performance was above the model school average in the remaining five aspects. The principal’s commentary in the report commended the efforts of CHP’s leadership team, praised its exemplary school management approach, and highlighted its potential for other school leaders seeking to accelerate school growth through efficient planning, operations, and leadership.

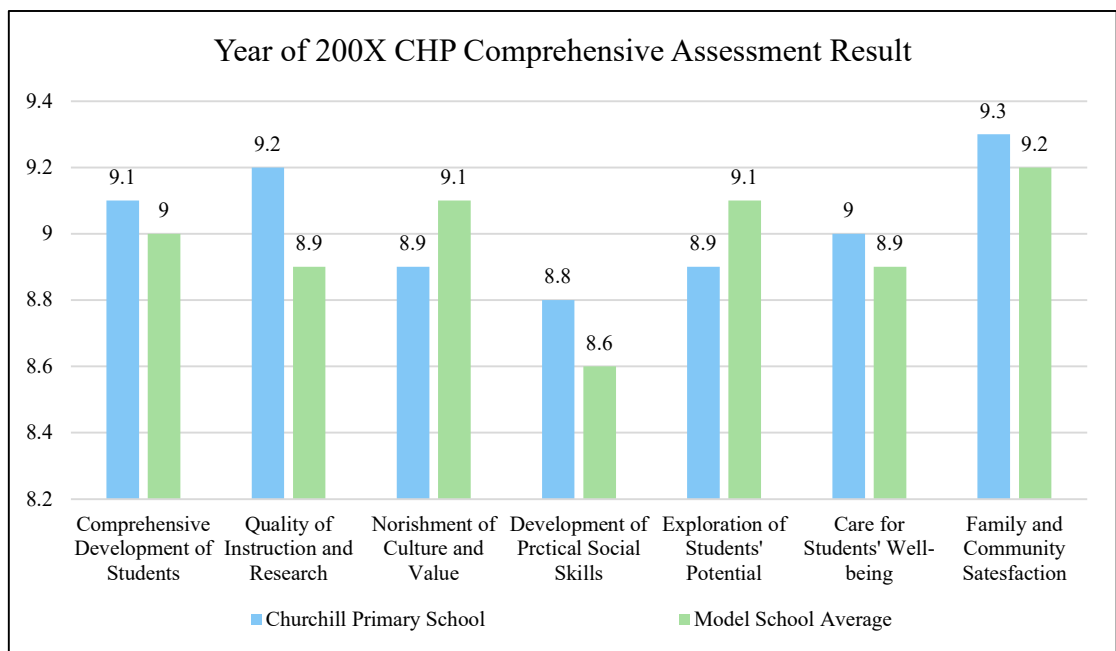


Figure 4.2 200X School Assessment Report for CHP issued by the Chengdu LEA

In the 2010s, the merger of the Windmill primary schools into CHP, coupled with rapid enrollment growth, presented operational and developmental challenges. These included rebuilding teams and redefining standards for effective teaching, learning and management. Although overall performance remained high, there were slight declines in all seven

dimensions. Later sections of this study discuss the impact of the merger and other significant events that affected CHP and its leadership.

Nevertheless, the decline in school performance was temporary. Within three years of the decline, CHP rebounded with consistent and impressive performance. Since 2015, CHP's evaluation report highlights its continued top-five status in the Riverside district's school league table.

CHP's commitment to fostering student versatility and well-being has been recognized by Riverside and municipal LEAs, resulting in multiple commendations. In particular, CHP was named an Exemplary School for Physical Education, Art Education, and IT Education, and an Outstanding School for Future Learning. The school's focus on teacher professional development paid off, with the city and district LEA designating CHP as a "Training Center for Professional Development and Continuing Education. This recognition was based on the school's success in training young teachers and achieving excellence in teaching competitions. In addition, CHP's commitment to fostering strong family-school and community-school relationships has earned it titles such as "Most Trusted School" and "High Social Responsibility School" in the Riverside LEA's Family and Community Surveys since 2015.

Insights from this section were gathered through interviews with principals and illuminate the role of school leaders in effective management and development. Subsequent sections explore CHP's high performance in relation to its leadership, analyzing the mindset, practices, impacts, and reflections of successful leadership at CHP.

4.1.3 The Values Settings of Churchill Primary School

The foundation of Churchill Primary School is based on its core values, vision, mission, and guidelines, carefully constructed to influence the behavior, and thinking of both school leaders and faculty as well as students (See Figure 4.3). The core value, "Living with Love and Beauty in the Heart," lies at the heart of this structure. It encapsulates the fundamental concepts of love and the continual pursuit of beauty. The value was conceptualized by the head principal Suie and serves as the foundation of the school's culture and ethos.

CHP’s vision aligns harmoniously with its core value of underscoring the role of love in shaping a more promising world. The mission statement focuses on cultivating students’ wisdom through science, nurturing a virtuous soul through authentic emotions, and fostering an enlightened mind through artistic engagement.

Integrated into this framework are two key perspectives: the professional development of teachers and the growth of students. Teachers are advised to “teach with responsibility and wisdom,” while pursuing love and beauty as part of their pedagogical endeavors. Students, on the other hand, are encouraged to take on the roles of “truth seekers, practitioners of kindness, and ambassadors of beauty.”

Embedded within this structure are cultural, team, and management guidelines. The cultural guidelines cover the school’s culture, its pedagogical practices, and the culture of learning. of learning, including values such as the pursuit of truth, the upholding of kindness, and the pursuit of beauty. The team guidelines emphasize the importance of personal development and continuous learning, as well as the essential role of collaborative teamwork.

Management guidelines cover management style, discipline, core procedures, and goals. The style emphasizes setting specific objectives, executing tasks diligently, and fostering teamwork. The discipline emphasizes avoiding haste and superficiality while adhering to core management protocols. Management goals prioritize the sustainable growth of teachers, the nurturing of students’ development, and the enhancement of overall school performance.

Category	Sub-Category	Content	Authorship
Core Value	School Motto	Living with Love and Beauty in the Heart	HP
	价值观	爱在心中，美在生活	
Outlook	School Vision	To render livelihood with love and to fulfill life with love	HP
	愿景	用爱瞻养生活，用爱圆满生命	
	Mission	To build a school that renders students with wisdom via the inspiration of science,	Ex-CHP Leaders

		nurtures students' beautiful souls via the exchange of genuine emotions, and cultivates bright minds via the enjoyment of arts	
	使命	建设一所用科学启发和赋予学生智慧，用真情滋养学生美丽心灵，用艺术陶冶情操的学校	
	Teacher Development	Teach with responsibility and wisdom and pursue love and beauty	HP
	师资培养	以责任和智慧教书育人，追求爱和美	
	Student Growth	Explorers for truth, practitioners of kindness, and ambassadors of beauty	HP
	学生培养	探索真理，实践善良，传播美好	
Guideline	for Schooling Culture	Truth-seeking, Kindness-upholding, and Beauty-pursuing	HP & VPs
	学校文化方针	追求真理、秉持善良、追求美好	
	for Teaching Culture	Rigorous, Pragmatic, and Innovative	
	教学文化方针	严谨、务实、创新	
	for Learning Culture	Keep humble and stay thinking, Pursue Beauty, and Stay Learning	
	学习文化方针	虚心好学、追求美好、终身学习	
	for Team Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Six Key Areas of Focus: ● Pay attention to personal image. ● Pay attention to learning and thinking. ● Pay attention to increasing personal value. ● Pay attention to communication and teamwork. ● Pay attention to opportunities for development. 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pay attention to trends in teaching and learning. ● Six Essential Skills to Master: ● Learn how to achieve. ● Learn how to progress under standard operating procedures (SOP). ● Learn how to work effectively. ● Learn how to solve problems from multiple perspectives. ● Learn how to use data and reasoning in communication. ● Learn how to respect others' time and privacy. 	
	团队文化方针	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 六个关注： 注重个人形象、注重学习思考、注重个人价值的提升、注重沟通和协作、注重发展的机会、注重整个行业的发展趋势。 ● 六个学会： 学习方法：学会追求目标、学会按程序办事、学会讲求效率、学会多角度分析问题、学会用数据和逻辑说话、学会尊重别人的时间和隐私 	
	for Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Style of management: set goals clearly, conduct work carefully, execute orders promptly, and make efforts jointly. 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discipline of Management: <p>Three Avoid: avoid impetuosity in thinking, superficiality in learning, and perfunctory in practicing.</p> <p>Three Reject: reject impracticality in planning, showmanship in working, and cheating in reporting.</p> <p>Core Management Procedures: guided by objective; follow the SOP; and retrospective review.</p> <p>Goals of Management: foster sustainable professional development for teachers, facilitate students' healthy growth, and improve schooling performance</p> 	
	<p>管理文化方针</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 管理作风：明确目标、过程严密、雷厉风行、团结协作。 ● 管理戒律： ● 三忌：忌心浮气躁、忌理论浮夸、忌实践浮浅。 ● 三不：计划不作秀、过程不作戏、总结不做假。 ● 管理程序：目标引导、过程实施、评价反思。 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 管理目标：促进教师持续专业发展、促进学生健康成长、提高学校办学绩效 	
*HP: Head Principal *VP: Vice Principal			

Figure 4.3 The Organizational Framework and Value Settings of Churchill Primary School

The table above provides insights into the core values, outlook, guidelines, and management practices of Churchill Primary School. It highlights the school's emphasis on values such as truth-seeking, kindness-upholding, and beauty-pursuing, as well as its vision to render livelihood with love. The term "organizational framework and value settings" encompasses the core values, vision, mission, guidelines, and management practices that underpin the operations and ethos of Churchill Primary School. The guidelines for teaching, learning, and team culture reflect a commitment to rigorous, pragmatic, and innovative approaches. Additionally, the management guidelines and procedures underscore a focus on clear goals, careful work execution, and continuous improvement. Overall, this framework offers a comprehensive view of the organizational structure and values guiding Churchill Primary School.

To comprehend the structure designed by the principal and colleagues, interviews were conducted with the leadership team to gather insights on constructing the school's operational frameworks. Additionally, the principals' thoughts on planning, conducting, and the outcome of leadership tasks were examined. As outlined in the methodology, on-campus observations of operational routines were conducted to investigate how school values, outlooks, and guidelines are translated into reality.

By observing on-site practices, gaps between the school leaders' intended practice and actual results were identified and examined. In subsequent sections of Chapter IV, a single-case synthesis examining the primary leadership at CHP is presented, including an introduction to and discussion of modern educational leadership models, such as transformational and distributed leadership.

4.1.4 Implications for Educational Leadership in Chinese Schools

This section explores the implications of Churchill Primary School's (CHP) developmental progress and attainment of model school status for our understanding of Chinese schools and educational leadership.

The remarkable pace at which CHP achieved model school status, noted by an assistant director in the Riverside Local Education Authority (LEA) as akin to “frog-leaping,” is a rarity. This progress contrasts with Tier II schools, which typically take more than a decade to achieve similar success. Although this observation suggests that CHP may not be a typical Chinese school, it raises important questions about the generalizability of the findings from this case study to other contexts. While the practices observed at CHP provide valuable insights, the unique context of the school, including specific leadership strategies and the local educational environment, may limit the direct applicability of these findings to other schools. The study highlights certain successful practices that could potentially be adapted in other high-performing schools, but further research is needed to assess their broader relevance.

Furthermore, the comment from the assistant director in the Riverside LEA and the rapid development of CHP might hint at a connection between the school's success and the performance of its leadership team, although this relationship should be interpreted with caution given the complexity of contributing factors. Notably, other schools in the same Riverside district, subject to similar governmental funding and supervision policies, did not experience such rapid development. This observation underscores the importance of considering the unique factors at play within CHP when drawing conclusions about the role of leadership in school success.

This study provides initial insights into the leadership practices and strategies that appear to contribute to the exceptional performance of schools like CHP. By examining the leadership mindsets and practices of principals in this high-performing school, the research explores leadership approaches that seem to contribute to school success. However, further research would be necessary to definitively establish these links and to explore their applicability to other contexts. Additionally, while the findings from this single case study provide valuable

insights into the contextual factors that influence school leadership and performance in China, these insights should be viewed within the specific context of this school, and further research is needed to determine whether these findings hold true across a broader range of schools.

Moreover, the study contributes to the broader literature on educational leadership by providing a detailed examination of the transformational and distributed leadership models in the context of Chinese schools. The findings enhance our understanding of how these leadership models can be applied in diverse cultural and educational settings, though the conclusions drawn from this single case study should be approached with caution.

4.2 The Profile of the Leadership Team at Churchill Primary

In this section, the researcher provides an objective description of the roles and positions of principals and other senior school administrators involved in school task setting, policy making, decision making, problem solving, and daily management. The section also includes important information regarding the power, responsibility, and professional experience of school leaders related to the research topic and questions.

4.2.1 The Settings of Leadership Posts at CHP

Churchill Primary School (CHP) consists of a main campus and two sub-campuses, each of which operates autonomously. This complex structure requires a skillful leadership team capable of efficiently coordinating the day-to-day operations of these diverse campuses. The school's top leadership team, which includes a head principal, five vice principals, and two senior administrative assistants to the head principal, is organized into three units, each of which is responsible for overseeing a specific campus, encompassing its educational, administrative, and managerial dimensions.

The main campus (C1) functions as the central location where the Head of School and three Vice Principals play leadership roles, guiding the academic journey of students from first to

third grade and overseeing general administrative responsibilities. Campus two (C2) is headed by Vice Principal Ms. Tung and her assistant Ms. Yi, who are responsible for fifth and sixth grade affairs. Meanwhile, Campus Two (C3) is assigned to another vice principal, Mr. Gane, who oversees the educational activities for fourth graders, with his deputy, Mr. Yao, serving as the de facto vice principal of the campus. Figure 4.4 shows this leadership distribution across the campuses. Gendered avatars are used to ensure confidentiality.

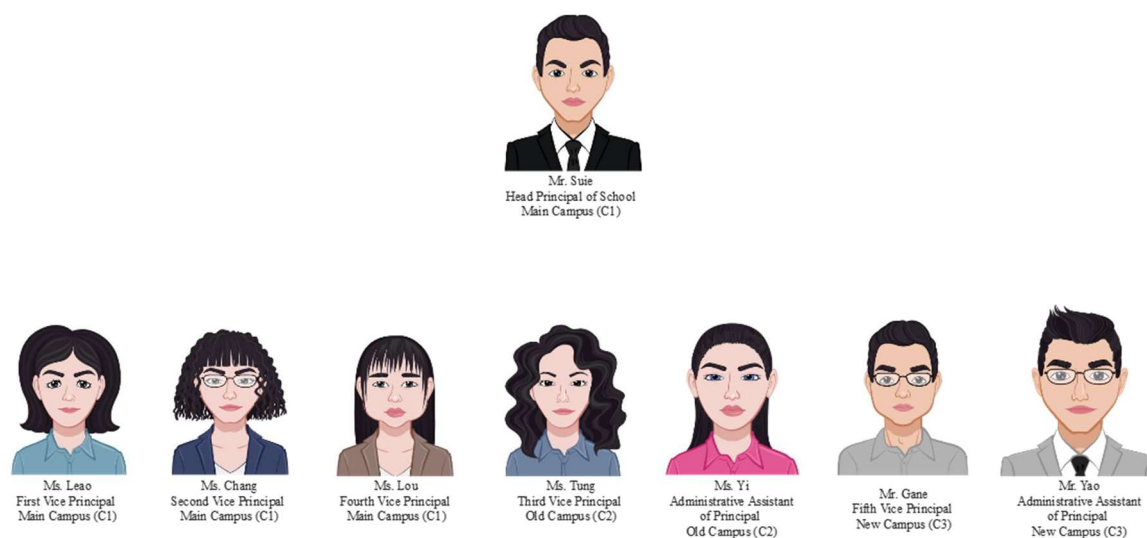


Figure 4.4 Eight School Leaders of CHP and Campus Assignments

The CHP follows a traditional organizational structure with five departments: leadership and administration, teaching and research, student welfare and family support, general services, and political organizations and autonomous units. The Leadership and Administration Department serves as the central hub, responsible for setting goals, providing leadership, issuing directives, formulating policies, and overseeing faculty management. The Teaching and Research Department is responsible for day-to-day teaching, research efforts, and faculty development initiatives. Meanwhile, the Student Welfare and Family Support Department aims to promote student welfare and provide support to parents.

In addition, the school attaches great importance to political organizations and autonomous unions as important components that promote democratic principles within the school. Figure 4.5 illustrates the organizational structure of CHP's main campus (C1), highlighting the central role of the five core departments.

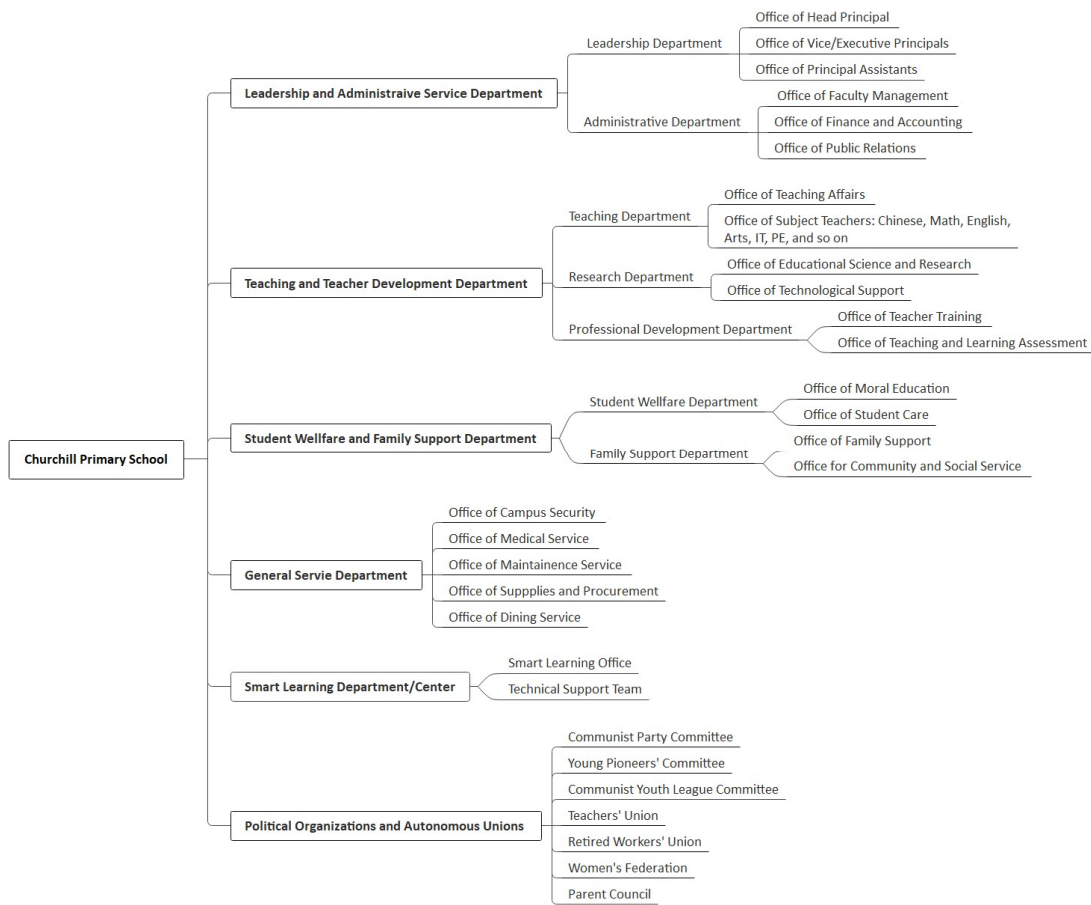


Figure 4.5 Organizational Setting of Churchill Primary School (C1)

The sub-campuses (C2 and C3) reflect a similar organizational configuration, although certain units such as the principal’s office, human resources, and public relations are omitted. These sub-campuses align their structure with that of the main campus to ensure centralized decision-making on key issues, thereby reducing the risk of administrative turbulence. The organizational layout of CHP’s sub-campuses (C2 and C3) is visually depicted in Figure 4.6.

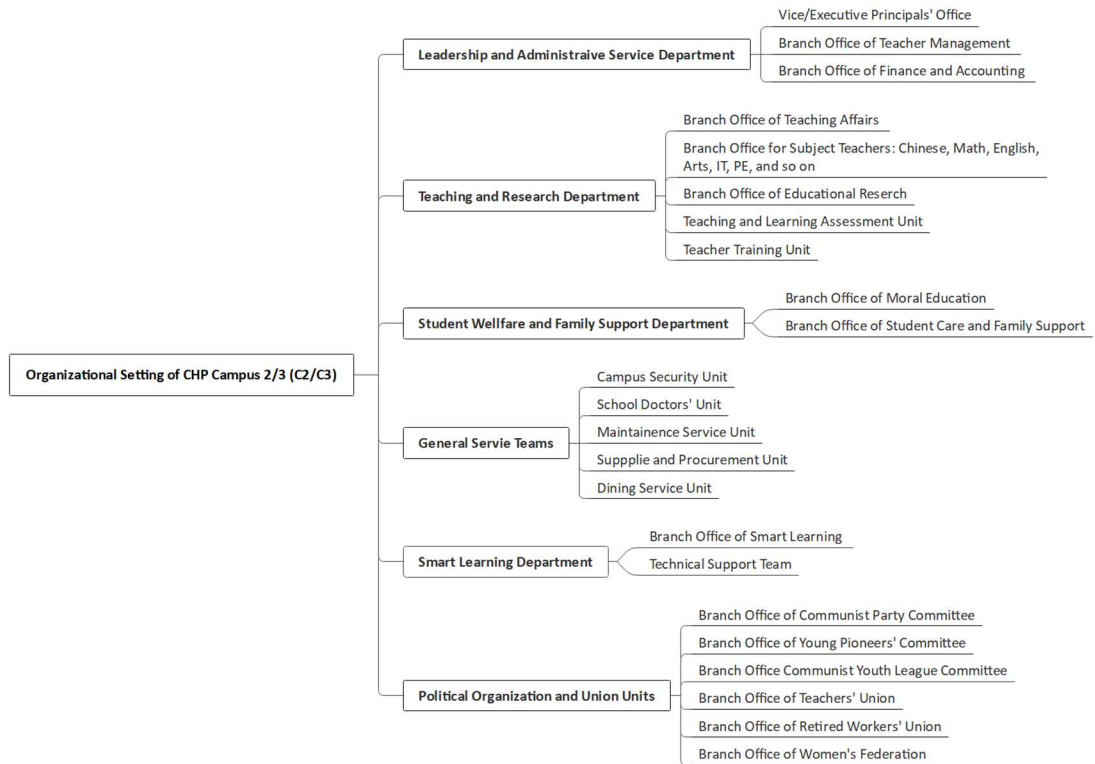


Figure 4.6 Organizational Setting of Churchill Primary School (C2/C3)

The Figure below (Figure 4.7) presents a calculation of various tiers of the CHP leadership team.

Leadership Level	Post/Rank	Affiliation	Number of Staff
Top Leadership Team	Head Principal	C1	1
	Vice Principals	C1, C2, C3	5
	Administrative Assistant of Principal (Vice-principal de facto)	C2, C3	2
	Total Top School Administration Team Members		8
Other Leadership Roles	Secretary of Political Organizations	C1, C2, C3	3
	Chair of Autonomous Unions	C1, C2, C3	3
	Chair of Parent Council	C1, C2, C3	3
Middle Leadership Team	Directors of Administrative Departments	C1, C2, C3	3
	Directors of Teaching and Research Departments	C1, C2, C3	6

	Directors of Professional Development Department	C1, C2, C3	3
	Directors of Student Welfare and Family Support Departments	C1, C2, C3	4
	Directors of General Services Department	C1, C2, C3	3
	Directors of Smart Learning Center	C1, C2, C3	4
	Grade Leaders	C1, C2, C3	6
Grassroots Leadership Team	Chief of Teams and Groups	C1, C2, C3	24

Figure 4.7 Calculation of CHP School Leaders of Different Level

Figure 4.7 illustrates the comprehensive leadership structure at Churchill Primary School (CHP), differentiating between the top school administration team, other key leadership positions, and middle and grassroots leaders.

The Top Leadership Team consists of the Head Principal, Vice Principals, and Administrative Assistants to the Principal (vice-principal de facto). Other leadership roles such as Secretaries of Political Organizations, Chairs of Autonomous Unions, and Chairs of the Parent Council are vital for governance and community engagement but are not part of the top school administration team. Middle and grassroots leaders play significant roles in day-to-day operations and support functions.

Senior Leadership Team:

The senior leadership team includes the Head Principal, five Vice Principals, and two Administrative Assistants to the Principal (vice-principal de facto), totaling eight members. These individuals are responsible for the strategic and operational leadership of the school.

Other Leadership Roles:

In addition to the top school administration team, CHP has other important leadership roles such as Secretaries of Political Organizations, Chairs of Autonomous Unions, and Chairs of the Parent Council. These roles are crucial for governance and community engagement but

are not part of the top school administration team. For instance, the Secretary of the China Democratic League is not a principal, and the Chair of the Parent Council is typically a parent rather than a school employee.

Middle Leadership Team:

Middle leaders, including Directors of various departments (Administrative, Teaching, Research, Professional Development, Student Welfare, Family Support, General Services, and Smart Learning Center) and Grade Leaders, play significant roles in managing specific areas and ensuring the smooth functioning of the school.

Grassroots Leadership Team:

The grassroots leaders, such as Chiefs of Teams and Groups, are responsible for the implementation of policies and support functions across different campuses.

By clearly distinguishing between these roles, the figure provides a comprehensive overview of the different types of leadership at CHP, highlighting the diverse responsibilities and contributions of various leaders within the school community.

The posts of principals at CHP on different campuses and their responsibilities in this study are shown below.

Name	Post/Title	Campus	Responsibilities
Suie	Head Principal	C1	Leadership Department; Grades 1 to 3
Leao	Vice Principal	C1	Research and School Relations Departments
Chang	Vice Principal	C1	Teaching and Teacher Training Departments
Lou	Vice Principal	C1	General Service Department
Tung	Executive (Vice) Principal	C2	Human Resource and Student Well-being and Family Support Departments; Grade 5 to 6

Gane	Executive (Vice) Principal	C3	Smart Learning Department; Grade 4
Yi	Principal's Administrative Assistant (Vice-principal de facto of C2)	C2	Research Department
Yao	Principal's Administrative Assistant (Vice-principal de facto of C3)	C3	Student Well-being and Family Support Department

4.2.2 The Profile of CHP School Leadership Team

In China's nine-year compulsory schooling system, the management team of public primary and junior high schools, also known as middle schools, is classified into three levels: the top, middle, and grassroots leadership. Although China's Ministry of Education stipulated no explicit rules or guidelines for LEAs or schools regarding the classification of the school leadership team, the Ministry suggested that the formulation and team-up of the school leadership team should be based on the practical needs of school management and development (MOE, 2017). Typically, an average-sized primary school in China, serving about 1,000 pupils, employs one principal and three vice-principals (MOE, 2021). According to the Riverside LEA, for public primary schools with over 1,000 student enrollments, an extra vice principal is expected to be assigned for every five hundred pupils. Thus, the principal-to-student ratio is estimated at 1:5 for large public primary schools in southwest China, explaining why six principals were required to serve CHP by the Riverside LEA director.

In the Chinese schooling system, the top leadership is conventionally understood as school principals, including the principals, vice-principals, senior directors serving as assistants to the principals or vice-principals, and chairpersons of political organizations, autonomous unions, and the parent council. Middle leadership at Chinese public primary and middle schools refers to a director of a grade, a teaching subject, a task force, or an office. The

grassroots leader indicates the individual who supervises or leads a five to ten-person team or group.

In this study, the top leadership at CHP is recognized as the head principal, his deputy, the five vice-principals, and two senior assistants of principals. The middle leadership at CHP consists of 32 directors and deputy directors of offices and grades, while the grassroots leaders are 24 chiefs of teams and groups. The individuals who lead political organizations, autonomous unions, and the parent council are omitted from the total number of staff, as these leadership posts are held by principals, teachers, or other people not currently affiliated with the school, such as former employees and parents.

As stated earlier, with 8 top leaders and 36 middle leaders at CHP, the top-to-middle leaders ratio is theoretically 1:4.5, which means each top leader supervises approximately four middle leaders. This ratio is significant because it ensures that each middle leader receives adequate guidance and oversight, while also allowing top leaders to manage their responsibilities effectively across CHP's three campuses. The structure supports a balanced distribution of leadership duties, enabling efficient management and decision-making processes. However, because CHP operates on three campuses, the top-to-middle leaders' ratio varies from campus to campus, with 1:4, 1:5.5, and 1:4.5 on C1, C2, and C3, respectively. Nevertheless, in daily school management, the number of middle leaders led by senior leaders is 1:6 or above, owing to the cross-campus jurisdiction of vice-principals.

For instance, Ms. Tung, the executive principal, based her work on C2 to administer daily teaching, learning, and management of fifth and sixth graders. However, as the human resources and student well-being department supervisor, she had to instruct directors remotely or on-site by traveling to different campuses. According to her work diary, Ms. Tung directly supervised six directors on C2 and four directors on C1. This distribution highlights the cross-campus management responsibilities that required her to travel frequently between campuses to ensure consistent leadership and effective oversight of both teams.

In interviews with principals, most school leaders mentioned their overworking status and expected some extra hands to be employed to share their excessive workload. Mr. Suie advised that at the end of the 2010s, he made an official request to the Riverside LEA on

behalf of CHP to add three more leadership posts to share the ever-increasing management workload. However, the LEA only partially approved CHP's request, permitting the addition of just one principal position to the primary school's payroll, rather than the three additional positions that had been requested.

Suie highlighted that the current version of the government's guide on school settings and staff recruitment had regulated the maximum number of primary school principals, which should not exceed five. The guideline for the Riverside LEA to finance and hire school leaders remained unchanged since the 2000s, giving no legal basis to CHP's leadership team expansion. In China's public schooling system, primary principals and teachers are public servants, planned, employed, and funded by local governments based on regional setting manuals or guidelines for public schools. Subsequently, the district people's congress (人民代表大会, the local council in China) reviews and decides on any school expansion, employment, or retirement budget raised by the regional LEA. A Riverside LEA director admitted that even if CHP's demand was, to some extent, reasonable, the local council would scarcely permit it, as creating three more principals' posts would breach the school setting guideline and be unfair to other primary schools in the Riverside district.

In pre-observation interviews, the head of CHP expressed his concern over the overworking status of his colleagues, suggesting that a single-principal leadership team could be easily overwhelmed, considering the sizable population of pupils and teaching faculty at the two branch schooling sites. Thus, in 2020, the leadership team created two vice-principal posts *de facto* in the name of the principal's administrative assistant, supporting Ms. Tung and Mr. Gane's work. Hence, two administrative assistants, Ms. Yi, and Mr. Yao were selected and dispatched to C2 and C3 as reinforcement.

Mr. Suie also mentioned that even if the LEA had turned a blind eye to CHP's setting two vice principals *de facto*, he insisted LEA deploy two actual principals when available. He claimed substantial distinctions existed between the actual principal and principal *de facto*, including leadership mindset, mission, responsibilities, influence, career planning, social desirability, and expectation management, leading to different managerial results and schooling outcomes. The head principal's approach highlighted his understanding of the responsibilities of a school leader, including the mentality required for effective leadership and the dynamics of his relationship with supervisory bodies. Correspondingly, his

relationship and interactions with the LEA and schooling policies reflected CHP's leadership beliefs and patterns. A discourse about the principal's concepts and self-reflections is given in later sections.

Since 2020, CHP has been adjusting its new post-rotation mechanism, encouraging and repositioning vice-principals and administrative assistants to work on another campus or lead a different department every year. The top leadership team believed that the job rotation mechanism helped exchange successful experiences in teaching, learning, and management across campuses, test and reflect existing leadership capacities and skills, and enrich their understanding of CHP from multifaceted perspectives. Moreover, principals suggested that the optimized system could enable them to exploit their specialties and traits flexibly, reasonably, and effectively. For instance, Ms. Chang was more experienced in teaching and learning enhancement, making her more suitable and competitive to support and improve the academic performance of fifth and sixth graders on C2. Meanwhile, Ms. Tung, on C2, was to be relocated to C1. As the supervisor of human resources, student support, and family service, her expertise on C1 could mitigate issues regarding newly recruited teachers and freshly admitted students.

In contrast, the previous job or post-rotation mechanism only applied to middle and grassroots leaders, used as a training and assessment process for selecting high-performing individuals for further promotion. Grassroots and middle leaders usually participated in two rounds of two-to-three-year-long post-rotation, understanding how different sections of CHP operated and examining their leadership capacities and skills.

The school leaders' posts of CHP demonstrated and discussed in this study only reflect the leadership team setting in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, the post setting was modified due to the renewed post-rotation system, which had Ms. Chang and Ms. Tung switch their workplace while other top leaders' places of work remained unchanged.

The leadership team at Churchill Primary School (CHP) consists of eight distinguished individuals who collectively drive the educational and administrative functions of the institution. These leaders embody a diverse range of skills, experiences, and perspectives that contribute to the multifaceted landscape of leadership at the school. This section

provides a comprehensive overview of each principal, highlighting their roles, backgrounds, and contributions to the CHP community.

4.2.2.1 Head Principal - Mr. Suie

Junior teachers' colleges (中级师范学院), also known as normal high schools, were vocational upper-secondary institutions that provided a three-year certification program for middle school graduates to be primary or middle school teachers. These schools were established by the Chinese government in the 1980s, aiming to supply enough qualified teachers on a fast track demanded by the rapidly expanding primary and middle schools in China's nine-year compulsory education system. A local junior teachers' college graduate, Mr. Suie started his teaching career at CHP right after graduating in 1996. Like all the other learners at junior teachers' colleges, Mr. Suie received training to instruct learning subjects, including Chinese, mathematics, English, science, arts, music, PE, IT, law, moral education, and other subject matters, among which Chinese was selected as the primary subject to be taught by him.

Having passed the teacher certification test by the municipal LEA, Mr. Suie was assigned to CHP as a Chinese teacher and class teacher. During the first six years of service, he was awarded CHP's "Outstanding Chinese Teacher of the Year (年度先进教学个人)" and "Outstanding Class Teacher of the Year (年度优秀班主任)" for five consecutive years and won the "Excellent Teacher Award (区优秀教师)" of the Riverside district in 2001. Owing to his competitive performance and teaching and student management talents, he was promoted to the associate director of the teaching affairs office in 2002, making him the youngest director ever in CHP's history. His promotion was perceived as an exception, as the directors' ranks were usually given to senior teachers with at least a decade of teaching or management experience. His predecessors praised him as a promising school leader, Mr. Suie added. Since 2002, he has held two posts simultaneously: a Chinese teacher and office director, of which all his work was accomplished with high quality.

Two years after his middle leadership at the teaching affairs office, a new appointment was made, repositioning him to the principal's office as an associate director and dealing with

policy-making and enactment at CHP. Suie claimed that his work at the principal's office allowed him to observe, review, and re-think how the school operated and developed, which enriched his knowledge and skill bank for being a potential school leader. In the meantime, school leaders and co-workers highly acknowledged his excellence in teaching Chinese lessons and his achievements in classroom-based research, which had him promoted to the chief of the Chinese curricular research team. Principal Suie believed that a successful principal must possess mastery in interaction with students, co-workers, and parents to know and tackle their problems and understand and fulfill their needs. Likewise, such experience of serving different posts enabled him to work, think, and communicate effectively.

In 2009, Suie was recommended by the former CHP leadership team to the municipal LEA's research division, the Chengdu Institute of Education Science, to join the research division for primary school administration improvement and the Chinese curriculum assessment and research team. After over three years of work at the institute, the former CHP leaders requested the municipal LEA permit Suie's return and appointed him as CHP's vice-principal. Suie told the researcher that his principalship substantially benefited from his secondment at the Institute of Educational Science, which helped him connect educational theories and practices in a perceptual sense. This secondment was perceived as cultivating Suie to be a principal by rendering him both a profound and holistic perspective while reviewing the essence of school management, the influence of principal leadership, and the impact of curriculum development.

In 2013, Mr. Suie was nominated by the ex-school leadership team as the next head principal of CHP. With the Riverside LEA's permission and appointment, Suie claimed his head principalship of CHP in the same year. Owing to his success in leading CHP to a consistently high-performing and high-achieving school, he won the municipal LEA's "Outstanding School Principal Award (年度优秀校长)" four times. Furthermore, he was entitled as the "Exemplary School Principal of the Province (省级优秀学校校长)" and awarded the "Model Educator of the Province (省级先进工作者工作者)."

School Leadership Profile I

Basic Information

Name	Suie
Age Group	41 - 45
Gender	Male
Post	Head Principal
Political Affiliation	Secretary of Party Committee, Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Leadership and Administrative Departments
Subject Taught	Chinese
Campus Site	C1 - Main Campus
Education Background	
1994 - 1996	Junior Teachers' College Diploma
2009 - 2014	BA in Education (Part-Time)
2019 - now	MOE's National School Leadership Profile Program for Principal
Professional Experience	
1996 - 2002	Class Teacher, Chinese Teacher
2002 - 2006	Associate Director of Teaching Affairs Office, Chinese Teacher
2006 - 2010	Associate Director of the Principal's Office, Chief of the Chinese Curricular Research Team
2010 - 2013	Researcher at CDIES (Chengdu Institute of Education Science)
2013 - now	Head Principal of Churchill Primary School
Achievements	
1996 - 2002	School Level Outstanding Chinese Teacher of the Year × 5 Outstanding Class Teacher of the Year × 5
	District Level Teaching Excellence Award School-based Research Competition 2nd Prize
2004 - 2008	District Level School-based Research Competition 1st Prize Teaching Excellence Award
2013 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding School Principal of the Year × 4
	Provincial Level Exemplary School Principal Leading Researcher of Chinese Curricular Distinguished Educator Award × 2

	National Level MOE's Future School Leader Project Participant Outstanding School Principal Award
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4.2.2.2 First Vice Principal - Ms. Leao

Ms. Leao, the first vice-principal of Churchill Primary School (CHP), leads the School Relations Department and the Research Department. As the first vice-principal, she also serves as the acting principal in the absence of Head Principal Suie. A fellow junior teacher's college graduate, Ms. Leao began her teaching career at CHP in 1995, initially as a Math teacher and class teacher. Over the years, she taught a variety of subjects including Math, Chinese, English, computer, and moral education. This broad teaching experience enabled her to develop a universal and cross-subject pedagogical approach, enhancing classroom engagement and learning dynamics.

Her proficiency in diverse teaching roles and her commitment to pedagogical excellence led to her promotion in 2004 as the director's assistant in CHP's Educational Research Office, while she continued her role as a Math teacher and class teacher. By 2006, Ms. Leao advanced to lead the Research Department as the associate director. This new role required her to step back from being a class teacher and reduce her Math teaching duties to focus more on computer science education. Transitioning from teaching mainstream subjects like Math to a less emphasized subject like computer science was initially a challenging adjustment for Ms. Leao, but she leveraged her extensive teaching experience to transform her computer classes into inspiring and interactive learning environments. In 2010, her innovative approach to computer education was recognized when one of her classes was chosen by the municipal LEA as a model classroom.

In 2010, Ms. Leao took over as the head of the Research Department, spearheading various educational projects including the pioneering 'fusion classroom projects'. These projects integrated learning and skill application across multiple subjects within single courses, enhancing interdisciplinary learning. Her successful leadership in these initiatives led to her appointment in 2011 as an administrative assistant managing public relations, where her adeptness at interpersonal communication proved invaluable.

Her capabilities in managing both educational and public relations effectively led to her nomination by Head Principal Suie in 2014 as a vice principal overseeing school-based research and public relations. With unanimous support from the leadership team and official appointment by the Riverside LEA, Ms. Leao was promoted to the position of vice principal.

Currently, as the head of the Research Department, Ms. Leao focuses on initiatives like spontaneous learning, reducing homework burdens, and enhancing STEAM education through intelligent classroom setups. She remains committed to encouraging both teachers and students to engage in creating personalized pathways for sustainable development. Additionally, as the supervisor of School Relations, she works diligently to strengthen CHP's connections with management bodies, community groups, and other social organizations, maximizing the benefits of these relationships for the school.

School Leadership Profile II

Basic Information	
Name	Leao
Age Group	41 - 45
Gender	Female
Post	First Vice Principal
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Research and School Relations Departments
Subject Taught	English
Campus Site	C1 - Main Campus
Education Background	
1994 - 1998	Teachers' College Diploma
2005 - 2010	BA in Education (Part-Time)
2015 - 2019	MA in Educational Leadership (Part-Time)
Professional Experience	
1998 - 2005	Class Teacher, English Teacher
2005 - 2010	Director of Teaching and Research Department
2010 - now	First Vice Principal of Churchill Primary School

Achievements	
1998 - 2005	School Level Outstanding English Teacher of the Year × 5 Excellent Class Teacher Award
	District Level Teaching Excellence Award Curriculum Innovation Award
2010 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Vice Principal Award × 3
	Provincial Level Exemplary Educator Award Leading Researcher in English Curriculum Development
	National Level Participant in National Educational Leadership Program

4.2.2.3 Second Vice Principal - Ms. Chang

Ms. Chang, the second vice-principal at Churchill Primary School (CHP), leads the Teaching and Professional Development Department. Positioned at CHP's main campus, she initially taught Mathematics to third graders and mentored new math teachers. Ms. Chang holds a BA in Math Education from a regional normal university and was one of the few founding staff members at CHP with a higher education degree.

Ms. Chang has been a class and math teacher for 12 years at CHP. She gained recognition for her instructional leadership and pupil management skills. In 2000, under her guidance, approximately a dozen students won medals in the National Mathematical Olympiad, setting a new record for CHP as it had never before had national medalists. Acknowledged as a gifted teacher capable of driving academic excellence and peer-coaching, the former school leadership encouraged Ms. Chang to advance her career focusing on leading and enhancing CHP's teacher training and teaching capacity building.

In 2006, after declining similar offers in 2004 and 2005 due to her initial reluctance to shift from teaching to administration, Ms. Chang accepted the promotion to the director's assistant in the Teaching Affairs Office. She was motivated by the opportunity to utilize her effective methods in addressing challenges faced by her peers in teaching skill improvement. However, she expressed reservations about moving into administration, concerned it would limit her direct teaching engagement and ability to pursue teaching excellence.

By 2006, Ms. Chang was promoted to associate director of the Teaching Affairs Office. During this period, she began a part-time MA program in Educational Administration, aiming to develop a systematic approach to teacher training and development. Her motivation stemmed from a desire to institutionalize a teacher training and development system that aligned with contemporary educational theories and practices.

In 2009, under her leadership, CHP issued the second edition of the Teacher Training Guidelines and Professional Development Handbook, introducing new standards for teaching quality and developmental pathways. These included incorporating international and domestic pedagogical theories and a standardized teaching performance assessment framework into the professional development handbook.

In 2011, Ms. Chang was promoted to director, overseeing both the Teaching and Professional Development Departments. She was informed by the leadership team that she was a potential candidate for a future principalship at CHP. In the year preceding Head Principal Mr. Suie's official appointment, she was promoted to principal's administrative assistant, taking on significant administrative responsibilities, including decision-making and problem-solving.

In 2014, endorsed by Head Principal Suie and Vice-Principal Leao, Ms. Chang was appointed as the second vice-principal of CHP by the Riverside LEA, tasked with leading teacher coaching and professional development. Committed to enhancing CHP's educational standards, she has focused on standardizing the teacher coaching system and enhancing career development programs for faculty. Since the initiation of the "two reductions movement" in 2021, she has concentrated on refining instructional efficacy and optimizing assessment methodologies to foster learning and teaching quality at CHP.

School Leadership Profile III

Basic Information	
Name	Chang
Age Group	41 - 45
Gender	Female

Post	Second Vice Principal
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Teaching and Teacher Training Departments
Subject Taught	Mathematics
Campus Site	C1 - Main Campus
Education Background	
1994 - 1998	Teachers' College Diploma
2008 - 2013	BA in Education (Part-Time)
2016 - 2020	MA in Educational Leadership (Part-Time)
Professional Experience	
1998 - 2006	Class Teacher, Mathematics Teacher
2006 - 2012	Director of Professional Development Department
2012 - now	Second Vice Principal of Churchill Primary School
Achievements	
1998 - 2006	School Level Outstanding Mathematics Teacher of the Year × 6 Excellent Class Teacher Award
	District Level Teaching Excellence Award Professional Development Innovation Award
2012 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Vice Principal Award × 4
	Provincial Level Exemplary Educator Award Leading Researcher in Teacher Training and Development
	National Level Participant in National Educational Leadership Program

4.2.2.4 Third Vice Principal - Ms. Tung

Ms. Tung, with over 30 years of educational experience, serves as the third vice-principal at Churchill Primary School (CHP), heading campus two as the executive principal. She oversees the Student Welfare and Family Support Department and manages faculty recruitment. Ms. Tung's career began at Windmill Primary, where she was initially a physical and moral education teacher after graduating from a regional sports university in 1988.

Ms. Tung's early career was marked by significant achievements, earning numerous awards for her exceptional performance in physical and moral education, including district and municipal level "excellent teacher" awards. Her innovative approach to integrating sports with moral education programs garnered recognition and was later adopted by local juvenile correction services.

Promoted to associate director of the moral education office at Windmill Primary in 1994, Ms. Tung led initiatives that significantly improved student care and family support. By 2001, she ascended to the role of director of the moral education department and the principal's assistant, where she initiated reforms that enhanced the democratic management of the school, involving more staff and families in decision-making processes.

In 2006, Ms. Tung was appointed head principal of Windmill Primary due to the sudden retirement of her predecessor. Her leadership was instrumental in maintaining the school's steady performance improvement, even as she introduced more inclusive decision-making mechanisms.

The merger of Windmill Primary with CHP in 2012 marked a significant transition in Ms. Tung's career. She was assigned the role of vice-principal at CHP, where she successfully integrated her team and adapted to the new environment, ensuring that former Windmill Primary faculty met CHP's standards. Her efforts facilitated a smooth transition and helped maintain educational continuity for the students affected by the merger.

In 2015, Ms. Tung was appointed the executive principal of CHP's old campus (C2), tasked with overseeing the education of fifth and sixth graders. Her responsibilities expanded to include leading the entire school if the senior leadership was unavailable. She continued her focus on updating CHP's legal and moral education frameworks, inclusive education programs, and enhancing school-family initiatives to promote students' holistic well-being.

Ms. Tung's career is a testament to her dedication to education, characterized by her ability to lead through significant transitions and her commitment to fostering an inclusive educational environment. Her leadership philosophy emphasizes the importance of community engagement and the well-being of both students and staff, making her a pivotal figure in the continued success of CHP.

School Leadership Profile IV

Basic Information	
Name	Tung
Age Group	46 - 50
Gender	Female
Post	Third Vice Principal
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Student Welfare and Family Support Departments
Subject Taught	Educational Psychology
Campus Site	C2 - Second Campus
Education Background	
1992 - 1996	BA in Educational Psychology
2005 - 2010	MA in Counseling (Part-Time)
2017 - now	National Certificate in School Leadership
Professional Experience	
1996 - 2005	School Counselor
2005 - 2015	Director of Student Welfare
2015 - now	Third Vice Principal of Churchill Primary School
Achievements	
1996 - 2005	School Level Outstanding Counselor Award × 5 Excellence in Student Support Award
	District Level Student Welfare Leadership Award Family Engagement Excellence Award
2015 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Vice Principal Award × 3
	Provincial Level Exemplary Leader in Student Welfare Distinguished Educator in Counseling
	National Level Participant in National Educational Leadership Program

4.2.2.5 Fourth Vice Principal - Mr. Gane

Mr. Gane, the youngest member of Churchill Primary School's (CHP) core leadership team, serves as the fourth vice-principal and executive principal of CHP's third campus. He also heads the school's Smart Learning Center, where he spearheads the integration of technology into teaching and learning processes, particularly in the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) subjects.

Trained as a primary physical education teacher at a regional sports university, Mr. Gane graduated in 2006 and soon after passed the teacher certification exam. He was hired by CHP as a PE teacher, where he quickly distinguished himself by integrating his keen interest in IT with physical education. Gane developed innovative approaches to using technology in PE lessons, making them popular among students and faculty alike. In 2012, he successfully transitioned to teaching IT, further demonstrating his versatility and commitment to leveraging technology in education.

Recognized for his leadership potential and innovative mind, Mr. Gane was promoted in 2015 to associate director of the administrative office. His ability to inspire and influence his colleagues across various subjects and grades was noted by his supervisors, Vice-Principals Leao and Chang, who described him as a transformative figure within the school.

In 2018, following the launch of China's "Smart Education" initiative by the Ministry of Education, which aimed to advance educational informatization nationwide, Gane was promoted to principal's assistant and tasked with leading the newly established smart learning department at CHP. His leadership was crucial as CHP participated in a pilot program to test and adapt a national smart learning platform to the school's specific needs.

With the expansion of CHP to accommodate a growing student body, Mr. Gane was appointed in 2020 as the executive principal of the newly operational third campus, which specifically housed all sixth graders. His role as fourth vice-principal also positions him as a potential acting head of school, should the need arise.

Colleagues and other school leaders at CHP have expressed confidence in Mr. Gane's potential as a future head principal. They believe his passion for educational technology and innovative leadership style could lead CHP towards becoming a more self-evolving institution, where technology significantly enhances educational outcomes and administrative efficiency.

Currently, Mr. Gane is focused on customizing the national smart learning platform to better suit the needs of CHP and developing a training framework to elevate teachers' competencies in smart education. His efforts also extend to digitizing CHP's administrative systems and enhancing communication channels between the school and families, ensuring that technology serves as a cornerstone of school improvement and community engagement.

School Leadership Profile V

Basic Information	
Name	Gane
Age Group	41 - 45
Gender	Male
Post	Fourth Vice Principal
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Smart Learning Center and Grade 4
Subject Taught	Educational Technology
Campus Site	C3 - Third Campus
Education Background	
1994 - 1998	BA in Educational Administration
2005 - 2010	MA in Educational Technology (Part-Time)
2018 - now	National Certification in Educational Leadership
Professional Experience	
1998 - 2005	School Administrator
2005 - 2015	Director of Smart Learning Center
2015 - now	Fourth Vice Principal of Churchill Primary School
Achievements	

1998 - 2005	School Level Outstanding Administrator Award × 5
	District Level Excellence in Technology Integration Administrative Leadership Award
2015 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Vice Principal Award × 3
	Provincial Level Exemplary Leader in Educational Technology Distinguished Educator in Administration
	National Level Participant in National Educational Leadership Program

4.2.2.6 Fifth Vice Principal - Ms. Lou

Ms. Lou holds the unique position of being the only member of Churchill Primary School's (CHP) leadership team without a teaching background, serving as the fifth vice-principal and head of the general service department. Her responsibilities encompass the oversight of all operational services that support the school's daily functionality, including finance, accounting, campus security, medical care, maintenance, food services, cleaning, supplies, and procurement.

Before joining CHP in 1993, Ms. Lou had accrued a decade of experience as an accountant at a local factory. She transitioned to CHP following her previous employer's bankruptcy, drawn by the financial stability and security offered by the school setting. Throughout her career at CHP, Ms. Lou has consistently viewed her role through a pragmatic lens, considering herself more a manager and caretaker of the school's physical and operational needs rather than a traditional principal with educational duties.

Her meticulous nature and ability to maintain organization and effectiveness across various service domains led to her first promotion to director of the finance and accounting office in 2001. After five years, her proven leadership and operational acumen earned her a further promotion to associate director of the general service department.

In 2011, Ms. Lou advanced to head the general service department, and in 2014, she was appointed as vice-principal in response to a directive from the provincial education

department. This directive aimed to professionalize and modernize the management of operational services across public schools in Sichuan Province. Despite not initially aspiring to a vice-principal role, Ms. Lou embraced the challenges of her new position, using them as motivation for ongoing professional development and personal growth.

Currently, Ms. Lou is spearheading initiatives to enhance the school environment and ensure the safety and well-being of all students and staff. These initiatives include upgrading CHP's healthy school meals program and campus security systems. Additionally, she has collaborated with art teachers on a redecoration project designed to reflect the school's values and the personalities of its students in the visual elements throughout the campus. This project aligns with her commitment to maintaining an inviting and supportive school atmosphere that fosters a sense of community and belonging.

School Leadership Profile VI

Basic Information	
Name	Lou
Age Group	46 - 50
Gender	Female
Post	Sixth Vice Principal
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Finance, Maintenance, and General Services
Subject Taught	N/A
Campus Site	C1 - Main Campus
Education Background	
1990 - 1994	BA in Accounting
2005 - 2008	MBA in Financial Management (Part-Time)
2015 - now	Certification in Educational Leadership and Administration
Professional Experience	
1994 - 2005	Accountant
2005 - 2010	Head Accountant
2010 - now	Sixth Vice Principal of Churchill Primary School

Achievements	
1994 - 2005	School Level Outstanding Accountant Award × 6
	District Level Excellence in Financial Management Service Excellence Award
2010 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Vice Principal Award × 2
	Provincial Level Distinguished Leader in School Services Exemplary Educator Award
	National Level Participant in National Educational Leadership Program

4.2.2.7 Administrative Assistant of Principal - Ms. Yi

Ms. Yi serves as the Administrative Assistant of the Principal and acts as the de facto Vice-Principal at Churchill Primary School's second campus (C2). She plays a critical role in supporting Executive Principal Ms. Tung in managing the educational and administrative needs of fifth and sixth graders. Additionally, Ms. Yi collaborates closely with Second Vice-Principal Leao, overseeing the Educational Research Department at CHP.

Ms. Yi's educational journey began at the same junior teachers' college attended by Vice-Principal Leao. She embarked on her teaching career in 1996, aspiring to excel as a Chinese teacher and class teacher at CHP and across the Riverside district. Driven by a passion for teaching and an unwavering commitment to her students, Ms. Yi quickly distinguished herself as a dedicated and effective educator. Her excellence in the classroom was recognized repeatedly, with her being named one of the top three Chinese teachers at CHP for seven consecutive years, an honor awarded by her peers in the Chinese teaching faculty.

In 2006, Ms. Yi's potential for leadership and her deep involvement in educational research led Second Vice-Principal Leao to nominate her as the assistant director of the Educational Research Department. Over the following decade, Ms. Yi worked alongside Leao to spearhead research initiatives and enhance the research capabilities of CHP's teaching staff. Her role expanded to include the coordination of regional research activities, bridging primary education with higher education institutions to foster collaborative research projects.

Additionally, her expertise in educational research was recognized by the Local Education Authority (LEA), leading to her appointment as an external examiner for school-based research projects within the Riverside district.

Ms. Yi's transition from a celebrated teacher to a pivotal administrative role exemplifies her growth and adaptability within the educational sector. Her contributions extend beyond classroom teaching to influence research and educational policy, underscoring her importance in both the leadership framework and the academic advancement of Churchill Primary School.

School Leadership Profile VII

Basic Information	
Name	Yi
Age Group	41 - 45
Gender	Female
Post	Administrative Assistant of Principal (Vice Principal de facto)
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Administrative Functions at C2
Subject Taught	N/A
Campus Site	C2 - Second Campus
Education Background	
1995 - 1999	BA in Education Administration
2008 - 2010	MA in Public Administration (Part-Time)
2015 - now	Certification in School Management and Leadership
Professional Experience	
1999 - 2005	Administrative Officer
2005 - 2015	Senior Administrative Officer
2015 - now	Administrative Assistant of Principal at Churchill Primary School
Achievements	
1999 - 2005	School Level Outstanding Administrative Officer Award × 3

	District Level Excellence in School Administration Service Excellence Award
2015 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Administrative Leader Award
	Provincial Level Distinguished School Administrator

4.2.2.8 Administrative Assistant of Principal - Mr. Yao

Mr. Yao serves as the Administrative Assistant of the Principal, acting as the de facto Vice-Principal at Churchill Primary School’s third campus (C3), notably supporting Vice-Principal Gane in overseeing the educational needs of all fourth graders. In addition to his administrative duties, Mr. Yao co-supervises the Student Welfare and Family Support Department alongside Ms. Tung, leveraging his prior experience as the former head of this department.

Mr. Yao embarked on his educational career at CHP in 2002, after obtaining a BA in English Literature. Unlike the traditional practice at Chinese primary schools during the 1990s and early 2000s where Chinese teachers typically took on class teacher roles, Yao impressed the interview panel with his innovative classroom management strategies. This led to his unusual appointment as a class teacher, a role generally reserved for more experienced educators.

Recognized for his outstanding peer-coaching abilities and effective communication skills, Yao was promoted in 2009 to Assistant Director of the Teaching Affairs Office, with strong backing from head principal Suie and second vice-principal Chang. His capabilities in teaching and leadership were further utilized in 2014 following the merger with Windmill Primary, when he was tasked to assist in managing challenges affecting student welfare and family relations — areas significantly impacted by the merger. His adept handling of these responsibilities earned him a promotion to Director of the Student Welfare and Family Support Department.

With the operational expansion of CHP to include a third campus in 2020, Yao was identified as the ideal candidate to support Vice-Principal Gane. His skills were particularly suited to addressing the concerns of parents upset by the relocation of their children to the new campus.

Under his leadership, a bi-monthly school-family communication panel was established to facilitate dialogue and address issues raised by the school community, involving teachers, family representatives, and experts from the Local Education Authority and universities.

Moreover, in collaboration with Ms. Tung, Yao has been instrumental in refining CHP's inclusive learning programs and enhancing support services for students with challenges, integrating resources from social organizations, community groups, and governmental bodies to bolster the support network available to students and their families.

Mr. Yao's role at CHP highlights his significant contributions to fostering a nurturing and responsive educational environment, reflecting his deep commitment to the welfare of the school community and his strategic approach to leadership within the school's administration.

School Leadership Profile VIII

Basic Information	
Name	Yao
Age Group	36 - 40
Gender	Male
Post	Administrative Assistant of Principal (Vice Principal de facto)
Political Affiliation	Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC)
Responsibility	Student Welfare and Family Support at C3
Subject Taught	N/A
Campus Site	C3 - Third Campus
Education Background	
2000 - 2004	BA in Education
2010 - 2013	MA in Education Administration (Part-Time)
2016 - now	Certification in Student Welfare and Support Services
Professional Experience	
2004 - 2010	Student Counselor
2010 - 2015	Senior Student Counselor
2015 - now	Administrative Assistant of Principal at Churchill Primary School

Achievements	
2004 - 2010	School Level Outstanding Student Counselor Award × 2
	District Level Excellence in Student Support Services
2015 - now	Municipal Level Outstanding Administrative Leader Award
	Provincial Level Distinguished School Administrator

4.2.3 An Overview of the Principal Leadership Team

The leadership team at Churchill Primary School (CHP) consists of eight individuals, six of whom hold the rank of principal and two of whom serve as de facto vice principals with the rank of administrative assistant to the principal. Of these leaders, three are male and five are female. In line with the trend observed in other public schools in Riverside District and Chengdu City, most principals at CHP are female, according to Principal Suie. He also points out that this is because males are a minority in the education system, and promotion within schools is determined by teaching and management capacity rather than gender.

Gender of School Leaders	
Male	Female
3	6

The average age of school leaders is 45.5, with only one person below the age of 40 and another nearing retirement age at 55. According to the Riverside LEA, in the district and model schools in the city, the average age of school leaders is 48.5 and 46.5, respectively. This distribution of younger age may imply that leaders at CHP have advanced more quickly in their careers. Such acceleration may suggest that these leaders have exceeded their peers, resulting in rapid career growth. As a result, interviews focused on leadership performance and career planning with the goal of comprehending their approach to managing self-expectations and self-reflection about leadership.

Age Group of School Leaders			
Age 36-40	Age 41-45	Age 45-50	Age 51-55
1	4	2	1

Privacy norms differ among various societies. While family status may be a sensitive topic in the Western contexts, it is worth noting that in Chinese cultural and social settings, parents find educators' family status relevant and do not consider it invasive to ask. There is an expectation amongst Chinese parents that teachers be married or have children, as this is believed to equip them with firsthand skills and knowledge to address family-related issues that impact children's growth. The researcher conducted this study with the utmost caution to uphold ethical research guidelines and ensure the protection of personal information. The information presented by school leaders was volunteered and not coerced, thereby respecting their autonomy.

Parental Status of School Leaders			
Married	Single	Parent	Non-Parent
7	1	6	2

Most school leaders received their first promotion after ten years of service, followed by subsequent promotions within five years. Suie explained that all school leaders of CHP follow a bottom-up progression before assuming the role of headship. The initial ten-year promotion timeline provides sufficient time to assess teachers' long-term work ethic, evaluate their comprehensive capabilities, and measure their dedication to professional development.

Interestingly, all members of the school's leadership team denied that advancement to the principalship was part of their career plans. Instead, they attribute their journey to leadership positions to a sense of responsibility toward education and a genuine commitment to serving others, as opposed to personal or professional ambition. Some leaders even resisted promotions, necessitating adjustments to their professional aspirations.

Average Time for A Promotion of School Leaders			
First Promotion	Second Promotion	Third Promotion	Forth Promotion
10 Years	4.5 Years	4 Years	3 Years

All school leaders at CHP are members of China's Communist Party, with six of the eight holding positions in social or political organizations. Interviews and on-campus observations

revealed how their Communist Party membership influences their leadership concepts, reflective practices, self-expectations, and implementation strategies. These aspects will be further explored in the following chapters.

Organizational Affiliation of School Leaders	
CPC Membership	Other Organization Membership
8	6

Ms. Tung, the person in charge of faculty management and recruitment, stated that the educational background requirements for new teachers were raised since the early 2000s, after CHP achieved its Tier-I school designation. Most CHP school leaders began their careers before the age of twenty, receiving their first degrees from junior colleges before pursuing additional degrees part-time. Of the eight leaders, only three have completed a full-time undergraduate education, and none have obtained a full-time master's degree.

Additionally, data obtained from the CHP archive indicates that a substantial proportion of the teaching faculty employed by CHP holds a bachelor's or master's degree from reputable Chinese universities, with this trend becoming more noticeable after 2015. As a result, there is an educational attainment gap between school administrators and instructors. This challenge requires school leaders to navigate society's expectations focused on academic credentials, as their followers have increasingly competitive educational backgrounds. As a result, an important question emerges that requires school leaders to effectively manage a generation of young, ambitious, and capable teachers with a global outlook while ensuring alignment with the school's vision and mission.

Education Background of School Leaders			
Junior College	BA (Full-time)	BA (part-time)	MA (Part-time)
4	3	4	4

While all but one of the school leaders have teaching experience, only six continued classroom instruction. Head Principal Suie stopped teaching and was unable to personally design lesson plans or deliver face-to-face instruction due to heavy leadership workload, according to him. And Lou, who was promoted from being an accountant at the school, has

never taught before but specializes in overseeing all kinds of maintenance and support services on campus.

Career Track of School Leaders	
Teaching Track	Non-teaching Track
7	1

Of the seven leaders with teaching experience, each dedicated at least a decade to instructing on a specific subject. Their average teaching experience exceeds 20 years. In the Riverside district, it is observed that most principals, despite being older than CHP school leaders, have less teaching experience on average. The records of the Riverside LEA support this observation, indicating that principals typically reduce their teaching duties upon promotion to the principal rank. The increased workload, primarily consisting of administrative responsibilities, tends to drain their time and energy.

Year of Teaching of School Leaders			
Year 10-15	Year 15-20	Year 20-25	Year 25-30
1	1	4	1

Of the seven leaders with teaching experience, each dedicated at least a decade to instructing on a specific subject. Their average teaching experience exceeds 20 years. In the Riverside district, it is observed that most principals, despite being older than CHP school leaders, have less teaching experience on average.

The records of the Riverside LEA support this observation, indicating that principals typically reduce their teaching duties upon promotion to the principal rank. The increased workload, primarily consisting of administrative responsibilities, tends to drain their time and energy.

Years of Serving as a Class Teacher			
Year 10-15	Year 15-20	Year 20-25	Year 25-30
1	1	4	1

In conclusion, the researcher was motivated and inspired by the professional profiles of CHP's school leaders to investigate the various factors that aid effective school governance. Additionally, the principals' narratives provide a multifaceted representation of educational leadership that captures patterns, elements, and attributes of leadership models such as transformational, distributed, and cultural leadership.

4.2.4 Insights from Leadership Profiles

The profiles of the leadership team at Churchill Primary School (CHP) offer several key insights that enhance our understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and impact on the school's success. This section provides a detailed analysis of these insights, emphasizing the principals' career progression, educational background, diverse roles, awards and recognitions, and leadership philosophy.

- **Career Progression**

Several principals at CHP have experienced rapid career advancement, often recognized through various awards and honors. For instance, Mr. Suie was promoted to the associate director of the teaching affairs office within six years of service, making him the youngest director ever in CHP's history. His leadership was instrumental during the period when CHP achieved Tier I status in the late 1990s. Ms. Leao received her first promotion within eight years of joining CHP, reflecting her outstanding contributions to the school's academic development, particularly during the early 2000s when CHP was elevated to a model school. Similarly, Ms. Chang advanced to the role of vice principal within ten years, underscoring her expertise in teacher training and management, which coincided with the school's sustained high performance in the late 2000s. These rapid progressions highlight their exceptional performance and leadership qualities that contributed to CHP's remarkable achievements.

- **Educational Background**

The educational paths of CHP's leaders are diverse, reflecting their commitment to continuous professional development. Many principals began their careers with degrees from junior colleges and later pursued additional degrees part-time. For example, Mr. Suie completed a BA in Education part-time while serving as a principal. This period of academic enhancement coincided with CHP's consistent ranking in the top 10% of district schools. Ms. Lou, who manages the school's finance and maintenance, also pursued further education part-time to enhance her qualifications. Participation in national leadership programs, such as the Ministry of Education's National School Leadership Profile Program, further illustrates their dedication to enhancing their knowledge and skills. Despite the differences in their educational journeys, all leaders share a common commitment to professional growth and excellence in education.

- **Diverse Roles**

The range of roles and responsibilities undertaken by each leader at CHP showcases their versatility and ability to contribute to various aspects of school management and development. For instance, Ms. Tung, who oversees student welfare and family support, has also been involved in human resources management. Her dual roles were crucial during the early 2010s when CHP expanded to additional campuses. Mr. Gane, responsible for educational activities for fourth graders, has expertise in educational technology and interdisciplinary learning, which has been pivotal in integrating new learning technologies during the school's expansion. This diversity in roles has equipped them with a broad understanding of the school's operations and the ability to address complex challenges effectively.

- **Awards and Recognitions**

The profiles highlight numerous awards and recognitions received by CHP's leaders, reflecting their achievements and the positive impact of their leadership on the school's

success. For example, Mr. Suie has been honored with the “Outstanding School Principal Award” four times by the municipal LEA, with these awards coinciding with CHP’s recognition as a model school and its top-tier status. Ms. Leao has received the “Innovative Educator Award” for her contributions to pedagogical research and teaching excellence during the years CHP maintained its top performance. These accolades serve as a testament to their hard work, dedication, and influence on the educational outcomes at CHP. The correlation between their individual recognitions and the school’s achievements underscores the effectiveness of their leadership.

- **Leadership Philosophy**

The profiles reveal a leadership philosophy centered on the importance of interaction with students, co-workers, and parents. This approach emphasizes understanding and addressing the needs and problems of the school community. For instance, Ms. Chang’s emphasis on maintaining a dynamic and open learning culture has fostered holistic growth among students, particularly during the late 2000s when CHP’s student performance metrics improved significantly. Mr. Suie’s belief in the mastery of interaction to tackle problems and fulfill needs highlights his inclusive leadership approach, which has been a driving force behind the school’s continuous improvement and high performance. By fostering strong relationships and open communication, the principals create a supportive and effective educational environment. Their leadership philosophy is characterized by a commitment to continuous improvement, collaboration, and responsiveness to the needs of the school.

In conclusion, the detailed profiles and additional insights provide a comprehensive and nuanced view of the leadership team at CHP. These profiles highlight the diverse backgrounds, career paths, and significant contributions of the principals to the school’s success. The rapid career progression of individuals such as Mr. Suie, Ms. Leao, and Ms. Chang; their diverse educational backgrounds; versatility in roles; numerous awards; and inclusive leadership philosophy collectively enhance the understanding of their impact on CHP’s performance and development. The correlation between their personal achievements and the school’s milestones underscores the critical role of effective leadership in fostering a high-performing educational institution. This in-depth examination underscores the critical

role of effective leadership in fostering a high-performing educational institution and highlights how individual excellence among leaders translates into overall school success.

- **Continuity of Leadership at CHP**

The leadership team at CHP is characterized by a blend of continuity and adaptability. Mr. Suie, the head principal, has led the school since its founding, providing a consistent vision and strategic direction. This continuity in leadership has been pivotal in maintaining the school's trajectory of success, as it has allowed for the steady implementation of long-term strategies that align with the school's evolving goals. Over time, new principals have joined the leadership team, bringing fresh perspectives and complementing the established leadership philosophy.

Each principal's tenure is marked by significant contributions to the school's development, including innovative teaching practices, infrastructure expansions, and policy frameworks that adhere to both local and national educational objectives. The continuity provided by having a stable leadership team, particularly Mr. Suie's long tenure, has facilitated the consistent growth and adaptation of the school to meet new challenges.

- **Complexity in Leadership Roles**

The roles within the CHP leadership team are diverse and multifaceted. While Mr. Suie focuses on the overall strategic leadership, other principals, such as Ms. Chang and Mr. Gane, specialize in areas like curriculum development and student welfare. This specialization allows the school to excel in various domains, ensuring comprehensive support for both academic and administrative functions.

The leadership team has successfully navigated complex challenges, including managing the expansion to multiple campuses and integrating modern educational technologies. Their

ability to collaborate effectively across different areas of responsibility has been crucial to the school's continued success.

- **Leadership Tenures and Achievements**

The achievements of the CHP leadership team are closely linked to their individual tenures. Mr. Suie's long-standing leadership has been instrumental in driving the school's success, while the contributions of newer principals have ensured that the school continues to innovate and improve. Each principal has been recognized for their leadership through various awards, which reflect the impact of their work on the school's performance.

These analyses provide a deeper understanding of how the individual and collective efforts of CHP's leadership team have shaped the school's current standing and its future potential.

Chapter 5 The Leadership Mindset at Churchill Primary School

This chapter analyzes and explores the leadership mindsets of the eight principals at Churchill Primary School (CHP), focusing on the core components of leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines. The researcher collected data for this analysis through on-site fieldwork at CHP, including semi-structured interviews with all eight principals and non-participant observations of their teaching, learning, and management practices.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section explores the principals' vision of education and the mission of schooling, which reflect their leadership beliefs. The second section examines principals' conceptions of leadership and its effects. The third section examines the formulation and impact of leadership guidelines. In the fourth section, the researcher presents the findings of the principals' leadership mindset at CHP. Finally, the chapter summarizes the critical insights gained from this investigation.

The study involved a total of 107 hours of interviews, including 16 hours of pre-observation interviews, 75 hours during observation interviews, and 16 hours of post-observation interviews (see Chapter IV, Section 3.5, p. 87). While the number of interviews may appear limited, the extensive hours and depth of these interviews with the head principal and vice-principals provide a comprehensive foundation for exploring the principals' leadership mindsets, practices, and impacts. Due to word length constraints, not all interview content can be fully detailed within the thesis, but representative excerpts have been carefully selected to illustrate key findings.

The keyword analysis conducted goes beyond a mere frequency count; it serves as a tool to identify recurring themes and shared perspectives among the principals. By examining the context in which terms like "holistic development," "moral education," and "innovation" were used, the analysis helped to uncover both commonalities and differences in how the principals interpret and implement the school's vision and mission. This approach ensures that the analysis is both nuanced and reflective of the complexities within the leadership team.

To further address concerns about the authenticity of the principals' perspectives, specific interview excerpts have been integrated throughout this chapter. These examples provide concrete evidence of how the principals actively embody and implement the school's values, such as the pursuit of love and beauty, the unification of knowledge and action, and core socialist values, in their daily leadership practices. For instance, Principal Suie demonstrated this by integrating moral education into the curriculum through community service projects, directly aligning with the core value of "love and beauty." Similarly, Vice-principal Leao emphasized promoting a culture of continuous learning, reflecting the value of the unification of knowledge and action.

5.1 The Principals' Leadership Belief: Vision of Education and Mission of Schooling

This section presents data on CHP principals' leadership beliefs, including their vision for education and mission for schooling. Examining principals' leadership beliefs provides insight into the characteristics, dispositions, and traits that shape their leadership. The data used in this chapter were collected through semi-structured interviews with the principals, as well as pre-observation and observation interviews. In addition, the findings from the interviews prompted the researcher to closely examine daily school management practices and to connect observations to CHP's leadership beliefs for further reflection.

The researcher obtained consent from all principals before including their statements, attitudes, and actions in the dissertation. Any information that could identify the participants was masked or blurred to maintain anonymity. The appendix contains the prepared questions for the semi-structured interviews and translations of all relevant keywords, terms, jargon, and expressions.

Subsequent sections of the dissertation explore the principals' mindsets, including their educational philosophy and critical evaluation of leadership models.

5.1.1 The Official School Vision and Mission of CHP

The formation of the school vision and mission at Churchill Primary School was a collaborative process involving both the former and current leadership teams. Principal Suie shared that the vision of “Love and Beauty” was influenced by his understanding of achieving happiness in life, which he developed through extensive professional development and reflection. However, this vision was not determined solely by him.

The existing official school mission, which emphasizes the holistic development of students, was initially formulated during the term of the former school leadership. This mission laid a strong foundation that was built upon by subsequent leadership.

During the pre-observation interviews, the researcher was informed, briefed, and clarified by Suie, Leao, Tung, Gane, and Yi about the formation of the school vision and mission and the former leadership team’s story as well as their contributions and legacies. When Principal Suie assumed his role, he, along with his deputies Leao, Chang, and Tung, revisited and refined the vision to ensure it aligned with contemporary educational goals and the evolving needs of the school community. Leao and Chang, as long-time members of CHP, recognized the positive impact of art and beauty education since the 2000s. Even before Tung, Gane, Yi, and Yao joined the leadership team, they were already advocates of the pursuit of love and beauty in education. Additionally, Luo agreed that love and beauty are essential in nurturing human beings. Thus, it became natural for the entire leadership team to support “Love and Beauty” as the school motto and official vision.

This collaborative process involved multiple rounds of discussions among the leadership team, allowing for the integration of diverse viewpoints. As a result, the final vision better reflected the collective aspirations of the leadership team while maintaining alignment with the school’s core values.

The involvement of both former and current principals in shaping the school’s vision and mission reveals a leadership mindset that values continuity, inclusivity, and collective contribution. This approach ensures that the vision and mission are not only aspirational but also representative of the shared values and goals of the entire leadership team. If the majority of current principals had not contributed to the formation of the school’s vision and

mission or fully agreed with them, it would have indicated potential disunity or misalignment within the leadership team. However, the collaborative and inclusive nature of the process has fostered a strong sense of ownership and commitment among all principals, which is essential for the effective implementation of the school's vision and mission.

5.1.2 Principals' Vision of Education

The vision of education at Churchill Primary School, as articulated by the principals, revolves around fostering a holistic development environment that emphasizes the pursuit of 'love and beauty'. This vision is encapsulated in the school's formal statement: "To live with love and to fulfill life with love." However, it is essential to delineate the vision from the leadership guidelines to avoid overlap and provide clarity.

The vision represents the overarching goals and aspirations that the school aims to achieve in the long term. It serves as an inspirational guide, shaping the school's direction and reflecting the core values and ideals that the institution upholds. For Churchill Primary School, this vision is embodied in creating an educational environment where love and beauty are central to the students' holistic development.

The school's vision of "Love and Beauty" aims to establish a nurturing environment that promotes both aesthetic appreciation and emotional development. This vision sets a high aspirational benchmark by integrating these values into every facet of school life, thereby fostering well-rounded development among students. The vision articulates the ideal state that the school strives to achieve, encapsulating long-term goals and the overarching direction for the institution's growth.

In contrast, the guidelines are concrete actions and principles designed to achieve the vision. They provide a roadmap for implementing the vision in everyday school operations and leadership practices. The guidelines are practical steps and strategies that principals and teachers follow to realize the vision within the school's framework.

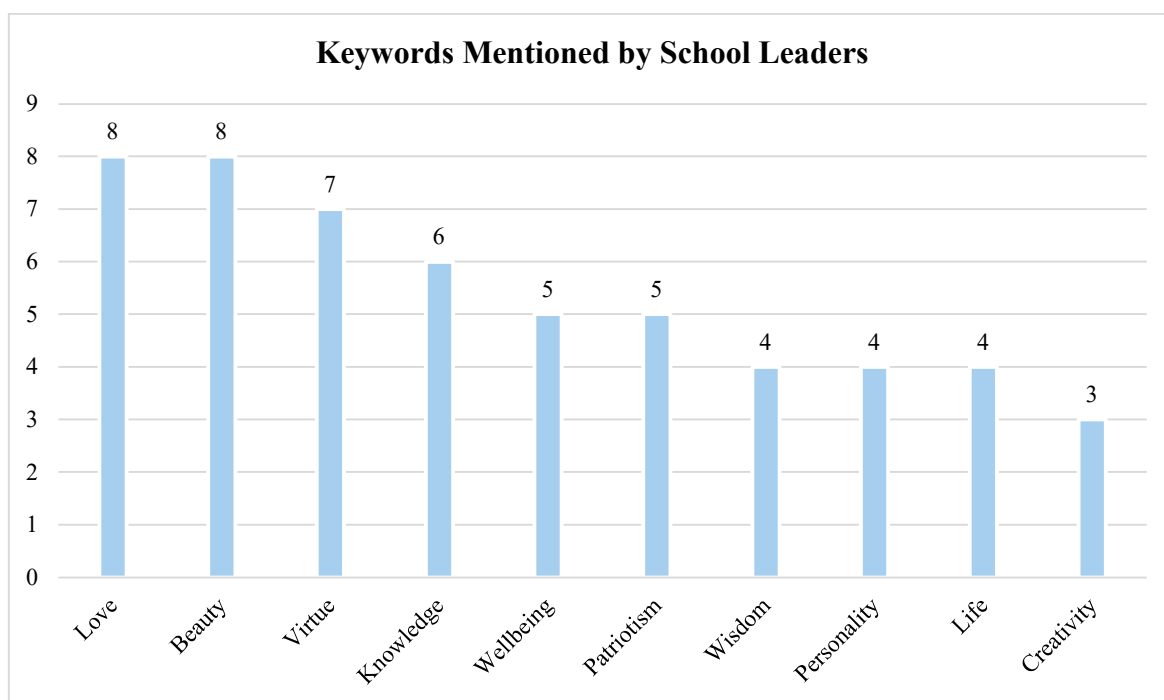
By differentiating between vision and guidelines, it becomes clear that while both aim to promote ‘love and beauty’, the vision sets the aspirational target, and the guidelines detail the means to achieve it.

During the semi-structured interviews with the principals, a series of questions were asked to understand the principals’ vision of education, particularly the following three aspects:

1. How to understand the nature of education?
2. What is the education that CHP is pursuing?
3. How do principals reflect the school vision on principals and the school?

These three questions are used to collect data on the CHP principals’ vision of education. In the interviews, all school leaders, including the principal, vice-principals, and the senior school director who acted as a de facto vice-principal, were encouraged to express their ideas in brief. The researcher recorded the most frequently used keywords and expressions during the interviews that the principals used to summarize their vision of education.

In the first question, all eight respondents answered the researcher’s question about the vision of education and gave their opinions. Most principals responded to the researcher’s question with a similar pattern of expressions, either “education is about A and B” or “education is about providing or bringing C and D.”



The researcher found that while there were differences in the principals' interpretation of the nature of education, all eight principals mentioned the same two key words: "love and beauty." These two words perfectly reflected the primary school's core value and motto, "living with love and beauty in the heart. The second and third most frequently used keywords were morality and knowledge, with seven and six mentions, respectively. Patriotism and well-being were both mentioned five times. Similarly, wisdom, personality and life were equally important as they were used four times. Creativity was the least used keyword in the interviews.

The shared school vision put forth by the principals not only underscores their commitment to the idea of "love and beauty" but also highlights Principal Suie's central role within the CHP leadership team. Despite this, Suie maintained that "Love and Beauty" stemmed from successful experiences accumulated and amalgamated by the school's frontline educators and administrators during his tenure. He stressed that he was not the originator but rather the synthesizer and advocate of this vision. According to him, the vision of "love and beauty" was intricately woven into the practical experiences of the school's teaching and management staff.

Seven principals unanimously emphasized the crucial role of virtue and morality within their educational vision. Principal Suie expounded on the significance of morality, stating,

“Morality is the genesis of love and the pinnacle of beauty.” Furthermore, six other principals also stressed the indispensability of morality in shaping an exemplary individual and society. Some principals underscored the importance of knowledge, happiness, and patriotism, considering them integral aspects of an ideal Chinese society and its citizens. Notably, Leao, Chang, and Gane posited that only those with profound love for their country and society could effectively and logically apply knowledge, ultimately contributing to the well-being of Chinese citizens. Moreover, several principals highlighted the importance of wisdom, personality, personal life, and creativity within their educational vision.

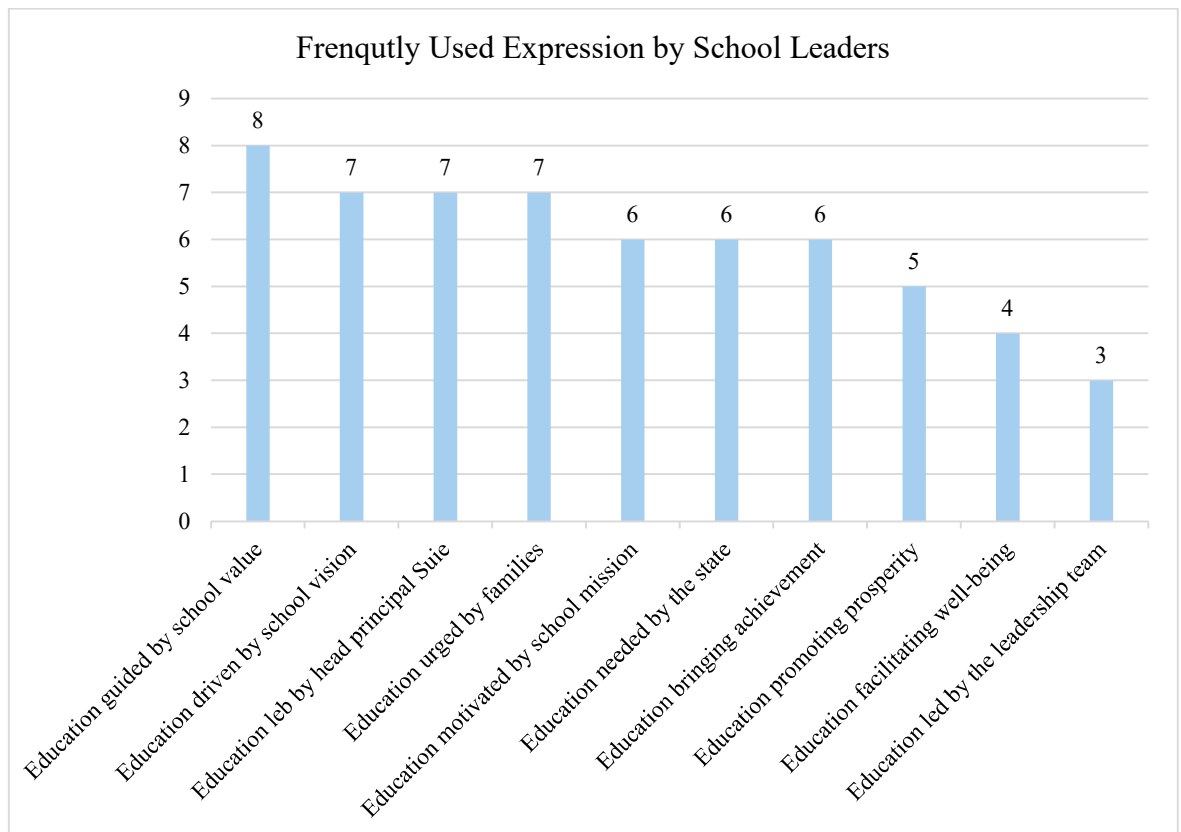
While the entire leadership team agreed to adopt “Love and Beauty” as the formal vision, some members had their own interpretations and philosophical ideals. For instance, the head principal Suie, when promoted, insisted on translating his educational ideals into the school’s value sets. His deputies at that time, Leao, Chang, and Tung, supported his efforts. Leao and Chang, as long-time members of CHP, recognized the positive impact of art and beauty education since the 2000s. Even before Tung, Gane, Yi, and Yao joined the leadership team, they were already advocates of the pursuit of love and beauty in education. Additionally, Luo agreed that love and beauty are essential in nurturing human beings. Thus, it became natural for the entire leadership team to support “Love and Beauty” as the school motto and official vision.

The head principal Suie and vice-principals Chang, Leao, and Gane informed the researcher that to finalize the expression of the school vision, multiple rounds of discussions were conducted among the leadership team. These discussions allowed for the integration of diverse viewpoints into a more comprehensive and inclusive vision statement. This iterative process ensured that the final vision better reflected the collective aspirations of the leadership team while maintaining alignment with the school’s core values.

It is noteworthy that all the principals unanimously regarded “living with love and beauty in the heart” as the cornerstone of their educational vision, establishing a consensus. However, over half of the principals expressed dissatisfaction with the school’s formal framing of “Love and Beauty,” citing discrepancies between their individual and collective educational visions and the school’s official perspective of “To live with love and to fulfill life with love.” While acknowledging that this discrepancy may not significantly affect the leadership team, the principals anticipated potential challenges in teacher training, parental communication,

and student guidance. Consequently, the school leadership team, including Head Principal Suie, grappled with ongoing debates regarding the necessity of aligning the school's core values, motto, and vision, and the potential need for alterations at the structural level.

All eight principals responded to the second question by elucidating the educational approach or model practiced and pursued by CHP. The key phrases utilized by the principals are detailed in the table below.



All eight leaders insisted that the education practiced at CHP was guided by the school's core value: "To live with love and beauty in the heart." Similarly, seven of the eight informed the researcher that CHP's education was guided by its vision. In addition, these same leaders believed that CHP's education addressed essential family needs. Interestingly, all the respondents mentioned that the principal, except Suie himself, led the education practiced and pursued at CHP. On the contrary, only three leaders mentioned the leadership team when answering the question. Six out of eight believed that CHP's school mission motivated its operation and that the education provided by CHP served the country and brought achievement to the people. Five leaders believed that CHP's education was dedicated to

promoting (social) welfare. In addition, four leaders understood that the education CHP practiced and pursued facilitated individual well-being.

The researcher observed that the principals frequently used similar expression patterns when discussing key aspects of CHP's education, with seven out of eight principals employing the same sentence structures, such as: "CHP's education is guided by A, driven by B, or motivated by C to achieve D and realize E."

During follow-up interviews, the head principal and his deputies offered insights into this phenomenon. Suie explained that he had introduced various thinking tools to his colleagues, including modern social organizational management methods and contemporary school management philosophies. These tools, acquired through professional development programs, were shared with the leadership team to promote a coherent approach to thinking and expressing ideas within the school's context.

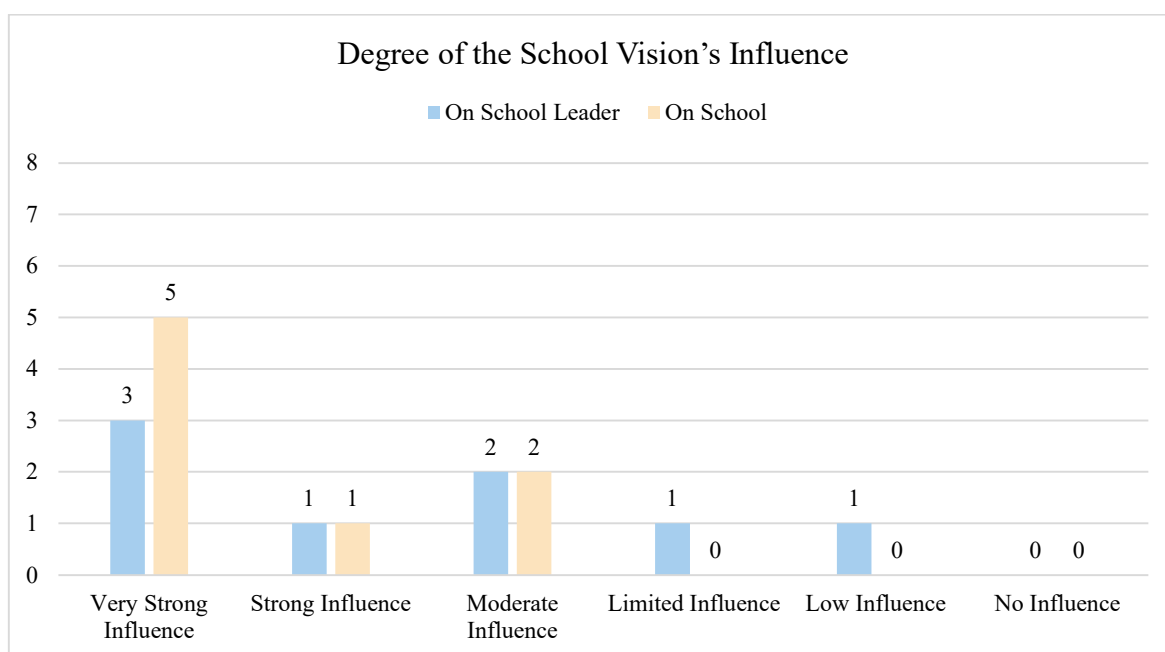
Suie highlighted that the purpose of this training was to cultivate a unified pattern of thinking and communication that would align with the school's values, vision, and mission. While the intent was to foster a shared understanding among the leadership team, it is important to acknowledge that this training could influence the uniformity in the principals' responses.

However, it should also be noted that despite the structured training, the principals' responses do not merely reflect learned patterns of expression. The interviews revealed that the principals genuinely engage with the school's vision and guidelines, adapting the training to their individual perspectives and experiences. Therefore, while the training provided a foundation for their responses, the principals' views appear to authentically represent their collective leadership mindset and practices, shaped by both the school's strategic framework and their personal interpretations.

Second, most principals were confused about CHP's core values, motto, and vision. Moreover, they use each of the three terms as an alternative to another. The principal and his follower did not provide an explicit definition that distinguished the value from the vision of the CHP. However, they did not see the ambiguity as a problem because the core concepts of "love and beauty" to be conveyed to students, teachers, and families remained the same. Principal Suie added that the school's motto and CHP's core value could be interpreted as

the ideal of achieving a good human life. The school vision, on the other hand, is the methodology that teaches people how to realize it.

The third question is about the school vision of CHP and its influence on the principals and CHP. Most of the principals agreed that CHP's school vision had an impact on the primary school and on themselves. However, not all principals felt that the school vision had a similar impact on principals and the school.



All principals believed that CHP's school vision influenced their primary school. They associated CHP's successes, including high academic achievement, comprehensive student achievement, and strong relationships with families, with its school vision. Five of the eight principals responded to the researcher that the influence of the school vision was very strong. One leader agreed that the impact was strong but felt that the impact of the school vision could be more robust if more families and parents shared it. The last two felt the school vision was moderate, explaining their response by saying that school leaders should not be complacent about the positive impact of the school vision, but should constantly review, refine, and renew the school vision to ensure that CHP is an ongoing development.

Not all the interviewees felt that they received a similar impact from the CHP school vision as did the principals. Three out of eight were optimistic about the impact of the school vision. They claimed that their lives, including their careers and family lives, benefited from the

pursuit of love and beauty. Principal Suie confessed to the researcher that such a school vision was derived from his understanding of achieving happiness in life. He said that his success as a respectful and high-performing principal was an example of acting according to such a vision. One principal remarked that the influence was strong, but there was still room for the influence to become stronger. Two principals shared similar thoughts but described the influence as moderate. The two recently promoted vice principals explained that they were new to their positions. As a result, they would accurately assess the degree of influence of CHP's school vision.

During the interview, two principals took an unfavorable position regarding their personal experience with CHP's school vision. One principal spoke highly of the school's vision, but confessed that she had been a negligible influence. According to the principal, various school affairs occupied and consumed most of her working time. She did not have enough time to think and experience the ideals behind the school's vision, let alone translate the vision into action. Ms. Lou informed the researcher that her answer of low influence did not mean that she disagreed with the content or attitude of CHP's school vision. She clarified that she perceived herself as a non-teaching figure who had no opportunity to teach students the values and ways of life, she learned from the school vision. Thus, the impact of the school vision on her tended to be unusable, impractical, or low.

From the three questions that principals answered about CHP's school vision, it could be concluded that most CHP principals had a positive attitude toward it. They neglected such confusion even though they tended to use the school's values and vision in different ways. This was because they highly recognized the core concept of the school vision and agreed that the school and they themselves were under its influence. The researcher acknowledged that principals tended to use a similar pattern of expression in response to questions about the school's vision. Principal Suie trained the use of such a pattern because he claimed that such a thought and action pattern could often remind his colleagues of the critical elements leading to school and individual success.

5.1.3 Principals' Mission of Schooling

To gather insights into the primary school's mission, the researcher posed three key questions to the school leaders: their interpretations of the mission of schooling, reflections on CHP's school mission, and the perceived influence of the mission on their leadership practices. The responses from all eight principals highlighted two significant findings: a tendency to use similar expression patterns when discussing the school mission, mirroring their responses to vision-related questions; and a notable disconnect between the principals' interpretations of the mission and the official school mission.

Principals generally categorized the mission of schooling into three levels: individual or personal, social or state, and international or humankind. Vice-principal Leao, for example, suggested that schooling should equip individuals with core competencies and lifelong pursuits, contributing to national rejuvenation and global prosperity. However, while the principals shared this overarching framework, their views diverged within each level.

For instance, although all principals acknowledged the importance of "lifelong learning," only half considered it a core component of the school mission. Older principals like Suie, Leao, Tung, and Chang viewed lifelong learning as essential for personal well-being and happiness. In contrast, younger principals expressed concerns that an early emphasis on lifelong learning could become burdensome for students. Gane and Yi argued that China's college entrance system often dampens students' enthusiasm for self-directed learning, and overemphasizing lifelong learning could perpetuate negative stereotypes about education. They advocated for broader societal involvement in fostering lifelong learning.

Additionally, Gane and Yi opposed including "promoting the construction of a learning community" in CHP's mission, reasoning that achieving a learning society requires collective effort from all societal sectors, not just schools. They believed schools should focus more on individual development rather than social issues.

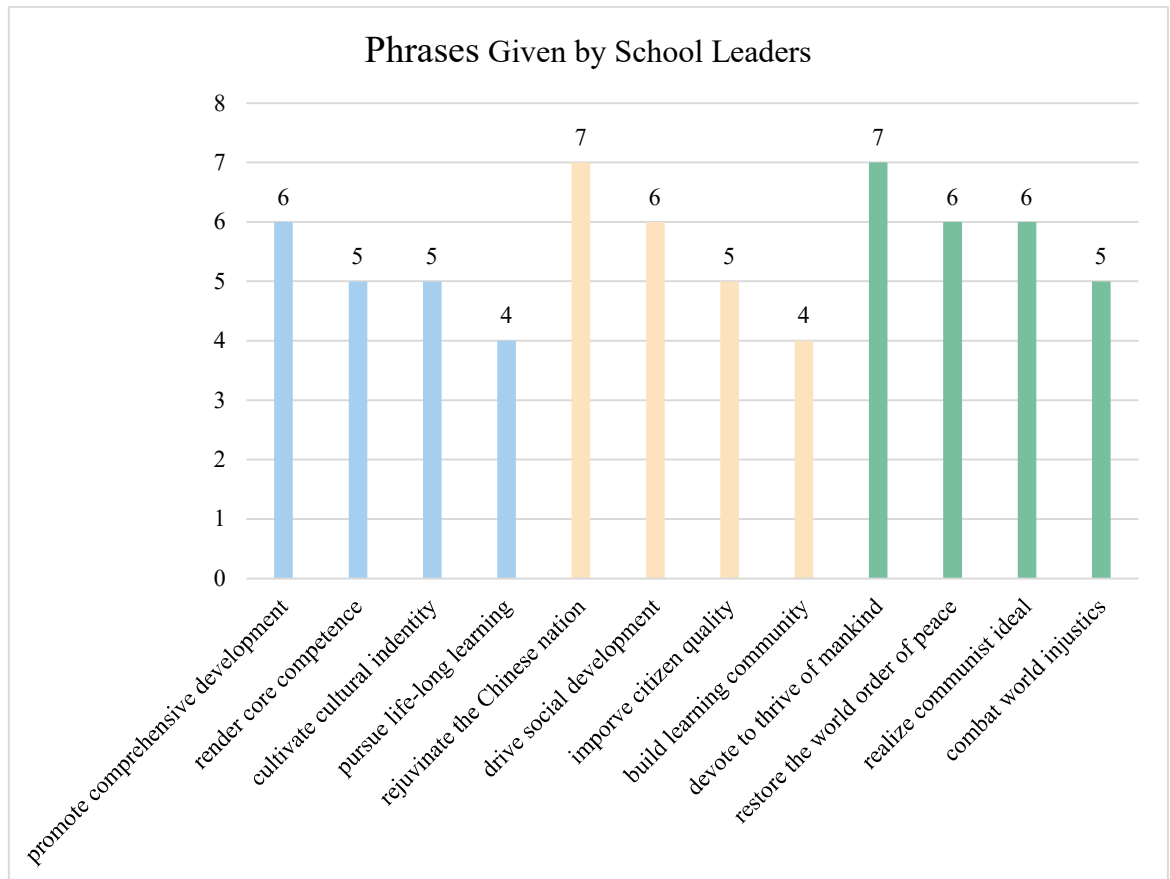
The researcher also observed that Principal Suie had actively trained his colleagues to adopt a unified thinking and expression paradigm. Suie explained that breaking down the mission into three levels was intended to remind educators of their broader commitments—from individual students to global impact. This approach aimed to inspire greater dedication to the educational cause. However, this training also led to some uniformity in the principals' responses, raising questions about the authenticity of their individual perspectives.

By acknowledging the influence of Suie's training, the section highlights both the benefits and potential limitations of such an approach. While it helped align the leadership team's views with the school's overarching mission, it also raises questions about the authenticity of the principals' responses. The training may have standardized the way the mission is communicated, but it might also obscure individual differences in perspective, which could offer a more nuanced understanding of the leadership dynamics at CHP. This revised section now clearly articulates how these factors contribute to the complexity of leadership within the school and provides a balanced view of the principals' collective and individual interpretations of the school's mission.

The researcher provided three questions to collect school leaders' thoughts on the primary school's mission. The questions are:

1. What are the school leaders' interpretations of the mission of schooling?
2. How do school leaders reflect the school mission of CHP?
3. How do school leaders reflect the influence of CHP's school mission?

All eight principals answered the three questions and offered their opinions regarding CHP's school mission. The researcher identified two noteworthy facts in the school leaders' answers to the first question. The first fact is that interviewees tended to use a similar expression pattern in response to the researcher's question, similar to their reactions to the question addressing the school vision. The second fact was that there was a limited connection between principals' version of the mission of schooling and the official one.



In terms of the expression pattern, the first fact, all principals tended to break down the mission of schooling into three levels: the individual or personal level, the social or state level, and the international or humankind level. For instance, vice-principal Leao came up with the idea that the mission of schooling is to render individuals core competencies and to fuel lifelong pursuits. Furthermore, people cultivated this way could join in rejuvenating the Chinese nation and promoting social development. Ultimately, plenty of people working together would bring the world prosperity, peace, and justice.

Principals used the same dimensions to understand the meaning and role of a school's mission, but in each dimension, there existed divergences. For instance, all principals acknowledged the importance of "lifelong learning" in interviews and supported promoting student growth, but only half considered "promoting lifelong learning" as a core component of the school mission. Their personalized and inconsistent understandings of the school mission were recorded multiple times during interviews.

Older principals, including Suie, Leao, Tung, and Chang, believed that learning was essential to promote personal well-being and happiness. Conversely, the younger principals felt that

teaching this concept to primary school students was premature, hasty, and intrusive and could create excessive pressure and burden for students and their families. Gane and Yi argued that China's college entrance examination system has largely reduced students' initiative and enjoyment of self-directed learning. Overemphasizing the need for "lifelong learning" at an early age may lead students to be influenced by negative stereotypes of learning as stressful and fun-less and carry them into their future studies. They also suggested that the state, society, and families should be involved in guiding students to embrace the concept of lifelong learning.

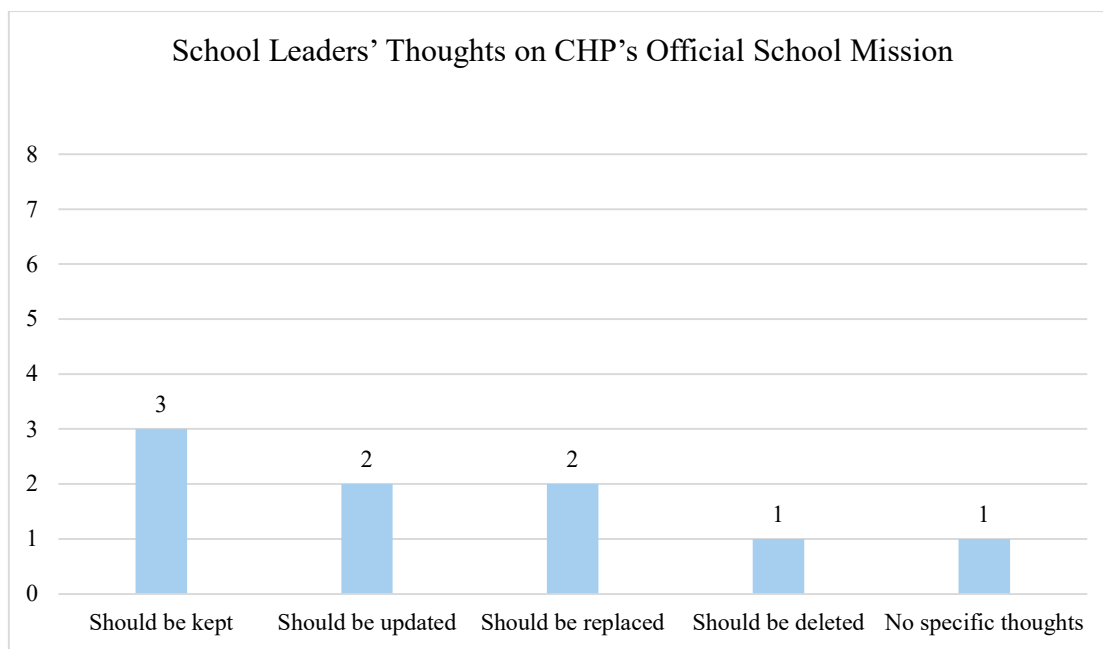
In addition, Gane and Yi felt that "promoting the construction of a learning community" should not be included in CHP's school mission. Achieving a "learning society" requires contributions from all parts of society, from individuals to the government, and not just assigning schools to play a crucial role. Therefore, schools should prioritize individual issues over social issues. In this sense, Gane and Yi did not select "promote the construction of a learning community" as part of the school mission.

The researcher was aware of the head of the school's attempts to train his co-workers and followers to adopt the same thinking and expression paradigm or pattern. Thus, in later interviews, the researcher discussed the matter with the head principal, Suie. Suie argued that breaking down the mission of schooling into three levels could remind him of the great cause his co-workers and he were committed to. He believed that school managers and teachers could devote themselves to the cause of education only by understanding the significance of their work, which extends from the mission of schooling to a single pupil, a family, society, a country, and even humankind. In later sections of this thesis, Suie's conduct of co-worker training is discussed.

The second fact, the principals' school mission version could not align with CHP's official one. The Official version is "to build a school that renders students with wisdom via the inspiration of science, nurtures students a beautiful soul via the exchange of genuine emotions and cultivates a bright mind via the enjoyment of arts." Neither of the keywords and expressions in the official version, including soul, emotion, mind, and arts, appeared in the principals' narratives.

The researcher was reminded that the existing official school mission was formulated during the term of former school leadership. Suie and his co-workers decided to keep it as a predecessors' heritage out of respect and acknowledgment of their devotion to serving the school.

The second question was about principals' thoughts on the existing and official school mission. Interestingly, less than half of the team could recite or paraphrase the correct content of CHP's school mission, while about half of them could merely quote segments of the original text of it. Only Suie, the head principal, could precisely recite and deliver the whole sentence.



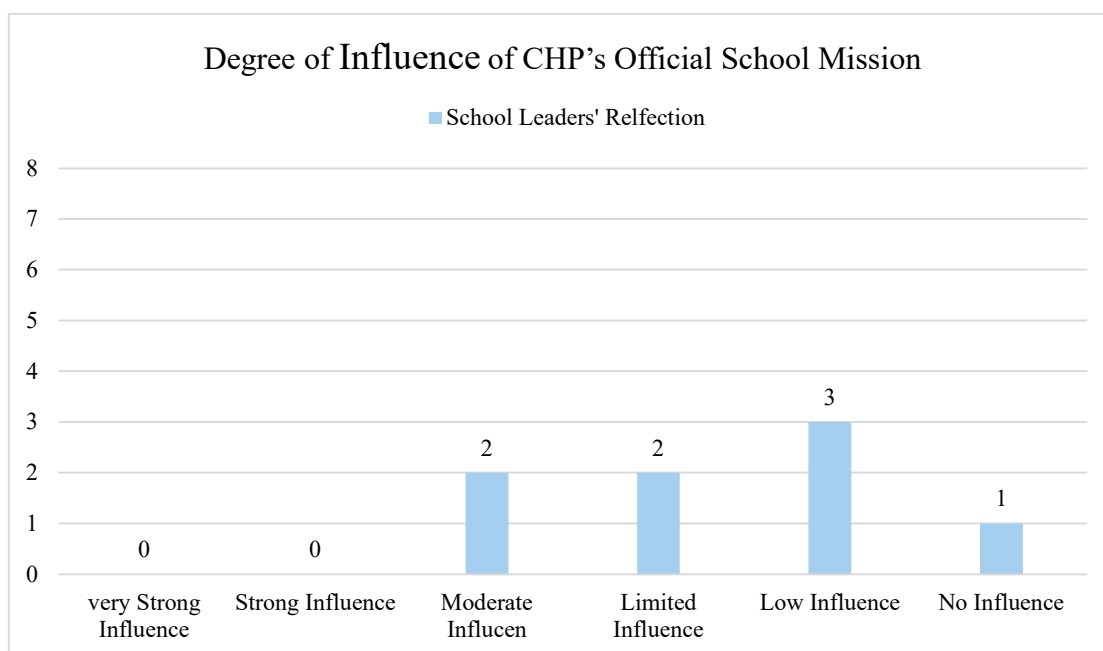
Head principal Suie pointed out that the former leadership team developed the school mission at the beginning of the 2000s. Their only modification was adding the adjective “beautiful” to the word soul. Also, Suie put it further that the school mission de facto was the “school vision” he and his colleagues composed and the “school mission” was mainly decorative paintwork on the wall. Also, five principals admitted that they failed to classify school values, vision, and mission explicitly, as each could be used as an equivalent to another.

Three of eight school leaders suggest they prefer that the existing version of the school mission be kept paying respect to the effort exerted by the former leadership team.

Additionally, they thought the information the school mission tried to convey contained nothing inappropriate but valuable and meaningful. Two school leaders advised the current version to be updated to include “love and beauty,” the two core concepts of CHP’s vision or value. At the same time, most content could remain unchanged because it demonstrated an ideal passage to cultivate decent human beings. On the contrary, two school leaders aimed to replace the whole sentence with what was considered the official school vision.

Two school leaders told the researcher that replacing the current school mission with a completely new one is their choice. The two believed CHP needed to be guided with a customized school mission to reflect the current school leaders’ values, vision, and ambition. Besides, the current version of CHP’s schooling task was labeled as incompatible with the current CHP’s school vision. One school leader thought CHP did not have to operate with a school mission, as the existing school vision was enough to instruct teachers, students, and school leaders on the objectives of schooling. Ms. Lou again gave up providing an answer with preference or stance as she insisted, she was not a teaching figure. She said she had no specific thoughts about it because utilizing the school mission to influence students or families was impossible.

The third question reflects the school leaders’ thoughts on the influence received from CHP’s school mission. No school leader stated that they had received strong or very strong influence. Seven out of eight acknowledged a certain degree of influence, but none suggested the impact was not powerful enough to change their course of action. Ms. Lou denied that she had not been influenced by the official school mission owing to the nature of her work, but she informed the researcher that she agreed with the ideals it delivered. Lou added that if the head principal requested his co-workers to adhere to such a school mission, she would conform to what Suie asked.



To conclude, all CHP school leaders have agreed that the primary school would benefit from a mission that motivates students, teachers, and families to progress, develop, and pursue. However, the leadership team gave low recognition to the official school mission, as more than half of them believe the one formulated by former principals failed to reflect the current school leaders' understanding of education, personal pursuit, and global outlook. Likewise, the boundaries between the terms, including vision, mission, value, and outlook, were blurry, implicit, and ununified, which led to chaotic terminology adopted by principals. Some principals were unaware of the missed use of terms, and most have agreed to reduce the use of specific terms at work, such as school mission and vision. Instead, they preferred to use the core values, also known as the school motto, to substitute them.

5.2 The Principals' Leadership Conception: Nature and Impact of Leadership

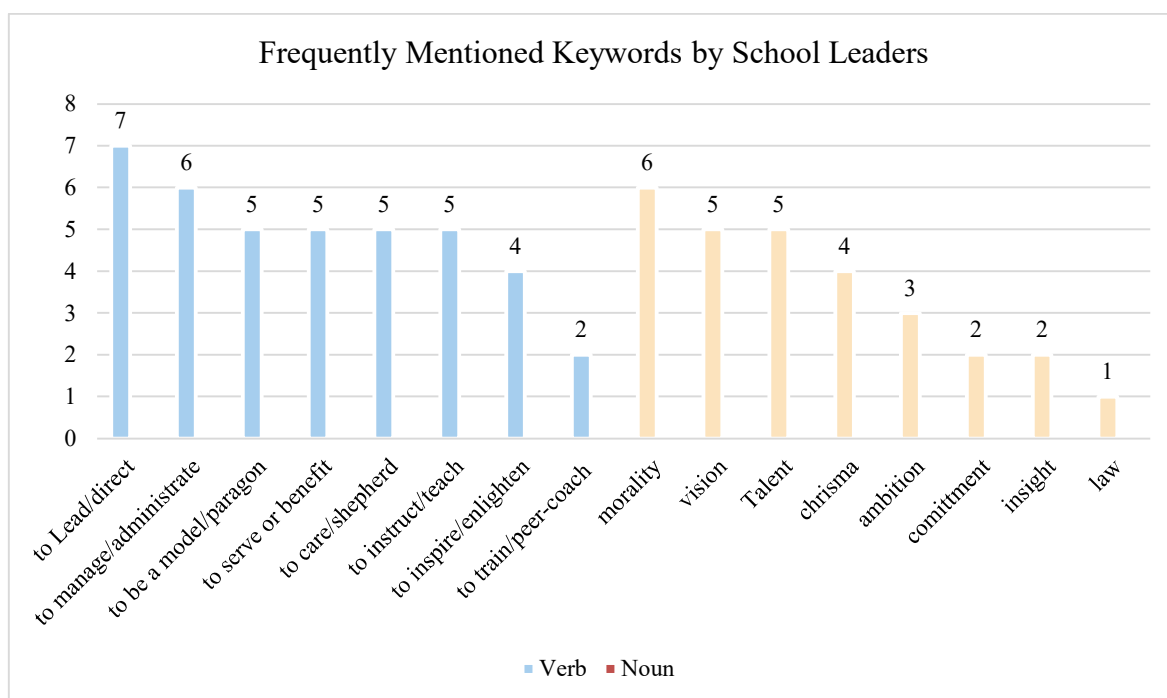
This section demonstrates school leaders' thoughts on leadership and their reflection on leadership impact. As articulated in the methodology, the principals' understanding of principal leadership, particularly the nature or essence of leadership, might affect their thinking patterns and behaviors, leading to different leadership results.

5.2.1 The Principals' Interpretation of the Nature of Leadership

During the semi-structured interview, a set of themed questions were given to all eight principals to gather their comprehension of the nature of principal leadership:

1. How do principals understand the nature of leadership?
2. How is the principals' concept of leadership formulated?
3. How do the principals reflect the development of leadership?

The first question explores principals' understanding of the nature or essence of leadership. All eight school leaders illustrate their definition of leadership. Seven leaders tended to use the sentence "leadership is a person who possesses or owns something (a noun or multiple nouns) to do (a verb or multiple verbs) (for or to somebody)," addressing the definition of leadership. There was also an expression pattern distinguished during the interview by the researcher. The frequently used keywords by principals are shown below, with verbs and nouns demonstrated separately. The words were translated from the original Chinese into English. For instance, "领导" is translated as to lead or to direct, and "管理" to manage or administrate.



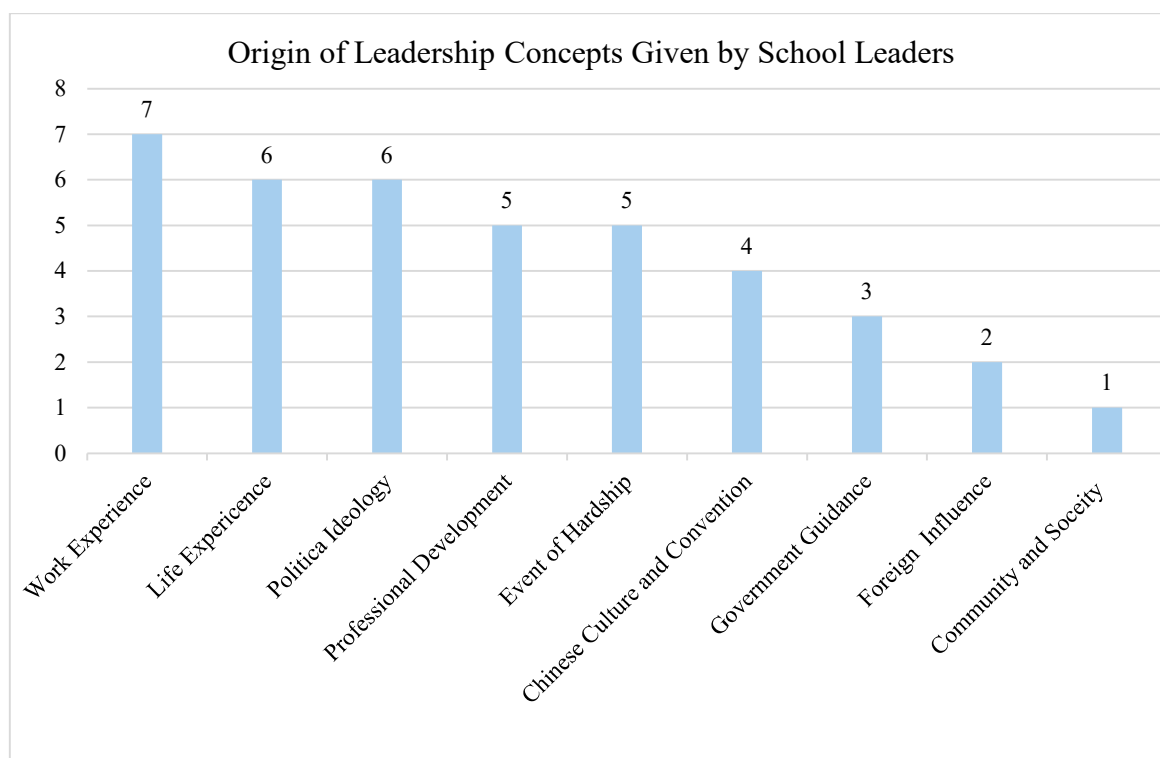
Regarding the use of verbs, seven principals chose lead” or “direct” to define the nature of work for a leader. Six used the word “manage” or “administrate.” Interestingly, to be a model, serve the country, care for others, and teach the young, the four categories were mentioned equally five times. Four thought leadership is to inspire and enlighten, while only two said leaders should train peers and colleagues.

Seven principals used the word morality in interviews when asked about the significant elements of leadership. In the meantime, vision and talent were mentioned equally five times. Four thought charisma was a necessary quality for school leaders. Three suggested leaders should act with ambition. Two argued that leaders must commit to their profession, and two said leaders should command insight. Only one mentioned the rule of law as a cornerstone of modern society.

According to the data collected from the interviews, principals have a high degree of consistency in their understanding of the nature of principal leadership. They view principal or school leadership as a quality or capacity possessed by individuals (the school leaders) with morals, vision, and talents who lead, manage, model, serve, and care for students and teachers, thereby leading the school, students, and even families to success. Moreover, the researcher also identified an expression pattern during the interview with school leaders.

Head principal Suie admitted that his presence or influence engaged in the unified pattern. The headship's impact is addressed later in this thesis.

The second question was about the origin of leadership concepts or how principals' thoughts on leadership were formulated. All eight shared the source of CHP principals' leadership concepts or decisive elements that shaped their leadership beliefs.



Seven principals thought their professional experience contributed to the formulation of leadership concepts. Among the seven, five believed their work at school played a vital and critical role in developing leadership ideas. According to the seven, the experience of instructing learning subjects, caring for students, and interacting with parents did help them to understand the pillars of being a school leader, which was comprehending the fundamentals of children's growth and frequent concerns of families. Ms. Lou refused to connect her leadership concepts to work experience or any factor contributing to the formulation of leadership ideas. She confessed that she was not equipped with a well-established set of leadership concepts, so she was not ready and not qualified to answer this question.

Six school leaders associated the formulation of leadership concepts with their life experiences. Five of the six interviewees reaffirmed the benefits of being parents in understanding family and children's needs. At the same time, four of the six answered that marriage did help them to refine their skills of negotiation, compromise, and communication. Three of the six interviewees thought they were inspired by moments of life, such as traveling, cooking, and sports.

Six principals claimed their leadership concepts were influenced by and sourced from socialist or communist political ideology. All of them were Communist Party of China (CPC) members, and some were in managerial posts in teachers' unions or other organizations at CHP. They explained that the CPC requested its members to serve the people with heart and soul and act as moral models to lead the mass (群众). Also, being a member of the CPC, principals must adopt the highest standards to behave and adhere to communist principles, such as "serving the public good and exercising power in the interests of the people (立党为公, 执政为民)" and practicing the "core socialist values (社会主义核心价值观)." Later, the discussion chapter gives discourse regarding the impact of political ideologies on school leaders.

Five principals mentioned that they benefitted from their professional development and self-motivated learning. The training provided by higher educational institutions or research institutes allowed them to learn modern educational administration and management. During the interview, Suie, Leao, Tung, and Yi provided examples of how educational management and leadership models inspired, guided, or influenced their leadership concepts and work.

Five principals said hardship in life had shaped their thoughts of how to act as leaders. They argued that the challenges and difficulties rendered them leadership traits or dispositions, such as determination, devotion, enthusiasm, grit, compassion, and prudence. Also, the five school leaders informed the researcher that they had greatly learned and evolved from their struggle, which made their leadership minds more keen, profound, and open.

Four school leaders believed their leadership ideas were influenced by or sourced from Chinese culture and conventions. Head principal Suie believed that he and his colleagues were affected by the thoughts, wisdom, and spirits of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

Suie raised an example that one of the core Confucianism principles, “benevolence (仁),” instructs people to love each other, ignoring their differences, as love is the shared nature of people. The core value of CHP, “living with love,” perfectly echoed Confucious’ pursuit. Similarly, Suie and his co-workers introduced other traditional Chinese spirits into CHP’s school outlook and guidance, such as “teach with wisdom” and “truth-seeking and kindness-upholding” from Taoism and Buddhism, respectively. In the meantime, modern Chinese culture and social conventions also impacted CHP school leadership teams’ thoughts. Vice-principal Chang and Tung said that about two decades ago, rule-based governance, science-orientated pedagogy, and student-centered learning started to be understood as substantial social conventions. These social changes have driven principals to renew and update their leadership concepts.

Three school leaders illustrated how modifying the official school guides and policies promulgated by authorities for schooling and school management led to changes in their leadership concepts. Suie and two deputies were the first to be trained for renewed government guidelines to mobilize and supervise all faculty, effectively having them operate under the newly implemented teaching, learning, and management standards. In this sense, sometimes principals had to adjust and update their leadership concepts to ensure the smooth progress of school reforms.

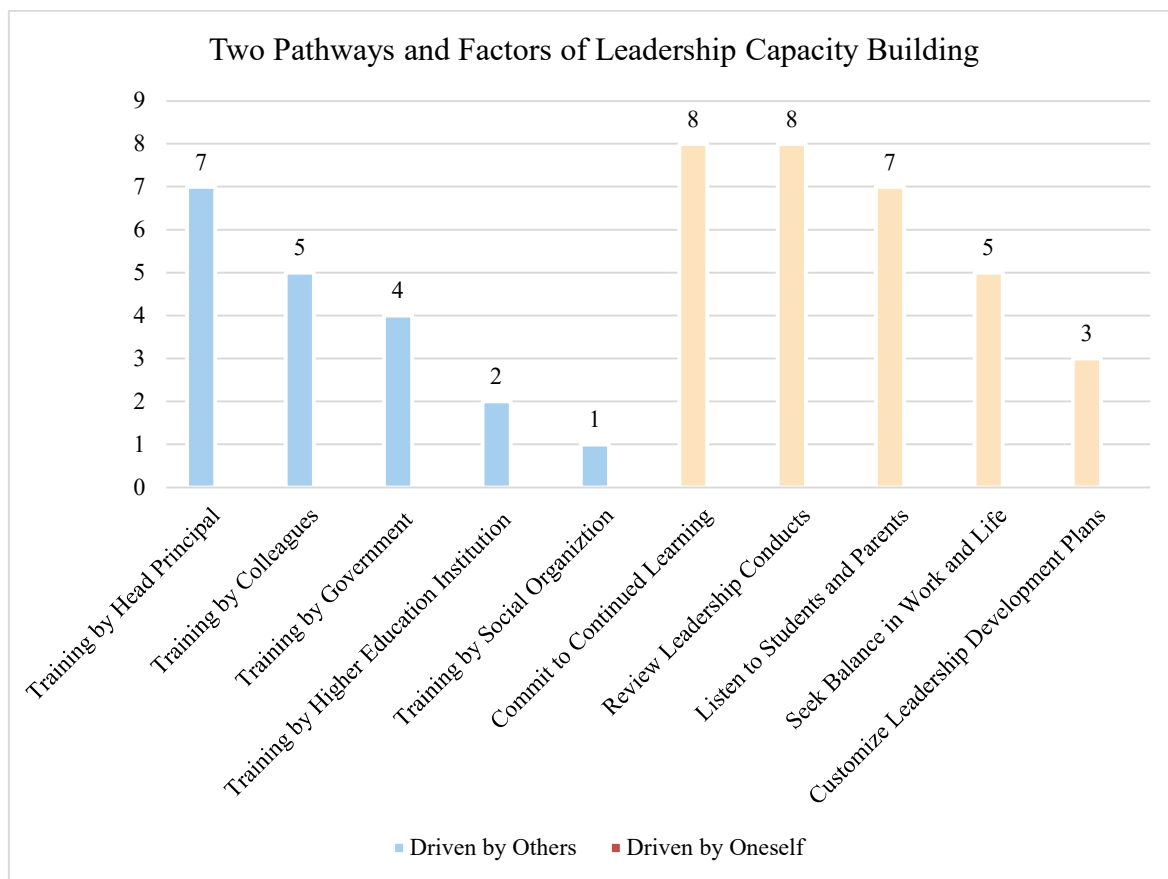
Two principals pointed out that international thoughts, theories, or models on teaching, learning, management, and professional development also inspired their concept of school management. As a cadet of China’s National School Leadership Academy, head principal Suie had participated multiple times in Sino-UK, Sino-US, and Sino-Japan education talks and exchange programs. He told the researcher he had been exposed to education in various social and cultural contexts. The practice and ideas observed and learned during his visit to foreign countries did inspire him to review and examine his leadership theory, mindset, value, and outlook. As a result, he refined and modified his leadership concepts to keep pace with his international peers.

Only one said the society or local community played a role in formulating and modifying leadership concepts. Tung, the third vice-principal, stated that she was a member of the riverside correction service center for juveniles. According to Tung, her work serving as a consultant for family support reminded her to include morality and the rule of law in her

leadership thinking toolbox. Thus, she placed the expression “the rule of law” in her answer to the question about the leadership concept.

Most school leaders associate their leadership concepts with personal experience of real life, work, and hardship encountered. In addition, principals’ political identity and ideology influenced their understanding, guidelines, and criteria for being qualified or decent leaders. It is noticed that influence from outside campus also affected the formulation and development of principals’ leadership concepts, such as government policy and guidelines, local community demands, social convention, and traditional culture. Besides, principals’ experience participating in professional development programs and international exchange activities has demonstrated their willingness, confidence, and openness to change leadership mindsets. Again, only one thought the researcher’s question was difficult to answer as she did not own well-established leadership thinking or concepts.

The third question reflects how CHP principals develop or build their leadership capacity, ability, or quality. The researcher has concluded two leadership capacity-building pathways from principals’ illustrations: One is receiving professional training from or assisted by others, such as administrative bodies, universities, or individuals. The other is via spontaneous activities or self-led conduct, such as committing to continued learning and assessing families’ feedback on leadership performance. All eight school leaders briefed the researcher on their leadership building and the essential element contributing to their high-speed or high-quality leadership development.



The first critical pathway of leadership capacity building is enhancing principals' leadership skills with assistance from others. All five vice-principals and two senior directors claimed that Suie's training in school leadership was indispensable to their leadership development. Gane, Yi, and Yao believed that they had received systematic training from Suie about how to act as a school leader, with theoretical knowledge and practical skills taught by him since Suie's official entitlement to the headship of CHP. Likewise, Chang, Leao, and Tung expressed their gratitude to Suie. They believed Suie's effort in peer coaching had successfully improved their work efficiency and confidence.

Peer coaching or training offered by co-workers was also considered an essential factor in sustainable leadership capacity building. Five school leaders reaffirmed the benefits of coaching colleagues, as it could make the most of each school leader's advantages and reduce the possibilities of the leadership team being held by bucket effects. Leao, Chang, and Gane had highly spoken of Tung's experiences, strategies, and measures for dealing with problem students and demanding families. Besides, Yi and Yao, the two vice-principal de facto, had demonstrated effective methods to interact with young faculty and address their concerns, which helped Tung and Chang establish ties with their younger cohorts more easily.

Four school leaders suggested receiving training from LEA or other official bodies helpful. Leao, Luo, and Yao informed the researcher that they had gotten used to the training programs offered by the Riverside LEA. They treated these official occasions as opportunities to exchange experiences of school management and learn from successful leadership cases or figures. Furthermore, Yi added that such training provided by the government was both practical and critical at the same time. For instance, principals could bargain or plead with LEA officials for more human resources or an extra budget to be granted when the CHP's difficulties were shown to the government during the training program.

Two school leaders admitted that attending training programs held by higher education institutions was also a valid pathway for improving leadership capacity. At the beginning of the 2010s, CHP established a research network with several universities in southwest China, among which some were noted universities with a reputation in basic education research. Suie told the researcher that he and his team had collaborated with CHP's research partners to assess the school management at CHP and produce reports on the leadership's performances. In the meantime, universities were invited to create tailored or themed training programs to mitigate problems they had jointly discovered.

Only one school leader, Tung, mentioned the contribution of social organizations to leadership capacity building. She regarded the training from regional voluntary organizations, such as support groups for juvenile convicts' families and support teams for handicapped learners, as valuable and necessary. Tung argued that the duty of her leadership work, interacting with children and parents to offer inclusive support service and humanitarian care, requested her to possess specific knowledge, skills, and mindset. According to Tung, these working essentials were not likely trained adequately by either an LEA official or university researchers.

The second pathway distinguished from the interviews with principals was leadership capacity building via school leaders' self-motivated, self-led, or self-oriented endeavors. All eight interviewees prioritized the effects of their commitment to continued professional learning or development. Head principal Suie claimed that all his co-workers had committed to improving their leadership knowledge and skills. Leao, Chang, Tung, and Gane echoed

Suie's statement on self-led continued learning. They agreed that such action was decisive, practical, and visionary, perceived as a countermeasure to the challenges of the ever-changing world and society. Yi and Yao, the two newly appointed school leaders, considered their continued professional learning a part of their life-long learning, which had rendered them momentum and competence to progress in their careers and outperform their peers. Lou said committing to learning helped her colleagues and her set models for students, teachers, and parents, as she thought it was educators' obligation to suit one's actions to one's words.

All eight school leaders mentioned the significance of self-review for leadership conduct, which gave them opportunities to understand the advantages and disadvantages of their leadership. It was considered a precondition for producing customized plans of leadership capacity building. The seven interviewees informed the researcher that they were trained by head principal Suie, LEA, and researchers in terms of methods to reflect, assess, and analyze their leadership carefully, scientifically, and promptly. Suie told the researcher that the habit of reviewing principals' practices was developed through his effort. He said introducing an operative and effective self-review mechanism took about half a decade. Constructing a self-assessment system to include all the top, middle, and grassroots leaders remained challenging and time-consuming. According to all eight principals, all levels of the CHP leadership team operated with a regular self-review mechanism. For instance, Leao, Chang, and Tung said they had gotten used to reviewing leadership conduct monthly. Likewise, Gane, Yi, and Yao performed bi-weekly self-assessments on school management and classroom instruction.

Seven school leaders agreed that their leadership capacity building benefitted from responding to students' and parents' feedback or demands. Suie used a metaphor to illustrate the function of family and peer feedback and requests. He referred to the self-led leadership review as "looking into the mirror" and listening to children's and families' voices as "taking a portrait photo by others." Combining the two images, a school leader could have known their actual performance and leadership impact. In this sense, all leadership team levels were requested to institutionalize an opinion poll to collect students' and parents' thoughts and advice on school affairs particularly matters relevant to teaching, learning, and management. Leao reminded the researcher that all faculty who held managerial posts or had administrative responsibilities were asked to keep a leadership diary and record their

responses to students' and parents' inquiries for self and peer evaluation. The top leadership team operated random checks to ensure these middle and grassroots leaders had adequately addressed pupils' and families' concerns. The Head principal and Tung pointed out that through this process, school leaders could decently acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses to make accurate professional development and practical action plans.

Five principals suggested that seeking balance in work and life was vital to sustainable capacity building and a healthy professional career. All five believed one factor that led them to outperform their peers constantly was to keep a balance between work and off-work life. Tung argued that pressure management was the core of maintaining work and life balance, particularly the pressure from self-expectations and social desirability. She said most CHP school leaders have acknowledged that becoming a successful leader was an achievable but time-and-energy-consuming long-term task. Also, in an interview, Leao quoted Suie's comment on the significance of rest during off-duty hours that a qualified leader knew how to work, but a good leader learned how to rest. In the meantime, the head principal pointed out that the most challenging situation at CHP for professional development was burnout and insufficient time for relaxation. The head principal added that he constantly encouraged colleagues to readjust and remodel their working patterns and ways of effort-making to make professional development a perennial habit rather than a quick-fix action.

Three mentioned how customization of leadership development plans had contributed to their professional development and leadership capacity building. Gane, Yi, and Yao told the researcher that Suie requested them to develop their plans to improve leadership capacity, with each individual's advantages and disadvantages considered, included, and catered to. The three said each plan was discussed with CHP's senior school leaders for effectiveness, efficacy check, and assurance. Yi said the tailored capacity-building plan had attached extra importance to interpersonal skills and community-school-tie management, which she thought was trained inadequately in her teaching career. Furthermore, Gane and Yao suggested they benefitted from their customized leadership development plans. They believed they had maximized their strength while weaknesses were utmost avoided at work.

As mentioned above, the researcher has concluded two capacity-building pathways for school leaders. One requires assistance from third-party entities or individuals, while one demands that school leaders rely on their efforts. There was also an intertwin identified

between the two paths. For instance, even if the customization of the leadership development plan was self-oriented and self-led, senior school leaders' advice remained critical and indispensable. Likewise, the professional training programs led and provided by governments and universities required school leaders' commitment to continued learning.

Moreover, the researcher noticed the significant role of head principal Suie in both leadership capacity-building pathways, owing to his presence in all seven deputies' narratives. Head principal Suie coached colleagues and followers regarding leadership thinking and action patterns. Moreover, he led the formulation of CHP's peer coaching and assessment framework. Besides, his humanitarian considerations and charisma might have impacted other school leaders, as they tended to quote Suie's words or refer to his statement. In later sections, the researcher discusses the head principal's impact and influence exerted by his co-workers.

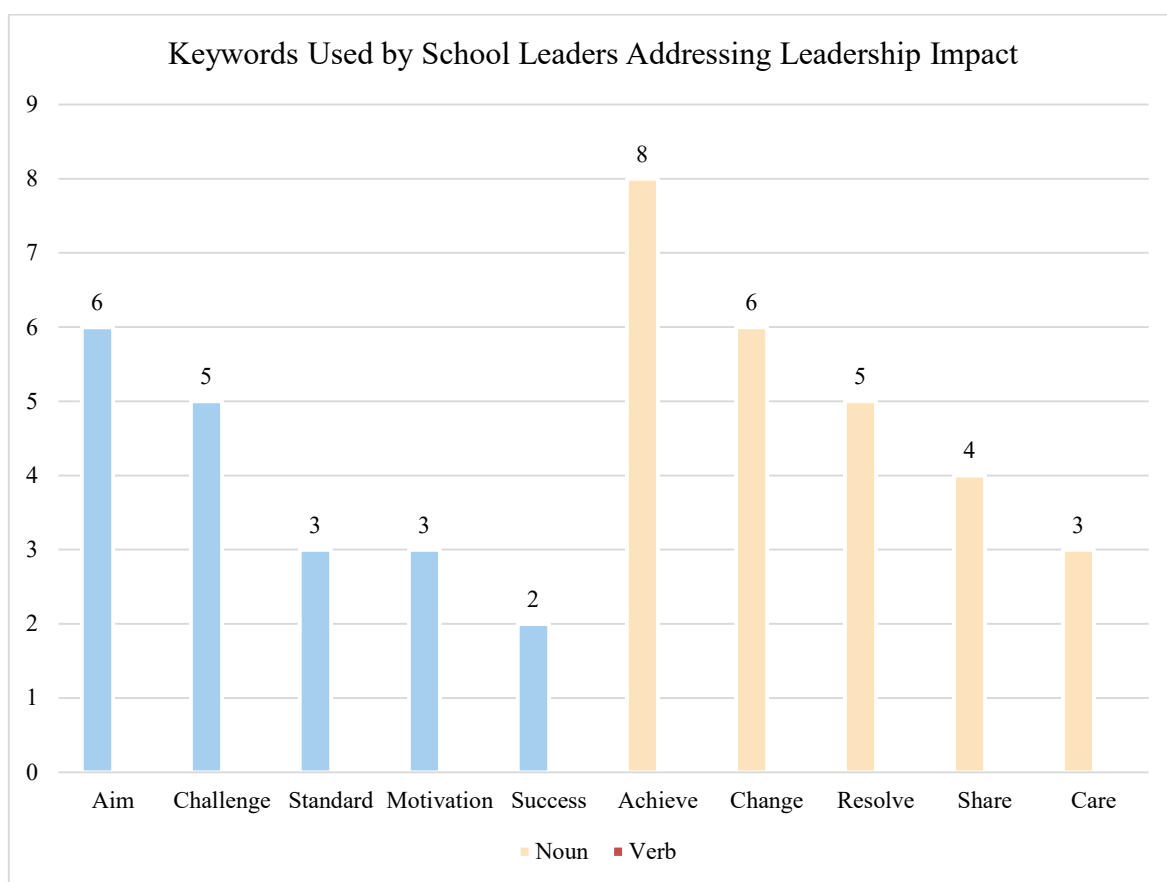
5.2.2 The Principals' Reflection on the Impact of Leadership

During the semi-structured interview, a set of questions were given to all eight principals to gather their comprehension of leadership impact:

1. How do principals understand leadership impact?
2. How do principals bring impacts to CHP?
3. How do principals review their leadership impact?

The first question was designed to explore the principals' perceptions of the impact and influence of leadership. All the participants shared their positive thoughts on this issue during the interviews. It is worth noting that the Chinese translations of "impact (作用)" and "influence (影响)" imply positive outcomes and rarely infer negative consequences. Thus, the researcher emphasized the differences in applicability and connotation between the two languages and allowed the interviewees to interpret the terms as they saw fit. In subsequent interviews, all eight principals chose to understand "impact" and "influence" positively.

In addition, all eight principals shared their views on the ideal manifestation of leadership impact. Amongst the eight, six school leaders put it as leadership impact should or could be something (a noun, such as a target or criteria) or to do (a verb, such as change or improve) for fulfilling something (a noun, such as a specific purpose, a group of people, or an organization). Head principal Suie admitted that the synchronized answers resulted from his unified leadership expression and thinking training.



Regarding the Nouns given by school leaders, six of eight mentioned “Aim.” They thought bringing leadership impact or exerting principals’ influence was the goal or aim of leadership practice. Suie, Leao, and Tung re-affirmed that as top managers of CHP, their influence must be tightly connected to or adequately reflect the school’s vision, mission, and value. In the meantime, their leadership impact should be prompt and timely. In their opinion, principals should always remind themselves of their objectives and should not deviate from them. To bring impact to CHP was the purpose of their work and the duty of all school principals, Gane, Yi, and Yao added.

Five school leaders used “Challenge” to address leadership impact, arguing that bringing change to the school or inspiring the faculty is problematic. Suie pointed out that managing a high-performing and top-ranking school remained challenging, let alone leading the school to success. Leao, Chang, Tung, and Yao also told the researcher that bringing a positive impact to a three-thousand-student primary school was complicated, as there were various risks, uncertainties, and conflicts with different stakeholders. Thus, all five school leaders said they were always cautious and prudent at work. Moreover, Suie, Chang, and Tung believed the challenges they had experienced were mainly associated with family and LEA’s expectations. They admitted that families and LEA officials were unlikely to tolerate, accept, or forgive any failure caused by the leadership team. Consequently, the challenging tasks brought pressure and tension to the leadership and faculty team, which drew strong concerns from the five interviewees.

Three principals, Chang, Tung, and Gane, associated the word “Standard” with leadership impact. They suggested that all results of leadership practices were assessed with different standards. In the meantime, not all impacts were considered acknowledgeable or acceptable if no standards were applied to assess their effectiveness and positivity. Tung admitted that multiple groups had made measurements, metrics, or criteria for evaluating principals’ work. There were official principals’ work assessment frameworks by LEA, peer-reviewed school management reports by third-party social organizations, and family satisfaction surveys led by the parent committee. Tung, Leao, and Chang informed the researcher that they welcomed all these assessments and standards for principals and their leadership impact as long as they were evidence-based, well-designed, and scientifically designed. In other words, the existing standards applied to assess the CHP leadership team were considered informal, fuzzy, and unpredictable by the three school leaders. Moreover, the ever-changing and diversified parents’ demands have made the standardization of family satisfaction surveys more problematic. Hence, the three vice-principals told the researcher that they regularly reminded themselves to collect, review, and understand parents’ and students’ needs so that they could bring the impacts requested accurately and effectively.

Three school leaders said they were constantly self-motivated to carry out professional development activities to bring long-lasting positive leadership impact to CHP. Gane, Yao, and Yi, the youngest three on the CHP leadership team, told the researcher that they wished all the influence they brought to school were positive and tended to reject failures caused by

their possible incompetence. As a result, to achieve such a goal, as young members of the top leadership at CHP, they were self-motivated to maintain a high work ethic, commitment to professional development, and solid school-family ties.

Three school leaders believed that realizing leadership impact was a resemblance of success. In addition, the three school leaders suggested that even a weak (positive) influence is better than no influence. Vice-principal Lou argued that despite the positive result, small or large, any progress made to promote the development of the school, faculty, or students was a celebration-worthy success. Lou explained that she had learned from her career that all significant leadership impacts relied on the accumulation of every leadership attempt. Chang and Tung added that bringing influence to school was a sign of maturity for one's leadership construction. According to the two vice-principals, a positive change in the school reflected a school leader's meaningful and practical participation in the school's aim-setting, decision-making, problem-solving, resource-allocating, or relationship-coordinating mechanism.

It was revealed that all of CHP's top leadership team members agreed that the most valuable, important, or necessary function of leadership influence is to achieve. In terms of the verbs that emerged most frequently in interviews with school leaders, the word "achieve" was mentioned by all eight interviewees. Suie, Leao, Tung, and Chang pointed out that achieving excellence in school management and high performance in schooling were their prioritized tasks. Yi, Yao, and Gane suggested that achieving co-workers' and followers' trust and reliance was critical to their work. Lou informed the researcher that she would like to achieve high operational effectiveness for the operational and maintenance units by exerting her influence.

Six school leaders associated the word "change" with leadership impact. They thought decent leadership impact could positively change all individuals working and learning at CHP. Head principal Suie told the researcher that he and his team constantly discuss the changes needed to meet the needs to facilitate leadership development, professional development for the faculty team, and comprehensive development for students. The head of the school added that change might not always refer to improvement. The head principal explained that it could be an experiment led by a principal to explore possibilities for STEM-inspired fusion classrooms or a micro-organizational reform dedicated to re-designing the role-setting and functionality of the teachers' affairs office. Tung and Leao implied that

although some changes brought by leadership impact could result in resistance and reluctance in the short term, the consequences of the change would eventually benefit the school, students, and faculty.

Five school leaders suggested that leadership impact should always help resolve challenges, difficulties, and problems in school management, teaching, and learning. Leao and Chang believed that as the top leaders of CHP, they were responsible for answering complicated questions and making difficult decisions. The two admitted that leadership could cause conflicts and disputes amongst faculty, and even the leadership team could cope with internal tension. Resolving problems and difficulties remained one of the indispensable impacts that qualified leaders must exert, the two school leaders affirmed. Also, Suie, Lou, Yi, and Gane perceive resolving challenges at school as a method to increase leadership influence. By demonstrating capacities in problem-solving, school leaders would help followers and colleagues to work smoothly, students to enjoy learning, and teachers to improve their professional skills. Moreover, school leaders' involvement in resolving school issues could win students' and teachers' respect and trust.

Four principals thought the leadership impact enabled them to share. Moreover, through sharing, they could unite students, teachers, families, and even the community to achieve more significant results from schooling. Head principal Suie said multiple items would be shared through the exerting of leadership influence, including the leadership outlook, management knowledge, professional development plan, problem-solving thinking, assessment skills, and school development strategies. By sharing, consensus could be reached and common goals set. Likewise, Leao, Gane, and Yao acknowledged the necessity of sharing in the leadership impact. The three stated that sharing views, thoughts, and visions with individuals allowed them to communicate with students, teachers, and families, which helped them understand their needs, difficulties, and goals. Besides, Gane and his deputy Yao added that sharing was a valuable trust-building conduct, particularly for young and newly promoted school leaders. They explained that it was proven irresponsible, indifferent, and ineffective to order families to discuss their requests. On the contrary, constructive conduct was school leaders sharing with parents a vision that the CHP was marching forward with their children on a shared journey and an opportunity to invite parents' joint efforts to make their children's journey smoother.

Three school leaders, Chang, Tung, and Yao argued that caring for people remained significant for an ideal leadership impact. Tung defined leadership influence without humanitarian concerns and care as “hard influence,” which was considered stiff, cold, ineffective, and unwelcome on campus. The vice-principal explained that she had learned from her over three decades of education career that students’ engagement and teachers’ professional performance were profoundly influenced by their emotional status, which was usually inadequately valued and cared for. Chang and Yao, whose work was heavily involved with student care and family support, shared similar views on the effects of insufficient care. The three interviewees argued that CHP did better in student and faculty care than most primary schools in Riverside and other city districts, which the recent LEA’s school inspection reports could prove. Moreover, they believed that the high performance of CHP reflected that the students and teachers were at least cared for moderately.

To conclude, all school leaders at CHP interpreted the term “leadership impact” or “leadership influence” positively. In the interviews, most school leaders suggested that to bring a positive, adequate, or proper leadership impact, they must produce a definite aim or plan to achieve something. In the meantime, more than half of school leaders connected their leadership impact with challenges and difficulties. Thus, they considered their leadership practice as problem-solving and challenge-mitigating orientated. Also, about half of school leaders claimed it was their responsibility and obligation to bring improvement and development to the school decisively, despite the change it triggered might be controversial or disruptive in the short term. Likewise, about half of principals distinguished a core component of good leadership impact, the care for people, since they insisted that humanitarian care, consideration, or concern was a key to CHP’s success in promoting student learning outcomes and teachers’ professional capacities. In the meantime, few school leaders stated that any noticeable positive influence of a school leader could be a sign of success in school management, but specific standards needed to be applied to assess the validity and positivity of influence. Less than half of school leaders mentioned that they were motivated by their leadership impact or driven to exert more influence.

5.3 The Leadership Guidelines: Setting, Formulation, and Impact

This section elaborates on the school leaders' mindset of professional and relationship guidelines. The data demonstrated below are generated from interviews with school leaders before, during, and after the researcher's on-site fieldwork.

As proposed in the methodology, the researcher argues that the guidelines for principals that regulate and direct their actions and influence their thoughts and expressions are an indispensable part of the leadership mindset. During the research fieldwork, these guidelines were documented and collected. Although there were official guidelines on school culture, management, professional learning, and other school matters, there was no single set of guidelines for leadership. Therefore, the researcher conducted interviews with school leaders to identify and reflect on their leadership guidelines.

As suggested by the researcher, the leadership guidelines reflect how principals translated their leadership mindsets into leadership behavior manuals and how they intended to apply these directories to supervise, plan, implement, evaluate, and review teaching, learning, and organizational behavior on campus. In interviews, all eight principals were asked about the leadership guidelines of their profession, relationship, and morality. Subsequently, they reflected on the formulation and impact of the guidelines. In addition, data from the fieldwork revealed that the principals' guidelines consisted of codes of conduct, principles, aspirations, and moral standards that have profoundly influenced their planning, problem-solving, policy-making, and decision-making.

5.3.1 The Settings of Principals' Leadership Guidelines

The leadership guidelines at Churchill Primary School are designed to operationalize the vision of 'love and beauty' into daily practices. These guidelines encompass specific strategies and actions that principals and teachers follow to promote a nurturing and supportive educational environment. For instance, the guidelines include principles for

fostering positive teacher-student relationships, encouraging collaborative learning, and integrating moral education into the curriculum.

By distinguishing between the vision and the guidelines, it is evident that while the vision sets the aspirational goal, the guidelines provide the practical steps to achieve it. This differentiation helps clarify the roles of both elements in guiding the school's leadership and operational practices.

Three themed questions were given at the semi-structured interviews, and all eight school leaders reacted to the researcher's inquiry.

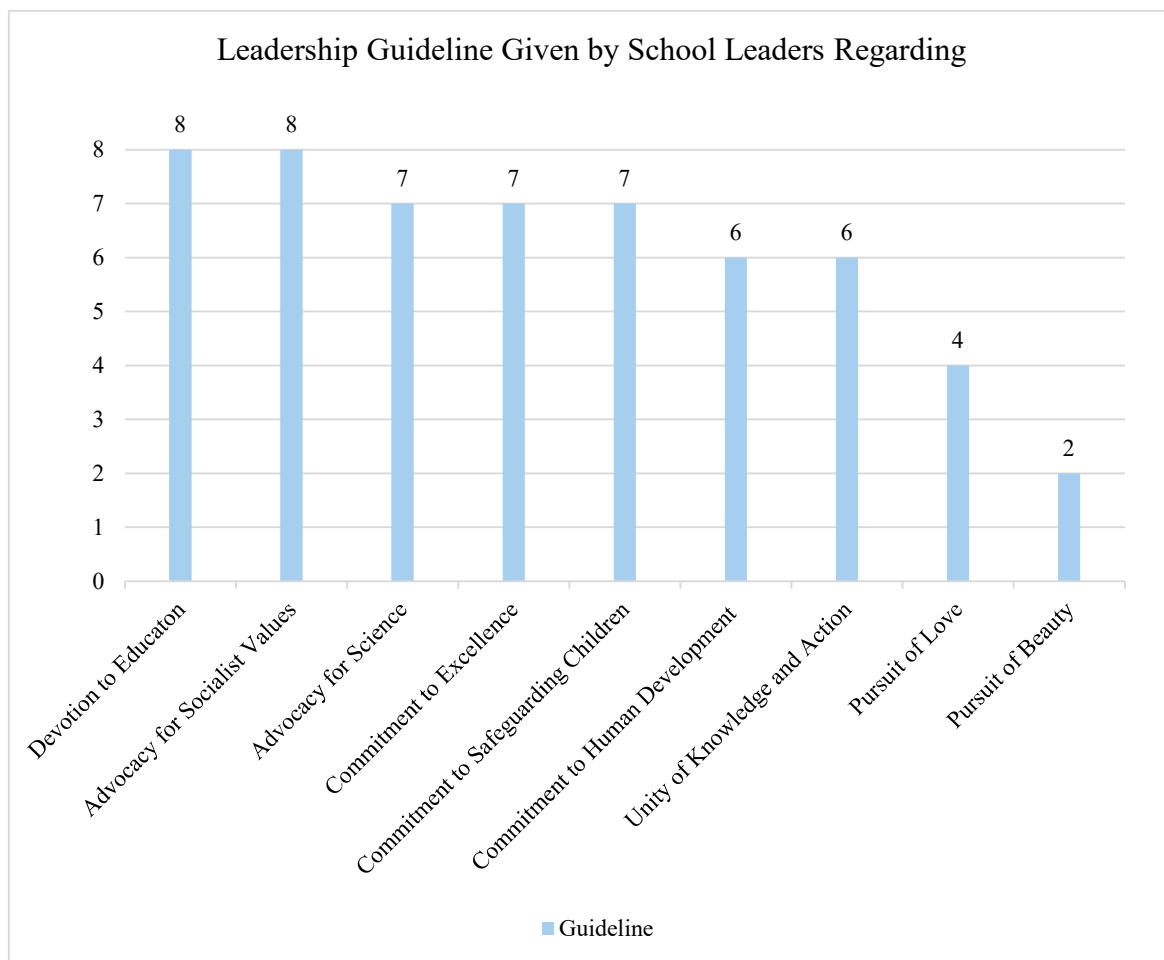
1. What are the principals' guidelines?
2. How are principals' guidelines framed?
3. What is the impact of principals' guidelines?

The first question asked the principals to elaborate on the guidelines they have upheld. As stated in the research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all eight principals, giving the interviewees the opportunity and autonomy to interpret the questions posed by the researcher. During the interviews, the researcher asked the respondents to define the term "leadership guideline." Surprisingly, all the principals offered a similar definition that leadership guidelines might include different sets of directories, but there must be sets of professional, relational, and moral guidelines included in the core settings.

During the interviews, all eight CHP leaders stressed the importance of education and advocacy of core socialist values, a political doctrine endorsed by the Communist Party of China. The CHP leadership team also emphasized the importance of promoting science and the pursuit of knowledge and excellence. Some school leaders emphasized their commitment to excellence, safeguarding students, and human development, while others identified other essential elements of their leadership guidelines, such as the pursuit of love and beauty and the unification of knowledge and action.

In addition, the CHP leaders expressed their desire for their leadership guidelines to serve as a reference for all teachers at the primary school. Principal Suie stated, “All CHP team members are considered future leaders. Top and middle leaders have the duty and responsibility to ensure that everyone’s potential is fully developed. First and second vice principals Leao and Chang emphasized that leadership development is critical to achieving excellence for teachers, students, and the school. Tung, the director of moral education and family support, noted that leadership guidelines could positively influence and inspire students and families. “We have stopped preaching. Instead, we invite teachers, students, and families to emulate what we have done. This is our commitment to ‘Zhi Xing He Yi’ (a Chinese philosophy that means ‘hands and mind’).” Younger principals Yi, Yao, and Gane also expressed their commitment to using their guidelines to influence young and newly licensed teachers, as such guidelines illustrate the essential qualities of a respected educator and the core competencies of an effective teacher.

During the interview, all eight principals emphasized their commitment to education and the promotion of socialist core values, supported by the Communist Party of China. The leadership team at Churchill Primary School (CHP) also emphasized science, excellence, and knowledge acquisition. Some school leaders highlighted their focus on excellence, student protection, and human development, while others mentioned additional core leadership guidelines, such as the pursuit of beauty and love, and the unification of knowledge and action. Suie and his colleagues discussed the impact of Suie’s leadership on the school’s ongoing training about leadership guidelines. According to the leadership team, key guidelines were instructed, promoted, and introduced by head principal Suie. These efforts and their impacts are analyzed and discussed in the findings section. The most frequently mentioned leadership guidelines are shown below.



Devotion to Education	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
All	8

All school leaders agreed that devotion to the cause of education was the first and indispensable guideline for educators. The head principal Suie argued that, as leaders of the school, he and his colleagues were obliged to serve as paragons and moral models to inspire and influence followers. The head of the school added that school leaders should devote themselves to the comprehensive growth of children, professional development, and contributing to the Chinese nation. Likewise, vice-principal Leao and Chang acknowledged that it was one of the moral obligations of a school leader to put personal interests aside if any school matter requires their sacrifices. Tung thought devotion to the cause of education was inevitable for any responsible and inspirational educator. Notable figures such as Confucius and Helen Keller were good examples. Lou, the supervisor of CHP's operational

and maintenance services, informed the researcher that she believed her devotion to work helped her outperform and win her colleagues' and parents' trust.

Nevertheless, younger school leaders, Gane, Yi, and Yao, thought an ideal leadership guideline could make one balance work and life simultaneously. The three school leaders agreed devotion was critical to professional development and excellence. However, they argued that devoting oneself to one's career did not contradict enjoying one's personal and personal life. Furthermore, Yi pointed out that excessive or unnecessary devotion may lead to faculty burnout and a reduction in family support. Suie and Tung admitted that inspiring, encouraging, or convincing young and middle-aged teachers to be devout was challenging, as the 2021 CHP working satisfaction survey reported. Many teachers had shown their reluctance to unconditional devotion to the development of school and pupils. Moreover, they considered it a self-pressurizing, demanding, and unfriendly social desirability.

Advocacy for Core Socialist Values	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
All	8

All eight school leaders have shown their advocacy for a socialist doctrine, known as the core socialist values, promoted by the Communist Party of China. The Core socialist values comprise twelve elements: prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendliness. The head principal Suie and vice-principal Leao, Chang, and Tung addressed the core socialist values as the guidebook for CHP's guidebook, which directed and regulated the conduct of all educators and pupils. Practices conforming to the value of democracy, harmony, equality, justice, the rule of law, and friendliness could lead to an optimal working atmosphere, harmonious campus culture, and comfortable collegial relationships, the four school leaders suggested.

Younger school leaders Yi, Yao, and Gane believed that using the core socialist values as leadership guidelines was pragmatic and critical to resolving and reducing conflicts, challenges, and even uncertainties during decision-making, problem-solving, and plan-making. As the supervisor of student care and moral education, Tung shared her observation of teachers' attempts to integrate and translate the core socialist values into daily conduct. Teachers could naturally and gradually influence and inspire students since students viewed

their teachers as moral models to follow and respect. Lou, the supervisor of the operational department, also showed her advocacy of the socialist doctrine. She informed the researcher that working under such guidelines has assisted in restoring harmony and solidarity in her team.

A good example of a member of the CHP leadership demonstrating successful principal leadership and practicing team coordination under the value of pursuing love and beauty is Lou's observed and documented success in handling conflicts among her followers.

Lou, the supervisor of the operational department, demonstrated her advocacy of the socialist doctrine by integrating the Core Values of Socialism into her leadership approach. The Core Values of Socialism in China, proposed by the Communist Party of China during the 18th National Congress in 2012, are divided into three levels: national, societal, and individual. They include Prosperity (富强), Democracy (民主), Civility (文明), Harmony (和谐), Freedom (自由), Equality (平等), Justice (公正), Rule of Law (法治), Patriotism (爱国), Dedication (敬业), Integrity (诚信), and Friendliness (友善) (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2012). These values are seen as the fundamental values of contemporary China, highly condensed to express the socialist core value system, and are intended to be integrated into various aspects of social development.

The disharmony within Lou's team initially stemmed from misunderstandings and a lack of clear communication regarding team roles and expectations. Additionally, there were differences in work ethics and attitudes towards collaboration, which created tension and hindered team cohesion.

To address these issues, Lou promoted open communication by implementing regular team meetings where members were encouraged to express their concerns and suggestions. She encouraged collaborative decision-making by involving team members in the decision-making process, ensuring that everyone's opinions were valued. Lou also organized team-building activities that promoted team bonding and mutual understanding, cultivating harmony and friendliness among team members. Recognizing and rewarding dedication, she introduced a recognition program to celebrate individual and team achievements, boosting morale and reinforcing a culture of appreciation and mutual support.

Lou associated her practices with the school's vision of love and beauty, insisting on resolving conflicts peacefully by understanding, discussing, and reaching consensus on the different interests of various groups. In an interview, she pointed out that convincing her followers that "love one's lives and love one's work" would help them seek common grounds. She believed that joint efforts to love and care for the school, pupils, and themselves would be acknowledged by people both within and outside the campus. Lou emphasized that dedication, integrity, friendliness, harmony, justice, and rule of law are integral to the Core Values of Socialism in China. She informed the researcher that she felt obligated to advocate and practice these values, working under these principles to inspire others, all for the betterment of the school, community, and society.

This leadership case is supported by data gathered through one in-depth interview with Lou, complemented by four separate observations of her efforts to coordinate and resolve conflicts within various teams. The consistent themes emerging from these data sources highlight Lou's commitment to socialist values, her efforts to foster collaboration, and her inclusive approach to leadership.

By consistently applying these socialist values and the school's vision of love and beauty in her leadership, Lou was able to address the underlying issues causing disharmony. Her efforts in promoting open communication, collaborative decision-making, team-building activities, and recognized dedication helped to restore harmony and solidarity within her team. Team members reported feeling more valued and understood, which translated into improved collaboration and productivity. These actions provide concrete examples of how the Core Values of Socialism and the school's values of love and beauty can be effectively integrated into leadership practices to address and resolve team conflicts, creating a more cohesive and harmonious team environment.

Advocacy for Science	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Tung, Yi, Yao, Chang, Gane	7

Seven school leaders have emphasized the value and literacy of science as a leadership guideline for all individuals at CHP. The head of the school believed that the knowledge,

skills, and thoughts of science constituted the core competence of citizens in the 21st century. Suie and his co-workers, Chang, Leao, and Tung, argued that science could help school leaders, teachers, parents, and students understand children's learning, well-being, growth, and development adequately and objectively. Furthermore, Leao, the vice-principal and science teacher, proposed that respecting and applying science in teaching, learning, and school management could affect people's attitudes toward disputed matters and help different parties reach a consensus or settle conflicts. For instance, pupils' unsatisfying learning or physical performances could be interpreted and explained by models or theories of developmental psychology and cognitive behaviorology, which assist teachers and families in identifying the cause appropriately and enforcing effective countermeasures.

Likewise, Chang and Tung informed the researcher that the literacy and value of science encompassed various disciplines and philosophies, which also could broaden school leaders', teachers', and learners' views on multiple topics and subjects, helping to foster individuals' creative and critical thinking, curiosity, entrepreneurship, prudence, and inclusiveness. Chang illustrated her stance from a math teacher's and school leader's perspective that educators should offer students and parents scientific problem-fixing plans and guide them to embrace the spirit of science, such as logic and rationalism, at the same time. Similarly, younger school leaders also advocated the significance of scientific value and literacy as leadership guidelines. Moreover, Gane and Yi expressed that children were keen to observe and imitate the grown-ups. Once pupils have perceived how grown-ups could have benefited from applying science, they might be self-motivated to learn science and adopt scientific values or attitudes to resolve problems. Lou told the researcher that scientific values and literacy were critical to teaching, learning, and school management. However, she refused to recognize science advocacy as her leadership guideline and insisted that her work was experience-related instead of science-based.

Commitment to Safeguarding Children	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, Yi, Yao	7

Seven school leaders mentioned the commitment to safeguarding children as a critical leadership guideline. Suie claimed that the CHP leadership team prioritized the safety and sense of safety for all pupils at CHP. Moreover, the children safeguarding guideline

requested all CHP school leaders and teachers to protect and respect the physical and mental health, food, campus life, identity, belief, and family matters. Suie and his five co-works told the researcher unanimously that causing no harm to children was their bottom line, and no teaching, learning, management, or other activities would breach it. Tung, the supervisor of family support and moral education, again highlighted their safeguarding obligations and suggested that families and teachers could have over-emphasized students' learning performances and results in the past two decades. In contrast, the preservation and development of students' well-being have been neglected, she added. Tung, Chang, and Leao thought the school's competitive performance and student achievement resulted from students' strong sense of belongingness and happiness experienced on campus. If children felt unprotected, under-cared, or un-supported, students' learning engagement, commitment to self-development, and willing participation in campus activities would be substantially undermined.

Commitment to Human Development	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Yi, Yao	6

Six school leaders thought the commitment to human development was the CHP faculty's responsibility. Suie proposed that survival was the first fundamental rule of human beings, then the second fundamental rule, development. In this sense, he and his team placed safeguarding children as the first rule for CHP managers and teachers, then human development second. Leao and Chang helped the researcher to digest the term "human development" by deconstructing the concept of human development into two dimensions: on the micro dimension, the term referred to the short-term and long-term growth of an individual; on the macro dimension, the term represented the flourishing of human civilization. All six principals stated that on the micro dimension, the human development concept could be applied to any individual on CHP or relating to CHP, including leaders, teachers, students, and parents. Likewise, on the macro dimension, the six school leaders thought human development practices might eventually influence the local community and contribute to improving citizens' well-being and quality of life. Yi and Yao, two younger leaders, admitted that promoting human development on a macro dimension was visionary and challenging.

Chang, the supervisor of teaching affairs and teacher training, addressed the leadership team's commitment to human development from a pragmatic perspective. She thought such commitment would facilitate professional learning for faculty and inspire students and parents on life-long learning. Moreover, promoting the comprehensive development of human beings would adequately illustrate the significance of non-test subjects, such as life and social skills, for teachers, students, and parents. The vice-principal also believed the ongoing assessment for learning reform at CHP benefited from their commitment to human development since both students and parents were convinced that the high-stake examination results were not the only important index for evaluating children's development.

Commitment to Excellence	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Tung, Yi, Yao, Chang	6

Seven school leaders acknowledged the commitment to excellence as an essential component of their leadership guidelines. Head principal Suie believed such commitment was a key to CHP's success, high performance in teaching and learning, and high parental satisfaction. He explained that commitment to excellence was a precondition to faculty's professional development and high work ethic, both short-term and long-term. Leao, Chang, Tung, and Gane agreed and added that such commitment inspired the leadership team to enhance their leadership capacities, instructional abilities, and professional satisfaction. Moreover, Yi and Yao thought the commitment to excellence was relevant to their occupational enjoyment, fulfillment, and contentment and should not contradict educators' commitment to family or the improvement of personal life. The two school leaders associated the commitment to excellence with their top leadership guideline, the devotion to the cause of education. They inferred that some middle leaders and middle-aged teachers could be pressurized owing to the ever-rising standards and regular KPI assessment for educators. Professional development requires faculty to invest time, energy, and money, which has become a burden to some faculty members.

In response to the negative impact of the commitment to excellence, Suie, Leao, and Tung admitted that CHP was in a dilemma: they could neither downgrade the KPI for teachers nor inform CHP's workers that it was acceptable to be assessed with a score slightly higher than the passing line. The leadership team told the researcher that they had discussed multiple

times how to manage the expectations and requirements for teachers. Nevertheless, no adjustment has been made to the primary schools' performance assessment system since 2014. Tung and Leao shared their concern that teaching and learning performance would be impaired once the standards for teachers were loosened or downgraded. Furthermore, the two vice-principals asserted that having students receive lower-quality schooling was irresponsible and unacceptable. In addition, the parents, local communities, and education managing bodies would never tolerate the downgrade of schooling quality for a model school, Suie added. Thus, the leadership team presumed that CHP would remain in the same predicament, and the only viable mitigation attempt was to increase the teachers' pay as compensation for their sacrifice of time, energy, and money.

The head of the CHP and his colleagues expressed concern over the ever-increasing pressure on the leadership team's performance, despite believing their team was capable and high-performing enough to address campus issues and drive school development. However, external parties such as the LEA, local communities, and parents considerably influenced their commitment to excellence. Suie suggested that his team was sometimes compelled to place unreasonable and unlimited demands on themselves and other faculty members. "We must constantly refresh and update our understanding and definition of 'excellence' to meet the expectations of the LEA, community, and families and translate their demands into our leadership guidelines and practices. Only in this way can we increase the possibility of fulfilling our promises. It feels like walking down a one-way street, where the only option is to move forward and upward, with no retreat or descent tolerated." Leao and Chang shared similar concerns with Suie, as the two vice-principals believed that these pressuring demands for their school had exacerbated the burnout and stress of all faculty.

Unity of Knowledge and Action	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Yi, Yao, Gane	6

Six school leaders illustrated the significance of the unity of knowledge and action as a leadership guideline. The school leaders' original expression was "知行合一 (Zhi Xing He Yi)," which means the unity of knowledge and action. "Zhi Xing He Yi" was a historical and traditional Chinese philosophy that dates back to the early 16th century (Okada, 2000). The English proverb "Mind and Hand" and "talk the talk and walk the walk" could be a synonym

for the Chinese expression. Head principal Suie thought the unity of knowledge and action motivated the leadership team and teachers to increase their effectiveness and develop their professional capacities. Chang added that “Zhi Xing He Yi” encouraged CHP faculty to translate explicit and implicit knowledge into activities or realities. Leao argued that such philosophy guided school managers and teachers to self-evaluate their instructional and managerial performances, identify and manifest knowledge and skill deficiencies, and produce further dedicated improvement plans. In addition, Leao believed the practice of “Zhi Xing He Yi” was part of CHP’s moral education, as it would influence students and families by school leaders and teachers setting examples of “talk the talk and walk the walk.”

Younger school leaders Yi, Yao, and Gane argued that decent and successful unification of knowledge and action inspired them to learn, think, and act critically, creatively, and prudently. They advised the researcher that school events involving policy-borrowing or policy-making required a seamless combination of theoretical knowledge, professional experience, and enactment to achieve a satisfying result. Thus, the spirit and practice of “Zhi Xing He Yi” became a key to the successful policy enactment at CHP.

Pursuit of Love	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Tung, Chang	4

Four school leaders said pursuing love was part of their leadership guidelines. According to the head principal, Suie, it was reasonable and necessary to include the core school value “Living with Love and Beauty in the Heart” in school leaders’ and teachers’ leadership guidelines. Moreover, Suie told the researcher that he wished all CHP faculty would regard “love and beauty” as a school DNA and “transcript into their own.” Hence, he inspired his co-workers to pay attention to the “love” at CHP and include “love” in daily schoolwork. Suie and three vice-principals admitted that it was simple to remember but difficult to conduct the “pursuit of love” at work owing to the ambiguities in such a guideline and the lack of explicit rules or methods for defining, practicing, and evaluating “love.” Consequently, to demonstrate school leaders’ “pursuit of love” in a perceivable manner, the leadership team constantly reminds themselves and their followers to be “caring, supportive, and considerate” to others at work, Tung and Chang said.

Younger school leaders Gang, Yi, and Yao agreed on caring and loving children and colleagues, but they thought it was confusing to include the “pursuit of Love” in their core leadership guidelines. Gane explained that he thought the leadership team might need to simplify existing sets of guidelines as there have already been many, such as guidelines for school management, school culture, learning culture, teaching culture, and team culture. Yi and Yao shared similar thoughts: they neither refused acting conformed to such a guideline nor denied the positive results it would have brought. They were concerned about the moral pressure it might cause. For instance, parents may accuse the leadership team and teachers of not loving or caring for their children enough. Thus, they were cautious about listing the “pursuit of love” in their core leadership guidelines.

Pursuit of Beauty	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao	2

The least mentioned guideline for principals was the “pursuit of beauty.” Only Suie and Leao informed the researcher that pursuing beauty at work was part of their leadership guidelines. Suie suggested that mastering a particular skill at the highest level or achieving one’s goals perfectly would demonstrate a particular form of beauty or pleasure. Suie went on to say that someone who mastered the skills of school management and teaching would bring a sense of beauty or artistic enjoyment to students, teachers, and families. Suie and Leao admitted that mastering leadership and teaching skills were their permanent and ultimate professional goal, which required them to be persistent and meticulous in their efforts. The principal of CHP told the researcher that he did not impose the pursuit of love and beauty on his staff and followers as a leadership guideline, but he said that he welcomed every member of the leadership team and teaching faculty to try to do their work beautifully.

As mentioned above, the CHP leadership team established nine basic leadership guidelines. All eight principals highly recognized and prioritized devotion to the cause of education and core socialist values. Seven principals clarified their advocacy of science and commitment to excellence and child protection. Meanwhile, six principals pointed out that their commitment to human development and the unity of knowledge and action had significantly influenced their work. However, few principals emphasized the pursuit of love and beauty, officially known as the core value of the primary school.

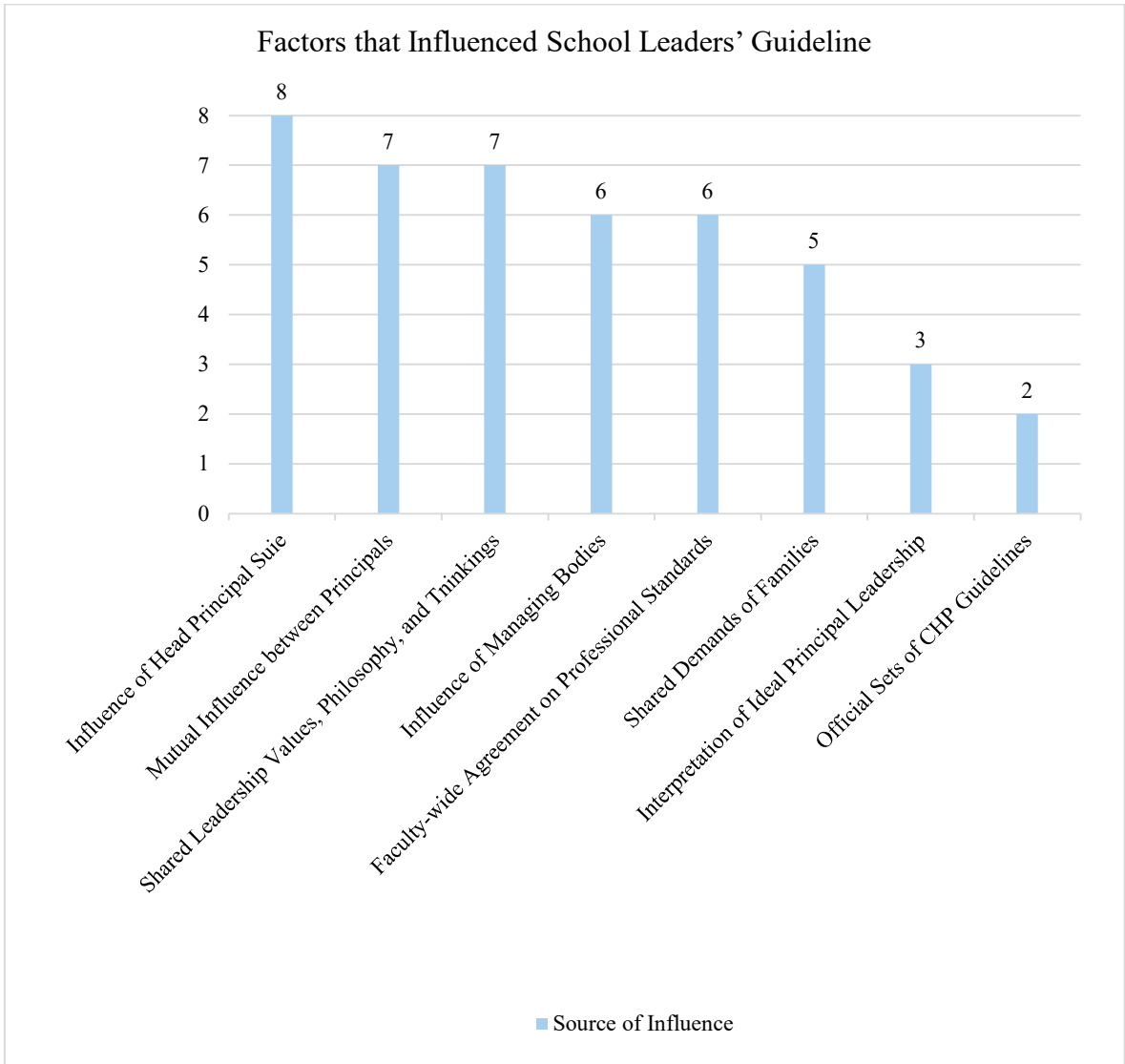
Interestingly, based on the interview with the eight principals, the researcher has found that the various sets of official guidelines, including management, culture, and team guidelines, were not mentioned by most of the principals as part of their leadership guidelines. On the contrary, some principals expressed concerns about the vagueness and ambiguity in the official school value set or a specific policy promoted by the principal, such as pursuing beauty and love. The principal of CHP admitted to the researcher that he was well aware of his staff's complaints and advice. However, he somewhat agreed with their opinions about simplifying and optimizing the existing school policies. In addition, he believed such a process would be problematic and time-consuming because he wanted to democratically manage the program for upgrading the school guidelines, which would help CHP develop in the next decade. Suie and his team planned to involve middle leaders, teachers, PTA representatives, and specialists in discussing and further developing a new set of school policies.

5.3.2 The Formulation of CHP Principals' Leadership Guidelines

Eight factors identified by the leadership team contribute to formulating their leadership guidelines. In addition, the researcher recognized that the eight factors could be categorized into two types: on-campus and off-campus factors. The former referred to factors related to individuals and their thoughts, interpersonal relationships, and practices on campus, such as the principal's influence and the shared values of the faculty. The latter referred to factors involving individuals, groups, or entities outside the campus, such as the influence of the LEA, parents, or the local community.

The researcher also noted Principal Suie and his colleagues' significant role in developing the leadership guidelines. Since all school leaders have mentioned Suie's efforts to discuss, share, and renew a specific leadership value, vision, and pursuit. Besides, in interviews, the leadership team acknowledged the teachers' efforts to review, revise, and update the handbook for all CHP faculty members. Meanwhile, the researcher also recognized the considerable influence of governing bodies, families, communities, and society on producing CHP leaders' guidelines. Interestingly, the least mentioned elements influencing

the leadership guidelines were the primary school’s official vision, mission, or other official settings.



Influence of Head Principal Suie	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
All	8

All eight principals, including Suie himself, emphasized the importance of the principal’s involvement in developing the leadership guidelines. Suie told the researcher that he felt responsible for developing a set of policies that would necessarily be both visionary and practical. “The policies should be made for all levels of leadership and the development of future leaders who are our teachers and students.” The CHP leader acknowledged the

challenges of capturing all core ideas that build a high-performing school and team at once. He added that all of the items Suie nominated and included in the core content of the leadership guide are based on the principal's two decades of experience in the cause of education and what he has learned about being a successful and respected school leader.

The vice-principals echoed Suie's statement that he had captured the essence of successful school leadership. Leao, Chang, Tung, and Lou told the researcher they were grateful that Suie had done an excellent job uniting his deputies under the same vision and mission. "Thanks to him (Suie), we could focus on realizing the school's vision, mission, and goals instead of discussing or debating some abstract issues such as 'the essence of school management,' 'the purpose of education,' and 'the goal of learning,'" said First Vice Principal Leao. Change believed that Suie was a gifted principal and a natural leader. She commented: "The guidelines Suie provided were simple enough to understand and practice, holistic enough to cover critical teaching, learning, and management issues, and insightful enough to connect the history, present, and future of the primary school." Chang felt that any leadership team member could produce a well-crafted set of guidelines for principals and teachers, but none could do it as conclusively, clearly, and coherently as Suie. Likewise, Lou praised Suie's work as she benefited from practicing CHP's leadership guidelines to lead the service team effectively. Younger principals Gane, Yi, and Yao thanked Suie for outlining the qualities that successful and respected principals should possess and for giving them viable ways to achieve them.

Mutual Influence between Principals	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, Yi, Yao	7

Seven principals recognized their mutual influence as essential in formulating leadership guidelines. Principal Suie confessed to the researcher that he was greatly inspired by his colleagues, whose understanding of the purpose of schooling, practical teaching and learning practices, and pursuit of professional excellence also motivated him to review, revise, and renew the leadership guidelines he had promoted."

There are no best guidelines for school leaders, only better ones. Therefore, we cannot stop improving our guidelines to keep up with world trends and meet the ever-changing needs of

students,” Suie added. Leao, Chang, and Tung told the researcher that they often discussed specific educational or managerial thoughts, theories, or trends with each other to deepen their understanding of schooling and improve their guidelines. “Ignore the principals who are younger or older than you. You can always learn from each other,” the principal’s assistant Yi said. The three younger principals told the researcher that the senior principals’ advice and support helped them understand the core requirements of their profession and how to act within the guidelines to become successful principals.

Shared Values, Philosophy, and Thoughts of the Leadership Team	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, Yi, Yao	7

The seven principals also emphasized the importance of the leadership team’s shared values, philosophies, concepts, and thoughts. The CHP principal credited the leadership team members’ shared and synchronized understanding of the school’s vision, the purpose of education, and the goals to be achieved. He suggested that it reduced resistance from his team and facilitated the investment of collective effort, especially in decision-making, problem-solving, and plan development. “Shared leadership ideas produce shared guidelines, which invite shared leadership efforts and lead to shared leadership results,” Suie asserted.

Other deputies said that achieving consensus on leadership guidelines was valuable and necessary because it gave them the confidence to tackle challenging issues, such as implementing school reform or managing human resources. “The unified concepts, ideas, and beliefs realized the unity and success of our team. It saved us time to perfect our management instead of spending hours debating with each other. I am not saying that all debate is meaningless. But some debates were unnecessary if the leadership team could adequately understand each other’s position and have the shared knowledge of leadership responsibilities and views,” Gane, the manager of CHP’s third campus, spoke about the importance of unified policies.

Influence of Managing Bodies	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, Yi	6

Six principals felt that influence from different levels of government had influenced the formulation of CHP's leadership guidelines. The CHP leadership team informed the researcher that the central, provincial, municipal, and district (local) government and education authorities had provided various standards and guidelines to guide, regulate, influence, and inspire principals' role-playing, teaching, management, and professional development. The closer to the lowest level of government, the more detailed the policy papers, requirements, and guidelines issued by administrations became. Suie believed the CHP leadership team received more influence from the municipal and district administrations than the central government because the latter's influence was general and sometimes ambiguous. "They (the Ministry of Education and the central government) offered moral standards and general professional requirements for principals, including benevolence, devotion, diligence, patriotism, righteousness, commitment to continuous learning, maintaining a high work ethic, and loyalty to the Chinese people, the state, and the (Communist) Party," the CHP leader told the researcher.

Suie and his five colleagues argued that these requirements only set the basic standards for a qualified principal and a functioning school but were incapable of leading principals and schools to success or excellence: "I do not deny that these things were necessary. However, guidelines that contribute to the flourishing of the school, the comprehensive development of students, and the sustained professional development of teachers were relatively more practical and important to us," First Vice Principal Leao reiterated her position. Chang added, "The central government has delegated its rights and powers to the regional and local levels of government and education authorities. Therefore, the local administrations and schools benefit from making more technical, practical, and customized policies and standards to meet and solve the educational needs and problems in a specific catchment area or district.

The leadership team informed the researcher that Riverside and the municipal LEA directly influenced guidelines such as advocacy for science and commitment to excellence. Suie explained that Chengdu City was selected as an experimental pilot zone for the "National Smart Learning Project" (国家智慧教育), which required principals and teachers to master competitive science, technology, and digital literacy to enhance teaching, learning, and management effectiveness, customize students' learning experience and meet children's personal growth needs. "As a newly promoted principal, with the reinforcement of the

guidelines promoted by the Riverside LEA and CHP leadership team, influencing and training teachers has become easier,” Gane expressed his gratitude.

Faculty-wide Agreement on Professional Standards	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, Yi	6

Six principals highlighted that the faculty-wide agreement on professional standards was crucial in formulating CHP’s leadership guidelines. This agreement was essential for creating a high-performing school, as it established a shared set of expectations and standards that fostered a culture of excellence and continuous improvement. Head principal Suie used a metaphorical expression to emphasize this: “What professional standards are to a team is like a language to a nation or programming codes to a computer. They outline the common rules and laws of conduct, fostering shared concepts, values, and beliefs.”

Head principal Suie and his deputies believed that the leadership guidelines should be co-constructed with the school community and applied to all individuals at the primary school, not just those currently holding leadership positions. This belief is grounded in the comprehensive set of leadership guidelines illustrated in Figure 4.3 (in Chapter IV), which outlines the core values and principles that guide behavior and decision-making within the school.

These guidelines are beneficial to teachers, students, and the broader school community in several ways. First, they provide a clear framework for expected behaviors and values, promoting consistency and unity across the school. By engaging the entire school community in the co-construction of these guidelines, a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to the school’s mission is fostered.

Moreover, the guidelines contribute significantly to the development of leadership qualities among teachers and students. Principals practice these guidelines in their daily lives on campus, serving as role models by embodying the values and principles they advocate. This role modeling is critical, as it demonstrates the practical application and positive impact of these guidelines on the school’s culture.

For example, the guidelines emphasize integrity, dedication, and collaboration. By observing principals embody these values through their actions—such as guiding decision-making processes, engaging in collaborative efforts, and maintaining high ethical standards—teachers and students learn the significance of these traits in effective leadership. The principals believe they should lead by example, thereby inspiring others to emulate these behaviors.

Additionally, the guidelines promote a supportive and inclusive environment where every individual feels valued and empowered. This empowerment is essential for fostering leadership qualities across the school community. As these guidelines are applied to all members of the school, from students to staff, they encourage a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

This information was collected through interviews with principals and observation. The researcher observed head principal Suie and vice principal Leao guiding middle leaders on how to apply these guidelines in daily teaching and team coordination on the main campus and Campus 3. Additionally, the researcher documented vice principal Tung, who is responsible for the student and family support department, advising and inspiring student leaders and senior members of the parental council to apply these guidelines in daily life. Vice principal Lou was also observed coaching middle leaders of the operational department, including the heads of the cafeteria and kitchen crew, and the head of the gardening team, on effectively managing their teams and fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships.

The leadership guidelines established by head principal Suie and his deputies are not only beneficial but essential for the holistic development of teachers and students as leaders. By embedding these guidelines into the fabric of daily school life and demonstrating their practical application, the school creates a nurturing environment where leadership qualities can flourish. This revision addresses the examiners' concerns about insufficient examples in the data analysis sections by providing a concrete illustration of how these guidelines are co-constructed and their impact on the school community.

Shared Demands of Families	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention

Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane,	5
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Five principals mentioned the influence of families' shared demands. "The leadership team's work is to meet the needs and demands of families, which are usually understood as children's growth and learning achievement," said the head principal. Leao and Chang believed that although there were individual and diverse versions of family demands for student development, there were common ones. The principals concluded that parents' five common demands were: students' safety and security, physical and psychological well-being, knowledge and skills, character and morality, and socialization and relationships.

Tung, the supervisor of student care and family support, told the researcher that the leadership team conducted a parental satisfaction survey every six months to understand the needs and desires of families so that they could incorporate them into the leadership and faculty guidelines to ensure that these needs were adequately addressed.

Interpretation of An Ideal Principal Figure	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Gane, Yi, Yao	3

Three principals told the researcher their interpretation of outstanding principal leadership influenced the CHP's leadership guidelines. Interestingly, only the three younger principals mentioned such factors. Gane, Yi, and Yao shared with the researcher a similar belief that a principal's success is closely tied to the principal's characteristics, traits, and dispositions. During the interview with each of the three, they all mentioned several successful principals in China's education system, which they used as examples of ideal principals to learn from.

The three younger school leaders highlighted different aspects of an ideal school principal whom they understood. Gane stresses the importance of professional development, science and technology literacy, and research capacity, which he illustrated as the core components of 21st century school leadership. On the other hand, Yi believes that decisiveness, diligence, commitment to excellence, and a strong capacity for compassion are crucial qualities that can help principals outperform their peers. Yao, however, considers building solid relationships with students, families, and staff and inspiring collaborative efforts to address school-wide issues as keys to success. Despite their differing views, all three principals agree

that the ideal principal should inspire and motivate their staff to strive for professional excellence and surpass their peers. As a result, they integrate this standard into their leadership guidelines and work to instill it in their staff.

During the interview with Suie and Leao, they expressed their interest in comprehending the common qualities, traits, and capacities that successful managers exhibit across various organizations. They highlighted their preference for identifying similar leadership patterns that contribute to effective management rather than focusing on a specific instance of successful principal leadership. According to Suie, he and Gane shared similar experiences as young principals. However, upon being promoted to senior director, he visited over a dozen accomplished principals in pursuit of the key to successful school leadership. Three years later, he realized that mere replication of the successes of others could not make one a top school leader. Instead, successful school leaders must identify and harness their strengths and collaborate with colleagues and followers to address their weaknesses. Thus, the head of CHP encouraged his co-workers to focus more on exploring the shared features of successful principals instead of benchmarking a specific person.

Official Sets of CHP Guidelines	
Leaders Who Mentioned	Times of Mention
Yi, Yao	2

Only two school leaders considered that the official school settings of vision, mission, and guidelines impacted their leadership guidelines. As mentioned earlier (Page X), only official guidelines for school culture, management, and teaching and learning at CHP were mainly applied to the teaching faculty. Although no official or unified guidelines for principals were made explicitly for or introduced to the leadership team, all leadership team members operated with some shared guidelines, such as devotion to the cause of education and advocacy of the core socialist values. However, in terms of the official school settings of vision, mission, and guidelines, only the two assistants of the principal were mentioned as factors influencing their guidelines.

The two school leaders informed the researcher that they still consider themselves a teaching rather than a manager role. Thus, they understood the guidelines for teaching practices and

school culture as directories. Moreover, during the interview, although they believed that the school's official guidelines were important, they could not accurately describe them in detail.

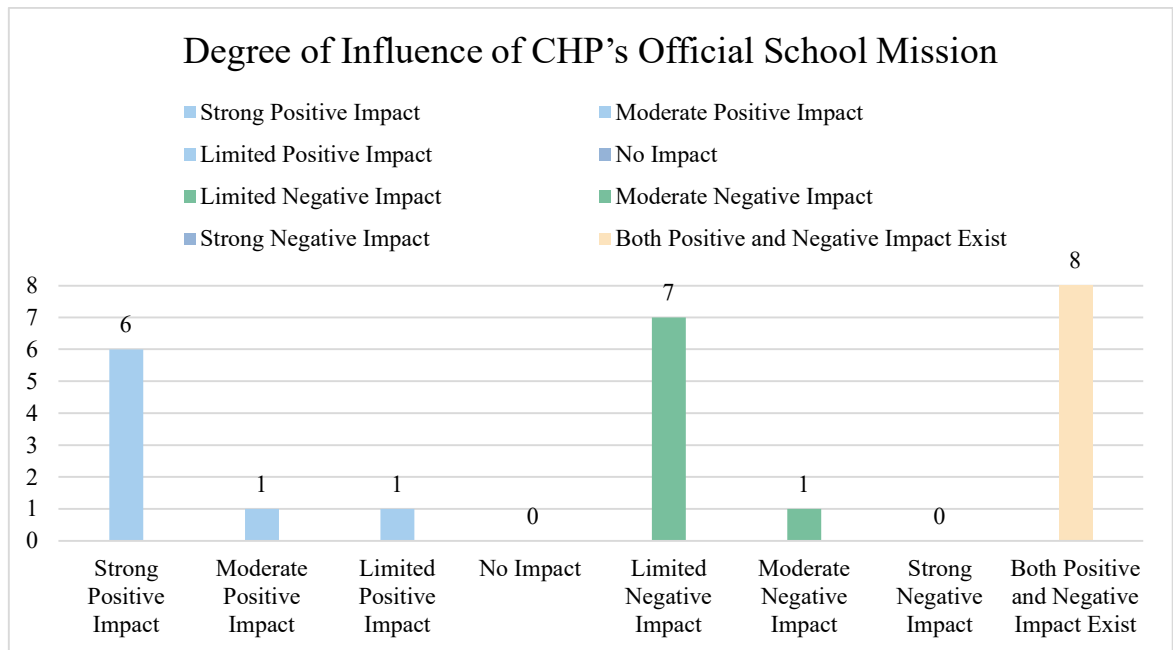
In conclusion, the absence of a universal and uniform set of clear and concise school leadership guidelines results in the different composition of each principal's guidelines. Although each principal's guidelines might differ in certain aspects, they were all influenced by the school's vision, mission, and objectives. Moreover, each principal incorporated some features or traits of an ideal school principal figure, understood or desired by a member of the CHP leadership team, into the guidelines.

The researcher noticed that internal and external factors had influenced the formulation of the leadership teams' guidelines. Within the school, the influence of the principals on the leadership team was a critical factor that helped promote mutual understanding and unity. As Suie and his colleagues suggested, the shared values and understanding of education and school leadership among them formed a cohesive team bond.

The consensus among all teachers in the school about professional requirements also influences the leadership guidelines of the principals. The school leadership team must adhere to these professional guidelines because it enables other teachers to recognize and follow them. Incorporating teachers' professional standards into school leadership policies is essential to creating a common framework for action and making school leadership more effective.

5.3.3 The Impact of Principals' Leadership Guideline

The researcher enquired all eight school leaders about the impact of their leadership guidelines. During interviews, the CHP principals were invited to reflect on the degree of impact and how they understood the impact they encountered. All school leaders confirmed that they have experienced the impact associated with or brought by their leadership guidelines, both positive and negative. Regarding the positive side of leadership guidelines, most of the principals acknowledged a powerful positive impact. Likewise, most of the interviewees thought the negative impact was limited.



Regarding the positive impact of the leadership guidelines, six principals reported significant benefits. According to Suie, “My team and I owe a debt of gratitude to the leadership guidelines we follow. We have improved our leadership, teaching, and management skills by aligning our practices with these guidelines. In addition, these guidelines have enabled us to make significant contributions to the success of our school, faculty team, students, and families. Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, and Yi echoed Suie’s sentiments, citing similar benefits from their adherence to the leadership guidelines.

Yao felt that the leadership guidelines he had experienced had a moderately positive impact on him, but he found some demanding and time-consuming when he tried to adhere to them. For example, he felt that the guidelines of “commitment to excellence” and “commitment to human development” sometimes conflicted with each other. According to Yao, “I believe that maintaining a work-life balance is critical to human development. However, if one is committed to achieving professional excellence, it can lead to an imbalance and an addiction to work in pursuit of excellence.” Yao acknowledged that following these leadership guidelines had accelerated his career development but was concerned about its sustainability. He felt he was overworking beyond what he thought was a reasonable workload, which raised doubts about his professional progress’s long-term viability.

During the interviews, principals described the influence of the official school mission using expressions such as “非常积极的影响” (quite a positive influence), “很好” (very good feedback), and “效果很棒” (excellent effect) for strong positive impacts. More moderate terms like “效果还不错” (pretty good) and “成果令人满意” (results are satisfactory) were used for moderate impacts. These expressions were categorized to reflect the principals’ views, ensuring clarity in data presentation without the use of a Likert Scale.

Similarly, when reflecting on Long-term Leadership Goal 2 (LG2), principals used terms such as “一般” (average), “比较困难” (relatively difficult), and “简单” (simple) to describe various levels of difficulty. These terms were categorized based on their qualitative responses to reflect differing degrees of difficulty.

The use of strong/moderate categories was generalized from these qualitative reflections to accurately convey the principals’ attitudes. This approach follows dynamic equivalence (Eugene Nida) in translation, ensuring that the meaning of the principals’ views is accurately represented in English.

Lou attributed the challenges faced by her team to her background, as most of her team members were migrant workers (“农民工”) with limited access to education in their youth. Migrant workers in China are typically born in rural regions where educational resources are significantly less available compared to urban areas. Many of these workers come from the southwest region of China, which is less economically developed compared to the southeastern and coastal regions. Lou informed the researcher that most of these migrant workers are in their 40s and 50s, and about half of them only completed high school. Consequently, it becomes challenging to instruct them in using modern school operational technologies, such as the smart campus security system and smart cafeteria and food storage management system, which are computer and internet-based systems.

Lou’s statement reveals her empathetic and inclusive leadership mindset, as she recognizes the difficulties her team members face due to their backgrounds and seeks to support their development rather than exclude them. She said, “Even non-teaching job workers, who are often seen as a marginalized group within a school, should not be excluded from continued professional development. In my view, lifelong learning is not only essential for long-term

occupational development but also for the comprehensive development of human beings. It is a right and a component of overall well-being.”

To address these challenges, Lou inspires the younger members of her department to engage in mutual learning and organizes group learning sessions to motivate older workers to participate and avoid feeling left behind or discriminated against due to their unfamiliarity with modern technologies. The researcher observed three group meetings on all three campuses, where Lou promoted the building of a smart campus and listened to the difficulties and challenges faced by her deputies, middle leaders, and representatives of janitors, gardeners, cooks, security guards, and IT service specialists.

Lou employed various strategies to foster a supportive learning environment, such as peer coaching, awarding “fast learners” among older workers, and inviting these workers to classrooms to share their essential life skills—like cooking, gardening, and IT maintenance—and newly learned skills for managing the smart campus. These activities included using the smart kitchen management platform to monitor food waste and the smart lighting system to improve the growth of flowers in the school’s greenhouse. Workers who were initially reluctant to use modern technologies and resistant to changes in their working patterns began to change their perspectives on modern school management and lifelong learning.

Through these efforts, Lou exemplifies the four “I” s of transformational leadership. She stimulates intellectual growth by encouraging her team to engage in mutual learning and adapt to new technologies. She demonstrates individual consideration by showing genuine care for each team member’s background and challenges, providing personalized support and development opportunities. Lou inspires her team by promoting a vision of lifelong learning and professional growth, motivating them to embrace new challenges and opportunities. Lastly, by leading by example and showing her commitment to her team’s development, she serves as an idealized influence, acting as a role model and inspiring her team to adopt a positive attitude towards continuous learning and improvement.

Lou’s leadership mindset, values, and behaviors reflect a deep understanding of her team’s needs and a commitment to their growth and development. Her approach aligns with the

principles of transformational leadership, making a significant impact on her team's attitude towards learning and professional development.

According to seven school leaders, the negative impacts of following leadership guidelines were limited or insignificant. The first vice principal, Leao, stated that the only noticeable negative impact was the leadership team becoming increasingly fatigued. She explained that the leadership team agreed on guidelines such as "devotion to the cause of education" and "socialist core values." Leao believed most principals took their commitment to excellence and professional development seriously. As a result, the standards used to assess her team's performance were increasingly high to meet the expectations of the LEA, teachers, students, families, and themselves. This expectation created pressure, resulting in burnout becoming an issue.

The other six principals who believed that the negative impact of leadership guidelines was limited and manageable had a similar perspective. According to Chang, she perceived the pressure as both a problem and a cure. The CHP school leaders had adapted to the demanding working conditions and learned to harness the adversity relating to leadership guidelines. Chang advised the researcher that they should learn from the pressure and fatigue and review and renew their "toolbox" to make their decision-making and problem-solving more effective. She emphasized that complaining about suffering would not make a difference. Suie, Tung, Lou, Gane, and Yi agreed that the negative impact was manageable and, at times, negligible compared to the benefits. Suie believed that the capacity to translate pressure into motivation was a necessity for a successful and excellent school leader.

Yao stood out among the principals for openly acknowledging that following his leadership guidelines had a moderately negative impact. He noted, "My colleagues know I struggle to balance work and personal life, especially with the demanding standards for CHP principals." While grateful for the support of his colleagues, Yao said that he continued to find his responsibilities in the Moral Education and Student and Family Support Department daunting. "I have provided care and support to many families, but unfortunately, I have not been able to spend much time with my wife and child. The more I dedicate myself to my work, the more I can care for my students, but the less time I can devote to my family. It is an ironic situation, isn't it?" Yao confided to the researcher.

In conclusion, all eight principals confirmed that they experienced positive and negative impacts associated with following their leadership guidelines. Most principals acknowledged a strong positive impact, with six reporting significant benefits from following the guidelines. However, one principal felt that some guidelines conflicted with each other and created an imbalance in his life, while another admitted that her leadership guidelines less influenced her team members due to their backgrounds. Regarding negative impact, seven principals felt it was limited or manageable, with pressure being both the problem and the cure. However, one principal stood out for openly acknowledging that following the leadership guidelines impacted his work-life balance, creating an ironic situation. Overall, the principals expressed a commitment to continue to follow their guidelines as a duty of a qualified leader, despite the challenges they may face.

5.4 Findings of the Principals' Leadership Mindset

This section synthesizes the key findings related to the leadership mindsets of the principals at Churchill Primary School, revealing how these mindsets are shaped by a complex interplay of individual experiences, personal beliefs, and the broader educational landscape of urban Southwest China. While common values and objectives are shared among the principals, each principal's approach is distinct, reflecting their unique professional backgrounds and the dual pressures of tradition and modern educational demands.

The findings presented here are derived from the research data collected during fieldwork and have been analyzed through the lens of established educational leadership models to answer the thesis's research questions. This section provides a detailed examination of the similarities and differences in the leadership mindsets of the principals, emphasizing key features and contextual factors that influence their leadership approaches.

The discussion then explores how the principals, particularly Head Principal Suie, have shaped and developed their leadership mindsets, considering the role of both personal values and the educational context in this process. This reflection extends to the effects of the principals' leadership mindsets on their teams and the overall school culture, critically analyzing both the positive and negative outcomes of their leadership practices.

Finally, educational leadership models are employed to observe and analyze the leadership mindset at CHP, providing a deeper understanding of how these mindsets align with or diverge from theoretical leadership principles.

5.4.1 The Similarities and Divergences in Principals' Leadership Mindset

The leadership mindsets of the principals at Churchill Primary School exhibit both shared values and unique differences. Through extensive interviews and observations, several key themes have emerged, highlighting their collective commitment to the school's vision and mission, alongside their distinct approaches shaped by personal backgrounds and experiences.

Head principal Suie, along with Vice-principals Leao, Tung, and Lou, share a unified vision that emphasizes democratic values, systemic thinking, and a deep sense of mission to foster a supportive and inclusive school environment. This collective mindset is reflected in their collaborative efforts to embed leadership guidelines into daily practices, promoting consistency and coherence across the school's operations (refer to Figure 4.3 for the leadership guidelines). Suie's strategic and inclusive approach to school management is informed by his background in educational administration and leadership training.

Vice-principal Leao's leadership, characterized by a strong focus on innovation and continuous improvement, reflects his background in educational research. She actively encourages his team to explore new pedagogical methods and integrate technology into teaching practices. For example, Leao led the introduction of digital learning platforms, which have significantly enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes. Meanwhile, Vice-principal Tung emphasizes the integration of moral education into daily interactions, drawing on her extensive experience in student and family support. Tung's compassionate leadership approach ensures that students' emotional and social needs are prioritized, creating a nurturing environment for holistic development. Her initiatives, such as the "Character Building Program," have been pivotal in fostering students' moral growth.

Vice-principal Lou's background in operational management adds a practical dimension to the leadership team, ensuring that logistical and infrastructural issues are handled effectively.

This diversity in leadership styles and experiences equips the school to be resilient and responsive to both internal and external changes, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability.

Additionally, the principals' leadership styles are deeply influenced by their personal values and beliefs. For example, Suie's emphasis on democratic leadership is rooted in his belief in the importance of shared decision-making and collective responsibility. He actively involves teachers, students, and parents in key decisions, ensuring that diverse perspectives are valued. This approach not only enhances decision-making quality but also builds trust and a sense of community within the school.

This range of skills and dispositions among the principals highlights the importance of building a leadership team that is both diverse and cohesive. By leveraging their varied strengths and perspectives, the leadership team at Churchill Primary School is able to address the complex challenges of school management, fostering an environment where innovative and effective leadership can thrive.

5.4.2 The Influence of Principals on the Leadership Mindset

The principals' influence on the leadership mindset at Churchill Primary School is profound and multifaceted. By embodying the principles outlined in the school's vision and mission, they set a powerful example for teachers and students alike. Their commitment to professional development and lifelong learning further reinforces these values, inspiring others to embrace similar attitudes (refer to Section 4.5 on professional development initiatives).

The principals also play a crucial role in fostering a collaborative leadership culture. Through regular meetings and open communication channels, they encourage the exchange of ideas and collective problem-solving. This approach enhances decision-making processes and builds a sense of ownership and accountability among staff members. For instance, the principals have implemented a system of distributed leadership, where responsibilities are shared across various teams and departments, promoting a sense of collective responsibility and empowerment.

Moreover, the principals' influence extends to the students, who are encouraged to take on leadership roles and participate in decision-making processes. This involvement helps to cultivate a sense of agency and responsibility among students, preparing them for future leadership roles. By integrating student voices into the school's governance, the principals ensure that the leadership mindset permeates all levels of the school community. For example, student councils and leadership workshops are regularly organized to empower students and give them a platform to voice their ideas and concerns.

The principals' ability to foster a supportive and inclusive environment is also reflected in their efforts to engage parents and the broader community. Regular workshops and meetings with parents help to align home and school values, creating a cohesive support system for students. These initiatives not only enhance student outcomes but also strengthen the school's ties with the community, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. Additionally, community service projects led by the school have helped build stronger relationships between the school and local community, reinforcing the importance of social responsibility and civic engagement.

5.4.3 The Impact of Leadership Mindset on Principals

The leadership mindset adopted by the principals significantly impacts their effectiveness and the overall success of the school. Their focus on moral values, democratic principles, and holistic education creates a positive, nurturing environment that supports student growth and well-being. This approach is reflected in the school's policies and practices, which prioritize student-centered learning and foster a supportive and inclusive atmosphere (see Section 4.4 on school policies).

Additionally, their emphasis on continuous improvement and innovation drives the school's progress, ensuring that it remains responsive to changing educational needs and challenges. The principals' proactive approach to identifying and addressing issues contributes to a culture of excellence and high performance. For example, the implementation of innovative teaching methods and the integration of technology into the curriculum have led to improved student outcomes and increased engagement. Programs like the "Tech for Tomorrow"

initiative, which integrates digital tools into classroom activities, exemplify this commitment to innovation.

The principals' leadership mindset also influences their professional development. By prioritizing lifelong learning and reflective practice, they continually refine their skills and adapt their approaches to meet evolving demands. This commitment to personal and professional growth enhances their ability to lead effectively and inspires others to pursue similar paths. The principals regularly engage in professional learning communities, attend conferences, and participate in workshops, demonstrating their dedication to continuous improvement.

Furthermore, the principals' leadership mindset fosters a resilient and adaptable school community. By promoting a culture of learning and development, they prepare their staff and students to navigate and thrive in an ever-changing educational landscape. This adaptability is particularly evident in the school's response to challenges such as changes in curriculum standards and the integration of new technologies.

The impact of the principals' leadership mindset is also evident in the school's achievements and recognition. Under their leadership, Churchill Primary School has received numerous awards and accolades for academic excellence, innovation, and community engagement. These achievements serve as a testament to the effectiveness of their leadership approach and the positive impact it has on the school community. Additionally, the school's high retention rate of staff and students further highlights the positive atmosphere and effective management created by the principals.

5.4.4 Principals' Leadership Mindset and Models of Educational Leadership

The leadership mindset at Churchill Primary School aligns closely with contemporary models of educational leadership reviewed in Chapter II, particularly transformational and distributed leadership. The principals demonstrate key traits of transformational leaders, such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (refer to Section 2.3 on Transformational Leadership). Their ability to articulate a clear and

compelling vision for the school, and to inspire and motivate their staff to achieve it, is a hallmark of transformational leadership.

Their collaborative approach also reflects the principles of distributed leadership, fostering shared responsibility and collective agency among staff members (refer to Section 2.4 on Distributed Leadership). This model promotes a sense of ownership and accountability, encouraging all team members to take an active role in the school's success. For example, leadership responsibilities are delegated to various team leaders and coordinators, who work together to implement school initiatives and drive improvement.

Comparing these practices to the literature, the principals at Churchill Primary School exemplify the effectiveness of transformational leadership in fostering a supportive and innovative school environment. As highlighted in Chapter II, transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating followers to exceed their own self-interests for the sake of the organization. This is clearly evident in the principals' practices, where they inspire staff through a shared vision and provide intellectual stimulation through professional development opportunities.

In terms of distributed leadership, the principals' approach aligns with the literature's emphasis on shared leadership responsibilities and collective decision-making. This approach not only enhances the school's capacity to address complex challenges but also fosters a sense of community and collective efficacy among staff members. By distributing leadership responsibilities, the principals empower their staff, promoting a collaborative culture that supports continuous improvement.

Furthermore, the principals' leadership practices serve as a model for other schools looking to adopt transformational and distributed leadership approaches. Their success demonstrates the importance of fostering a collaborative and inclusive leadership culture, where all members of the school community are empowered to contribute to the school's vision and goals.

Additionally, the principals' approach to leadership is continuously evolving. They actively seek feedback from their staff, students, and the wider community, using this information to refine their strategies and practices. This reflective approach ensures that their leadership

remains relevant and effective, adapting to the changing needs of the school and its community. The principals' commitment to ongoing evaluation and adaptation exemplifies the dynamic nature of effective leadership, making them well-equipped to navigate the complexities of modern educational environments.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the nuanced and multifaceted nature of leadership at Churchill Primary School. The principals' leadership mindsets and practices are deeply embedded in the school's vision and mission, particularly emphasizing moral values, democratic principles, and holistic education. This collective commitment to core values fuels their collaborative efforts to integrate leadership guidelines into everyday practices, fostering consistency and coherence across the school's operations.

The study also reveals the substantial impact of the principals' leadership mindset on their effectiveness and the school's overall success. By nurturing a supportive and inclusive environment, and emphasizing continuous improvement and innovation, the principals create a positive atmosphere that promotes student growth and well-being. Their dedication to lifelong learning and reflective practice enhances their capacity to lead effectively, motivating others to follow similar paths of personal and professional development.

These findings provide critical insights into effective educational leadership within the specific cultural and societal context of urban Southwest China. The alignment of the principals' leadership mindset with contemporary educational leadership models, such as transformational and distributed leadership, highlights the relevance and adaptability of these principles across various educational settings.

The study also identifies certain limitations, such as the reliance on a single-case study design, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, the detailed exploration of leadership practices at Churchill Primary School offers valuable lessons for educational leaders and policymakers aiming to enhance school leadership and management practices. It suggests that a holistic, value-driven approach, combined with fostering a

collaborative leadership culture, can significantly address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st-century educational landscape.

In conclusion, the leadership practices at Churchill Primary School demonstrate how a well-articulated leadership mindset, grounded in core values and adaptable to the needs of the school community, can lead to substantial improvements in school culture and performance. These practices offer a practical model for other schools striving to cultivate inclusive, innovative, and resilient educational environments.

Chapter 6 The Leadership Practices at Churchill Primary School

This chapter examines the leadership practices of principals at Churchill Primary School (CHP) to address the research question outlined in the research design. The data presented in this chapter consists of field notes documenting principal leadership behaviors and interviews conducted with principals to gain insight into the characteristics and patterns of principal leadership at CHP. By examining three key themes, including the settings, routines, and impacts of leadership practices, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between successful principal leadership and high-performing primary schools in the Chinese context.

The chapter is organized into five sections. The first section discusses the crucial setting of principals' leadership practices, including guidelines, rules, and accountability. The second section examines the routine aspects of principal leadership practices, delving into key areas such as planning, decision making, problem-solving, team management, professional development, resource allocation, and relationship management. The third section presents representative cases that illustrate the outcomes and challenges faced and reflected upon by principals. The fourth section presents the key findings derived from principals' leadership practices, addressing the research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarizing the main points discussed.

In accordance with the research design and research ethics, this chapter of the thesis has redacted any information related to personal privacy that could potentially identify organizations and individuals. During the data collection process at the school, the researcher strictly adhered to Chinese and British regulations concerning children's protection and information security. The researcher collected and recorded the data for this study while respecting the privacy and ensuring the anonymity of the research participants, who were informed and consented to the use of their data for research purposes. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent to the use of research data at any time without conditions. All data presented in this chapter have been approved and authorized by the participating subjects.

6.1 The Setting of Principals' Leadership Practices: Goals, Guidelines, and Accountability

This section presents the key factors that influence, guide, and constrain the practices of principals at the school. These factors encompass the assigned leadership goals, practical guidelines, and the school's accountability system. By providing an overview of these institutional designs, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the daily work settings of principals at the school, as well as the underlying factors that shape their practices. The subsequent discussion analyzes and interprets these factors.

The section is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the goals assigned to principals and examines their efforts to achieve these goals through their practices. It also explores the perspectives of principals regarding these goals. The second part presents the practical guidelines that guide, constrain, and manage the behavior of leaders. This section helps readers comprehend the mechanisms employed to assess the leadership behaviors of principals within the school. The final part of this section examines the school's accountability system and presents feedback from principals on this system. This information facilitates readers' understanding of how power is distributed and balanced within the administrative and power systems of the school.

6.1.1 The Leadership Goals for Principals

This section explores the leadership goals pursued by principals and categorizes them into three groups: long-term goals (LG), medium-term goals (MG), and short-term goals (SG). Long-term goals are established by principals in alignment with the school's vision and mission. Medium-term goals encompass tasks set by higher-level administrative entities such as the Ministry of Education and the central government of China, as well as goals established by the school's leadership team to facilitate the school's development over a 3-5 year timeframe. Short-term goals encompass tasks defined by the school on an academic

year or semester basis, as well as assignments issued by provincial, municipal, and district education authorities and research institutions with a one-year deadline.

The data utilized in this study pertains to the 2021 academic year and primarily focus on the leadership practices of principals at CHP during the first semester (late February to early June) and the second semester (early September to the end of December). This data encompasses the actual leadership behaviors exhibited by principals as well as their reflections on these practices derived from interviews. Subsequent sections provide detailed explanations of each leadership goal category and the principals' interpretations of them.

● **Long-term Leadership Goals (LG)**

This study asserts that there is a reciprocal relationship between principals' leadership mindsets and their leadership practices. Principals formulate their educational missions based on their vision for education and subsequently establish leadership goals aligned with these missions at various stages. Through observations of principals' daily work and interviews, this study reveals that principals' educational vision and school mission exert a profound influence on their leadership practices and significantly shape the development of long-term leadership goals.

In Chapter V, the researcher summarizes the educational vision and school mission identified through consensus among the principals during the interviews. The educational vision is defined as follows: "To nurture individuals with love and beauty while fostering their morality and knowledge." The school mission is described as: "To promote students' comprehensive development, contribute to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and foster shared prosperity for humanity." Principals translate these overarching statements into specific school missions and further break them down into tangible goals.

In accordance with the school mission, principals actively participate in the formulation of the school's long-term goals, which are articulated as follows: "To instill in students a sense of love and appreciation for beauty, to empower teachers to pursue personal growth and strive for excellence while serving as role models for students, and to cultivate a school culture infused with love and beauty that can influence families, communities, and society."

Item	Content
LG1	Teach students to love and appreciate beauty
LG2	Train teachers to be models for students
LG3	Expand the influence of CHP's school culture of love and beauty

In the interviews regarding principals' leadership goals, principals described long-term goals as "pursuits" and "motivations." They emphasized that long-term, medium-term, and short-term goals should function as practical guidelines to meet the requirements of implementing school missions and realizing school visions at different stages, within the collective pursuit of the CHP leadership team. Suie expressed, "Ideally, goals set at different times should not conflict with one another. However, in practice, it is challenging to achieve this as many indicators used to evaluate short- and medium-term goals may contradict the school's vision and mission." This sentiment was echoed by Leao, Chang, Tung, and other principals. While they acknowledged the presence of contradictions and obstacles in realizing their vision and mission, they maintained confidence in their cause. They believed that progress entails both challenges and advancements, and thus, they were undeterred by the contradictions stemming from the gap between reality and ideals.

The long-term goals of the school leadership team focus on building a sustainable and high-performing educational institution that will endure for decades. These goals include teaching students to love and appreciate beauty, training teachers to be models for students, and expanding the influence of CHP's school culture of love and beauty.

In interviews with Suie and Leao, both emphasized the importance of CHP's culture, philosophy, and values. Suie stated, "The pursuit of love and beauty should run through one's life. This is not only the pursuit of our school team but also what we hope to instill in our students and teachers, guiding and inspiring them to pursue it for life. The concept of 'love and beauty' is not only a significant idea that I, as a teacher, educational researcher, and principal, have summarized and found to positively influence a person's growth and development, but also something I learned from the development and success of CHP and inherited from my predecessors." Leao echoed similar sentiments in a meeting with mid-level cadres, emphasizing the relentless pursuit of long-term goals for the benefit of all. When asked about the potential changes in leadership affecting the school's vision, mission, and values, Leao confidently responded, FI cannot guarantee the future with 100% certainty.

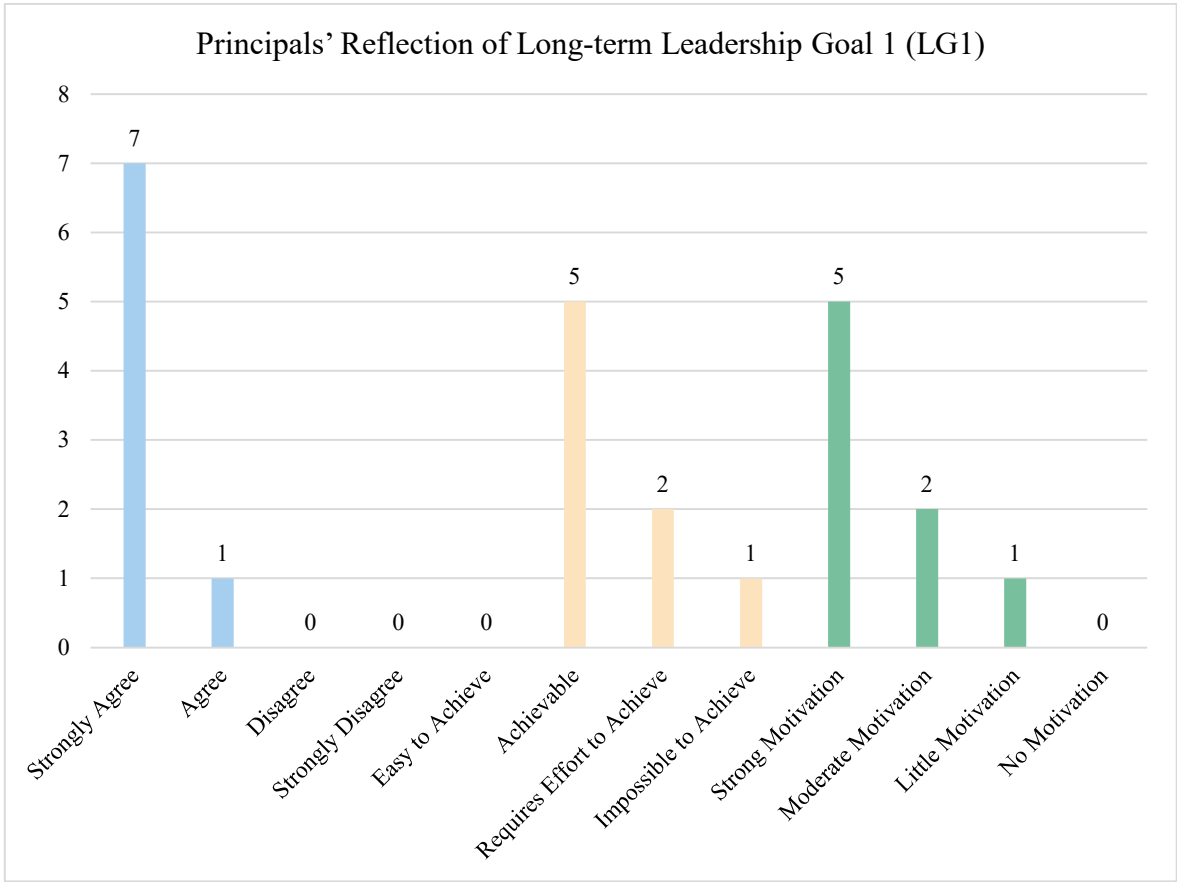
However, we firmly believe that the pursuit of love and beauty is a great and worthy goal. As for my successors, I trust that future leaders of CHP, nurtured in an environment that values ‘love and beauty,’ will continue this pursuit, even if expressed differently.”

Tung and Chang discussed the logic behind setting long-term goals. Tung emphasized that the leadership team sets standards and development policies not only for themselves but also for students, teachers, and parents. If these principles are not practiced by the leaders, they become empty words. Similarly, if teachers do not adhere to the rules set for students, the students will become lax. Therefore, in the long run, principals must be role models for teachers, and teachers must be role models for students. This goal will be supported through sustainable professional development, occupational health management, well-being development and protection, and ethical guidance to ensure that teachers exemplify “unity of knowledge and action.”

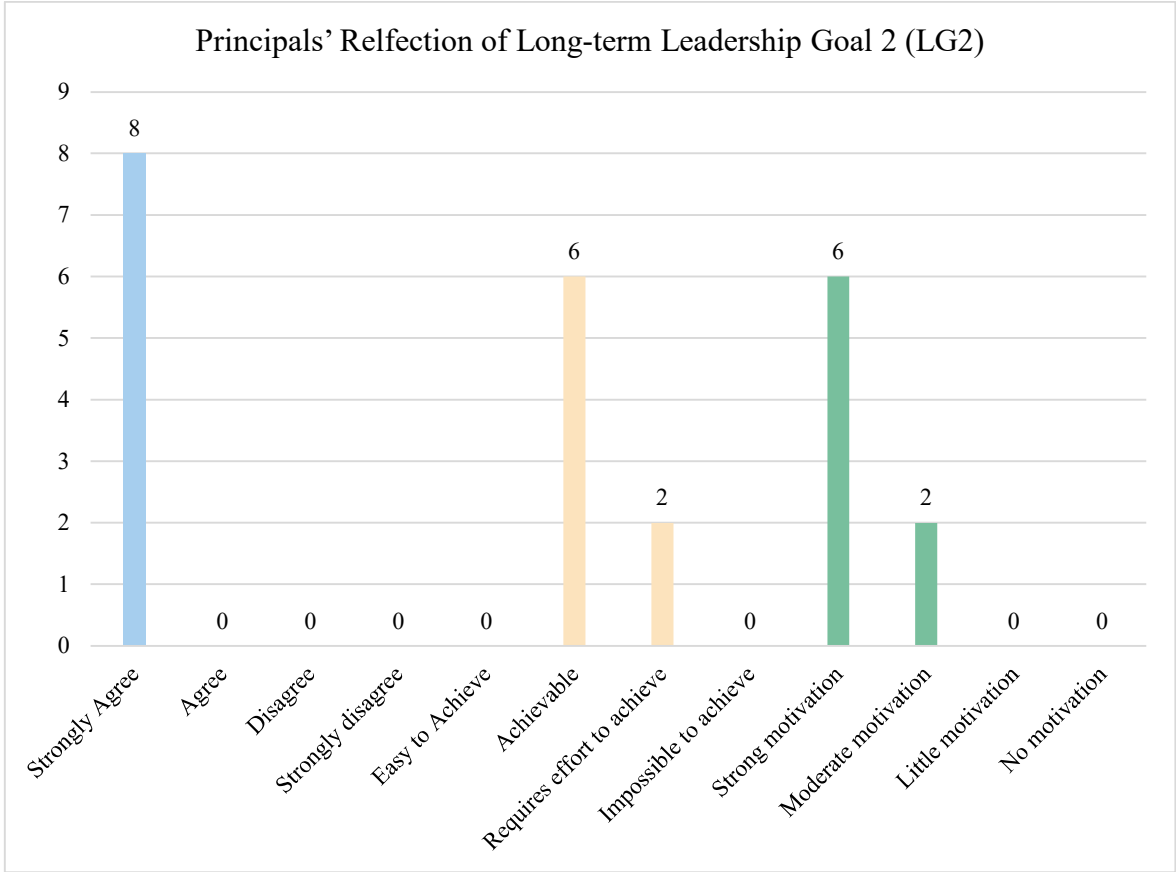
The principals view the expansion of CHP’s school culture of love and beauty as an ambitious plan. To achieve long-term influence on students and foster a continuous pursuit of love and beauty, external support is essential. Suie and others advocate for promoting the school’s philosophy to the broader society, other regional schools, educational researchers, and international individuals and organizations. In a staff meeting, Suie stated that strengthening external communication and avoiding isolation can attract like-minded partners, gain support and resources, and help the school explore ways to enhance its pursuit of love and beauty from different perspectives.

The chart below presents principals’ perspectives on three long-term leadership goals. It includes their agreement on whether these goals should be considered as long-term leadership goals, the perceived difficulty in achieving them, and their capacity to motivate principals.

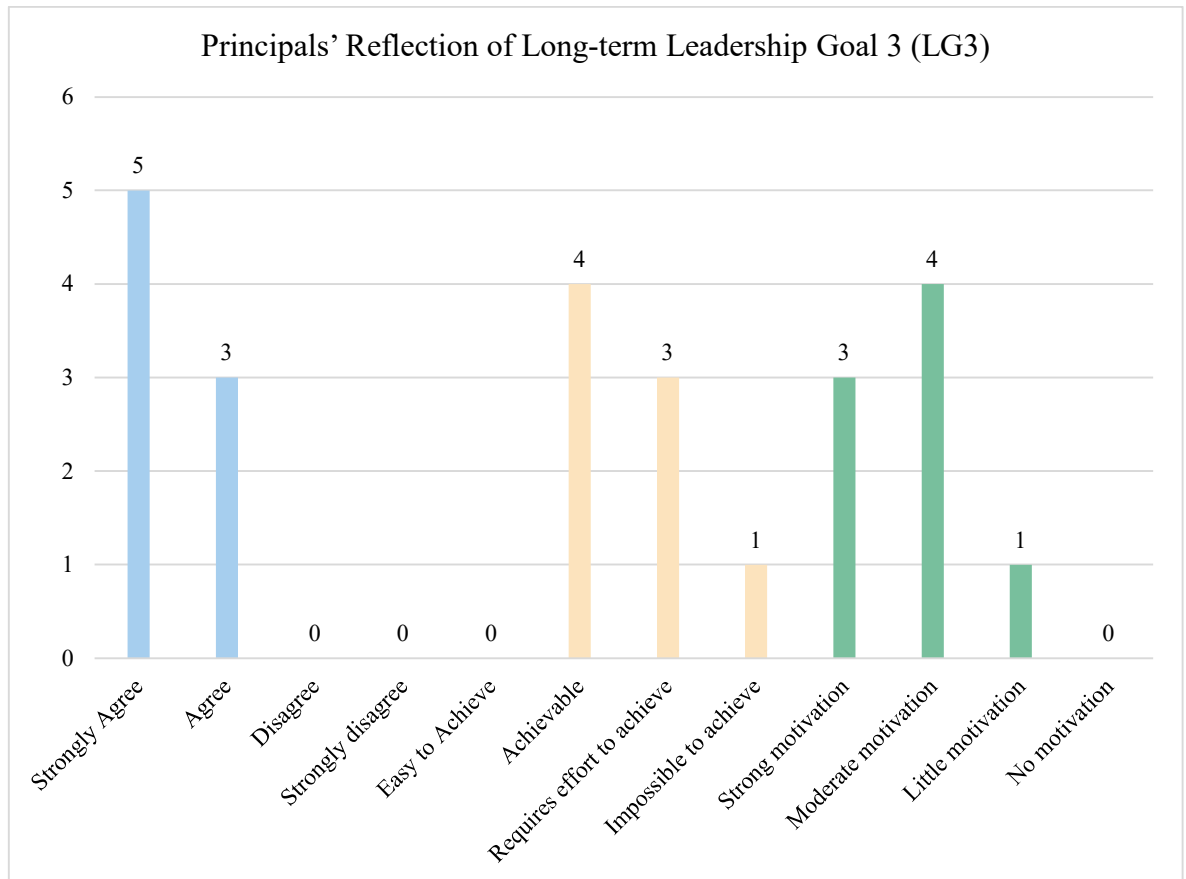
Long-term Leadership Goals	Agreement as Long-term Goals	Perceived Difficulty	Ability to Motivate Principals
Goal One	Yes	High	Strong
Goal Two	Yes	Moderate	Moderate
Goal Three	Yes	Moderate	Limited



Regarding LG1, most principals agree that developing students into individuals who are caring and able to appreciate beauty is a long-term task. They also believe that this goal is achievable. This task has motivated most principals to work toward achieving this goal.



Regarding LG2, all principals agree that they should strive to develop exceptional teachers and enable them to serve as role models for students. All principals believe that this task is achievable, and all principals are motivated to do so.



With respect to LG3, not all principals endorse the promotion of CHP’s “love and beauty” culture beyond the campus to influence families, communities, and society at large. Although most principals are motivated by this task and believe that it can be achieved through effort, one principal maintains a negative attitude.

In conclusion, the CHP leadership team exhibited a strong consensus and recognition of the three long-term leadership tasks. They firmly asserted that these tasks were achievable through diligent effort, and they were driven by a sense of motivation to achieve these visions and fulfill their missions. Moreover, the principals demonstrated a heightened level of commitment by actively engaging in their work to realize these aspirations and goals.

- **Medium-term Leadership Goals (MG)**

In this study, the researcher defines medium-term leadership goals of principals as specific leadership tasks to be accomplished within a designated timeframe. These goals can be

categorized as either external, aligning with national or regional initiatives, or internal, focused on planning and preparing for the school's future development. Typically, medium-term goals span a duration of three to five years. External goals involve the completion of national or provincial education initiatives or reform pilots, while internal goals involve formulating the school's development plan for the upcoming two to five years and making necessary preparations for its implementation.

The concept of a five-year plan, referred to as “五年规划” (Wǔnián guīhuà) in Chinese, is deeply embedded in the modern Chinese socialist society, as well as in other socialist countries. While both “规划” (guīhuà) and “计划” (jìhuà) can be translated as “plan,” there are nuances between the two terms. “规划” implied a plan that retains flexibility and allows for improvisation and change, aligning with the “socialist scientific outlook” promoted by the Chinese Communist Party. This outlook emphasizes respecting the principles of development and handling issues from a scientific perspective.

In the context of the school, the head principal and all deputies understood that a five-year period is relatively short when considering the long-term vision of building a school that lasts for decades or even centuries. Both the National People's Congress and the local congress, as well as the Communist Party, create five-year plans for various purposes and for different people and organizations. The school's five-year plan was a response to these broader governmental and political practices. It also reflected the principals' interpretation of the five-year plans at the state level, particularly concerning the goals set for educational and cultural development.

The five-year plan also contained intentional ambiguities to allow flexibility and modification. For example, while there were standards and criteria for the improvement and equity of schooling, these were dynamic and could be adjusted as needed. During a leadership administrative meeting, the principals discussed setting an assessment mechanism and ratings for student and parental satisfaction regarding the equity of schooling. At the meeting, all principals agreed to approach feedback from parents and students dynamically. Principal Tung used a metaphorical expression: “Whether our efforts made today have paid off would be observed and manifested tomorrow and approved effective on the day after

tomorrow. And after the day after tomorrow, if there is a verified and still positive result, progress can be acknowledged.”

In the five-year plan, there was a range or dynamic standard for specific development goals. This standard was based on the history of the school, the developmental pace or status of CHP, the LEA’s expectations, the parents’ feedback, the resources allocated, the teachers’ reflections on the status quo, and the leadership team’s understanding, intention, and expectations for a specific area of school development.

The five-year plan served as a comprehensive roadmap that outlined the steps required to attain the school’s specific goals, rather than constituting the goal itself. This plan provided a structured approach to ensure systematic progress toward the school’s broader long-term vision. The iterative nature of planning and assessment allowed the leadership team to adapt to changing circumstances and new information.

The goal-setting process involved collaboration among the leadership team, faculty, and key stakeholders. This inclusive approach ensured that the goals aligned with the school’s vision and mission. Developing the five-year plan included a series of strategic meetings, workshops, and consultations, incorporating feedback from various members of the school community. Effective communication of goals was critical for their successful implementation. The leadership team employed multiple channels to communicate these goals, including staff meetings, newsletters, and digital platforms. This comprehensive communication strategy ensured that all stakeholders were aware of the objectives and understood their roles in achieving them.

The implementation of leadership behavior guidelines involved establishing clear expectations, providing necessary resources, and monitoring progress. The leadership team modeled the desired behaviors and supported staff in adopting these practices. This systematic approach ensured consistency and coherence in the school’s leadership practices. Regular assessment and revision of goals were integral to the strategic planning process. The leadership team conducted periodic reviews to evaluate progress, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments. This iterative process ensured that the five-year plan remained relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the school.

To summarize, the principals demonstrated consistent attitudes toward the implementation of both medium-term goals. Whether assigned by educational authorities or formulated internally by the school leadership team, the principals expressed a willingness to exert efforts for the school’s development and the growth of its teachers and students. They emphasized the importance of formulating corresponding strategies and measures to effectively execute these tasks. While expressing cautious optimism about achieving these leadership goals, the principals maintained confidence in their ability to accomplish them. They emphasized the need for a realistic understanding of the school’s actual situation and believed that steady progress was crucial, rather than rushing through the process, to successfully accomplish the medium-term goal.

During the data collection phase, the researcher documented one external and one internal medium-term leadership goal. The external goal is to fulfill the task of “promoting high-quality and equitable development of compulsory education” within the 2020-2025 phase of the “China Education Modernization 2035” initiative (MOE, 2019). The internal goal pertains to the school leadership team’s five-year development plan for 2023-2027. This plan entails setting clear and feasible objectives, establishing an educational model that emphasizes the school’s “love and beauty” educational philosophy, and implementing an innovative and effective teaching and learning assessment system and teacher training framework that can serve as a model for other schools in the region.

Item	Content
MG1	Improve the quality and equity of schooling
MG2	Develop the five-year school development plan for 2023-2027

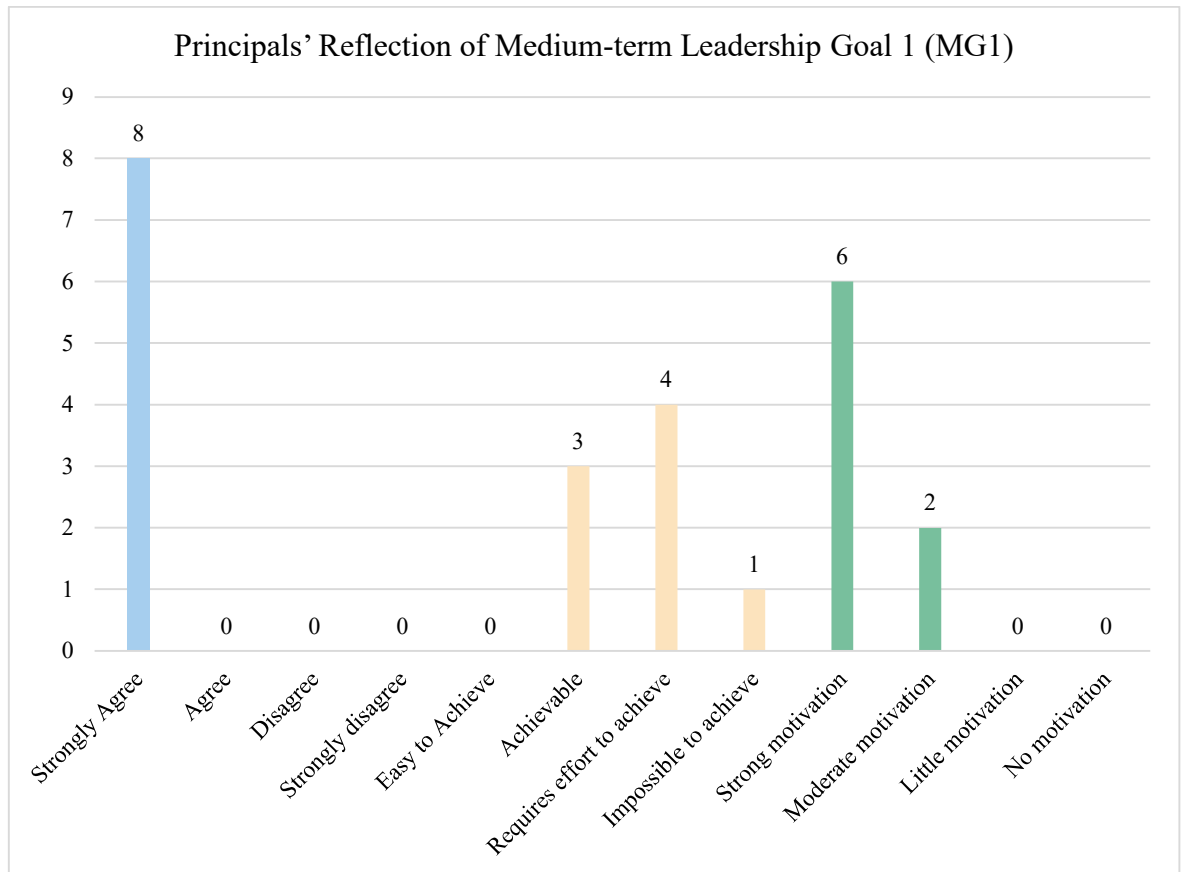
“China Education Modernization 2035” refers to a series of initiatives proposed by the Chinese government in 2021 aimed at promoting the development of modern education (MOE, 2019). One of the goals within this initiative is for schools in the nine-year compulsory education system to achieve “high-quality and equity” from 2021 to 2025. This goal provides clear guidance for education supervisory bodies and schools, emphasizing the need for continuous improvement in education quality and the equitable distribution of educational resources.

For schools, this entails allocating more educational resources to students with learning difficulties, disabilities, low-income backgrounds, and disadvantaged groups. The objective is to mitigate the negative impact of factors such as low family income or inadequate education on their learning performance, outcomes, and overall well-being. For the CHP leadership team, this initiative outlines their responsibility to develop and implement school development plans in line with national policies during this period and beyond, ensuring that students in need receive appropriate and timely support.

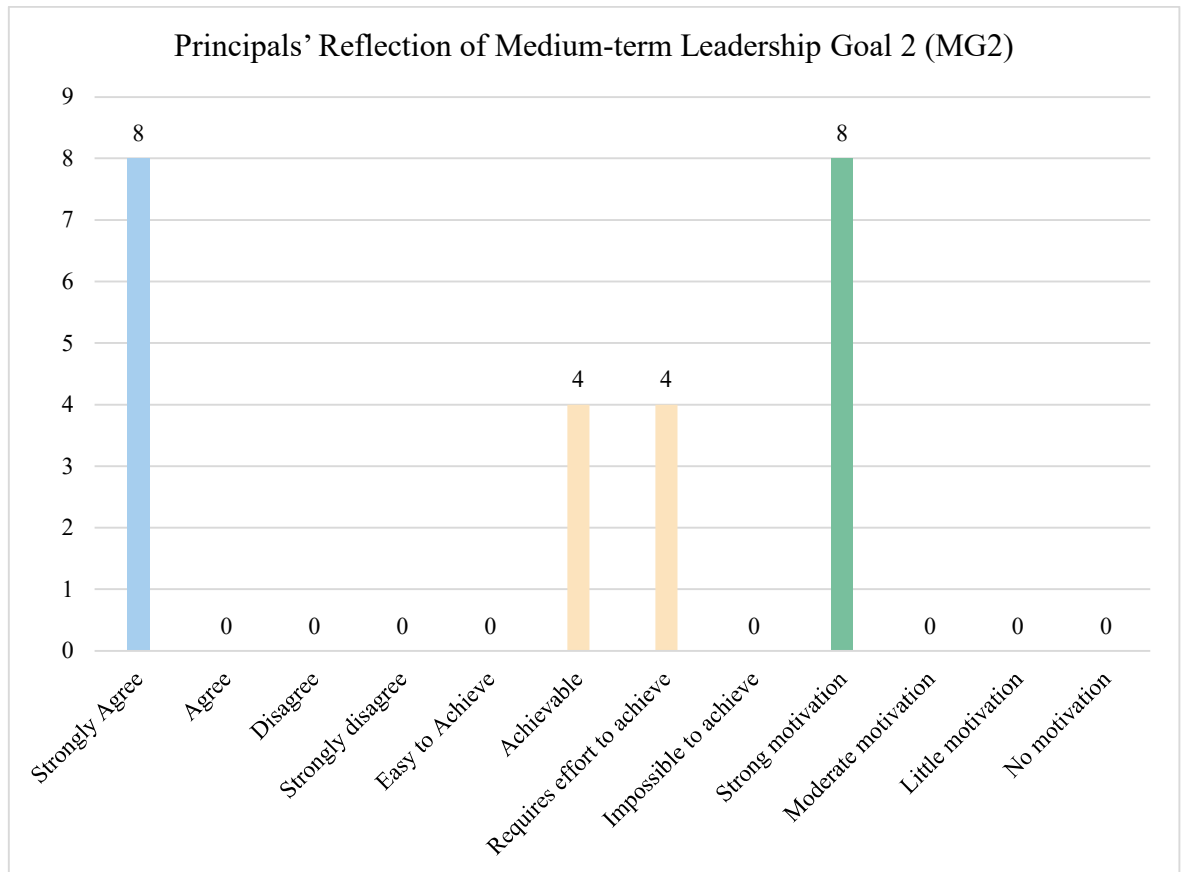
The medium-term goal of the school leadership team is to devise a five-year plan for the next phase of the school's development (2023-2027). This involves setting development objectives, designing a roadmap, preparing implementation and evaluation tools, assessing the necessary educational software and hardware, and submitting resource and government investment requests to education authorities and local people's congresses. Additionally, the principals aim to systematize and standardize the school's "Love and Beauty" development model for teaching and teacher development during this five-year plan to commemorate the school's 30th anniversary.

Goal	Agreement as Medium-term Goal	Perceived Difficulty	Ability to Motivate Principals
Promoting high-quality and equitable development of compulsory education (2020-2025)	Yes	High	Strong
Develop five-year school development plan for 2023-2027	Yes	High	Strong

The following charts present principals' reflections on the two medium-term leadership goals. The charts display their agreement on whether these goals should be considered medium-term leadership goals, the perceived difficulty in achieving them, and their capacity to motivate principals.



Regarding MG1, all principals exhibited strong agreement with the importance of this goal while recognizing the significant challenges associated with its attainment. Principals Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung expressed concerns about the potential difficulties in achieving this medium-term leadership goal. They acknowledged the necessity and reasonableness of investing additional resources in marginalized or disadvantaged students during the school's development phase but worried about the increased workload for teachers, as well as grassroots and middle-level managers within the school. These concerns were compounded by the prevalent issues of professional burnout and teacher overload faced by schools. However, despite these concerns, the school leadership team remained highly motivated to enhance the school's quality and equity through the pursuit of this goal.



Regarding MG2, the principals displayed a high level of consensus as a cohesive team. All principals unanimously agreed on the importance of this medium-term goal for the school's next developmental stage. They recognized the valuable experience accumulated by the school in its less than thirty-year history and considered it a significant asset worthy of exploration and dissemination. Prior to its dissemination, the operational model of CHP and its "love and beauty" approach to teaching, learning, assessment, teacher training, and management needed to be comprehensively summarized and conceptualized. The three younger principals and Vice Principal Lou, responsible for the school's maintenance and service department, acknowledged the substantial effort required from the school's leadership team and teaching staff to achieve this goal. In contrast, the four senior principals believed that this medium-term goal was not particularly challenging. They expressed confidence that, with unity among all school staff and the contribution of their individual strengths, the school's successful model could be systematically standardized, conceptualized, and implemented over the next few years as part of the upcoming five-year plan.

- **Short-term Leadership Goals (SG)**

The short-term leadership goals of CHP principals, as identified by the researcher, encompass a broader scope beyond goals with a relatively short-term timeframe. In this study, these goals are defined as a combination of responsibilities assigned to the school leadership team by external organizations and goals linked to the school's short-term development plan.

Typically executed over an academic year or semester, these short-term goals involve activities such as monitoring, promoting, implementing, testing, and providing feedback on educational policies, reform initiatives, and legislation concerning health and rights protection. These initiatives are introduced by regional and local government agencies, education bureaus, and educational research institutes. Additionally, principals are tasked with formulating plans and setting goals for their schools' development over the next 1 to 2 years, while establishing metrics for progress supervision and evaluation.

During the data collection, the researcher recorded the following externally assigned goals for principals: ensuring the implementation and promotion of the national “double reduction” policy within their schools and passing inspections conducted by municipal-level units, fulfilling responsibilities assigned as part of the National Smart Education Demonstration Zone in Riverside District and passing inspections conducted by provincial-level units. Regarding internal leadership goals, the study documented the following: completing the application for a national innovative curriculum project and applying for national recognition, finalizing the upgrade of CHP's teaching assessment system, and finalizing the development of a new professional development framework for teachers.

Item	Content
SG1	Implement the “double reduction” policy at CHP
SG2	Fulfilling responsibilities relating to Smart Education Demonstration Zone
SG3	Complete the application of national curriculum project
SG4	Upgrade the assessment system for teaching and learning
SG5	Complete the new teaching training framework

The short-term goals of the school leadership team are aimed at addressing immediate needs and setting the foundation for achieving medium-term and long-term objectives. These goals include implementing the “double reduction” policy at CHP, fulfilling responsibilities relating to the Smart Education Demonstration Zone, completing the application of the national curriculum project, upgrading the assessment system for teaching and learning, and completing the new teaching training framework.

The leadership team expressed both the urgency and pressure of executing these short-term goals during interviews. They also discussed the potential conflicts between short-term and medium-term or long-term goals, along with strategies for addressing these conflicts.

The “double reduction” policy (MOE, 2021), introduced by China’s Ministry of Education in 2021, aims to alleviate the excessive and unreasonable homework burden within the nine-year compulsory education system and reduce the pressure on students to excessively participate in after-school tutoring institutions, commonly known as “Chinese Cram Schools (教培机构).” Yi commented, “Reducing the burden of extracurricular tutoring and bringing schools back to the core of basic education is necessary, but the involvement of school leaders and teachers in the ‘double reduction’ action, including setting performance evaluations and metrics, seems unreasonable.” This is because the decision to send children to cram schools is influenced by family decisions, societal pressures, employment situations, and the educational system—factors beyond the school’s control. Despite this, under the requirements of the LEA and local government, everyone in the school must participate in this initiative, continuously educating families and communities while cautioning teachers against working part-time at tutoring institutions.

Riverside District, located in Chengdu City, was designated as a “Smart Education Demonstration Zone” by the Ministry of Education in 2021. Schools within this zone are required to comprehensively apply effective and intelligent teaching and management methods to enhance overall schooling performance. Teachers are also expected to enhance their scientific and technological literacy to meet diverse and individualized educational needs through intelligent, modernized, and informatized approaches. Suie remarked, “These two national-level tasks are urgent and require implementation with little room for negotiation with the LEA and government regarding their execution.” All principals

mentioned feeling pressure from various sources, including the LEA, government departments, parents, the community, and peer pressures from other schools within the same school catchment or administrative district. Although all principals agree with these policies, there is concern about the extent to which their implementation may consume time that could be used for other school matters.

Regarding the Smart Education Demonstration Zone, all principals acknowledged that it aligns with modern educational development trends and the exploration of new educational models for the future. However, there was debate over involving all staff in this activity. Suie's approach of treating everyone equally, requiring all staff regardless of age to participate in smart education skills training and evaluation, was generally accepted. However, there was disagreement over whether to offer some consideration for older staff nearing the end of their careers or close to retirement. Leao and Gane noted that while the school's policies emphasize unity, harmony, and collaboration, they also stress no special treatment, strict self-discipline, and continuous learning. For many nearing retirement, high-intensity learning and training now could be challenging, raising concerns about their ability to stay focused and master new IT skills.

In a staff meeting on advancing smart education, Suie and Leao emphasized a humanistic approach, pairing younger and older teachers to help each other learn. Suie stated, "This arrangement, although consuming personal time, aims to benefit teachers' professional development and the school's progress, ultimately improving students' education. We cannot delay students' education due to our laziness. If we fail the evaluation this year, we can try again next year, but lost learning opportunities for students cannot be regained." Suie encouraged staff with concerns to communicate directly with middle and senior leadership for support and resource allocation to ensure all staff receive adequate support.

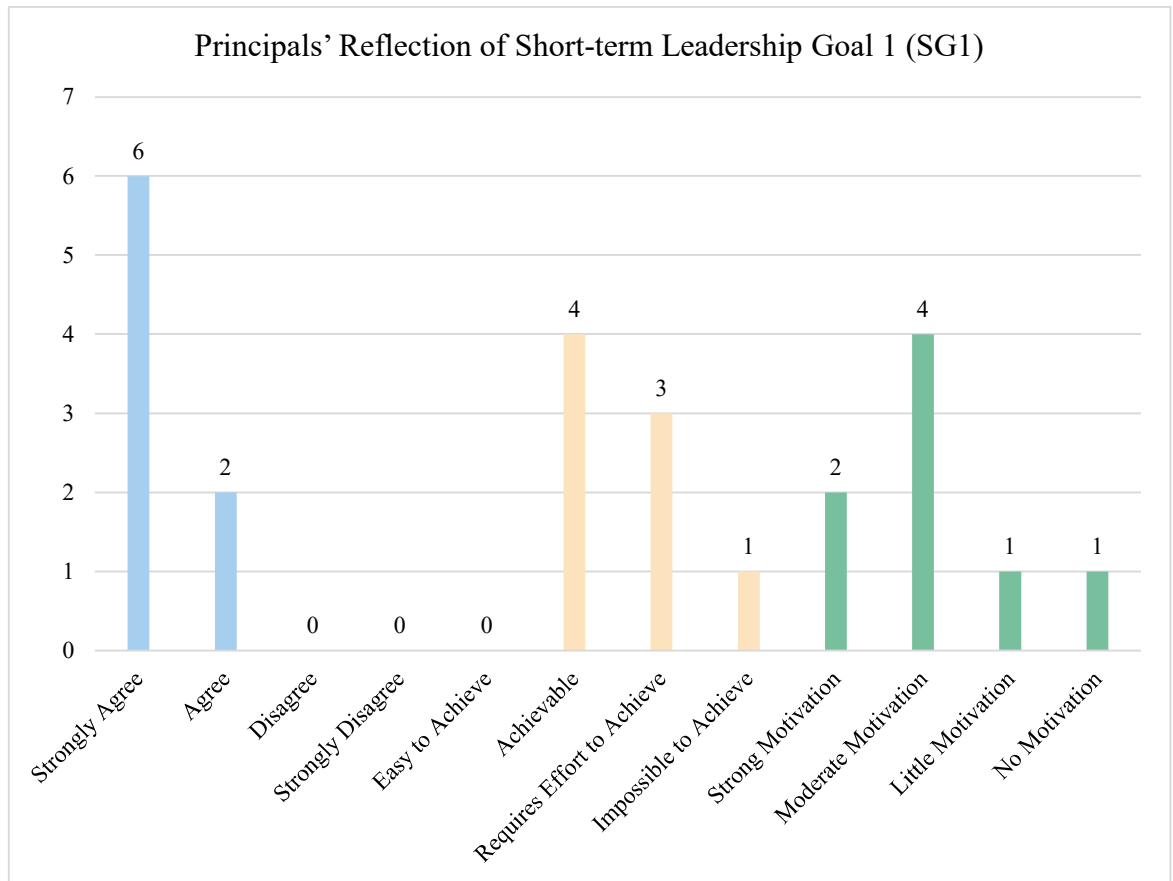
During interviews, the principals provided a comprehensive overview of their short-term goals for the 2021 academic year. They emphasized the significance of the school's application for a national-level innovative curriculum project and expressed aspirations to receive recognition and awards in the national selection process. Head Principal Suie highlighted the school's progress in curriculum and teaching reform, successfully integrating classroom teaching with interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. He expressed

anticipation for recognition and appreciation from national and provincial education authorities.

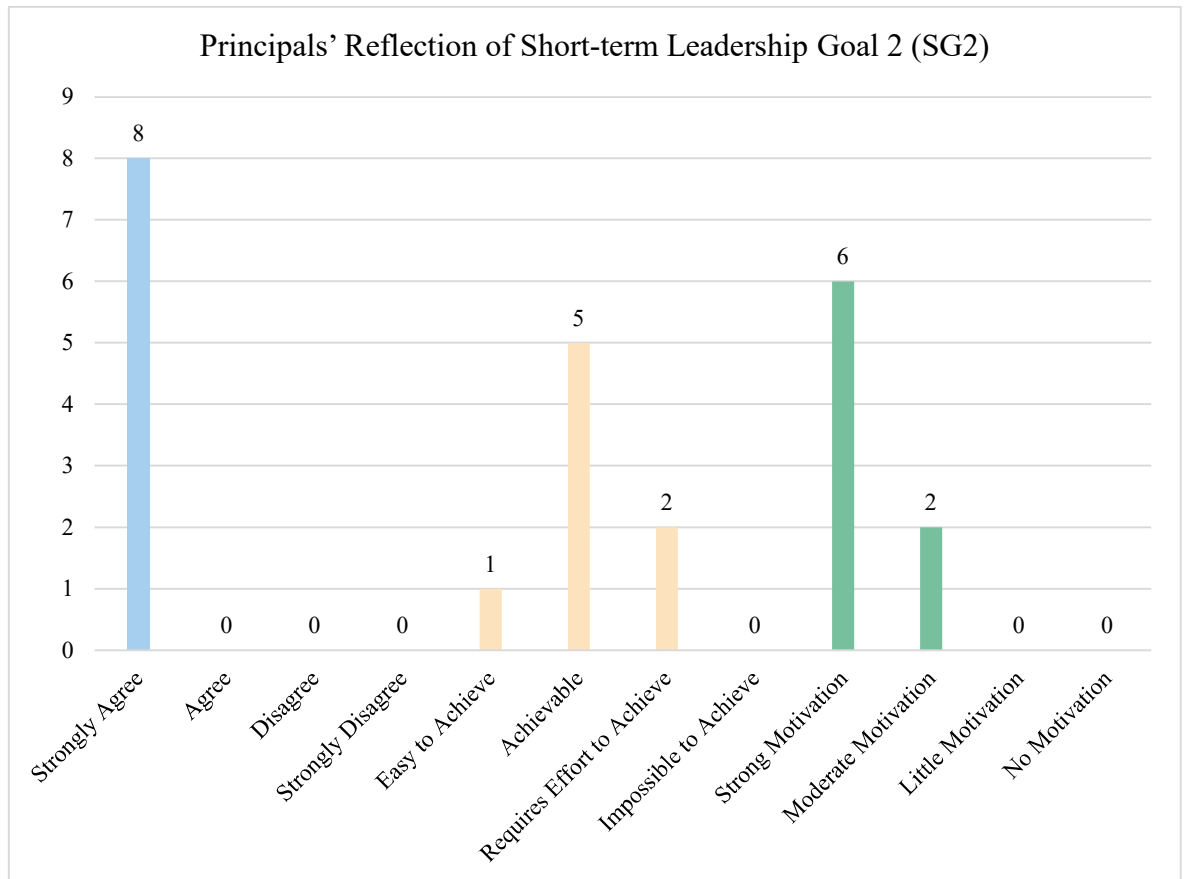
Furthermore, during the interview, Leao and Tung informed the researcher about the school's ongoing efforts to accelerate the completion and testing of CHP's upgraded teaching assessment system. They plan to officially launch the upgraded system in 2022. Simultaneously, Principal Chang, responsible for teacher professional development, along with younger principals Gane, Yi, and Yao, were finalizing the teacher professional development framework for CHP. This framework includes modules such as career planning, specialized task forces, and interdisciplinary teacher training. They intended to pilot this new framework at the school's main campus in 2022.

The third, fourth, and fifth short-term tasks—completing the application of the national curriculum project, upgrading the assessment system for teaching and learning, and completing the new teaching training framework—were described as periodic and habitual goals. Principals noted that these tasks are fundamental, recurring objectives essential for achieving long-term goals and concretizing medium-term goals. Suie, Chang, Leao, and Tung indicated that, compared to the urgent and sudden nature of the first two short-term goals, these tasks arise naturally and reasonably within the school's development. Therefore, they do not anticipate these tasks impeding the progress of the school's medium-term and long-term goals.

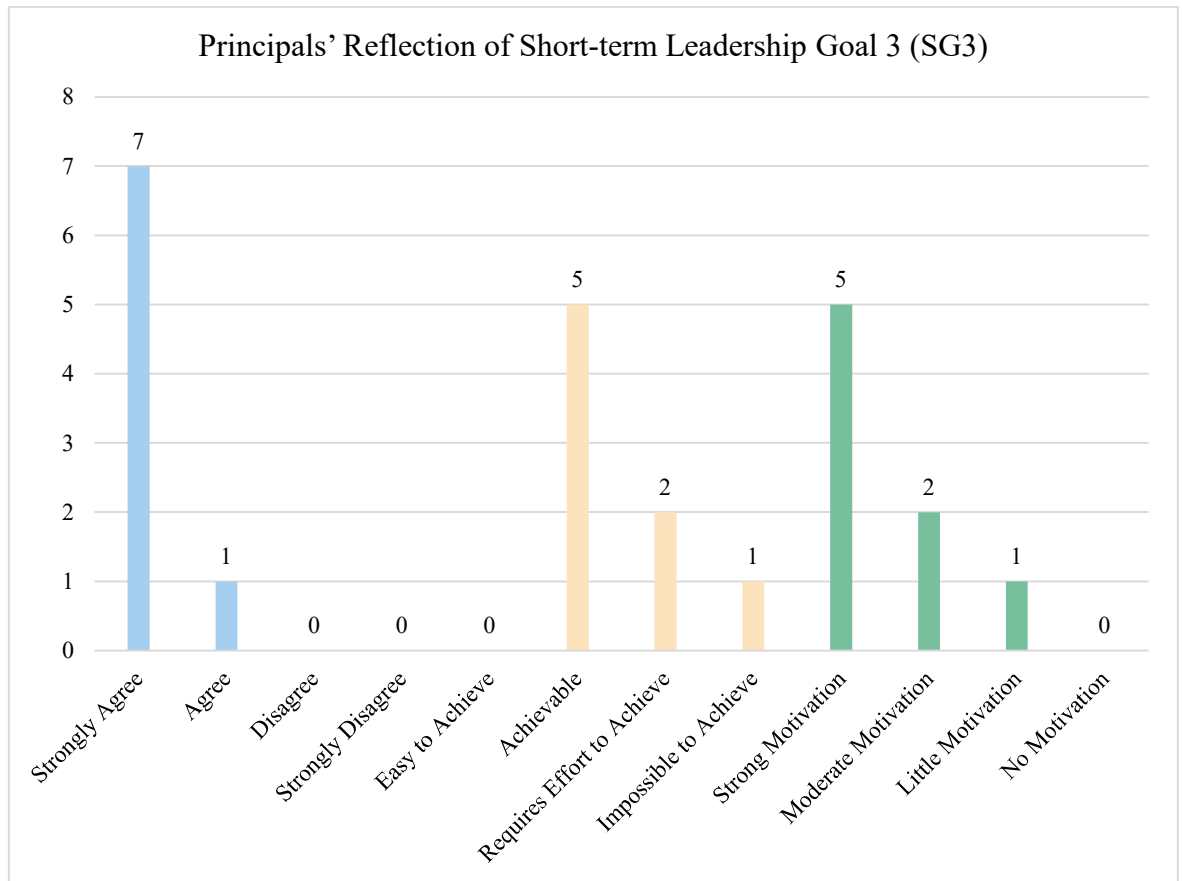
The following charts illustrate the principals' reflections on the five short-term leadership goals. These perspectives include their agreement on considering these goals as short-term leadership goals, the perceived level of difficulty in achieving them, and the potential to motivate principals.



In relation to SG1, most principals expressed agreement with the state's "double reduction" policy and considered it an important component of the school's and leadership team's short-term goal. They generally believed that this goal could be achieved with effort, although not all principals were equally motivated by this task. Younger principals Yi and Yao felt that addressing off-campus issues, such as reducing the excessive learning burden caused by cram schools, should not be the primary responsibility of the primary school.



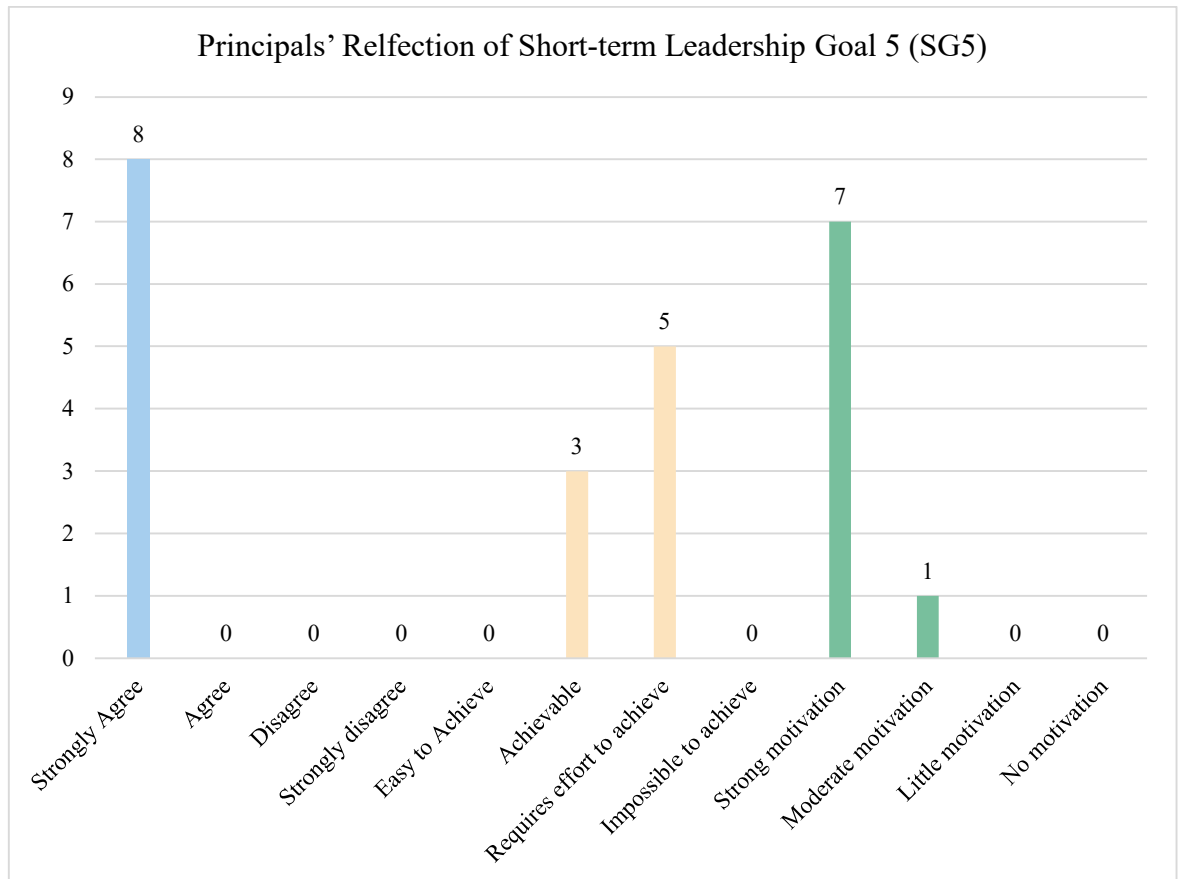
Regarding SG2, all principals acknowledged the necessity of completing a series of tasks assigned to the school as part of the requirements for schools in the Smart Education Experimental Zone. They viewed this as a valuable opportunity to advance the school's modernization and informatization. Furthermore, they believed that accomplishing this short-term task was not particularly challenging. Principal Suie and his deputies, Leao, and Chang, spoke highly of the task assigned by the municipal and district education bureau, as they saw it as a means to alleviate professional burnout and foster a willingness among teachers, particularly senior and soon-to-retire teachers, to adapt to 21st-century teaching skills. Consequently, the leadership team expressed a high level of motivation toward this task.



Concerning SG3, the principals unanimously agreed to prioritize the school's application for national innovative curriculum development as a short-term leadership goal. They aimed to leverage the school's recent achievements in teaching reform and sought national or provincial recognition to actively promote their progress. Most principals believed that this goal was attainable and provided a clear motivation for the school leadership team.



Regarding MG4, the principals unanimously recognized the need to enhance CHP’s teaching assessment system and expedite the pilot and full implementation process. They firmly believed that this goal could be accomplished through hard work and were greatly inspired by this task.



With regards to SG5, the principals unanimously and strongly agreed to prioritize the completion of the school's teacher professional development and training framework as a crucial short-term leadership goal. They recognized that the school's development in the second decade of the 21st century relies on a forward-looking, innovative, and effective teacher professional development and training framework. Although constructing the framework would require significant effort, the principals firmly believed in their ability to accomplish this task and expected a positive impact on the school leadership team.

In summary, while the CHP leadership team acknowledged external short-term leadership goals on par with principals' own goals for facilitating school development, principals remained cautious about the feasibility and outcomes of these external tasks. The author suggests that this attitude toward SG1 and SG2, which were assigned by governing supervisory bodies, diminished the motivation derived by the school leadership team from these tasks. This observation is supported by explicit attitudes expressed by the principals during interviews. In contrast, principals displayed greater confidence in their own short-term goals dedicated to school development, believing these tasks were achievable and would provide sufficient motivation to work towards their goals.

6.1.2 The Guidelines of Conduct for Principals

The guidelines of conduct for principals in this chapter refer to strategic principles and operational protocols developed by the school's leadership team, which guide the day-to-day actions and ensure coherence in leadership practices across the school. These guidelines focus on maintaining organizational consistency and aligning administrative practices.

In contrast, the guidelines in Chapter V emphasize the vision, ethical values, and personal leadership philosophies of individual principals. These guidelines shape the principals' approaches to leadership, focusing on cultivating a positive school culture based on their personal values and philosophies.

To support this distinction, Figure 4.3 in Chapter IV outlines the school's organizational framework and core values, which serve as the foundation for both strategic decision-making and individual leadership philosophies. By cross-referencing this framework, the distinction between the guidelines in Chapter V and Chapter VI becomes clearer, ensuring that both uses are understood in their respective contexts.

By making this clarification, the revised text ensures that the two different uses of "Guidelines" are clearly distinguished, avoiding any potential duplication and ensuring clarity across the study.

This section explores the influence of leadership conduct guidelines on the practices of principals at CHP. In contrast to the inconsistent guidelines ingrained in the principals' leadership mindset, the conduct guidelines exhibit a consistent approach. According to an interview with Suie, the development of the school leadership team's action guide involved collaborative efforts among himself, the vice principals, middle and senior school managers, and grassroots managers following his appointment as the head principal of CHP. Through multiple rounds of discussions, debates, research, and adjustments, the initial version was introduced in 2014 and subsequently revised in 2018, resulting in a total of nine action guides encompassing the "Three Pursuits," "Three Oppositions," and "Three Reminders." During

the on-site data collection at CHP, the principals had already commenced discussions on the revised version, anticipated to be implemented in 2022.

The acting leadership conduct guideline at CHP includes the following content:

The Guideline for Leadership Practice	
Three Pursuits	The Pursuit of Sustainable School Development
	The Pursuit of Cultivating Beauty and Love
	The Pursuit of Excellent Performance
Three Opposites	Opposition to showmanship in actions
	Opposition to false work processes
	Opposition to false summaries
Three Reminders	The reminder not to seek hasty success
	The reminder to be cautious in applying theories to practice
	The reminder to work steadily and meticulously

Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung, the four senior principals, were the creators of the initial version of the leadership behavior guidelines. They explained that during the design phase, they aimed to develop guidelines that could be adopted by all principals, vice principals, and individuals on campus, including students, teachers, and non-teaching staff. The guidelines were intended to influence the behavior of school leaders in terms of motivation, inspiration, results, and risks. By adhering to these guidelines, the vision, mission, and tasks of the school could be realized, benefiting primary education stakeholders such as students, teachers, families, and the wider community.

Suie and Leao expressed their strong desire for widespread adherence to the leadership practice guidelines among all CHP faculty and staff. They emphasized the importance of these guidelines in cultivating continuous development within the school, recognizing grassroots leaders as future leaders. Leao and Chang highlighted that a high-performing principal is not merely a manager of a high-performing school, but a leader who establishes a sustainable development system. This aspect is crucial for defining excellence.

Tung, the former principal of the Eastern Wind Primary School, which merged with CHP, and currently the school's third vice principal, praised this set of leadership behaviors. She believed they were key to translating the school's ideas and plans into effective practices and results. Tung revealed that even before the merger, she had heard about CHP's effective, motivating leadership philosophy and conduct guidelines. "What makes CHP unique is that these guidelines are not tailored to specific groups or accompanied by detailed rules for middle, high, and grassroots leaders, as is the case in many other schools in the region. In fact, these directives can even be shared with students and families to inspire them to become collaborative leaders within the school and in their own lives," Tung added.

The three younger principals and Vice Principal Luo also recognized and embraced these guidelines. Luo mentioned sharing them with the security, cleaning, and cafeteria management teams and monitoring their implementation. She observed significant improvements in areas such as school cafeterias, campus environment, and safety since the implementation of the guidelines in 2015. There have been no complaints or management problems within the school's security team and campus environment in the past two years.

Upon reviewing the leadership guidelines, the researcher noticed some overlap between the "Three Opposites" and "Three Reminders" and the school's official leadership guidelines. To clarify, the researcher consulted Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung, the creators of the guidelines, but received conflicting responses.

Suie and Leao explained that while there is a relationship between the two sets of guidelines, they are not identical. They emphasized that the leadership behavior guidelines encompass behaviors beyond managing school affairs, such as teaching, interacting with parents and the community, and serving as role models. In contrast, Chang and Tung argued that the two sets of guidelines are consistent but named differently, representing similar concepts in different contexts. The younger principals acknowledged some redundancy between the two sets of guidelines, as well as between the official settings and the leadership mindset of CHP principals discussed in Chapter V. From their perspective, the leadership conduct guidelines serve as an expanded and refined version that goes beyond the management guidelines found in official school settings.

Overall, the leadership behavior guidelines at CHP have garnered recognition and support from the principals, including both senior and younger leaders, as well as Vice Principal Luo. These guidelines are regarded as instrumental in shaping the behavior of school leaders, fostering continuous development, and translating the school's vision, mission, and tasks into effective practices. While there may be some overlap or differences in interpretation, the guidelines are seen as a valuable tool for guiding leadership conduct and inspiring collaborative leadership within the school community.

6.1.3 The Accountability for Principals' Leadership Practice

This subsection examines the accountability system implemented for principals at CHP School and explores their responses to this system. The study emphasizes the significance of accountability in shaping school leadership practices and outcomes. The accountability system plays a vital role in observing, understanding, and reflecting upon leadership attitudes and practices, which establish power, responsibility, and expectations within leadership roles.

Furthermore, this primary school's leadership accountability system in Southwest China serves as a noteworthy representative model within China's compulsory education system. It provides valuable insights for addressing leadership accountability issues and conducting research in a Western context.

To maintain confidentiality and adhere to ethical and privacy policies, specific local policy documents are not referenced in this study, except for national policies. This approach safeguards the anonymity of the school and its leadership team, preserving the privacy of potentially identifiable information. Moreover, the school's internal accountability policy documents are not directly disclosed, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines. All data presented in this study have been approved by the school's leadership team.

The accountability system at CHP School incorporates both common and unique features compared to other schools in the region and primary schools across China. It aligns with the established framework for principals in Chinese compulsory schools, outlining their duties, powers, and accountability mechanisms. Principals' actions undergo supervision, evaluation, and assessment by three key stakeholders: the school community (teachers, colleagues,

students), education authorities (education administrative units, education research institutes, education committees of local people's congresses), and families and society (parents, communities, third-party institutions).

Additionally, provincial, municipal, and district education authorities, in line with the Ministry of Education's guidelines, include the completion of goals set by various units at different levels within the scope of accountability. The "*Accountability and Supervision Mechanism for Compulsory Education Schools*" mandates that principals of compulsory education schools voluntarily include self-set tasks within the scope of accountability (MOE, 2013). Consequently, CHP principals integrate the implementation and completion of CHP's short-, medium-, and long-term tasks into their accountability framework. They actively promote participation in the accountability system among teachers, staff, leaders at all levels, and parents, fostering collective support from internal and external stakeholders.

Interviews with the eight principals revealed unanimous agreement regarding CHP's leadership accountability mechanism. They acknowledged the need for accountability, despite the increased demands and pressures it imposes on their work, including mental, moral, and professional aspects. The principals recognized that an accountability system focused on results could inadvertently overlook their efforts, particularly when outcomes fall short despite substantial exertion. Nevertheless, they accepted the notion that high standards and rigorous accountability were both reasonable and necessary, based on their understanding of the profession and the expectations placed upon them. For instance, principals emphasized the importance of dedication in teaching, the unacceptability of failing to meet family and social expectations, the refusal to use fatigue as an excuse for student learning failure, and the continuous pursuit of improved performance as a demonstration school. They were also cognizant of potential negative consequences stemming from this accountability system, including professional burnout, physical and mental exhaustion, and personal sacrifices.

During data collection, this researcher summarized policy documents, goals set by regional education authorities at various levels, and evaluation standards for principals' leadership conduct and results from the three parties. The accountability for CHP principals in 2021 is outlined as follows:

The Accountability for CHP principals in the Year of 2021	
Responsibility	Maintain the school's ranking in the top 10% of the overall school performance assessment at the municipal level.
	Achieve a ranking in the top 10% of the municipal level in the assessment of students' physical and mental health and overall development.
	Attain teaching and educational research achievements ranking within the top 15% at the provincial level.
	Obtain a parent satisfaction survey rate of at least 90%.
	Achieve a satisfaction rate of at least 90% from the LEA, education committees of the local people's congress, and third-party school inspectors.
Penalties	Failure to meet any of these standards will result in a 25% deduction from the principal's year-end bonus and render them ineligible for participation in regional Principal of the Year competitions for one year.
	Principals failing to meet two or more assessment criteria will face a 25% deduction from their year-end bonus for each failure and have their eligibility for Principal of the Year selections frozen for one year, along with a suspension of salary increases.

Furthermore, the conduct and results of CHP principals must comply with Chinese laws and regulations concerning civil servants and educators jointly issued by local governments and the LEA. As the highest authority figure in the school, principals risk penalties such as frozen promotion opportunities, suspension of salary for reflection while retaining their position, demotion, or even discharge from the public service team if their actions involve safety incidents, public controversy, dereliction of duty, or failure to accept responsibility. However, up until 2021, no CHP principal has faced any of these penalties due to the excellent performance of the leadership team.

The researcher also identifies a distinctive system within CHP that differs from the typical accountability system found in state primary schools. This system involves school-specific groups or units, including the Special Task Group, the Teaching and Management Reform

Group, and the Smart Education Development Unit, initiated by the CHP principal. Although the principal holds primary responsibility, they are not directly accountable for the day-to-day operations of these units. Instead, their role focuses on serving as a liaison, coordinator, and supervisor. They oversee the establishment of accountability mechanisms, chair discussions among decision-makers, participate in defining the content and standards of accountability mechanisms, oversee personnel selection, and allocate necessary resources to ensure the effective and successful completion of assigned tasks by these specialized groups.

Suie, Leao, and Tung emphasize their roles and positions within these special task groups by highlighting the concepts of “letting specialists do their jobs,” “streamlining administration and delegating power,” and “being a service-oriented principal dedicated to serving teachers and students.” Chang elaborates on the design of the democratic system within the accountability framework, emphasizing that the principal’s power extends beyond decision-making and includes commanding authority to ensure the full implementation of democratic systems. Gane, Yi, and Yao describe the principal’s involvement in assembling the necessary people to achieve goals, specifying responsibilities, rewards, and evaluation standards, and conducting meetings to select candidates, clarify rights and responsibilities, reach consensus, and institutionalize evaluation and accountability mechanisms.

Although other accountability systems exist within schools based on principals’ roles in various organizations, such as vice president of teachers’ unions, secretary of the Communist Party, president of women’s federations, vice director of retired teachers’ unions, members of parents’ councils, and directors of faculty sports associations, these systems do not directly impact the daily management work of CHP. Therefore, they fall beyond the scope of this study and are not further discussed.

The accountability measures implemented within the school, while aiming to enhance performance, also present several potential negative implications. Moreover, research shows that accountability can often become inefficient or counterproductive, as it may misdirect educational professionals away from their primary tasks (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This inefficiency is supported by a body of evidence suggesting that such measures can lead to increased stress and workload for teachers, ultimately detracting from the quality of education provided to students.

The findings on leadership practices are derived from both interviews and observations. To provide a clearer picture, these observations are reported separately, detailing specific instances and interactions within the school environment. During a staff meeting attended by senior and middle leadership team members, the discussion focused on the implementation of new accountability measures, which is part of the ongoing construction of CHP's "Future School Framework." The meeting included Principal Suie, Vice-Principals Leao and Tung, several department heads, and teacher representatives. The meeting began with Principal Suie presenting an overview of the new accountability measures mandated by the LEA, with content reflecting CHP's vision, mission, guidelines, and other settings. This presentation included the rationale behind these measures, expected outcomes, and the roles and responsibilities of each staff member in ensuring compliance.

Principal Suie facilitated the meeting, encouraging open discussion and feedback from all attendees. Suie stated, "Accountability is essential, but it must be balanced with the core mission of education, which is to inspire and develop students for having them pursue love and beauty. We must ensure that our measures do not become an obstacle to this mission." Department heads and teacher representatives raised concerns about the potential increase in workload and the impact on teaching quality. Vice-Principal Tung provided insights from previous experiences, suggesting, "We can manage these new requirements by redistributing certain administrative tasks to support staff, allowing teachers to focus more on instructional activities." This suggestion was met with agreement and noted for further discussion.

The interactions highlighted a collaborative approach to addressing the challenges posed by the new accountability measures. While concerns about inefficiency and increased workload were evident, the discussion also generated constructive strategies for managing these issues. For example, the strategy of redistributing administrative tasks aimed to alleviate some of the pressures on teaching staff.

Vice-Principal Leao, in an interview, added, "Our goal is to implement these measures in a way that supports our teachers rather than burdens them. We need to find a balance where accountability enhances our educational outcomes without compromising the wellbeing of our staff." This sentiment was echoed by other members of the leadership team, emphasizing a supportive and pragmatic approach to accountability.

The leadership team demonstrated a collaborative approach by involving various stakeholders in the discussion. They later invited chairpersons and representatives of the parent council, regional researchers specialized in schooling performance assessment, and officials from LEA's research divisions for another follow-up meeting. This inclusivity helped in addressing concerns and finding feasible solutions. The presentation of the new measures and the open forum for discussion showcased transparency and effective communication within the leadership team. Principal Chang emphasized, "Transparency in our decision-making process is key to maintaining trust and cooperation among all members of our school community."

The detailed description of these observed practices provides a comprehensive understanding of how the leadership team at CHP navigates the complexities of implementing accountability measures. These practices not only reflect the theoretical underpinnings discussed in the literature but also offer concrete examples of how leadership operates within the school to manage and mitigate the challenges associated with accountability.

This integrated approach of top-down and bottom-up decision-making ensures broad participation, informed decision-making, and alignment with the school's long-term strategic goals. Democratic centralism and scientific decision-making are thus essential for the leadership team's success and the school's rapid development.

6.2 The Managerial Routine of Principals' Leadership Practices: Task Management, Professional Development, and Relationship Enhancement

This section aims to comprehensively examine the daily school management practices of principals at CHP School. It is divided into five subsections to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The first subsection focuses on the pre-implementation phase, exploring goal setting, planning, and decision-making processes. The second subsection examines the implementation phase, including the actual execution, supervision, and

evaluation of leadership tasks. The third subsection highlights faculty management and professional development efforts by principals. The fourth subsection focuses on principal-student-family interactions, emphasizing the role of principals in student management and developing relationships with families. Finally, the fifth subsection investigates principals' leadership practices related to public engagement and social responsibility.

CHP's work manual and regulations stipulate that principals need to mobilize all teachers for major tasks, such as the school's five-year development plan or national education policy implementation. In daily school management affairs, the person in charge of the branch campus, the branch office of the main functional department, and the class teachers have the autonomy to set goals, plan pathways, and make task decisions based on actual needs while adhering to laws, regulations, and school rules. The study focuses on the leadership practices of principals, and thus the practices of middle and grassroots leaders are not further discussed.

The data presented in this subsection were collected through interviews and observations conducted by the researcher with principals, with their permission and authorization. Confidentiality measures were strictly followed to protect the anonymity of the school and individuals involved. The researcher aims to provide a comprehensive overview of principals' daily work routines, management strategies, impacts, and reflections on their leadership practices at CHP School, while upholding privacy and ethical guidelines.

6.2.1 The Leadership Routine: Goal Setting, Path Planning, and Decision Making

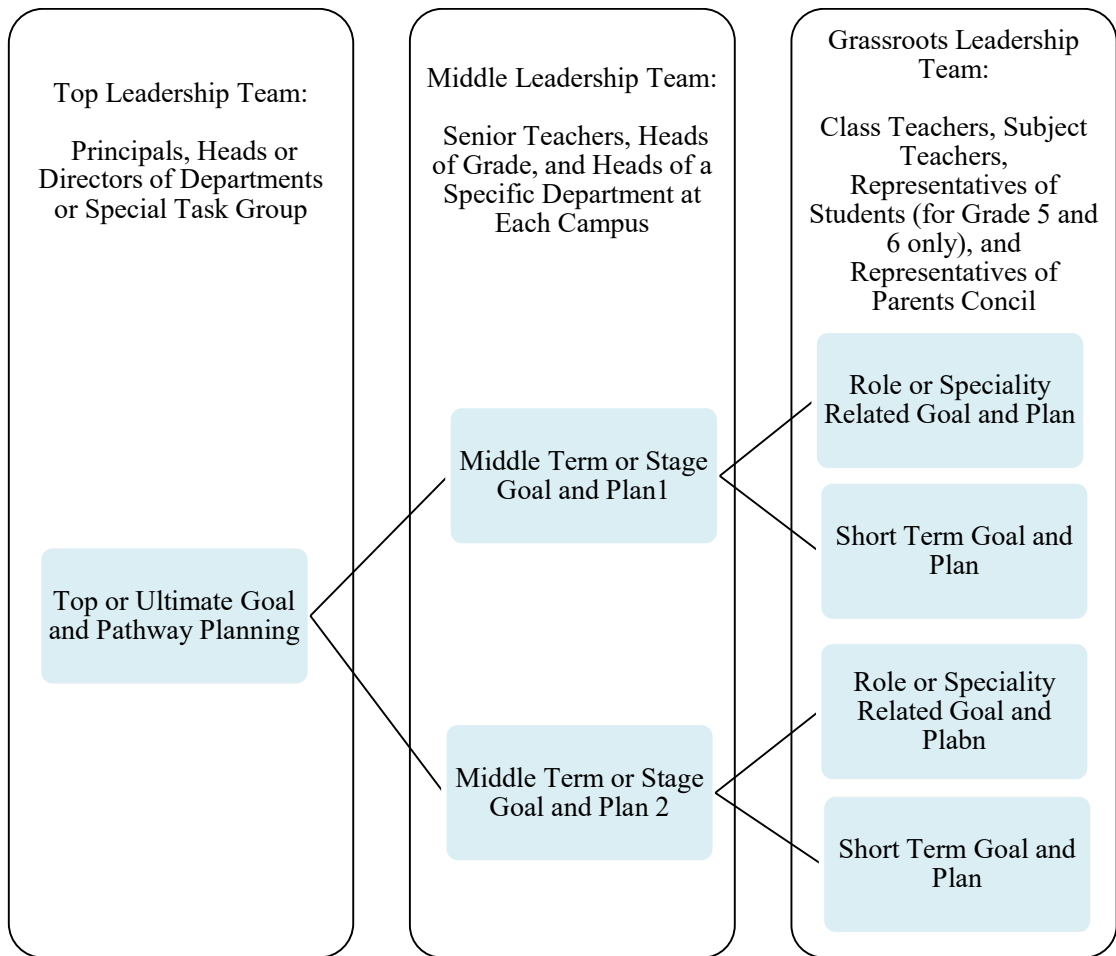
This subsection focuses on examining principals' goal setting, path planning, and decision making in their daily work within school settings. The study emphasizes the importance of high-level principal leadership, which entails clear and reasonable goal setting, effective path planning for task implementation, involving professionals in decision making, and establishing responsibilities, groups, implementation strategies, and evaluation criteria.

During fieldwork, CHP principals demonstrated characteristics such as respect for professionalism, advocacy for democracy, long-term vision, and realistic thinking and behavior in goal setting, path planning, and decision making. The study also documented the top-down influence of principal leadership on teachers, students, and families, as well as the

bottom-up influence from students, families, front-line staff, and middle-level school leaders. These reciprocal or multi-lateral influences shaped the goal setting, path planning, and collective decision making of principals. The distribution of influence from top-down and bottom-up processes allowed for consideration of stakeholders' demands through democratic discussion and rational analysis, fostering consensus within the school and creating favorable conditions for task implementation and stakeholder support.

Based on principals' statements during interviews and observations of their behaviors at CHP, this study outlines the pre-task leadership practices of CHP principals. Principals engage in discussions and inquiries among themselves to establish overall goals, stage goals, and role-specific goals to accomplish specific tasks assigned by the school or education authorities. They evaluate the rationality and feasibility of tasks considering factors such as school conditions, teachers' skills, students' performance, and parental cooperation. Principals provide stakeholders involved in tasks with clear, reasonable, and efficient strategies, which are then validated by supervisors, senior teachers, or educational authorities. Finally, goals, paths, and plans are approved through collective discussions within the school leadership team or special task groups.

The diagram below illustrates the three levels of leadership and their roles in the two-way mechanism.



● The Goal Setting and Pathway Planning

According to the researcher's interviews and observations, goal setting and pathway planning in CHP schools involve a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes. These processes enable the school's leadership team to set coherent goals and pathways that are consistent with the school's values, vision, and mission, and that are both feasible and effective. Decision-making follows the principles of democratic centralism, in which a high-level decision-making team composed of representatives of middle and grassroots leadership is convened by the school's leadership. Through collective consultation, this team considers various opinions, proposals, and plans before reaching a final decision, which is usually made by the principals or supervisors of specialized task teams.

During the top-down process, principals, department heads, and task-specific teams play crucial roles in formulating significant tasks for the school. They integrate national, regional,

and local education policies, tailor goals and plans to the school context, and receive mission statements from higher education authorities. Middle leadership further breaks down these goals into specific objectives and plans, considering input from classroom teachers, subject teachers, student representatives, and parent council representatives to refine them according to classroom realities as well as student and family's needs.

In the bottom-up process, goal-setters at lower levels reflect on and evaluate higher-level goals for feasibility and effectiveness. They engage in communication and receive feedback from higher-level leaders, allowing for adjustments in goals and plans. A meeting is then convened, involving top leadership and representatives from middle and grassroots teams, to comprehensively analyze and discuss feedback and plans. Decision-making during this meeting adheres to the principles of democratic centralism, reaffirming responsibilities, authority, and accountability systems.

Principals, interviewed during the study, acknowledge the significance of the two-way mechanism of "pre-task implementation," which facilitates open expression of opinions and comprehensive feedback from stakeholders in both top-down and bottom-up processes. Principals view it as their responsibility to reflect and collect views and demands to build consensus and promote collaboration. To ensure its effectiveness, principals are committed to institutionalizing and standardizing the mechanism, strengthening its role in the school's upcoming five-year plan.

Furthermore, the principals' leadership practice emphasizes gathering opinions and feedback from middle and grassroots leaders through this mechanism. Discussions and debates are organized between middle-level cadres and frontline teacher representatives, fostering consensus and cooperation. While recognizing the increased workload and pressure on grassroots teachers and middle-level principals, the system is seen as beneficial for reaching consensus, improving cooperation, and enhancing operational efficiency. Concerns are raised regarding the negative social perception of "mediocrity" and its impact on the mental health and career development of young teachers. Principals are aware of these issues and strive to address them.

During the interviews, Principal Suie illustrated with the researcher the red lines and bottom lines drawn by the CHP leadership team. The red line refers to legal and moral boundaries,

while the bottom line encompasses the school's values, especially the pursuit of "love and beauty" and relentless efforts to promote the development of all. Suie's deputies, Leao, and Chang, further emphasized that the school's performance must not decline, which serves as an additional bottom line. Acknowledging the crucial role of frontline teachers, Tung said, "Classroom teachers and subject teachers have the most intimate knowledge of how to match our set goals with reality. Therefore, we highly value their perspectives on the goals we set." However, Tung clarified that "being reasonable and feasible" should not be misconstrued as lowering expectations for teachers, students, parents, or principals. The goal is to maintain a rapid and high level of progress for the school's development, and no one should question that.

Gane, who oversaw the school's third campus (CP3), told the researcher about their approach: "We will organize discussions and even debates between middle-level cadres and representatives of frontline teachers, especially young teachers, those experiencing professional burnout, or those nearing retirement. If their proposed goal changes are in line with the principle of 'serving students and promoting the growth of teachers committed to school development,' we are open to any changes." Yi and Yao explained that young teachers would recognize that this system can help teachers reach consensus, foster cooperation, and improve operational efficiency. But they also noted that it has increased the workload and pressure on grassroots teachers and middle-level principals.

Yi also expressed her concern: "For new and young teachers, it is rare not to 'overdo' the tasks assigned by superiors for fear of being labeled as irresponsible, unprogressive, or 'lying flat' (躺平 in Chinese, referring to a mindset of abandoning the traditional path of striving for excellence and accepting one's mediocrity) by parents and colleagues. This terrible social and peer undesirability damages the mental health and sustainable career development of young teachers. No teacher wants to be perceived as 'mediocre' in a high-performing school that strives for excellence." In interviews, Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung also expressed awareness of these related issues.

- **The Decision Making**

Through interviews with principals, it was evident that democratic centralism was unanimously supported as the preferred decision-making principle. CHP principals argued that democratic centralism is better suited to address complex challenges in China's unique context compared to Western liberal democracy. The system allows for thorough debates and discussions, prioritizes rationality and scientific considerations, and involves experts and stakeholders in decision-making. Additionally, a well-defined system of accountability ensures oversight of those in positions of power.

The researcher found that decision-making in CHP schools primarily occurred through democratic, centralized, and collective processes. Meetings convened by principals included participants such as principals, task force leaders, senior teachers, and experts who offered their insights based on their expertise. The input of these participants significantly influenced the decision-making process. Principals or leaders of special task groups carefully considered all factors, including long-term goals, current circumstances, and stakeholder interests, before making a final decision. Decisions became official if they were supported by more than half of the participants. The "democratic centralism" approach effectively assigned decision-making authority and post-decision responsibilities, preventing unaccountable opinions or the concentration of excessive power in a single individual. Moreover, clearly defined lines of responsibility and accountability kept decision-makers focused on the task at hand.

The decision-making process at the school is grounded in the principles of democratic centralism, a socialist concept and approach to democracy. Democratic centralism combines elements of both democracy and centralization, ensuring broad participation from various stakeholders while maintaining a coherent and unified direction guided by expert judgment. This dual approach allows for inclusive discussions and informed decision-making, balancing input from different groups with the strategic oversight of the leadership team.

Democratic centralism, as outlined by Schurmann (1968) in "Ideology and Organization in Communist China," emphasizes collective decision-making and centralized leadership to ensure efficient and accountable governance. This principle is deeply embedded in the political, social, and educational institutions in China, promoting broad participation while maintaining a unified direction.

School members participate in discussions through structured processes that include regular meetings, open forums, and workshops. During the development of the new curriculum, teachers, students, and parents were invited to a series of workshops to voice their opinions and provide input. These sessions were facilitated by neutral moderators to ensure that all voices were heard equally. Additionally, suggestion boxes and online platforms were made available for those unable to attend in person.

The prioritization of scientific considerations in decision-making is evidenced by the incorporation of research-based strategies and expert consultations. For example, the researcher observed how vice principal Chang and Leao instructing implementing new teaching methodologies. The school leadership team conducted extensive literature reviews and consulted with educational researchers to ensure the methods were evidence-based. A specific example includes the adoption of project-based learning, supported by research findings indicating its effectiveness in enhancing critical thinking skills.

Thorough debates and discussions are exemplified by the structured debate format adopted in meetings. Each major decision, such as the introduction of new technology in classrooms, was preceded by a series of discussions following a specific format: presentations by experts, question-and-answer sessions, small group discussions, and a final plenary session. Meeting minutes detail the arguments presented and the evidence considered. For instance, during the debate on integrating tablets into the curriculum, expert presentations covered topics such as cost-benefit analysis, impacts on student learning, and technical feasibility. These procedures were emphasized by principals during interviews, highlighting the meticulous planning and execution involved.

While principals set meeting agendas, these were based on pre-meeting consultations with key stakeholders to ensure that the topics reflected the concerns and priorities of the broader school community. Before the annual strategic planning meeting, surveys were distributed to teachers, students, and parents to gather input on important issues. The resulting agenda was a composite of these inputs, ensuring that discussions were relevant and comprehensive.

Decisions were made through a transparent voting process requiring over 50% of votes to pass a decision. This process included safeguards to ensure fairness and inclusivity. For example, before voting on a new school policy, the proposed policy was distributed to all

members for review and comments. Representatives from each stakeholder group presented their views during the meeting, ensuring that the final vote was informed by diverse perspectives.

An illustrative example of this process is the “馆校教育” (Museum-School Education) project, which integrates social venues (场馆) and school education to fully utilize social resources for educational opportunities for students and families. Suie, Leao, and Tung emphasized that making full use of various social resources, creating educational opportunities, and innovating educational methods are essential for a school aiming to sustainably explore and develop educational resources.

During a meeting attended by the principal, parent committee representatives, LEA officials, class teacher representatives, senior student representatives, and community public activity leaders, the leadership team expressed the intention to expand traditional school partners for off-campus activities. They aimed to include high-tech enterprises, organizations supporting vulnerable groups, local intangible cultural heritage institutions, and new types of farms. As the school had no prior contact with these organizations, they sought suggestions, references, and support from the attendees to build connections and collaborations.

The leadership team listened to suggestions and concerns from different groups, noting valuable, creative, and feasible ideas, as well as potential risks and benefits. Leao and Tung paid particular attention to creative proposals and concerns raised by parents, student representatives, and public organization leaders, expressing their intent to study these valuable ideas further. LEA officials, parents, and class teacher representatives were also requested to participate in future discussions to explore risks and feasibility.

In a subsequent interview, Leao discussed plans to broaden the discussion, inviting more senior students, parents, class teachers, and teachers to participate and provide feedback. “This is not just part of risk management but also part of our scientific democratic decision-making process. Scientific management needs to be based on sufficient facts and data. Without facts and data for analysis, feasible plans, and risk avoidance measures, we will not make decisions lightly, no matter how innovative they are. This involves not only the resources and time invested but also the trust of thousands of families and the safety of students.”

Meanwhile, Tung, Lou, and Gane, through LEA officials, established contact with external enterprises and venue leaders to explore the possibilities of activities. Suie communicated with principals of high-level schools in Beijing and Shanghai and with university scholars involved in social responsibility and museum-school education, leveraging networks established during national leadership training programs by the Ministry of Education.

After multiple internal middle management reports based on student and parent feedback analysis, a final administrative meeting was held at the end of the semester. The principals discussed the feasibility, safety, resource input, originality, and potential benefits of the known plans. Suie organized a vote at the meeting, resulting in preliminary activity plans, which were then communicated to external researchers, organization leaders, and LEA officials for further feedback. After adjustments based on feedback, the initial school activity plans were presented at the end-of-semester teacher-student meetings and parent meetings for additional input.

Before the start of the second semester, the principals analyzed and discussed reports from middle and grassroots leaders, ultimately voting to finalize the first confirmed activity plan. This plan was announced at the first faculty meeting of the new semester, where a special organizing committee was established, comprising representatives from various grades, campus management, parent committees, and class teachers, each playing different roles. Suie, Chang, and Leao expressed gratitude to teachers, students, and parents who contributed key opinions and suggestions on activity processes, innovation, and risk management, and thanked different social groups and individuals for their support and resources.

In multiple interviews, Suie and his vice-principals emphasized that this top-down and bottom-up decision-making and execution model is a crucial part of democratic and scientific decision-making at CHP. Lou noted, “Without centralized democracy, everyone is responsible, and in fact, no one is responsible. If there is only centralization, it can cause a lack of enthusiasm, missed opportunities for reform and innovation, and slow down or halt the school’s development. If there is only centralized democracy without decisions based on educational laws, factual data, and scientific analysis, it becomes empirical or dogmatic and may amplify the subjective limitations of managers.”

Suie added, “We hope that the feedback and participation we receive are meaningful and constructive. Students lack practical work experience and social experience; their imaginations can be wild, but for teachers and managers in the school, we cannot waste too much time on discussions about unrealistic ideas. I welcome some brainstorming, but these should not be placed on the negotiation table.” Gane and Yao also discussed the importance of rationality beyond their own positions and the inclusive perspectives during the democratic voting process. They emphasized the need to understand and solve problems more comprehensively rather than engage in binary opposition.

Gane stated, “The goal of seeking common ground while reserving differences is not an end but a process. Our democratic discussions and debates should not only be viewed from our own perspectives or see different views as competitive. We advocate for a dialectical approach to problems and dissent, emphasizing that teachers and leaders sometimes need to step out of their roles to analyze and understand issues more comprehensively.” Yao added, “After all, we are fundamentally the same kind of people—educators who work hard for the future and growth of children. Therefore, there is nothing that cannot be discussed as long as our vision, mission, and work principles are consistent.”

This integrated approach of top-down and bottom-up decision-making ensures broad participation, informed decision-making, and alignment with the school’s long-term strategic goals. Democratic centralism and scientific decision-making are thus essential for the leadership team’s success and the school’s rapid development.

This study also finds that the CHP leadership team adheres to the principle of “meritocracy” when selecting members for decision-making teams. Decision-making roles prioritize professional level, specialized skills, and qualifications rather than position or status. On-site observations demonstrated that junior subject teachers served as primary decision-makers in various groups, with higher-level leaders playing supportive roles as coordinators, resource allocators, and supervisors. For instance, the Teachers’ Smart Education Literacy Development Group, the Student Career Planning Group in the Fifth and Sixth Grade Campus (CP3), and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance Group in the Main Campus (CP1) were led by junior subject teachers as primary decision-makers, with vice principals or directors as secondary decision-makers.

The principals also shared their perspectives on the personnel selection mechanism in daily school management. Suie acknowledged that while “meritocracy” is an ideal mechanism the school is exploring to counteract negative elements associated with traditional school hierarchy or bureaucracy, its implementation is hindered by practical challenges. Chang shared several examples with the researcher during an interview that highlighted conflicts between young leaders and older group members. She explained, “Although work experience and academic qualifications are not everything, older teachers may feel psychologically challenged by young teachers giving orders because it undermines their authority. At the same time, experience tells them that young teachers’ decisions may not be mature or comprehensive enough. However, for fear of being perceived as using seniority or age to assert their authority, they often choose to remain silent. This can lead to unsatisfactory task outcomes, which not only undermine young teachers’ confidence, but also weaken mutual trust among colleagues, which is contrary to our original intentions in establishing this mechanism.”

In interviews, Leao, Tung, and Gane also discussed successful cases of the “meritocracy” system, as well as lessons learned from unsuccessful cases. Tung added, “Whether successful or not, as the top leaders of the school, we assure those selected as decision-makers that we will share the consequences, encourage them to take bold actions, and reflect on their experiences and lessons learned.

In conclusion, CHP principals engage in pre-task activities involving goal setting, path planning, and decision-making. These activities employ a combination of top-down and bottom-up communication mechanisms to build consensus and unity. The principle of meritocracy guides the selection of decision-makers and key personnel, facilitating democratic centralism and considering the demands and interests of all stakeholders. By aligning the school’s current situation with long-term aspirations, tasks are implemented effectively with favorable expectations.

6.2.2 The Leadership Routine: Implementation, Supervision, and Evaluation

This subsection focuses on the leadership practices of CHP principals, examining their implementation, supervision, and evaluation of school management tasks through interviews

and observation records. The researcher also explores the principals' reflections on these practices to gain insight into their characteristics, traits, and attitudes. The study identifies result-oriented task implementation, friendly and timely supervision, and accurate and scientific evaluation as significant factors contributing to effective task implementation and positive outcomes, thereby exemplifying the effective leadership of CHP principals.

Moreover, the study reveals that CHP principals advocate a results-oriented and practical approach to task implementation, supervision, and post-task evaluation. They emphasize providing timely and sufficient humane consideration to teachers, students, and families while promoting staff unity, cooperation, and acceptance of diverse viewpoints. The principals strive for objective and evidence-based evaluation of task results and individual performance. These findings are supported by multiple interviews and on-site observations conducted by the researcher. Overall, the guidelines, characteristics, behavioral orientations, and aspirations demonstrated by the principals throughout their leadership roles positively impact the teachers and students at CHP.

Based on interviews with principals and observations of leadership practices, this study understands the task implementation, supervision, and evaluation of daily principal leadership practices as follows: Principals lead by example, actively engage in tasks, and prioritize task outcomes while directing all involved to adhere to the same principle. In monitoring and facilitating tasks, principals foster unity and cooperation among teachers and students by encouraging the search for common ground among differences and by being attentive to the needs of all task participants. Timely and sufficient support and consideration are prioritized. After completing the task, principals organize comprehensive evaluation activities to assess the roles, contributions, and effectiveness of each participant. They adopt a scientific and objective attitude in evaluating task results, ensuring an impartial and accurate assessment of both the results and the individuals involved. They recognize and respect their respective contributions through fact-based criticism and plans for further improvement.

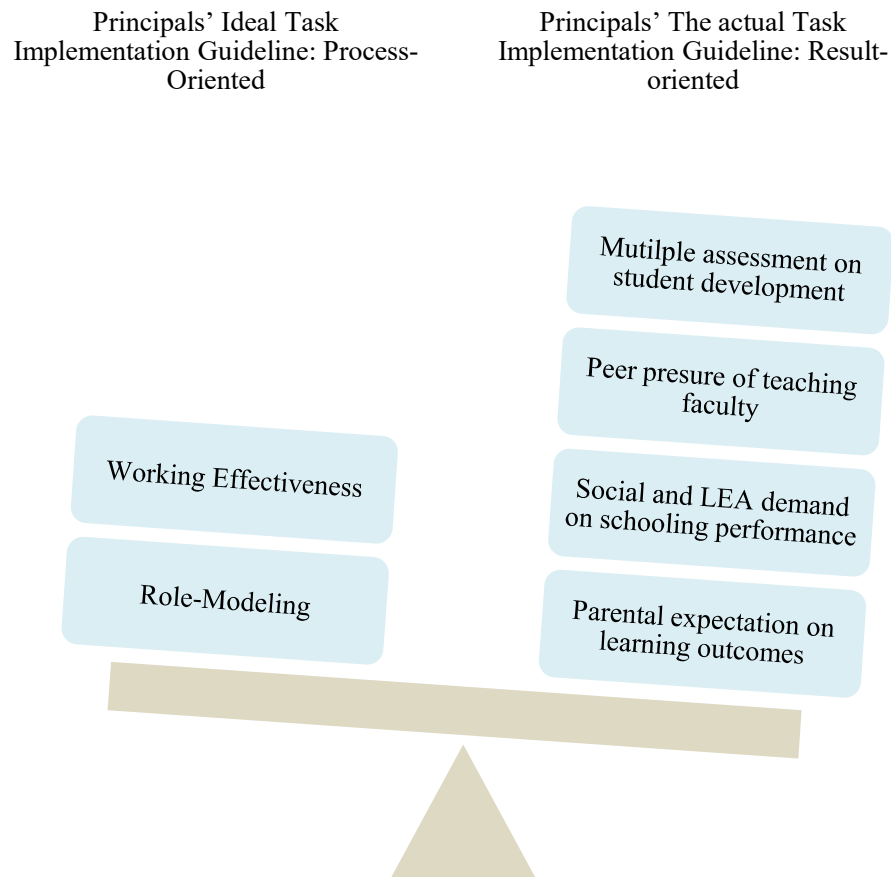
- **Task Implementation**

Based on the researcher's interviews with principals and observations, the practices of the CHP leadership team can be identified in the following aspects: They demonstrate moral standards during task performance, inspiring and influencing colleagues, teachers, students, and families. They adhere to consistent rules for self-evaluation and evaluation of task participants, without granting special privileges. While emphasizing the importance of the task process and guiding teachers in process-oriented "formative assessment," they also recognize the significance of valuing and appreciating outcomes. They acknowledge the positive feedback and motivation derived from successful outcomes and the potential for learning from negative outcomes.

The researcher acknowledges that emphasizing both process and outcomes for a group engaged in the same task can create confusion. The principals themselves acknowledged this confusion caused by the idealistic leadership approach of "emphasizing both process and tracking results" during their interviews.

Through on-site observations, the researcher noted that principals consistently emphasized the paramount importance of leaders at all hierarchical levels demonstrating accountability and exemplary behavior, serving as role models for all members of the school. They also emphasized the effectiveness and inherent benefits of daily effort, while discouraging wasteful effort from both teachers and students. In an interview, Suie clarified that prioritizing process does not neglect results, and vice versa. Positive outcomes often result from a well-executed process, although a good process does not guarantee positive outcomes. Conversely, an unfavorable process is more likely to lead to unfavorable results.

Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, and Gane further explained that academic performance and teaching effectiveness are essential concerns in the school context, not only for students and teachers but also for families, society, and educational authorities. These factors contribute to the ongoing tension between divergent orientations of teachers and students in prioritizing either the process or the outcomes.



Vice Principal Leao highlighted several cases that exemplify the conflicting perspectives among faculty members regarding the tension between “outcome-oriented” and “process-oriented” approaches. For instance, the selection process for the best teachers of the year, which is highly competitive and places emphasis on day-to-day teaching and research performance. While a quantifiable grading and evaluation system is utilized, it may not fully capture the care, dedication, and extensive time and effort invested by teachers to achieve desired results. Gane expressed concern regarding the ongoing debate surrounding the relative importance of process and results, particularly in the context of teachers’ summative evaluations based on their implementation of “formative assessment” practices at CHP. Nevertheless, both Chang and Tung highlighted the diminishing relevance of these debates due to external pressures from parents, society, educational authorities, and the pervasive influence of China’s test-driven education system, especially with regards to the college entrance exam.

Chang, in her role as a supervisor of teacher training and professional development, believes that high-performing students and teachers would attain a balance between process and

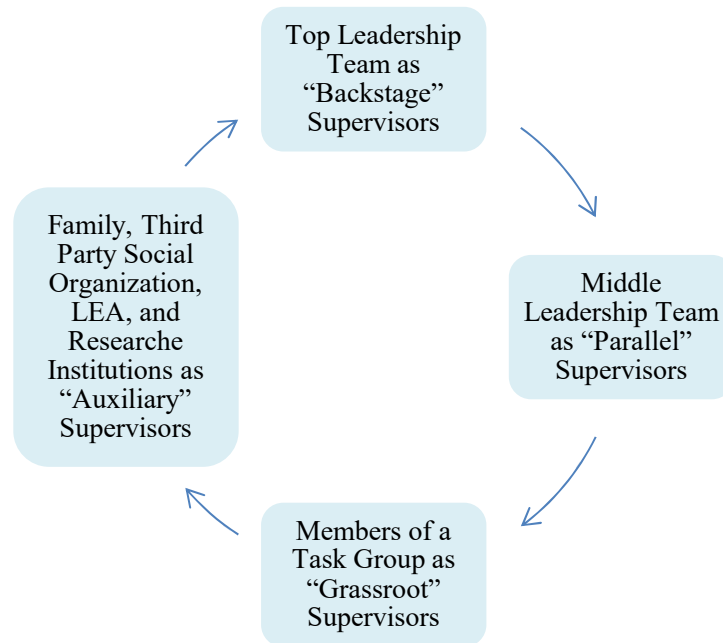
outcome through a clear understanding of their priorities and making necessary compromises. According to her, most teachers and students gradually achieve this balance through their growth and development. She does not perceive the need for explicit choices between process and outcome as highly significant. Both Chang and Tung argue that regardless of the emphasis placed on process or outcome, opposition and support will inevitably arise. They believe it is more effective for principals to act as role models by diligently performing tasks and actively engaging. Through firsthand experience, teachers and students naturally comprehend the importance of striking a balance between process and outcome.

- **Task Supervision**

In terms of task supervision within the daily leadership practice, specific aspects of the CHP principals' approach were identified by the researcher. The principals determine their level of involvement in supervising a given task based on factors such as the task's content, importance, and the internal work supervision mechanism of CHP. They engage in prompt discussions and consultations to determine if their personal supervision is necessary. For tasks that do not require their direct supervision or continuous monitoring, the principals delegate the responsibility to middle managers or individuals assigned to the specific task. In such cases, the principals ensure that the task's accountability mechanism is clearly defined and receive regular progress reports, conducting spot checks. These tasks typically involve campus-specific day-to-day school activities or non-urgent and challenging assignments.

However, if a task demands the personal supervision or continuous monitoring of the principal, it signifies its urgency, necessity, and importance. Such tasks encompass the implementation of national and local education policies, assignments designated by the LEA or research institutions, and critical or time-sensitive matters related to school development and the well-being of teachers and students. To effectively facilitate and oversee these tasks, the principals either act as supervisors themselves or designate suitable candidates for direct supervision. Principal Suie referred to the school's supervisory mechanism as "multi-role and multi-level supervision." High-level principals assume the role of "behind-the-scenes" or "backstage" supervisors, monitoring the progress of tasks at each stage. Middle-level supervisors share the responsibility as "parallel" supervisors, closely monitoring the specific

progress of tasks and utilizing their expertise to identify risks and issues during implementation. Grassroots supervisors, selected from the task members, provide timely feedback to the task leader and middle and senior school leaders to ensure adherence to school regulations and laws.



According to Suie and his colleagues, various stakeholders, including families, third-party social organizations, research institutions, the LEA, and the local People’s Congress, are involved in the supervision of school tasks. The supervision mechanism operates as a closed loop, where leaders at all levels and teachers can participate as supervisors or participants throughout the task’s progress. Since 2016, CHP has refined the selection process for supervisors at all levels and established detailed standards for task supervision and evaluation. Suie emphasized the school’s reliance on systems rather than individuals to enforce supervision. Democratic supervision is a requirement for ensuring accountability to students, families, faculty, staff, and taxpayers, regardless of one’s position.

Suie explained to the researcher that the school’s supervision mechanism was established after his second year as principal. Upon assuming office, he convened several general meetings of all faculty and staff, seeking their opinions and suggestions regarding the school’s rules and regulations. Taking into account the concerns raised by teachers regarding task supervision in the daily work of the school, Suie initiated discussions and voting among middle and senior leaders, senior teachers, and representatives of junior teachers. This led to

the introduction of the “multi-role and multi-level” supervision mechanism that has been in use to date. Leao, who witnessed and facilitated the discussion on school supervision mechanisms, informed the researcher that prior to this, the school’s supervision mechanism was merely “famous but not real” and absent. Many faculty members believed that the school should have an effective set of supervision mechanisms that operate without granting individual privileges. Chang, in an implicit admission, stated during an interview that previous leadership teams, including himself, did not establish clear rules for supervision due to concerns that mutual supervision could jeopardize friendly relationships among teachers and intensify competition.

Leao, Chang, and Lou admitted that the primary school once lacked explicit rules for supervision. However, Suie recognized the need for an effective supervision mechanism to ensure the success of the school’s mission and goals focused on student development. Despite initial resistance from some senior teachers, Suie assured them that the supervision system was designed to protect individuals and the smooth conduct of tasks. He encouraged teachers to do their work diligently and not to worry that supervision would be personal because supervisors would vindicate them in case of misunderstanding or criticism and highlight personal contributions to specific school tasks.

Gane, Yi, and Yao expressed their support for the supervision system during interviews. Gane emphasized its role in maximizing student growth, ensuring efficient organizational operation, and addressing issues of loose behavior and irresponsibility among certain teachers. Yi and Yao provided a detailed explanation of the system’s principles and design, highlighting the symbolic role of principals as “behind-the-scenes” supervisors and the crucial role of middle-level supervisors in conducting real-time evaluations, providing risk warnings, and offering support. They also underscored the responsibility of frontline supervisors to identify and report work-related issues to ensure compliance with rules and regulations.

After more than five years of implementation, the supervisory system has gained widespread acceptance among faculty members, as evident from the positive feedback received in the CHP teachers’ work experience questionnaire. The school’s leadership team frequently referred to concepts such as “democracy,” “democratic system,” and “democratic centralism” in interviews, although their understanding of these concepts may differ somewhat from the

Western interpretation of democracy. A more comprehensive discussion on leaders and democratic ideas will be presented in a subsequent subsection of this chapter.

● Task Evaluation

In interviews, the principals emphasized the implementation of the “integrated monitoring and evaluation” mechanism at CHP, which assesses tasks based on both their completion outcomes and a combination of ongoing dynamic evaluation and a final summative evaluation. Supervisors at all levels fulfill the role of evaluators in monitoring task progress. Principal Suie informed the researcher that the CHP leadership team introduced a task evaluation reform in 2018, drawing inspiration from the concept of “formative classroom assessment.” This reform integrated supervisors’ evaluations with self-evaluations from task group members, aiming to provide comprehensive evaluation materials and yield more accurate and objective conclusions. By comparing these two assessments, issues in the task evaluation system and task implementation can be identified, enabling continuous improvement of CHP’s integrated supervision and evaluation mechanism.

During the fieldwork, notable observations were made in the school. Despite advocating for “integrated supervision and evaluation” during task implementation, the principals themselves were rarely directly involved in supervising or evaluating specific tasks. Head principal Suie regularly visited the school’s other two campuses (CP2 and CP3), focusing on supporting frontline teachers and conducting classroom observations during these visits. Task evaluation, supervision meetings, and branch campus-specific issues did not fall within his involvement. Similarly, Tung and Gane, who hold direct responsibilities for CP2 and CP3 respectively, had limited direct participation in task supervision and evaluation. Their involvement primarily revolved around reviewing task supervision reports, examining periodic task implementation logs, and organizing task completion summary meetings. As previously mentioned, for significant tasks related to school development and the implementation of national or local education policies, principals periodically request reports from task leaders and supervisors to emphasize the importance of their work and make appropriate decisions and arrangements. Principals fully engage in supervision and evaluation only in emergency situations or when the safety, health, or specific rights of teachers and students are at risk.

In interviews, principals were questioned about the inconsistency between their endorsement of the integrated mechanism and their actual actions, which appeared to lack the promised supervision and evaluation. Suie confidently asserted during an interview that the advocacy and practice are not contradictory. According to Suie, the integrated supervision and evaluation mechanism should involve all those who seek the growth of students and teachers, as that is the ultimate goal. Suie further argued that excessive interference in task implementation and meticulous supervision and evaluation of every action would undermine the enthusiasm and confidence of task leaders and implementers, potentially burdening them. Furthermore, it might lead to negligence of duties by those responsible for supervision and evaluation, assuming the principals have everything under control. Considering the vast scale of CHP as a large primary school with over 3,000 pupils across three campuses, the principals' time, energy, and capacity are limited and must be rationally and scientifically allocated. Therefore, for non-urgent long-term school tasks, it suffices to maintain an appropriate level of involvement to ensure task leaders, supervisors, evaluators, and participants perceive the presence of school leaders. Rather than exerting top-down positional pressure, the role of principals is to serve as exemplars and moral models, reminding everyone of the journey ahead to achieve the vision and mission.

Leao, Chang, and Gane expressed similar perspectives during interviews, indicating their expectation for more active and positive participation in the integration of "supervision and evaluation" to facilitate smooth task progress. Tung echoed these sentiments, drawing on her prior experience as principal of Eastern Wind Primary School, where she tended to handle tasks herself. However, Tung acknowledged the impracticality of such an approach at CHP, given the increased number of students and staff she now manages. She emphasized the significance of mobilizing a greater number of individuals to participate in school management, inspiring their sense of mission and responsibility, guiding students, and families, and closely aligning their development with that of the school—a factor she believes underpins CHP's consistent and rapid advancement.

Yi and Yao, who have recently been promoted to administrative assistants and de facto vice principals of CHP's second and third campuses, expressed their gradual adjustment to their new roles. Previously, they were accustomed to co-leading task groups or serving as key members of school tasks. However, their responsibilities have now shifted to supervising,

making decisions, coordinating, and evaluating. According to Yao, “We must rely on our frontline teachers, grassroots managers, and middle managers, as their knowledge, skills, and experience are crucial for successful implementation. Our role is to ensure the efficient and wise utilization of these ‘tools’ while preventing misuse and mismanagement.”

In terms of post-task evaluations, the researcher observed that the CHP leadership team highly values a scientific, democratic, and fair review process. The researcher attended more than five task summary review meetings and noted that the convening principal consistently emphasized the principles of fairness and evidence-based evaluation of task performance and outcomes. Through democratic discussions and negotiations, the convening principal would then integrate the majority’s opinions, considering the perspectives of task participants, supervisors, and the task process and outcomes, to reach conclusions.

The researcher also identified an unacknowledged pre-assessment mechanism for task implementation at CHP that principals did not explicitly mention during interviews and that was also not included in the school’s task implementation framework or leadership team manual. This mechanism involves the school leadership team evaluating the importance of tasks, potential outcomes, risks, accountability of supervisors or task leaders, and other factors during the planning and preparation phase prior to task implementation. Interestingly, when asked about the inclusion of “pre-assessment before task implementation” in the school’s task evaluation mechanism, all principals acknowledged its necessity and recognized it as a leadership practice and responsibility.

During the interview, Suie and Leao openly acknowledged several shortcomings in the current system and procedures at CHP. They highlighted the reliance on habits, customs, and “unspoken rules” in the daily operation of the school by all levels of the CHP leadership team and faculty members. Similarly, Chang shared her understanding of “unspoken rules” or “ambiguous routines” with the researcher, stating, “For example, the official mission of the school may not perfectly align with the principal’s version, but this discrepancy does not undermine the confidence of the majority of staff, students, and families in the current leadership team and its mindset, values, or beliefs. We have been able to routinely assess, reflect, and review our work and the progress of the school’s mission with or without a specific leadership framework, guidebook, or handbook. Although many of our practices are not institutionalized or included in CHP’s leadership handbook, this has not prevented us

from achieving significant leadership results.” When asked why the pre-evaluation mechanism was not explicitly documented in the school’s operations manual, Lou replied, “While our work is based on established processes, it should not be constrained by rigid adherence. Manual updates cannot keep up with the changes and challenges we face in our work. Adherence to established processes alone would leave many of the school’s problems unresolved.

Suie, Yi, and Yao emphasize the importance of achieving a balance between adhering to rules and maintaining pragmatism in the daily operation of the school. Suie told the researcher: “As mentioned before, the sustainable development and success of CHP depends on the establishment of an efficient and humanized management system, rather than relying solely on the talents and abilities of a single principal. Even in the event of the resignation or secondment of the current leadership team, I hope that CHP can maintain the momentum of the school’s development by benefiting from the legacy we have left. Therefore, it is critical to institutionalize successful leadership mechanisms that have been tested and proven to be practical and effective. Developing a CHP Leadership Handbook that incorporates these elements would enable our successors and future leaders at all levels to benefit from them.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complexities and challenges faced by CHP principals in implementing the integrated monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The principals’ approach to monitoring and evaluation involves a delicate balance between active involvement and appropriate delegation, aimed at facilitating task progress while mitigating the risk of excessive burden or negligence. Meanwhile, this study reflects the importance of conducting post-task evaluations based on principles of fairness and empirical evidence, as well as recognizing the value of pre-evaluation mechanisms during task planning and preparation. Despite the reliance on implicit standards and practices, the ability of the leadership team to evaluate, reflect, and review their work has contributed significantly to the school’s progress. It is considered imperative to institutionalize successful leadership mechanisms through the creation of a comprehensive CHP Leadership Handbook that would ensure the continuation of effective practices and serve as a guide for future leaders. By balancing adherence to established processes with the incorporation of pragmatic considerations, CHP principals seek to maintain the school’s developmental trajectory and achieve long-term success.

6.2.3 The Leadership Routine: Faculty Management and Continue Professional Development

This subsection presents principals' practices in managing teachers and promoting continuing professional development (CPD) in their daily work, along with their reflections on their leadership practices. The researcher conducted interviews with principals and observed their daily activities to document their behaviors and phenomena related to managing teachers and support staff, as well as promoting their own professional development ideals and plans. The study argues that principals adhere to management by rules combined with humanistic management practices to manage teachers and promote continuing professional development through the integration of internal and external resources of CHP.

This study focuses particularly on the principals' leadership regarding the teachers and some support staff, as they are directly managed by the principals and employed by the school. Other teams, such as the school security team, cafeteria staff, cleaning staff, and others, are mostly outsourced to social service providers through local government tenders, and employment contracts are signed with these companies. Although Principal Lou oversees their management while they work at the school, Lou does not have the power to organize professional development projects for these employees or to include them in the school's performance evaluation and management system. Therefore, this study does not focus on the management of this group. In the following parts, the management of teachers and the professional development of the school leadership team at CHP are presented.

● Faculty Management

During the researcher's fieldwork, it was observed that principals prioritized a rule-first approach to personnel management, while emphasizing personalization and humanization in the management process. This approach addressed the specific management needs of different groups and provided appropriate and prompt attention to teachers with different personalities, needs, and problems. Principals also valued harmony among groups and individuals and strove to create a united and cooperative community of teachers committed

to professional development. In terms of professional development, principals were committed to using both internal and external resources to maximize the results of teachers' professional growth. Harnessing the potential of internal staff and seeking assistance from external sources were considered practical strategies for promoting internal staff professional development by school leadership teams.

In interviews, principals emphasized that the current teacher management system implemented by the school was characterized by being "rule-based, humanistic, and fair." Suie stated in an interview that he believed the school's teacher management system was built on an effective, clear, efficient, and humanistic foundation. This system aimed to stimulate teachers' potential, sense of mission, and sense of accomplishment, encouraging them to actively engage in education, prioritize students' growth and well-being, and focus on their own knowledge and skill development, ultimately leading to professional satisfaction. Suie expressed confidence in CHP's ongoing efforts to establish this ideal system, acknowledging that while the current design was not perfect and there were implementation issues, he believed in the continuous improvement of the teacher system, especially in terms of teacher management and professional development.

Through observations of monthly faculty meetings and daily administrative affairs, the researcher found that principals consistently emphasized the core principles of CHP's teacher management system. These principles included adherence to CHP's teacher management framework, school rules, and laws. Chang, the principal in charge of teacher management at CHP, emphasized in an interview that the foundation and bottom line of the teacher management system were based on following the rules. This approach ensured the normal and efficient functioning of school personnel management while safeguarding the rights and interests of teachers.

Chang emphasized that the system should be fair, with consequences for those who broke the rules. In addition, it should not treat individuals as mere teaching machines but should incorporate humanistic considerations for the caregivers of students. The system should provide opportunities for those who made mistakes but were willing to correct them and provide sufficient help and support for teachers who faced difficulties and had special needs. Tung, who oversaw teacher recruitment at the school, provided a simplified breakdown of CHP's teacher management system into three categories: "prohibited actions," "required

actions,” and “actions the school will take.” Similarly, Leao and Lou provided similar summaries using the terms “discipline, responsibility, and right” to summarize the three main aspects of the school’s teacher management system.

Observations of principals’ behavior during faculty meetings, new teacher training sessions, and meetings with parent council members provided clear evidence that CHP’s faculty management system embodied the consensus of the vast majority of faculty members. These observations revealed a consistent pattern of inclusive and collaborative decision-making practices, highlighting the principals’ commitment, inclusiveness, self-sacrifice, spirit of democracy, passion for education, and enthusiasm for being educators.

During a faculty meeting held in the middle of the second semester, Principal Suie led a discussion on the implementation of new teaching methodologies. The meeting was attended by senior and middle leadership team members, department heads, and teacher representatives. Principal Suie began by presenting the proposed methodologies, emphasizing the importance of incorporating feedback from all stakeholders. He stated, “Your input is crucial in refining these methodologies to ensure they meet the needs of our students and align with our educational goals.” Throughout the meeting, Suie encouraged open dialogue and invited teachers to share their perspectives. One teacher expressed concerns about the practicality of implementing the new methods within the existing curriculum. Suie acknowledged the concern and suggested forming a working group to explore potential solutions. This collaborative effort concluded with a vote on the proposed methodologies, with the majority of attendees expressing support for the plan, indicating a strong consensus.

During a new teacher training session, Vice-Principal Leao facilitated a workshop on classroom management techniques. Leao emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment for both teachers and students. She encouraged new teachers to share their experiences and challenges. One new teacher described difficulty in maintaining student engagement during lessons. Leao responded by sharing effective strategies and invited other experienced teachers to offer their insights. Additionally, Principal Tung reminded new teachers and first graders’ parents about the basics of the school’s value sets, such as the pursuit of love and beauty. Tung stated, “Mentors are there not only to guide you professionally but also to help you balance life and work. They are your role models.” New

teachers were assigned mentors to help them transition from novices to effective educators who can handle the challenges of teaching, learning, student management, and communication with students, families, and coworkers. This mentorship program fostered a sense of community and support, further contributing to the consensus-building process.

At a parent council meeting, Vice-Principal Chang and Vice-Principal Tung presented a proposal for increasing parental involvement in school activities. The meeting included parent representatives and class teachers. Chang and Tung outlined the benefits of enhanced parental involvement and invited parents to share their ideas and concerns. Leao, Tung, and Yi coordinated the different ideas held by parents of pupils with varying performance and learning expectations. They led a workshop to leverage the experiences of parents of higher graders, grades 5 and 6, to serve as tutors for lower graders' parents. This peer-coaching of parents helped those with younger children understand common challenges and needs, as well as effective strategies to foster smooth growth for their children and stronger ties with classmates, teachers, and family members. This inclusive approach ensured that parental voices were heard and integrated into the school's decision-making process, reinforcing a collective commitment to the school's goals.

Additionally, Suie and Gane led an initiative to promote interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning (PBL) classrooms, which is part of the school's smart education promotion projects. They proposed that IT, science, and art classrooms work jointly to create innovative "fusion" classrooms, offering students an engaging and integrated learning experience. Suie stated, "We want to move beyond fact-based knowledge and make learning fun and engaging, driving students to learn spontaneously and willingly." Typically, PBL projects were more frequently led by Chinese, Math, and English teachers, with PE, music, and moral education teachers rarely involved at CHP. This initiative aimed to include a broader range of subjects, fostering a more holistic educational approach. By involving teachers from diverse disciplines in planning and executing these projects, the leadership team ensured a broad base of support and further solidified consensus among faculty members.

The behavior observed during faculty meetings, new teacher training sessions, and parent council meetings provided compelling evidence that CHP's faculty management system is a reflection of a broad consensus. These observations revealed a consistent pattern of inclusive and collaborative decision-making practices. This is highlighted by instances such as a

faculty meeting led by Principal Suie, focusing on the adoption of new teaching methodologies. This meeting saw active participation from various stakeholders, emphasizing an integrated approach to decision-making. Similarly, during a new teacher training session, Vice-Principal Leao conducted a workshop that facilitated an open exchange of strategies and experiences, which reinforced the supportive environment for staff. Moreover, a parent council meeting led by Vice-Principal Chang involved detailed discussions that aligned parental expectations with school goals, illustrating a strategic alignment facilitated by the leadership.

These detailed observations underscore how the leadership at CHP has effectively navigated consensus building through practices that foster inclusivity and collaboration. By engaging various school community members in decision-making, the leadership ensured that diverse perspectives were considered, leading to decisions that reflect collective inputs. This approach not only fortified the community within the school but also bolstered the effectiveness of the faculty management system, showcasing the leadership's commitment to fostering an environment of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

Chang noted that in recent years, the focus of the school leadership team's work on teacher management had been on optimizing processes to make the system more effective, user-friendly, and humanistic. While the 2016 framework defined the boundaries and guidelines for teacher management, the current upgrade focused on clarifying the purpose, process, and benefits for teachers who followed the rules. Chang also emphasized the importance of a well-functioning management system with reasonable rules for both penalties and rewards, which was key to ensuring fairness. Tung echoed similar sentiments, stating that CHP's current mid-term tasks were closely related to motivating and guiding teachers' commitment to continuous professional development (CPD). Gane expressed the view that the 2016 version represented version 1.0 of CHP's teacher management system, and the current iteration was version 1.5. However, it had not yet reached version 2.0 because the current system did not address issues such as burnout among young and middle-aged teachers and the ineffectiveness of certain senior teachers.

The two youngest members of the CHP leadership team, Yi, and Yao rated the functioning teacher management system at 70 out of 100. They argued that the system did not reflect the school's vision and mission, as the charter mentioned serving the school's pursuit of love

and beauty but lacked specific institutionalization to concretely embody this pursuit. They saw themselves as advocates for young teachers and believed that the system needed to pay more attention to the well-being of young teachers. They asserted that the system should consider the needs and challenges of newly registered teachers and teachers in their thirties, who usually had families and often carried the heavy burden of work and family responsibilities. They argued that it would be unfair and inequitable to use the same set of standards to evaluate whether their work was adequate. Therefore, Yi and Yao insisted that fairness must be pursued.

The two told the researcher that CHP could learn from productivity-based evaluation approaches used by business organizations, which encouraged everyone to improve efficiency, innovation, and the use of modern technology. In addition, they argued that the current system did not fit well with current education reforms such as “double reduction” and “smart education initiative” because it neglected the operational effectiveness of teachers, the use of technology, and attempts to innovate. Therefore, they suggested that the upcoming upgrade of the school’s teacher management system should include the modernization, informatization, and innovation of the AS guidelines for CHP’s teacher management system.

In managing the demotion, discipline, promotion, and rewards of faculty and staff, the CHP leadership team told this researcher that they adhered to the school’s rules and regulations while supplementing them with humanistic care. They established dispute resolution, reporting, and arbitration mechanisms to maintain fairness, justice, objectivity, and credibility. Suie noted that actions such as promotion and demotion, rewards and punishments not only affected the rights and interests of faculty and staff, but also affected their confidence in leadership, colleagues, and the system. The principal reported that since taking office, he had worked with colleagues to establish an evaluation and supervision mechanism for promotion and demotion, as well as rewards and punishments. The decisions were made by voting at a general meeting of all faculty members and staff. The supervisory mechanism stipulated that if any faculty or staff member believed that he or she had been treated unfairly, he or she could negotiate with the team responsible for evaluating his or her relevant matters through this mechanism.

Chang, who was the supervisor of this mechanism, explained its operation to this researcher. She said that although they tried to understand each employee and their performance as much as possible to make reasonable judgments, due to the fact that the school had nearly 300 employees and operated in three campuses simultaneously, the leadership team was unable to make accurate, objective, and fair judgments on each school matter and employee performance, or to give appropriate rewards and punishments. As a result, the principals could not fully understand each subordinate. Chang suggested: “It was crucial to let democratic supervision play a role in this mechanism. Allowing members of teachers’ unions, faculty representatives, and senior directors specialized in a particular field to participate in the evaluation and give feedback on a particular event could respect the facts more than the personal arbitration of the principal, while maintaining fairness and justice.” Tung also explained that this system adhered to the principle of democratic centralism. On the one hand, it collected opinions and suggestions from teachers and staff; on the other hand, an arbitration body including the principal, senior teachers, or leaders of special task teams made decisions on disputed matters based on the school’s values, vision, mission, rules and regulations, and facts, while taking responsibility for their decisions.

● **Continuing Professional Development**

In terms of teachers’ professional development, CHP principals followed a policy of exploring both internal and external resources to maximize CPD outcomes. Through years of effort, they established a “mentorship system,” “specialized skill enhancement workshops,” and “thematic skill lectures by volunteering teachers,” which were a collection of projects aimed at developing professional competencies and facilitating career planning. School staff were encouraged to participate in their own growth and share their experiences based on their age, experience, role, and position. In addition, the school leadership team actively involved external constructive forces in internal professional development projects by inviting participation from educational authorities, research institutes, Internet communities, social organizations, and even parents. These external entities played different roles and provided different types of support.

All principals consistently emphasized the importance of professional development to teachers during CPD projects. During school observations, the researcher frequently

witnessed principals taking the lead in planning, evaluating, and conducting teacher professional development projects. For instance, at multiple monthly school-wide faculty conferences, Suie reiterated that in response to new tasks and policies assigned by the Ministry of Education and local education authorities, particularly the localization of two national education policies, CHP would establish task-specific groups led by himself or vice-principals as direct supervisors. These groups aimed to improve the application of modern educational technology, formative assessment, and effective homework management daily. The principals stressed the integration of young teachers' theoretical knowledge and modern educational technology with experienced teachers' traditional skills to boost teaching and learning performance.

The researcher recorded similar comments from several principals about professional development. Chang, Leao, and Tung repeated the following statement several times: For a school like CHP, which had more than 3,000 students and nearly 300 teachers and operated on three campuses, implementing instructional and student management reforms was challenging and complex. Faced with high expectations from the school board, parents, and the community, and constrained by fixed staffing quotas, the school drew on the potential of its teaching team from within. Through mutual training, learning, and inspirational activities that stimulated the improvement of teachers' capacities, CHP aimed to realize the potential of teachers in different professional areas and discover potential leaders within the team, allowing teachers to reassess their strengths and weaknesses.

Based on interviews, observations, and documents provided by principals, the study categorized CHP's internal teacher professional development pathways or blocks into three categories.

The first category focused on professional development proposed by principals to improve specific professional skills, knowledge, and career planning for teachers. These projects had clear objectives and were planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated by the school leadership collective. Examples included CPSD projects such as the "Classroom Leadership Enhancement Project for New Teachers," "Child and Adolescent Mental Health Protection Project for Grade 5-6 Teachers," and "Instructional Skills Enhancement Project for Interdisciplinary and Fusion Classrooms."

The second category of projects involved the fulfillment of tasks assigned by the Ministry of Education, local education authorities, educational research institutes, or those crucial for school development. Principals appointed a leader for each task group who was responsible for supervising and promoting the assigned task while providing relevant professional skills and knowledge training to the group members. Examples of projects that fell under this category included the “Science Literacy Development Project for Art, Physical Education, and Chinese Teachers” and the “Humanities Literacy Development Project for Science and Mathematics Teachers.”

The third category entailed the “mentorship system” and “thematic skill development lectures,” which fostered collaboration between senior and young teachers and encouraged young teachers to demonstrate and explore their potential, respectively. Principals ensured that the benefits of active teacher participation were acknowledged and integrated into performance evaluation criteria as bonus components. Simultaneously, principals themselves frequently organized and participated in projects falling under this category.

Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung viewed the first category as the foundation for the sustained professional development of CHP’s teacher team. They saw it as a key factor in building a high-performing teaching team that was aligned with and guided by the school’s vision and mission. Principals also acknowledged their responsibility to meet the mandates of national and local education authorities and noted the significant overlap between the second and first categories of professional development projects. The third type of project, according to Suie, was critical to transforming the school into a “learning community” that continually tapped the potential of teachers, ensured student growth, and prevented professional burnout.

Training projects in the second category were collaborations between government agencies, universities, research institutions, and the primary school. These projects had jointly developed training frameworks, processes, and evaluation standards. Training projects in the first and third categories of professional development, on the other hand, were managed entirely within the CHP. In the first category, school leadership teams sought to align the school’s vision, mission, and goals with the specific circumstances of teachers and students. They took a comprehensive approach to developing professional development projects for teachers. The researcher observed that principals prioritized democratic decision-making mechanisms and scientific evaluation in the implementation and monitoring of professional

development projects. They involved lead teachers, frontline teacher representatives, and parent council members in discussions about project goals, content, processes, and evaluation methods. This inclusive approach promoted consensus and expertise through democratic centralism, resulting in well-developed professional development plans.

In the third category, which included teacher-led mentoring and presentations on specific skill development by volunteer teachers, principals ensured that the benefits of active teacher participation were recognized and incorporated into performance evaluation criteria as bonus components. Principals themselves often organized and participated in projects that fell under this category. For example, head principal Suie, also a renowned Chinese teacher, acted as a mentor to newly hired Chinese teachers, providing guidance and evaluation on classroom instruction and student management. He also offered development suggestions to these novice teachers and middle-level managers who were struggling with the difficulties of newcomers or at the threshold of their careers.

Similarly, Leao volunteered as a mentor for the “Science and Mathematics Fusion Classroom” project, conducting seminars, sharing experiences, and mentoring young teachers as apprentices. Tung and Gane also contributed as lecturers and mentors to projects such as the “Effective Family Engagement Project for New Class Teacher,” which focused on training communication skills between teachers and parents, and the “Technology Literacy Enhancement Project for Elder Teachers.” Their involvement ensured timely assistance to teachers in need and facilitated the exchange of experiences.

Regarding the use of external resources, all principals agreed that relying solely on internal resources to solve 21st-century school problems was unrealistic, inefficient, and inappropriate. Suie emphasized the importance of using external resources effectively, stating that many internal school problems were manifestations of external factors, including social, economic, and cultural issues. He believed that external resources were critical to solving these problems. “Our limited skills, knowledge, time, and energy prevent the leadership team from playing a decisive role in solving growing professional problems, resulting in a waste of valuable internal resources. In the current context, we cannot simply close the school gates, pretend that nothing has changed, and deal with all the problems on our own. On the contrary, we should adapt to the evolving society and world by adopting

professional, effective, and humanistic approaches to face unprecedented challenges,” the head principal explained.

In interviews, principals shared examples of using external resources to address school issues and support teachers’ professional development at CHP. For example, Leao collaborated with an Internet company and a public relations consulting firm to handle online media publicity and manage the school’s public image, while providing teachers with training in public relations and social networking skills. Suie and Chang highlighted collaborations with research institutes to establish a mental health crisis intervention mechanism within the school and provide long-term training in mental health counseling for teachers. Tung mentioned collaborations with the judiciary, women’s and children’s rights organizations, juvenile corrections centers, and special education centers to exchange successful practices in inclusive education and anti-bullying. Gane and Yao demonstrated collaborations with museums, giant panda reserves, and cultural heritage protection institutions to enhance teachers’ knowledge of science, environmental, and cultural education, which also strengthened participants’ classroom and instructional leadership skills.

Maintaining a healthy engagement with the outside world was seen as crucial to CHP’s rapid development. Suie emphasized the importance of creating educational opportunities for students and growth opportunities for teachers. Collaboration with outside individuals and organizations not only addressed diverse educational needs but also supported teachers’ professional development, subject matter expertise, holistic qualities, well-being, and career planning. Several CPD projects documented during the researcher’s time at CHP included efforts such as inviting singing coaches from music schools and public speaking trainers to educate teachers on the use of voice, consulting with the local women’s association and obstetricians to advise pregnant teachers on work-life balance, and hosting online seminars with sister schools in Singapore and Canada to share experiences in dealing with children’s health issues such as myopia, obesity, and mobile phone addiction. These efforts exemplified the use of external resources to enhance CHP’s internal professional development.

To understand the influence of CHP leadership team’s use of external resources for promoting internal faculty CPD in the region, the researcher consulted with the deputy director of the Riverside LEA. The response indicated that CHP’s approach was not common in the region. While some principals were inspired by CHP’s practices, few had

institutionalized the use of external resources internally. The deputy director explained that this disparity was due to a lack of forward-thinking among other school leaders and a lack of principals like Suie who were willing to adopt such pioneering strategies. In addition, even with exceptional principals and acceptance of the model by the school's leadership team, teachers, and parents, the successful utilization of external school resources to enhance faculty CPD remained challenging and uncertain, as it demanded years of effort-making to secure a viable, suitable, and effective pathway for implementing such CPD approach. Therefore, the deputy head of Riverside LEA recognized CHP's successful integration of internal and external resources for teacher professional development as a notable achievement. The LEA leader acknowledged that CHP's approach reflected a changing direction in problem-solving within schools and expected it to gradually gain prominence and become mainstream in the coming years.

6.2.4 The Leadership Routine: Student Management and Family Relationship Development

This subsection presents the daily practices of principals in student management and family-school relationship development, along with their feedback on leadership practices. The study reveals that principals empowered teachers to guide, encourage, inspire, and discipline students, using these interactions to communicate the school's vision, values, mission, and goals. Furthermore, school leaders have developed a framework for school-family relations, fostering enriched interactions and encouraging greater family involvement in school development. This framework has proven effective in resolving conflicts between parents and the CHP, facilitating collaborative efforts towards school development and children's growth.

Through observation, it was evident that principals serve as role models in inspiring and guiding students, particularly in their moral and behavioral development. In addition to adhering to rules and regulations, principals empower classroom and subject teachers through the CHP's student management system, enabling efficient and flexible management. They effectively convey the school's values, vision, mission, and tasks, thereby solidifying a consensus between teachers and students and fostering mutual development. Regarding family relationships, principals prioritize establishing systems for communication,

cooperation, mutual-inspiration, and accountability. By empowering teachers to actively engage with families and involving them in various school affairs, the leadership team benefits from the valuable contributions of families to school development.

Based on recorded interviews and observations of leadership practices, the researcher concludes that student management practices and family relationship building behaviors encompass the following aspects: Principals establish systems to define goals, content, methods, principles, and boundaries for CHP students and families. These systems and frameworks ensure the appropriate implementation of behaviors aligned with the CHP's vision, mission, and goals. Additionally, principals serve as moral exemplars, inspiring students through their conduct and promoting the pursuit of "love and beauty." They demonstrate humanistic care in their work and employ diverse strategies and management methods tailored to different groups, effectively and flexibly addressing challenges.

● **Student Management**

During on-site observation, the researcher noted that the principals at CHP effectively embodied the school's values and rules, serving as exemplary figures for both teachers and students. They prioritized students' physical and mental well-being, moral character development, learning achievement, and individual growth, emphasizing the concept of "love and beauty." Additionally, principals who taught specific subjects actively participated as subject matter teachers, focusing on delivering high-quality instruction and engaging in student management.

The researcher also observed that principals rarely intervened in students' campus life and classroom performance. Instead, they empowered classroom and subject teachers to manage students effectively through the implementation of a student management system. This system allowed for flexible management within established regulations and incorporated a supervision and feedback mechanism to evaluate teaching team performance and administer appropriate rewards or disciplinary actions.

Regarding the design of the student management system, Suie informed the researcher that it was implemented three years after he became principal. Influenced by the CHP leadership

team's philosophy of "managing the school with rules and systems," they led the development of the system. Drawing on existing student management practices, the experience of senior teachers, and feedback from families, the leadership team proposed a system that fully entrusted and empowered teachers. This system recognized classroom and subject teachers as the primary managers, facilitated student peer management, and involved the entire school leadership team and families as stakeholders in student management. It provided teachers with practical methods and action manuals and granted them disciplinary authority within the framework of laws and regulations.

Vice Principal Leao stated that the current system at CHP was effective and user-friendly. It required all faculty and staff to serve as role models for children while giving teachers the confidence and authority to encourage, reward, guide, restrain, and discipline students. She believed that the system, endorsed by the majority of the faculty, encapsulated successful experiences and approaches to student management, met parental expectations, and was applicable to various teachers and situations. Chang emphasized that the system's advantage was its clarity in defining protected and prohibited disciplinary behaviors, ensuring the well-being of both teachers and students.

Gane and Yao highlighted the greatest advantage of CHP's management method, which allowed teachers to utilize disciplinary measures within the framework of school rules and laws while maintaining flexibility in student management. Yao told the researcher: "in the past, some management behaviors of young teachers may have been perceived as unconventional or undesirable by senior teachers. However, the current approach encourages individualization and result-oriented methods, creating a more supportive environment for young teachers. Their primary concern is the satisfactory outcome of their management rather than potential criticism from colleagues."

Suie emphasized that in the current system, the school leadership team emphasized student participation in management. In the previous version, "student self-management" was not as significant. The updated version emphasized the crucial role of principals and leaders at all levels compared to the old version. Leao stated, "If leaders fail to practice what they preach, it either indicates a lack of belief in their proposed ideas or incompetence and irresponsibility." With the system upgrade, the management structure shifted from primarily teachers in the old version to encompass leaders at all levels, teachers, students, and families.

Clear roles and responsibilities were defined within the student management system to avoid confusion caused by multiple heads supervising management. Tung and Yi noted that when principals and teachers serve as role models together, they gain recognition from students and support from families. While some parents may not fully comprehend the school's vision, mission, and goals, they are willing to collaborate with teachers and principals and support school reforms based on their trust in CHP and its leaders and faculty.

● **Family-school Relationship Development**

Based on on-site observations and interviews with school leaders, the researcher has found that the school-family relationship development Framework implemented at CHP was developed and guided by the school's leadership team. Principal Suie informed the researcher that families are considered crucial members of the school's "learning community." Meeting parents' diverse and individualized needs for student growth is viewed as essential for building school-family relationships, while ensuring parents' right to know serves as an important element in school-family communication. The role of parents within this framework has been clearly defined, and effective interaction mechanisms have been established to promptly address parents' demands. Therefore, Information from the LEA, principals, and teachers can be effectively and accurately conveyed to parents. Tasks carried out by school leaders, based on the vision, mission, and tasks of CHP, are more likely to gain understanding and support from families. Similarly, school-family activities are likely to receive greater recognition and active participation.

Principal Suie explained to the researcher that the current "school-family relationship development framework" consists of three core components: the parents representative council, the family-school communication mechanism, and the family-school conflict mediation mechanism. Within this framework, the principal assumes roles such as executor, supervisor, and arbitrator. Similar to the various systems implemented at CHP as discussed in the previous chapter, the existing framework was also proposed by Suie. He elaborated, "This framework integrates my experience with other CHP principals, considers the suggestions of senior teachers, and listens to the demands and expectations of parents. The framework was implemented after receiving approval at a faculty assembly. Recent surveys on teachers' work experiences indicate that the majority of teachers highly value this

framework as it helps resolve conflicts and enhance mutual understanding and trust between partners and CHP.”

Tung informed the researcher that the school’s parent council is an integral part of CHP’s democratic governance system. “Every year, we distribute handbooks and explain the mechanisms of this framework during parent meetings. Simply put, the school’s parent council is composed of parent representatives at four levels: class, grade, campus, and school. Parent representatives at the class, grade, and campus levels are elected by parents based on the principles of fairness, openness, and voluntariness. Class-level parent representatives or chairpersons may be either volunteers or elected individuals. The election of class and campus-level parent representatives is conducted by representatives from each class and campus, respectively. We supervise the election process but do not directly interfere. As for the CHP school-level parent representatives, they are elected at a meeting attended by school principals, senior teachers, and each campus parent council chairperson. After assessing work performance and educational concepts, they are elected for a general term of two years based on suggestions from principals and senior teachers. Later, they will participate in supervising and evaluating a wide range of school affairs.”

Younger principals, Gane, Yi, and Yao, believe that parents in the school’s “School-Family Relationship Development Framework” not only provide feedback and act as resources of understanding school-family conflict but also play a role in resolving conflicts and facilitating parenting knowledge. Yi expressed, “Many conflicts between lower-grade parents and teachers stem from parents’ lack of knowledge and experience in children’s development. For instance, some parent council representatives in the first or second grade often reported issues related to children’s concentration problems and reluctance to participate in group activities. Higher-grade parents, who have more experience in dealing with such problems and understand that these phenomena are normal in growth, have accumulated richer experiences and effective countermeasures. Coordinating higher-grade parent council representatives to communicate and share experiences with their lower-grade counterparts not only reduces the workload of teachers who repeatedly explain children’s growth issues to a large number of parents but also effectively alleviates concerns of lower-grade parents.”

Likewise, Gane emphasized that one of the major successes of CHP's school-family relations work is freeing some frontline teachers from inefficient and repetitive communication with parents, allowing them to focus on more innovative work such as classroom instruction and student management. Yao shared similar view, stating that using the parent council to mitigate and resolve conflicts aligns with the school leadership team's advocacy that "consensus building is a prerequisite for school success."

During the on-site observation period, the researcher attended and observed several parent council meetings chaired by the principal. In these meetings, the principals served as mediators between the school and families. They explained educational policies and upcoming school reforms, listened to parents' concerns, demands, criticisms, encouragement, and suggestions. The researcher documented several meetings where Suie, Leao, Tung, Chang, and Gane fulfilled the role of mediators between parents and teachers. They identified the causes of conflicts, provided suggestions and solutions based on school regulations, parents' demands, and teachers' actions. Additionally, Suie and Leao explained the school's plan to localize the China Ministry of Education's "double reduction policy" during a meeting with CHP's parent council representatives from each campus. They instructed these representatives to actively collect and report parents' opinions and suggestions on this matter. At the end-of-term meeting on all three campuses, vice principals reported on the school's achievements, problems, and challenges in the past term. They directed parent representatives to collect parents' reflections and opinions to incorporate into the school's performance report prepared by the leadership team.

6.2.5 The Leadership Routine: Public Relations and Social Responsibility

This subsection examines the principals' leadership practices in developing and maintaining public relations while fulfilling social responsibility within their daily work. It also presents their feedback on these practices. The study demonstrated that by focusing on the maintenance and development of the school's public image, principals have successfully cultivated trust and positive evaluations from diverse stakeholders, including the community, families, students, teachers, LEA, and the media. These efforts have facilitated the smooth operation of the school, garnered increased support from families and the public, and enhanced the effectiveness of the school leadership team in tackling challenging tasks.

Furthermore, the CHP leadership team has actively engaged in collaborations with external entities such as individuals, non-profit social organizations, government agencies, research institutions, other primary schools, universities, social media platforms, and public institutions. These collaborations have aimed at launching initiatives dedicated to serving society, supporting vulnerable groups, promoting environmental protection, and supporting other meaningful causes. By embracing the social responsibilities of all CHP members, these activities not only uphold the school's core philosophy of "love and beauty" but also bring valuable external resources into the school's teaching and activities, fostering the professional development of teachers, the holistic development of students, and the sustainable growth of the school.

Based on interviews and observations, the principals' leadership practices in developing and maintaining public relations and fulfilling social responsibilities can be summarized as follows: principals actively manage and participate in public relations affairs, formulate plans and standards, organize various activities to enhance the school's public image and social influence, and effectively communicate CHP's school vision, mission, and values. Additionally, the principals actively establish connections with external individuals and organizations to facilitate interaction and cooperation, organize various public relations activities, and involve teachers, students, and families in these endeavors. These practices serve the purpose of serving society and encouraging participation in activities that contribute to social development, aligning with the core values and aspirations of CHP.

● **Public Relations**

During the on-site observation period, the researcher found that the principals had implemented a comprehensive framework to enhance the school's public relations. This "public relations engagement and development framework" involved setting goals and guidelines to cultivate a positive public image, managing relationships with social media platforms, handling public controversies, fostering trust, and shaping positive perceptions. The researcher has discovered that the CHP school leaders played a crucial role in formulating and implementing this framework. They referred to their vision of an ideal school image and adapted it to the context of CHP to set a goal for the public image

development of the primary school. Also, they defined goals, established boundaries, developed strategies, and empowered young teachers with strong communication skills and digital media literacy to engage the school's public relations activities.

Head principal Suie informed the researcher that the "public relations development framework" had been introduced before 2020, with vice principal Leao responsible for its initial draft. After presenting the draft and discussing it with principals, the framework was adopted as a preliminary guide for managing public relations. However, Suie admitted that the current version needed further refinement and had not been discussed by the faculty assembly.

During the interview, Leao provided a detailed explanation of the framework's rationale, objectives, content, and mechanisms. Leao stated, "The current version is still in its early stages and consists of three main components: establishing a bottom line for the school's public image, outlining practical pathways for its development, and setting phased objectives. The first section focuses on safeguarding the school's reputation and protecting individuals. The second section consolidates experiences and explores viable development approaches, identifying suitable participants in public relations affairs. The final section encapsulates the idealized vision of CHP's school image and formulates objectives for its development."

During interviews, Suie, Chang, and Tung emphasized the importance of a school's image in the internet age of the 21st century, highlighting its impact on internal operations and the trust of parents, students, and teachers. To safeguard the school's reputation and the personal image of its faculty and students, the principals established a baseline within the public relations development framework to prevent any infringements.

According to Leao, the active involvement of all stakeholders, including school leadership, faculty, students, and families, was crucial in maintaining and developing the school's image through daily practice and effective management of public relations. Individuals must recognize the close relationship between the school's image and their own school life, which encourages their active participation in building the school's positive public image. Leao particularly emphasized the importance of young teachers who possess internet and digital media literacy. She stated, "The internet serves as the primary battleground for developing and maintaining a public image. As natives of the digital ear, our young employees are adept

at using online platforms for expression and interaction. We must not only reactively counter false information but also proactively utilize various social media platforms to enhance and maintain the positive image of CHP.”

Lou demonstrated the implementation of the “transparent kitchen” initiative and invited the researcher to visit the school’s catering system. This initiative allows parents to access daily nutritious lunch recipes, information about suppliers, and real-time surveillance cameras in the kitchen through the school’s social media account. Lou explained that by addressing problems transparently and reducing outsiders’ ignorance about their operations, they aim to maintain a positive image.

Tung informed the researcher about the regular school open day activities that were organized prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. These activities invited parents to visit various areas of the campus to gain firsthand understanding of campus life without disrupting teaching and management activities. The records of these activities were shared on social media platforms, and organizers and teachers actively collected suggestions and feedback from visitors to identify any potential gaps in their daily work. Gane expressed the view that by minimizing the occurrence of problems, the school’s leadership team and young teachers responsible for social media operations could devote more time and energy to improving school performance. Yi and Yao shared similar views on this issue.

When asked about the involvement of middle-aged and older teachers in social media operations to maintain and develop the school’s public image, all the principals stated that the framework did not explicitly include older teachers or those nearing retirement. Many older teachers did not see the need to invest additional energy or time in image maintenance and development. Moreover, their limited internet and social media skills hindered their effective participation in the public relations tasks carried out by younger teachers.

There was some ambiguity and inconsistency in the responses of the CHP principals regarding the goals set for public image development. While Suie, Leao, and Yi aimed to foster greater trust among parents and the community, Tung envisioned a school where parents would feel comfortable sending their children and experiencing joyful education. Chang’s goal was to ensure that the public recognized the alignment between the school’s image and its values, vision, and mission. Gane and Yao aimed to portray the school as a

vibrant learning community. Suie highlighted the importance of having different ideal schools rather than adhering to a single template, anticipating diverse responses from different principals. The image development goals set by the principals were consistent with this perspective, enabling the leadership teams to collaboratively build schools that encompassed diverse and excellent qualities across multiple dimensions, benefiting students, teachers, and families.

Additionally, the researcher attended two school law meetings chaired by head principal Suie. These meetings addressed controversial public issues related to the school on social networks and discussed possible countermeasures. The principals invited school lawyers and local media leaders to interpret public events and offer suggestions for managing public concerns. They also discussed CHP's plan for handling public relations issues and examined the potential impact on the school's image in similar situations.

● **Social Responsibility**

During the on-site observation period, it was identified that the principals had implemented a social responsibility practice guide encompassing leaders, teachers, students, and families. The guide provided goals and directives for collaboration with various social organizations. Principals actively engaged teachers, students, and families in social activities and sought partnerships with social organizations and individuals to leverage internal and external resources. They considered social responsibility activities as opportunities for student education and family involvement, facilitating the development of a learning community through social responsibility practices.

Vice Principals Tung and Leao took the lead in formulating the current social responsibility practice guide. They based it on studies of regional schools collaborating with social organizations, incorporating suggestions and needs from school leaders, teachers, families, communities, and LEA. Suie explained that the guide promotes active participation of all members in public activities to understand and address community problems, significant issues in Chinese society, and important global development concerns. Through these activities, members apply their knowledge and skills, contributing their strengths and wisdom to foster a harmonious society.

Tung emphasized the interdependence of student growth, teacher professional development, and school progress with support from various sectors of society. Consequently, all members of CHP have a responsibility and duty to give back to society. Tung regarded involving students and teachers in social activities as essential for moral and character education. She stated, “We need to expose teachers and students to the societal issues that exist beyond their comfort zones and the wall of school. It is crucial for today’s children to be aware of these problems, understanding their complexity and the challenges involved in solving them. By cultivating a problem-solving mindset and promoting social progress throughout the educational process, we inspire their individualized development. Making the world a better place becomes part of their mission during growth. Only citizens educated in this manner can drive the flourishing of Chinese nation and humanity.”

In an interview, Leao highlighted several successful cases of collaborations between CHP and external social organizations in recent years. These partnerships involved government agencies, NGOs, communities, special education organizations, universities, research institutions, art galleries, and museums. Activities covered a range of topics such as waste recycling, intangible cultural heritage preservation, care for the disabled and vulnerable groups, community traffic management, biodiversity, drug prohibition, and forest fire prevention. Leao stressed that social responsibility practices are integral to school education. She stated, “Through active engagement in public welfare and service activities, school leaders, teachers, students, and families contribute to social development and problem-solving while acquiring relevant knowledge and skills. CHP aims to leverage every educational opportunity.”

Gane noted that present-day parents are more active and cooperative compared to their predecessors in terms of involvement in social change. They actively participate in community affairs and encourage their children to engage in activities promoting social progress and change. Organizing and participating in such activities not only fosters parental recognition of the school’s values, vision, and mission but also provides a platform for parents from various industries to offer suggestions on social responsibility practices. Gane expressed, “We welcome parent-related organizations to collaborate with the school in organizing meaningful activities involving parents and students. Additionally, we are eager

to adopt comprehensive action plans or feasible suggestions presented by fifth and sixth-grade students.”

During the observation period, the researcher witnessed student activities focused on “community traffic problem management” and “utilization of green space in parks.” These activities were carried out at the class level, with fifth and sixth-grade students designing questionnaires, conducting field inspections, identifying issues, and proposing solutions. Principals, subject teachers, and parents provided guidance and support throughout the process. Moreover, school leaders invited community leaders, engineers from local urban planning and design institutes, traffic police officers, and park service representatives to participate in guiding the students’ activities and evaluating their proposals. Three months after the conclusion of the “Community Traffic Problem Management” activity, Tung informed the researcher in an interview that the local government had taken the students’ traffic congestion concerns seriously. Consequently, the local transportation and urban management departments promptly responded by optimizing traffic signs, increasing traffic police patrols, and providing traffic guidance to address congestion and illegal parking issues in the community.

In addition, the researcher found that CHP principals emphasized the importance of teacher, student, and family participation in social responsibility practices at family-school meetings and faculty assemblies. At three faculty assemblies, Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung emphasized that teachers’ involvement in social responsibility practices would inspire students and exemplify how to be a responsible citizen capable of promoting social development and change. In addition, Leao, Tung, and Gane informed parents at mid-term and end-of-term school-family meetings about the benefits of student and family involvement in community activities and social responsibility programs. These benefits include enhancing students’ cognitive and practical skills; promoting their moral, legal, and civic awareness; and enabling parents to participate in and guide their children’s moral and character development.

6.3 The Impact of Principals' Leadership Practices: Achievement and Challenges

This section provides an analysis of the achievements and challenges experienced by CHP principals in their leadership practices. The researcher conducted on-campus observations to document the impact of these practices, which yielded positive outcomes aligned with the principals' goals and benefited various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and families. However, the researcher also observed instances where expectations were not met and encountered resistance from internal and external sources. To gain further insights, interviews were conducted with principals to explore their perspectives on the impact of their leadership practices, assess successful and unsuccessful outcomes, and identify underlying causes.

The section is structured into two subsections. The first subsection highlights the successes of principal leadership practices, emphasizing their positive effects on teacher and student achievement, as well as their contributions to improving staff and student well-being and fostering stronger relationships between the school and external individuals and organizations. The second subsection focuses on the challenges and difficulties principals face in their leadership practices, including issues such as teacher burnout, the professional health issues brought by high expectations, and conceptual inconsistencies among staff.

It is important to note that the achievements and challenges discussed in this study are specific to the spring and autumn terms of 2021, as per the research design. The phenomena and issues related to principal leadership practices identified, recorded, and analyzed by the researcher are considered outcomes of the work carried out by CHP principals during this specific period. Additionally, these findings take into account the cumulative impact of prior leadership practices. During interviews, CHP principals acknowledged that certain phenomena or issues could be attributed to policy changes and leadership practices implemented before 2021. They also recognized that long-standing challenges, such as burnout, pressure, and conceptual differences, have persisted within the schools and exhibit varying levels of performance and causes over time. Further exploration of these issues is presented in subsequent sections and chapters.

6.3.1 The Achievement of Principals' Leadership Practices: Development of Performances, Well-being, and Relationship

In this section, the researcher illustrates the achievements of CHP principals through their leadership practices, as well as their reflections on the successful outcomes. The researcher conducted observations and interviews to assess the positive impact of principals' leadership practices on teachers' and students' learning and teaching performance, well-being, and the establishment of collaborative relationships between schools and social organizations. Through interviews, principals provided insights and evaluations of the beneficial effects of their leadership, identified key success factors, and explained noteworthy phenomena.

The terms "successes" and "accomplishments" used in this section refer to the positive outcomes of the CHP leadership team's practices, which align with the goals and standards set by the CHP leadership team or the Riverside LEA for specific tasks. During observations and interviews, principals demonstrated the assessment criteria for school and LEA tasks and the underlying goal setting for each task. The researcher also verified the completion status of certain tasks through discussions with Riverside LEA officials. Permission was obtained to access internal documents, such as the CHP's school task assessment standards and the LEA's school task inspection reports, which further verified the identified achievements of principal leadership practices in this subsection.

It is important to note that documents such as the CHP's and the LEA's task assessment reports are internal and confidential. The researcher was granted access to these documents through an official request made to the principals of CHP and Riverside LEA. However, to maintain the anonymity of the primary school and its principals and to avoid potential issues related to "school choice," it is deemed by the researcher, CHP leadership team, and LEA officials inappropriate to include these reports as references at present. Nevertheless, CHP principals and Riverside LEA officials have suggested that interested scholars may contact the researcher of this study under appropriate circumstances to request access to specific documents. Furthermore, with the permission of the CHP leadership team, certain school documents have been included in the appendix of this thesis.

● Performance Development

This subsection presents the researcher's observations of the achievements of CHP principals in various areas during 2021. These areas encompass the improvement of teachers' teaching and research skills, the enhancement of students' holistic development and academic performance, teachers' professional development, and the development of the campus environment and culture.

Regarding the development of teachers' teaching and research skills, CHP principals have made significant efforts in teaching and assessment reform, interdisciplinary classrooms, and support for teachers' research capacities. These efforts have effectively encouraged teachers to explore their potential and have resulted in increased teaching effectiveness. The implementation of formative assessment in subject classrooms and the pilot project on teaching evaluation reform have acquired positive feedback from most subject teachers. Likewise, Suie informed the researcher that recent teacher surveys have indicated that the majority of teachers recognize the effectiveness and validity of formative assessment, leading to a growing willingness to implement it in the classroom. Consequently, there has been a rise in research projects focused on formative assessment. Despite initial concerns, teachers have reported improved student engagement in the classroom, while parents have observed greater self-motivation in their children's after-school learning. Recognizing these successes, the Riverside LEA designated the school as a demonstration unit for formative assessment reform in 2021, facilitating visits, exchanges, and learning opportunities for other principals and teachers.

Principals Leao, Suie, Tung, and Gane acknowledged the importance of strong leadership and acknowledged the challenges they encountered. Some senior and older teachers expressed resistance to the introduction of formative assessment in the classroom, conveying concerns that unquantifiable standards lacked practicality and clarity in implementation. Likewise, some parents resisted the incorporation of formative assessment into their children's education, arguing that valid and scientific assessment should be exam-based and translated into grades.

The researcher observed principals' countermeasures to address these challenges during on-site fieldwork. In both spring and autumn term of 2021, CHP principals devoted substantial time and effort to building relationships with educational researchers and university professors, providing formative assessment training to CHP teachers, organizing cross-school workshops, and inviting experts to conduct parent meetings jointly to explain the science and evidence behind assessment for learning. The CHP leadership team emphasized the scientific validation of formative assessment and the importance of maintaining open communication with parents.

During the on-site observation period, the researcher attended three meetings chaired by Chang's "formative assessment implementation and research promotion group." These meetings assigned different tasks to junior, mid-career, and senior teachers, using a mentorship system (师徒制) to foster collaboration among teachers, particularly between newly registered teachers and their senior colleagues. The meetings aimed to facilitate instructional reform and school-based research projects at CHP. Chang emphasized that even prior to planning the assessment for learning reform, the school's leadership team reached a consensus with teachers that any educational reform or effort should ultimately contribute to student growth and teacher professional development. Thus, the CHP leadership team encouraged teachers to engage in open discussions, fostering a comprehensive understanding of various issues from different perspectives. Suie, Leao, and Chang encouraged teachers to set aside differences and seek common ground for the cause of education. Likewise, they promoted teaching reform and research projects tailored to CHP's specific circumstances and the demands of students and parents.

The researcher found that the success of the CHP leadership team in engaging teachers in uncertain tasks was a result of teachers' strong alignment with the school's vision, mission, tasks, values, pursuit of "love and beauty," and commitment to teaching excellence. The leadership mindset was widely discussed at the school level, exemplified by principals, and embraced by teachers, fostering shared values, attitudes, and a strong sense of belonging within CHP. In interviews, vice principals Leao, Chang, Tung, and Gane provided several examples of the effectiveness of democratic centralism in decision-making, consensus building, leadership by example, and the utilization of external resources to drive progress on school tasks, involving students and families in various schooling performance assessments and reviews.

In addition to promoting formative assessment, the CHP leadership team implemented a comprehensive student development assessment program in 2019. This program prioritized moral values, personality, and holistic quality in the assessment framework, while increasing the importance of physical fitness and psychological well-being assessments. It also encouraged parent participation in regular assessments of student engagement in learning and extracurricular activities. Despite initial resistance similar to that experienced by CHP principals in the “assessment for learning in classroom reform,” similar strategies were employed to overcome challenges, and parent satisfaction surveys indicated that CHP’s assessment and evaluation methods ranked highly in the region.

Furthermore, significant progress was made and witnessed in teachers’ professional development, school infrastructure improvement, and school culture development. The task groups led by Leao, Chang, and Gane, namely the “science subject fusion teaching research group,” the “teachers’ psychology literacy development group,” and the “teachers’ smart education literacy development group,” successfully achieved their goals and received commendations from regional and provincial education authorities. Proposals by vice principals Gane, Chang, and Lou to establish an ecological learning platform and projects promoting environmental education were approved, resulting in the allocation of funds for the construction of a mini greenhouse, a garden, and a pond. CHP’s intangible heritage projects, such as ethical minority painting and local drama, have been showcased at city art festivals and galleries. Suie, Leao, and Chang attributed this success to their commitment to social responsibility and their ability to utilize external resources as educational opportunities.

● **Well-being Development**

This section provides an examination of the leadership practices employed by principals in 2021 to promote the well-being of teachers and students at CHP. The initiatives implemented by the principals encompassed various areas, including occupational health development programs, career path planning workshops, the “mental green island” project, campus anti-bullying systems, self-health management programs, myopia prevention projects, and the daily one-hour exercise program.

In terms of teachers' well-being, since 2013, under the leadership of head principal Suie, principals have introduced a series of programs aimed at protecting teachers' rights and improving their physical and mental health. Extensive communication has taken place between principals and teachers of different age groups since 2015 to collect feedback on well-being, occupational health needs, and suggestions to promote teachers' well-being at CHP. In 2017, Suie and Tung proposed a framework to protect and improve teachers' health, which was approved and endorsed by a faculty assembly.

By 2021, CHP had established over ten projects to promote faculty well-being, such as a faculty sports club, lectures on childcare and women's health in collaboration with relevant organizations and hospitals, and an online platform for faculty mental health counseling with professional psychotherapists. Additionally, Tung, Chang, and Leao were appointed to lead the teacher care and coordination groups on the three campuses, resolving conflicts and collecting teachers' opinions on staff health issues and complaints. In 2021, Suie and Gane established career development planning centers at the main campus and the C3 campus, inviting influential teachers and principals from other schools in the region to give lectures and develop customized career development plans for teachers.

The researcher observed that the bonuses won from various competitions held by different levels of educational management bodies were used for projects and expenditures aimed at improving teachers' well-being. For example, on traditional and public holidays, such as the Dragon Boat Festival and Teachers' Day, principals organized entertainment activities and provided traditional delicacies, flowers, non-alcoholic beverages, and activity allowances for teachers. Furthermore, the researcher was informed by Suie and Leao that the upcoming school's five-year plan would include the establishment of a "teacher well-being and occupational health promotion center" to promote teacher well-being and address professional burnout at the primary school.

The results of the teachers' working experience questionnaire presented by Suie, Leao, and Tung in the spring term of 2021 showed that more than 83% of teachers expressed satisfaction with the school's efforts to protect their rights and welfare, while more than 75% showed willingness to participate in the school's well-being promotion programs, and 67% were well aware of the school's well-being initiatives. In 2018 and 2019, the percentage of

teachers showing positive attitudes towards these aspects was less than 70%, while it dropped below 60% in 2020 due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and internet-based teaching and learning. However, in 2021, the school achieved satisfactory results in maintaining and promoting teachers' well-being, as indicated by the teachers' survey.

In terms of promoting and maintaining the well-being of students, the school's various projects and achievements have been recognized by both internal and external stakeholders. The "Mental Green Island" project, which focuses on mental health management and mental health crisis intervention for minors, was highly praised by the Riverside LEA, child mental health agencies and parents. Tung pointed out that by operating the school's student mental health management system and with the support of specialists, students with autism spectrum disorder and bipolar disorder were promptly identified, the crisis intervention mechanism was successfully activated, and two students with suicidal tendencies were helped. Similarly, the anti-bullying system and the student conflict arbitration committee played key roles in quickly addressing violations of school rules and providing support to bullied students through cooperation with local women's and children's rights protection organizations and counseling agencies.

In addition, interviews with Tung, Gane, and Yi revealed that the school is developing a mechanism called the "Students' Mutual Care Framework," which empowers fifth- and sixth-grade students to play a greater role in mental health self-management and peer support by involving families and teachers in supervision. Furthermore, the school's myopia prevention initiative developed jointly with families and daily one-hour outdoor exercise program received high recognition in parent surveys. Gane noted that the school's annual student fitness test reports showed consistent improvements in students' aerobic capacity, flexibility, and limb coordination over the past three years, in contrast to the declining trend observed prior to 2018. Gane highlighted the school's current focus on working with parents to encourage students to reduce their reliance on short videos and mobile games and increase participation in outdoor activities and exercise.

In an interview, Lou, who led the school's nutritious lunch program, informed the researcher that she worked with the local health committee and the nutrition department of a children's hospital to introduce meals with less oil, salt and fat, but more protein. Lou also reorganized

the kitchen teams and upgraded the kitchen facilities at all three campuses to accommodate the school's healthy lunch program.

● Relationship Development

In this section, the researcher provides an analysis of the leadership practices implemented by principals in 2021 to cultivate and strengthen the school's relationships with external individuals and organizations. These relationships involve various stakeholders, including parents, educational authorities, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, foundations, universities, research institutions, museums, sports arenas, art galleries, and other public venues.

To foster trust and mutual support between the school and families, CHP principals undertook several actions in 2021, observed by the researcher. They reinstated school visits and campus open days, which had transitioned online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, to allow parents and parent council representatives to visit the school and provide insights, reflections, and suggestions on student campus life and other school matters. Additionally, Suie and Tung introduced the concept of "acting principal" by parents, which was piloted since 2020. The researcher observed the election and selection of the "parent principal" during the autumn term of 2021. Through an election within the parent representative council at the school level, two parent representatives were appointed by the CHP leadership team as "acting principals" at the main campus. Their responsibilities included visiting the school on a weekly basis and actively participating in student management, conflict resolution, and mediation among students, families, and teachers. According to the 2021 Riverside LEA primary school parent satisfaction survey, CHP ranked among the top three schools in the region for overall parent satisfaction. The survey also revealed that parents expressed a high level of identification with the school's values in the Riverside district.

In terms of collaboration with social organizations, the researcher identified the restoration of offline interactions between the school and non-governmental organizations, public welfare foundations, women's and children's rights protection organizations, and the local community in 2021. Under the leadership team's promotion, CHP actively engaged in various social responsibility activities, involving teachers, students, and families in diverse

projects. Noteworthy social activities were observed during the researcher's on-campus fieldwork. At the main campus, head principal Suie collaborated with a regional foundation for special education of children and the district disabled association to organize a special education experience day for students, parents, and teachers. This event provided students with insights into the learning and lives of visually impaired, hearing impaired, and mentally handicapped peers. Tung reported positive feedback from many parents and students regarding the activity. At the C3 campus, vice principal Gane facilitated a visit from a team of experts from the children's mental health development association. They held discussions with parent representatives to enhance knowledge of childhood psychological issues. At the C2 campus, vice principal Tung invited community leaders and social workers to share information with students and families about community-based research and investigation work, promoting community governance. Parents were also involved in supervising students' research on community transportation issues.

Regarding the development of relationships between the school and higher education and research institutions, the researcher found that CHP principals managed to actively utilize social resources and networks in 2021. With their efforts, exchange programs and research projects were established with local and non-local universities. Suie, as a participant in China MOE's Future School Leaders Training Program, reached out to and invited other participants he met in the program, who were renowned primary school principals, as well as trainers who were noted scholars in primary education research, to visit CHP and engage in joint research activities. Additionally, Leao, overseeing CHP's International Development Group, actively participated in international exchange programs for educators organized by the China Scholarship Council and the Ministry of Education. The group established thematic forums with primary schools in Japan, Canada, and Singapore. Furthermore, as the leader of the "teachers' smart education literacy development group," Gane collaborated with local educational science research institutes, a regional normal university, and a top-ranked Chinese university to conduct research on the practical and effective application of AI and big data in teaching, learning, assessment, and student management.

In addition, CHP principals promoted collaboration with public institutions by proactively contacting provincial museums, natural history museums, science and technology museums, art galleries, and other venues to facilitate various off-campus and on-campus activities. They invited professionals from these institutions to the school and organized lectures and

activities for teachers, students, and parents. In 2021, the researcher documented several activities initiated by CHP principals across all three campuses. For example, at the main campus, a month-long “Little Librarian” event was held in collaboration with the district library. Third-grade student volunteers assumed the role of acting librarians at the school and volunteered at the district library after school and on weekends. At the C2 campus, catering to fifth and sixth graders, Tung and Yi arranged for scientists and researchers from the Provincial Museum to serve as science teachers for a day. At the C3 campus, serving the fourth grade, Gane and Yao coordinated with the Museum of Science and Technology. They brought in technicians and engineers to train students and parents in activities such as 3D printing, robot programming, and drone control.

6.3.2 The Challenges in Principals’ Leadership Practices: Systematic Overwork, Occupational Burnout, and Conceptual Conflicts

In this subsection, the researcher presents the challenges that principals face in their leadership practices, based on interviews and on-site school observations. One major challenge found to significantly impede principals’ leadership practices and outcomes is occupational health issues. Principals consistently perceive systemic overwork as the most formidable and challenging problem within schools. In addition, pressures and high expectations from internal and external stakeholders have a significant impact on principals and teachers, resulting in professional burnout as a significant challenge to their leadership practices. The researcher further identifies conceptual conflicts among principals, between principals and teachers, and between principals and students and their families as influential factors that shape principals’ daily leadership behaviors.

While the researcher also identified other challenges and difficulties through interviews and observations, such as balancing teaching and management, limited time and energy for professional development, managing diverse campus relationships, responding to unforeseen events, and dealing with online media controversies, these issues were predominantly perceived by the principals as more related to job-specific aspects, individual characteristics, and leadership skills. Compared to the pervasive problems of systemic overwork, professional burnout, and conceptual conflicts, all eight principals considered these other challenges to be more manageable. In addition, due to space limitations, this

subsection focuses only on these three major challenges and omits a detailed discussion of other issues and difficulties. The following sections provide a comprehensive illustration of each of these three major challenges.

- **Systematic Overwork**

Through interviews and observations with principals, it was revealed that leadership practices of principals in schools are impeded by the challenges and consequences of “systemic overwork.” Principals themselves bear a heavy workload comprised of numerous and demanding tasks that consume significant time and energy. Additionally, principals not only experience the pressures of systemic overwork, but also contribute to its prevalence within the school system.

In interviews, principals acknowledged their role in reinforcing pervasive overwork among teachers and staff. However, they also recognized that in the decision-making process, they are compelled to increase the workload of teachers and staff to meet the demands of the LEA, students, and parents, even though they perceive many of these demands to be irrational and unreasonable. Consequently, principals expressed a sense of powerlessness to address overwork and its detrimental consequences due to their leadership mindsets and practices. They consistently emphasized their subordinate position within multiple systems, such as the Chinese Higher Education System and Chinese society. Consequently, unless these systems undergo operational and assessment changes, all employees within the Chinese Higher Education System, including students and parents, will continue to bear the burden of overwork.

Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung emphasized that the excessive workload stems from the continuous growth and substantial volume of tasks assigned to principals. CHP Principals perceive their responsibilities as school leaders to encompass various duties, including promptly and appropriately responding to the demands of teachers and students, complying with administrative directives from the LEA, addressing various demands from families and social organizations, analyzing, and making decisions regarding school teaching and management, and resolving internal conflicts. Some principals also engage in daily teaching and research activities. Suie stated, “Every trustworthy and responsible principal must fulfill

their duties and missions to satisfy teachers, students, families, education authorities, and society. However, CHP faces an overwhelming number of demands that surpass those of a typical school. Even with eight principals working together across three campuses, meeting the diverse needs and individual requirements of 3,200 students and nearly 200 teachers remain a formidable challenge.”

Furthermore, principals consistently mentioned in interviews that the difficulty of tasks increases with shifting expectations from teachers, families, and educational authorities, as well as escalating performance standards for the school. These expectations, originating from internal and external stakeholders, are translated by principals into specific tasks delegated to themselves, as well as to faculty and staff. Leao and Tung expressed concern about the steady increase and variability of expectations placed on principals by various groups over the past five years. Tung stated, “In CHP, principals serve not only as leaders and school managers, but also as caretakers of faculty and students, coordinators of conflicts among students, teachers, and families, communicators, and responders to various requests. Each role carries high expectations from various individuals or organizations. These entities anticipate prompt fulfillment of their needs, with little regard for whether those needs align with students’ developmental patterns or exceed the reasonable scope of principals’ and teachers’ responsibilities. In this high-performing school, CHP, only success is acceptable, while failure is not.”

As the number and complexity of tasks assigned to principals have increased, the researcher observed that although principals may not fully endorse the demands or needs of certain individuals or groups as reasonable, they nevertheless adhere to the school’s work guideline of “responding to and caring for every member” by translating these demands into tasks and either completing them themselves or delegating them to responsible individuals. Furthermore, the researcher documented task assignments made by Suie, Tung, and Gane in administrative meetings during the spring and fall semesters of 2021 at three CHP campuses. These assignments addressed requests that some principals perceived as “troublesome” and “unreasonable.” In these meetings, Suie and Tung emphasized to the attending middle-level leaders and senior teachers the importance of adhering to the school’s values and operational guidelines, particularly those related to “caring for students and safeguarding their rights,” regardless of their full agreement with the significance and rationality of a given task.

Elaborating on the distribution of these undesirable tasks, head principal Suie explained during an interview, “Our work policy mandates that we respond to and care for each member to the best of our ability. To instill such values and behavioral guidelines in our faculty and even our students, it is imperative that we, as principals, led by example. Even though some demands may lack complete justification, such as the recent concerns expressed by many parents regarding the influence of a television production called ‘Squid Game’ on children, leading them towards violence and extremism, we immediately committed ourselves to understanding student dynamics, guiding positive and friendly interactions, and minimizing the imitation of violent behavior. Honestly, it is the responsibility of families, society, and the government to prevent children from being exposed to such inappropriate content. Nevertheless, considering the demands we have received from parents, we feel compelled to respond. As I mentioned, we must exemplify the behavioral guidelines of ‘caring for and protecting children.’”

During on-site observations, the researcher found several cases where principals assigned tasks to teaching faculty that they did not fully endorse. Principals invested considerable time and effort in communicating with families, teachers, and students to accommodate individual or group requests as much as possible. In interviews, Gane and Yi expressed their awareness that certain tasks might not yield tangible outcomes but still had to be assigned to avoid being perceived as inactive or risking complaints. Gane expressed, “I sincerely wish we had the courage to refuse some unreasonable requests. It is unfair to expect principals and teachers to act as saints. However, the reality is that we do not have the authority to decline such demands. From a rational standpoint, refusing these requests would be justifiable and even necessary, but emotionally, we may bear the moral burden of our refusals.”

Likewise, Suie also expressed a sense of powerlessness concerning excessive workloads: “Our education system demands that principals and teachers maintain high moral standards, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of mission, but the corresponding support is lacking. Everyone expects principals and teachers to perform flawlessly and rejects any notion of failure, citing it as detrimental to children’s interests. However, few consider the well-being of educational professionals and the issue of overwork.”

Also, during the on-site fieldwork, the researcher has learned that CHP, under the leadership of Suie and Leao, is actively promoting the development and institutionalization of teacher well-being initiatives. The goal is to increase the effectiveness of school leaders and teachers in responding to family demands through systematic approaches, while reducing the generation of unwarranted demands and the associated unnecessary excessive workload by expanding family participation in school affairs.

● **Professional Burnout**

Through interviews and observations, the researcher has identified a significant challenge encountered by school principals in their leadership roles: professional burnout. All eight principals from CHP consistently highlight the detrimental effects of professional burnout on daily school management and individual well-being. Principals find themselves grappling with excessive workloads, high pressure, and a lack of opportunities for professional development and rest, leading to physical and psychological exhaustion. Furthermore, the school's progress is hindered by bottlenecks arising from principals and teachers being overwhelmed with burdensome administrative tasks that are tedious, repetitive, and often inappropriate, resulting in fatigue in their day-to-day leadership and teaching practices. During the interviews, Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, and five other principals emphasized that professional burnout is a systemic issue interconnected with the problem of overwork within the school system.

Suie noted, "Professional burnout is not confined to principals alone; many middle-aged and soon-to-retire teachers also face this issue. Our recent teacher survey reveals a lack of motivation for future career development and advancement." Leao shared her perspective on professional burnout at CHP, stating that it arises from similar causes as the challenges experienced by principals. She expressed, "Principals should serve as role models by practicing what we preach, such as pursuing excellence and sustained professional development. However, in reality, we often find ourselves trapped in heavy workloads with limited time and opportunity for self-improvement. This can set a poor example for some teachers. Despite our desire to change this negative state of affairs, we often feel powerless in the face of reality."

Both Suie and Gane recognize professional burnout and overwork as systemic problems requiring a systematic approach for resolution. Suie proposed updating the school's current operational system to alleviate professional burnout and overwork. This entailed delegating the school's vision, mission, values, responsibilities, and rights to middle managers and frontline teachers, enabling them to actively contribute to problem-solving within the school and fully utilize their professional skills and expertise. Additionally, implementing a proactive occupational health management program can promote the protection and development of the well-being of all school staff. Moreover, fostering trust and mutual support between school leaders and staff could facilitate timely awareness of teachers' and staff's work status, enabling the provision of timely care and support.

Gane stressed to the researcher his belief in utilizing science and technology to enhance the effectiveness of principals and teachers in designing new institutional systems within schools. The shared leadership guideline among CHP principals is "Embracing Science." Addressing complex and sometimes unreasonable administrative issues necessitates approaching demands with a scientific and objective mindset, fully understanding and evaluating them, and then utilizing more efficient and modern technological means to resolve them. Establishing trust and mutual support with parents, seeking external support, and transforming burdensome challenges into necessary tasks are crucial. Leveraging technologies such as the Internet, computer programming, big data, and artificial intelligence can significantly improve the efficiency of these processes.

The researcher also observed examples at all three of CHP's campuses where principals encourage teachers to achieve a work-life balance, adjust their work expectations, foster their interest in research, and actively participate in professional development programs. Tung explains that as a model school, CHP has encountered bottlenecks in its development in recent years. Urgent updates and improvements are needed for the current teaching, research, and management models to adapt to the evolving needs of students, families, and educational management institutions. Tung acknowledges that while some senior teachers are satisfied with the current high performance and reputation of CHP, leading to a lack of ambition, others exhibit reluctance towards embracing modern educational technologies, innovation, and reform. This resistance discourages their participation in projects involving the acquisition of new technologies and skills, as they perceive it as a potential threat to their "authority" in the eyes of younger teachers.

During the researcher's visit to CHP's teachers' union activities, Leao and Chang delivered speeches. They encouraged young teachers to actively share modern educational technologies that enhance work efficiency, theoretical knowledge, and strategies for addressing educational issues with senior teachers. Simultaneously, they urged senior teachers to share their experiences with junior teachers to foster a comprehensive and rational approach to various professional development issues. Leao acknowledges that fear of change is a significant contributor to burnout at CHP. Despite achieving favorable outcomes through established development paths, maintaining a high level of performance without innovation and change is inadequate to meet the ever-changing needs of students and families. This sense of mission propels principals and teachers, including herself, to bravely initiate reforms, although concerns exist regarding potential failures and their impact on external evaluations.

- **Conceptual Conflicts**

Conflicts of concepts among principals, teachers, students, and families present a significant challenge in the context of CHP, as revealed through interviews and observations conducted by the researcher. These conflicts, which arise due to disparities in personal worldviews, values, positions, understandings of education, perspectives on task analysis and decision-making, and interpretations of behavior, not only impact interpersonal relationships but also hinder effective communication and collaboration between principals and the various stakeholders involved. The large student and teacher population at CHP magnifies the resistance and operational difficulties caused by these conflicts.

Similar views were expressed by principals, such as Leao, Gane, Yi, and Yao, during the interviews. Younger principals perceived conflicts of ideas with more experienced colleagues as opportunities for critical thinking, speculation, and professional growth. Conflicts of ideas between principals and teachers were found to be less frequent than conflicts with younger teachers, as observed by the researcher and corroborated through discussions with Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, Gane, and Yi. For instance, meetings moderated by principals Leao and Yi jointly on CHP's reform of formative assessment in classrooms provided platforms for in-depth exchanges of educational ideas, practical approaches, and

expectations for educational reform among teachers. The two vice principals acknowledged the dedication and bravery of the teachers and offered their own insights and recommendations based on experience and theoretical knowledge. Through discussions guided by democratic centralism, consensus and resolutions were reached.

In subsequent interviews, Leao and Yi shared their understanding and strategies for addressing conflicts of ideas among teachers. Leao emphasized the importance of teachers' commitment to their work. While respecting diverse viewpoints, she evaluates their comprehensiveness, effectiveness, innovation, and feasibility. Leao guides the faculty in making joint decisions and resolving conflicts to avoid fruitless arguments. Yi echoed similar sentiments, highlighting CHP's encouragement of diverse ideas among teachers if they contribute to the advancement of teaching and management practices. Furthermore, Yi emphasized the strengths of young teachers, such as theoretical knowledge, confidence, and initiative, and suggested combining their strengths with the experience of senior teachers to promote teaching reforms and professional development.

When conflicts arise among teachers, principals assume the role of mediators, emphasizing adherence to school regulations and prioritizing student development while considering the perspectives of all parties involved. Principals encourage teachers to determine methods and outcomes for conflict resolution themselves. During teacher conferences, principals such as Suie, Tung, and Gane shared their experiences with conflicts and emphasized the value of diverse ideas, perspectives, knowledge, and skills. However, they strongly asserted that positions contradicting the school's vision, mission, values, and the overall purpose of education, student development, and professional growth are not acceptable.

Conflicts of ideas between principals and students' families present a particular challenge, as discussed by Suie and Leao. These conflicts often stem from disagreements between teachers and students' families regarding the implementation of principal tasks or adherence to school management rules. Principals find it difficult to maintain a neutral position in these conflicts and are sometimes perceived by parents as favoring teachers. Suie emphasized that these issues often arise due to discrepancies between family educational ideals and the school's educational guidelines. While understanding parental concerns and irrational viewpoints, the principals cannot comply with unreasonable demands. Tung, responsible for student care and family support, mentioned during the interview that the CHP leadership

team is exploring ways to institutionalize and standardize conflict resolution methods. They also aim to involve representatives and members of the school's parent council as mediators and intermediaries between parents and the school to address conflicts arising from differences in ideas.

The researcher documented several examples of principals mediating conflicts between parents and teachers caused by unsynchronized concepts. Principals invited representatives from the school's parent council, education department officials, community leaders, research institute experts, and other groups to participate in conflict resolution and provide different perspectives. For example, a meeting between parents and teachers was organized to address concerns about the criteria used to evaluate student behavior. Tung emphasized that conflicts between families and schools cannot always be resolved through democratic centralism. While the school provides solutions that are scientific, reasonable, and fair, parents have the freedom to accept or choose to file a complaint against the school. Chang stressed the importance of promoting the inclusiveness of different ideas through ongoing teacher training. Teachers are encouraged to maintain their positions while learning to listen and empathize, as long as they abide by the school's guidelines and rules without violating them.

6.4 Findings on Principals' Leadership Practices

In this section, the researcher illustrates the findings regarding leader traits and patterns of leadership behavior derived from the interviews and observational data. This chapter consists of three subsections. The first subsection demonstrates the systematic and rule-based thinking of the principals and the resulting effects. The second subsection explains the democratic and meritocratic mechanisms principals employed in their leadership practices. The third subsection establishes links between school leadership practices and educational leadership models, such as transformational and distributed educational leadership, reflecting the distinctive characteristics of CHP school leadership practices.

Through interviews with principals and observations of their behaviors, the researcher documented the leadership practices and impacts of CHP principals. In addition, during the

interviews, the researcher asked the principals about specific leadership practices, phenomena, and issues to obtain their feedback. Based on these data, the researcher addresses the research question, “What are the leadership practices at CHP as a high-performing school?” and presents the discovered behavioral patterns, personal characteristics of CHP principals, as well as the patterns or mechanisms of leadership practices in CHP schools. In line with the research design, these traits, behaviors, and leadership practice patterns of principals in this Chinese primary school help educational leadership researchers understand effective school leadership in a non-Western context. In addition, this study provides inspiration for exploring both Eastern and Western models of educational leadership, as well as existing models derived from the Western context.

During the fieldwork at CHP, the researcher documented not only the three primary findings related to principal leadership, but also observed and recorded other findings of research interest. These include the personalized “teacher capacity development workshops” facilitated by teacher volunteers, the “future classroom” involving interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaboration in lesson preparation and instruction, and the “acting principal” system in which parent council representatives monitor school operations. Although these findings are related to the leadership mindset and practices of CHP principals, they deviated from the three findings presented in this chapter and the theme of this study. Also, the phenomena reflected and the theories available for analysis differ from the focus of this study, which is principal leadership. Due to space limitations, these additional findings are not discussed in detail.

6.4.1 The Systematic and Rule-based Thinking in Principals’ Leadership Practices

Based on observations and interviews with eight principals across three school campuses, this study reveals two prevalent behavioral traits displayed by principals in their daily school management: systemic thinking and rule-based thinking. Systemic thinking involves considering the interconnections among organizational components and their overall impact, while rule-based thinking emphasizes aligning personal actions with established rules and regulations. These thinking patterns were observed through field investigations that documented principals’ expressions and behaviors influenced by these cognitive frameworks, particularly in task setting, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine the extent to which these thinking patterns influenced the CHP principals. Although the principals did not spontaneously mention systemic and rule-based thinking as part of their leadership philosophy, they unanimously acknowledged the influence of these cognitive frameworks when asked directly. Principals such as Suie, Leao, Chang, Tung, and Lou viewed systemic and rule-based thinking as fundamental principles that guide their behavior, shaped by years of professional experience and growth within the CHP school context. In contrast, younger principals Gane, Yi, and Yao attributed their recognition of the importance of these cognitive approaches to the examples set by senior principals, such as Suie and Leao. As a result, the three younger principals actively reminded themselves to apply these thinking patterns in their work.

Head principal Suie metaphorically explained during the interview that these thinking patterns had become his innate logic, similar to breathing, rather than a consciously acquired or cultivated mindset. Similarly, principals Leao, Chang, Tung, and Lou expressed that systemic and rule-based thinking are essential qualities for leaders in modern social organizations, refined through years of professional experience and growth within the CHP school setting. In contrast, three younger principals, Gane, Yi, and Yao, attributed their recognition of the importance of these mindsets and their integration into their own practices to the influential examples set by senior principals such as Suie and Leao. As a result, the three younger principals actively reminded themselves to use these thinking patterns or tools in their work.

- **Systematic Thinking**

The researcher found that principals frequently used terms like “systemic problems” and “systemic resolutions” when discussing school-related issues, highlighting the complexity and interconnectedness of both the problems and strategies to address them. Factors influencing principals’ leadership practices, such as overwork, burnout, and ideological conflicts, were consistently addressed as “systemic problems” requiring systemic approaches. Terms like “systemic challenges” and “systemic countermeasures” were also observed in conversations and meeting materials between principals and teachers. Principals extended their systemic thinking to issues concerning students and families, attributing root

causes to problems within the Chinese education system, including the CHP. They concluded that resolving these problems required support from external communities and families, which they referred to as the social system. Similarly, principals considered the implementation of formative assessment reforms as a systemic transformation, emphasizing the crucial role of classroom teachers and maintaining strong relationships with families to mitigate resistance to pedagogical changes.

The researcher proposes that Suie, the head principal, has developed a preference for using systemic thinking to understand, analyze, and address school-related issues. This systemic thinking extends its influence beyond the leadership team, permeating various levels of the school hierarchy and even reaching frontline teachers. Suie and other principals played a key role in promoting the adoption of systemic thinking by sharing their thinking pathways, patterns, and toolbox in interactions with colleagues, middle-level and grassroots leaders, as well as daily interactions with teachers. Systemic thinking, characterized by a holistic approach, featured prominently in Suie's toolbox for problem analysis and solving. As these cognitive patterns spread among other principals and teachers through practical experiences, they further embraced and integrated this thinking pattern. Systemic thinking allowed principals to comprehensively understand problems and their underlying causes, formulating solutions that consider various stakeholder groups, their interests, roles, and capacities at CHP. Consequently, both principals and teachers enthusiastically embraced this cognitive approach, leading to a consensus on task planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, ultimately facilitating smooth school operations and high performance.

- **Rule-based Thinking**

Regarding rule-based thinking, the researcher observed that principals consistently emphasized the importance of rules in interviews and daily work. They regularly establish, follow, and enforce rules, applying rewards and punishments accordingly. Similar to systemic thinking, rule-based thinking significantly influences principals' mindsets and practices. Although principals did not explicitly define or conceptualize this thinking pattern as a primary determinant of their actions, they emphasized the importance of establishing and revising rules in school management. They highlighted the positive impact of teachers adhering to and using rules while underscoring the serious consequences of rule breaches.

Interviews with Suie, Leao, Tung, Chang, and Gane revealed their recognition of rule-based thinking or rule consciousness as an effective guiding principle for organizational behavior in modern society.

The study found that principals proactively establish and clarify rules in school management when rules are absent or unclear. This ensures that their managerial actions are informed and rule-based. The rule-making process reflects principals' democratic values and includes extensive democratic consultation to understand stakeholder demands. The results of these consultations are evaluated by experts from CHP or other organizations. Through democratic centralization, principals draft preliminary rules and invite stakeholders to vote on them, aiming to develop rules aligned with stakeholder demands, as well as the school's vision, mission, goals, and values. Several systems were established during the observed semesters, including the faculty welfare promotion project, teacher professional growth framework, comprehensive student evaluation system reform, and the acting principal selection system. These systems exemplify the rule-based thinking and democratic beliefs of CHP principals.

Furthermore, principals' awareness of rules extends beyond their own practices to influence the adherence, review, and modification of rules by the broader CHP faculty and staff. Principals actively communicate their understanding of rules, considering them the foundation of school behavior, protecting, and promoting the rights and interests of teachers and students, and playing a vital role in CHP's sustainable development. During faculty and special task group meetings, vice principals Leao, Chang, Tung, and Gane encouraged middle leaders and teachers to identify flaws in existing rules and propose more efficient, scientific, and reasonable modifications. This proactive approach facilitates the implementation of school tasks and reforms.

The principals' extensive use of systemic and rule-based thinking influences not only the leadership team and faculty, but also extends to students and families. During the observation period, sixth grade student council meetings led by Tung and Yi demonstrated a systematic analysis of student-related issues, recognizing their interconnectedness and identifying root causes. Systemic strategies were considered necessary to address these issues, with students expressing hope for care and support from principals, teachers, parents, communities, and society at large. Similarly, during routine monthly meetings, parent council representatives reported parental problems to principals, presented specific demands, and mediated disputes

between parents and teachers. The parent representatives provided comprehensive and systematic explanations of disputed issues and offered solutions based on relevant school and local education authority regulations. This distribution and dissemination of thinking patterns from principals to teachers and from teachers to students and families exemplifies the influence of CHP principals, extending beyond conveying the school's vision, mission, tasks, and values to teachers, students, and families. It encompasses the acceptance, modeling, and application of principals' thinking patterns and approaches by teachers, students, and families.

6.4.2 The Democracy and Meritocracy in Principals' Leadership Practice

This subsection aims to illustrate the democratic and meritocratic principles embodied in the leadership practices of CHP principals. The previous section has demonstrated how principals apply systematic and rule-based thinking in school management, resulting in enhanced operational efficiency, improved teacher management, elevated student performance, and strengthened relationships with families and social organizations. Consistent with these thinking patterns, CHP principals adhere to democratic and meritocratic principles in their daily school work. Through interviews and observations, it has been observed that principals effectively utilize institutional frameworks to enact democratic decision-making and merit-based selection, enabling individuals within the organization to foster consensus and contribute their expertise. Consequently, organizational efficiency and performance were improved.

- **Democracy**

Regarding democracy, CHP leaders show several specific manifestations in their leadership practices. First, they institutionalize democratic systems, especially democratic centralism, and democratic consultation, while upholding the spirit of democracy throughout the institutionalization process. Second, democratic principles are evident in the three stages of decision making: pre-decision, characterized by democratic consultation to determine the needs of the majority; decision making, in which democratic centralism is used to

consolidate consensus and determine rights and responsibilities; and post-decision, in which democratic monitoring is used to provide authentic and timely feedback on decision outcomes. Third, CHP principals reject formalistic democracy and instead advocate substantive democracy characterized by results orientation, evidence-based decision making, consensus building, responsiveness to the aspirations of the majority, and accountability.

It is also noteworthy that CHP principals attached great importance to institutionalizing democratic principles in the school's regulations. At the faculty assemblies in the spring and autumn term of 2021, Suie, Leao, Tung, and Gane consistently emphasized the significance of democratic principles in improving operational efficiency, fostering the holistic development of teachers and students, and addressing school-related issues. This statement was echoed by Suie in subsequent interviews. Specifically, for a large primary school with over 3,200 students, nearly 2,00 teachers, and three campuses, the integration of democratic spirit and institutional frameworks becomes paramount to comprehensively understanding school-related challenges, responding to the needs of teachers, students, and families, facilitating effective problem-solving, and meeting demands to the greatest extent possible. Given the time and energy constraints of school leaders dealing with many student and faculty issues, a systematic approach is required to ensure effective resolution rather than relying solely on investing human resources in repetitive and inefficient tasks. Thus, the implementation of systematic democratic mechanisms becomes imperative.

Suie, Leao, and Chang mentioned the development of school regulations related to democratic systems in their interviews. After Suie's appointment, they collected extensive suggestions from frontline teachers and various levels of school administrators. Taking into account the principals' leadership experience, the CHP's vision, mission, and goals, and the school's short-, medium-, and long-term goals, they formulated an initial version of a set of school regulations. After presenting and introducing the policies at a faculty assembly, they gathered feedback from the staff and made subsequent revisions. Ultimately, a school management system was created that reflected the consensus of the majority of faculty members. Within this system, school leaders emphasized the importance of democratic consultation, supervision, and decision-making, and integrated the promotion of democratic values into the school's daily code of conduct. They encouraged teachers, students, and even families to resolve issues democratically and fostered a culture of democratic behavior among school members.

During the interviews and observations, the researcher noted the frequent use of terms such as “substantive democracy,” “people’s democracy,” and “full process democracy” by the principals, accompanied by explanations. Suie and Leao consistently underlined the purpose and criteria for evaluating the practice of democracy in school. They rejected formalistic democracy and emphasized an outcome-oriented approach to evaluation. The evaluation of democracy should reflect the fulfillment of the needs of teachers, students, and families, as well as the achievement of various school tasks. Suie shared his understanding and perspective on democracy during a weekly administrative meeting attended by all principals. He pointed out the necessity of democratizing the concept of democracy itself, noting that discussions often center on the Western model of liberal democracy, with the right of interpretation historically monopolized by Western countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. For China, Suie emphasized the importance of inheriting democratic concepts from Chinese history and various human civilizations, while promoting the development and innovation of democracy to make it more inclusive and diverse. At the meeting, Gane, Yi, and Yao critically analyzed the phenomenon of “everyone participates and no one takes responsibility” in liberal democracy, while Leao, Chang, and Tung reiterated the existence of a perfect democratic model. For CHP, they draw lessons from various democratic forms, explore a democratic system suitable for CHP’s actual situation, and promote the realization of the school’s vision and mission.

● **Meritocracy**

Regarding the meritocracy system at CHP, the researcher found that principals support the promotion of high-performers and appointment processes through a combination of “election” and “selection.” They considered the meritocracy system essential for selecting individuals with high moral standards, exemplary roles, and a commitment to continuous professional development, in order to meet the needs of students and families. Suie provided explanations of the school’s meritocracy system during interviews. The head principal illustrated: “In essence, the election process encourages teachers to actively pursue opportunities for promotion and to demonstrate their abilities and accomplishments in their work. Once teachers meet the basic requirements for a position, they engage in a competitive process, presenting their abilities and competitiveness to principals, senior staff

representatives, and parent council representatives. Through consultation and democratic voting, principals and middle leaders select the best candidates from the pool. Subsequently, the school published a preliminary list internally and externally through the school's social media platforms. During the public notice period, the school actively encourages individuals with doubts or objections about the candidates to provide feedback, ensuring compliance with school rules and legal requirements throughout the selection process.

The researcher attended the promotion and evaluation meetings of teachers and middle managers chaired by Suie, Chang, and Tung. Interviews were subsequently conducted to explore the principals' roles in talent selection and their perspectives on the meritocracy system. Suie emphasized that the meritocracy system is an integral part of the school's democratic framework, reflecting its commitment to democratic centralism. The selection process itself includes assessments of professional competence, comprehensive qualities, professional ethics, and feedback from parents and staff. Chang added that as principals, they must also consider the long-term development of the school and the potential career paths of individuals, and engage in thorough discussions about the pros and cons of each candidate before making a fair decision that fosters consensus and broad support.

Tung echoed similar sentiments during the interview, emphasizing the importance of public disclosure of candidate lists as an essential element of the democratic system. All CHP members, like employees of government institutions, are public servants whose conduct is subject to public supervision. This ensures that individuals selected for positions possess recognized ethical standards, professional skills, and comprehensive qualities, while avoiding undue scrutiny.

The researcher acknowledges the influence of contemporary Chinese socialist systems, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese culture, and history on the principals' demonstration of democratic consciousness and their understanding of democracy. Through observation, it was evident that Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung, as Communist Party leaders within the school, frequently endorsed and popularized the concepts of "people's democracy" and "seeking truth from facts" advocated by the Chinese Communist Party. They also embraced the values of "seeking common ground while reserving differences" and "harmonious coexistence" inherent in traditional Chinese culture. "People's democracy" emphasizes broad and deep democratic participation, which requires an accurate and

systematic understanding of relevant issues. The principle of “seeking truth from facts” discourages simplistic binary thinking and instead encourages scientifically based and objective decision-making in line with common goals. These principles also incorporate the values of “seeking common ground while reserving differences” and “harmonious coexistence” from traditional Chinese culture. They advocate inclusiveness and modesty in group affairs, strive to identify common goals and agreements, adopt a long-term perspective, promote consensus-driven progress, and preserve individual differences while pursuing collective goals. In addition, the researcher found that non-Communist Party members among the faculty were also deeply influenced by socialist and communist ideologies, including Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. This suggests that the expansion of the principals’ leadership has facilitated the distribution of their political beliefs and ideologies.

6.4.3 The Principals’ Leadership Practice and Models of Educational Leadership

In this subsection, the researcher examines the relationship between principals’ leadership practices and educational leadership models. Through interviews and observations, similarities and correlations were identified between principals’ thinking and behavior in their leadership practices and models such as transformational leadership and distributed leadership. While most principals demonstrated some understanding of leadership models such as transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and cultural leadership during the interviews, they did not perceive these models to influence their leadership mindset and daily practices directly or indirectly. However, principals mentioned that their leadership mindset and practices were influenced by the leadership model explored by the school leadership collective, led by Suie, which they referred to as the CHP model.

Since the relationship between the CHP principals’ mindset and specific leadership models has been extensively discussed in the previous chapter, it is unnecessary to reiterate the relevance of the leadership mindset to specific models. The next chapter will explore the relationship between the leadership model of CHP principals and existing leadership models and theories, highlighting the common characteristics of distributed leadership and transformational leadership at CHP, as well as successful principals’ traits in the context of CHP. Therefore, this section focuses solely on interpreting the phenomena related to the

identified relationship between principals' leadership practices and two educational leadership models.

● **Transformational Leadership**

Through observations and interviews with the principals, the researcher found that the leadership practices of the CHP principals included the four key components of the transformational leadership model: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, 1998; Antonakis et al., 2003). Although the principals expressed in their interviews that these models had no direct impact on their daily work, Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung acknowledged the strong alignment between their practices and the transformational leadership model after receiving training from the LEA, educational research institutes, regional normal universities, and the national principal leadership development system. They also suggested that transformational leadership training be incorporated into future principal training programs.

During the interviews, Suie mentioned that prior to the mid-2010s, he had little familiarity with the specific concept and elements of transformational leadership. However, his perspectives and practices as a principal were closely aligned with transformational leadership. He attributed this similarity to the development of similar management theories, concepts, and practices in different educational systems in response to common challenges in modern societies. Leao and Chang shared similar views, suggesting that the leadership model in CHP schools emerged as an inevitable result of China's social and educational modernization. Tung emphasized that the demand for student development in contemporary society required a leadership model characterized by effectiveness, innovation, humanistic care, and the stimulation of individual potential. Consequently, she believed that although they originated in the West, transformational leadership and the CHP model developed in parallel, justifying different labels without contradiction. The three young principals expressed the need to further democratize and innovatively develop the concept of transformational leadership, with CHP schools serving as exploratory attempts within the context of China's educational system.

In terms of transformational leadership practices, the researcher documented the following leadership characteristics observed among principals in various school management contexts and interactions:

First, principals acted as moral and professional role models while promoting school tasks and embodying their advocated ideals, aspirations, and codes of conduct. Throughout the spring and autumn terms of 2021, principals demonstrated responsibility, focus, dedication, determination, and a sense of pursuing “love and beauty” in promoting initiatives such as formative assessment reform, smart educational literacy training projects, and teacher professional development system reforms. They effectively overcame challenges through innovation and collaboration, thereby cultivating trust and understanding among teachers, students, and families.

Second, these behaviors also reflected the principals’ capacity for inspirational motivation. They demonstrated steadfastness and resilience, skillfully managed teacher expectations, and instilled confidence in the successful fulfillment of the school’s mission. As a result, principals, teachers, students, and families formed a collective trust in the school’s reform and development.

Third, principals utilized the skills and intellectual capacities of individuals and groups within and outside the school to facilitate intellectual stimulation among teachers. For instance, various school organizations were established, including “special task groups,” a “mentoring system,” and “personalized professional development workshops,” which successfully invited support and expertise on and off the CHP campus. Through democratic centralism approaches, principals selected capable and promising teachers to participate in various decision-making and implementation of reform and development initiatives. This innovative approach effectively addressed the challenges typically encountered in hierarchical and bureaucratic systems in traditional schools. It fostered direct and productive interaction between grassroots and top-level leadership, resulting in more scientific, rational, and reliable decision-making at higher levels, clearer and more effective practices at the grassroots level, and reduced workloads for middle-level administrators. As a result, they had more time and energy to devote to administrative matters.

Finally, the researcher found that principals placed a high priority on providing individualized consideration to teachers, students, and families in their daily school work. Tung, who headed the student care and family support department, worked with child mental health experts, regional university's child well-being research teams, community organizations, and local women's and children's rights groups. Their collaboration facilitated the establishment of a comprehensive student health management network based on class and grade levels. This network enabled the timely identification, understanding, and resolution of physical and mental health issues affecting students and families while implementing, teaching, and managing assignments. The teacher well-being maintenance and development project, co-led and facilitated by Chang and Tung, provided individualized and timely support for teachers' professional well-being.

● **Distributed Leadership**

In the previous chapter, the researcher mentioned that the understanding of distributed leadership in this study was informed and inspired by the works of Spillane et al. (2001, 2003), Harris (2007), Gronn (2003), and Leithwood et al. (2008). The researcher found that principals' leadership mindsets influenced the mindsets of managers, teachers, students, and even families. These mindsets encompassed the educational vision, mission, school tasks, values, and moral guidelines advocated by the principals. In their leadership practices, principals conveyed their own school management and governance concepts, models, approaches, and strategies through their actions to stakeholders at various levels within the school. This facilitated the stakeholders' understanding, comprehension, and support of the principals' work. Moreover, the principals' adherence to democratic principles and the practice of meritocracy facilitated the distribution of their management concepts and thinking patterns throughout the school. This distribution not only fostered a shared logic of action and clarified common interests among stakeholders but also increased awareness, understanding, and application of an effective school problem-solving system. Ultimately, this served the common advancement of teacher professional development, future leader cultivation, and school reform and development.

During the interviews, the researcher found that compared to transformational leadership, principals had limited awareness and understanding of the distributed leadership model.

While principals such as Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung were able to provide relatively accurate definitions and explanations of the model, other principals had a limited understanding that was limited to a literal interpretation: the dissemination or distribution of certain principals' thoughts, ideas, and behaviors to their followers through leadership practices. Suie, Leao, Chang, and Tung expressed their belief that the Western-originated distributed leadership model could hardly be recognized as a mature and practical leadership model to guide daily leadership practices. They felt it was vague and lacked specific criteria for evaluating the effectiveness and success of distributed processes. In addition, existing research did not explicitly define the appropriate interactions between distributors and recipients of leadership, nor did it specify the content of leadership distribution. As a result, school principals perceived the distributed leadership model as a conceptual framework without direct applicability to school practice.

Interestingly, after reviewing the literature on educational leadership and management and gaining further knowledge of distributed leadership through relevant studies, all eight principals informed the researcher during interviews that they believed CHP's school management practices already embodied the spirit, pattern, or characteristics described in the distributed leadership model. In fact, they argued that the implementation of distributed leadership at CHP preceded its theorization. Suie offered an alternative expression of distributed leadership in the Chinese context, emphasizing fairness, scientific democracy, streamlined management, and respect for professionalism, which were not new concepts in contemporary Chinese education. As he put it: "Many Chinese school leaders, including myself, preferred to call this model the 'scientific democracy leadership model' because it upholds democratic and accountability systems, empowers those in need, and utilizes the knowledge of educational science." Suie supported his view with numerous examples of actual school management cases from the 1990s to the early 2000s, demonstrating how the extensive leadership practices in CHP schools were consistent with the distributed leadership model.

In addition, in interviews on distribution of leadership, vice principal Leao, Tung, and Chang discussed the evolution of democracy in China's education system and the significant influence of democracy in China as a socialist country. They also pointed out the perceived limitations of Western-originated distributed leadership, such as the lack of solutions for addressing divergences in democratic debate, scientific decision-making, and

institutionalizing accountability. They argued that the practices of CHP leaders effectively addressed these gaps at multiple levels.

Furthermore, previous studies on distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004; Harris, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Bush & Glover, 2014) briefly addressed democratic behaviors in leadership practices. However, they did not explore the specific forms, content, and accountability systems of democracy. At CHP, distributed leadership was based on consensus and involved the construction of rules. Principals and teachers adhered to principles of fairness, equity, respect for expertise, and results orientation during the rule construction process, which was aligned with the school's vision, mission, and values. They used systematic and rule-based thinking to establish these rules democratically. In addition to the leadership traits discussed earlier, leaders exert influence by serving as moral role models and embodying their beliefs. This influence shapes followers' recognition, understanding, and imitation of the leader's tools for improving thinking, developing skills, and building relationships. As a result, the leader's skills, aspirations, beliefs, and cognitive tools are systematically distributed and circulated. In the following chapter, the researcher will visually present the characteristics and processes of leadership distribution in schools through diagrams and propose a hypothetical framework based on the synthesis of effective and successful leadership distribution patterns observed at CHP.

Furthermore, the researcher found that cultural leadership, servant leadership, empowering leadership, and collaborative leadership could be used to analyze principals' leadership practices, but these models were not the primary focus of the study and will not be discussed in detail due to space limitations.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of principals' leadership practices. It first describes and examines principals' leadership behaviors, their impact on CHP and its members, and the challenges they encountered. The chapter also explores the principals' reflections on their own leadership practices. Finally, the findings section discusses the traits of the educational leadership model reflected in principals' thoughts and actions. Through a

thorough analysis of these aspects, significant conclusions and insights are drawn about principals' leadership practices.

As noted in the previous chapter, the research findings indicate that the school leadership team consistently embraces a collective leadership mindset. They have established a shared educational vision and mission, along with short-, medium-, and long-term development and reform goals that align with the principals' aspirations for holistic student development and creating a sense of "love and beauty" at CHP. The principals demonstrated a strong consensus around these goals and unwavering confidence in the school's long-term vision. While they acknowledged the challenges associated with realizing long-term goals and aspirations, they firmly believed that the school was consistently on the correct path toward development. Additionally, principals demonstrated steadfast commitment to implementing medium- and long-term tasks assigned by regional and national educational authorities, while recognizing the difficulties and challenges that may arise. Regarding short-term tasks within the school, principals actively participated in goal formulation, evaluation system establishment, and task monitoring and implementation.

This study primarily focuses on five essential components of principals' day-to-day leadership routines: goal setting and task decision-making, implementation oversight and evaluation, promotion of faculty professional development and effective management, student management and the cultivation of trusting relationships with families, as well as the development of public relations and the integration of social responsibility within the school context.

In terms of goal-setting, pathway planning, and decision-making, the research findings reveal that principals' leadership practices embodied traits such as respect for expertise, advocacy for democratic processes, and a balanced perspective that encompasses both immediate and long-term considerations. Principals skillfully used systematic and rule-based thinking as guiding frameworks and tools for decision-making and problem-solving. Within the context of the three leadership practice processes related to school tasks, the researcher identifies two distinct streams: top-down and bottom-up. These processes promoted consensus building and effectively capture the opinions of most stakeholders. Principals took different roles in engaging with leaders at different levels and with frontline teachers, encouraging their active participation in the task decision-making system. In particular, these

activities facilitated the distribution and sharing of principals' leadership philosophies, practices, mindsets, and problem-solving approaches.

During the process of task implementation, supervision, and evaluation, the researcher observed that principals consistently applied systematic thinking, rule-based thinking, and democratic principles. They established mechanisms to ensure task implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and emphasized adherence to rules and regulations by all school members. In selecting task performers, principals used democratic consultation and a meritocratic approach to identify the most appropriate candidates. These individuals were usually uncontroversial and demonstrated the ability to effectively deal with various task-related issues and challenges.

In terms of teacher management and professional development, the researcher found that principals placed significant emphasis on teachers' professional well-being and sustainable growth. They recognized the importance of providing teachers with timely, comprehensive, and humanistic care, as well as individualized and diverse opportunities for professional development. To facilitate this, principals established special task groups and other organizations to promote teachers' professional development and well-being. In evaluating performance and promotion, principals prioritized democratic supervision and conduct comprehensive assessments, with ethical standards and behavioral norms as the primary criteria. Moreover, principals actively embodied the moral and behavioral standards they advocate and served as role models for teachers, students, and families.

In terms of student management and cultivation of family-school relationships, the researcher found that principals not only engaged in classroom instruction and daily administrative affairs but also made concerted efforts to serve as role models for students. They prioritized the physical and mental well-being of students and their moral development, actively involving families and communities in fostering student welfare and growth. Principals entrusted teachers with autonomy and encouraged them to choose appropriate educational, counseling, and disciplinary strategies based on the individual and collective circumstances of students within established regulations and laws. In the reform of comprehensive student assessment, principals advocated reducing the emphasis on academic performance and giving greater importance to students' physical and mental well-being and moral conduct. Furthermore, principals institutionalized a framework for school-family

relationships by introducing the “acting principal system,” in which democratically elected and comprehensively evaluated parent volunteers play an important role in facilitating effective communication and collecting feedback between the school and families.

Regarding the development of public relations and the practice of social responsibility, the researcher found that principals attached great importance to the public image of the school and fostered positive interactions with various social organizations and individuals. They actively collaborated with various entities and integrated school resources with various tasks to effectively promote school activities, teachers’ professional development, and students’ comprehensive growth. Through these interactions, principals distributed the school’s vision, mission, and values, gaining recognition and support from families, communities, and educational authorities. Additionally, principals demonstrated a strong commitment to practicing social responsibility within the school and among its members. They firmly believed that fulfilling social responsibility was an obligation of modern citizens and an integral part of building a better society. Consequently, principals organized the active participation of teachers, students, and families in a wide range of community service projects and promote cooperation with external organizations and individuals to facilitate students’ citizenship education and involvement in community activities.

This study examines the outcomes and challenges of principals’ leadership practices. The impacts and difficulties resulting from these practices reflect principals’ traits and leadership effectiveness. Through their leadership practices, principals have effectively advanced various aspects of school, teacher, and student performance. They have also promoted the well-being of students and teachers while building positive and trusting relationships with external individuals and organizations. Nevertheless, principals encountered challenges in their practice. For example, systemic overwork has placed additional burdens and pressures on principals and staff while intensifying systemic burnout within the school system. In addition, as a high-performing primary school, CHP has experienced a growth bottleneck that has led to professional burnout among principals and staff. The conflicting ideas among principals and between principals and teachers of different age groups also posed challenges to their practice, requiring the use of rules and the investment of additional time and effort to mediate conflicting views and build consensus among various groups.

Through comprehensive research involving principal interviews and on-campus observations, the researcher identifies two underlying traits behind principals' leadership behaviors: proficiency in systematic thinking and rule-based thinking, and advocacy for democracy and meritocracy. Principals employed systematic thinking to gain a profound and comprehensive understanding of school issues, enabling them to develop objective and educational science-based strategies to address these challenges. Simultaneously, they used rule-based thinking to guide their leadership practices, institutionalize the results of their systematic thinking, and gain consensus and trust from school members through democratic processes. Principals' commitment to democratic principles was evident across all five key components of their leadership practice routines. They skillfully used democratic consultation to broaden discussions about internal school matters and to enhance the involvement of school members in decision-making processes. Through democratic consultation and respect for expertise, principals understood and impartially evaluated the demands of most stakeholders. Furthermore, they applied a meritocratic system to select and elect the most appropriate candidates to implement and supervise various school tasks, while utilizing democratic centralization to foster consensus, establish common goals, resolve disputes, and implement systems of democratic supervision and accountability.

The principals' leadership at CHP aligns closely with transformational and distributed leadership models. They exemplify key elements of transformational leadership, such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Their leadership has significantly impacted not only themselves but also the behavior, thought processes, and performance standards of teachers, students, and families, reflecting distributed leadership characteristics.

In summary, CHP principals have effectively modeled and distributed their leadership ideals, values, and problem-solving approaches throughout the school community. By adhering to principles of democracy and meritocracy, they have fostered trust, supported diverse groups within the school, collaborated with external partners, and utilized resources to enhance the school's development, contributing to its high performance.

Chapter 7 Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher addresses three research questions related to the traits of successful principals in a Chinese high-performing primary school, the impact of principals' leadership mindsets and practices on their schools, and the implications of successful principals for educational leadership theory and practice.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the traits that principals manifest in their leadership mindsets and practices and explores the coherence between their leadership mindsets and practices. The second section explores the impact of principals' leadership mindsets and practices on schools, teachers, students, and families and communities. The third section provides the theorization of principal leadership models based on the findings of this study.

7.1 The Traits Manifested in CHP Principal's Leadership Mindsets and Practices

This section addresses the research questions regarding the leadership traits demonstrated in the mindsets and practices of principals. Chapters 5 and 6 present a comprehensive analysis of the principals' leadership mindsets, practices, and their impact, shedding light on both the commonalities and differences among CHP principals.

Building upon the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6, this study observes consistent leadership traits such as vision, mission, resilience, and moral integrity among principals, reflecting their professional ethics and deep commitment to educational excellence. These traits align with Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins' (2020) principles of successful school leadership, which emphasize the importance of personal attributes like vision and mission in educational leadership. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, transformational leadership theories emphasize vision and mission as central components that inspire organizational commitment and excellence (Bass, 1990; Leithwood, 1999).

Principals at CHP schools employ rule-based thinking in their management practices to enhance organizational effectiveness through structured decision-making processes. This approach ensures that regulations, laws, and rules are established through consensus-building rather than dictatorial authority, aligning with democratic decision-making principles. This reflects Bush and Glover's (2014) findings on effective school leadership models, as outlined in Section 2.1.4, which emphasizes structured processes that promote fairness and transparency. Furthermore, Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) argue in Section 2.2 that transformational leadership strategies should integrate strategic frameworks to align personal values with organizational processes.

Moreover, CHP principals demonstrate democratic leadership by fostering an environment of equity and inclusiveness, ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and valued. This aligns with Shields (2010), as discussed in Section 2.1.3, which highlights the importance of participatory leadership models like distributed leadership in promoting school effectiveness (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2013). In Section 2.3, Gurr (2015) supports the value of distributed leadership in enhancing collaboration and inclusiveness within school communities.

The combination of rule-based thinking and democratic practices is not contradictory; rather, it reflects a complementary relationship where regulations are created through inclusive processes. Rule-based thinking, established through collective consensus, ensures structure and order, while democratic decision-making guarantees that diverse voices contribute to these regulations, thus enhancing both fairness and organizational integrity. This is consistent with the distributed leadership models discussed in Section 2.1.2, where leadership responsibilities are shared and collective decision-making is prioritized.

Based on the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6, principals exhibit a high level of consistency in their leadership values, including equity, integrity, and collaboration, which guide their vision, mission, and roles as educational leaders. As emphasized by Antonakis et al. (2003) in Section 2.2, transformational leaders are characterized by their moral and ethical grounding, a key component seen in CHP principals' dedication to professional ethics and educational excellence. Their leadership practices, characterized by systematic and rule-based thinking, democratic and merit-based approaches, and serving as moral and

professional role models, enhance the effectiveness of school management, as discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to both transformational and distributed leadership models.

Furthermore, the study uncovers a noteworthy alignment between principals' leadership traits and leadership values, which supports Bass and Avolio's (1994) emphasis on intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, as explored in Section 2.2. The coherence between words and actions cultivates commitment, focus, and resilience as principals translate abstract concepts into tangible realities. The translation of beliefs and values into actionable behaviors has a direct and distinct impact on teachers, students, and families, as discussed in Section 2.1.3.

This section provides an in-depth discussion of the leadership traits evident in both the leadership mindset and practices. Additionally, the clear alignment between leadership values and traits ensures that principals' actions are both principled and effective. Finally, the researcher offers a concise analysis of the significance and implications arising from the strong alignment between leadership mindset and practices.

7.1.1 The Shared Traits Manifested in Principals' Leadership Mindsets

In this study, the researcher has identified that principals consistently exhibited leadership mindsets despite variations in age, gender, personal career experiences, career paths, and personal ambitions. These mindsets reflected their consistent beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines regarding leadership. Chapter 5 explored the principals' diverse interpretations of the nature of education, the role of the principal, and the mission of schools, influenced by their career paths and professional experiences. However, a remarkable set of shared leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines emerged among principals.

Firstly, principals exhibited a firm belief in leadership encompassing vision and mission. This belief is critical as it aligns with the principles of successful school leadership outlined by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020), who emphasize the importance of a clear vision and mission in guiding effective school leadership. In Chapter 2, Section 2.2, transformational leadership theories underscore that a clear vision and mission are essential for driving organizational commitment and fostering excellence in leadership practice (Bass,

1990; Leithwood, 1999). This strong focus on vision and mission among CHP principals has inspired and influenced the school community, as well as external organizations and individuals, garnering trust and support from teachers, students, families, communities, and educational authorities. This shared vision has facilitated effective operations and fostered school reform and problem-solving endeavors.

Secondly, principals demonstrated a deep passion and strong sense of mission for education. This passion is a critical component of transformational leadership, as discussed by Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) in Section 2.2, who emphasize the impact of a strong sense of mission in driving school improvement and positive educational outcomes. The CHP principals' commitment to education has motivated and inspired the school community, contributing to a positive school culture and high levels of engagement among staff and students. This passion is evident in their continuous pursuit of professional development and excellence, reflecting a deep commitment to their profession and its impact on educational outcomes.

Thirdly, principals exhibited a strong sense of morality and high professional ethics, which aligns with the concept of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership emphasizes ethical practices and building trust within the school community, a key aspect discussed in Section 2.1.4 (Begley, 2001). The CHP principals' adherence to high moral standards has earned them the respect and trust of their colleagues, students, and the wider community. Their ethical leadership practices have fostered a culture of integrity and professionalism within the school, supporting effective school management and positive educational outcomes.

The significant influence of leadership mindsets on educational outcomes has also been highlighted by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), who emphasize that leadership focused on clear educational visions and structured practices positively impacts student outcomes. This aligns with Section 2.3 of this study, which supports the idea that leadership plays a critical role in school success. Similarly, CHP principals' focus on structured leadership practices and clear visions contributes to improved student performance.

Furthermore, principals at CHP schools exhibit a systematic and rule-based approach to school management. This approach aligns with Bush and Glover's (2014) models of effective leadership, which emphasize structured decision-making processes, as discussed in Section 2.1.4. The findings here also resonate with Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016), who

suggest that such structured processes are critical for school effectiveness. Additionally, Robinson et al. (2008) found that systematic, rule-based leadership enhances student outcomes, providing further empirical support for the practices observed among CHP principals.

The democratic and merit-based leadership approaches observed in CHP principals reflect Shields' (2010) concept of transformative leadership, which promotes equity and inclusiveness in decision-making processes. This mirrors the distributed leadership model, as discussed in Section 2.1.2 by Spillane (2006) and Gurr (2015), which emphasizes the importance of participatory leadership in achieving school effectiveness. The emphasis on inclusive leadership practices among CHP principals is crucial for fostering collaboration and enhancing school culture, thereby promoting educational success.

Within the research design as stated in section 3.6 in Chapter 3, leadership mindsets were divided into three dimensions: leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines. Leadership beliefs encompassed principals' understanding of the nature and mission of education, while leadership conceptions focused on their perceptions of their roles, functions, and tasks as principals, as well as the impact of leadership on the organization. Leadership guidelines referred to the rules guiding their own leadership practices. Based on the research design, this study hypothesized that principals' beliefs, reflections on the nature of education, and understanding of educational missions would determine their conceptions of the principal's role. Similarly, principals' understanding of the principal's role would shape their leadership guidelines. Ultimately, these guidelines would inform and influence their actual school leadership practices.

The findings presented in the previous two chapters confirmed the hypothesis proposed in the research design and illustrated the influence and alignment of principals' leadership beliefs with their understanding and expectations of their role. In the CHP context, principals viewed the pursuit of "love and beauty" as the essence of education and saw the mission of schooling as providing "love and beauty" to students. Interviews and observations revealed that principals perceived themselves as leaders, participants, and supervisors in fulfilling this mission. Under the influence of these leadership beliefs and conceptions, a set of leadership guidelines emerged to construct schools as institutions that foster "love and beauty" among students.

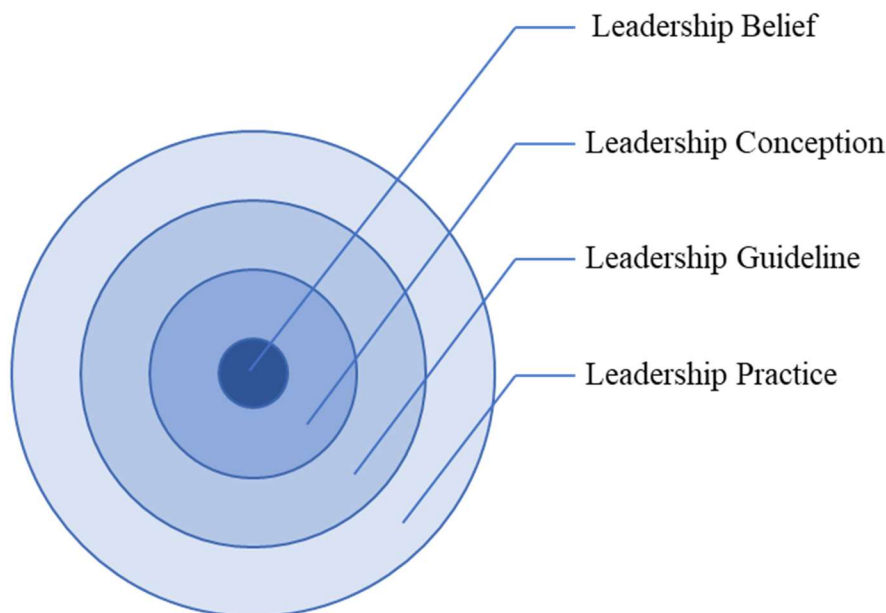


Diagram 7.1

The researcher interprets the process of transitioning from beliefs to concepts and from concepts to guidelines as the continuous concretization of abstract concepts by school leaders. This process represents the transition from the “realm of theory” to the “realm of reality.” Diagram 7.1 visually illustrates the spread of principals’ leadership beliefs and their transformation into practical guidelines. The researcher suggests that the strong leadership beliefs exhibited by CHP principals, comparable to “seeds” and “DNA,” permeate themselves and their followers, ultimately disseminating throughout the organization.

The process of transforming leadership beliefs into practical guidelines, as illustrated in Diagram 7.1, aligns with Fullan’s (2014) discussion on how principals can translate their beliefs into effective leadership practices. This process reflects the continuous refinement of abstract concepts into actionable strategies, which is essential for effective leadership. Similarly, Heck and Hallinger (2009) emphasize the importance of distributed leadership in school improvement, which involves the systematic application of leadership beliefs into practical guidelines. The findings from this study provide a concrete example of how such theoretical models are enacted in practice, aligning with the theoretical discussions in Chapter II.

Furthermore, the researcher suggests that leadership beliefs arise from leaders' practices. Leaders extract their experiences and lessons learned from teaching and managing work into guidelines for high performance and efficiency. Subsequently, school leaders engage in abstraction and reflection, summarizing leadership beliefs contributing to success within specific contexts or organizations. Through further abstraction and refinement, these leadership ideas evolve into beliefs encompassing leadership patterns or visions that contribute to excellence. The researcher employs a "funnel-shaped diagram" (Diagram 7.2) to illustrate this process, revealing how leaders summarize and distill phenomena promoting individual and organizational success, effective and rational problem-solving, and driving individual and organizational development and achievement.



The Encapsulation and Concentration of Leadership Belief

Diagram 7.2

As principals have developed and shaped their leadership beliefs, they would further translate these beliefs into leadership concepts applicable to schools. Guided by these concepts, principals formulate guidelines that inform, constrain, and inspire leaders and school members in their practices, aligning them with the specific circumstances and missions of the school. Diagram 7.3 visually represents how principals' leadership beliefs diffuse and permeate into their actual work, as well as within the organization and individuals.



The Infiltration and Dissemination of Leadership Belief

Diagram 7.3

Walker and Qian (2015) provide valuable insights into how traditional Chinese cultural values, such as Confucianism, and socialist ideology influence school leadership practices, particularly in the context of CHP principals. The findings in this study reveal that the leadership traits and practices of CHP principals are deeply rooted in these longstanding cultural traditions and ideological frameworks. This influence is evident in their emphasis on collectivism, harmony, and hierarchical respect, which influence their decision-making processes and day-to-day leadership actions. Moreover, the blending of historical leadership values with contemporary socialist ideology highlights the adaptive nature of leadership in CHP, where principles of community welfare and social cohesion are central. The cultural specificity embedded within these findings adds a unique dimension, showcasing how local traditions and values continue to influence modern leadership practices in the Chinese educational context.

In summary, despite variations in personal backgrounds, CHP principals consistently demonstrated a firm belief in leadership encompassing vision and mission, a deep passion and strong sense of mission for education, and a strong sense of morality and high professional ethics. These shared leadership mindsets have profoundly influenced the school community, fostering trust, support, and effective operations. The alignment of these traits with existing leadership models and theories underscores their significance in achieving educational excellence.

7.1.2 The Shared Traits Manifested in Principals' Leadership Practice

This study revealed significant similarities in the patterns of leadership practices among CHP principals, highlighting shared traits rather than values. Through the analysis of principals' leadership practices in Chapter 6, three core traits emerged: 1) systematic and rule-based thinking, 2) adherence to democracy and meritocracy, and 3) a spirit of scientific objectivity and pragmatism.

Firstly, CHP principals demonstrated a preference for systematic and rule-based thinking to guide their practices. This approach enhances organizational effectiveness by ensuring that decisions are made in a structured, methodical manner, based on clear rules and regulations established through consensus. This trait aligns with Bush and Glover's (2014) models of effective school leadership, which emphasize the importance of structured decision-making processes. The empirical evidence presented here corroborates these theoretical insights, illustrating how structured leadership contributes to school effectiveness (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Rule-based thinking, in this context, refers to the application of laws and policies that are developed collaboratively, ensuring both fairness and accountability in decision-making processes.

For example, Principal Suie institutionalized systematic decision-making during the implementation of a new curriculum at CHP. He organized a series of workshops involving teachers, students, and parents to gather diverse perspectives. This participatory approach ensured that the new curriculum was well-received and effectively implemented, demonstrating the impact of rule-based thinking on school management.

Secondly, the principals adhered to the principles of democracy and meritocracy. Democratic centralism (民主集中制), a core principle in Chinese political, social, and educational institutions, integrates broad participation with centralized authority, ensuring inclusivity in decision-making while maintaining strategic oversight. This principle differs from Western democratic models in its combination of collective input and hierarchical accountability. The traditional Chinese concept of meritocracy, emphasizing the selection and promotion of

individuals based on both ability and moral character, further reinforces this leadership approach.

For instance, Principal Leao employed democratic centralism to navigate a complex policy change at CHP. She consulted widely with teachers and parents before consolidating these inputs within the leadership team for final decision-making. This process ensured that decisions were both inclusive and strategically sound, highlighting how CHP leaders blend democracy and meritocracy to enhance school management.

Principals institutionalized democratic systems, particularly democratic centralism and consultation, throughout the decision-making process. This included pre-decision democratic consultation to gauge the needs of the majority, decision-making through democratic centralism to consolidate consensus, and post-decision democratic monitoring for timely feedback on outcomes. Such practices align with Shields' (2010) concept of transformative leadership, advocating for equity and inclusiveness in leadership practices. They also embody the distributed leadership model explored by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), which emphasizes the importance of participatory leadership in achieving school effectiveness. Gurr (2015) further supports this view, highlighting the significance of inclusive leadership practices in fostering a collaborative school environment. The findings in this study confirm that CHP principals' emphasis on democratic and merit-based approaches enhances school management and fosters a positive school culture.

Thirdly, CHP principals demonstrated a spirit of scientific objectivity and pragmatism in their leadership practices. They displayed respect for scientific knowledge, educational principles, human development, and subject-specific teaching rules. This respect is reflected in their advocacy for seeking truth from facts in campus decision-making and problem-solving processes. Tian (2008) explains that the development of scientific objectivity in China emphasizes practical applications in various fields, including education. In this context, the principals' use of scientific objectivity is primarily a pragmatic approach to understanding and solving problems in the school environment. This systematic and rule-based approach, combined with the democratic and meritocratic principles, results in a more accurate, efficient, and pragmatic approach to problem identification, understanding, analysis, and resolution within the school.

For example, Principal Tung's pragmatic approach was evident when addressing a sudden drop in student performance in mathematics. By analyzing performance data and consulting educational experts, Tung implemented targeted interventions and continuously monitored their effectiveness, demonstrating the practical application of scientific objectivity in school leadership.

The shared leadership traits of CHP principals, influenced by traditional Chinese cultural values and modern educational principles, create a dynamic leadership environment where theoretical beliefs are seamlessly integrated into practical educational outcomes. The highly consistent leadership beliefs of CHP principals, along with the resulting leadership concepts and guidelines, systematically influence various members within the school. Through daily interactions and care for faculty and students, training programs for leaders at all levels, interactions between the school and families, and collaborations with social organizations, principals continually disseminate and reinforce their pursuit of ideal education and their understanding of its nature. The compelling influence of CHP principals' pursuit of "love and beauty" in moral, emotional, and conceptual aspects fosters a strong sense of identification and confidence among individuals inside and outside the school regarding the school's long-term pursuits, development path, reforms, and challenges.

Principal Suie's pursuit of "love and beauty" directly reflects Confucian ideals of benevolence toward others and the aesthetic principles of "manners and art education" in Confucianism. Similarly, the principals' emphasis on being moral and behavioral role models reflects the pursuit of the "integration of knowledge and action" in Taoist thought. Their dedication to education, care for others, and the spiritual satisfaction derived from their work also embody the spirit of "diligence without food, contentment without worry" in Confucianism (Walker & Qian, 2015).

CHP principals recognized that modern democratic systems, education systems, management systems, and the corresponding theories originated from Western social realities. They acknowledged the importance of learning from and drawing upon these ideas, concepts, theories, and systems to facilitate the modernization and development of China's education system and the quality of schooling at CHP. They also acknowledged that the formation of these concepts and theories was influenced by historical, cultural, and political

factors, necessitating profound reflection and careful exploration of their application in non-Western societies.

In terms of leadership innovation, the principals explored the application of systematic and rule-based thinking in their school contexts. They recognized the need for cognitive tools in school leadership within the framework of China's educational modernization and social development. Consequently, they deepened their understanding of systematic and rule-based thinking through professional development, self-learning, and experience accumulation. They institutionalized these approaches and disseminated them among all school members. For example, Principal Chang's efforts to institutionalize systematic and rule-based thinking included creating a comprehensive training program for teachers. This program emphasized structured decision-making processes and the importance of consistent, rule-based approaches in classroom management and teaching practices. By integrating these principles into the school's professional development initiatives, Chang ensured that all staff members were aligned with this leadership trait.

Additionally, regarding democratic systems and meritocracy, the principals highly valued and actively utilized Western-derived democratic systems as decision-making tools. They also explored the localization of these systems within the Chinese cultural, historical, traditional, political, and social contexts. Inspired by historical examples of substantive democratic practices in China, they merged socialist democratic centralism with the traditional Chinese concept of meritocracy, creating a democratic decision-making model suitable for their school. This exploration of school democratization and democratic systems is regarded by the researcher as a democratic act that enriches Western democratic concepts with diverse cultural interpretations, principles, and behavioral patterns, enhancing their universality in a multicultural context.

Furthermore, CHP principals demonstrated a commitment to democratic systems and merit-based decision-making. They organized participatory forums where teachers, students, and parents could voice their opinions on school policies. These forums were structured to ensure that all voices were heard, and decisions were made based on merit and collective input. For example, Principal Yao exemplified this approach, enhancing the school's decision-making process and building trust and collaboration among the school community. By fostering an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives were heard and considered, Principal Yao

promoted a sense of collective responsibility and shared ownership over the school's direction. This integration of democratic systems and merit-based decision-making aligns with the broader leadership goals of CHP, ensuring that leadership decisions are both fair and aligned with the school's long-term objectives.

Despite differences in principals' career paths, personalities, educational backgrounds, and subject expertise, they share a strikingly similar understanding of the nature and mission of education. Influenced by Principal Suie's refinement and dissemination of leadership beliefs, the CHP principal leadership team has achieved consensus and is committed to practicing and promoting the core leadership belief of educational vision and mission. This shared and co-constructed leadership mindset among principals is attributed to three essential characteristics: unwavering beliefs, passion for education, and high moral standards. Principals' commitment and passion for education, coupled with their role as role models of professionalism and morality, significantly contribute to gaining the trust of teachers, students, families, communities, and educational authorities.

Under the influence of their leadership mindset, as described in interviews with principals, despite the demanding and strenuous nature of their work, CHP principals receive continuous positive feedback and support from multiple stakeholders. This continuous positive feedback motivates principals to remain committed to their work and to continue to practice and disseminate their leadership beliefs. Consequently, based on the exemplary qualities of principals, a positive feedback cycle is created in which leadership mindsets influence leadership practices, resulting in positive outcomes. This leadership model, which generates constructive feedback, is critical to sustaining high-level development and achieving excellence in the CHP context.

In summary, the shared leadership traits among CHP principals—systematic and rule-based thinking, adherence to democracy and meritocracy, and a spirit of scientific objectivity and pragmatism—create a robust framework for effective school management. These traits, deeply rooted in traditional Chinese cultural values and modern educational principles, systematically influence various members within the school, enhancing the overall development and success of the institution.

7.1.3 The Alignment between Principals' Mindsets and Practices

This study identifies the high level of alignment between principals' mindsets and practices as crucial for effective school management, leadership effectiveness, and principals' professional success. Three key factors contribute to this alignment:

Firstly, principals demonstrate a high level of professional competence, professional ethics, and comprehensive qualities acquired through extensive experience in school settings. This aligns with Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016), who emphasize the significance of professional standards and ethics in effective school leadership, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.

Secondly, their charismatic personality traits are reflected in their humanistic care and empathy towards school members, as well as their role modeling for faculty and students. This aspect resonates with Begley's (2001) concept of authentic leadership, which highlights the importance of ethical and empathetic leadership in building trust within the school community, as covered in Section 2.1.4.

Thirdly, their hands-on approach, self-discipline, and commitment to pragmatism are essential for translating leadership mindsets into practical actions. This pragmatic approach is supported by Fullan (2014), who discusses the importance of practical leadership practices in achieving educational outcomes, as noted in Section 2.2, the alignment between leadership mindsets and practices in CHP principals can be further understood through the lens of transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and cultural leadership models:

Transformational leadership, characterized by its emphasis on inspiring and motivating followers, is evident in the way Principal Suie and Principal Tung foster a shared vision and mission within their schools. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders demonstrate charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, as highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.2. For instance, Principal Suie engages in regular inspirational talks and workshops to instill a sense of purpose and direction among staff and students, aligning their daily practices with the school's overarching goals.

Distributed leadership, as explored by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), emphasizes the importance of shared leadership responsibilities and collaboration among

team members, which aligns with Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2. Principal Tung embodies this model by fostering a culture of democratic decision-making and meritocracy, ensuring broad participation in decision-making processes. This approach echoes the distributed leadership principles of inclusivity and participatory leadership practices.

The cultural leadership model, which considers the influence of cultural values and societal norms on leadership practices, is particularly relevant in the context of CHP principals. Walker and Qian (2015) highlight the impact of traditional Chinese cultural values and socialist ideology on school leadership in China, as discussed in Section 2.1.4. Principal Leao integrates these cultural values into his leadership practices, demonstrating a deep understanding of the unique socio-cultural context in which he operates.

The remarkable performance of CHP schools and the success of principals like Suie, Tung, and Leao are intrinsically linked to the alignment between their leadership mindsets and practices. These principals not only embody their leadership mindset in daily practice but also use practice to assess, reflect upon, and refine their mindset. This dynamic and virtuous cycle results from the mutual integration of mindset and practice, where the comprehensive qualities, personal charisma, and behavioral style of school leaders play pivotal roles, as seen in both transformational and distributed leadership models.

Exceptional school performance and principals' success depend not solely on their leadership mindset or practice in isolation, but rather on the high degree of integration and alignment between the two. As Spillane (2006) asserts, distributed leadership facilitates the inclusion of diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities, ensuring a balanced and sustainable leadership practice. This integration gives rise to a virtuous cycle, wherein the leadership mindset and practice mutually reinforce each other.

The researcher finds that principals' high level of professional competence, ethics, and comprehensive qualities are fundamental for the accurate, effective, and adaptable guidance provided by their leadership mindset in practice. Advanced professional standards and skills ensure their ability to make informed and timely decisions addressing school-related issues, accurately identifying the need for specific leadership mindsets to guide their actions. For example, Principal Tung prioritizes educators' dedication to the field of education and student welfare, emphasizing ongoing pursuit of excellence and sustained professional

development. However, real-world challenges, such as teacher overwork and burnout, persist. If school leaders solely emphasize dedication and commitment, directly translating the leadership mindset into practice may exacerbate these challenges. Consequently, Principal Leao prioritizes occupational health and planning as essential aspects of teachers' responsibilities in real-world school management. Drawing on his professional experiences and expertise, he identifies necessary resources, seeks external assistance, and establishes internal systems to implement relevant leadership mindsets effectively, rationally, and sustainably.

School leaders' charisma acts as a critical catalyst for translating leadership mindsets into tangible practices. This charisma garners recognition, assistance, and trust from individuals and groups within and outside the school. Guided by the leadership mindset, principals like Suie and Tung drive challenging initiatives within the school, such as educational and management reforms, which inherently present problems and challenges for various school groups. Principals' demonstration of empathy, humanistic care, and high ethical standards is paramount in eliciting positive feedback from teachers, students, families, and the broader community. The researcher observes that principals' charismatic personalities exert an attractive and influential force on members within and outside the school. Through interactions with diverse individuals and groups, principals disseminate their leadership vision, mission, and values, fostering consensus and motivating stakeholders to collaborate towards shared interests and objectives.

Principals' leadership by example, self-discipline, and pragmatic behavioral style establish positive models for school members, enhancing the trust placed in them by different individuals and groups within the organization. This fosters an environment where principals' effective thinking and behavioral tools are understood, learned, emulated, and applied, facilitating the smooth progress of various school affairs. Principals' behavioral style not only ensures the full embodiment of their leadership mindset in their work but also enables the diffusion of their leadership influence, gaining increased recognition and support from diverse individuals and groups within and outside the school for leadership practices grounded in the leadership mindset.

The high level of alignment between principals' leadership mindset and practice unites their unwavering beliefs, passion for education, and elevated ethical standards with their thinking

tools, democratic principles, and scientific spirit in leadership practice. This inspires increased trust and support from a wide range of individuals and groups, including teachers, students, families, communities, and various external organizations. It allows these stakeholders to align with the school's vision and mission and ultimately collaborate to promote continuous development and contribute to the success of CHP school leaders.

7.2 The Impact of CHP Principals' Leadership Mindset and Practice

This section presents a thorough investigation of how the leadership mindset and practices of principals affect various dimensions. Chapters V and VI provide a detailed analysis and demonstration of leadership mindsets and practices, highlighting principals' comprehension and introspection of their own leadership approaches and their impact on various stakeholders within and outside the school.

The first part of this subsection focuses on the moral leadership that principals demonstrate through their leadership mindsets and practices, and the resulting moral appeal to stakeholders within and outside the school community. The second part focuses on the transformative impact of principals' leadership models, rooted in systems thinking and rules-based approaches, on school dynamics. Finally, the third part examines the impact of principals who embrace democratic principles and implement a meritocratic mechanism in their various school task processes.

7.2.1 The Impact of Role Modeling and Visionary Inspiration

Chapters V and VI reveal how principals in CHP schools prioritize the role of moral leadership in their leadership mindset and practices. They demonstrate a high level of professional ethics and emphasize the importance of establishing moral exemplars among teachers, students, families, and communities. By embodying the advocated concepts and ethical standards through actions, principals not only gain the trust and support of various

stakeholders within and outside the school but also foster a shared pursuit of the school's vision and mission centered on "love and beauty."

The researcher contends that the moral leadership and high ethical standards displayed by CHP principals in their thoughts, speech, and behavior significantly contribute to their professional success and the promotion of effective school development. For most teachers, the moral exemplary role of principals inspires greater trust and confidence in school leadership. Throughout China's traditional culture, history, and contemporary society, educators have been held to high ethical standards by various social entities and individuals, including families, educational authorities, and students. These standards provide educators with respect and trust, leading to professional satisfaction and self-identity. However, the social expectations or social desirability associated with high ethical standards also impose additional and sometimes excessive moral burdens on educators.

Nevertheless, CHP principals' adoption of moral and professional exemplary roles, alongside their provision of humanitarian and personalized care to teachers, reduces resistance to these high ethical standards. The charisma displayed by principals in their exemplary roles sets a moral example for CHP teachers while demonstrating the positive benefits of successful exemplary performance. Additionally, principals embody an "ideal" and "successful" educator image that many teachers seek, inspiring them to consider, emulate, and implement the ethical and professional concepts promoted by principals.

Furthermore, the moral models and inspiration provided by principals not only influence teachers but also extend to students and their families. Previous research confirms that the positive image of principals significantly influences students' and parents' acceptance and support of their speech, decisions, and behavior. The trust, support, and tolerance of students and parents are critical when schools implement reforms or address controversial issues. If school reform efforts encounter obstacles or go beyond the understanding of students and parents, they may opt for more conservative approaches, leading to the rejection or impediment of reforms. Consequently, conflicts arising from different perspectives, positions, and interests between principals and parents could impede the long-term development of the school and the realization of transformative goals. However, when principals and teachers gain the trust of parents, parents are more likely to support seemingly

“difficult” school reform efforts because they recognize the moral image projected by these educational leaders.

Moreover, as the CHP school leadership team interacts and collaborates with different individuals and social organizations, the influence of principals’ leadership extends beyond the school, affecting a broader range of individuals and groups. In their interactions with various social organizations and individuals, CHP principals actively practice social responsibility, thereby gaining partners’ trust and support. This not only enables schools to conduct off-campus activities more smoothly but also enriches their educational resources, creating more opportunities for education.

7.2.2 The Impact of Systematic and Rule-based Management

In the previous two chapters, this study demonstrates the presence of systematic and rule-based thinking in principals’ leadership beliefs and practices. Although principals did not explicitly use the terms “systematic thinking” and “rule-based thinking” during interviews about their leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines, their demonstration, deconstruction, and encapsulation of concepts and ideas revealed underlying patterns of systematic and rule-based thinking. Additionally, observations of principals’ daily activities revealed a significant number of speeches and behaviors guided by systematic and rule-based thinking, which also permeated various levels of leaders, teachers, and students within the school. As a result, these individuals adopted systematic and rule-based approaches to acknowledging, understanding, analyzing, and solving problems.

This research suggests that CHP principals’ ability to use and rely on systematic and rule-based thinking stems from a comprehensive integration of their professional experiences, the school’s demand for effective management, and training acquired through participation in professional development programs. Furthermore, this type of thinking aligns with the requirements of modern educational and social systems for decision-makers and managers to achieve highly effective and innovative management.

Based on interviews and observations, the researcher proposes that principals have gradually honed a rational and efficient behavioral approach over years of experience in education and

management. In particular, they pay close attention to adhering to rules and systematically analyzing and solving problems. In the decade after 2010, with the rapid development of schools, improving the efficiency of school management emerged as a vital issue for principals. The behavioral style and management model rooted in systematic thinking and rule-based thinking not only validate the feasibility and necessity of these thinking frameworks as tools for improving management efficiency but also make principals advocates of these tools. Additionally, with the internationalization and professionalization of regional school professional development programs, CHP principals have been exposed to modern school management and educational leadership theories that have influenced and inspired them. Consequently, principals have emerged as proponents of systematic and rule-based thinking based on successful experiences, demands for efficient school operations, and capacity building through professional development programs.

The researcher suggests that this pattern of thinking, accompanied by their own practice and advocacy, has influenced leaders and teachers at various levels at CHP to use these two thinking tools to guide their work. Although principals did not explicitly elaborate on the different functions and importance of systematic thinking and rule-based thinking during interviews, the researcher identified through observation that principals' rule-based thinking encompasses both bottom-line thinking and standardized thinking. The rules established at CHP not only ensure safe, stable, and sustainable development but also enforce standardized rules to improve the standardization of teachers' behavior. This, in turn, facilitates more effective identification, recognition, and evaluation of their performance. Furthermore, when discussing the implementation of student leadership policies and advocating for teachers to discipline students in accordance with school rules, principals conveyed the protective role of rules for both teachers' and students' rights.

The researcher believes that the advocacy and implementation of systematic thinking by principals play a significant role in improving the efficiency of various school affairs, comprehensively understanding school issues, and promoting consensus among various stakeholders. It serves as a necessary guarantee for scientific decision-making, democratic centralism, and the selection of talented individuals within the school. These two ways of thinking are also influenced by modern Western social ideologies, such as the Enlightenment ideas of Rousseau and Montesquieu, and the socialist ideas of Marx and Lenin. In addition, they are shaped by China's socialist system and ideology. During several administrative team

meetings chaired by the school leadership team, the researcher observed several cases in which principals referred to Rousseau's "Social Contract" and emphasized the importance of fairness and rules in society and organizations. Similarly, during faculty meetings, several principals stressed the importance of respecting scientific and systematic approaches as essential cognitive tools for promoting the development of society and various entities in scientific socialism.

In addition, CHP principals routinely use systemic thinking as a means of addressing complex issues or phenomena within the school. They advocate that teachers and students adopt a comprehensive perspective and utilize logical and rational thinking tools, while embracing the spirit of respect for science and objective facts. This approach fosters an open and inclusive attitude toward discovering, understanding, analyzing, and solving various problems. The researcher asserts that the application of systemic thinking is an essential quality for large-scale school leaders and a necessary thinking tool for high-performing administrators in problem-solving, management, decision-making, and planning practices.

The researcher found that various members of the school community were highly supportive of systemic and rule-based thinking, which allows for smoother progress when undertaking reforming and challenging tasks. Once faculty members adopt and apply these thinking tools, they become more forward-looking and receptive to understanding failures, obstacles, and the lack of immediate positive feedback during the reform process. In the meantime, faculty members perform tasks in a standardized and regulated manner, allowing decision-makers and supervisors within the school to accurately assess the impact of their decisions and goals. Consequently, they can make timely, precise, and rational adjustments. Students and families, by embracing and using these ways of thinking, enable the school and families to identify more common aspects based on their vision and to approach contradictions objectively. This fosters more rational behavior within the rules among school leaders, teachers, students, and families.

7.2.3 The Impact of Democracy and Meritocracy

In Chapter Six, the researcher examines how principals embody democratic principles and the concept of meritocracy in their leadership practices. Although principals do not explicitly

use terms such as “democracy,” “democratic centralism,” or “meritocracy” when asked about their leadership mindsets, they demonstrated a commitment to ideals such as “democracy, freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law,” which align with China’s core socialist values. The researcher suggests that principals consistently apply democratic processes, including consultation, supervision, decision-making, feedback, and principles of meritocracy, in their daily school operations. These practices are influenced by the realities of the school, China’s socialist system, ideology, and traditional Chinese culture. The adoption of democratic awareness, principles, and practices by principals plays a crucial role in fostering consensus among diverse school members, effectively integrating and maximizing their collective strengths, and promoting progress toward achieving various goals.

The analysis of challenges faced by school leaders in Chapter Six highlights the need to effectively address numerous well-known school issues and ensure sustainable school development. To achieve this, school leaders must integrate and utilize all internal and external resources and support toward a shared goal, encouraging individuals and groups within the school to contribute to this common objective. These challenges and requirements are inherent in the reality of school leadership. Additionally, the pervasive influence of socialist ideologies and communist thought, such as Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, remains prevalent in Chinese society and has left a lasting impact on China’s educational landscape. The pursuit of values such as “fairness, justice, democracy, and science” is deeply embedded in these social and ideological beliefs and permeates every corner of China’s education system. As a result, school leaders nurtured within this system naturally internalize and uphold these values, making the establishment of democratic mechanisms based on fairness, justice, and science essential and inevitable in the context of the CHP.

Furthermore, the researcher observes that principals are significantly influenced by the concept and system of meritocracy. In interviews and meetings with principals, references to historical systems of meritocracy in different periods of China’s history are frequently cited as sources of inspiration. Explicit statements are often made about how the implementation of democratic systems is profoundly shaped by the combination of election and selection mechanisms inherent in China’s contemporary political system, along with the principles of democratic centralism. Consequently, the researcher suggests that principals,

driven by the pragmatic demands of school development and problem solving, and influenced by China's social and political system, ideology, and historical traditions, vigorously advocate democratic principles. They institutionalize democratic practices such as consultation, supervision, decision-making, and accountability, and embody democratic centralism and meritocracy, which is both reasonable and inevitable from the principals' perspective.

The implementation of democratic and meritocratic principles by school leaders not only drives various school tasks, but also disseminates these values, concepts, and conducts embedded in democracy and meritocracy, thereby influencing teachers and even students within the school. The widespread adoption of systematic and rule-based management practices in schools accelerates the promotion and distribution of democratic and meritocratic thoughts and practices, leading teachers, students, families, and the local community to wholeheartedly accept and support various school arrangements and decisions guided by democratic and meritocratic values.

Moreover, in the process of democratic consultation and decision-making, principals not only receive diverse perspectives, advice, and feedback, but also effectively focus the attention of different groups and individuals on common goals, demands, and interests, thus effectively mitigating conflicts and meaningless debates among the stakeholders of CHP. The researcher believes that the practice of democratic principles and the institutionalization of democracy and meritocracy at CHP fundamentally constitute a process of democratization and serve as tangible manifestations of democratization in the school context. The principals have skillfully localized Western democratic ideas to effectively manage a high-performing and large-scale Chinese primary school, exploring the validity, feasibility, and effectiveness of their approaches. The democratic and meritocratic system implemented by CHP principals enables comprehensive and insightful evaluation of school affairs, promotes efficient and rational strategies, cultivates unity, and facilitates consensus building, ultimately contributing to high-level management and outstanding performance within the school.

7.3 Rethinking and Remodeling of Educational Leadership Model

In this section, the researcher presents a re-examination and re-modeling of distributed leadership and transformational leadership models. Based on the analysis of CHP principals' leadership, it was found that their indigenous leadership model in Chinese society and education system significantly aligns with the transformational and distributed leadership models originating from Western societies, education systems, and educational research. This alignment has led the researcher to re-evaluate existing leadership models and explore further possibilities for their development. In addition, by integrating the elements of distributed and transformational leadership observed in CHP principals and the foundational leadership traits that contributed to successful school development and reform, the researcher proposes an original leadership model entitled "Full Spectrum Leadership." It is hypothesized that this model can be effectively applied to school leadership and management practice and research in both Eastern and Western societies and educational systems.

This section consists of three sub-sections. First, the researcher explores the reinterpretation of CHP principals' leadership in relation to the existing concept of distributed leadership. This exploration leads to a more comprehensive explanation of leadership distribution, including its processes, conditions, and rules, ultimately forming a systematic model of leadership distribution. Second, the researcher examines the characteristics of transformational leadership observed in CHP and proposes the inclusion of "Integrated Resources" and "Increased Consensus" as two additional essential components of transformational leadership. Consequently, the original four "I"s are expanded to six "I"s. Finally, the researcher presents the original Full Spectrum Leadership model and explains its underlying logic, content, and significance.

7.3.1 The Consensus and Rule-based Systematic Distributed Leadership

In Chapter V, the researcher demonstrated how CHP principals distribute their leadership beliefs, conceptions, and guidelines widely throughout the school in their daily work. In

Chapter VI, the researcher provided detailed insights into how CHP principals facilitate the design, implementation, and monitoring of school tasks through democratic consultation, democratic centralized decision making, and the establishment of various systems while promoting democracy and meritocracy in school management. Throughout this process, the principals' cognitive tools, namely systems thinking and rule-based thinking, and their leadership approaches, such as leading by example, being a moral example, being pragmatic, and respecting science, spread throughout the school and profoundly influenced faculty and students.

Moreover, the researcher explained how principals institutionalize their understanding and pursuit of the school's vision, mission, and roles through democratic decision-making, gaining consensus, trust, and support from most of the faculty. This consensus-building among school members, including families and social organizations, not only disseminates the principals' values, aspirations, and moral standards, but also garners support and endorsement from various stakeholders within the primary school. Throughout this process, the personal charisma and moral leadership of principals, as well as the ideals they advocate, exert a magnetic and inspirational effect on various individuals and groups inside and outside the school. They establish unified and coordinated goals, pursuits, and assessment criteria for these individuals and groups, thereby gaining their trust and support.

In the literature review, the researcher has examined previous studies by Harris (2009; 2011; 2013), Spillane (2001; 2006), and Gronn (2000) that had high citation rates and significant impact on educational leadership research. Nevertheless, these studies did not clearly identify the premises, processes, content, and criteria of distributed leadership. Most descriptions of distributed leadership in the literature described a "decentralized" process within the school system, with a focus on the responsibilities and authority of leaders. However, these studies did not elaborate on a specific distribution process and standard. While Chapman & Muijs (2014) and Harris (2013) acknowledged the potential burden and pressure on staff under distributed leadership, as well as the challenges and responsibilities associated with its implementation, they still viewed distributed leadership as a linear process focused on school administrators, describing the distribution of influence or power from leaders to followers, without considering whether distributed leadership could also occur from lower to higher levels of leadership in a bottom-up manner. Diagram 7.4 illustrates a typical distributed leadership process in a hierarchical system.

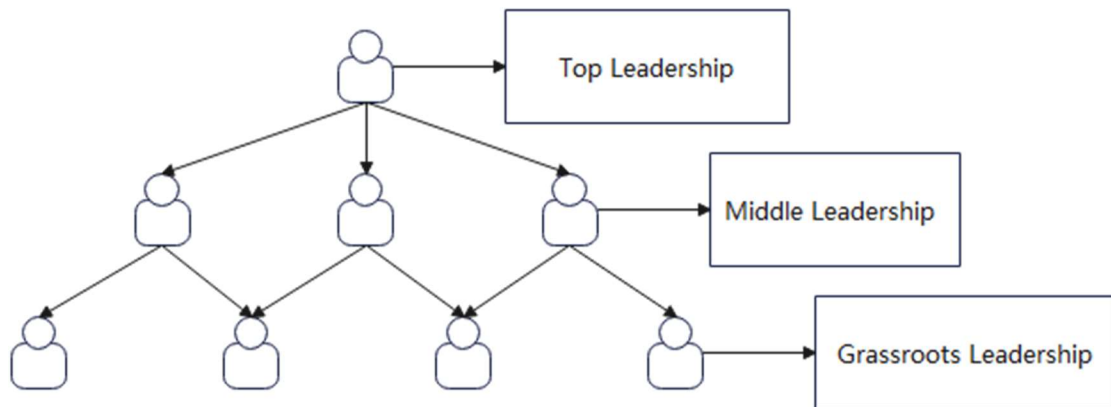


Diagram 7.4

Although the above literature suggests that power, influence, and responsibility can be distributed directly from top school leaders to middle managers and frontline teachers, observation, and analysis of the leadership distribution process among CHP principals reveals that leadership distribution is more than a simple linear path from A to B. Instead, it becomes a systematic and even cyclical complexity. The research suggests that CHP leaders create a conceptual field into which they project their leadership ideas (including beliefs, conceptions, and policies) and practices. They then invite faculty to engage in cognitive processes, discussions, and reevaluations of the leader’s ideas and behaviors, leading to the development of a complex process involving shared emotions, perspectives, psychological states, and identities.

For example, from 2013 to 2015, Suie and Leao facilitated a series of meetings focused on achieving the school’s vision and mission. All school staff were given the opportunity to discuss extensively “the nature of our education,” “the origins of our school’s vision, mission, and values,” and “where our school will take teachers and students. These discussions revolved around the school’s “three ultimate propositions.” Once consensus was reached among the school’s leadership team and the majority of the faculty members, specific discussions about how to achieve the school’s mission, particularly the role of teachers, included detailed requirements for ethical standards, professional qualities, and comprehensive competencies. During these discussions, school leaders created a virtual or conceptual “Ancient Greek Square” and projected their ideas and values for faculty and staff to debate and consider, ultimately leading to a shared consensus on the leaders’ ideas.

Through interviews and observations, it became clear that CHP principals view all their school leadership efforts as serving the purpose of realizing the school's vision and mission. Therefore, the process by which principals distribute their ideas, pursuits, values, thinking tools, codes of conduct, responsibilities, and powers among school members is referred to as the "leadership distribution process under the influence of the leader's ideals." Within this process, the dissemination of leadership behaviors and content reflects, to some extent, the internal consensus, shared aspirations, interests, or tasks within the school.

Thus, the researcher suggests that the distribution of leadership in CHP schools is a systematic model based on shared ideals, attraction to diverse groups and individuals within and outside the school, and the influence of the leader's morality, charm, and behavior. Furthermore, the distribution and circulation of leadership does not simply revolve around school leaders in a "unitary" manner or manifest itself as a linear transmission or network distribution pattern on a two-dimensional plane. Instead, it takes the form of a circular flow in the two-dimensional plane and an ascending spiral process in three-dimensional space.

To illustrate the leadership distribution process among CHP principals, the researcher categorizes it into four stages: the pre-distribution stage, the during-distribution stage, the post-distribution stage, and the re-distribution stage, and presents them chronologically (see Diagram 7.5).

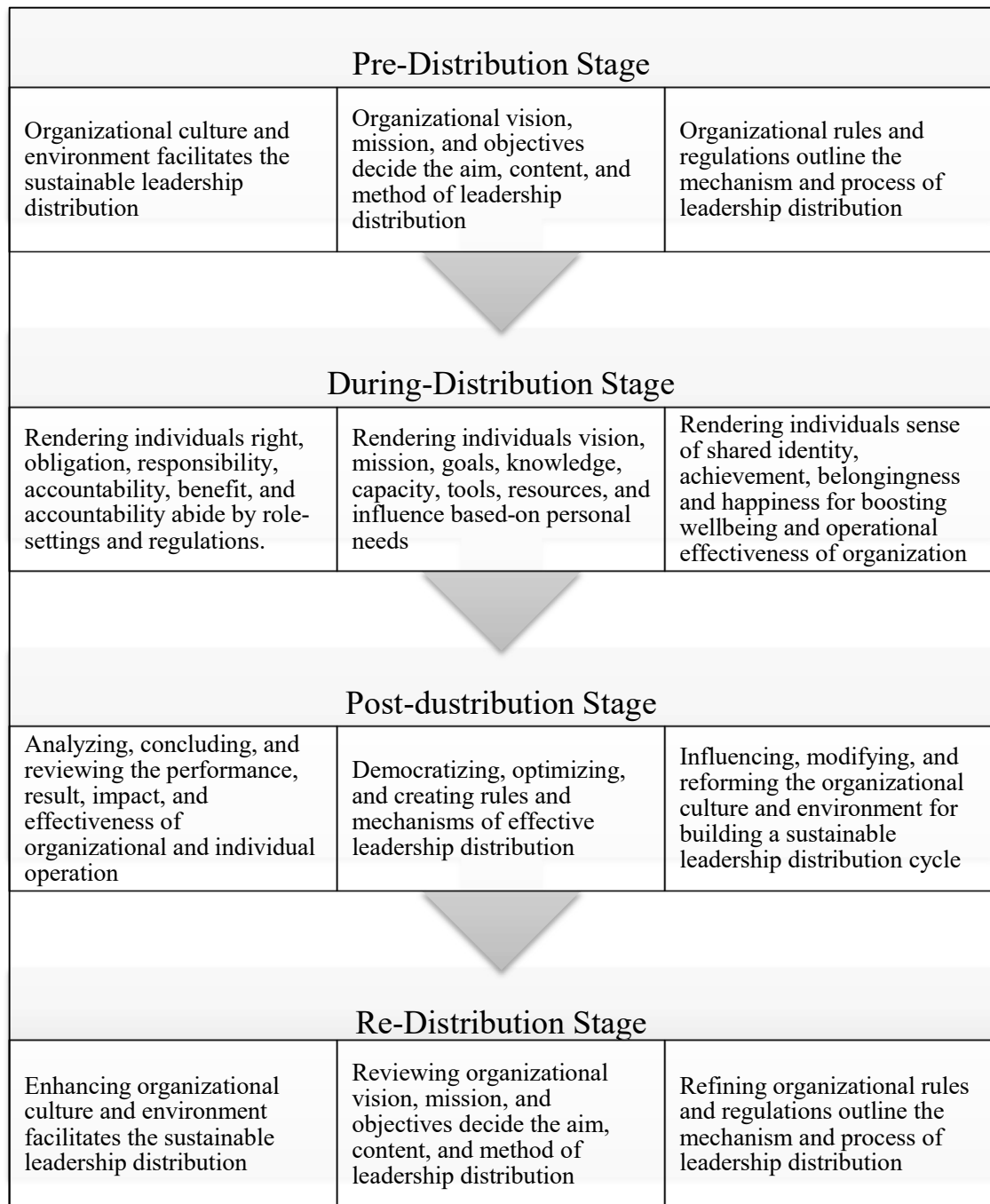


Diagram 7.5

In the first stage, the “pre-distribution stage,” leaders define the purpose, content, methods, and rules for leadership distribution and lay the groundwork for specific distribution tasks. In the next stage, the “during-distribution stage,” leaders supervise, execute, and guide the implementation of leadership distribution. This is followed by the “post-distribution stage,” in which leaders evaluate and validate the results and effectiveness of the distribution process. Finally, the Redistribution Stage represents the completion of the current distribution and the initiation of the next distribution cycle. During this phase, leaders review existing leadership

concepts, distribution outcomes, and impacts while envisioning the upcoming leadership distribution and considering its objectives, content, methods, rules, and other pertinent aspects.

In addition, the researcher proposes that each effective leadership distribution cycle comprising these four stages functions as a cog, while the systemic distribution of leadership in the school is realized through the synergistic movement of numerous such cogs. The collaborative operation and efficient functioning of these multiple leadership distribution cycles serve as the driving force for the school’s “engine,” providing momentum for the progress of both the institution and its individuals (as illustrated in Diagram 7.6).

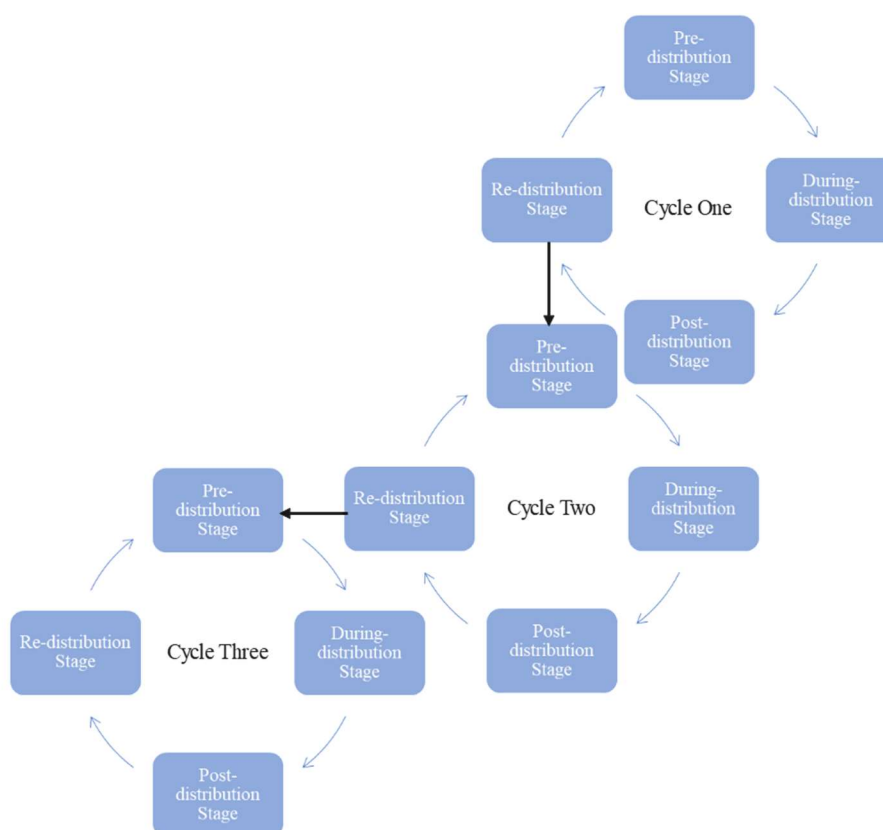


Diagram 7.6

Based on the researcher’s analysis of effective and successful leadership distribution in CHP, it is observed that in the first and fourth stages of leadership distribution, three prerequisites are crucial for smooth implementation: First, a strong relationship of mutual trust and support between leaders and members of the organization. Second, consistent recognition and consensus among all members of the organization regarding the vision, mission, and

tasks set for the organization or by its leaders. Third, a leadership distribution culture and environment that is friendly, inclusive, and guides, regulates, contains, and promotes the distribution. These elements are essential for sustainable and successful leadership sharing in the school. Without any of these elements, leadership distribution becomes challenging and problematic.

Regarding the content, methods, patterns, and rules of distribution, the researcher draws three conclusions based on the analysis of various phenomena, outcomes, and impacts of principal leadership distribution in CHP. First, the content and forms of distribution are diverse, but any reasonable distribution content can reflect the specific requirements of tasks or groups, the values of the school, or the goals and missions of principals. Second, the distribution process is systematic, and the content of distribution forms an integral unit, including power and duty, theory and methodology, responsibility, and accountability, thinking tools and behavioral guidelines, and evaluation criteria and evaluation tools. Third, the direction of distribution is determined by the necessity reflected in the content of distribution for a particular school task, rather than following a top-down pyramid-like approach. Thus, the direction of dissemination is multi-directional and multi-centered, where the values of principals can be disseminated to grassroots leaders and frontline teachers, and the ideas of frontline teachers and grassroots leaders can also be distributed to principals and middle and upper-level leaders, as anyone would be considered a leader for possessing a certain expertise to fulfill and lead a task.

In addition, the researcher finds that the evaluation conducted by leaders during the “post-distribution stage” of each cycle is critical to assessing the effectiveness and outcomes of leadership distribution. This evaluation serves three main purposes: First, to assess the appropriateness and adequacy of the content and forms of leadership distribution in meeting specific needs. Second, to verify whether the purposes and outcomes of leadership distribution are consistent with the planned design and to examine whether the perception of school tasks, vision, and mission is consistent among leaders and school members. Third, to summarize the successful experiences and draw lessons from the current distribution to make the planning, decision-making, and execution work of leaders and even school members in subsequent leadership distribution cycles more efficient, rational, and accurate.

Throughout all stages of distribution, the researcher identifies three key principles that ensure effective, rational, and successful leadership distribution: the principles of cooperation, democracy, and justice. First, the principle of cooperation suggests that both school leaders and members should work together based on shared goals, missions, and tasks; encourage tolerance of diverse opinions; and discourage divisive activities undertaken solely for the sake of opposition. Second, the principle of democracy is essential for building consensus within the organization and maximizing internal and external strengths. Extensive democratic consultation, supervision, and accountability enable leaders and their followers to have a profound and holistic understanding of the problems and various situations within the school. The principles of democratic centralism and meritocracy can tap the potential of individuals in the organization and enhance organizational effectiveness. Finally, the principle of justice requires all individuals in the organization, including leaders and followers, to abide by the rules and not exceed the framework of regulations. In addition, individuals in the organization must respect objective facts, adhere to scientific principles, and make judgments and express demands based on specific circumstances.

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions can be drawn about ideal distributed leadership in schools:

First, ideal distributed leadership is a systematic allocation and flow of leadership based on consensus and rules. It encompasses various approaches to distributing essential elements within the organization that enable the school's tasks and missions to be accomplished while effectively fostering the development of both the school and its individuals.

Second, in the context of ideal distributed leadership, the generation of leadership distribution results from addressing the historical and current challenges of the school, as well as meeting the demands of present and future development. These demands essentially reflect the mindset of school leaders, which includes their beliefs, concepts, and guidelines, as well as the school's short-, medium-, and long-term goals. By integrating their mindset with the school's goals and presenting them through institutionalized means, school leaders naturally stimulate the creation of necessary content and specific methods for leadership distribution. This process is facilitated when members establish a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation with leaders and interact to reach consensus based on the principles of cooperation, democracy, and justice.

Third, in the ideal distributed leadership model, goals and demands should not be generated arbitrarily, the distribution process should not disrupt the mutual trust and cooperation among groups within the organization, and the distribution rules should avoid being arbitrary and destructive. The results of distribution should effectively address the school's tasks and promote its development. Moreover, the underlying principles of distribution should be in harmony with the ideals and beliefs of the organization and its leaders.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the distributed leadership existing within CHP, the researcher designates this form of distributed leadership as “Consensus and Rule-based Systematic Distributed Leadership.”

7.3.2 The Integrated resources and Increased Consensus for Promoting Transformational Leadership

In Chapters V and VI, the researcher observed a significant alignment between the leadership mindset and practices of CHP principals and the four “I”s of transformational leadership. By considering the impact of these mindsets and practices on the school, faculty, students, families, and external partners, it can be concluded that the CHP leadership model, with *Suie* at its core, is highly consistent with transformational leadership. Notably, the transformational leadership model identified at CHP was developed internally, similar to the formulation of the distributed model at CHP. During the interviews, principals acknowledged their awareness of transformational leadership as a theoretical pursuit and approach to school management and leadership. However, they strongly believed that the leadership model demonstrated by the CHP leadership team, which incorporates core elements of transformational leadership, is the result of integrating the successful school management experiences of CHP leaders, the diverse demands placed on leaders by high-quality school development, and the essential ways to achieve sustainable teacher and student development.

Furthermore, although the principals were familiar with the implications of transformational leadership theory, they did not perceive it as directly applicable to school management in the context of the Chinese education system. They felt that the “quasi-transformational

leadership” they exhibited at CHP was not unique to the institution, as many high-level school leadership teams in the region demonstrated elements of “idealized influence,” “inspirational motivation,” “intellectual stimulation,” and “individualized consideration” that are characteristic of transformational leadership.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the leadership mindset and practices of CHP principals, it is evident that their leadership model not only encompasses the four “I” s proposed by Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003), but also reflects the leadership qualities described in the works of Bass (1990), Bass & Avolio (2006), and Leithwood (1999; 2006) that drive school transformation and development. Conversely, Bass (1997; 1998) asserts that the effectiveness of transformational leadership is not confined by cultural or contextual differences, suggesting that transformational leadership can effectively operate across different cultural and contextual settings.

In Chapters V and VI, the researcher found that the leadership mindsets and practices of CHP principals not only reflected the four “I”s of transformational leadership but also included two additional “I”s: “Increased Consensus” and “Integrated Resources.” Through the observation and analysis of successful cases of “transformational leadership” implemented by CHP principals and its positive impact on the school and its stakeholders, the researcher contends that in the current educational environment characterized by globalization, digitalization, intelligence, diversity, and Internet-based social networking, leaders must prioritize promoting consensus among individuals and groups within and outside educational organizations and effectively integrating various resources to facilitate organizational change and development. Given the dynamic realities influenced by changes in families, social networks, and external entities, CHP principals are driven to harness diverse resources inside and outside the school to better accomplish school tasks. By building consensus among various individuals and groups, they can mitigate conflicts arising from diverse ideologies in society and facilitate greater collaboration toward shared visions and missions.

In Chapter V and VI, the researcher also emphasizes the significance of “Increased Consensus,” which refers to the principals’ advocacy for harmonious coexistence among school members, cooperation driven by a shared vision and mission, and the implementation of democratic principles such as democratic consultation and decision-making. As the school’s development reaches a bottleneck and slows down, CHP principals express concern

and believe that reform and innovation are necessary to revitalize the school's developmental momentum. However, in the face of the uncertainties that reform, innovation, and change have brought, as well as issues such as faculty overwork, professional burnout, and conflicting conceptions, it is crucial to gain the trust and support of the vast majority of faculty, students, and families, to motivate them to set aside their biases, and to positively confront temporary lack of positive feedback or even failure. Fostering consensus among different groups becomes an essential and indispensable aspect.

Based on CHP principals' leadership mindsets and practices related to "increased consensus," the researcher found that they played a critical role in achieving or facilitating school development and change. This means that a collective effort is made within the school, including leaders, teachers, students, and external families and community organizations, to achieve common developmental and transformational goals and to build harmonious, trusting, and supportive relationships. Simultaneously, this approach serves as an effective means of resolving and mitigating conflicts among different individuals and groups. In today's world, various ideological conflicts are spreading rapidly and extensively into schools as social media and networks spread contradictory and controversial topics, while globalization deepens the distribution of diverse social problems. In this context, school leaders need to promote consensus among school members. This implies encouraging and preserving individualized interests and positions while striving for a common vision, shared values, the realization of a common mission, and cooperation among members.

In Chapter VI, the researcher discusses how several CHP principals effectively use external resources to address internal issues and integrate various resources from within and outside the school. These efforts are aimed at creating educational opportunities, promoting effective fulfillment of school missions, fostering sustained professional development for teachers, and improving students' overall competencies. By observing and analyzing principals' utilization of internal and external resources, the researcher found that principals integrate inherent internal resources, such as teachers and school facilities, along with external resources, including families, public organizations, professionals, university research institutions, the government, and modern technologies.

The concept of "Integrated Resources" extends beyond the simple combination of various resources from inside and outside the school. Instead, it involves a thoughtful and viable

approach to resource management that addresses school issues and achieves specific goals set by the school's leadership team. Principals actively work with various social organizations and individuals outside the school to initiate extracurricular activities. Additionally, they invite parents and community representatives to participate in the monitoring of school affairs. All these actions are undertaken with the goal of promoting school development, facilitating transformation, and solving school-related challenges.

The process of resource integration also reflects the principals' commitment to promoting "increased consensus" and the four "I"s of transformational leadership. In this process, principals not only provide "idealized influence" to gain support and agreement from human resources such as teachers, parents, and leaders of external organizations, but they also offer "individualized consideration" based on the different needs of individuals and groups. They also use "inspirational motivation" and "intellectual stimulation" to encourage exploration of resource integration opportunities and approaches by various individuals and groups, both inside and outside the school. These efforts contribute to the school's internal development and achieve sustainable progress in the school's overall performance, teachers' professional development, and students' comprehensive competencies.

Based on the above findings and analyses, the researcher defines "integrated resources" in the context of promoting transformational leadership as an action carried out by school leaders to maximize opportunities and resources that contribute to the development of the school. It involves rational and strategic planning and management of various resources, both inside and outside the school, with the aim of improving school performance, teachers' professional development, and students' comprehensive competencies. The content of resource integration includes various personal, organizational, institutional, technological, social, and cultural resources, both inside and outside the school. To achieve this goal, building mutual trust and support among school leaders and individuals and groups within and outside the school is essential. Establishing such relationships requires school leaders to foster consensus while providing encouragement, care, inspiration, and influence.

The researcher argues that the leadership demonstrated by CHP principals is not only highly consistent with "transformational leadership," but also serves as a crucial foundation for achieving transformational leadership and driving school development and change through the practical application of "Increased Consensus" and "Integrated Resources". In today's

uncertain world, schools inevitably face various challenges and conflicts from society. As a result, school leaders are required to unite all strengths and utilize available resources to protect and promote the rights and well-being of individuals and groups within the school, mitigate internal conflicts, fulfill the school's social responsibilities, and adopt a proactive role in driving social change.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of Integrated Resource and Increased Consensus by principals not only contributes to school transformation and development but also challenges Bass' (1997) assertion that situational factors have a limited influence on transformational leadership. The researcher suggests that when the theory of transformational leadership emerged in the late 20th century, the impact of the Internet and globalization on human society was not as profound as it is today. Therefore, leadership models at that time did not consider and predict essential components of human society in the 21st century, which is understandable. Nevertheless, this underscores the need for the development of transformational leadership theory to incorporate contemporary means of addressing current school leadership challenges in the complex context of educational organizations within and beyond human society.

In conclusion, the CHP Principals' leadership approach effectively incorporates "Increased Consensus" and "Integrated Resources," which are essential for promoting transformational leadership, facilitating school development and reform, responding to the demands of students and families, and meeting the challenges of today's society. The successful application of these leadership elements not only promotes positive change and development for schools, teachers, and students, but also demonstrates the need for leadership theories to evolve to meet the ever-changing social context. As the educational context continues to change, leaders must remain adaptable and utilize innovative strategies rooted in 21st century characteristics to effectively address current school leadership challenges.

7.3.3 The Formulation of Full Spectrum Leadership Model

In the previous sections, the researcher introduced and remodeled the "Systemic Distributed Leadership Based on Consensus and Rules" and incorporated the elements of "Integrated Resources" and "Increased Consensus" into the transformational leadership model. However,

it is argued that leadership at CHP is a complex outcome influenced by the interplay of leaders' mindsets, practices, and various factors involving faculty, students, families, and society. Thus, a single leadership model cannot fully encompass the diverse leadership patterns exhibited by CHP principals. Furthermore, merely combining or reconfiguring these leadership approaches into "transformational distributed leadership" or "distributed transformational leadership" falls short in capturing the essence of leadership at CHP. To provide a comprehensive representation of CHP principals' leadership, their positive impact on school development and reform, and drawing inspiration from their leadership mindsets and practices, the researcher proposes the "Full Spectrum Leadership" model.

The term "Full Spectrum" refers to projecting all relevant aspects and elements of individuals, organizations, and affairs within the school onto a virtual two-dimensional plane, represented as a 360° circular sunburst or pie chart. In this model, leadership is deconstructed into four spectrums: leadership identity, leadership capacity, leadership skills, and leadership character (see Diagram 7.7). Each spectrum is further divided into three levels that radiate outward from the center of the circle, providing detailed explanations and descriptions of the previous level. Currently, each spectrum is divided into only three levels due to limitations in research capabilities, time, experience, and the availability of samples for further validation and enrichment of the model. However, subsequent research will refine the classification and content of the model.

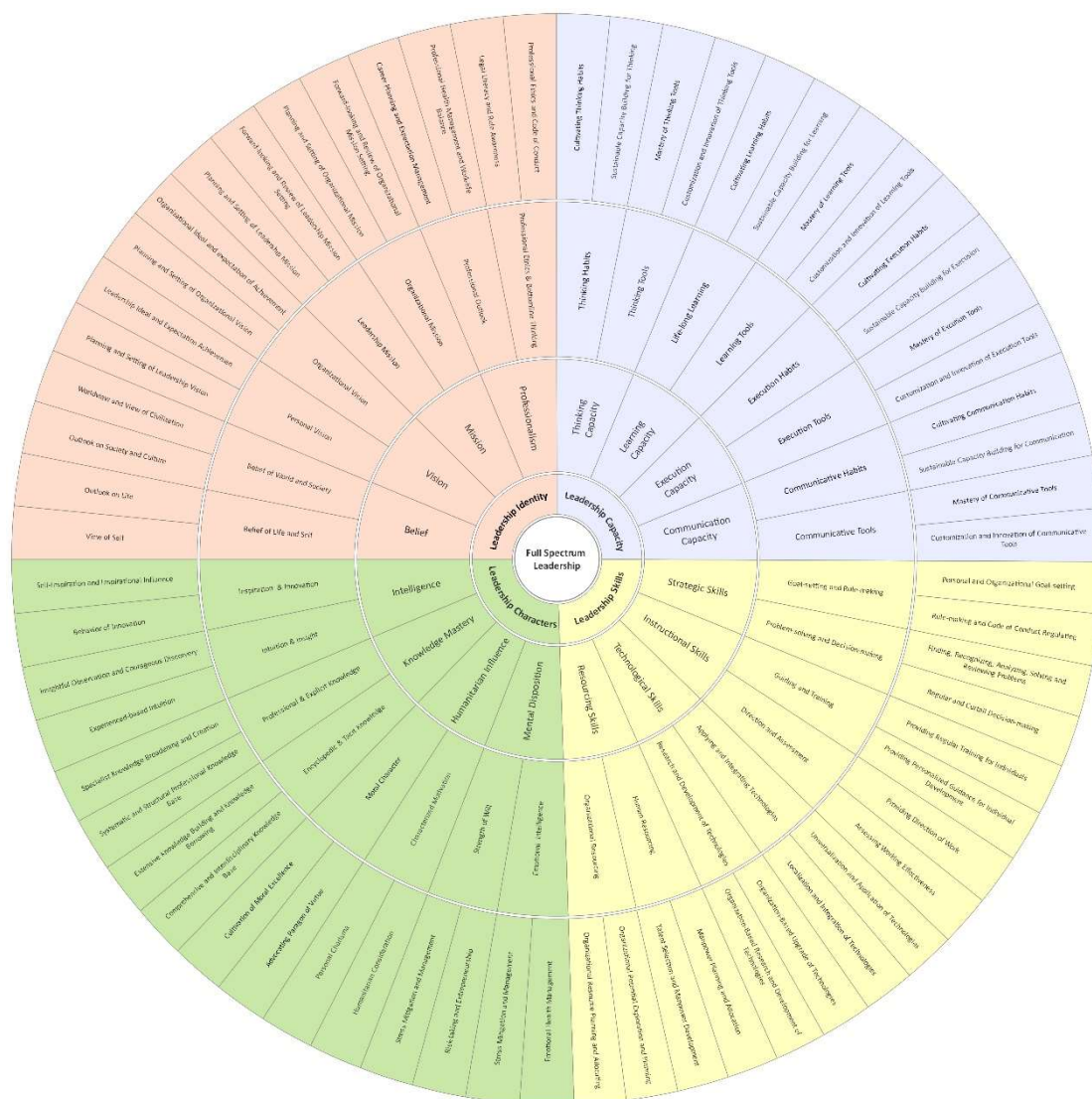


Diagram 7.7 The Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM)

The four primary spectrums that form the foundation of leadership in this study are identity, capacity, skills, and character. Within each spectrum, the researcher further divides them into four first-level, eight second-level, and sixteen third-level components, based on an understanding of specific characteristics and requirements of school leaders. The objective is to comprehensively depict the elements closely related to school development, the professional growth of school leaders and teachers, and the holistic development of students.

The first component of the spectrum is leadership identity, encompassing beliefs, visions, missions, and professional qualities (see Diagram 7.8). Analysis of CHP principals' leadership mindsets and practices reveals the pivotal role of their visions, missions, beliefs, and professional qualities in fostering consensus among diverse groups within the school,

continually influencing and inspiring them, and earning their trust, support, and understanding. Additionally, principals' professional perspectives significantly influence their identity and positioning as leaders. Furthermore, principals' perspectives on the world and themselves inform their leadership mindset and ultimately manifest in tangible impacts on the school through their leadership practices.

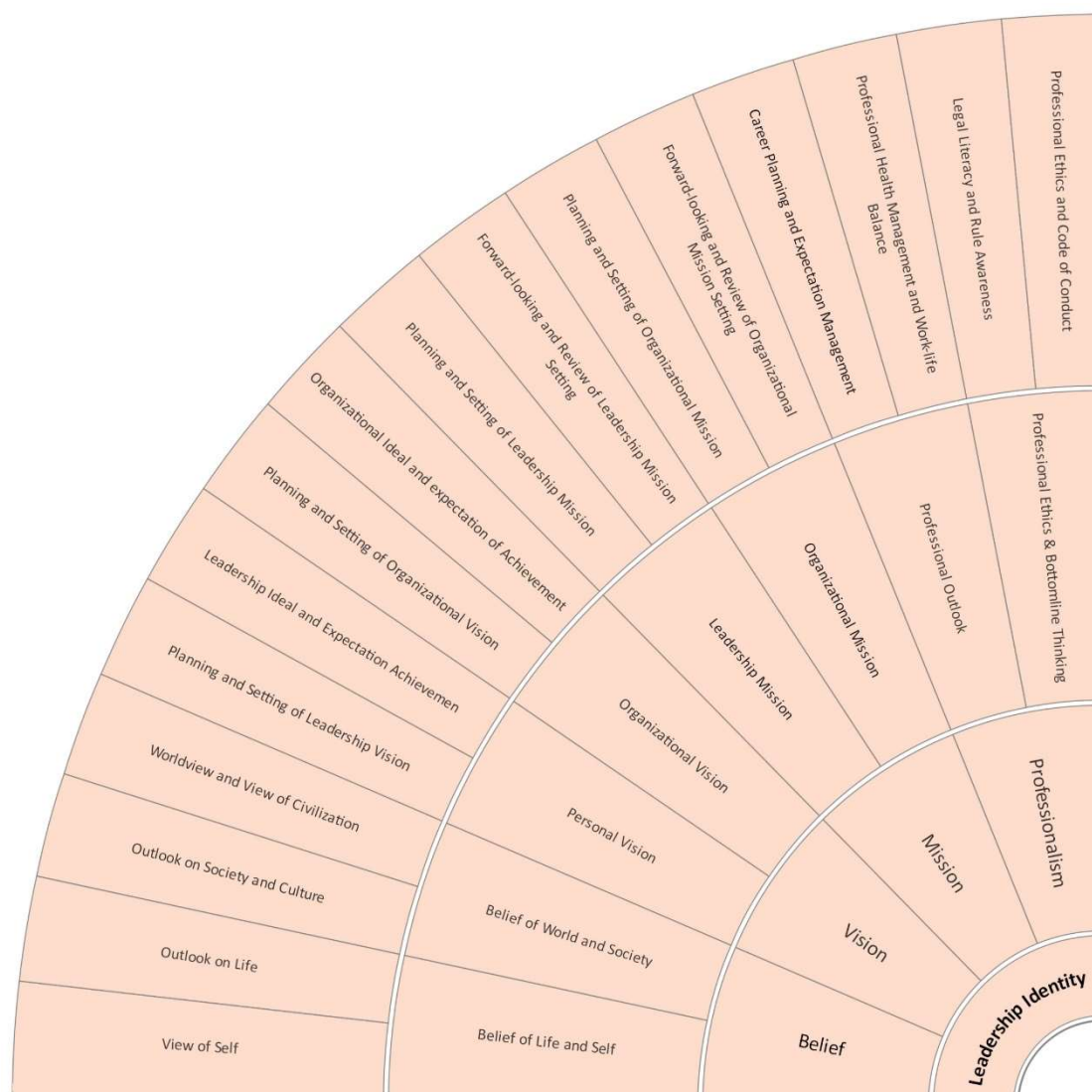


Diagram 7.8 The Spectrum of leadership Identity

The second component of the spectrum is leadership capacity, encompassing core skills such as thinking, learning, executing, and communicating (see Diagram 7.9). These skills play a critical role in a school leader's daily work. Whether making decisions, planning, evaluating, or communicating with teachers, students, and families, principals need a robust set of skills to accomplish these tasks. The successful leadership cases of CHP principals demonstrate that they cannot take a static approach to their skills; rather, they must continuously improve,

cultivate the habit of using their skills, and create tools for further development. The researcher argues that only leaders committed to continuous capacity development can effectively address the dynamic social environment, family needs, and the diverse challenges and issues faced by the school.



Diagram 7.9 The Spectrum of Leadership Capacity

The third component of the spectrum classifies leadership skills, encompassing four core skills: strategic skills, instructional skills, technological skills, and resource skills (see Diagram 7.10). These leadership skills are also considered essential for school leaders in their daily work. By analyzing the successful goal-setting, path-planning, task-execution, and rule-making of CHP principals, the researcher contends that effective principals should systematically apply these skills in school management to achieve comprehensive and systematic development and reform. Additionally, principals' own beliefs, aspirations,

missions, thought processes, and practical tools also disseminate and influence school members in the process of leading teachers and students. Furthermore, the researcher contends that the use of modern technology and the full integration of various resources from within and outside the school to efficiently promote and accomplish various school tasks align with the current societal demands on principals. The success of CHP principals also validates the necessity of these two skills.



Diagram 7.10 The Spectrum of Leadership Skills

The fourth component of the spectrum encompasses the leader's character, with four core characteristics: intelligence, knowledge, humanistic influence, and mental dispositions (see Diagram 7.11). The researcher believes that these core characteristics are essential for promoting sustainable school development and effective problem-solving. School leaders should possess both wisdom and knowledge, and in this study, CHP principals demonstrate

multidisciplinary knowledge, keen insight, and an innovative spirit that dares to take risks and embrace change. Additionally, principals' role as moral exemplars and their humanitarian consideration are critical to earning the trust and support of school members while promoting ethical development and maintaining high moral standards within the school. Moreover, the mental attributes of principals serve as a pillar to withstand pressure, adversity, and challenges. They must be able to make difficult decisions, cope with psychological stress, maintain emotional and mental well-being, and remain steadfast in the face of risks and uncertainties to ensure the successful implementation of the school's medium- to long-term plans.

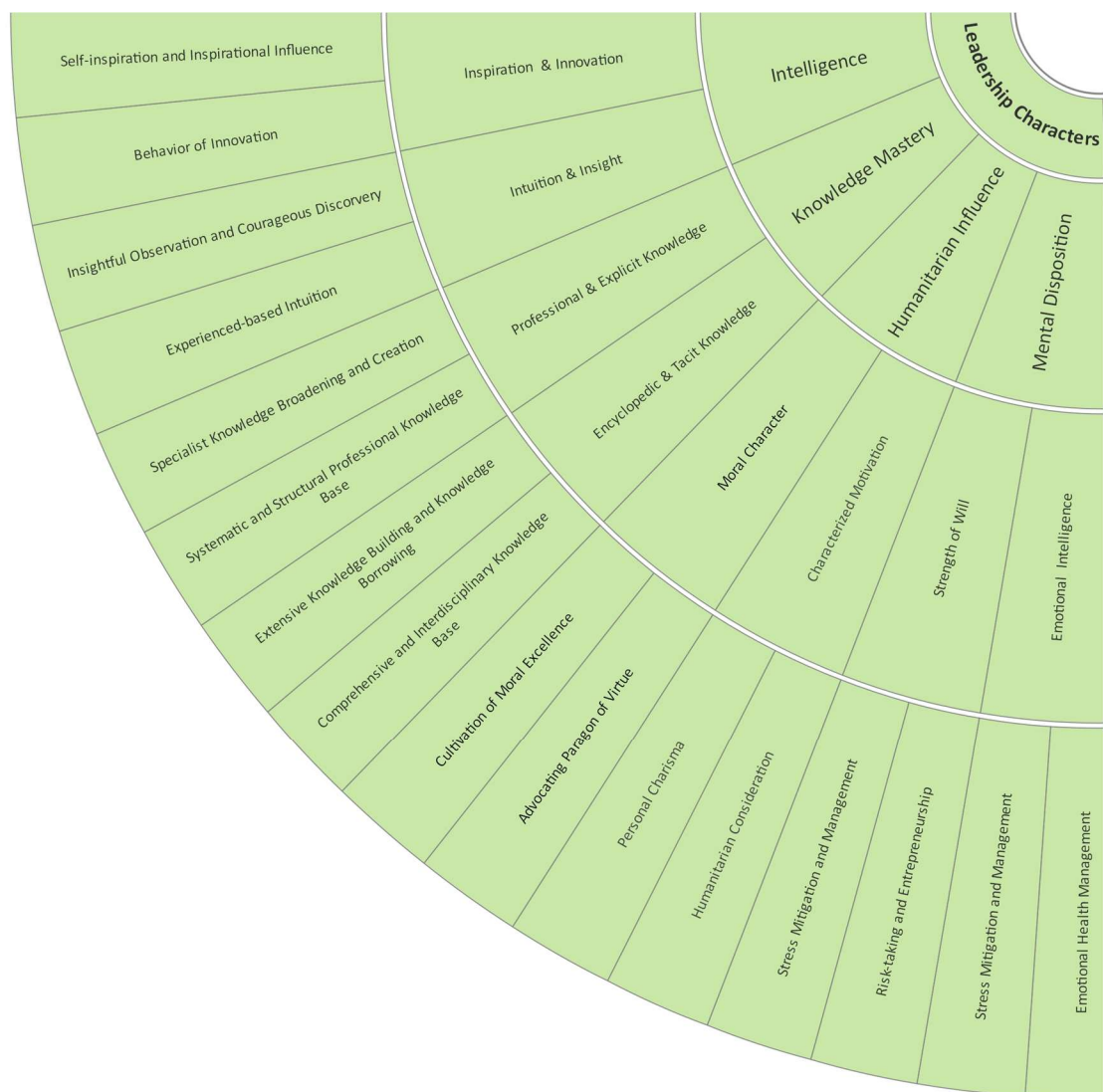


Diagram 7.11 The Spectrum of Leadership Characters

As illustrated above, the four spectrums constitute all the core components of the researcher's "Full Spectrum Leadership" model. The model not only incorporates core ideas

from mainstream educational leadership models that emerged in Western societies and education systems, such as distributed leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, and cultural leadership, but also reflects critical factors that contribute to the success and high effectiveness of school leadership models in the context of Chinese society and education systems. Thus, this “full-spectrum leadership” model, abstracted from school management practices and synthesized with core concepts from existing leadership models, has a certain feasibility as a research tool for school leadership and as a theoretical tool to inspire school management.

The Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM) encapsulates a holistic approach to educational leadership, uniquely synthesizing key elements from established leadership theories. This model was conceptualized from the observed successful leadership practices at Churchill Primary School (CHP) and integrates transformational, distributed, cultural, instructional, and other leadership theories into a cohesive framework.

Transformational leadership, as described by Bass and Avolio (1994), involves inspiring and intellectually stimulating staff and students to achieve higher levels of performance. This model emphasizes four key components: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Transformational leaders create a shared vision, encourage innovation, and support personal and professional growth (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). However, a limitation of transformational leadership is its potential over-reliance on the charisma and vision of individual leaders, which can lead to challenges in sustainability if the leader departs (Bass, 1985). At Churchill Primary School, Principal Suie and Vice-Principal Yi embody transformational leadership by fostering an environment of continuous improvement and high morale among teachers and students. For example, Principal Suie regularly communicates an inspiring future vision during school assemblies, motivating the school community to strive for higher levels of achievement. The FSLM builds on this by ensuring that the inspiration and motivation extend beyond individual leaders, embedding these qualities into the school’s culture and practices, thus mitigating the dependency on singular charismatic figures.

Distributed leadership, as Harris (2010) suggests, views leadership as a practice spread across various members of the organization, rather than residing in a single individual. This model emphasizes collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective responsibility

(Spillane, 2006). It positively impacts schools by fostering a sense of ownership among staff and promoting innovative practices through diverse inputs (Gronn, 2002). However, distributed leadership can sometimes lead to a lack of clear accountability and decision-making inertia. At Churchill Primary, distributed leadership is demonstrated through collaborative planning sessions and shared leadership roles among teachers and administrators. For instance, during the planning sessions for the new interdisciplinary curriculum, differing opinions on the curriculum's focus areas were addressed through structured workshops, leading to a balanced approach that incorporated both science and arts integration. The FSLM incorporates these principles, ensuring that leadership responsibilities are balanced with clear roles and accountability structures, thereby addressing the potential downsides of distributed leadership.

Cultural leadership involves understanding and integrating the cultural contexts within which a school operates. Schein (2010) emphasizes that cultural leaders shape and influence the values, beliefs, and norms of their organizations. This model is particularly relevant in multicultural settings where diverse cultural backgrounds must be acknowledged and respected (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Cultural leadership can sometimes be limited by the complexity of managing diverse cultural expectations. At Churchill Primary School, leaders like Principal Suie effectively integrate cultural responsiveness into their leadership practices, promoting an inclusive school environment. The FSLM expands on this by providing strategies to adapt leadership practices to different cultural contexts, ensuring that leaders can navigate and leverage cultural diversity effectively. For example, Principal Suie initiated cultural competency workshops that are mandatory for all new and existing staff, equipping the faculty with the skills needed to effectively navigate and embrace the multicultural landscape of the school.

Instructional leadership focuses on the core activities of teaching and learning. Hallinger (2003) describes instructional leaders as those who prioritize curriculum, teaching quality, and student achievement. This model is effective in directly improving educational outcomes but can be narrow in scope, sometimes neglecting broader organizational and community aspects (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). At Churchill Primary, Vice-Principal Tung emphasizes instructional leadership through professional development programs and instructional innovations. For instance, Tung's initiative to host workshops on innovative pedagogies directly encourages teachers to adopt new and effective educational methods,

such as project-based learning, which align with modern educational standards and the specific needs of students. The FSLM incorporates instructional leadership while also addressing broader strategic and organizational aspects, ensuring a well-rounded approach to school leadership.

Each of these leadership models has its strengths, but also limitations when applied in isolation. Transformational leadership can create dependency on individual leaders; distributed leadership can result in blurred accountability; cultural leadership can be complex to manage; and instructional leadership can be overly focused on academics at the expense of other important areas. The Full Spectrum Leadership Model integrates the best elements of these models while addressing their limitations. By combining transformational, distributed, cultural, and instructional leadership into a cohesive framework, the FSLM ensures a balanced approach that enhances overall school effectiveness.

The successful leadership practices at Churchill Primary School demonstrate the practical application and benefits of the FSLM. For instance, the school's leadership team exemplifies transformational leadership through their inspirational vision and commitment to professional development, distributed leadership through shared decision-making processes, cultural leadership by fostering an inclusive environment, and instructional leadership by prioritizing teaching quality. These integrated practices have contributed to Churchill Primary's success, making the FSLM a valuable framework for other schools to adopt.

The versatility of the FSLM lies in its adaptability to different educational contexts. While the model is derived from practices within a high-performing Chinese school, its foundational principles are universally applicable, addressing leadership behaviors that promote effective school management and positive school cultures worldwide. This adaptability is supported by the model's alignment with global leadership theories, which suggest that effective leadership transcends cultural boundaries, adapting to local contexts while maintaining core leadership values (Northouse, 2018).

The development of leadership capabilities as outlined in the FSLM can be sequential or adaptive, depending on the specific needs and strategic goals of the school. The model encourages school leaders to develop competencies in various domains of leadership progressively. This progressive development allows leaders to build on their existing

strengths while addressing areas for improvement, creating a balanced and effective leadership profile. According to Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, and Leithwood (2009), effective leadership development involves a combination of formal training, experiential learning, and reflective practice. By adopting a sequential approach, school leaders can systematically enhance their skills in areas such as strategic planning, instructional oversight, and community engagement. Alternatively, the adaptive approach of the FSLM allows leaders to prioritize and focus on specific competencies that are most relevant to their immediate challenges and long-term objectives. This flexibility is particularly important in dynamic educational environments where leaders must respond to evolving demands and unforeseen circumstances.

The FSLM is designed to be dynamic, allowing for the rapid integration of new educational trends and technologies. Fullan (2014) emphasizes that effective leadership in education requires continuous development and the ability to adapt to changing contexts. The FSLM supports this by encouraging leaders to stay abreast of emerging trends such as digital learning, data-driven decision-making, and innovative pedagogical practices. The model promotes a culture of lifelong learning among school leaders, fostering an environment where they are equipped to implement and manage technological advancements effectively. This dynamic approach ensures that leaders are not only responsive to current educational trends but also proactive in anticipating future developments, thereby maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of their leadership practices.

While the FSLM is applicable in both Chinese and Western contexts, it recognizes the importance of cultural nuances in leadership practices. Hofstede (1980) argues that cultural dimensions significantly influence organizational behavior and leadership styles. The FSLM advocates for cultural sensitivity, urging leaders to adapt their strategies to reflect the values, expectations, and needs of their specific educational communities. This involves understanding the cultural backgrounds of students, staff, and the wider community, and integrating this understanding into leadership practices. In a Chinese context, this might involve emphasizing collectivist values and community-oriented approaches, while in Western contexts, it could mean fostering individualism and innovation. By being culturally responsive, the FSLM ensures that leadership practices are not only effective but also respectful and inclusive of the diverse cultural landscapes within which schools operate.

The FSLM helps different groups of people in various ways. For school leaders, it provides a comprehensive framework that guides them in developing a wide range of leadership competencies, enabling them to address diverse challenges effectively. For teachers, the model promotes an environment of professional growth and collaboration, enhancing their teaching practices and job satisfaction. Students benefit from the FSLM through improved educational outcomes and a supportive learning environment fostered by effective leadership. Parents and the broader community are also positively impacted, as the model encourages inclusive practices and strong school-community partnerships, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for student success.

However, FSLM also has its limitations. Implementing such a comprehensive model requires significant time, resources, and commitment from all stakeholders. The complexity of integrating multiple leadership theories into a single framework can be challenging, especially in schools with limited capacity for extensive professional development. Additionally, the effectiveness of the FSLM largely depends on the willingness of school leaders to embrace continuous learning and adaptation. Resistance to change or a lack of cultural sensitivity can hinder the successful application of the model. Despite these limitations, the FSLM provides a valuable guide for developing effective, adaptable, and culturally responsive educational leadership.

In conclusion, the Full Spectrum Leadership Model offers a robust framework for understanding and implementing effective leadership in educational settings. By integrating multiple leadership theories and emphasizing adaptability and comprehensive development, it prepares school leaders to meet both current and future educational challenges, ensuring sustained school improvement and success.

7.4 Leadership Dynamics at Churchill Primary School: A Multifaceted Perspective

This section synthesizes the various leadership models exemplified by Churchill Primary School (CHP) principals, underlining the practical manifestations of these models as

discussed in earlier chapters, and provides a theoretical framework for their integration and effectiveness.

At Churchill Primary School, the integration and application of distinct leadership models—transformational, distributed, cultural, moral, and instructional—demonstrate a dynamic approach to educational leadership. Each model, as employed by the school’s principals, enhances the strategic goals of the school while fostering an inclusive and effective educational environment. These models are not only pivotal in influencing school culture and academic performance but also in aligning the school community towards common strategic goals, thereby enhancing both individual and collective educational outcomes.

The transformational leadership model, characterized by its ability to inspire and intellectually stimulate, is vividly manifested through the actions and communications of principals like Suie, Tung, and Yi. This leadership style is complemented by the distributed leadership approach, which integrates traditional Chinese philosophical principles to emphasize ethical governance, reflecting a harmonious blend of Eastern and Western paradigms.

Furthermore, instructional leadership focuses on the continuous improvement of teaching practices and student engagement, ensuring that Churchill Primary remains at the cutting edge of educational innovation. Together, these leadership models create a robust framework that not only supports but actively drives the school’s mission to foster an environment of comprehensive excellence and inclusivity.

This holistic approach not only aligns with the theoretical constructs explored in earlier chapters but also positions Churchill Primary as a beacon of effective leadership practices, setting a benchmark for how schools can integrate diverse leadership styles to meet the complex demands of contemporary education. This synthesis of cultural, moral, and instructional leadership underpins a strategy that ensures Churchill Primary not only achieves but also sustains excellence in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

In the following subsections, the researcher will explore each leadership model in detail, highlighting specific instances and strategies that exemplify how Churchill Primary’s

leadership team effectively implements these models to enhance educational outcomes and school culture.

7.4.1 Manifested Characteristics of The Transformational Leadership by CHP Principals

Transformational leadership at Churchill Primary School involves practices that inspire, intellectually stimulate, and attentively respond to the individual needs of faculty and students, fostering a robust commitment to the school's strategic goals. This leadership style, pivotal in influencing school culture and academic performance as discussed in Chapters V and VI, is characterized by its four core components: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration.

Principal Suie, known for his charismatic presence, embodies idealized influence by serving as a role model for integrity and commitment. Through his actions and public communications, he inspires trust and admiration, setting a powerful example for both staff and students. His visionary leadership style, characterized by regularly communicating an inspiring future vision during school assemblies, motivates the school community to strive for higher levels of achievement. This method of inspirational motivation aligns closely with Bass and Avolio's (1994) transformational leadership theory, which highlights the leader's ability to articulate a vision that resonates with the followers' aspirations.

During key events and through regular communications, Principal Suie articulates this vision, not merely as a formality but as a strategic effort to align the community with the overarching goals of integrating technology and enhancing holistic education. This practice not only motivates but also directs the energy of the staff and students towards common goals, a critical aspect highlighted by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) in their study on the effects of transformational leadership on school outcomes.

Vice-Principal Tung plays a crucial role in promoting intellectual stimulation, another pillar of transformational leadership. He challenges the teaching staff to innovate their instructional practices and encourages them to think critically and creatively about their pedagogies. His initiatives, such as hosting workshops on innovative pedagogies, directly

encourage teachers to adopt new and effective educational methods, such as project-based learning, which align with modern educational standards and the specific needs of students. This practice not only fosters an atmosphere of continuous improvement but is also theoretically grounded in the work of Gumuseli and Ilsev (2010), who argue that transformational leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative.

Individualized consideration is prominently practiced by Vice-Principal Yi through his tailored mentoring program for new teachers. By recognizing and responding to individual teachers' needs for professional growth, Yi ensures that each member of the faculty feels valued and supported. This aligns with Bass's (1985) component of individualized consideration, where transformational leaders offer support and encouragement, fostering an environment where personal and professional growth can thrive. Yi's approach not only aids in the retention of faculty but also enhances their capability to contribute effectively to the school's mission.

The leadership practices at Churchill Primary are not isolated actions but are deeply integrated into the school's culture and operational strategy. These practices reflect the transformational leadership model's emphasis on change and innovation, fostering a climate where school commitment and community involvement are significantly enhanced. According to the meta-analysis by Judge and Piccolo (2004), such leadership practices are linked to higher levels of satisfaction, motivation, and performance.

Moreover, the effects of these leadership actions at Churchill Primary support the findings in Chapter V, where leadership impact on educational innovation is highlighted, and Chapter VI, which discusses the role of leadership in supporting teacher development and retention. The congruence between theory and practice not only substantiates the effectiveness of transformational leadership but also showcases its adaptability and relevance in contemporary educational settings.

In conclusion, the transformational leadership manifested by the principals at Churchill Primary School significantly enhances the educational environment, aligning with both the contemporary educational needs and the personal development of its staff. This approach, underpinned by rigorous theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, demonstrates how

transformational leadership is effectively implemented to meet the complex demands of modern educational leadership.

7.4.2 Distributed Leadership Manifested by CHP Principals

Distributed leadership at Churchill Primary School operates within a framework where leadership responsibilities and decision-making powers are shared among all members of the school leadership team. This model not only includes principals but also teachers and department heads, fostering a sense of collective ownership, accountability, and an enhanced capacity for responsiveness and innovation. This collaborative engagement of multiple actors across different contexts aligns with Spillane's (2006) definition of distributed leadership, which emphasizes the involvement of various stakeholders in the leadership process, extending beyond the confines of formal leadership roles.

At Churchill Primary, decision-making processes are notably inclusive. Strategic planning sessions, for example, demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that every voice is heard, particularly on critical issues such as curriculum changes or technology integration. This inclusive approach resonates with Gronn's (2002) concept of "concertive action," where the concerted efforts of all leaders lead to more coherent and unified leadership actions. The development of a new digital literacy initiative, shaped through collaborative efforts involving not just principals but also key teachers, is a prime example of this, showcasing a shift from more hierarchical Western models that might emphasize top-down decision-making.

Churchill's ability to navigate disagreements constructively is facilitated by traditional Chinese philosophical concepts like "求同存异" (seek common ground while preserving differences) and "君子和而不同" (gentlemen harmonize without conforming). These guiding principles help transform potential conflicts into opportunities for consensus-building, illustrating a nuanced application of distributed leadership that incorporates philosophical depth often absent in Western interpretations.

The roots of Churchill's approach to distributed leadership are also influenced by historical Chinese management philosophies, such as “知人善用” (knowing people, using them wisely), “选贤任能” (selecting the virtuous and appointing the capable), and “不拘一格降人才” (not confining talents to conventional standards). These ancient principles, emphasizing leadership based on individual morality and capability rather than hierarchical status, find historical backing in the “*唐书 (Book of Tang)*”, which states, “设官分职, 选贤任能, 得其人则有益于国家, 非其才则贻患于黎庶” (When positions are assigned and roles distributed to the capable and virtuous, it benefits the state; if not, it brings harm to the populace). This emphasizes the critical importance of appropriate role allocation in governance, a practice that predates the formal theorization of distributed leadership and highlights a culturally specific adaptation of these principles at Churchill.

In conclusion, the distributed leadership model at Churchill Primary School not only aligns with but also significantly expands upon the widely recognized definitions found in Western educational leadership literature. By integrating traditional Chinese management philosophies, Churchill's leadership practices showcase a culturally enriched and philosophically robust approach. This model not only enhances the school's organizational structure and decision-making efficacy but also sets a benchmark for integrating culturally rooted leadership philosophies with contemporary educational demands, leading to improved educational outcomes and a dynamic, inclusive educational environment.

7.4.3 Cultural, Moral, and Instructional Leadership Manifested by CHP Principals

At Churchill Primary School, cultural leadership under Principal Suie focuses on integrating diverse cultural dynamics to foster an inclusive environment. Initiatives like cultural competency workshops support Edgar Schein's (2010) model, which emphasizes that leaders play a crucial role in actively shaping organizational culture. These efforts are complemented by the school's annual International Day, which allows students and teachers to showcase their cultural backgrounds, promoting global citizenship and cultural appreciation. This not only supports academic learning about various cultures but also fosters a deeper sense of community and mutual respect among students.

Building on this foundation of cultural inclusivity, Principal Suie, along with Vice-Principals Chang and Leao, is extending the school's cultural values into the broader community with the long-term goal of spreading Churchill Primary's "love and beauty culture." This initiative aims to enhance societal cohesion and cultural appreciation by hosting community events and public workshops, making a lasting impact on the surrounding area and demonstrating a commitment to leadership that transcends the confines of the school.

Transitioning from cultural to moral leadership, Vice-Principal Yi champions a values-based educational framework that integrates ethical considerations into all school activities. This framework mirrors James Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory, which underscores the importance of ethical standards in leadership. Yi, supported by Tung, Lou, and Gane, insists that all adults at the school should serve as moral exemplars for the students. This philosophy is actualized through the establishment of clear guidelines, rules, and practical procedures that train teachers and guide parents to model desirable ethical behaviors, ensuring that moral leadership is manifested in everyday interactions and decisions within the school community.

Further enhancing Churchill's leadership approach is the instructional leadership primarily led by Vice-Principal Tung, who focuses on actively improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Tung's commitment is demonstrated through regular workshops and classroom observations that promote instructional innovation, aligning with Philip Hallinger's (1983) framework. Additionally, principals like Tung, Yi, Gane, and Yao, who teach subjects, actively participate in professional development programs aimed at teaching excellence. Their involvement sets a powerful example for their staff and demonstrates a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

This commitment extends to integrating the latest educational technologies and innovative teaching methods, crucial for improving teaching effectiveness and continuously developing student engagement. By employing cutting-edge educational practices, these leaders ensure that Churchill Primary remains at the forefront of educational innovation, significantly enhancing the learning experience for all students.

In conclusion, the comprehensive leadership framework at Churchill Primary, encompassing cultural, moral, and instructional models, significantly influences the school's operational

and cultural ethos. Each leadership model, integrated into practical applications, ensures that Churchill Primary not only meets but exceeds contemporary educational demands, setting a standard for effective and holistic school leadership.

7.5 Conclusion

Chapter VII has provided an in-depth examination of the leadership practices at Churchill Primary School (CHP), focusing on the alignment between leadership traits, practices, and the school's values and objectives. This exploration reveals the complexity and effectiveness of educational leadership in this high-performing primary school in urban Southwest China.

The shared leadership traits among CHP principals, including their systematic and rule-based thinking, democratic and meritocratic adherence, and pragmatic approach, have been instrumental in maintaining high standards and fostering an environment that supports both academic excellence and personal development. These traits have significantly contributed to the school's operational efficacy and have cultivated a nurturing atmosphere for students and staff.

Moreover, the principals' leadership practices are closely aligned with the school's strategic vision and mission. Their commitment to moral integrity, democratic participation, and holistic education has not only enhanced the school's effectiveness but also ensured that the community's needs are addressed. This alignment underscores the importance of integrating leadership traits with institutional goals to create a cohesive and supportive educational environment.

A significant contribution of this research is the introduction of the Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM). This original framework integrates elements from transformational, distributed, and cultural leadership theories, offering a comprehensive approach tailored to the unique cultural and societal context of urban Southwest China. The model's flexibility and adaptability illustrate how CHP principals effectively blend traditional values with modern educational leadership practices, fostering an inclusive and dynamic leadership environment. This integration of various leadership elements highlights the potential for the FSLM to serve as a valuable tool for educational leaders in diverse contexts.

The Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM) has demonstrated its adaptability in responding to the dynamic and rapidly changing educational environment. This adaptability is particularly crucial in the context of digital learning and data-driven decision-making (Fullan, 2014). At Churchill Primary, the leadership team's proactive integration of new teaching methods and technologies illustrates this flexibility. The ability to remain responsive to emerging trends and innovations, while maintaining the school's educational objectives, underscores the FSLM's effectiveness in fostering a future-oriented and resilient educational leadership approach.

In addition to framing the FSLM, this research proposes two additional "I"s for the transformational leadership model: Increased Consensus and Integrated Resources. Increased Consensus emphasizes the importance of building a collective agreement and shared vision among all stakeholders, thereby enhancing cohesion and unity within the school community. Integrated Resources focuses on the strategic utilization and coordination of resources to maximize educational outcomes and support innovative practices within the school. These additions expand the transformational leadership model, making it more comprehensive and applicable to a broader range of educational settings.

Further enriching the discussion, the research maps the circulation and flow mechanisms of distributed leadership. By offering a visual representation, it elucidates the complex interplay of leadership activities within the school. This visualization enhances the comprehensibility and practical utility of distributed leadership by clearly depicting how leadership tasks and responsibilities are shared and enacted in real-time. Such mapping is vital for understanding the dynamic and collaborative nature of leadership in an educational setting.

The concept of Consensus and Rule-based Systematic Distributed Leadership is also introduced. It reflects how leadership distribution at CHP is systematically organized based on consensus and established rules. This approach ensures that leadership practices are democratic, fair, and efficient, promoting a stable and productive educational environment.

This chapter has engaged extensively with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, reflecting on the identified gaps and how this research addresses them. The lack of visualized models for distributed leadership is addressed by providing explicit visual representations, enhancing understanding and practical application. The limited adaptation of Western leadership

models to Chinese contexts is critically assessed, leading to the development of culturally relevant leadership frameworks. The underexplored impact of cultural nuances is integrated into the leadership models, ensuring their applicability and effectiveness in non-Western settings. Lastly, the insufficient research on leadership in Southwest China is mitigated by providing localized insights, contributing to the global discourse on educational management and leadership.

Reflecting on these contributions, the importance of cultural and contextual nuances in shaping effective leadership practices is further emphasized. The ability to adapt and respond to the changing educational landscape is crucial for sustaining leadership impacts and ensuring continuous improvement in educational practices. This research underscores the need for educational leaders to remain flexible and responsive to their specific cultural and contextual demands.

In conclusion, the leadership at Churchill Primary School exemplifies a dynamic and adaptive approach that successfully integrates personal leadership traits with institutional goals. The principals' practices provide a robust model for effective educational leadership, characterized by a continuous cycle of reflection, adaptation, and improvement. The Full Spectrum Leadership Model, the proposed additional "I"s for transformational leadership, and the visualized mechanism of distributed leadership collectively offer valuable insights into how leadership can be both a deeply personal and profoundly communal endeavor.

While this research provides significant insights into leadership practices at CHP and proposes the Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM), it is important to acknowledge several potential limitations. Implementing the FSLM, particularly in diverse educational contexts, may present challenges related to time, resource allocation, and the need for ongoing professional development. Additionally, cultural sensitivity and the adaptability of leadership models to specific socio-cultural contexts remain crucial. Future research could further explore these aspects to ensure the FSLM's broader applicability and long-term effectiveness.

This research explores the applicability and scalability of these original contributions in other educational contexts. The findings from this chapter provide a solid foundation for studies aimed at enhancing educational outcomes through effective and culturally responsive

leadership practices. By building on these insights, research can further validate and expand the utility of the Full Spectrum Leadership Model, the enhanced transformational leadership model, and the visualized distributed leadership mechanism, potentially influencing educational leadership on a global scale.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presents a comprehensive overview of the entire thesis, which is divided into five parts. The first section consists of a thorough review and summary of the key aspects of this thesis, reiterating the research design, objectives, and findings of the study. In the second section, the researcher addresses the three research questions that were the focus of this study. In section three, the researcher discusses the significance of this research within the field of educational leadership studies and its implications for school leadership practitioners. Moving forward, in the fourth section, the researcher candidly outlines the limitations of this study. Finally, the researcher provides recommendations for future research efforts in related areas.

8.1 Summary of this Research

This study adopts bounded realism as its ontology and constructivism as its epistemological stance, utilizing a case study methodology that involves semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation as research methods. It centers on principals in high-level public schools within China's compulsory education system, aiming to explore leadership mindsets, practices, and their impact on schools. The research identifies shared traits and leadership patterns among successful principals, contributing valuable insights for educational leadership research and school management practitioners.

During the research design phase, the researcher established contact with education authorities and public schools in two regions of southwest China. Through communication with local education authorities, information was obtained about top-performing primary and secondary schools. Research invitations were sent to potential research areas and subjects through a network of school principals, and schools willing to participate were included in a random selection pool, with the participating school chosen through random sampling.

The selected subject of this study is Churchill Primary School (CHP), a large-scale primary school with three campuses, eight principals, over 3200 students, and more than 250 employees. After confirming that CHP met the study's criteria, such as high academic achievement, comprehensive student development, and high levels of teacher performance and parent satisfaction, the researcher chose to investigate principal leadership at CHP.

The researcher provided comprehensive explanations of the research process, personal information protection measures, and security of research data storage and usage to CHP principals. After informing the principals about the study's purpose, ethical provisions, potential risks, and procedures, and obtaining permission and consent from all research participants, fieldwork was conducted at the school from February to December 2021.

As described in the research design, this study uses a case study method that integrates semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation to collect data. Before commencing fieldwork at CHP, initial interviews with the principals were conducted to gain preliminary insights into various aspects of the school. During the observation period, involving the daily activities of CHP principals at the school's three campuses, the researcher conducted interviews to discuss research topics, interesting phenomena, and identified problems. Retrospective interviews were conducted with the principals at the end of the two academic terms in 2021 to gather perspectives on the term's work and validate the school's phased objectives' achievement. Through interviews and observations, extensive data and reflections on leadership mindsets, practices, and impact on the school were collected, organized, categorized, cleansed, and analyzed.

The findings suggest that CHP principals share common traits. They possess a strong sense of mission, morality, and professional ethics at the leadership mindset level, emphasizing care for school members and providing intellectual guidance. In terms of leadership practices, they adeptly use systemic and rule-based thinking, value the democratic system, democratic centralism, and meritocracy, while maintaining scientific and pragmatic approaches. Their consistency between mindset and practice as role models garners understanding, trust, and support from school members, families, and social organizations.

The study also identifies shared patterns in the leadership model at CHP. The school's operation and management are influenced by the moral model and vision of its leaders,

fostering unity and cooperation among various groups within and outside the school, aligned with the same vision and mission. Internally, the school's management is strongly influenced by systemic and rule-based thinking, with adherence to rules and operating procedures. The management team innovates and updates rules to improve work efficiency. The democratic system and spirit significantly impact the school's management and operation, promoting consensus among individuals and groups regarding the school's vision, mission, and tasks, while enhancing efficiency, transparency, accountability, and supervision through democratic mechanisms and meritocratic systems.

Based on principals' leadership mindset, practices, and their impact on the school, and employing distributed leadership and transformational leadership models as investigative perspectives, this study suggests that both models, originating from the 20th century, need further development and modification to respond to 21st-century social changes and to be appropriately applied to school leadership practices in diverse cultural, social, and institutional contexts. The study proposes that effective distributed leadership relies on systemic organizational design, internal consensus, and ideal distribution of leadership functions in a cyclical manner. Additionally, two new "I" elements, "increased consensus," and "integrated resources," are added to transformational leadership, reflecting changing demands and the need for leaders to facilitate school development and reform.

Furthermore, based on the successful school leadership findings at CHP, this research constructs the "Full Spectrum Leadership" model. This model outlines the ideal identity, capabilities, skills, and characteristics of a full-spectrum leader and provides a possible pathway to explore leadership mindsets, practices, and impact, serving as a research instrument in educational leadership studies.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreaks and restrictive policies significantly affected the conduct of this study. This was further aggravated by health issues associated with the researcher's contraction of COVID-19 and other misfortunes. As a result, the progress of the study and the researcher's work status were disrupted. To mitigate these unforeseen challenges, a leave of absence was taken to ensure that the researcher's health issues did not compromise the study. Ethical and national guidelines were strictly adhered to, regulating access to schools during the pandemic. These measures aimed to uphold the study's integrity and maintain its quality amidst the unavoidable disruptions.

8.2 Response to the Research Questions

This study addresses three sets of research questions to gain insights into the leadership mindset, practices, and impact of successful principals in China's compulsory education system:

1. What constitutes the leadership mindsets of principals, and how does it reflect their leadership traits?
2. What are the leadership practices employed by principals, and how do these practices demonstrate their leadership traits?
3. What is the impact of principals on their schools, and how does it reflect specific leadership patterns?

After conducting in-depth exploration and analysis of the leadership mindset, practices, and impact of CHP principals, the researcher comprehensively addresses these three research questions in subsequent sections.

8.2.1 Response to Research Question One

To address research question one, this study examines the leadership mindset of successful principals, which includes three dimensions: educational beliefs, leadership concepts, and leadership principles. These dimensions also reveal common traits among principals.

1. Leadership Beliefs: Principals collectively pursue the educational vision of "love and beauty," seeking comprehensive student development, fostering a culture of lifelong learning, contributing to a learning society and the revival of the Chinese nation, ultimately fostering

the common prosperity of human society, and working towards the realization of communism as their mission.

2. Leadership Conceptions: Principals view themselves as moral and professional role models, leading schools toward development, transformation, and success. In addition, they serve as supervisors and mentors to teachers, students, and families. By modeling their vision, mission, and roles, they influence a broader community. Principals see their influence manifested in setting goals, overcoming challenges, establishing standards and rules, improving school performance through transformational leadership, and achieving sustainable development by motivating, guiding, and caring for all school members.

3. Leadership Guidelines: Principals dedicate themselves to the cause of education as the supreme guiding principle of their leadership. They advocate the promotion and practice of socialist values as their political stance and adhere to respect for science and objective facts as their code of conduct. They strive for excellence and uphold principles that safeguard children's well-beings and facilitate all-round development, placing great emphasis on aligning words with actions.

4. Leadership Traits: Principals demonstrate a deep sense of vision and mission, great enthusiasm, and a willingness to dedicate themselves to the cause of education. They also exhibit strong moral and professional ethics. These common traits exert significant moral and spiritual influence on various groups inside and outside the school, uniting diverse stakeholders in their consensus on school sustainability through transformation and the pursuit of "love and beauty. As a result, they gain understanding, support, trust, and assistance from inside and outside the school community.

8.2.2 Response to Research Question Two

In response to research question two, this study provides insights into the leadership practices of principals in high-performing schools in China's compulsory education system. These practices are analyzed across three dimensions: leadership practice setting, routine

leadership practices, and leadership practice impact. These dimensions reveal common leadership traits that principals exhibited in their daily work.

1. **Leadership Practice Setting:** Principals formulate short-, medium-, and long-term tasks based on the school's vision, mission, and national and local education policies. Consensus is sought on the content and difficulty of the tasks. In addition, school leaders establish common leadership guidelines for all administrators, including the principal. They also create and implement mechanisms for democratic supervision and accountability.
2. **Leadership Practice Routine:** Principals follow a combination of democratic centralism and meritocracy. Through democratic discussion and consultation, they gain a comprehensive understanding of the tasks' requirements, challenges, goals, and implications. Emphasizing meritocracy and democratic centralism, they ensure that competent individuals are appointed to suitable positions and act with accountability and oversight. Principals actively participate in the implementation, supervision, and evaluation of tasks and foster collaboration among school staff, students, families, and external partners to achieve common goals. In addition, they strive to mobilize all available resources to support teacher professional development, comprehensive student growth, and the establishment of various systems to ensure task efficiency. Principals also prioritize the well-being of teachers, students, and families and actively engage in the school's social responsibility.
3. **Leadership Practice Impact:** School leaders have made remarkable progress in areas such as faculty team building, professional development, and improving the overall quality and well-being of students. However, they also face challenges related to systematic overwork, pervasive professional burnout, and divergent perspectives and ideas among different groups and individuals.
4. **Leadership Traits:** The study identifies common leadership traits demonstrated by principals, including their adoption of systems thinking and rule-based thinking as guiding cognitive tools for daily school management. They also disseminate these tools to teachers and students to improve the effectiveness of various school operations. Principals prioritize democratic decision-making and meritocratic selection and apply these principles in daily analysis, planning, decision-making, and problem-solving processes to build consensus and foster unity and collaboration within the school.

8.2.3 Response to Research Question Three

In response to research question three, the study's findings indicate that the leadership of successful principals in three dimensions: morality and vision, systems and rules, and democracy and meritocracy, has a significant positive impact on schools. At the same time, however, their work to some extent increases internal problems such as overwork, professional burnout, and ideological conflict within the school.

1. Impact of Morality and Vision: Principals strive to be moral and professional role models that embody their values, aspirations, and educational mission and vision. Their positive behaviors resonate with various stakeholders inside and outside the school, earning their appreciation and support.

2. Impact of Systems and Rules: Principals consistently use systematic thinking and promote this cognitive approach throughout the school to facilitate evidence-based decision making, problem solving, and other actions. They also promote rule-based thinking among administrators and teachers at different levels of the hierarchy, encouraging compliance, innovative, responsive, and timely rule-making, as well as rule modification based on any situational shifts that lead to changes in requirements.

3. Impact of Democracy and Meritocracy: Principals establish, optimize, and reform democratic systems and achieve greater attention and broad participation in school management affairs. They increase the efficiency of daily administration by obtaining professional evaluation and accurate feedback from various individuals or groups in the school. Through democratic centralism and meritocracy, they ensure that capable individuals hold appropriate positions and that all actions are subject to democratic oversight and accountability.

4. Dual Impact of School Leaders: On the one hand, principals' high expectations and commitment to education foster a sense of responsibility among teachers. On the other hand, this may increase psychological burdens and stress among colleagues. Furthermore, while some teachers, especially those in the late stages of their careers and experiencing

professional burnout, may not fully embrace the far-reaching ideas advocated by principals, it could magnify ideological differences among different groups.

The above includes the researcher's responses to the three sets of research questions in this study.

8.3 Significance of This research

This section examines the theoretical and practical significance of this research, including the study's design, process, findings, and theoretical contributions to the field of educational leadership. It also explores the implications of the successful principals' leadership in high-performing schools for educational management practices.

8.3.1 Significance for Educational Leadership Research

This study makes a significant contribution to educational leadership research in three key areas. First, it examines and validates the performance characteristics and applicability of current mainstream models of distributed leadership and transformational leadership across diverse national, social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2 discusses the significance of distributed leadership in enhancing collaborative efforts and shared responsibilities among school leaders (Spillane et al., 2004). Transformational leadership, as described in Section 2.2, emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to exceed expectations and align with the shared vision of the organization (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). These models have been applied to analyze the leadership practices at CHP, revealing how the principals effectively utilized both leadership approaches to achieve the school's goals while navigating local cultural contexts.

Second, the research design and implementation employed a combination of semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation, providing an effective and comprehensive methodology for scholars exploring leadership in non-Western and large-scale school

contexts. As noted in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, these methods allow for deep engagement with leadership behaviors and uncover practice gaps—the difference between what leaders say and what they do (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Spillane & Kim, 2012). By applying these methods in a large-scale school in a non-Western setting, this study extends the applicability of these research tools beyond the smaller, Western-centric settings typically examined in the literature. It provides a useful template for future leadership studies in non-Western and high-enrollment educational contexts, particularly in Asia.

Third, the research findings enrich and advance late 20th-century leadership models, such as distributed and transformational leadership, making them more applicable to the challenges of 21st-century educational systems. The introduction of the Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM), which integrates desirable elements from distributed, transformational, cultural, and moral leadership theories, offers a comprehensive framework that enhances both organizational effectiveness and individual leadership development. As noted in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, cultural leadership theory (Walker & Qian, 2015) emphasizes the importance of adapting leadership models to specific cultural contexts. The FSLM reflects this adaptability and flexibility, offering a tool that can be applied in both Eastern and Western social contexts. It bridges gaps between theoretical frameworks and practical application, making it relevant for leadership scholars and practitioners alike.

The Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM) is an original contribution developed by the researcher based on the leadership practices observed at CHP. It synthesizes successful leadership strategies and traits of CHP's leadership team, including the principals' mindsets, practices, impact, and shared traits that have led the school to success. Unlike existing models, the FSLM provides practical guidelines for leaders, addressing limitations in other models such as the distributed leadership model, which has been critiqued for lacking a clear roadmap for distributing influence and resources. FSLM overcomes these shortcomings by defining key elements for effective distribution of power and influence, offering leaders clear guidelines on how to mobilize their colleagues and achieve collective goals. It also emphasizes the distribution of moral influence, linking leadership actions to ethical decision-making.

Furthermore, the Full Spectrum Leadership Model has potential for broader use across various sectors, including corporate, governmental, and non-profit organizations. This

extended relevance is rooted in the model's ability to integrate leadership principles that can be adapted to a wide range of organizational environments, making it a flexible tool for leadership research in diverse fields. As global organizations increasingly navigate multicultural environments, this model provides insights into how leadership practices can evolve to meet the demands of modern organizational challenges, including those related to rapid technological change and the globalization of educational and organizational systems.

The study's primary research lenses—transformational leadership and distributed leadership—served as critical tools for observing, interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating leadership behaviors demonstrated by the principals in Chinese society and educational settings. While the research shows that the leadership demonstrated by CHP principals aligns closely with Western leadership models, such as distributed and transformational leadership, it also highlights the nuanced way in which these principals adapt these models to the Chinese educational system and the specific context of CHP. Chapter 2, Section 2.3 on cultural leadership highlights that leadership is deeply influenced by local cultural contexts, a finding supported by the leadership practices observed in this study (Walker & Qian, 2015).

Suie, the head principal of CHP, shared his views on Western leadership models and the patterns, models, theories, and hypotheses of educational leadership research and practices in China, drawing from his professional experience as an education researcher, teacher, and school leader. He commented, "Great minds think alike," and emphasized that "there are highly similar elements between the development of modern Western educational systems and the post-modernization of Chinese educational systems." According to Suie, these shared elements include "the needs for student growth, teacher professional development, an emphasis on management efficiency, and the importance of values in school impact." His observation reflects the idea that effective school leadership, regardless of geographic or cultural context, tends to converge around core principles of efficiency, values-based management, and developmental goals. Chapter 2, Section 2.2 (Burns, 1978) discusses how transformational leadership often transcends cultural boundaries by focusing on universal principles of inspiring and motivating others to achieve shared goals.

Moreover, the principals interviewed in this study have been exposed to a variety of Western leadership models and theories throughout their professional development and leadership training. They have studied, reflected upon, and even applied these theories and models,

which originated in Western educational systems and research. Despite the similarities between their leadership practices and some Western leadership models, the principals believe that their leadership practices are more closely derived from years of accumulated school leadership experience and the practical challenges of enhancing school management efficiency and solving complex school-related issues. This aligns with the concept of situational leadership, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, where leadership practices must adapt to the specific situations and challenges faced by school leaders (Gronn, 2008; Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

In addition, this study employed a combined method of semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation to provide a dynamic and comprehensive understanding of leadership practices at CHP. These methods allowed the researcher to assess the consistency between principals' actions and their stated leadership philosophies, providing a more direct and effective means of identifying practice gaps and understanding the underlying implications of leadership behaviors. As noted in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, previous studies on school leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Spillane & Kim, 2012) have used similar methods, but the schools studied were predominantly smaller, Western-centric educational environments. This research expands the scope of these methods, demonstrating their effectiveness in a large school within a non-Western society, culture, and educational system. This provides a reference point for future research on school leadership in non-Western contexts, particularly in large enrollment schools in developing regions.

Finally, based on the observed leadership practices at CHP, this research validates, critiques, and extends the distributed and transformational leadership models. In terms of distributed leadership, the researcher acknowledges the traditional view that leadership often emerges organically and may not always be planned or predictable. This emergent nature is a key characteristic of distributed leadership, as noted in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2 (Spillane et al., 2004; Gronn, 2008). However, distributed leadership has also been critiqued for its ambiguity and lack of practical application, as discussed by Bennett et al. (2003) and Mayrowetz (2008) in Chapter 2. This study proposes a refined approach to understanding and applying distributed leadership through the development of visual models that help practitioners conceptualize leadership configurations and interactions more clearly. These visual models enhance the framework's utility by offering clearer guidance for implementing distributed leadership in large, complex schools like CHP.

Regarding transformational leadership, previous research (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Avolio & Bass, 1995) has not thoroughly explored whether this model remains applicable across different eras, cultures, and social systems. Chapter 2, Section 2.2 discusses how transformational leadership has been adapted to modern contexts, but gaps remain in understanding its application to 21st-century schools influenced by globalization, digitalization, and societal change (Day et al., 2016). This research addresses these gaps by revealing how school leadership in China must adapt to respond to these changes, promoting both school development and transformation. The introduction of two new elements for transformational leadership—Increased Consensus and Integrated Resources—helps meet the challenges posed by modern Chinese schools and ensures that leadership models remain relevant in today’s educational landscape.

The Full Spectrum Leadership Model (FSLM), introduced in this study, integrates elements from distributed leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, and cultural leadership. As noted in Chapter 2, this model reflects the leadership practices observed among successful principals at CHP. The FSLM offers a comprehensive framework that responds to the specific challenges faced by school leaders in Confucian-influenced cultures, such as China, while also maintaining applicability to Western educational systems. This model’s integration of distributed leadership allows for shared responsibility and collaboration among school leaders, as discussed by Spillane et al. (2004) in Section 2.1.2. The transformational leadership component, as defined by Bass (1985), emphasizes the importance of vision, inspiration, and motivating staff to pursue the collective goals of the school. The inclusion of moral leadership aligns with the need for ethical decision-making and values-driven leadership, as described by Begley (2001) in Section 2.1.4. This is particularly relevant in the context of China, where societal and cultural expectations place a strong emphasis on the moral conduct of educational leaders.

The cultural leadership component, explored by Walker and Qian (2015) in Section 2.3, acknowledges the role of cultural values in shaping leadership practices, ensuring that leadership approaches are contextually relevant and responsive to the specific needs of the school community. By combining these elements, the FSLM offers a dynamic and adaptable leadership model that can be applied across various educational and organizational settings.

Moreover, the FSLM addresses significant literature gaps identified in Chapter 2, including the need for visualized models that depict the complex flow of leadership activities within a school. The development of visual models for distributed leadership, as proposed by Bennett et al. (2003) and Gronn (2008), offers clearer guidance for school leaders attempting to implement distributed leadership in large schools. This refinement of the distributed leadership model provides a more practical tool for school leaders in both Eastern and Western contexts, particularly in large, complex organizations like CHP. These visual models enhance the clarity and applicability of the distributed leadership framework, addressing critiques of its ambiguity and fuzziness in practical implementation.

In terms of transformational leadership, the FSLM addresses the evolving needs of 21st-century schools, particularly in the context of digitalization and globalization. The introduction of two new elements—Increased Consensus and Integrated Resources—reflects the changing landscape of school leadership. Increased Consensus emphasizes the importance of building collective agreement and shared vision among all stakeholders, which aligns with the transformational leadership focus on fostering a cohesive school culture (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Integrated Resources, on the other hand, underscores the necessity for strategic resource utilization in modern schools, where educational outcomes are increasingly tied to the effective deployment of both human and material resources. These additions to the transformational leadership model ensure its continued relevance in rapidly evolving educational environments.

In conclusion, this study addresses significant gaps in the literature on educational leadership, including the need for more culturally adaptive models of leadership that can be applied in both Western and non-Western contexts. By integrating Western leadership theories with indigenous practices, the study presents a hybrid model of leadership that is both influenced by and distinct from existing Western frameworks. The introduction of the Full Spectrum Leadership (FSLM) model, along with the enhancements made to transformational and distributed leadership models, provides a comprehensive understanding of effective leadership in diverse educational settings. The FSLM offers a practical tool for leadership development, applicable to schools and organizations across the globe.

Furthermore, this research contributes valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by school leaders in China, particularly in terms of balancing local cultural values with

global educational trends. The findings have far-reaching implications for future studies on school leadership, especially in non-Western settings, and underscore the importance of contextual adaptability and cultural sensitivity in leadership research and practice. The FSLM serves as both a theoretical framework and a practical guide, offering educational leaders the flexibility to navigate the complexities of leadership in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

8.3.2 Significance for Educational Leadership Practitioners

The research findings suggest that the leadership patterns observed in CHP principals, characterized by achieving high-level school development and transformation and fostering individual and collective growth, have significant implications and serve as valuable references for school management practitioners. These implications extend not only to school leaders within China's compulsory education system, but also to those working in different educational and social systems. In addition, the study provides a practical and effective leadership model and a viable way to strengthen leadership, especially for school leaders interested in school development and problem solving in the context of large-scale, multi-campus schools. Three core aspects of the CHP principals' traits and underlying leadership patterns deserve specific attention.

First, the leadership mindset, characterized by steadfast beliefs, a strong sense of mission, the significance of serving as a moral example, and the regular offering of humanistic care and inspiration to individuals within the school, generates extraordinary personal charisma. This creates a powerful influence and spiritual inspiration for stakeholders both inside and outside the school, fostering collaboration based on shared values, missions, and goals. The researcher asserts that such beliefs, sense of mission, and moral commitment are essential for any school leader seeking change, development, internal unity, and external recognition. Possessing these elements reduces the risks and uncertainties of reform within the school and increases the level of trust, understanding, and support from within and outside the leadership team.

Second, the application of thinking tools such as “system thinking” and “rule-based thinking,” in conjunction with the principles of democratic centralism and meritocratic mechanisms, plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable and regular school development. The researcher recommends that school leaders in any educational system should adopt system thinking to gain comprehensive and profound insights into school components and employ rule-based thinking to define behavioral boundaries within the school, ensuring its orderly operation. Concurrently, school leaders should uphold the importance of facts, science, and individuals, promoting and expanding the level of democracy in school affairs within the framework of democratic participation, supervision, and accountability. This approach enables a comprehensive and accurate view of school issues from frontline and diverse perspectives, facilitating more rational and effective decision-making. Additionally, implementing meritocratic systems ensures that capable individuals can assume positions where their skills are most needed, fostering efficient utilization of human resources and enabling sustainable career development for teachers and staff.

Finally, when exploring effective leadership models that promote school development, continuous professional development for teachers, and comprehensive growth for students, and when incorporating existing leadership theories and models, school leaders should synthesize theory with the specific and practical circumstances of their schools, local educational policies, and social, cultural, and institutional contexts. The researcher emphasizes that rigidly applying existing educational leadership theories or models, or treating them as dogma, without considering the unique issues of each school, may not unveil the most effective approach to address the school’s specific challenges. In the process of exploring leadership models and advancing school reform, school leaders must continuously unite internal forces and integrate internal and external resources, reduce barriers to school development, and leverage the support and resources of various groups within and outside the school to gain greater momentum for school development and reform.

8.4 Limitations of this Research

This study, while comprehensive in its approach, acknowledges several limitations that must be addressed to provide a balanced perspective on the findings.

Firstly, although this research heavily relies on interviews with CHP principals, the conclusions drawn are not solely based on their subjective assessments. The research incorporates extensive observational data recorded during on-site visits. For instance, high scores and positive feedback from parental surveys, regional school assessment reports presented at administrative meetings, and verbal statements from teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders during various school events substantiate the impact of CHP principals. These observational facts provide a solid foundation for the study's findings on leadership impact.

The robustness of the research data is further highlighted by the extensive time spent in the field. Based on the documented research field log, 172 days were spent at Churchill Primary School, observing and documenting the leadership team's daily work. This included 87 days on the main campus (C1, Grade 1 - Grade 3 students), 52 days on C2 (Grade 5 and 6), and 33 days on C3 (Grade 4 students). Additionally, the total interview hours comprised pre-observation interviews totaling 16 hours (8 hours for each term), during observation interviews totaling 75 hours (10 hours with the principal and 65 hours with the vice-principals across three campuses), and post-observation interviews totaling 16 hours (8 hours for each term). These efforts ensured that the data collected was comprehensive and well-rounded.

Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the research process and data collection. The pandemic caused disruptions to regular school operations and posed challenges in maintaining the continuity of fieldwork. Social distancing protocols, periodic lockdowns, and transitions to online learning limited opportunities for direct observations during specific periods of the research. In response, the researcher adapted by adhering to social distancing guidelines, rearranging interview schedules, and wearing PPE to ensure the continuity of fieldwork as much as possible during the crisis. COVID-19 also affected school stakeholders' priorities, as principals and leadership teams had to pivot their focus to health and safety, digital transformation, and the emotional well-being of students and staff. These shifts in focus provided unique insights into how CHP principals navigated crisis leadership but also introduced limitations as some typical leadership practices were either deprioritized or altered during the pandemic.

Thirdly, the study employed a single-case study method, raising questions about the generalizability of the findings. While the traits exhibited by CHP principals—such as strong beliefs, a sense of mission, and adherence to democratic principles—were corroborated by Riverside LEA officials, further research is necessary to confirm these traits across other high-performing schools.

Fourthly, this qualitative study did not aim to systematically compare all high-performing school principals in China but focused on the mindset and practices within a specific context. Time constraints and the demanding workload during fieldwork limited the depth of analysis, potentially introducing biases, especially when relying on principals' self-reported data. Efforts to validate these statements through non-participant observations were made to mitigate these biases.

Additionally, the novice status of the researcher and the cultural differences encountered during the research process posed challenges. The researcher, as a non-native Chinese speaker and a novice in the field, had to carefully navigate communication and cultural nuances to ensure a respectful and effective exchange with the participants. The potential influence of these factors on the research was addressed by maintaining a neutral and objective approach and by designing communication strategies that respected cultural sensitivities and effectively conveyed Western theoretical concepts in a way that was understandable and relevant within the Chinese educational context. These efforts helped to mitigate the risk of misinterpretation and ensured that cross-cultural communication barriers did not significantly affect the findings.

In conclusion, recognizing these limitations and the measures taken to address them is crucial. Future research should aim to include broader stakeholder perspectives and explore the applicability of the findings across different contexts, thereby enhancing the scientific rigor and reliability of educational leadership studies.

8.5 Recommendation for Further Research

The study provided valuable insights into the leadership mindset, practices, influence, and traits of principals at CHP, a high-performing primary school. It also sheds light on future research possibilities in both the Chinese and international education systems and societies.

A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach is recommended to explore principal leadership in similar settings. Researchers in cognitive psychology and behavioral science can contribute by scientifically interpreting the mindsets and practices of school leaders and uncovering the cognitive principles behind their leadership approaches. Simultaneously, researchers in organizational behavior, anthropology, and public management can examine leadership models and traits from a systematic perspective, investigating their underlying causes, similarities, differences, and implications. Adopting this multidisciplinary perspective will enrich our understanding of school leadership and contribute to the development and innovation of research paradigms, memes, and models in educational leadership.

Establishing collaborative research teams, conducting joint research projects, and implementing longitudinal studies would facilitate research on large schools and multiple case studies. This approach overcomes the limitations of a single researcher collecting and processing massive data from a large school, providing a comprehensive understanding with multiple interpretive perspectives and peer triangulation. With an interdisciplinary, collaborative, longitudinal research team, leadership characteristics and their underlying causes can be comprehensively collected, recorded, and analyzed, even across multiple campuses with multiple school leaders simultaneously. This approach will yield more accurate and in-depth research results.

To advance the research, a comprehensive and mixed-methods study could be undertaken within the domain of educational leadership research. A comparative study would involve multiple schools and principals as research subjects, facilitating cross-school, cross-regional, and cross-national comparisons, thereby leading to more generalizable and representative conclusions. This approach could shed light on how identical leadership approaches operate in diverse contexts and the impacts of different leadership styles within similar settings. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, a mixed-method study can delve into the intricacies and diversities of school leadership issues. Incorporating feedback from leadership recipients, such as teachers, students, families, and social organizations, may

provide researchers with a holistic understanding of leadership influences from various perspectives. This comprehensive approach can offer a panoramic view of leadership influences, re-evaluate the applicability of leadership models, and explore principals' perspectives on their leadership mindsets and practices. Additionally, there are other promising research avenues worth exploring, including investigations into leaders' professional development, leaders' gender, political stance, cultural backgrounds, knowledge reservoirs, and professional experiences, all of which can contribute to enriching the understanding of school leadership within the educational system.

Implementing these recommendations could enrich the field of school leadership research, enhance the scientific rigor and applicability of studies, and provide valuable insights for the future practice and development of educational leadership.

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Appendix 1 Ethics Application Approval



College of Social
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13 September 2020

Dear Xipeng Liu

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: Successful Principals in Southwest China's Central Cities: Leadership in High-performing Primary and Middle Schools

Application No: 400190124

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 14/09/2020
- Project end date: 31/08/2022
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you as the Collated Comments Document in the online system.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: (https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
 - ◆ **Approval has been granted in principal:** no data collection must be undertaken until the current research restrictions as a result of social distancing and self-isolation are lifted. You will be notified once this restriction is no longer in force.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Muir Houston
College Ethics Officer
Muir Houston, Senior Lecturer
College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer
Social Justice, Place and Lifelong Education Research
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Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet



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Participant Information Sheet for the School Principal

Title of Research Project: Successful Principal in Southwest China's Central Cities: Leadership in High-performing Primary and Middle Schools
Researcher: Xipeng Liu 刘希鹏
Supervisor: Prof. Margery McMahon & Ms. Kathleen Kerrigan
Affiliation: School of Education, University of Glasgow

Dear Participant,

Hello! This is Xipeng Liu, a PhD student studying educational leadership at the University of Glasgow, who would like to invite you to my research project on the leadership of Chinese school principals.

This participant information sheet is dedicated to well instruct you on the purpose, process and participant's role in this study. Your rights matter, as a participant and an individual with dignity, and the researcher is to make every effort to protect them and to ensure them remain unharmed.

The researcher would like to ask you for taking the time to read the following text carefully for ensuring that you are being fully informed about this research. Should you have any question regarding the research or anything unclear, the researcher is glad to help. Again, please take the time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Your collaboration is greatly appreciated.

Key Information of This Study:

- The purpose of this study is to explore the successful school principal leadership in the Chinese context, especially the leaders' disposition, features of leadership practice, and impact to schools.
- The study is designed to use methods including on-campus observation and interviews, which requests your permission and participation. The observation is around 3 weeks for understanding your daily school management. The interviews you are involving, each around 30 to 60 minutes, are to be held before, during, and after the on-campus observation.
- Voice recording device may be applied to collect necessary research data during interview and observation, but none of the personal/sensitive information of minors (under 16) are to be documented by the voice recording devices in accordance to the regulations for children protection in China and UK.
- Your participation should be entirely voluntary. You are entitled to withdraw at any time without prejudice and without any reason.
- By taking part of this research, you would be benefited from: learning the effective models of educational leadership and research findings about their influence on modern school management; knowing your patterns of principal leadership as well as its similarities and dissimilarities to the distributed leadership model; reflecting your leadership via offering other cases of successful principal leadership in China's southwest region.

- The researcher is trained and experienced for mitigating uneasiness or anxiety that would occur during research activities, but please feel free to express any discomfort or inconvenience that the research would cause and ask the researcher to pause.
- The researcher is a PhD student, not a school inspector, who would like to communicate and to learn with you, like any other learners at your school. The only things that the researcher seeks are your professional knowledge and experience without any intention of bringing interference to the teaching, learning, and managing at school.
- The researcher has prepared plans for data management ensuring no leakage or abusive use of data. The data generated from the research are only used for the researcher's PhD thesis, academic publication and conference papers. Electronic data is to be stored in the researcher's laptop, with password/fingerprint protection and encryption. Paper documents are to be archived in a locked in a safe place. Neither external nor internal access to the data is permitted.
- The researcher follows the protocols, regulations and laws of privacy and confidentiality protection. Any personal information or identifiable information of any individual is to be protected during the research and to be destroyed when research is finished. Names in this research or any other publication using the data of this research are to be replaced by pseudonyms. If you wish to withdraw from this study at a certain time, the data related to you are to be erased and not be used.
- Please note that it would be impossible to completely guarantee confidentiality on account of the researcher's presence on campus and school faculty potentially becoming aware as to who is participating. The researcher endeavours to maintain the confidentiality as far as possible, but the researcher reserves the right of reporting any dangerous or harmful information that concerning breach of laws, public safety or personal welling to relevant agencies.
- This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any further inquiry, please contact the researcher or his supervisors: x.liu.4@research.gla.ac.uk; margery.mcmahon@glasgow.ac.uk; kathleen.kerrigan@glasgow.ac.uk.

For further information and where to pursue any complaint: this should be the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

_____ End of Participant Information Sheet _____



College of Social
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参与者信息表

研究项目标题： 中国西南中心城市小学成功校长：高绩效小学的领导力的研究
 研究人员： Xipeng Liu 刘希鹏
 导师： 玛杰丽·麦克马洪教授 & 凯瑟琳·克里根女士
 隶属单位： 格拉斯哥大学教育学院

尊敬的参与者，

您好！我是刘希鹏，一名就读于格拉斯哥大学教育领导专业的博士研究生。我诚挚邀请您参与我的关于中国校长领导力的研究项目。

本参与者信息表旨在清楚地向您介绍本研究的目的、流程以及您在研究中的角色。您作为一名参与者和一位尊严的个体，拥有自己的权利，研究人员将尽一切努力保护您的权利，确保其不受损害。

研究人员希望您能仔细阅读以下文字，以确保您充分了解本研究。如果您对研究内容或任何不清楚的地方有任何疑问，我愿意提供帮助。请再次花时间考虑您是否愿意参与。

非常感谢您的合作。

本研究的关键信息：

- 本研究旨在探讨中国背景下成功校长的领导力，特别是领导者的性格特点、领导实践特征以及对学校的影响。
- 本研究旨在采用校园观察和访谈等方法，需要您的许可和参与。观察时间大约为 3 周，旨在了解您的日常学校管理情况。您将参与的访谈每次大约 30 至 60 分钟，将在校园观察之前、期间和之后进行。
- 在访谈和观察过程中可能会使用语音记录设备收集必要的研究数据，但根据中国和英国的儿童保护法规，不会记录未成年人（16 岁以下）的任何个人/敏感信息。
- 您的参与完全是自愿的。您有权在任何时候无需解释原因地撤回参与。

- 参与本研究，您将受益于：了解教育领导有效模式以及研究发现对现代学校管理的影响；了解您的校长领导模式及其与分布式领导模式的相似性和差异；通过提供中国西南地区成功校长领导案例来反思您的领导方式。
- 研究人员经过培训和经验丰富，可以缓解研究活动中可能出现的不安或焦虑情绪，但请随时表达任何不适或不便，并要求研究人员暂停活动。
- 研究人员是一名博士研究生，而非学校督导员，希望您沟通和学习，就像您学校的其他学习者一样。研究人员寻求的只是您的专业知识和经验，没有意图对学校的教学、学习和管理造成干预。
- 研究人员已制定数据管理计划，确保数据不泄露或滥用。从研究中生成的数据仅用于研究人员的博士论文、学术出版物和会议论文。电子数据将存储在研究人员的笔记本电脑中，采用密码/指纹保护和加密。纸质文件将被存档在安全的地方上锁。未经许可，不得外部或内部访问数据。
- 研究人员遵守隐私和保密保护的协议、法规和法律。在研究期间，任何个人的个人信息或可识别信息都将得到保护，并在研究结束时被销毁。本研究或使用本研究数据的任何其他出版物中的姓名将被替换为化名。如果您希望在某个时候退出本研究，则与您相关的数据将被删除并不会被使用。
- 请注意，由于研究人员在校园中的存在以及学校教职员工可能知道参与者的情况，无法完全保证保密。研究人员将尽力保持保密性，但保留向相关机构报告任何涉及违反法律、公共安全或个人福祉的危险或有害信息的权利。
- 该项目已经经过学院研究伦理委员会的审查和批准。如有任何进一步的疑问，请联系研究人员或他的导师：x.liu.4@research.gla.ac.uk；margery.mcmahon@glasgow.ac.uk；kathleen.kerrigan@glasgow.ac.uk。
如需进一步信息或提出投诉，请联系社会科学学院伦理官员，穆尔·休斯顿博士，电子邮件：Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

参与者信息表结束

Appendix 3 Consent Form



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form for the School Principal

Title of Research Project: Successful Principal in Southwest China's Central Cities: Leadership in High-performing Primary and Middle Schools
Researcher: Xipeng Liu 刘希鹏
Supervisor: Prof. Margery McMahon & Ms. Kathleen Kerrigan
Affiliation: School of Education, University of Glasgow

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

About Participation:

- I consent that the researcher can conduct the study in my school.
- I consent that my work at school will be observed and I'm going to be interviewed.
- I acknowledge that interviews and observations will be conducted with my colleagues.

About Confidentiality:

- I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonyms in any publications arising from the research.

About Children Protection Regulations:

- I acknowledge that neither personal nor sensitive information of minors (under 16) are used or recorded in this research in accordance to regulations regarding children protection in China and UK.

About Digital Devices Used in Research:

- I consent the use of voice recording devices for documenting on-campus observation and interview.

About Data Usage and Storage:

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material containing personal data will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Hereby, as the principal of (Name of Institution)

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

Date

..... End of consent form



College of Social
Sciences

研究参与者确认书

研究课题 “教育领导力”视角下的中国高水平中小学校长与学校管理与发
展研究
研究人员 刘希鹏
指导教师: 玛格丽·麦克马洪教授 & 凯瑟琳·凯芮甘女士
受理单位: 格拉斯哥大学教育学院

我确认已经阅读和了解以下关于参与本次研究的各项事宜, 并被告知有询问研究相关信息的知情权。

我已知悉参与本次研究的志愿性质, 也被告知我有权在任意时间或以任意理由退出研究。

在校研究授权:

- 我准许该研究人员到访我校进行研究
- 我准许该研究人员进行在校观察和访谈

个人隐私保护:

- 所有与本研究所关联的人物和对象将以化名的方式出现在发表刊物中

未成年人保护:

- 依据中华人民共和国和英国的相关法律法规, 本研究不会使用或涉及任何未成年人的隐私和个人信息

研究中的数码设备使用:

- 我已知悉和同意研究人员在本研究中使用数码影音设备

研究数据的储存与保管:

- 研究中所涉及的人物姓名和可供推断个人的信息数据将被隐去
- 研究中的所有数据均会被保密处置和安全储存
- 研究完成后所有涉及个人信息的数据将被销毁
- 研究中的数据将供未来公开实体或互联网刊物的发表
- 我同意放弃研究本次研究中与我有关的版权

在此，本人作为_____ (学校名称) 校长：

同意在我校开展本研究

不同意在我校开展本研究

确认人： _____ 签名： _____
日期： _____

研究者： _____ 签名： _____
日期： _____

确认书完结处

Appendix 4 Semi-Structured Interview Plan

Semi-Structured Interview Plan

Introduction:

Provide a brief introduction about the purpose and scope of the interview.

Establish rapport and ensure the interviewees are comfortable.

Section 1: Leadership Mindset and Beliefs

What is your personal philosophy or mission as a school leader?

How do you define effective leadership in the context of Churchill Primary School?

What are the core values and beliefs that guide your decision-making processes?

How do you perceive the role of morality and ethics in your leadership approach?

Can you provide examples of situations where your beliefs and mindset influenced significant school decisions?

Section 2: Leadership Practices and Strategies

How do you foster a positive and productive school culture among faculty, staff, and students?

What strategies do you implement to encourage collaboration and teamwork among school members?

How do you handle conflicts or challenges within the school community?

What measures do you take to ensure effective communication with all stakeholders?

How do you prioritize and allocate resources to support educational initiatives and student development?

Section 3: Impact on School Dynamics and Performance

How do you assess the overall impact of your leadership on school performance and student outcomes?

Can you elaborate on any specific instances where your leadership strategies led to notable improvements or achievements within the school?

How do you measure the success of your leadership initiatives in fostering a positive learning environment?

In what ways do you seek to maintain a balance between academic excellence and student well-being?

Section 4: Challenges and Adaptations

What are the key challenges you have faced as a school leader, particularly within the context of Churchill Primary School?

How have you adapted your leadership strategies to address these challenges?

Can you discuss any instances where you needed to revise your approach to accommodate changing circumstances?

What support systems or resources do you find most beneficial in overcoming leadership obstacles?

Conclusion:

Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding your experiences as a school leader at Churchill Primary School?

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for enhancing leadership practices within the school or broader educational context?

Closing Remarks:

Thank the interviewee for their time and valuable insights.

Offer the opportunity for follow-up discussions if needed.

半结构化访谈计划

介绍:

- 简要介绍访谈的目的和范围。
- 建立融洽氛围，确保被访者感到舒适。

第一部分：领导心态和信念

- 作为学校领导者，您个人的理念或使命是什么？
- 您如何界定在 Churchill Primary School 背景下的有效领导力？
- 指导您决策过程的核心价值和信念是什么？
- 您如何看待道德和伦理在您的领导方式中的作用？
- 您能举例说明您的信念和心态如何影响了重大的学校决策吗？

第二部分：领导实践和策略

- 您如何促进教职员工和学生之间积极和有效的校园文化？
- 您实施哪些策略来鼓励协作和团队合作？
- 您如何处理学校社区内的冲突或挑战？
- 您采取了哪些措施来确保与所有利益相关者进行有效沟通？
- 您如何确定并分配资源以支持教育项目和学生发展？

第三部分：对学校动态和表现的影响

- 您如何评估您的领导对学校绩效和学生成果的总体影响？
- 您能否详细说明您的领导策略导致学校内显著改进或成就的具体情况？
- 您如何衡量您的领导举措在促进积极学习环境方面的成功？
- 您如何在学术卓越和学生福祉之间保持平衡？

第四部分：挑战和调整

- 您作为学校领导者所面临的主要挑战是什么，特别是在 Churchill Primary School 的情况下？
- 您如何调整您的领导策略来应对这些挑战？
- 您能否讨论一些您需要修改方法以适应不断变化情况的具体情况？
- 在克服领导障碍方面，您认为哪些支持体系或资源最为有益？

结论:

- 是否还有其他要补充或分享关于您在 Churchill Primary School 担任学校领导者的经历的内容？
- 您对改善学校或更广泛教育背景中的领导实践有任何建议或推荐吗？

结束语：

- 感谢被访者的时间和宝贵见解。
- 提供进一步讨论的机会，如果有需要的话。

Appendix 5 Observation Record

Leadership Practice Record (Sample)

Record Number	CHP-C1-STW8-T1		
Time	Spring Term Week 8	Source of Data	Observation
Leadership Task	Resolve Conflicts between Parents and Class Teacher		
Leader	HP Suie	VP Chang	

Narrative	
	Timeline
	14:00 p.m.
	A rumor spread in the Grade 1 Class E parents' WeChat group alleging mistreatment of a boy by the class teacher, Ms. May. Outraged parents demanded an immediate investigation after hearing that the boy was allegedly refused permission to use the toilet, resulting in him urinating in front of his classmates.
	15:00 p.m. - 16:00 p.m.
SW8 Monday Afternoon	The scandal rapidly permeated the primary school's social network and chat groups, leading to increased involvement of more parents of first-year students. Some parents even called for the expulsion of Ms. May. The middle leadership promptly notified the headship team about the escalating situation, leading to an agreement to organize a meeting with the concerned parents and launch an investigation after school hours. Vice-principal Chang, who oversees Grade 1, instructed Ms. May to complete her tasks before reporting to the vice-principal's office at 16:30. Simultaneously, she arranged a meeting with the boy's father and other parents who had expressed grievances about Ms. May's conduct, aiming for an open discussion.

	16:00 p.m. – 16:30 p.m.
	<p>The following incident was observed and documented:</p> <p>Before 16:30, an upset man approached principal Suie’s office, demanding the dismissal of the teacher. Despite attempts at calming him, the man refused and insisted on immediate action. As tensions escalated, Suie warned him to leave or be escorted out for the safety of the school community. The father expressed concerns about his 6-year-old son’s humiliation, to which Suie assured that protocols would be followed and both sides heard before any decisions were made. With a reluctant agreement, the discussion was set for a thirty-minute timeframe.</p> <p>Maintaining composure, Principal Suie ushered the man into his office and closed the door, the father’s voice still audible from within as the researcher discreetly moved to the vice-principal’s office.</p>
	16:30 p.m. – 17:00 p.m.
	<p>Around 16:30 at the vice-principal’s office, the researcher met with vice-principal Chang and May, visibly distressed with tears still on her face. The researcher expressed gratitude for their transparency during the conversation.</p> <p>May, a recent graduate from a Chinese normal university, had been appointed as the Grade 1 Class E teacher three months prior. Chang comforted her and requested an explanation.</p> <p>“May, I trust you. Please tell me what happened so I can assist you,” Chang said gently.</p> <p>“If the parents want me gone, I’ll leave. I’m sorry. Maybe I’m not cut</p>

<p>out for teaching,” May replied with remorse.</p> <p>“Stay calm, May. Tell me what went wrong. If there were mistakes, I share the responsibility for choosing you as the class teacher,” Chang reassured her.</p> <p>“I feel disappointed and betrayed by both myself and the parents. They know I’m innocent, and the students know too, but no one supported me,” May lamented.</p> <p>“May, I understand you’re going through a tough time. But right now, we need to focus on understanding what happened. We don’t have much time before the meeting with the parents. If you want my help, you must share the facts with me,” Chang urged.</p> <p>After composing herself, May recalled that Chuck, a troublesome student known for his misbehavior, goaded his peers to challenge her authority. Despite trying to maintain decorum during a class discussion on manners and respect, Chuck provoked a confrontation by threatening to urinate in class. May recounted feeling embarrassed as the situation escalated, compounded by her recent breakup with her boyfriend over prioritizing her students.</p> <p>May argued that Chuck’s actions were deliberate, but Chang expressed concern for the possibility of a genuine emergency. While promising support for May, the vice-principal refrained from passing judgment, acknowledging that the incident could be used against her. Chang discouraged the idea of seeking testimonies from other students, highlighting the potential negative impact on the students’ relationships with their parents.</p> <p>“You don’t need to prove your innocence, May. Instead, it’s your accusers who must substantiate any claims against you. You’ve acted</p>

	<p>reasonably and within your role as a teacher. Take a moment, have some tea, as we might be in for a long night. Rest assured, we have your back," Chang assured her, concluding the conversation with a reassuring embrace.</p>
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Appendix 6 Reflective Fieldwork Journal

Weekly Fieldwork Journal (Sample)

CHP-C2-STW2

Theme: Chaotic Order during Class Breaks

Location of Fieldwork: Campus 2

Date: Spring Term Week 2

Source of Data: Interview

Leadership Challenge: Disrupted Teachers' Work during Class Breaks

In the early 1990s, Churchill Primary's campus (C2) was the sole operational site, accommodating six grades in 18 classes. However, the rapid socio-economic development in southwest China during the 2000s led to an increase in the local birth rate and urban expansion, tripling the school-age population and doubling the school catchment's coverage. Consequently, a newly constructed campus was assigned to Churchill Primary in the early 2010s by the local educational bureau. This expansion provided 60 classrooms, a football pitch with a 200-meter running track, and a modern teaching complex. Additionally, because of urban expansion and restructuring, a smaller primary school with relatively lower academic performance within the same catchment, was merged into Churchill Primary, adding an additional 20 classes. This led to the operation of Churchill Primary in two divisions, with fifth and sixth graders situated in the smaller campus.

The C2 campus, accommodating over 1000 students, offered limited space for sports and outdoor activities compared to the main campus. It featured a 120-meter running track alongside a multifunctional football pitch, serving as a central sports zone. Additionally, the football pitch doubled as a gathering point for flag-raising ceremonies and weekly assemblies on Mondays. Other popular sports facilities included 22 ping-pong tables adjacent to the teaching building and a 20*20-meter tiled open-air square.

The teaching building, a three-level cubic-shaped complex, housed 22 classrooms and 8

offices. During breaks, students frequently left classrooms for relaxation or leisure activities, utilizing the four corridors on each level as makeshift playgrounds. However, teachers expressed concerns about students engaging in risky behavior, such as running in the narrow corridors, and considered it a breach of school rules. Observations revealed that only half of the students remained in classrooms during breaks, with the rest scattered across the campus either socializing with friends or seeking privacy.

Vice-principal Tung and her assistant, Yi, expressed concern over the disorder during breaks, emphasizing the school's commitment to student well-being and effective student management. They noted that students' unpredictable activities disrupted teachers' educational plans during breaks, making it challenging to provide individualized learning support and pastoral care. Tung acknowledged that the lack of a spacious playground had prompted students to seek private spaces for leisure and recreation.

Despite efforts by school leaders to address the issue by reiterating the importance of good behavior and adherence to school protocols, no effective resolutions have been devised yet.

CHP-C2-ATW8

Theme: School-based Research

Location of Fieldwork: Campus 2

Date: Autumn Term Week 8

Source of Data: Observation and Interview

Leadership Challenge: Teachers Incapacity in Research

Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives and Piaget's cognitive development theory have been extensively integrated into Churchill Primary's school-based research projects. Both the leadership and the teaching staff consider these learning theories critical for enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and improving students' learning outcomes. However, interviews with school leaders responsible for school-based research revealed that most

faculty members have insufficient knowledge of the theoretical and practical aspects of these two cognitive learning concepts. On-site observations and interviews at the campus unveiled conflicts between two generations of teachers concerning teaching concepts, practices, assessments, and research.

Granted access to Churchill Primary's research department, the researcher observed the school-based research process. The research archive analysis revealed a trend of using "higher-order thinking" as a popular keyword over the last three years. However, examination of the research designs and content suggested a potential misunderstanding among teachers, who appeared to perceive "higher-order thinking" as an optimal thinking pattern rather than the cognitive process defined by Bloom. Interviews with school leaders and middle managers overseeing research indicated a lack of a clear and unified understanding of Bloom's original theory or its revised versions. Instead, the term was interpreted from various perspectives, leading to a personalized understanding of the concept.

Vice-principal Tung candidly informed the researcher that the integration of "higher-order thinking" into school-based research had gained prominence since 2015. She also acknowledged that very few teaching faculty members at Churchill Primary had received appropriate training or attended lectures on the theory and practice of Bloom's work. The school had procured works related to the "taxonomy of educational objectives" as recommended by the school's academic consultant from a regional normal university in southwest China. Tung acknowledged that most academic publications remained unread, as indicated by the library records, attributing this to teachers' heavy workloads or reluctance to engage in professional development. She also highlighted that a few educators dedicated to excellence through learning were motivated by their strong work ethic, passion for education, or high self-expectations.

While younger and middle-aged teachers welcomed new knowledge and acknowledged the positive impact of professional development on their careers, they struggled to commit to enhancing their pedagogical literacy after school hours. Tung explained that teaching and

managing students were time and energy-consuming, especially for new teachers who were still developing practical skills and lacked experience. Additionally, many novice teachers were also dealing with the demands of parenthood, further limiting their after-school time.

On the other hand, a significant portion of senior teachers, aged in their late 40s or early 50s, had ample time for professional development but demonstrated less motivation and enthusiasm to acquire new knowledge and skills. Tung attributed their low participation in professional development to their educational background and a mindset inclined towards retirement. A substantial number of the senior cohort at Churchill Primary, comprising approximately 30% of the faculty, graduated from junior teacher colleges in the 1980s and 1990s, which were criticized for providing inadequate academic training. These institutions primarily emphasized moral guidelines, subject knowledge, and practical teaching techniques while neglecting research capacity building, including educational theories and research methods.

Tung suggested that the insufficient academic training received before starting their careers and the early career experiences had significantly influenced this generation of teachers. Consequently, applying research tools or approaches to daily work was not considered a viable problem-solving pathway or an essential component of professional development by most graduates from junior teacher colleges. Moreover, she identified that the knowledge structure and professional experience of senior teachers had confined them to rigid path dependence, hindering them from embracing innovation or drawing inspiration from unfamiliar concepts.

The school is currently restructuring its KPI system and promotion policy, placing greater emphasis on research-oriented activities and professional development. The research department head, Yi, informed the researcher that teachers' participation in research had substantially increased since the announcement of the new policies. However, neither Vice-principal Tung nor Yi could definitively ascertain the driving force behind this change, as it was challenging for the leadership team to identify the motivations underlying each teacher's

involvement.

CHP-C2-ATW13

Theme: History of CHP school Reforms

Location of Fieldwork: Campus 2

Date: Autumn Term Week 13

Source of Data: Interview

Leadership Challenge: Coordinating Stakeholders of School Reform

Tung expressed concerns regarding the uncertainties arising from the ongoing reforms at Churchill Primary, influenced by policy changes in the national education system. In March 2021, the Chinese Ministry of Education mandated primary and lower-secondary schools to operate under the "Double Reduction" (reducing homework burden and off-campus training) and "Five Management" policies, compelling school leaders and teachers to develop action plans aligned with official guidelines. Vice-principal Tung emphasized the substantial impact of these policies, emphasizing the need for prompt school-wide reform to fulfill the state's mission.

Tung recounted the school's previous failed reform in the early 2010s, which aimed to enhance teachers' professional development and students' comprehensive capacity building. The reform, initially promising, faced resistance and controversy upon implementation, leading to its eventual withdrawal due to a lack of consensus among the faculty.

A significant uprising followed the introduction of the reform, with many teachers, particularly those in their late 40s or 50s, expressing dissatisfaction with the perceived unattainable goals. The revocation of the new guide by school leaders was viewed as a regrettable compromise and a setback for the school's development, according to Tung and Yi.

However, the current leadership, including Vice-principal Tung, expressed optimism about the ongoing reform, emphasizing the inclusion of more teachers in the reform design and decision-making processes. Lessons learned from the past have led to a more participatory approach, prioritizing teachers' consensus and collaboration to ensure sustainable school development.

Despite the leadership's confidence in the success of the reform, challenges such as teacher reluctance and the top-down approach to outlining reform strategies remain unresolved. Some teachers seemed hesitant to provide feedback, possibly due to ethical considerations, highlighting the complexity of implementing changes in line with the state's policies.