The Secondary School Principalship in China: Leading at the Cusp of Change

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Abstract

This study investigates how Chinese school principals perceive and enact their roles. Given that there is a conceptual crevice in our understanding of the Chinese principalship, the study intends to add a much needed dimension to the Anglo-American dominant leadership discourse.

The context within which the research was conducted was one full of uncertainty and constant change. As a result of systemic and sustained reform efforts to restructure education, principals are caught between the often contradictory forces generated by educational imperatives, market forces, political hegemony and managerial complexity. It would be naive to believe that Mainland China is immune to the universalising tendency of educational reform. However, without careful study we are unsure whether Chinese principals are faced with similar dilemmas, paradoxes, and difficulties as their Western counterparts. There is thus a need to conduct more contextually sensitive research to unveil the intricacies of the role played by Chinese principals in the change context and to delve into the meanings they attach to their work.

Because of the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, a qualitative methodology was adopted for the study. The research was anchored in the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Interviews formed the chief data collection method. Eleven secondary school principals from Shanghai were selected through a form of purposive sampling. The study aimed to derive categories, typologies and theoretical models from the data to help explain the realities of the Chinese principalship.

The research findings were integrated into a framework comprised of three major categories, namely, *stage*, *unwritten libretto* and *performance*. The school constituted the most important *stage* that enabled and constrained their principalship. School status was found to be the most important influence in that it framed the role set within which each principal was situated. Despite the influence exerted by each principal's immediate context, a number of commoalities were identified when the eleven cases were pulled

together. These common issues, defined as *unwritten libretto* in the study, included maintaining *guanxi* with the government, ensuring internal harmony within the organisation and the need to win resources. The knowledge of these rules was found to be indispensible to a principal in China and formed the instinctive grounds upon which they based their actions. Influenced by both the stage - where they were, and the unwritten libretto - their knowledge about how to be a principal in China, principal *performance* varied. An initial typology was constructed comprised of four types of principals. These types were Leading Actors, Supporting Actors, Opportunists and Marginal Actors.

Further interpretation across the major categories and initial typology exposed a set of tensions which captured some of the basic dynamics of the principalship in China. A dominant subtext across these tensions was the multiple accountabilities confronting the principals. The study found that the principals placed unquestionable emphasis on upward accountability. Among the various stakeholders, superiors and the higher level government departments and officials were regarded as the most important audience. Finally a set of five propositions was proposed as a way to capture succinctly the major features of the role of the principalship in China.

The research has implications for the knowledge base of school principalship. It stretches this base beyond its current near-exclusive grounding in Western theory and provides some empirical understandings about the principalship in China. The development of a list of propositions also serves as a starting point to explicate the meanings of 'leadership' in the context of Chinese schools. The research findings also have substantial implications for principal development in China. Some suggestions are provided for program providers that may help to make the development programs more effective.

摘要

校長歷來是教育改革中備受關注的一個群體。而有關中國校長領導的文獻大多被“校長應該是什麼樣，應該做什麼”式的命題所佔據，本研究旨在打破這種“開處方式”教育領導研究的統治，提供更多的關於“中國校長是什麼樣的，他們在做什麼”的認識，並進一步探討“他們爲什麼是這樣”，從而能與西方的教育領導學文獻進行對話。

本研究以學校評估，課程和人事制度多項素質教育改革爲背景，對上海市的11位高中校長如何解讀這些政策以及如何認識和行使自身校長的角色進行了個案調查。運用深入訪談和文件分析的方法，分析了校長們在改革中的集體經歷和角色認識。

本研究運用象徵互動論的解釋框架將主要研究發現整合在一個“舞臺(stage) – 默會的歌劇劇本 （unwritten libretto）- 表演(performance)”的三維度結構之中。其中舞臺主要指校長所在的學校背景。組織因素，尤其是學校的類型，會影響校長的角色夥伴對他的角色期待，從而影響他的角色場域關係(role set relationships)。默會的歌劇劇本指的是一套校長們共有的，如何在中國做校長的知識體系。之所以說是默會，因爲他們似乎已經被校長們所內化，並構成了校長們很多行爲的一個本能基礎（instinctive grounds）。主要的內容包括對一些默會規則比如說如何經營關係，如何保證學校和諧以及如何爭取更多資源的認識。雖然被內化，校長們運用這套默會體系的純熟度是有差別的。研究表明校長們的表演受了舞臺以及他們操縱劇本的能力兩方面的影響。 根據舞臺的顯赫程度和對劇本運用的純熟程度，校長們大致可以分爲以下四種類型：主角式校長 (Leading Actors); 配角式校長 (Supporting Actors); 機會主義型校長(Opportunists) 以及邊緣型校長(Marginal Actors)。

本研究進一步探討了一些校長們共同面對的張力（tensions），對校長著力于向上問責（upward accountability）作出了初步的解釋，並提出了一系列關於中國校長角色認識的命題 (propositions)。研究結果爲認識中國校長這個群體提供了實征基礎，但是構建中國校長本土化認識體系呼喚更多的實征研究。

Acknowledgement

My most profound gratitude is to my supervisor, Professor Allan Walker. I am just lucky to have worked with him. Thank you, *shifu*.

致謝

好幾個月了，一個人坐車的時候就在想我的致謝該怎麼寫，在腦子裏構思了很多遍。可是因爲我一貫的拖拉作風，一直拖著沒有動筆，終於拖倒了現在 - 交論文的前夜。用中文寫這篇致謝，實在是要寫這種與自己情感‘零距離’的文字的時候，深感還是母語表達自如。好吧，當然，還要承認自己的英文功底也還不夠用來說些真摯的感謝的話。所以就偷懶在前面給老師一個人寫了一段英文，這裏還是讓我用母語盡情地寫一篇吧。

首先，還是要最感謝我的師父，Allan Walker 教授。雖然他看不懂，不過還是想爲他寫一段中文。我們倆是非典型的師徒，又是最典型的師徒。他會因爲我情緒低落而幫我找原因，找方法；他會因爲我的小小成績而百倍地高興；他會在我缺乏信心要退縮時給我鼓勁，不停地告訴我“你行，你可以的”。我在他的面前可以完完全全地‘be myself’, 這也是他對我的一貫期望。每完成一項工作，最希望聽到的是‘I am proud of you’. 覺得有師父這句話，吃了什麼苦都值了。謝謝您，師父。

大家都說我擁有一個超豪華的指導老師陣容，除了 Allan, 還有盧乃桂教授和曾榮光教授。對教育學院尤其是政策系的同學來說，一個保留項目似乎是在讀期間逐步建立然後又慢慢消除對盧先生的“敬畏”。敬畏是大家一來就被他的學識和風度傾倒了，覺得要“小心翼翼”地說話，儘量掩蓋自己的無知和粗鄙。後來大家能逐漸不怕他了，不是因爲自己翅膀硬了，不是因爲自己要離開何添樓了，而是發現在盧先生“威嚴”的臉孔下，其實是把教育學院的學生們都當作自己子女般的關心。他希望每個孩子在離開何添樓這個家時，都已練就了一身本領；但同時他又讓我們感到，我們在外闖蕩時，還始終有個家和一個大家長在那裏做我們的堅強後盾。

曾榮光老師在我們心目中是智慧和博學的代言人。引經據典那是張口就來，而且談到興奮處，那可是眼閃光芒，手舞足蹈。上他的課既是負擔又是享受，負擔的是那麼多的思想火花往外蹦，稍不留神就跟不上。享受的是他可能三言兩語就把你一個百思而想不通的問題給點撥了，而且領會了以後還有一種自己特有學問的感覺。曾先生，雖然我們可能永遠看不了您看的那麼多書，成不了您那樣的博學又可愛的人，您始終是我們最佩服的，最喜愛的老師。

我要感謝在香港遇到的這幫同學，他們陪我度過了最後的 2 字頭的年紀，迎來 3 字頭的歲月；他們見證我成爲母親，當上博士。多謝這一幫姐妹淘和兄弟們，他們是（排名不分先後哈）：張爽、張永平、古盛麗、陳霜葉、王蕊、王曉莉、高建群、徐慧璇、羅雲、徐華女、陳高偉、尚俊傑、林一鋼、尹弘飆、操太聖、張中華、柯政等等。

感謝參與我研究的 11 位校長，雖然之前自己頗爲膽怯，但他們都“出乎意料”地給了我充分配合。這個訪談經歷讓我認識到，揭開研究訪談的“學術面紗”，最本質的仍然是人與人的交流，所以真誠和坦誠可能是幫助訪談的最好“武器”。感謝我的受訪者們讓我認識到這一點。在校長這個身份之下，他們是一群非常可愛的人。

感謝我的父母，祖父母，外祖母及所有的家人，在我打電話告知媽媽答辯通過的消息時，媽媽長籲了口氣說你總算把書讀完了。想起來覺得愧疚，不但不能在身邊侍奉，還常常要他們爲我擔心，現在還要麻煩他們照顧我的女兒。謝謝親人的支持和理解。

感謝我的愛人。他容忍我這麼多年來在外讀書；容忍我研究進行不順暢時對他發脾氣；

容忍我血拼購物攢不下錢。每次自己感覺到要迷失時總是第一個給他打電話；每次失落受傷是到他那裏發洩哭泣，第二天還是笑臉對人；每次有問題要討論時他也總是最好的學友。雖然生活不總是一帆風順，但我們倆過去這八年多來共同面對了很多挫折和困難，希望能一直攜手走下去，當然，還有我們的女兒。

說到女兒子瞻，真是心底最柔軟的地方。每次想到她，嘴角就忍不住上揚，上揚。她孕育在我即將做 'proposal'之時，但生論文這個孩子比她花的時間多多了，小子瞻還有一個星期就要 11 個月了，媽媽才終於把博士讀完了。好吧，子瞻，媽媽有很多不成熟的地方，我們倆一起成長吧。

有了女兒，更希望世界上所有的孩子都能享受自由公平，愛和溫暖。這也就是我們當初選擇讀教育的初衷吧。

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Chapter 1 Statement of the Problem

> *The world of the principal is uncertain, constantly changing, and entails having to judge continuously the significance of and respond successfully to a relentless influx of local events and broad external forces. Principals work in a context that is exceedingly complex, in which human, technical, policy, organisational and pedagogical factors are constantly intertwined. As principals try to negotiate the swampy realities of this daily practice they must paradoxically be able to give both clear direction yet be responsive and flexible, be able to both listen and lead, and be deft at using both top-down and bottom-up strategies. They need to have moral purpose and vision yet be pragmatic and politically adroit (Scott, 2003).*

The quote above depicts a typical image of contemporary school principals. As a result of systemic and sustained reform efforts to restructure education, principals today are caught between the often contradictory forces generated by educational imperatives, market forces, political hegemony and managerial complexity. This image of principalship under siege has been supported by multiple studies carried out across Anglo-American and West European societies (Ball, 1994; Bredeson, 1993; Grace, 1995; McInerney, 2003; Moos & Møller, 2003; Moos, 2005; Robertson, 1998; Sugrue, 2005; Vandenberghe, 1998). At the same time there have been few serious studies conducted in Asian societies, including the Chinese Mainland. Given that similar policy reforms spawned in USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have spread across the globe like wildfire (Hallinger, 2005), it would be naive to believe that Mainland China is immune to the universalising tendency of educational reform. However, without careful study we are unsure whether Chinese principals are faced with similar dilemmas, paradoxes, and difficulties as their Western counterparts. There is a need therefore to investigate what it means to be a principal in Mainland China, what principals do, how they do it, and more importantly, why they do it. In other words, there is a need to more fully understand the meanings Chinese principals attach to their work within a rapidly shifting reform environment. The study aims to unveil some of the intricacies of the role played by Chinese principals in a change context and delve into the meanings they attach to their work.

This chapter has six sections. The first section addresses the question: why is there a need to conduct a study focusing on Chinese principals' role meanings? After identifying what we do not know about Chinese principalship, the second section specifies the research purpose – what this study aims to find out. The research purpose informs the formulation of research questions. The third section lists the research questions that help to guide the study. The fourth section further justifies the importance of the study while the fifth section discusses the major limitations inherent in the research. The final section briefly introduces the remaining chapters.

Rationale of the Study

This section outlines why it is important to study the meanings Chinese principals attach to their roles. The rationale is underpinned by two interrelated arguments. First, recent education reform has prompted a fundamental re-thinking of the role of the principal. Neoliberalist reforms that emphasise decentralisation, marketisation and accountability have largely reshaped the global education environment over the past two decades. Similar reform trends have also swept across the Chinese Mainland. If any consensus can be derived from the current shifting education context, it would be the undeniable importance of the school principal to what happens in schools (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006). As the work environment facing principals becomes increasingly complex, a fundamental reconceptualisation of the role of school principalship is required.

Second, the broader field of educational leadership, and school principalship in particular, appears to be in the midst of a conceptual paradigm shift (Cheng, 2002; Heck & Hallinger, 1999). Recognising the limitations of decontextualised prescriptive studies, more and more scholars are seeking to explore the 'contextualistic, interactionalistic, and dynamic' aspects of leaders' work lives (Dhunpath, 2000: 545). These studies are designed to open up the black box of how principals interpret the various demands they face and how they act on the basis of their interpretation. However, in regard to both philosophical underpinnings and stated intents, such studies cannot be carried out

without careful attention to context. It is now widely accepted that studies which attempt to just identify 'best practice' on a global scale are doomed to failure as societal culture and a multitude of other factors play an undeniable role in shaping the way principals perceive and enact their roles (Walker & Quong, 2005). Thus, indigenous understandings of Chinese principals must be based within the history, culture and reality of China. However, few serious studies have delved deeply into the principalship in Mainland China. Subsequently there exists a conceptual crevice in our understanding of the principalship in China.

When juxtaposed these two arguments suggest the need to examine the role of the Chinese principalship within the changing socio-political and education reform context and to develop a firmer indigenous knowledge base of the principalship in China. Towards this end, there is 'simply no substitute for research which has in significant part been locally conducted by indigenous researchers, and which is grounded in the local mental models of the actors' (Ribbins and Gronn, 2000: 43) . The present research is one such study.

These two arguments will be further elaborated and juxtaposed in the following sections. The first section maps the international as well as the Chinese reform context and argues for the need to reconceptualise the principalship in the change context. The second section traces the conceptual development of the principalship and suggests that a study on Chinese principals' meaning construction is timely and necessary.

Contextual Underpinnings

International Context

With the advent of globalisation, the past twenty years have witnessed increasingly fierce global competition. No government today wants to or can afford to be relegated to a permanent status of political subordination and economic backwardness (Lo, 2002). National competitiveness, however, is often narrowly interpreted as economic power, which in turn is expressed by knowledge power (Cheung & Walker, 2006). Recognising that 'it is the quality of their education and training systems which will decisively shape

the international division of labor and national prosperity' (Brown & Lauder, 1997: 174), governments across the world have dedicated their energy to various radical educational restructuring initiatives.

Most education reform initiatives largely reflect a neo-liberalist interest that explicitly seeks to 'link economic productivity and education' (Walker, 2003: 974) and to maximise productiveness and effectiveness (Mok & Welch, 2002). Central to these initiatives are moves to dismantle centralised educational bureaucracies and to create in their place devolved systems of education entailing significant degrees of institutional autonomy (Power, Halpin & Whitty, 1997). School-based management is widely adopted as perhaps the most common reform initiative worldwide in the hope that such a mode of school autonomy and governance will unleash the initiative, creativity and productivity at the local level and result in quality school education (Moos & Møller, 2003).

An equally visible cornerstone of neo-liberal education policy has been the introduction of market competition into school sectors (Lauder, 1997). By enabling parents to exercise a choice in a free market, the assumption is that competition between educational institutions will lead to a rise in standards (Brown, Halsey, Lauder & Wells, 1997; Murphy & Datnow, 2003). The role of the state, then, shifts from a direct provider of educational service to an umpire and a regulator of the market (Chan, 2002; Sbragia, 2000). This by no means represents a weakening of the state power; in fact, many commentators suggest that with the recentralisation of curriculum and overt forms of accountability, the grip of the state on schools has in fact tightened (McInerney, 2003; Moos & Møller, 2003). Schools are increasingly subject to a greater emphasis on output controls, explicit standards and measures of performance and clear definition of goals, targets and indicators of success, preferably in quantitative forms (Blackmore, 2004; Dempster, 2000).

As a consequence of decentralisation, marketisation and accountability initiatives,

schools today across the globe are faced with a major problem of what Habermas[1] (1987: 173) refers to as the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' by the systemsworld (Sergiovanni, 2000). With a strong and increasing emphasis on efficiency, outcomes, productivity and performance, the systemic powers steered by the state and the market exert a dominant influence on schools. Subsequently, school goals, purposes, values, and ideals based on adherence to the system's requirements are imposed on parents, teachers, and students rather than created by them.

This change, in turn, requires a fundamental re-thinking of the role of school principals who are smothered by relentless waves of policy directives and vastly increased expectations to implement and make change work in their schools. They are held to be increasingly accountable for school success and failure in a budding education marketplace where the success is increasingly judged by how well they exercise their leadership roles (Power *et al.*, 1997; Sugure, 2005). As principals have to dwell across both the school systemsworld and the lifeworld, school principalship becomes the point at which contradictions, tensions and ambiguities of recent reform movements and educational restructuring generally converge (Blackmore, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2000).

The discussion thus far has depicted an international scenario of the influence of education change on school principals. In globalised societies, policy-makers can easily borrow the education policies and practices from other contexts (Hallinger, 2005). It is now widely acknowledged that education reforms in the Asia-Pacific region, including China, share 'similar roots and mirror global, often neo-liberalist trends' (Walker, 2003: 974). The following section focuses specifically on reform in China.

The Chinese Context

The Chinese ex-Vice Premier Li Lanqing[2] (2004) recalled that a consensus reached by the central leadership in the 1990s was that 'whether [China] can rise to the daunting

[1] According to Habermas (1987), all of society's enterprises are made up of two mutually exclusive yet ideally interdependent domains: the 'lifeworld' and the 'systemsworld'. The lifeworld is a world of purposes, norms, growth and development while the systemsworld is a world of efficiency, outcomes and productivity. The distinction and relationship between the systemsworld and the lifeworld will be further elaborated in Chapter 2.

[2] He was the Vice Premier in charge of education from 1993 to 2003.

challenges of global competition with comprehensive national strength in the 21st century ...depends on whether or not we can ... bring forth a generation with good education, lofty ideals, moral integrity and a good sense of discipline'. Education should be 'given strategic priority to raise the moral, scientific and cultural standards of our entire nation' (then-President Jiang Zeming, 1994; quoted in Li, 2004: 15). The quest for quality has since become the major goal of educational reform in China and a term *Quality Education*[3] (*suzhi jiaoyu*) was coined and endures in various forms to underpin current initiatives. In the wake of various pilot quality projects conducted in different parts of China, two documents issued in 1999 - *Cross-Century Quality Education Project* (The State Council, 1999) and *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality Education in an All-round Way* (CCP, 1999) – marked the beginning of the full-scale promotion of quality education in China.

Since 1999, three major reform initiatives – new school review system, new curriculum and school personnel reform - were introduced with the goal of promoting quality education. They are used in this study to broadly define the policy context within which contemporary Chinese principals work. It is recognised that these initiatives are built upon the previous 1985, 1993, 1995 and 1998[4] major reform policies that sought to promote devolution and marketisation in China[5]. In retrospect, however, the three 'quality' reforms adopted at the turn of the new century signaled a shift from a focus on structural and administrative changes in the education system to the transformation of school curriculum and evaluation systems (Lo, 2002). The quality reforms targeted the core business of schools (teaching and learning) and the direct deliverers of education (teachers). As such, these three quality policies play at least three important roles in reshaping the work environment of Chinese school principals.

First, the new school review system was initiated as a way to reclassify school status and

[3] A brief history of Quality Education will be outlined in Chapter 2.
[4] Reform of China's Educational Structure: Decision of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, 1985; Outline for China's Educational Reform and Development issued by the State Council, 1993; The Education Law, 1995; The Action Scheme for Invigorating Education towards the 21st Century, 1998.
[5] These previous policies advocated, for example, the adoption of principal responsibility system, the adoption of multiple channels of educational funding and the introduction of competition in the educational sector (Agelasto & Adamson, 1998; Hawkins, 2000; Mok, 1997, 2000).

equalise opportunities for all schools to be recognised as 'exemplary school' (*shifan xiao*). This system enables schools to design their own path towards a quality school, but also places them under constant external pressure to perform. This is also accompanied by similar and related pressure to monitor their performance internally. Second, the national curriculum reform which began in 2000 attempts to promote student-centred classroom teaching and to enhance the all-round development of students. The reform also aims to establish a new system whereby the curriculum is managed at the central, local and school levels. Schools are granted more autonomy to design school-based curriculum while the importance of high-stake national examinations remains paramount. Third, ongoing personnel reforms were implemented in an attempt to develop high quality principals and teachers. For example, a new professional ranking system was proposed for school principals that links their ranking and income with school performance. Principals were also given more discretionary power to employ, develop and promote teachers and monitor teacher performance.

The themes and concepts underpinning these reforms mirror those prevalent in Western countries such as the US and the UK. The Western vocabulary of reform, such as the quest for quality, decentralisation, school-based management, competition, performance and accountability, are now commonly used in the Chinese policy documents, even as they are operationalised in a different context. More administrative and personnel power has been officially devolved to the schools. The competition between schools has increased and there is now a much stronger emphasis on performance management and accountability. In this increasingly competitive environment, the principal is expected to lead changes at the school level and cater for the central government's demands for performance and accountability. Consequently, the place of school principalship becomes unarguably an important key in the success or otherwise of successful change in China.

This initial contextual analysis indicates that principals' work environment is increasingly characterised as 'hypercomplexity' and they are now faced with 'more tasks, more demands, more choices, more perspectives and less time to reflect and act upon

them' (Moos, 2005: 325). The situation calls for reflection on a now commonly asked question: 'A principal is a principal – but is the role changing?' (Murphy & Louis, 1999: xxiii). In attempting to make sense of the shifting role of the principal, the field of educational leadership is also undergoing a paradigm shift (Cheng, 2002; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Young & Lopez, 2005). The shift has led to a reconsideration of theoretical conceptualisations as well as research methods of educational leadership and school principalship in particular.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Much of the evidence and advances in conceptualisations of school leadership have emanated from school effectiveness and improvement research over the past two decades, which in turn has both knowingly and unwittingly shaped and circumscribed the discourse on leadership (Sugure, 2005). The traditional 'orthodoxy' of school leadership was dominated by a narrow instrumental orientation and sought to 'provide leaders and others with effective strategies and tactics to deliver organisational and system level goals' (Ribbins, 2003: 3). The dominant image of 'prescriptive leadership' (Goodson, 2005: xvi), characterised by best practice rhetoric and checklist solutions, failed to recognise that the world of the school, and of the principal within it, is a complex one in which there may be as many interpretations of reality as there are individuals[6] (Ribbins & Gronn, 2000). When leaders face diverse requirements and demands, there is 'no single "one size fits all" solution possible' (James, 2001: 6). Check-lists provided to principals are often unhelpful because 'living systems cannot be directed along a linear path' (Glatter & Kydd, 2003: 233).

Recognising the limitations of prescriptive studies, research in the field has begun to adopt broader frameworks for understanding leadership, organisational life, and the role and purpose of leaders in a changing social context (Young & Lopez, 2005). These studies focus on school principals, but also pay heed to 'the impact of group dynamics or the effects of organisational context on the leader or the kind of leadership that is most appropriate in the larger context' (O'Neil, 2002: 7; quoted in Glatter & Kydd, 2003: 232).

[6] It is not to deny the need for studies that are instrumental and evaluative, but they are not all that is necessary.

Such studies enable principals to tell stories 'as actors in an unfolding drama in which they have a prescribed role in terms of a "script", "lines" of priority to be pursued, but with agency also ... "to put their own stamp on things"' (Sugrue, 2005).

More contextualised studies show that principals today have to simultaneously perform different roles and implement activities of a varied nature, which, as shown in many studies, leads to role conflicts and ambiguities. For example, principals are expected to hold managerial, market-oriented, public, professional and ethical accountabilities to the state, the consumers, the community, the teaching profession and the ethical/moral norms of their societies (Greenfield, 1995; Moos, 2005). Given that a major problem facing schools is the colonisation of the systemsworld onto the school lifeworld (Sergiovanni, 2000); the dominant discourse of school principalship seems to be shifting from 'welfarism' to 'new managerialism' (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000). Subsequently, role conflicts often arise between the educative and entrepreneurial aspects of principals' work, that is, between their role as a leading professional and a chief executive (Bell & Rowley, 2002; Johnson, 1998; McInerney, 2003).

Although an increasing array of studies provide a robust, dynamic, and multi-faceted description of leadership and the work of school principals, most have been situated 'within an Anglo-American axis of influence' (Sugure, 2005: 1). The predominant models and theories of educational leadership have been informed by a Western cultural perspective and it has been almost blindly assumed that such theories apply in other societies (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). The globalisation in educational leadership has resulted in the export of theory, policy and practice from some systems, chiefly the Anglo-American world, to non-Western and developing countries (Walker & Dimmock, 2005). In recent years, scholars in the field have recognised the dangers inherent in cross-national prescription (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Glatter, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2002) and advocated the necessity of 'more strongly contextually bound' studies in non-Western settings (Oplatka, 2004). More culturally and contextually embedded studies emerging in non-Western societies also support the view that societal norms shape the way school administrators conceive of and enact their roles (Hallinger,

Walker & Bajunid, 2005). Non-Western studies must pay heed to the fundamental cultural and structural differences that contribute to the indigenous knowledge base (Glatter, 2002).

Most principalship studies in Mainland China, however, fail to meet this end. Most available research papers written in China tend to be commentaries devoid of empirical support. Furthermore, most studies are underpinned by a best practice mentality and aim to provide prescriptions for school principals. Many of the prescriptions are presented in forms of idealised practices which cannot be reached by principals. Some researchers (e.g. Liu, 2002) advocate that school principals should simultaneously take these five roles: a proletarian politician, a modern educational theorist, a modern educational manager, a socialist moralist, and a school psychologist. As such, these studies risk forcing principals to widen the gap between espoused theories and theories in use and lead 'either to skepticism or to frustration and burnout' of principals (Eraut, 2000: 123; quoted in Glatter & Kydd, 2003: 234). Furthermore, the few studies which sought to tap principals' voices (e.g. Ma, 2004; T. J. Wang, 2005) have produced little more than collections of colourful stories of successful or famous principals (*mingxiaozhang*). Although interesting and somewhat enlightening, these studies do not seek to problematise principals' work environments. Instead, they primarily aim to generalise successful experiences to other schools and principals and to inform what they should do. It seems that the educational research community in China has been busy indicating the 'do's and don'ts' of good principals while few serious studies have been conducted to explore principals' experience in the education reform. Subsequently, there exists a conceptual gap in our understanding of school principalship in China.

In sum, rapid education change requires a reconceptualisation of school principalship, while research on the principalship has failed to keep pace with the contemporary changing context. When juxtaposed, the two interrelated arguments suggest a need to develop an indigenous knowledge base of school leadership in China. To contribute to the indigenous knowledge, empirical studies that seek to understand how Chinese principals make sense and meaning of the changing environment are needed. These

studies must be embedded in China's cultural, political, social and schooling context. As Hallinger and Kantamara (2002) note, better understanding of the nature of leadership can only come through exploring the hidden assumptions of the cultural context. If hidden assumptions of the Chinese principalship can be identified, new understandings will contribute significantly to current leadership thinking. As some researchers (Gordon, 2002; Ray, Clegg & Gordon, 2004) recognise, only when leadership is inspected in a radically different context of, and for, sense-making, can Western scholars have the basis for thinking about a different conceptualisation of leadership.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the study is to understand how Chinese principals perceive and enact their roles and to identify the factors that shape their perception and enactment. This can be broken down into three sub-purposes.

The first sub-purpose is to investigate how Chinese principals position themselves within the current shifting context and how they conceive of their principalship. As principals face ever-more complex demands from a wider array of stakeholders, the question of 'for whom do [they] work?' must continuously be revisited (Moos, 2005: 309). To fully understand how principals perceive their own roles, two things are important. First, we need to understand the context within which they believe they perform their roles. This indicates the need to explore how they make sense and meaning of the current education changes. As noted earlier, since 1999 three major quality education initiatives, that is, new review system, curriculum reform and personnel reform, have largely reshaped the education context in China. Thus, the emphasis is on how principals interpret the constraints and possibilities derived from these three quality education policies. Second, to understand principals' roles, we need to understand how principals interpret their relationships with other actors on the stage, be they local education bureau officials, teachers, parents or peer schools. More importantly, the study aims to understand who, among the various stakeholders, are perceived as significant others by principals. This may have a bearing on the question of 'for whom do [they]

work?'

The second sub-purpose is to seek knowledge about what principals do in the face of multiple expectations. The emphasis is on investigating major dilemmas and conflicts Chinese principals encounter and the way they deal with them. This will help to identify contemporary principals' major concerns in dealing with the quality education reforms. This may also shed light on the aspects of their work-lives which principals deem as problematic. These problematic issues are potentially important and deserve attention of policymakers. Furthermore, exploring what principals do provides a lens to understand questions such as why certain concerns become higher priorities.

The third sub-purpose is to pull together a number of emerging patterns by comparing role perceptions and enactment of Chinese principals. Depicting pictures of individual principals is important, but what is more important is to delineate collective understandings of this group of educators. Patterns identified may comprise both differences and commonalities – the former are different types of principalship and the latter are role characteristics of Chinese principals, in other words, role meanings that are common to this group of people. Although not an explicit aim of this study, the identification of the Chinese principals' role characteristics of may also enable a comparison with Western principalship literature. This comparison will illuminate the broader institutional-level questions such as whether the Chinese society 'screen[s] ... leadership cohorts in any way to guarantee conformity to preferred cultural types or models' (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996: 464).

In line with these research purposes, an array of role concepts have been adopted and explored in the study. As Crow and Glascock (1995) suggest, any understanding of a role conception is comprised of four components: role set relationships, task priorities, language and values. Each social status or position involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles; the totality of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status is labeled as a *role-set* (Merton, 1957). Members of a role-set are called *role parties* or *role senders*; the role occupant is thus

faced with complex demands from a wide range of role parties, many of whom base their expectations on very different foundations. Given the set of *role expectations*, the role occupant needs to determine their *task priorities* and what the person actually does is called *role enactment* (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Whenever role incumbents cannot simultaneously meet various expectations, *role conflicts* arise. Principals' choice of task priorities and the way of dealing with conflicts are also embodied in and influenced by the language they employ and the values they align with; variations in language and values incorporate the set of rules and codes of the role (Crow & Glascock, 1995).

Research Questions

Role concepts lead to the formulating of the major research question. This question is: within the broader education reform context, and within the context of the three quality education reforms implemented since 1999 in particular, how do Chinese school principals perceive and enact their roles and what shapes their perception and enactment? Three specific questions and six sub-questions help guide the study.

1. How do Chinese school principals perceive their roles?
- How do they interpret the possibilities and constraints of the reform context?
- How do they interpret relationships with key role parties?

2. How do they enact their roles?
- How do they interpret and prioritise the various role expectations and perform on the basis of these perceptions?
- How do they deal with role conflicts?

3. What commonalities and differences exist across the role perceptions and role enactment of these principals?
- Are there any role characteristics which appear common across principals and why are they shared by the principals?
- Are there different types of principals in terms of role characteristics and, if so, what are the main types and why have they developed?

Importance of the Study

This study is important for at least three reasons. First, it will contribute to the construction of an indigenous knowledge base. Second, it can contribute to theory-building of school principalship in China and third, the research findings may help to re-shape principal development programs in China. These are now explained in greater detail.

First, the study is one of the few attempts to empirically understand principals in relation to ongoing socio-political and educational transformations in China. As such, the findings may help fill conceptual gaps identified in our understanding of Chinese principalship and add a much needed dimension to the dominant prescriptive studies that focus narrowly on the successful experiences of famous principals. The study targets a range of principals and encourages them to express 'the triumphs as well as the setbacks; the small victories but also the losses they encounter personally and institutionally' (Jansen, 2006: 39). The study can thereby provide in-depth descriptions of how principals, in the face of reform challenges, create and sustain (or fail to create and sustain) the in-school factors that foster school-level changes. Such in-depth and contextualised accounts of Chinese principals have been largely missing in contemporary leadership discourse.

Second, this study may contribute to building 'middle-level theory' of Chinese leadership that 'not only beckons, but also provides insightful examples of how school principals would manage typical paradoxical situations that they increasingly face' (Fullan, 1996). Although the study recognises the principalship as constructed and interpreted by individual principals, it also believes in comparability across such constructions and interpretations (Johnson & Fauske, 2000). Stories of these principals can thus be invested 'with the wider significance that can be transformed into "theoretical knowledge"' (Theobald, 1998: 31). In this sense, the research findings can 'enrich theory and practice in education ... that have existed largely hidden in the shadows of the dominant Western paradigm that have guided the field' (Hallinger &

Leithwood, 1996: 100).

Third, as 'voices' of principals are given a central role in the study other principals may see their peers doing things differently or in the same manner. Only then will they begin to see the 'bigger picture' of what is occurring in principals' practice nationally (Robertson, 1998: 367). More contextually specific research findings help to re-shape professional preparation and the continuing professional education of school principals and potential school principals in China.

Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations are acknowledged. First, given that very few empirical studies have attempted to understand school principals in China, there is a limited knowledge base upon which this study can draw. As such, the study is unavoidably exploratory and draws in part on Western concepts of leadership and principalship. While the data was collected in the Chinese language, it was interpreted within the informative framework comprised of some Western sensitising concepts. The categories and theoretical models emerging from the research were also presented in English. Although great care has been taken with transference, there remains the risk that some of the nuances and intricacies may have been lost in exercising the cross-cultural translations.

A second limitation concerns the research participants; only one group of principals was studied: senior secondary school principals. The decision to focus just on this group was made because these principals are believed to face especially challenging environments due to the pressure of the College Entrance Examinations (or High Exam, *gaokao*). In doing so, however, the study may miss the bigger picture of principalship at other levels of schools. Third, the choice of the geographic site also limits the generalisability of the study. The decision to conduct the study in Shanghai was made in spite of the vast geographical and economic disparities in China. Shanghai, as a metropolitan city, has undergone rapid development and it is relatively advanced compared to other parts of China in terms of the economic development, international exchanges and resident welfare. In this sense, principals in Shanghai may not be 'representative' of those across

China[7].

Structure of the Paper

The thesis is comprised of eight chapters. The content of each will be summarised as follows:

This chapter has introduced the contextual and conceptual backgrounds of the study by providing an overview of the current situation with respect to the role of the principal. The chapter has also outlined the major and specific aims of the study, the main research questions, the importance of the research, and certain limitations inherent in the study.

Chapter 2 maps the societal and educational changes within which contemporary Chinese principalship is enacted. Given that Chinese education change increasingly reflects the international trends of education development, the chapter will first present a brief examination of the international educational reform context. The chapter will also investigate the macro social-political-economic transformations transpiring in China in order to facilitate understanding of education change. Against these backgrounds, the major reform policies facing contemporary principals will be explored in greater detail.

Chapter 3 presents a literature review of principalship understandings in the Western, non-Western and specifically Chinese academic discourses. The major argument is that, in the field of school principalship, the focus of research has shifted from prescriptive to more descriptive, humanistic and contextualised investigation. Recent research conducted in non-Western societies also supports the argument that understanding the principalship requires careful attention to the culture and context within which school

[7] Under this caveat, Shanghai was chosen as the site of study because, first, it is the theory derived from the data, rather than the data itself, that I seek to generalise. Second, Shanghai has, for long, been an educational experimental zone. Many policies have been put in trial there before they are adopted nationwide. For example, Shanghai started the curriculum reform and principal career-ladder system reform years before they became a national policy. Thus, issues facing Shanghai principals today may encounter principals in the rest parts of China tomorrow. A study that reports Shanghai principals' role conflicts, tensions and dilemmas will have implications for the practice of principals elsewhere in China.

leaders operate. The review also suggests that few contextualised empirical studies have been conducted in China which helps us make sense of the shifting role of the principal.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology in detail. In particular, the chapter justifies the adoption of a qualitative approach, examines the assumptions underpinning the paradigm of 'symbolic interactionism', and explains its relevance to the study. The chapter defends the choice of semi-structured interviews as the major data collection method and justifies the use of qualitative data analysis method.

Chapter 5 lays out the analysis schema and stages as a precursor of Chapter 6. The chapter serves two purposes. First, it introduces the background information and major characteristics of the eleven participant principals. Second, the chapter provides a detailed account of the three major categories that were used to organise the research findings. The three categories are *stage*, *unwritten libretto* and *performance*.

Chapter 6 delves deeply into the data and presents the major research findings under these three categories: *stage*, *unwritten libret*to and *performance*. It aims to paint a holistic picture of the role of the principalship in China. As such, this chapter addresses each of the major research questions.

Chapter 7 aims to weave the major research findings into a clearer, more contextualised fabric in order to gain a more focused understanding of the Chinese principals' roles and lives. The chapter will discuss the major tensions and accountabilities facing Chinese principals and pull together the emerging issues of the role of the principalship in China into a list of propositions.

Chapter 8 summarises the research process and the major findings and discusses the implications of the research findings for the knowledge base of the Chinese principalship. It also discusses possible future research in the area and the implications for principal preparation and development in China.

Chapter 2 Reform Context

Chapters 2 and 3 present an analytic description of the context within which school principals lead. There is now a clear understanding that any study of the principalship must be situated within the context of widespread educational reform and restructuring, and also within the field of educational leadership (Blackmore, 2004; Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Evers & Lakomski, 1996; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). Given these considerations, this chapter attempts to map the societal and educational changes within which contemporary principalship is enacted. The following chapter aims to locate principalship in the discourse of leadership theories. Juxtaposition of these broad policy and theoretical contexts is to help to depict the background of the study. As such, it forms a key facet of the argument for the need to conduct an empirical study into Chinese principalship.

Thus, the major purpose of Chapter 2 is to map the macro context of school principalship in China. This includes comment of the international educational change context, the socio-political transformation in China itself and the specific education reform policy context in the country. The major purpose can be further divided into three areas. The first area aims to understand the relationship between education change internationally and recent reforms in China. The second area explores the major reform policies which frame Chinese principals' work today. An exploration of these specific policies intends to identify the major stakeholders with whom principals work and interact. The third area stresses that the rapidly changing context demands deeper empirical understanding of school principals in China.

This chapter is organised around four major sections. This first section presents a brief examination of the international educational context. The rationale is that Chinese education change not only comprises, but also increasingly reflects the international trends of neo-liberal education development. The second section recognises that change is not the time-less synchronic present and cannot be isolated from the historical, social-political and economic transformations ongoing in China. The third section focuses on

education reform policies in China. The section first outlines the major policies released since the beginning of education reform in the mid-1980s and then argues that contemporary principalship is mainly framed by the reform policies implemented since 1999 under the banner of 'Quality Education'. The section then specifically introduces three domains of policies, that is, reforms in school review, curriculum and personnel systems. The final section summaries the reform context in China. This context calls for a need to study how school principals position themselves in the shifting grounds of state and market and in relation to different stakeholders.

International Reform Context

This section aims to outline the international education reform context. In a globalised world, a significant feature is the cross-cultural borrowing of reform policies (Blackmore, 2004). According to many East Asian researchers (for example, Mok & Welch, 2002; Walker, 2003), most education reform initiatives in the region largely reflect the international neo-liberalist interest that explicitly seeks to link economic productivity and education and to maximise productiveness and effectiveness. Thus, to better understand education reform initiatives in China, it is necessary to first explore the international political-economic context and the impact of neoliberalism on public sector and education reforms.

Harvey (2005) suggests that future historians may well look upon the years 1978-1980 as a revolutionary turning-point in the world's social and economic history. The newly-elected Thatcher and Reagan Governments[8] in the UK and the US turned to a particular doctrine labelled 'neoliberalism'[9] which rapidly recurred the central guiding principle of economic thought and management. Since then, a core of developed countries (including, for example, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) has been similarly influenced by 'New Right' ideologies (Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons, 2000) and their accompanying revolutionary impulses have reverberated to remake the political economic and social

[8] Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister of Britain in May 1979. Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States in 1980. Their governments were also known as 'New Right' Governments.
[9] It refers to a political movement that espouses economic liberalism as a means of promoting economic development and securing political liberty.

face of the world in a totally different configuration.

The rise of neo-liberal states has been accompanied by the decline of the Keynesian welfare regime. The Keynesian welfare regime and the pursuit of economic nationalism were viable during the third quarter of the 20th century when a great deal of economic activity took place within the confines of national 'walled' economies (Panic, 1995). It was believed that the nation-state not only had the power to 'deliver prosperity, security, and opportunity', but that it had 'a responsibility to do so' (Brown *et al.*, 1997: 2). However, since the 1980s, the revolution in new technologies coupled with cheaper transportation costs have made it economically possible and viable for multinational corporations to move production to whatever country has a comparative advantage (Cowling & Sugden, 1994). With the intense flows of investment, industry, information technology and individual consumers, the middleperson role of nation states has been challenged (Ohmae, 1995; Waters, 2001) and notions such as 'entrepreneurial government' have become fashionable (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald, & Pettigrew, 1996). Emerging New Right governments embraced these notions and determined to 'reassert the principle of market competition in every nook and cranny of contemporary life' (Brown *et al.*, 1997: 6). The role of the government shifted from a provider of welfare benefits to a champion of the market, whereby the state actively built markets, shaped them in different ways and regulated them (Sbragia, 2000).

Consequently, there has been a fundamental change in the relationships between the state, the public sector and the market. The ideology of neo-liberalism and its strategies of marketisation, devolution, choice and privatisation have come to be the dominant paradigm of public sector policies in most Western communities over the past two decades (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001). The common themes[10] include:

- A reduction in government's role in public service provisions (outsourcing through tenders);
- Imposition of strongest feasible framework of competition and accountability in public sector activity;

[10] Significant differences exist in how these structural adjustment policies are named in different countries, for example, economic rationalism in Australia, 'New Public Administration' in New Zealand and the UK.

- Explicit standards and measures of performance and clear definition of goals, targets or indicators of success, preferably in quantitative forms;
- A greater emphasis on output controls – a stress on results, not processes; and
- A reduction in the self-regulating powers of the professions (Dempster, 2000: 2).

The past two decades have also seen an increasing number of attempts in various parts of the world to restructure public education. Central to these initiatives are moves to dismantle centralised educational bureaucracies and to create in their place devolved systems of education entailing significant degrees of institutional autonomy (Power *et al.*, 1997). Dale (1998) regards this shift in education governing from bureaucratic control to a set of governance relationships, where other agencies than the state are involved in different activities, as a process dependent on the changing role of the state.

Such a shift in governing implies changes in school management and steering. This includes greater use of private sector management practices, explicit and measurable standards of performance and so forth (Lindblad, Johannesson & Simola, 2002). School-based management is widely adopted as perhaps the most common reform initiative worldwide in the hope that such a mode of school autonomy and governance will unleash the initiative, creativity and productivity at the local level and result in quality school education (Moos & Møller, 2003).

An equally visible cornerstone of neo-liberal education policy has been the introduction of market competition into school sectors (Lauder, 1997). The role of the state, then, shifts from a direct provider of educational service to an umpire and a regulator of the market (Chan, 2002; Sbragia, 2000). This by no means represents a weakening of the state power; in fact, many commentators suggest that with the recentralisation of curriculum and overt forms of accountability, the grip of the state on schools has in fact tightened (McInerney, 2003; Moos & Møller, 2003). Schools are increasingly subject to a greater emphasis on output controls, explicit standards and measures of performance and clear definition of goals, targets and indicators of success, preferably in quantitative forms (Dempster, 2000; Blackmore, 2004).

As a consequence of decentralisation, marketisation and accountability initiatives, schools today across the globe are faced with a major problem of what Habermas (1987: 173) refers to as the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' by the systemsworld (Sergiovanni, 2000). With a strong and increasing emphasis on efficiency, outcomes, productivity and performance, the systemic powers steered by the state and the market exert a dominant influence on schools. Subsequently, school goals, purposes, values, and ideals based on adherence to the system's requirements are imposed on parents, teachers, and students rather than created by them. School principals, however, have to dwell across both the school systemsworld and the lifeworld. School principalship thus becomes the point at which contradictions, tensions and ambiguities of recent reform movements and educational restructuring generally converge (Blackmore, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2000). This reform context can be shown in the following figure:

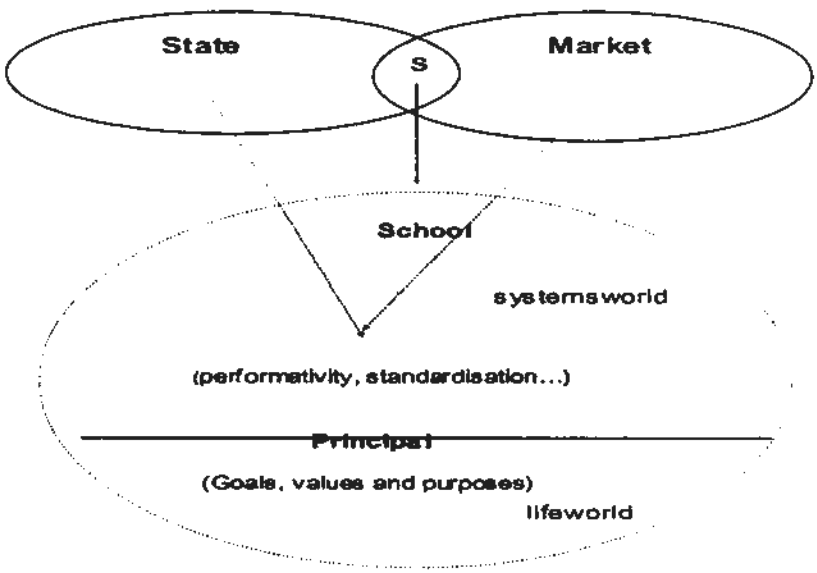

Figure 2.1 Principal's location in relation to the school systemsworld and lifeworld

As many researchers (for example, Lindblad, Johannesson & Simola, 2002) comment, education restructuring is 'a world movement' of cultural, social and political changes in our time. Similar changes are occurring over the world, although the timing and focus varies between regions (Lindblad *et al.*, 2002; Papagiannis, Easton & Owens, 1992). The next section examines major reform policies in China, particularly those related to

education. The discussion will reflect the influence of neoliberalism in China.

Reform Antecedents in China

The 3rd Plenum of the 11th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was assembled in December 1978. The outcome of the conference was a fundamental decision to reorient China toward the market (Yergin & Stanislaw, 1998). It is known in China as the beginning of the adoption of 'Reform and Opening-up' policy. This coincided with the turn to neo-liberal solutions in the UK and the US (Harvey, 2005). Before the adoption of this policy, China had been closed to the rest of the world as a socialist country with almost everything of significance under the state control[11]. Since 1978, the central leadership under Deng Xiaoping advocated that China should shift from a 'socialist planned commodity economy' to a 'socialist market economy' with the ultimate goal of realising 'four modernisations' - in agriculture, industry, education and science, and defense (Yergin & Stanislaw, 1998; Mohrman, 2003). Reforms emerged in many different segments of society, starting from agriculture, then moving to industry and the government agencies[12]. These reforms aimed to break 'the eating-out-of-the-big-pot egalitarianism' and 'iron-rice-bowl' ideology[13] and to introduce competitive mechanisms in order to spark innovation and growth (Harvey, 2005).

As a result, overt state control and planning gradually weakened the importance of market and free enterprise was gradually recognised (Yergin and Stanislaw, 1998; Hayhoe, 1996; PRC Yearbook, 1999). What is noteworthy is that the centralised political

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11 State-owned enterprises (SOEs) dominated the leading sectors of the economy. They offered not only security of employment to their workers but a wide range of welfare and pension benefits (known as 'the iron rice bowl' system or the state's guarantee of a livelihood). For most urban residents, their life was tied to their *danwei* and individual's sacrifice for the public power was taken for granted (*China Daily*, HK Edition, 22 August 2003). *Danwei* is a government-controlled work unit which provides employment and welfare benefits such as free housing and medical care and also monitored employees for political waywardness (*The Economist*, 4 September 2003).

12 The initial reform effort centred around agriculture with the adopting of 'household responsibility system', which means each family was responsible for the land it tilled. Since the mid-1980s, the reform came to the industry with the introduction of 'contract responsibility system', echoing 'household responsibility system' and culminated in emergence of dynamic and township enterprises. In the 1990s, the emphasis of reform was on restructuring of state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) to make them more responsive to imperatives of market-place and to competition pressures. The late 1990s also witnessed the institutional restructuring to cut down the number of government agencies and government workforce (Yergin and Stanislaw, 1998; Hayhoe, 1996; PRC Yearbook, 1999).

13 The two idioms refer to the system of guaranteed lifetime employment in state enterprises, in which the tenure and level of wages are not related to job performance.

system retains, thus what has emerged in China is a particular kind of market economy, one that 'increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements interdigitated with authoritarian centralised control' (Harvey, 2005: 120). China has managed to construct a form of state-manipulated market economy and taken its own peculiar path towards 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. The spectacular emergence of China as a global economic power after 1980 has been in part an unintended consequence of the neoliberal turn in the advanced capitalist world (Harvey, 2005).

Over the past twenty years or so, education has also undergone fundamental changes. One consensus reached by the central leadership of the Chinese government was that education is an important means to promote economic development. For example, in May 1985, when addressing the first national conference on education, Deng Xiaoping pointed out: 'Our national strength and sustained economic development depend more and more on the educational qualifications of the working people and on the number and quality of intellectuals'. The *Program for China's Education Reform and Development* issued by the central authorities in 1993 further stressed that education was the basis of the modernisation drive and must be given strategic priority. In June 1994, at the Second National Conference on Education, then-President Jiang Zeming pointed out that 'it is crucial that our economic development switches to a reliance on the advancement of science and technology and a better educated workforce, and that education is given strategic priority to raise the moral, scientific and cultural standards of our entire nation' (cited in Li, 2004: 15). *Rejuvenating the nation through science and education* (*kejiao xingguo*) became a national policy. The next section will focus on the education reform context in China and explore how neoliberal interest is reflected in educational reform policies.

Education Reform Policies: Towards a Pursuit of Quality Education

This section will give a brief account of major education reform initiatives implemented in China since the mid-1980s. This brief outline indicates that, first, education policies in China, as those in the Western societies, adopt rhetoric of educational devolution and

marketisation. Second, with the advent of the new century, reform focus shifted from the structural and administrative changes in the education system to the transformation of school curriculum and teaching and learning qualities (Lo, 2002). 'Quality Education' (*suzhi jiaoyu*) became a major goal of education polices. The section then focuses on three quality education initiatives implemented since 1999 that aim to change school review, curriculum and personnel systems.

A Brief Account of Education Reform Policies in China

One of the most important issues facing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the late 1970s and early 1980s was to transform China's educational system into a more responsive enterprise that would make itself relevant to societal needs (Lo, 1999). In May of 1985, the CCP convened a conference to address the issue. Out of these deliberations came the document 'Reform of China's Educational Structure: Decision of the Communist Party of China Central Committee'. This signified the beginning of a process of education reform and the gradual alignment of the education system with the newly emerging marketisation of the economy (Hawkins, 2000). This section will list the major reform initiatives in a chronological order. This brief account of policy context serves two purposes. First, it helps to depict the general policy context Chinese principals have to deal with. Second, it helps to identify the major reform trends ongoing in China. Since 1985, there have been waves of reforms in the education sector:

Year	Document Release	Major Initiatives
1985	• *Reform of China's Educational Structure: Decision of the Communist Party of China Central Committee*	• authority should be 'devolved' to lower levels • multiple methods of financing should be sought • schools should gradually start to adopt the 'principal responsibility system'[14] • party functionaries should be

[14] This system was established in 1985, which attempted to reverse structures established during Mao's Chairmanship which posted a party secretary in each school and gave them considerable power in all aspects of school governance and ideology. The 'principal-responsibility system' repositioned the school principal rather than the party secretary as the key leader in the school.

		separated from the day-to-day running of the schools
1993	• *Outline for China's Educational Reform and Development*	• reaffirmed the direction of education reform as set by the 1985 initiative • provided enough space for those at the local level to take increased responsibility for basic education both in terms of the management and finances. • stated that the 'state' remains the arbiter of rules and regulations • reaffirmed that all schools should adopt the 'principal responsibility system'.
1995	• *Education Law*	• confirmed the major principles of PRC educational funding under market-economy conditions, that is, the bulk of educational expenditure would come from central government grants, while schools were encouraged to seek alternative channels
1996	• *Ninth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-term Outline Objectives for the Year 2010*	• called for 'switching the mode of training professionals from examination-oriented education to all-round quality education'
1998	• *Action Scheme for Invigorating Education towards the 21st Century*	• reiterated the move towards decentralisation and marketisation and towards achieving quality education
1999	• *Cross-Century Quality Education Project* • *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality Education in an All-round Way*	• Requested that the focus of quality education be shifted from pilot projects to full-scale implementation. • To mobilise the nation to implement quality education
2001	• *The Decision on Reform and Development of Basic Education*	• further recognised Quality Education as a major goal of the nation's Tenth

by the State Council Five Year Plan

The general trends emerging from these reform documents are the diminishing Party influence, the reduced participation of the state, the devolution of authority to local levels and to school principals, and the increasing place of the market. First, the central government in China has consciously retreated from being the sole provider of social services and devolved the financial and administrative power to lower-levels of governments (Mok, 1997). Some of rights held by the state over the previous decades have been delegated to local governments[15]. Second, the policy encourages the adoption of a 'market-oriented' approach in education. The major marketisation initiatives include the encouragement of a diversity of educational providers, calls for multiple channels of educational funding, increased numbers of self-supporting students, the reorientation of curricula to meet market needs, and the introduction of competition in the educational sector to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of educational services (Agelasto & Adamson, 1998; Mok, 2000). Third, the adoption of the principal responsibility system has positioned the school principal instead of the party secretary as the person who actually runs the school. The policies stipulate that principals can make decisions independently on such matters as student admissions and teacher assignments without having to consult with CCP functionaries (Delany & Paine, 1991: 36).

The brief account also indicates that quality education (*suzhi jiaoyu*) has become a major goal of educational policies since the mid-1990s[16]. Although the term was originally raised as an antithesis to 'examination-oriented education', the quality rhetoric has endured and continued to broadly frame the major policy goals of many current reforms. The increasing emphasis on quality rhetoric also signals that reform focus is shifted to the improvement of schooling, teaching and student qualities. Since 1999, when quality education came to the stage of 'full-scale promotion' (Li, 2004), a series of national reforms have been initiated that target school review and accountability, new curriculum

[15] These include the power to define the school-entry age; school staff commitments and duties; teachers' salaries; the current duration of basic education and the structure of primary and junior secondary grades; as well as the authority to choose curricula and textbooks (Hawkins, 2000). The state now takes the role of facilitator, enabler, policy coordinator and regulator (Mok, 2005).

[16] The first time the exact term Quality Education was officially used was in the central government document, the *Proposals on Reinforcing and Improving Moral Education in Schools* issued in 1994.

and enrollment policies; and school personnel system reforms. The three groups of policies implemented since 1999 are perhaps the most significant in terms of their impact on schools and school principals today. The next section examines these three groups of policies and attempt to explore this immediate policy context that shapes Chinese principalship.

Major Reform Initiatives Implemented Since 1999

This section gives a detailed account of three quality initiatives implemented since 1999: reforms on school review system; reforms on curriculum, enrollment and examination systems and reforms on school personnel system.

Reform on School Review System

The practice of categorising key schools and ordinary schools dates back to the 1950s when the young People's Republic was in desperate need of professional talents to rebuild the nation. 'Key schools' were set up to identify and prepare the most promising candidates for higher levels of education (*China Daily*, 27 February 2006). In the state-controlled system, key schools were usually assigned more financial resources and better teachers, recruited higher-scored students and had better student performances. To overcome the problems caused by the over-concentration of quality resources in a few schools, the central leadership (The State Council, 2001) decided that an exemplary school system should be established to replace the previous key school system. The general principle was that all kinds of schools, whether previously key or ordinary schools, could apply for an 'exemplary school' title, as long as the school has made some breakthrough or achievements in the promotion of Quality Education. The ultimate aim is that these exemplary schools can lead all the senior secondary schools towards the successful implementation of Quality Education.

Shanghai, for example, started this system in April 1999 [17] (Shanghai Education Commission, 1999, 2004a). A review cycle usually takes at least three years. The

[17] That year 21 schools applied for the title of 'municipal experimental exemplary schools' and 16 succeeded in the first round review. All the 16 schools used to be key schools (14 previously municipal key schools, 2 district key schools).

application starts with the submission of the school development plan outlining the steps the school will take towards becoming a quality school. Only when the district educational bureaus approve of the plan can the application be submitted to the municipal selection committee. The municipal selection committee, then, organises the external review. External reviewers are usually selected from various government functional departments and education research institutions. External review includes examination of the school report, site inspection and focus group and random interviews of teachers and students. Schools that pass the external review are required to implement the plan they submit. During the implementation process, there will be another 'mid-term' external inspection and only those schools that pass this can enter the final summative review stage. For schools that succeed at the summative review stage, detailed school information will be put on the Internet to solicit feedbacks. If there is no negative feedback, schools are granted the title of 'municipal experimental exemplary school' (*shiji shiyanxing shifanxing xuexiao*).

Schools granted this title are subject to a constant review system (Shanghai Education Commission, 2004a) which includes:

1. These schools need to make another round of 3-5 Year school development plan. The plan is to be co-evaluated with the school principal's work performance.
2. A complete system of the application, review, annual inspection, publication and revocation of exemplary schools is to be established.
3. An annual inspection system is to be established. Any serious violation of education policies can result in the revocation of the title.
4. Schools need to establish a complete self-review system.
5. The review results need to be publicised.
6. The experimental and exemplary projects conducted by these schools and major activities organised by the schools need to be publicised on the Internet.

Parallel to the municipal-level exemplary schools, there is also a district-level exemplary school review system based on similar policies. Thus, a hierarchical school system remains. On the top are the 50 *municipal experimental exemplary schools* (including 15

modern boarding schools). Further down are *district experimental exemplary schools* and at the bottom are *ordinary schools*. Although the exemplary school policy aims to dedifferentiate the distinction between original key and ordinary schools, the fact is that most exemplary schools are originally key schools. The distinction between exemplary schools and ordinary schools still exists, and, in fact, may well have widened. Exemplary schools are still granted privilege, for example, in enrolling students. This will be further illustrated in the next section.

Reform on Curriculum, Enrollment and Examination Systems

According to then-Vice Premier Li Lanqing (2004), reforms of curriculum, enrollment and examinations were triggered by calls to reduce students' workload. The heavy workload of students, however, resulted from some deeply ingrained beliefs shared by Chinese parents.

China has a long history of relying on high stake exams to select people. The 2000-year-old ancient education system was established around the Civil Service Examination system on the Confucian concept of serving the state through learning (Gu, 1981; Mao, 1984). A Confucian superior man's first responsibility to the society was to serve the state by participating in government. Scholars believed that it was this examination system that created the Chinese bureaucratic system[18] (for example, Ho, 1964; Sunoo, 1985). This system also made it possible that the ruling class could select the nameless intellectuals for government service; thus intellectuals of all classes had a chance for advancement. On the one hand, this enabled people to change their status through education. By passing exams, they could not only serve the imperial government, but also change their family status and bring glory to their families and ancestors (Gu, 2006: 173). On the other hand, this system became an effective means for the government to control intellectuals, given that 'the topics used in the examinations are from the classics, which are the only courses taught in all schools' (Sunoo, 1985: 113). 'Obedience' was the major characteristic of those cultivated by this education system who 'dare not think,

[18] By adopting this exam system, each new dynasty only 'meant change of personnel, not change of the political system...Then centralised bureaucratic institution in China was able to preserve the rather peaceful and orderly society of China, largest country in the world, for the longest time in human history' (Sunoo, 1985: 103).

dare not speak, dare not take risks, and lack [a] pioneering and innovating spirit' (Gu, 2006: 173).

Although the imperial examination system ended in 1905, the reliance on high stake exams retains, even after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949[19]. The socialist education system was to cultivate the red and expert Socialist Man (Wang, 2002), but striking similarities exist between the virtues encouraged in 'Socialist Man' and those of a 'Confucian Man', in that they both emphasise such qualities as selflessness, dedication to serve the ruling power, modesty and honesty (Louie, 1984). The education system under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government in Mao's era was also highly centralised and politicised. Before the Cultural Revolution, the major education practices could be summarised as 'Three Centredness' (*sange zhongxin*), that is, teacher-centredness, classroom-centredness and textbook-centredness (Tao, 2006). In one word, education at that time mainly relied on teachers to transfer knowledge to students in classrooms. These practices, together with the exam system, were strongly attacked during the Cultural Revolution and the school system stopped functioning for more than ten years. Thus, one major task facing the post-Mao leadership was to bring the school system to a normal state. The College Entrance Examination was restored in 1978.

As excelling in imperial exams was the only road to officialdom for ancient people, parents today believe that passing college entrance exams to go to university is the best route to a good future for their children. Thus, as Premier Li (2004) explained, 'university entrance examinations inevitably drive primary and secondary schools to chase high enrollment rates. The pursuit of high enrollment rates invariably leads to competition in test scores, and the quest for high scores prompts schools to increase course load and difficulty' (p. 337). Two reform initiatives were proposed to address the issue: one was a curriculum reform to revise the difficult and outdated textbooks and enhance the all-round development of students; another was to expand higher education

[19] For several years during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the examination system was overhauled.

and senior secondary school resources[20].

Curriculum reform is believed to be the key to the successful implementation of Quality Education. The new round of setting elementary and secondary school curricula and standards for syllabi and textbook compilation began in 2000. The new textbooks are designed to eliminate difficult, complicated, obscure, and antiquated (*nan, fan, pian, jiu*) contents. While formulating new syllabi and compiling new textbooks, the reform also aims to establish a new system whereby the curriculum is managed at the central, local and school levels. Schools today are supposed to design school-based curricula that can adapt to their local needs.

Accompanying the curriculum reform is the university enrollment policy change. University enrollment has been expanding since 1999 and the pressure of university entrance examinations has been somewhat alleviated. However, new problems cropped up after universities increased their enrollment. As most parents aim at elite universities, the pressure has shifted from college entrance examinations to senior secondary school entrance examinations, so much so that some parents would rather spend tens of thousands of *yuan* to squeeze their children into elite schools (Li, 2004). It then becomes an acceptable practice that schools charge certain school-choice fees (*zexiao fei*) for this group of students. Thus, the enhancement of all-round student development and the expansion of university enrollment do not mean the devaluation of examinations. University and secondary school entrance exams still retain, although the test subjects and the scoring system have been constantly changed[21].

Shanghai is ahead of the rest parts of China in terms of curricula, exam and enrollment reforms. The pilot stage-2 Curriculum Reform in Shanghai started as early as 1998 and

[20] On the evening of February 1, 2000, President Jiang Zeming summoned Politburo members and leaders of relevant departments to study these problems. The publication of his speech at the meeting drew the serious attention of leaders at the various levels and prompted them to seriously study the issue of reducing workload while enhancing the all-round development of students.

[21] As Premier Li (2004) explains, 'In comparison with other selection methods, tests are still the fairest and the most sensible. Entrance exams cannot be dispensed with for enrollment in senior secondary schools and universities. Regular tests in schools are necessary as well, and cannot be abolished either'. However, he also advocates that 'we cannot take test scores as the only criterion for judging students. We need to explore and establish more sensible and comprehensive evaluation and testing systems that enable us to evaluate the all-round development of students and better cultivate competent professionals in diverse ways'.

the new curriculum has been adopted in all the senior secondary schools in Shanghai since September 2006. Different from the stage-1 reform[22] that emphasised textbook innovations, this stage of reform aims at T&L changes, with an emphasis on cultivating students' moral development, innovative spirits and practical abilities. The new curriculum is comprised of three categories of courses: basic, extended and research courses (Shanghai Education Commission, 2004b). Each school sets up a curriculum reform leading team with school principal as the head. In terms of examination and enrollment, each school is assigned a quota of the maximum number of students they can enroll. The admission to senior secondary schools is mainly determined by students' performance in the unified senior secondary school entrance examination held in June each year[23], together with the reference to their comprehensive quality review report (*zonghe suzhi pingjia*) submitted by their junior schools. However, different types of schools (e.g. municipal exemplary schools, district exemplary schools, ordinary schools) are treated differently. For example, while municipal exemplary schools are allowed to admit students from all over Shanghai, ordinary schools can only admit students from the district where the school belongs. Also, each school is allowed to enroll some school-choice paying students (*zexiaosheng*), under the general principle of *Three Limits* (*sanxian*) [24] (Shanghai Education Commission, 2006a) but the policy-stipulated maximum fee a school can charge for these students varies according to the types of schools (40,000 *yuan* for modern boarding schools, while the amount for a municipal exemplary school is 30,000 *yuan* and 20,000 *yuan* and 10, 000 *yuan* respectively for district exemplary schools and ordinary schools). In a sense, a title of an exemplary school still means better and more resources.

Reforms on School Personnel System

School personnel reform concerns two groups of people: principals and teachers.

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[22] Stage-1 Curriculum Reform in Shanghai started at the end of 1980s.

[23] Five test subjects: Chinese, Mathematics, English, Physics and Chemistry. The full score is 600. Chinese, Mathematics and English each accounts for 150. Physics accounts for 90 and Chemistry 60. There was also an open-textbook exam of Moral Studies and a PE test. The grades scale is 'Excellence, Ok, Pass or Failure'.

[24] This means each school can enroll a limited quota of school-choice students (usually not exceeding 20% of the students to be admitted by a single school). These paying students have to meet certain score requirement (lower than the school score line but higher than the municipal score line) and pay certain amount of money (the maximum amount of money is policy-prescribed).

Decentralisation in China involved the redistribution of power and responsibility from the central government to local communities; and then further to the school level (Tang & Wu, 2000). A key factor in this rebalancing was the 'principal responsibility system' adopted since 1985 in schools. This attempted to reverse structures established during Mao's Chairmanship which posted a party secretary in each school and gave them considerable power in all aspects of school governance and ideology. The 'principal-responsibility system' repositioned the school principal rather than the party secretary as the key leader in the school.

Recognising the importance of the principal within the broader reform environment, in 1989 the State Education Commission (SEC, renamed the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 1998) issued *Strengthening the Training for Principals of Elementary and Secondary Schools Nation-Wide*. The document stated: 'Generally speaking, the performance of the elementary and secondary school principals cannot meet the demands of educational development and further reform, both in political and in professional aspects' (State Education Commission, 1989). The policy thereby proposed a professional training scheme with attached certification for future and new principals (Feng, 2003). The central government further recognised the development needs of serving principals and suggested that some form of certification was necessary. These requirements were expressly stipulated in the MOE's *Training Regulations for School Principals*[25] in 1999.

Thus, important progress has been made over the last ten to fifteen years in terms of establishing policy structures to promote principal preparation and development. However, school principals in China had long been regarded as a 'state cadre' (*guojia ganbu*) who had a nominal official rank. Their official rank was usually determined by

[25] The basic aim of principal development policy was to facilitate the provision of quality education (Article 6) and to formulate detailed guidelines. All newly-appointed principals were to be certified through a series of development programs of not less than 300 contact hours prior to or within six months after taking office (Articles 6 & 20). It also stipulated that serving principals undergo not less than 240 continuous development hours over a five-year cycle. If they failed to fulfil this requirement they would be given one year to 'make it up', or be 'dismissed' (Articles 6 & 20). In addition to induction and continuing training programs, the policy stipulated advanced training programs for 'backbone principals' (excellent and competent principals, (*gugan xiaozhang*) (Article 6). Subsequently, a *Professional Development Project for One Thousand Backbone Principals (qianming gugan xiaozhang yanxiu jihua)* was launched in 2000.

the status of the schools they worked for and the rank, in turn, determined their income. For example, the principal of a provincial/municipal key secondary school usually had an official status equal to that of the mayor of a county while the principal of a county (district) key school equal to that of a deputy mayor. This system caused a lot of problems. It was extremely difficult to transfer principals from a higher-status school to a lower-status school, because it meant the degradation of the official status of the principal. All the principals were looking forward to going up the official ladder. The team of principals was more bureaucratic-oriented than professional-oriented (Yang, 2004).

Thus, one major task of school personnel reform was to establish a professional ranking system and a new pay scale for principals. A career-ladder system (*zhiji zhi*) was proposed. Shanghai[26], again, became the experimental city of this new system. Under this system, principals are divided into five classes: special, first, second, third, and fourth class. A review scheme has been established that is comprised of six major performance domains and twelve performance indicators. The six domains are: education ethos, school management, teaching, staff development, personal qualities and school performance. Each of the twelve indicators accounts for 10 scores and the full score is 120. Furthermore, for reviewers' reference, two sets of criteria – criterion A and B – are adopted. Criterion A applies to the review of the first-class and special-class principals while criterion B is for the rest professional rankings. For example, to become a special-class principal, the applicant has to receive a total score of 108 or above (on average scoring 9 for each of 12 indicators) on the basis of criterion A[27] (Shanghai Education Commission, 2006b). In sum, this is a system that attempts to place emphasis

[26] Two districts (Jing'an and Luwan) in Shanghai started to adopt this system as a trial in 1994 and since 2001 this system was implemented in all schools in Shanghai. The practice has also been followed by many other cities such as Shenyang, Dalian, Zhongshan, Guangzhou and Guiyang.

[27] The review usually takes three steps. First, principals make a self-evaluation on the basis of the review scheme and decide which class they will apply for. Then they need to submit an up to 3, 000-word report stating their ethos, strategies and performances. Second, the applicants read their reports to the school staff. An anonymous voting will be conducted. Any principal who receives over 50% 'Basically satisfied' and 'Unsatisfied' votes is disqualified for further evaluation. Third, their materials together with a comment by the district education bureau will be presented to the municipal and district principal career-ladder review office for the final decision (Shanghai Education Commission, 2006). It is also worth noting that principals' working experience is also very important for the application. For example, to apply for special-class principal, the applicant has to have at least 13 years of principalship. Furthermore, quotas will be assigned to each district and it is recommended that the number of different class principals should be maintained within a desired proportion (2: 4 : 3.5 : 0.5, for first-class to fourth-class secondary school principals)

on school principals' competences, contributions to the school, and work performance. As different class principals have a different income scale, the system in effect relates principals' income to their school performance. It is hoped that this will motivate principals' competition awareness and innovative spirits (Yang, 2004).

Besides principal career-ladder system, there are also reforms on the teacher personnel system. As the reform grants school principals more autonomy in recruiting and promoting teachers, principals' role as a reviewer of teacher performance is strengthened. First, teachers used to be assigned to schools by the local education bureaus. Today, schools can advertise the vacant positions, interview potential candidates and then propose a list of successful candidates to the local education bureaus for approval. Second, principals also gain more power in promoting teachers. Secondary school teachers in China are divided into these ranks: special, senior, first, and junior. Higher rank means higher recognition of their work and higher pay. Thus, getting higher professional ranks is very important for a Chinese teacher. Each school in Shanghai is required to establish a committee for reviewing teachers' performance. The committee usually has 5-9 members with the principal as the head. The committee is required to review these four aspects of the teachers' work: teacher morality, work performance, teaching and research abilities, and then grade them on an 'A, B, C, D' scale. The committee then proposes the to-be-promoted list of teachers to the district education bureaus for sanction (Shanghai Education Commission, 2003). Third, with the implementation of the curriculum reform and Quality Education, teachers are under pressure to demonstrate their ability in designing school-based courses and conducting school-based research. For example, any teacher who applies for the senior teacher rank in Shanghai has to show the records of publication in recognised journals (Shanghai Education Commission, 2003).

These reform initiatives illustrate that China has experienced an explosion of school reforms over the past decade under the banner of Quality Education. The next section summarises the major reform trends as embodied in these reform initiatives.

Major Reform Trends: A Summary

The review of the reform context indicates that the quest for quality has been apparent in a series of policies targeting, for example, a new review system that subjects schools to constant external and self evaluation, a shift to student-centred classroom practice, new curriculum catering to individual student needs, and improved teacher and principal qualifications. These reform initiatives seem to reflect a similar international reform trend towards increased market involvement, decentralisation and accountability.

First, with the expansion of the market influence, schools today exist on an ever shifting ground – somewhere between the state and the market. As the state loosens its powerful hold on schools and schools must secure an ever-increasing proportion of funding from local resources, schools have relocated along a spectrum of authorisation and control that is characterised at one end by the school as state agency and at the other end by the school as constituted within the market.

Accompanying increased market involvement in the school sector, inter-school competition has drastically increased. Schools today are pressured to compete for 'exemplary school' classification, better students and teachers, more school-based research outputs and better academic performance on district, provincial and/or national unified examinations. With the implementation of the quality education scheme, schools not only have to ensure that they are academically outstanding, but also unique in other ways.

Second, as in other parts of the world, quality and market related reforms in China have been inevitably accompanied by increased decentralisation and accountabilities. Decentralisation in China involves the redistribution of power and responsibility from the central government to local communities; and then further to the school level (Tang and Wu, 2000). Under the Quality Education scheme, the 'principal responsibility system' seems to promise principals more autonomy in terms of school-based curriculum, teacher development, recruitment and promotion. However, an integral

aspect of decentralisation is increased public accountability for academic performance and resource utilisation. Various performance indicators have been adopted to review the performance of schools, principals and teachers.

Given this context, the role of school principals becomes increasingly important. They are expected to facilitate schools to achieve better-quality teaching and improve student learning outcomes on the one hand, and shoulder devolved financial and personnel responsibilities on the other. Their position also seems to have become more vulnerable as principals are now held more personally accountable for school performance under the new personnel system. In a sense, the success or failure of a school has become a matter of how well principals exercise their principalship roles. Questions then arise as to how principals interpret the possibilities and constraints derived from the Quality Education policies; how they position themselves on the shifting ground of the state and the market; and how they perceive their principalship roles in this turbulent reform age. This contextual analysis is only a 'starting point' for an examination of the shifting and complex positioning of real people acting out their roles in specific places and over specific periods of time (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000: 254). There is a need to explore how principals actually rather than rhetorically reposition themselves in this restructured system and to understand how Chinese principals perceive and enact their principalship roles within the context of Quality Education policies. This then begs these questions: what is principalship? How is the concept developed and what empirical studies have been done that help us understand this concept? The next chapter will tackle these issues which will provide a conceptual context for this study.

Chapter 3 Principalship: A Literature Review

The major purpose of this chapter is to synthesise and critique literature relevant to studying principalship in China. The first sub-purpose is to provide 'a state-of-the-evidence description of what is already known' about educational leadership and school principalship (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006: 5). The second purpose is to suggest an informative frame for the study. As such, it aims to clarify the most important questions for inquiry, offer conceptual lenses on key relevant variables, and provide a source of information about promising research methods. The third purpose is to further justify the demand for empirical research into the principalship in Mainland China. This justification acknowledges the generally inadequate knowledge base.

The field of educational leadership has been heavily dominated by Anglo-American paradigms and theories (Hallinger, Walker & Bajunid, 2005; Oplatka, 2004; Walker & Dimmock, 2000; 2002). Given that most conceptual and empirical leadership understandings originate from Western societies, there is always a danger of assuming that Western models of leadership and principalship are universal (Oplatka, 2004). In recent years, researchers have recognised the limitations of this over-reliance on a mono-cultural perspective (Heck, 1996). While there may be similarities in many of the issues faced by educational administrators around the world, it is also important to consider the practice of educational administration within context-specific and particularly non-Western settings. Given these considerations, this literature review will be divided into three major sections. It begins with dominant Western leadership understandings and studies that have largely shaped the field. It then discusses a number of emerging non-Western research findings that may differ or complement the predominant Western thinking. Finally, it focuses on literature on principalship in Mainland China.

A review of Western leadership literature indicates that leadership itself is a contested concept. Researchers attempt to make sense of the concept from various angles. Traditionally much research has tended to treat leadership as an independent variable, i.e. the research aim is to identify which leadership qualities and behaviours contribute to

organisational effectiveness and how leadership makes a difference (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006; Southworth, 2005). Although such research yields important findings, it runs the risk of searching for 'best practices' for cross-organisational and even cross-national prescriptions (Glatter & Kydd, 2003). Furthermore, such studies do little to help understand how leaders themselves conceive of their work environments and/or their roles. Recognising these limitations, new approaches to leadership have emerged over the past three decades. These new approaches conceptualise leadership (such as principalship) as an agency who influences and is influenced by the environment. Aided by cognitive approaches, the focal point of such studies is how principals construct the meaning of the principalship. This body of literature has expanded leadership understandings through calling for a greater awareness of 'the culture and context in which school leaders operate' (Walker & Dimmock, 2002: 1).

Research findings emerging from the non-Western settings have also supported the view that theories, policies and practices implemented in specific social settings may not be valid and applicable in other social-political-cultural contexts (Hallinger, 2004; Oplata, 2004; Walker & Dimmock, 2002; Walker, 2003). This is because societal cultures, along with local economic, political and religious conditions, act as mediators and filters to policies and practices imported from overseas (Walker, 2003). Among other things, non-Western principals are faced with the particular challenge of managing the conflicting pressures for stability and change; this is exacerbated by the fact that many change initiatives come from cultures that operate with different normative assumptions (Hallinger, 2004). Thus, this body of literature suggests that, first, research into educational leadership must 'stretch beyond its current near-exclusive grounding in Western theory and move towards including more diverse perspectives from the multiple cultural contexts within which educational administration takes place' (Dimmock & Walker, 1998: 559). Second, adopting a culturally and contextually embedded approach can aid exploration of, for example, the typical, culturally constructed assumptions or implicit theories of leadership held by the actors in particular educational settings (Ribbins & Gronn, 2000).

Contextualised studies that focus on how principals construct meanings, however, are lacking in Mainland China. An examination of the Chinese literature reveals that, first, there is a marked lack of empirical studies in the Chinese education discourse. Personal commentaries and reflections are usually falsely labelled as research. Existing 'research' tends to take two forms. One is to provide prescriptive suggestions telling principals what they should be and do; however, these prescriptions are not usually based on the realities of Chinese schools. The other form touches upon the reality and discusses the issues and problems that concern principals. Although these provide useful and interesting descriptive information of the practical concerns of principals, they are not supported by empirical or analytical data. Second, many empirical studies conducted in China adopt quantitative methods. Very few qualitative studies that investigate principals' perceptions about leadership in the context of education reform in China have been attempted. Thus, a substantial knowledge gap exists in our understanding of Chinese principalship.

School Principalship in the West

This section attempts to outline the conceptual and empirical understandings of educational leadership in Western countries. There are two sub-sections. The first sub-section provides a brief overview of dominant leadership understandings. It concludes that much of this literature is concerned with 'the instrumental and the evaluative and gives little attention to the critical, the humanistic, the descriptive, and the conceptual' aspects of educational leadership (Ribbins, 2003: 3). These studies assume that influence 'flows in one direction – from the leader to the student, however tortuous the path might be' (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999: 471). Furthermore, they treat leadership as a series of theories imposed upon leaders by researchers rather than a concerted effort to capture the differing cognitive lens used as interpretive filters by active leaders (Fairholm, 1998). There is a strong argument to be made for research that gives more weight to the 'contingent characteristic of school leadership' (Hallinger, 2003a: 346) and lets school leaders themselves tell their stories (Sugure, 2005). More research needs to focus on the 'contextualistic, interactionistic, and dynamic aspects' of leaders' work lives (Dhunpath,

2000: 545).

The second sub-section reviews this set of contextualistic and interactionistic research. The review focuses on two groups of research findings; i.e. the components and the sources of principals' role conceptions. The review reveals that the dominant discourse of school principalship is undergoing a continuous transition from welfarism to new managerialism and that principals are faced with a range of tensions related to their changing roles. The review also indicates that multiple societal, institutional and personal factors can account for the different ways principals conceive of and perform their roles.

An Overview of Leadership Conceptualisation and Research

This section attempts to sketch a brief outline of leadership understanding in the West. Given that leadership itself is a contested and ambiguous term, the review does not seek to define leadership. Instead, the review aims to explore the assumptions and beliefs that have guided most leadership research and argues that the theoretical foundations of its traditional knowledge base are too limited to inform the principalship in the increasingly globalised 21st century.

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth (Burns, 1978: 2). People view the concept from almost innumerable perspectives. Some perceive leadership as a process[28] while others view it as a personal attribute[29]. Some try to define leadership by differentiating it from management. The distinction between management as doing things right and leadership as doing the right things is widely known (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Some, however, argue that such distinctions are largely meaningless: Achieving success as a leader requires 'doing right things right' (Leithwood, 2004). In one of the latest comprehensive literature review of educational leadership, Leithwood and his colleagues (2006) argue that there seem to be two functions which are

[28] For example, MacGregor Burns (1978) defines leadership as 'the reciprocal process of mobilizing ... in order to realise goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers'.
[29] For example, a widely cited belief held by the US former president Henry Truman is that 'leadership is 'the ability to get men to do what they don't want to do, or do what they are too lazy to do, and like it' (quoted in Smith & Piele, 1997; Sadler, 2003).

indispensable to most leadership definitions: setting directions and exercising influence. Thus, their generic definition of leadership is very simple: it is about direction and influence.

Despite the differences existing in the earlier discussion of leadership conceptions, they are all associated with some common assumptions. For example, as Rost (1991: 27) has observed, the traditional leadership narratives 'have a structural-functionalist frame of reference in the hierarchical, linear, pragmatic, Newtonian background assumptions of what makes the world go around' and leadership theories tend to be 'oriented toward goal achievement'. Senge (1990: 340) comments that the traditional view of leadership is 'based on assumptions of people's powerlessness' and MacBeath (2004: 7) argues that leadership tends to be conceptualised as 'individual, measurable, hierarchical, conferred, trained, archetypical and exclusive'[30].

Underpinned by these assumptions, much leadership research attempted to find out how leadership contributes to goal achievement. In other words, it sought to answer questions related to whether and how educational leadership (or particular aspects of leadership) impacts various organisational variables such as organisational efficiency, teachers' job satisfaction and most importantly, student learning (Leithwood, 2004). Two types of empirical evidence speak to these questions. One branch of literature can be categorised as leadership effect research that aims to understand the process through which leadership influences organisational effectiveness and student learning in particular. The other branch is 'effective leadership practice' research that aims to identify the 'right' type of leadership practices and associated values and qualities that can contribute to school effectiveness. Various leadership models arise from this branch of literature.

For the first branch of the literature, important evidence can be drawn from large-scale quantitative studies of overall leader effects. Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998)

30 Individual: Seen in terms of individuals possessed of special qualities, or competencies; Measurable: Premised on being individual, its inherent competencies may be measured; Conferred: Leadership is not assumed or 'taken' but earned through selection and appointment; Trained: While leadership qualities may be 'born', increasingly leadership is seen as an outcome of programmatic induction; Archetypical: Leaders follow a defined and limited template of knowledge and skills; Exclusive: Limited to senior and middle managers and generally excludes teachers and students (MacBeath, 2004: 7).

reviewed evidence of approximately four dozen studies across all types of schools. They concluded that the effects of school leadership on student learning are small but educationally significant[31]. They also found that leadership mainly exerts a measurable *indirect effect* on school effectiveness and student achievement through combined mediating and moderating variables. The indirect nature of a high proportion of school leadership effects on students has prompted research about mediating variables or conditions in classrooms and schools that (a) are open to significant influence by those in leadership roles and (b) produce demonstrable improvements in pupil learning as a dependent variable (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). Studies have also been devoted to identifying those moderating variables, which, as features of the organisational or wider social context that may enhance or mute leadership effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). A widely adopted research framework on leadership effects takes this form, which is shown in figure 3.1.

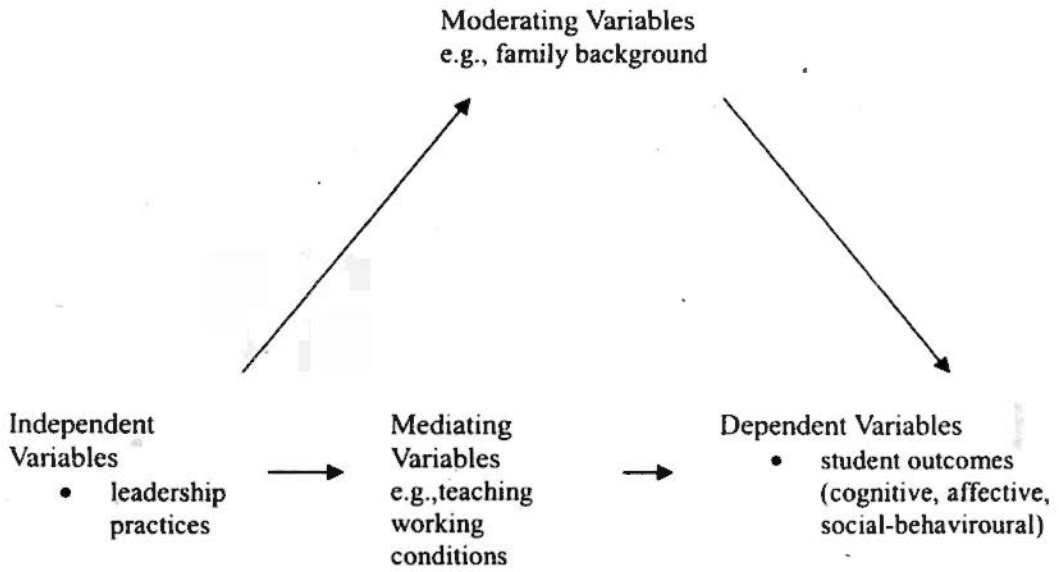

Figure 3.1 A framework guiding research on leadership effects (Adapted from Leithwood *et al.*, 2006).

As the figure indicates, the leadership behaviours or practices have direct effects potentially on a wide range of other variables. Some of the variables *moderate* (enhance or mute) leadership effects, others 'link' or *mediate* leadership practices to pupils and

[31] While leadership explains only 3% to 5% of the variation in student learning across schools, this range of variation represents about one quarter of the total across-school variation (10% - 20%) explained by all school-level variables, after controlling for student intake or background factors (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996; Townsend, 1994).

their learning, the dependent variables in the study[32]. Research adopting such a framework aims to identify the process through which the independent variable influences the dependent variables. This is related to the second branch of literature – 'effective leadership practice' research that searches for leadership practices and qualities that can maximise leadership effects.

Multiple conceptual models have emerged in the field of educational leadership that attempt to 'capture – in a succinct, memorable, and inevitably simplified manner – aspects of successful or effective leadership in relation to these and other areas' (Leithwood, 2004: 7). Over the years, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, constructivist leadership, servant leadership, cultural leadership, and primal leadership, to name but some, have entered the leadership jargon (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). This branch of 'effective leadership practice' literature is generally of two sorts.

One sort of the literature, exemplified in some of the work of such authors as Deal and Peterson (1994) and Fullan (2003), typically begins with attractive visions of schooling, school conditions, or approaches to the improvement of schools and then infers what leaders need to do (or be) to help realise such visions (Leithwood, 2004: 21). Although this literature can inspire and motivate leaders out of old ways of thinking, it generally lacks support of the reality-grounded evidence. Another sort of 'effective leadership practice' literature is evidence-based and focuses explicitly on the educational leadership that brings about improved educational outcomes (Hallinger, 2003a). Two of the foremost models, as measured by the number of empirical studies, are instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

Instructional leadership models emerged in the early 1980s from school effectiveness research. It focused predominantly on the role of the school principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction in the school

[32] Leithwood and his colleagues (2006) also point out that much of the leadership effects literature has focused narrowly on a small but critical set of academic outcomes, it is thus important for future research to include but extend its measures of pupil outcomes to other indicators of this sort

(Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The most frequently used conceptualisation of instructional leadership was developed by Hallinger[33] (2000). This model shaped much of the thinking about effective principal leadership disseminated internationally in the 1980s and early 1990s (Hallinger, 2003a). Most instructional leadership research, however, tended to describe long lists of behaviours for principals to adopt, regardless of their contexts (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997). The limitations of instructional leadership were increasingly recognised when school improvement and restructuring became the focal points of education policies.

Accompanying the surge of government policies around the world to change, improve and restructure schools, the 1990s saw the popularisation of terms such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, leadership of change and innovation and transformational leadership (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Hallinger, 2003a). The most frequently used model has been transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1997; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000a; Silins & Mulford, 2002). Unlike instructional leadership, transformational leadership focuses on stimulating a collaborative culture and developing an organisation's capacity to innovate (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; 2000b). Hallinger (2003a) identifies these major distinguishing characteristics between instructional and transformational leadership:

- Top-down vs. bottom-up focus on approach to school improvement[34];
- First-order or second-order target for change[35];
- Managerial or transactional vs. transformational relationship to staff[36] (p. 337).

Despite some accumulated evidence that transformational leadership makes a

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[33] The model proposes three dimensions of the instructional leadership construct: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate.

[34] Instructional leadership emphasises the principal's coordination and control of instruction (Cohen & Miller, 1980; Heck *et al.*, 1990). In contrast, transformational leadership is often considered a type of shared or distributed leadership. Transformational leadership models may explicitly conceputlise leadership as an organizational entity rather than the property of a single individual, accounting for multiple sources of leadership (Hallinger, 2003).

[35] Instructional leadership is conceputlised as targeting *first-order* variables in the change process. This means that the instructional leader (i.e., the principal) seeks to influence conditions that directly impact the quality of curriculum and instruction delivered to students in classrooms (Cuban, 1984, 1988). Transformational leadership seeks to generate second-order effects. Transformational leaders increase the capacity of others in the school to produce first-order effects on learning (Lambert, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1999).

[36] This distinction contrasts leadership that focuses on management of existing relationships and maintenance of the status quo with leadership that seeks to envision and create the future by synthesizing and extending the aspirations of members of the organizational community (Hallinger, 2003).

difference[37], this leadership model is not without critiques. The available evidence suggests that transformational leadership is no easier to exercise than instructional leadership (Jackson, 2000)[38]. It is an exceptionally tall order when educational leaders are expected to possess a talisman capacity for 'transformation' to provide leadership that enables both teachers and learners to transcend biographical, local and national constraints (Sugure, 2005).

A brief overview of traditional leadership research suggests that at least two main issues in educational leadership research need to be addressed. First, leadership tends to be conceptualised as a one-way rather than a *mutual influence process* (Hallinger, 2003a: 346; italics as original). The goal of such research is normally to 'validate a specific form of leadership by demonstrating significant effects on the school organisation and on students' (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999: 471). There is a need to recognise that leadership both influences and is influenced by the context. Second, various leadership models, whether transformational or instructional leadership, are proposed and imposed by researchers on principals (Wexler, 2005). As such, little is known whether and how these models make sense to educational leaders. There is a need to explore how leaders make meaning of these leadership theories and their leadership roles.

Recognising that such issues must be addressed, more and more scholars begin to ask questions such as 'what school leadership looks like from the perspectives of those who daily deals with the [complexities] of the role and what differences it would make to a [conceptualisation] of contemporary literature on school leadership if the 'voices' of principals were given a central role' (Sugure, 2005: 5). There has been a shift in research focus to open the black box of how school leaders contemplate their existence in and adapt to the complex contexts in which they work.

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[37] Many transformational leadership research findings have confirmed its strong effects on school and classroom conditions, teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their commitment to change, and the organizational learning (Bogler, 2001; Day *et al.*, 2001; Fullan, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). For example, a study of the effects of transformational leadership conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) found that transformational leadership had strong direct effects on school conditions (.80) which, in turn, had strong direct effects on classroom conditions (.62).

[38] As Hallinger (2003) comments, normative conceptions of what is most suitable or correct may not be supported by empirical reality. There may not be enough transformational leaders for all schools (West *et al.*, 2000).

This shift in focus has been facilitated by the emergence of a socio-psychological approach to research principalship, exemplified by various cognitive studies[39] (Hallinger, Leithwood & Murphy, 1993). Drawing on broad perspectives such as symbolic interaction, cognitive research helps to understand how principals make sense and make meaning of their work environment, that is, their social construction of reality (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997). As such, cognitive studies are able to address questions as to why principals do what they do. The past decades have seen a surge of cognitive leadership research. Although these studies adopt different concepts as a focal point, for example, roles (Johnson, 1998), identity (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Sugrue, 2005), cognitive processes (Johnson & Fauske, 2000) and worldviews (Wexler, 2005), they all aim to reach an understanding of the meanings leaders attach to leadership. As such, these studies are considered most relevant to the proposed research and worthy of a much more detailed review.

Before exploring this perspective further, it is necessary to explicate why such studies deserve greater attention. First, such studies are particularly necessary in today's societies where many of the traditional norms, values and benchmarks for educational leadership have been contested and at least partially obscured (Starratt, 2005). Review of the reform context in the previous chapter reveals that schools today are faced with a major problem of what Habermas (1987: 173) refers to as the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' by the systemsworld. The lifeworlds of schools gradually come under pressure from often well-intended 'one best way' approaches to school improvement (Sergiovanni, 2000). As a result, leadership roles and identities are 'being continually improvised, continually being reinvented to take account of unforeseen forces, continually being internally deconstructed in a process of reconstruction' (Starratt, 2005). More studies are called for to capture this dynamic process.

Second, such contextualised and cognitive research echoes Thomas Greenfield's sustained advocacy for a 'humane science of educational leadership'[40] (quoted in Grace,

[39] Cognitive approach is underpinned by the belief that what principals do depends on what they think – their overt behaviour is the result of covert thought processes (Leithwood, 1993).

[40] In his prize-winning paper entitled *Organisation Theory as Ideology*, Greenfield (1979) advocated that 'organisation

1995: 51). It represents 'a humanistic cross-current ... that challenges the tidal mainstream embodied in the dominant discourse of what we might call "prescriptive leadership" (Goodson, 2005). This dominant prescriptive leadership image offers incomplete explanations of the practical realities and problems of schools (Dillard, 1995; Heck & Hallinger, 1999). More research is needed to help to understand power, conflicts, values and moral dilemmas in educational leadership and to examine the changing role of language and discourse in constructing new administrative 'realities' (Grace, 1995).

Third, these studies recognise the place of human agency and the dynamism between human agency and environmental determinism (Reed, 1996). The dynamic view stresses that 'agency derives from the simultaneously enabling and contradictory nature of the structural principles by which people act' (Whittington, 1994: 72). Such studies have now begun to question how school leaders shape and are shaped by their experiences within the socio-political context in which they live and work. In these studies, principals 'have stories to tell as actors in an unfolding drama in which they have a prescribed role in terms of a "script", "lines" of priority to be pursued, but with agency also, as they frequently say, "to put their own stamp on things"' (Sugure, 2005).

Recognising the need for more contextualised and cognitive principalship studies, the next section reviews the major findings derived from them. This review helps to provide some sensitising concepts and lenses that can inform the research.

A Review of Contextualised and Cognitive Principalship Research

In reviewing contextualised and cognitive principalship research, special weight is given to work reported over the past decade, and to work of higher quality judged by conventional standards[41]. Also more emphasis is placed on research similar in nature to

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is experience' (italics as original). He argued that the quality of experience within organisations greatly varies from person to person, from time to time, and from place to place, thus it is an act of enormous importance to place meaning upon experience.

[41] The main body of literature to be reviewed include: Dimmock and O'Donoghue's (1997) life history studies of innovative principals within the school restructuring reform in Australia; Johnson's (1998) study of principals' dilemmas and responses to restructuring in the US; Vandenberghe's (1998) study of the way principals cope with external pressures and internal redefinition of their role; Johnson and Fauske's (2000) research of principals' environmental enactment and the accompanying cognitive processes; Moos and Møller's (2003) study of how

the present study. As the research focuses on how Chinese principals perceive and enact their roles, two groups of research findings will be reviewed: the components and the sources of the role conception of the principal.

Components of the Role Conception of the Principal

According to Crow and Glascock (1995), four components define a particular role conception: role set relationships, task priorities, language and values. This framework will be borrowed to organise this section of review.

Role set relationships and task priorities

Social statuses and social roles comprise major building blocks of social structures that 'connect culturally defined expectations with the patterned conduct and relationships which make up a social structure' (Merton, 1957: 110). Each social status or position involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles. The totality of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status is labeled as a *role-set*[42] (p. 110). Members of a role-set are called *role parties* or *role senders*, who are apt to hold social positions differing from that of the occupant of the status in question. The role occupant is thus faced with complex demands from a wide array of role parties, many of whom base their expectations on very different foundations. Given this set of *role expectations*, the role occupant needs to determine their *task priorities* and what the person actually does is called *role enactment* (Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

The review of the context has revealed that principals have to sit across both the systemsworld and lifeworld of the school and respond to calls from both outside and

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Scandinavian school leaders cope with dual pressure of external New Public Management (NPM) reform and sustaining trust and loyalty in schools; Sugure and his colleagues' (2005) principal identity project across the US, UK and Denmark; as well as Leithwood and his colleagues' (2006) successful principalship project. This review will also consult some non-empirical sources, for example, Merton's (1957) role theory; Crow and Glascock's (1995) analysis of the components and sources of role conception; Goldring and Greenfield's (2002) analysis of conditions of educational leadership; Leithwood and Prestine's (2002) classification of principalship approaches to accountability and Wexler's[41] (2005) four types of sense making of leadership. This source of literature provides the insights and frameworks for understanding the role of the principal.

[42] For example, as Merton (1957) illustrates, the status of school teacher in the United States has its distinctive role-set, in which are found pupils, colleagues, the school principal and superintendent, the Board of Education, professional associations, and, on occasion, local patriotic organizations.

inside of the school. This means principals are engaged in complicated role set relationships with role parties such as the educational headquarters and local educational departments (the state sphere); parents (the market sphere) and teachers and students (school lifeworld). These role parties, based on very different foundations, raise different expectations on principals. Adopting the concept of accountability, Moos (2005) develops a comprehensive model to describe the environment facing principals. His model includes:

> *1. Managerial accountability*: The school must live up to standards, standardised procedures, norms and criteria outlined by superior administrations and ministries.
> *2. Market oriented accountability*: The school must deliver the products/services that consumers expect on the basis of standardised declarations.
> *3. Public accountability*: The local community/parents assess if the school performs according to public promises because schools are important cultural and social institutions in the local community.
> *4. Professional accountability*: The school must live up to professional standards as defined by the teaching profession.
> *5. Ethical accountability*: The school must live up to ethical/moral norms as it is an educational, human institution (p. 323-24).

As Moos (2005) notes, most kinds of accountability are represented in any educational system most of the time, but the balance between them is different and changes over time. In this reform age it becomes increasingly problematic for principals to determine their priorities and their worklives are ridden with tensions.

A major tension facing principals is the need to cope with external accountability while building internal trust (Moos & Møller, 2003; Moos, 2005). Hallinger (2003b) comments that principals are caught between the demands of those above them and the expectations of those below them in the hierarchy. This can also be interpreted within Sergiovanni's (2000) framework: conflicts arise from the need to meet the calls from both the systemsworld and the lifeworld of the school. Principals are torn between a more autocratic form of the chief executive role with regard to matters of resource management and deployment to ensure the school's success in the 'market place' and a more collegiate form of the leading professional role with regard to the curriculum and its delivery (Wylie, 1997: 11). They suffer from feelings of frustration that they cannot

'do justice to both' aspects of their role, and cannot 'get enough focus on either' (p.11).

Further analysis exposes another two sets of tensions facing principals: the external and the internal. Externally, principals are increasingly positioned between the competing demands of the state and the market. They have to engage both with the demands of the central state in terms of meeting centrally determined objectives and with the day-to-day 'business' of running their school and ensuring its survival within the education market. Internally, the increasing divergence between the corporate priorities of the principal and the educational concerns of classroom teacher colleagues is leading to a growing gap between the manager and the managed.

Externally, principals stand at the interface between central government and local stakeholders, especially consumers. The devolution of ever increasing decision-making capacity to site-based managers in schools is one means whereby the central state is able simultaneously to exercise a degree of control over what they do and to shift responsibility when things go wrong (Halpin, Power & Fitz, 1993). Principals are increasingly forced into a position in which they have to demonstrate performance along centrally prescribed criteria in a context over which they often have diminishing control (McInerney, 2003; Johnson, 1998; Power *et al.*, 1997). Principals today increasingly experience the impact of the reforms on a more individual basis. They have always felt responsible for the future of their schools, but this is heightened in the education market place where success and failure becomes a matter of how well they exercise their leadership roles and compete successfully for students. The principals seem to have a stronger sense of being 'in charge' than before, and of having to guide the school toward a successful future (Power *et al.*, 1997: 357). Thus, principals today are under pressure to respond to the external demand for accountability imposed by politicians and local authorities on the one hand; and ensure the school's success, good image and reputation in the local education market on the other (Moos & Møller, 2003).

Internally, principals and their staff seem to have been privileged differently under the reforms. In many cases the devolution of decision-making to schools has resulted in a

concentration of power in the hands of principals alone, or together with the senior management team (e.g., Johnson, 1998; Moos & Møller, 2003; Power *et al.*, 1997). There is a highly asymmetric relationship between principals and teachers, and the prerogative to define the values and goals still sits with the principals (Moos & Møller, 2003). This is somewhat paradoxical, given that the rhetoric of reform is about participation and shared decision-making. Granström (1996: 180) claims it is because that 'decentralisation is forced upon an unprepared hierarchical organisation'. The growing divergence between principals and teachers is also underpinned by the very logic of the reforms. Principals are no longer partners in the process of educating pupils, instead, they have become 'allocators of resources within the school, managers who are driven to ensure that the activities of employees are appropriate to the needs of the business, and givers of rewards to those whose contribution to the business is most highly regarded' (Sinclair *et al.*, 1993: 8, quoted in Power *et al.*, 1997: 353). Therefore, the coupling of site-based management with market mechanisms and competence-based assessments has contributed to an exaggeration rather than a reduction in bureaucratic, top-down control within individual schools (Moos & Møller, 2003; Moos, 2005).

In summary, principals today are faced with multiple expectations and tensions. They need to be increasingly accountable for outcomes – there are financial and administrative demands from the political, administrative and parental sectors. They are also required to build communities of trust in human relations that are at the core of schools. It seems that the pressure to cope with the external accountabilities is more dominant in principals' worklives and this can be shown in the changing discourse of school principalship which will be reviewed in the next section.

Language and Values

Language is used to articulate the vision of the role and to perform the duties of the role (Gronn, 1983). Variations in language incorporate the set of rules and codes of the role which differ depending on the occupational 'sub-community', the organisation and the individual (Crow & Glascock, 1995). Language and values are often inseparable and language can be viewed as a vehicle that carries certain values. One way of making

sense of the value changes is focusing on the shifting discourses of school principalship (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000).

In many respects, the attributes of good school leadership are now being described according to business values and management practices rather than inclusive, educative and participatory forms of decision-making (Smyth, 2001). An increasing permeation of business values into what might hitherto have been considered a 'purely' professional domain signifies a discursive shift of school principalship from 'welfarism' to 'new managerialism'[43] (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000). The main characteristics of welfarism and new managerialism are shown in the following table:

Welfarism	New Managerialism
• public-service ethos	• customer-oriented ethos
• decisions driven by commitment to 'professional standards' and values, e.g., equity, care, social justice	• decisions instrumentalist and driven by efficiency, cost-effectiveness, search for competitive edge
• emphasis on collective relations with employees – through trade unions	• emphasis on individual relations – through marginalization of trade unions and through new management techniques, e.g. total quality management (TQM), human resources management (HRM)
• consultative	• authoritarian
• substantive rationality	• technical rationality
• cooperation	• competition
• managers socialised within field and values of specific welfare sector, e.g. education, health, social work	• managers generically socialized, i.e. within field and values of 'management'

Table 3.1 Main characteristics of welfarism and new managerialism

As the table indicates, the welfarist discourse revolves around ideological commitments

[43] This shift has been conceptualised in various ways. For example, Angus (1994) describes a move away from participative/professional forms of administration to technical/managerial ones. Grace (1995) contends that a social democratic phase of school leadership has been superseded by a market phase. The two researchers argue that despite the existence of other discourses, the shift from welfarism to new managerialism encompasses some of the most common transitions in the languages and practices of school principalship.

to equity, care and social justice; it values collegiality, service and professionalism (Clarke & Newman, 1992; Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; McInerney, 2003). A welfarist principal is a 'public servant...clearly committed to a conception of a public interest' (Yeatman, 1993: 348). By contrast, new managerial principals are expected to take the responsibility for the pursuit of centrally-determined responsibilities, account for their achievement and ensure the compliance of their staff (Fergusson, 1994). Good management within the managerialist discourse involves the smooth and efficient implementation of aims set outside the school, within constraints also set outside the school (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000).

Although principals today must simultaneously perform different roles and implement activities of a varied nature, principals who align themselves with new managerialist discourse seem to be more favoured in this reform age. This is well illustrated in Gewirtz and Ball's (2000) case study of two principals of a disadvantaged school in the UK. The first principal, Ms. English, was committed to the strand of welfarism and resistant to the idea of becoming bilingual speaker of the old and new management idioms. Partly due to 'the disjuncture between [her] welfarist commitments and the values and practices generated by the new policy environment', she resigned her job (p. 262). Ms. English was replaced by Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones, on the contrary, was more instrumentally oriented and performance focused and very concerned with the semiological subtleties of image, symbols and presentation. He was 'multilingual' in the sense that he could move relatively easily between the 'older' language of public service (which has embedded within it a language of equal opportunities) and a number of new languages of school management[44]. In this sense, he knew what he had to do to 'make [the school] 'successful', as success is defined by the market/management discourse' (p. 263).

On the basis of Ms. English and Mr. Jone's stories, Gewirtz and Ball (2000) conclude that market revolution is a transformational process that brings into play a new set of

[44] For example, the language of the market (public relations, entrepreneurship, marketing and recruitment), the language of financial management (the budget, plant management, income generation), the language of organisational management (corporate culture, human resources, quality, effectiveness and performance) and, when required, the new language of curriculum (programmes of study, units, modules, levels of attainment, national testing).

values and a new moral environment. During this process, new subjectivities are generated; the role and sense of identity and purpose of school managers are being reworked and redefined. Then, what factors may influence the languages principals adopt and the role they perceive themselves?

Sources of a Role Conception

A synthesis of literature review indicates that the individual, institutional and societal contexts are especially salient in principals' lives and work; these three contexts largely comprise the sources of the role conception of the principal (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Gordon, 2002; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006; Ribbins & Gronn, 2000; Sumulyan, 2000). The next section synthesises the discussion of these three contexts as the sources of a role conception of the principal.

First, the personal context of the individual, including home, educational background, life stages, career experiences, and interactions with family and friends, seems to be significant (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Sumulyan, 2000). This dimension may also include some internal states such as personal values and cognitive processes, The cognitive process helps to explain why principals selectively attend to certain aspects of the environment while ignoring others (Cyert & March, 1963; Johnson & Fauske, 2000). In this sense, Sergiovanni's (1991) concept of mindscapes offers a useful way to look at how individuals define their roles. He defines mindscapes as 'mental images and frameworks through which administrative reality and one's place within this reality are envisioned by the person' (p. 45). They may consist of beliefs concerning how schools work, the purpose of school, and the nature of leadership. The mindscapes act as roadmaps guiding principals' attention and selection processes (Johnson & Fauske, 2000). Only some issues in the institutional and societal contexts may capture the attention of principals while the formation of the mindscape is also shaped and constrained by the institutional and societal contexts. There is an iterative relationship between individual and institutional and societal contexts.

- Second, the institutional or organisational context consists of two constituencies: the

demographic, geographic and structural elements of a school and the people of the organisation. The demographic, geographic and structural elements of an organisation refer to, for example, level of schooling, school size, location, and status and type of schools (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). Among them, the 'market position' of the school within the local competitive arena is particularly salient (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000: 266). This is not difficult to understand as privileged schools can choose their intake and are thus subject to less pressure of the market competition (Brown *et al.*, 1997). Organisations also significantly influence conceptions of the role of the principal by the information provided, deliberately or not, by colleagues, superiors and subordinates (Hall, 1996). Hughes (1958: 43) states that 'one of the most important things about any man is his audience or his choice of several audiences to which he may address his claims to be of some worth'.

Finally, Smulyan (2000: 4) argues that the historical and social context encompasses and reflects all of the other contexts. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 86) has commented on the importance of the societal context in defining a principal's role conception:

> It is clear that the concept of role involves an integration of the elements of activity and relation in terms of societal expectations. ...[T]he role, which functions as an element of the microsystem, actually has its roots in the higher-order macrosystem and its associated ideology and institutional structures...It is the embeddedness of roles in this larger context that gives them their special power to influence — and even to compel — how a person behaves in a given situation, the activities she engages in, and the relations that become established between that person and others present in the setting.

The societal dimension includes the historically accepted patterns of behaviour, hierarchies of power, and norms of interaction that shape principals (Smulyan, 2000: 4). Gordon (2002: 152) terms this as deep structures that reflect historically constructed 'codes' of behavioural order and 'convey the relative status of people within the social system within which they exist'. Deep structures are usually non-tangible, less readily identifiable and lurk unseen everywhere in organisations. Despite its importance, this

societal dimension has not been fully explored. One possible reason is that the field of educational leadership has been historically dominated by Western paradigms and theories; thus Western researchers generally lack the cultural sensitivity. In recent years, however, more research has been conducted in non-Western settings and evidence begins to be accumulated that the societal values shape the way principals perceive and enact their roles. Given the universalising trends of educational reforms, the non-Western literature also helps to investigate how international 'social movements' are refracted within national systems (Sugure, 2005). The next section reviews the research findings emerging in non-Western societies over the past ten years or so.

School Principalship in Non-Western Settings

This section reviews the recently emerging research findings of school principalship in non-Western societies. It has two purposes. One purpose is to support the argument that it is necessary to embed school principalship research within societal contexts and to 'explicate the influence of cultural norms on the conceptualisation and exercise of leadership' (Hallinger & Heck, 1998: 187). The second purpose is to suggest the need for more principalship research embedded in the Chinese Mainland context.

Drawing on the literature review conducted by Oplatka (2004), the section will first sketch some characteristics of principalship in non-Western settings. The dissimilarities between Western and non-Western principalship identified in her review suggest that the societal cultures and deep structures do exert an influence on principals. The second sub-section provides more research findings, collected in East Asia in particular, to support the assertion. East Asia is chosen for its geographical and cultural affinity to Mainland China. The third sub-section suggests that the globally disseminated education reforms may not be consistent with traditional cultural values in East Asia. Principals in this region are thus faced with more complicated tensions.

A Portrait of School Principalship in Non-Western Countries

Oplatka (2004) conducted a comprehensive literature review of the prinicpalship in

developing countries[45] and depicted a portrait of principalship in non-western countries.

First, principals' power tends to be severely constrained by the highly centralised educational systems in these countries. Although decentralisation reforms have been introduced in some of these countries (e.g., Thailand, Singapore, Botswana), the situation has not changed dramatically. Second, while principals in the West are increasingly recognised as innovators and initiators of school change, principalship in non-Western societies is characterised as a lack of change initiation. Principals in developing countries are usually 'depicted as conservative, concentrating on routine activities and unlikely to encourage innovations in their schools or to be change agents' (p. 436). Third, in most developing countries, the degree of autocratic leadership style displayed by the principal is relatively high, although manifold autocratic leadership style may exist[46]. By contrast, a major ideal characteristic of principalship in developed countries is a participative, democratic leadership style.

As Oplatka (2004) concludes, some significant organisation regulations and cultural features underpin these characteristics[47]. For example, a cultural feature that appears to be related to principals' school change avoidance is what Hofstede (1991) called 'cultures of uncertainty avoidance'. The cultural scripts underpinning the 'right' leadership style also seem to suggest that principals adopt an autocratic style (Oplatka, 2004: 440).

This conclusion is also endorsed by the recent GLOBE study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) that investigated the meaning and exercise of leadership across 62 societies. Part of the study's findings identified attributes which people across cultures perceived as making effective or ineffective leaders. The research found that

[45] She defined 'developing countries' as those outside of Europe and North America with a few exceptions (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Japan, etc.).

[46] As Oplatka (2004: 438) comments, the autocratic leadership style ranges from tight, 'army-like' control of the principal over his staff to patterns of pseudo-participative leadership style. In other words, spontaneous, dangerous and difficult-to-control forms of teacher collaboration are replaced by more controlled, more harmoniously managed forms.

[47] This is not to deny the dissimilarities existing among non-Western countries. Oplatka's (2004) review also reveals some of these dissimilarities. For example, Southeast Asian principals were found to attach more importance to instructional leadership, setting school aims and the promotion of quality teaching. Nevertheless, instructional leadership functions were relatively rare in other developing nations.

despite the universal positive/negative leader attributes (factors which people regardless of their cultural context say are associated with effective/ineffective leadership), there were also culturally contingent leader attributes (factors which in some culture were seen as to enhance effective leadership, but in others to impede it). For example, one of the leadership dimensions – participative leadership – differed substantially across cultures. Anglo cultures (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, white South Africa, UK, and USA) viewed participative leadership more positively than Confucian Asian cultures (mainland China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan)[48].

The next section will discuss the impact of societal culture on principalship in non-Western settings, and in East Asia in particular.

Principalship in East Asia

Research on principal leadership in East Asian systems has generated interesting findings concerning the avenues through which school leaders achieve desired results[49]. It seems that East Asian principals achieve results through similar avenues (i.e., goals, school structures, people and culture) as principals in the West (Hallinger, 2003b). As Leithwood *et al.* (2006) comment, the core practices of school principalship around the world are similar, but the way in which these practices are enacted differs in response to the cultural and institutional context.

First of all, research concludes that school effectiveness is a culturally and contextually sensitive concept. There is always a need to examine the concept in the local context, trace its origins and explore its implications in the practice of school principalship (Dimmock, 2003; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). In East Asia, teachers 'have developed culturally-adaptive ways of teaching to circumvent what is regarded in the West as

[48] The Confucian Asian culture values 'power distance and practices relatively high levels of societal collectivism. In this culture, a leader is trusted to get on with the job on behalf of (usually) his subordinates'. By contrast, in Anglo cultures, where individualism is strongly valued, subordinates are more valued for their contributions at every level in society, and therefore are expected to take a more active role in leadership.

[49] Such research has been conducted in Thailand (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000; Hallinger, 2004), Hong Kong (Cheung, 2004; Dimmock and Walker, 1998, 2000; Law, Walker & Dimmock; 2003; Walker, 2004), Malaysia (Bajunid *et al.*, 1996) and Singapore (Gopinathan and Kam, 2000).

unfavourable conditions, especially in terms of large class sizes, for effective teaching' (Dimmock, 2003: 995). Children are socialised in ways that endorse and support school success (Dimmock, 2003; Salili, 1996). They are highly conscious of parental pressure and expectation on them to do their best at school and are likely to feel that they are letting their parents down if they do not perform at school (Watkins, 2000). Because of the pressure of parental expectations and the overly competitive examination systems, the main preoccupation of many Asian schools has been passing the examination rather than learning *per se* (Dimmock, 2003). This is one of the most important contexts facing East Asian school leaders.

Second, the power dynamics in schools emphasise hierarchy and give those at the top of the hierarchy the right to lead (and interfere) in any sphere of operation (Hallinger 2003b; Walker & Dimmock 2002). These forces limit the systemic authority of principals on the one hand; and increase the day-to-day influence they exercise over their schools on the other hand. Third, different forms of relationships often exert an influence on principals. For example, Dimmock (2000) finds that East Asian societies give greater attention to relationship obligations (e.g., kinship, patronage and friendship) than to impartially applied rules. This kind of influence is usually exercised in private regions, backstage and behind the scenes, but the tacit knowledge is that this form of influence can intervene in the school decision-making. Finally, in East Asian terms, conflict is the antithesis of order and harmony (Hallinger, Walker & Bajunid, 2005). Thus, principals tend to settle disputes in private, rather than through open debate. For example, Lo's (2002) study finds that Hong Kong principals make decisions even before meetings commence, rather than as a result of brainstorming or through the use of productive conflict of ideas.

The review shows exercise of leadership in the region is influenced by the values principals bring with them to school and these values are partly influenced by societal culture (Walker & Dimmock, 2002). East Asian principals operate within a system that shapes their roles more as bureaucratic administrators rather than participative leaders or leaders of change (Hallinger, 2003b). Thus, they are posed particular challenges in this

reform age when virtually all educational policy reforms adopted over the past decade have come from outside the region[50] (Hallinger, 2004). Education reform is part and parcel of broader cultural change in the society and coping with reform calls for *cultural leadership* (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997). Cultural leadership requires principals to assess the demands for change originating in the school and its environment in light of the school's capacities for change (Hallinger, 2004). They must always be sensitive to the competing pressures for stability and change (Lam, 2003; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Challenges for East Asian Principals

As Walker (2003) comments, principals throughout the region are being called upon to change the way they work and lead in at least five ways:

1. principals are asked to become more proactive – to direct actively meaningful change and not just sit back and watch the world go by.
2. principals are told to be consultative, open and democratic, to promote staff ownership and to create a school culture which nurtures shared leadership.
3. principals as educative leaders are increasingly charged with promoting a more integrative, coherent school.
4. the move to school based management is based on the premise that there is no all-encompassing remedy to school level needs and problems. Leaders must help develop within their own community a capacity to identify and fashion solutions to local concerns.
5. in addition to expectations targeting internal school operation, principals in the region are more and more involved in the environment beyond the school. School leaders are held more accountable for the success or otherwise of their organisations, and the success of local initiatives depends on the principals' abilities to adapt their roles to new realities (p. 978-9).

Many of these shifting expectations seem to suggest a movement away from educational practices that are consistent with traditional Asian cultural values and norms (Hallinger, 2004). As a result, although it is easy to clone surface-level structures from Western nations, deep leadership structures may remain largely unchanged (Walker, 2004). For example, Hallinger (2004) and Hallinger and Kantamara (2000) find that principals in

[50] These reforms include, for example, school-based management, student-centred learning, information and learning technology and quality education.

Thailand tend to emphasise the use of position power during the change process. The cultural expectation that staff will 'follow orders' to adopt officially pronounced changes has led Thai principals to underemphasise their role in creating a shared vision of the change process and motivating staff to change[51]. Thus, involving parents and teachers in change and policy decisions is often problematic for many East Asian principals, given the history of their often-unquestioned authority. The other side of the coin is that teachers can be equally reluctant to engage in shared decision-making. For example, parents in HK are often reluctant to participate actively in school-level decision-making because this is seen as the responsibility of the professionals (Walker & Dimmock, 2000, 2002).

Furthermore, multiple reforms implemented in the region may lack coherence. As a result, principals are charged with diverse and sometimes paradoxical tasks. As Cheung (2000: 62) comments on Hong Kong principals: 'HK principals face an uncertain, constantly changing and rather stressful future...they face wave upon wave of reform initiatives. Additional responsibilities without adequate resources have made the role changes much more painful than necessary'. Principals are expected to retain their traditional role as 'stabiliser' in the school and uphold tradition on the one hand; and are being increasingly called upon to change, reform and redefine their schools on the other (Walker, 2003: 979).

When put together, principals in the region are faced with an environment of excitement, uncertainty, confusion and often-contradictory demands. They are undergoing struggles to find their place and make sense of their new roles in the process of change. More research is required to investigate into the meaning and sense making process. Furthermore, the review of non-Western studies indicate that Western frameworks may lack cultural validity and better understanding of the nature of leadership can only come through exploring the hidden assumptions of the cultural context (Hallinger &

[51] A typical change strategy observed among Thai principals would consist of the following steps:
- Announce the change to be implemented by the school at a meeting of teachers.
- Send selected staff to workshops for training.
- Leave staff to implement the new practices in their classrooms largely on their own (Hallinger, 2004).

Kantamara, 2002). Societal culture provides an important backdrop to, and influence on, leadership (Walker, 2003). There is a need to develop a substantial indigenous research base in non-Western settings. The next section reviews the leadership literature in China and argues that such a knowledge base has not been fully established.

School Principalship in Mainland China

This section has three purposes. The first purpose is to identify some traditional Chinese thinking about leadership. It is believed that the traditional leadership wisdom may, explicitly or implicitly, shape the way contemporary principals perceive their roles. The second purpose is to understand the status quo of principalship research in China. This review exposes some of the major concerns of principals today, which helps to inform the study. The review also indicates that the knowledge base and systematic theoretical frameworks for educational leadership have not been adequately developed in China. Thus, the third purpose is to reaffirm the importance of the study.

Historical and Cultural Underpinnings of Good Leadership in China

This section reviews some historical and cultural underpinnings of leadership in China. Consistent with the previous argument that societal cultures play an important role in shaping leadership, these traditional views on leadership are believed to constitute, at least partly, the deep leadership structures in Mainland China.

From a historical and cultural perspective, Guo (2002) depicts a portrait of ideal Chinese leaders. Although his emphasis is on political leaders, his study is believed to have implications for understanding culturally endorsed leader qualities[52]. Guo (2002) confirms that Chinese rely on a ruler's personal qualities to master officialdom rather than favour an institutionalised political system to control bureaucracy. The history of Chinese political leadership thought includes three traditions: Confucian *junzi*

[52] In ancient China, many records were kept about management practice; for example, in classic books like 'The Art of War' (*Sun zi bing fa*), 'Mensius' (*Meng zi*), 'History' (*Shi ji*) and 'Reflections on History' (*Zi zhi tong jian*), many illustrations and ideas about management could be found. School management was also mentioned in a famous book 'Learning' (*Xue ji*) in Chinese history (Wu, 2000: 29-30).

(nobleman), Daoist *shengren* (sage) and *zhenren* (authentic person) and Legalist *mingjun* (enlightened leader). Different leadership ideals emerge from these traditions[53].

These three traditions and the ideals suggest, according to Guo (2002), five characteristics of ideal Chinese political leadership:

1. This leadership emphasies Confucian humaneness (*ren*)[54].
2. Chinese leadership promotes a strong tendency toward ritual (*li*)[55]. This tendency toward ritual means that leaders are more likely to depend on social norms and ceremonies than on fear to establish social control.
3. These traditions emphasise a strong moral obligation of leaders[56].
4. The ideal leader is not dependent on political authority, office, glory, and possessions and in fact must remain free of these in order to provide leadership.
5. The ideal leader is a strategist[57].

These characteristics of the ideal Chinese political leader suggest a picture of leadership that includes moral obligation, humanness, wisdom, cunning, freedom from distracting glory, and even the ability to lead by inaction.

Child (1994) also concludes that Chinese cultural traditions have long been underpinned

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[53] In the case of Confucianism, leaders are expected to exemplify three concepts: humaneness, which involves sympathy and empathy; ritualism, where the leader is expected 'to comply with established social norms and to set himself as a model for the populace' (p.x); and moralism, where the leader is expected to provide a role model for establishing moral order. In the Confucian ideal, morality and politics are inseparable. In the Daoist tradition, the ideals of sage and authentic person are emphasized. The leader as sage exemplifies the belief that 'political order and social harmony can be achieved and maintained by following Nature' (Guo, 2002, p.xi). At times, this tradition encourages the doctrine of inaction, which discourages intervention. Also in the Daoist tradition, leaders are expected to be authentic persons. This expectation involves shunning glory and wealth in order to keep the spirit free. By diminishing reliance on position, fame, fortune, and so on, the leader is able to reach a purer and clearer focus for followers. The Legalism tradition, like all Chinese political thought, emphasizes wisdom but combines this with cunning. Based on the assumption that individuals are evil and that human interactions are focused on exchange relationships, the Legalist tradition expects leaders to use political technique, political authority, and penal law to maintain control. However, Chinese political thought 'does not favour an institutionalized political system to control bureaucracy, but rather relies on a ruler's personal qualities to master officialdom' (Guo, 2002, p.xiii).

[54] 'The ideal political personality in Confucianism is a heroic figure motivated by a sense of historic mission, socially intuitive knowledge, and a desire to uphold the Way to change the world and manifest humanness' (Guo, 2002: 232).

[55] 'Compared with the Christian concept of law, li is more inclusive and relates to personal conduct, social relations, and political organisations' (Guo, 2002, p. 233).

[56] The moral obligation is interpreted differently by the different traditions. The Confucian *junzi* (nobleman) is seen as a sage emphasizing humanness, altruism, sympathy, and so on. For the Daoist, this social harmony is achieved through union with Nature.

[57] 'The ideal Daoist sages...were those who could employ traits such as softness, darkness, receptivity, transquility, and weakness to overcome hardness, lightness, exclusiveness, agitation, and dominance to protect themselves and pursue an advantage' (Guo, 2002, p. 237).

by four significant values:

- The importance of face: giving respect and obligation to the one who possesses higher social status, giving and soliciting favours according to one's importance and status in the family clan or society;
- Respect for hierarchy: respect for seniority and age;
- The importance of collectivism: thinking and behaving within accepted social norms and avoiding hurting others within the same social group and same social environment;
- The importance of harmony: keeping good relationships with reciprocal obligations and duties between members of the same clan.

Thus, respect for hierarchy, maintaining harmony, conflict avoidance, collectivism, face, social networks, moral leadership, and conformity are also the key values that have affected leadership traditions in China. When put together, there are multiple traditional expectations of leaders. On the one hand, the culture reveres hierarchy; on the other hand, leaders are expected to be responsive to the dependency needs of the followers. In short, authority is expected to combine, with grace and benevolence, both elitism and sympathy (Pye, 1991). This 'omnipotent' image of the leader seems to have rooted in Chinese people's mindset (Chen, 2004). For example, a popular Chinese adage is that 'A good principal is a good school' (Chen, 2001). This 'omnipotent' image is also refracted in the predominant form of principalship research in China that tends to provide prescriptions for and raise high demands on principals. The contemporary research will be reviewed in the next section.

The Status Quo of School Principalship Research in China

This section will first provide an overview of principalship research in China. It will identify some problems inherent in most contemporary education studies, in terms of research purpose and methodological use. The second section will then review different forms of principalship 'research' and argue that a knowledge base of school principalship in China has not been fully constructed.

An Overview of Education Research in China

When Western-educated Hong Kong scholar Cheng Kai-Ming first collaborated with a Mainland education institute in the 1990s, he found problems arose over the meaning of

the term *research (yanjiu)*. What was seen as research at the Institute largely fell into four distinct categories (Cheng, 2000):

1. *The Questionnaire Survey*: Survey methods were seen as a modern way of doing research in their use of computerised statistical analyses. This was seen as the most sophisticated approach for doing educational research.
2. *The Experiment*: Educational experiments had been used as a means for promoting reforms in schools or localities for a number of years. A researcher would be sent into the field to direct a project. The role of the researcher was to make sure that the project would accomplish the outcome anticipated by the designer of the reform.
3. *The Collation*: Often, a project's goal was the compiling of a monograph written by writers famous in the field. The Institute would collate the articles and publish the text. This project was also known as 'research' (*yanjiu*).
4. *The Reflection:* The institute was also asked to ponder policy issues in the name of *yanjiu*. It was expected that a paper containing opinions about an issue and recommendations for its implementation would be written.

In the opinion of Cheng, the difference between the research conventions was not so much a question of *methods* as a question of *purposes*. Most of the research projects done by the Institute were *prescriptive* in nature, aiming at definitive conclusions that would lead to immediate recommendations about educational policy. Its members were not accustomed to *descriptive* studies that aimed at general understanding and developing insights regarding educational processes.

Despite the improvement over the past decade, a lack of empirical studies remains a striking feature of the academic discourse of education in China. Education research relies overwhelmingly on the traditional Chinese way of argumentation (Yang, 2005a). Many falsely labelled research papers are simply an explanation or illustration of some policies or personal reflections, lacking theoretical contribution and short of tight logical reasoning (Wang, 2004; Yang, 2005a). For example, in the first volume of *Educational Administration Review* (*zhongguo jiaoyu guanli pinglun*, a new journal that claims to improve the knowledge base of school administration in China), only 3 out of 19 papers are based on empirical data (Chu, 2003a)[58].

[58] For another example, a review of educational management studies (from 1982 to 1999) indicated that during this 17-year period, and among 2389 papers on education management, only 203 were based on empirical studies,

For studies that do employ empirical data, an overwhelming majority of them hold an objectivist view (Shi, 2004). Researchers tend to regard quantitative studies as a more advanced research form. The following summary by Ding (2004, cited in Yang, 2005a: 8) serves as a good example: 'With the integration of other disciplines in natural and social sciences and the speed of world process of globalisation, we must conform to international practice and methods, advocate scientifically-based research, normalise our methods and behaviours, improve our research quality in order to achieve scientification of our educational research and serve our educational practice and policy-making'.

Many quantitative studies are modeled on Western research. As such, they do little to contribute to the indigenous knowledge base[59] in China. What can contribute to the indigenous understanding are empirical studies that are embedded in China's cultural, political, social and schooling contexts. More descriptive and qualitative research can help to serve this purpose. Although some of such studies have emerged and helped to construct the indigenous knowledge base, they are by no means the majority.

The different forms of research will be reviewed in the next sections with recognition of both their merits and limitations. These include:

- Dominant prescriptive papers
- Commentaries on the problems and concerns of principals
- Quantitative principalship research
- Emerging qualitative principalship research

Dominant Prescriptive papers: Do's and Don'ts' of 'Good' School Principals

There is no shortage of prescriptions telling principals in China what they should do in this changing environment. There are three kinds of prescriptive studies. The first kind is reform-oriented. Researchers comment on what qualities principals need to have towards

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accounting for only 5% of the total number of papers (Tang, 1999).

[59] Indigenous knowledge refers to 'the knowledge unique to a given culture or society characterized by the common-sense ideas, thoughts, and values of people formed as a result of the sustained interactions of society, nature and culture' (Yang, 2005b).

the goal of the successful implementation of a certain reform initiative. For example, in a paper talking about the leader qualities needed to face the challenge of the new curriculum reform, Zhou (2006) proposes that principals should be able to take the following thirteen roles: a caring teacher, a tolerant friend, a trusting supervisor, a highly disciplined person, a cooperative team-member, a fire-fighter, a flexible leader, a servant, a learner, a researcher, an optimistic person, an innovator, and a practitioner.

Another kind of prescriptive research is oriented towards some ideal leadership styles or models and these models are usually imported from the West. Efforts have been made recently to introduce current Western educational leadership theories (e.g., Feng, 2002; Gu & Meng, 2001). However, the relevance and applicability of Western theories to Chinese contexts fail to be adequately explored. Such papers usually begin with detailed introductions of these theories or models and end with a few remarks on the conditions and qualities required for the adoption of the desired model.

The third kind of prescriptive research centres on some heated debates ongoing in China. One debate concerns whether principal is an occupation (*zhiye*) or a profession (*zhuanye*). Many papers have been generated as to the means of occupationalising (*zhiye hua*) or professionalising (*zhuanye hua*) principalship (Chu, 2003b; Li & Li, 2003; Wang, 2003). However, during the process of the debates, more confusion arises as to what is occupation, profession and principalship[60] (Li, 2004).

Another debate concerns the issue why few of the contemporary principals are entitled to be called educators (*jiaoyu jia*)[61]. Many researchers advocate that principals should aim to be educators (e.g., Liu, 2002). The debate partly gives rise to 'the myth of the superprincipal' (Copland, 2001), or the 'superwoman' principal (Reynolds, 2002). In this regard a group of nationally recognised principals such as Liu Pengzhi, principal of the *High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China*, and Wei Shusheng, ex-principal of *Panjin Experimental High School* have been identified. A large strand of literature

[60] For example, principal as an occupation is interpreted by some researchers as the need to emphasise the entrepreneurial aspects of the role of the principal; while other argue this is too narrow an interpretation (Zhang, 2004).
[61] Widely acknowledged outstanding educators were *Cai Yuanpei* and *Tao Xingzhi*, who lived in the pre-Liberation period.

tells stories of these famous principals, who are often portrayed as omniscient leaders mastering a repertoire of leadership skills[62]. Thus, this strand of literature does not seek to problematise principals' work environment or to reveal the difficulties and struggles these principals may encounter. Instead, it aims to generalise these successful experiences to other schools and to inform other principals what they should do.

Some issues arise from these various prescriptions. First, some prescriptions are full of empty rhetoric that is even difficult for principals to comprehend. For example, T. J. Wang (2005) suggests that principals should be an implementer of new education ideas, a thinker reflecting on practices as well as an innovator trying new practices. Second, many scholars provide long lists of 'best practices' which are far too lofty for principals to reach. This literature aims to urge principals 'to judge their work according to a form of idealised practices which is unachievable'; over time this may 'lead either to skepticism or to frustration and burnout' (Eraut, 2000: 123). Third, some prescriptions handed down to principals are contradictory. For example, many papers exhort management to be 'scientific', 'well-planned' and 'rational' (Wang, 2004) and schools are suggested to establish a quality assurance system conforming to the ISO9001 standards (Cheng, 2006). At the same time, principals are advised to adopt a human-based approach to school management and to avoid the technical rationality (Chen, 2005). Thus, this body of literature does not help much for the understanding of the realities of Chinese school principalship. The next section will review another group of literature that discusses the realities of principals.

Commentaries on the Problems and Concerns of Principals

The section reviews the commentaries and reflections on the problems and concerns of principals. It has to be acknowledged that although they are categorised as commentaries and reflections, some of them loosely use some first-hand observation and interview data. Such papers usually begin with the words such as these: 'I have visited a school and talked to the principal...' or 'I have some friends who are principals and they told me...'.

[62] For example, Wei Shusheng's practices have been summarised as encompassing eight domains of management such as target management, time management, space management, and efficiency management (Zhou, 2006).

The data are not collected or analysed within the accepted convention; thus they cannot be deemed as empirical studies. Under this caveat, these papers help to provide sharply different stories from the prescriptive research: stories of daily realities, dilemmas, concerns and problems facing principals.

First, Chinese principals are concerned about financial responsibility. Principals appear worried about insufficient funding to support the development of their schools. The capability to make more money for schools seems to have become a must for principals today. Principals have to, in their own words, 'beg for alms' (*huayuan*) from various sources such as the local government, local enterprises and parents (Zhang & Gu, 2005). Seeking financial support calls for principals' creativity. They have to lobby local education authorities to give their schools greater quotas to admit self-paying students, to seek donations from local enterprises and parents, or to engage in business activities such as renting their classrooms to all kinds of informal schools (Lin, 2000; Zhang & Gu, 2005). Seeking financial help consumes much of principals' time and distorts their attention from teaching and learning. This often results in principals' personal and professional dilemmas.

Second, principals are also concerned about students' academic results and school leavers' destinations. It has been a concern of school principals in China for many years, even before the structural reform took place. However, the coupling of the increasing competition among schools, the financial stringency and the advocacy for quality education has made it an increasingly complicated issue. Today, the success of a secondary school, at least in the eyes of parents and the public, is judged by the college entrance examination results and the number of students getting admitted by universities. Academic results are also related to schools' financial well-being. Schools with higher admission rates are more likely to get financial support from parents, local governments and local enterprises, and *vice versa* (Zhang & Gu, 2005). Given these considerations, it is not surprising that ensuring a high admission rate is the top priority in many schools (Liu, 2005). To attract more quality students, schools nowadays engage in all kinds of marketing strategies such as media advertisements, open days, home visits, and bonus

awards (M. Wang, 2005; Zhang & Gu, 2005). For example, *Shatoujiao High School* in Shenzhen provides students scoring above 580 in junior school leaving exams with tuition waiver awards (Zhang & Gu, 2005). In terms of teaching content, many schools also seem to reach a consensus that 'what to be examined is what is to be taught in schools' (*ibid.*). This apparently contradicts the ethos of the new curriculum reform. Facing the dilemma, many schools prepare two sets of timetables and syllabies. One set, attuned to entrance exams, is actually adopted in schools, while the other is reserved for external assessment to show that the school is implementing the new curriculum reform (ibid).

Third, *Guanxi* is a key concern of principals. One consensus among principals is that establishing and maintaining *guanxi* (connections and good relationships) with important school stakeholders and other influential figures is important. As one school principal stated, 'if you have *guanxi* [with those influential people], then nothing matters; if you don't, then everything matters' (Zhang & Gu, 2005). Good relationships with local government agencies can provide schools with all kinds of benefits, including financial support. This seems to be the rule of the game. Therefore, principals have to spend a lot of time taking part in various meetings organised by education bureaus as well as other government functional departments as they understand that their presence can strengthen their *guanxi* with government officials (Lin, 2000).

Obeying the rule of the game also means that sometimes principals have to do what they do not want to. For example, the principal in a study (Feng, 2004) received a visit from the director of the local education department before the school's closing time. Although he wanted to go home and spend time with the family, he understood it was his obligation to treat his superior a hearty meal in a restaurant and to drink as much as he could to satisfy him. Furthermore, principals often get caught in the relationship network (*guanxi wang*) and as a result, their decision-making autonomy is influenced by the hierarchical connections to accede to their superiors' wishes. For example, principals, especially those of key schools, face huge pressures each summer from all kinds of influential people to squeeze their children or relatives into the schools. Given the

insufficient quota, it is a problem that troubles many principals. Some principals even have to hide for weeks to avoid this relationship obligation (Zhang & Gu, 2005).

The literature helps to outline some major concerns of Chinese principals today. Then the question is: does empirical research also support these findings? The next section will review the quantitative principalship research.

Quantitative Principalship Research

Some quantitative research has been conducted on various aspects of school principalship, for example, implicit conceptual framework of Chinese leadership (Ling, Chia & Fang, 2000); qualities of principals (Wang, 2001); factor analysis of internal antecedents of successful school principalship (Qu, 2002) and qualities and professional development of successful principals (Ying & Wang, 2002).

It seems that many quantitative studies, focusing on successful principals, are also underpinned by a 'best practice' mentality. Some of them, however, help to illustrate the importance of examining Chinese principalship within its societal context. For example, Ling, Chia and Fang's (2000) study explored the implicit conceptual framework of Chinese leadership[63]. They developed the Chinese Implicit Leadership (CILS) and administered it to different occupation groups in Beijing (cadres, factory workers, teachers, college students, and technicians). They found that the Chinese use four dimensions to describe their conceptualisation of leadership: personal morality, goal efficiency, interpersonal competence, and versatility. Among them, all groups gave the highest ratings to interpersonal competence, which is consistent with Chinese collectivist values. The Chinese participants also considered virtue as the most important feature of leadership. In concluding the paper, the researchers argued that Chinese tradition, values and perceptions are so different from those in the West that there is an urgent need to better understand each other. They suggested that future researchers 'must continue to explore deeper into the hearts and minds of the Chinese to find out the true Chinese meaning of leader'.

[63] This implicit theory approach assumed the existence of a conceptual structure regarding the definition of a leader and what a leader should be in the minds of people.

Although quantitative research provides some useful information about Chinese principalship, qualitative research is considered more appropriate to serve the purpose of exploring deeper into the hearts and minds of principals and of revealing their true meanings of leadership. For example, in a study that aimed to find out principals' everyday job specifications (Qiao, 2003), the questionnaire analysis indicated that principals placed priorities on these tasks: strategic planning, school work monitoring, class observation, self learning, fund raising and *guanxi* maintaining. The researchers then interviewed some principals to validate the data. However, the interviews indicated that principals were only concerned these three major tasks: strategic planning, *guanxi* maintaining and fund raising. As for the discrepancy between the questionnaire and interview data, principals said they just felt it necessary to give higher ratings to the tasks 'principals were supposed to do'.

This example shows that more qualitative studies need to be conducted to expand our understandings on Chinese principalship. Limited number of qualitative studies has been conducted and will be reviewed in the next section.

Emerging Qualitative Principalship Research

Chen (2002) examined the leadership role of secondary school principals in China utilising a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis. He identified a tension between bureaucratic culture and democratic culture. He indicated that the position of principals demonstrated inconsistency in empowerment because there was a confrontation between the existing bureaucratic culture and the emerging democratic culture in Chinese schools, with the former favouring political and systemic interests and the latter stressing the interests and desires of people working in and for schools. This study thus exposed constraints and dilemmas that jeopardised the principals' effective running of the school.

Another example is a life history study reported by Gao, Su and Hu (2006). The study captured how a principal, X, artfully accommodated the traditional top-down

educational administration approach and the market-oriented approach required when his school transformed into a self-funded tertiary vocational institution. It also documents how X dealt with complex internal and external relationships, including relationships with colleagues, the Party, government agencies, students, parents, and enterprises.

A further example is Wong's (2005) basic study of two principals in Shanghai. The study aimed to examine the unique features of the Chinese educational system and cultural context that both support and constrain principalship. His study found that the two principals were appointed as a result of meritocracy, which has a rich tradition in China. They had been in different positions and had proven records before being appointed principal. Furthermore, the two principals are both 'top-down' managers. Although consultative processes were used to allow the participation of teachers in major decisions in their schools, it was more in response to the initiative of the principals. Once decisions were made, deputy principals and teachers in middle management were charged with implementing them, which is known in China as position responsibility. As Wong (2005) noted, this is consistent with an expectation of how schools should be managed in China. In this sense, the principals knew the system well and exploited it for their own purposes.

These studies help to probe into principals' worklives. However, they are still small in quantity; the humanistic anti-currents are still in a relatively marginal position and not able to challenge the dominant prescriptive research. Furthermore, these studies do not particularly focus on how principals themselves perceive their roles. To date and to the knowledge of the researcher, there has been no systematic empirical study to investigate Chinese principals' perception of their roles. This study thus attempts to contribute to the filling of this knowledge gap.

A Summary

As informed by Chapters 2 and 3, the ideology of neo-liberalism and its strategies of

marketisation, devolution, choice and privatisation of educational provision have come to be the dominant paradigm of education policies in most Western communities over the past two decades (Henry *et al.*, 2001). A major consequence of the restructuring initiatives is the increasing colonisation of the systemsworld onto the lifeworld (Sergiovanni, 2000). Manifestations include, for example, increased reporting, monitoring, and surveillance under new regimes of managerial accountability (Down *et al.*, 1999) and changed social and political relations of work with teachers repositioned as education providers, parents as clients and students as consumers (Blackmore, 2004). Consequently, school principalship, which has to respond to both the school systemsworld and lifeworld, becomes the point 'at which contradictions, tensions and ambiguities of recent reform movements and educational restructuring generally converge' (p. 268-9).

Principals today are under considerable pressure to succeed but within a particular set of constraints and with particular images of successful schools and leadership. There is increased executive prerogative with principals and the role of principalship is recast more as a chief executive than a leading professional. New managerialism, in the place of welfarism, has become the dominant discourse on school principalship (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000). One consequence of positioning principals as managers rather than educational leaders is to significantly change the relations between principals and significant others such as teachers, governments and parents.

The neoliberal reforms spawned in Anglo-American countries have spread over many non-Western settings, given that a significant feature of the contemporary world is the cross-cultural borrowing of reform policies. For example, a series of reform policies underpinned by the neoliberal ideology have been adopted in Mainland China under the quality rhetoric. These reform policies, and particularly three major initiatives adopted since 1999, attempt to change school review, curriculum and personnel systems. These reform initiatives employ policy technologies such as decentralisation, marketisation and performance management, as those commonly observed in Western settings. These rapidly traveling education policies, while similar textually, may take on 'different

readings and effects because of the different histories, forms of governance, industrial relations systems, level of centralisation/decentralisation, cultural attitudes, and welfare systems when articulated in local contexts' (Blackmore, 2004: 270). Thus, it is worth exploring how the reform context shapes Chinese principals' worklives and how Chinese principals interpret their circumstances.

The review of leadership literature in this chapter also suggests a way to frame the investigation - one that would provide a little distance from the descriptions of routine activities of principals; one that can get at the deep structures of the role and focus on the personal and interpersonal dimensions of the job; and most importantly, one that can place our understanding of educational leadership within the broad socio-political and historical context in which schools operate and principals manage and lead. The review also indicates that few qualitative studies have been conducted to understand Chinese principalship. The knowledge base of Chinese school principalship has not been adequately constructed. To contribute to the knowledge base, qualitative research is deemed to be more timely and necessary. The next chapter discusses the methodological issues.

Chapter 4 Methodology

The previous two chapters have sketched the practical and theoretical context within which this study was conducted. This chapter describes the methodology of the study in greater detail. The first purpose of the chapter is to further 'clarify the issues' and narrow the 'focus of concern' (Bouma, 2000: 36). To do this the chapter will clarify the analytical boundary, the research questions and the key terms and concepts adopted in the study. Given that 'how research questions are posed (differently) depend[s] upon the research paradigm one adopts' (O'Donoghue, 2007: 6), the second purpose is to discuss the paradigm adopted and the specific theoretical framework underlying the study. The third purpose is to report how the research was designed. This will include discussion and justification of the choice of the methodological approach and the specific data-collection and -analysis methods.

The three purposes are inter-related. According to Crotty (1998), it is important 'to put considerable effort into answering what methodologies and methods [are] employed in the research' (p. 2). What is more important, however, is 'to ask how we justify [the] choice and use of methodologies and methods' (p. 2). This justification lies with and is expressed by the purposes of the research and questions that the research seeks to address. The justification is also something that 'reaches into the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work' (p. 2). Thus, a methodology chapter comprises a logical discussion of research questions and purposes, the choice and justification of the research paradigm as well as of the specific research methods.

The major purpose of the research was to examine and analyse the worklives of a particular group of Chinese secondary school principals. The study also aimed to construct rudimentary theoretical models of how Chinese principals arranged their task priorities and enacted their roles, based on their interpretation of their work environments. In accordance with the research purposes, an interpretive and qualitative paradigm was adopted. Research conducted within this paradigm seeks to elicit the meaning of events and phenomena from the point of view of participants involved in the

research. As such, it values the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The study further interpreted this paradigm from the perspective of 'symbolic interactionism'; a perspective that looks upon 'human life as chiefly a vast interpretative process in which people, singly and collectively, guide themselves by defining the objects, events, and situations which they encounter' (Blumer, 1956: 686). Based on the meta-theory of symbolic interactionism, the study employed semi-structured interviews as the major data collection method.

The chapter is comprised of six sections. The first section will sketch the scope of the study. The contextual and analytical boundaries of the study will be discussed and the key concepts and terms defined. After outlining the scope of the study, the general and specific research questions will be listed. The second section discusses the theoretical framework of the study. As this study focused on the sense and meaning making of the principalship, a qualitative framework was deemed appropriate. The section further explains why the research was specifically located within the framework of Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism. The third section discusses the qualitative multiple case study design and purposive sampling strategies while the fourth section explains what methods were adopted to collect and record data. The fifth section is devoted to explaining how the data was analysed. The final section provides a reflective account of the methodology through a discussion of the role of the researcher, the trustworthiness of the research, ethical considerations and some of the limitations of the study.

Scope of the Study

This section clarifies the analytical focus of the study, restates the research purpose and poses the research questions. As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, empirical-based understanding of school principalship in China is very thin on the ground. Knowledge about how school principals perceive and enact their roles within the reform era is particularly inadequate. While research conducted in the West can provide an informative framework, it cannot fully explain the realities of the Chinese principalship. Thus, the purpose of the research is to examine and analyse principals' worklives and to

derive from empirical data some propositions that reflect the realities of Chinese principalship in this reform age.

In line with the purposes, a basic proposition underpinning the study is that school principals, as social actors, are not merely passive respondents of their social structure. Rather, they are active agents who continuously interpret external situations and act in ways that can change the structure. Individual interpretations, rather than a definition of the facts by external umpires, influence their perceptions and actions. Different individuals may place different interpretations on an identical set of circumstances and be motivated to act in very different ways. The identification of individual principals' interpretations, and the way in which these interpretations affect their perceptions and actions, forms the essence of the study. Capturing each principal's lived experience was a central focus of the inquiry.

Although an understanding of how the experience of each principal unfolded was an important anticipated outcome, the study also attempted to move beyond 'individualism' and understand how these experiences were socially, culturally and politically constructed in specific contexts. This recognises that social relations are not only experienced, but are continuously shaped and reconstructed by each participant through social discourse with others. As Goffman (1983) argues, interactions are not completely independent but coexist with a structural order, each with its own form or forms. Thus, the study also aimed to explore in greater depth the relationship between each principal and the broader values of the society and relevant social and/or cultural subgroups. In short, an important focus of the inquiry was to capture the situatedness of the principals' leadership interactions.

Clarifying the study's analytical focus informs the use of some important concepts such as principalship, role and change. In terms of *principalship*, a major critique identified in Chapter 3 was that this term tends to be narrowly defined and is often used synonymously with principalship effect. This study did not seek to restrict the definition of principalship. Rather, it sought to examine what principalship meant for Chinese

principals. Adhering to too narrow a definition was considered inappropriate in this study because of the lack of empirical-knowledge of the principalship in the Chinese context. To predetermine such a definition risked over-relience on Western conception of principalship. Instead, as Ogawa (2005) suggested, principalship in this study was broadly conceptualised as an expression of human agency while principals were viewed as active agents who continuously made meaning of the world. As active agents, each principal monitored his/her positioning in light of existing constraints and determined the parameters for the construction of his/her principalship experiences.

In terms of the concept of the *role*, the study adopted Merton's (1957) line of thinking. Merton argued that the social status of the principal had a distinctive role-set; one in which were role parties such as local governments, parents, teachers and students. Informed by Crow and Glascock's (1995) framework of four components of a role conception, the role of the principal was examined and understood using these relatively culture-free dimensions: role set relationships, task priorities, language and values.

The *change* context within which each of the principal worked was taken mainly as the three quality reform initiatives - school review, curriculum and personnel reforms. The research focused particularly on how principals interpreted the constraints and possibilities derived from the three reforms, and how they dealt with the changes which accompanied them. The three quality reforms largely defined the role set within which principals were located and the major role parties they had to interact with. However, it should be noted that the three quality reforms cannot, in reality, be neatly separated from preceding reform efforts and the macro socio-political transformations ongoing in China. The study aimed to investigate the dynamism between the human agency of school principals and the macro quality education reform and social-political changes.

A set of research questions was asked to unveil the vaious aspects of the role of the principalship in China. The central question posed was: Within the broader education reform context, and within the context of the three quality education reforms implemented since 1999 in particular, how do Chinese school principals perceive and

enact their roles and what shapes their perception and enactment? More specific questions included the following:

1. How do Chinese school principals perceive their roles?
- How do they interpret the possibilities and constraints of the reform context?
- How do they interpret relationships with key role parties?

2. How do they enact their roles?
- How do they interpret and prioritise the various role expectations and perform on the basis of the priorities?
- How do they deal with role conflicts?

3. What commonalities and differences exist across the role perception and role enactment of these principals?
- Are there any role characteristics which appear common across principals and why are they shared by the principals?
- Are there different types of principals in terms of role characteristics and, if so, what are the main types and why have they developed?

The following sections will focus on methodological issues related to answering the research questions. The arrangement of different sections is informed by four questions:

> 1. What research paradigm informed [the] approach to the research?
> 2. What theoretical perspective was chosen within this paradigm?
> 3. What methodology was chosen?
> 4. What methods were used in light of the chosen methodology?[64]

Choosing the Research Perspective

As Lancy (1993: 8) argues, research needs to 'be thought of as being much more than simply choosing a method, or a program or set of procedures'. Instead, it involves the discovery and interpretation of facts and the acquisition of new knowledge. For

[64] The four questions were adapted from O'Donoghue (2007: 13).

researchers carrying out any type of research, it is essential to first clarify one's understanding about knowledge and to identify how one positions oneself from a paradigm's perspective (O'Donoghue, 2007). Any social research needs to be informed by a critical consideration of the assumptions underlying two overarching research perspectives: 'positivism'[65] and 'post(anti)-positivism'[66](Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Choosing the Qualitative Framework

Informed by the positivist and post(anti)-positivist debate, and considering the research objective as well as the research questions formulated to guide the study, the qualitative research perspective was considered more appropriate.

Positivism is the epistemological doctrine that physical and social reality is independent of those who observe it, and that observations of this reality, if unbiased, constitute scientific knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The positivist research orientation insists on objective enquiry based on measurable variables and provable propositions and holds that science is or should be primarily concerned with the explanation and prediction of observable events (Maykut & Morehourse, 1994: 3). Postpositivism is based on the assumption that social reality is constructed and differently interpreted by different individuals who participate in it (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). This school of thought argues that social reality does not have an existence apart from the meanings that individuals construct for them. Therefore, one needs to study multiple constructed realities so as to gain better understanding of the holistic reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Positivist research tends to adopt quantitative methodology (Silverman, 2000: 5; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Quantitative research, therefore, aims at objectivity, standard procedures and replicability (Bryman, 1988, cited in Silverman, 2000: 4). Within the post-positivist

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[65] 'Positivism', according to Silverman (2000: 5) is a slippery and emotive term, which is difficult to define. It is believed to have been coined by Auguste Comte as early as the 1830s and was used synonymously with science or with positive or observable facts.

[66] Broadly speaking, positivist, interpretive, and critical theories of knowledge have characterised social research and principalship research in particular (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

paradigm, the methodology used is mainly qualitative. Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2) define qualitative research as 'multi-method in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter'. A synthesis of the writings suggests that qualitative research has the following features (Bryman, 1988; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall & Rossman, 1999: 2-3; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994: 11-14; Silverman, 2000: 8):

- The researcher works in a natural setting. The main research instrument is the researcher who attempts to obtain a participant's account of the situation under study.
- It is flexible in terms of methods. Rather than testing preconceived hypotheses, qualitative research aims to generate hypotheses and theories from the data that emerge, in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous, and possibly inappropriate, frame of reference on the subjects of the research.
- It is conducted within a theoretical framework that focuses upon social processes and the meanings which participants attribute to social situations. It attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behaviour.
- It is holistic, in that it tends to incorporate a wide variety of specific research techniques, even within one research project. Thus, it draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of participants in the study.

Informed by assumptions and strategies associated with the *positivist* (quantitative strategy) and *post-positivist* (qualitative strategy) divide[67], the qualitative research perspective was considered more appropriate for this study for three interrelated reasons. First, the assumption of post-positivistic epistemology that meaning is embedded in local, immediate contexts befits this research. A basic proposition of the study is that reality takes on a subjective character when it is interpreted by different individuals in different contexts. Second, as articulated clearly in chapter one, this study seeks, among other things, to investigate the perceptions of principals themselves as to how they position themselves in the shifting grounds of the state and the market and how they

[67] Higgins (1996: 27-28), argues that the distinction between quantitative research (search for causes) and qualitative research (search for meaning) are made, perhaps, for purposes of simplification: 'In order to clarify our thoughts, and as part of learning and describing a field; but the distinctions are not mutually exclusive. The search for meaning does not exclude the search for causes, any more than the search for causes excludes the search for meaning. An approach through qualitative research does not exclude a quantitative approach [...] the two poles complement each others'.

react to the changes. The achievement of these objectives requires a research strategy that operates in a natural setting and creates a congenial atmosphere for the participants to talk about their work.

Third, the research questions formulated to guide the study also provide justification for adopting the qualitative approach. The questions predominantly aim to draw principals' perspectives, while qualitative approach is particularly appropriate to address questions that 'focus on understanding the meaning events have for persons being studied' (Patton, 1991). The context sensitivity that qualitative approach values further helps to understand the principalship in all its complexity and within a particular situation and environment.

Specific Qualitative Framework – Symbolic Interactionism

Among the many variants of qualitative and interpretive approaches, three significant 'traditions' are noteworthy (Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 23-26). They are phenomenology[68], ethnomethodology[69] and symbolic interactionism[70]. The specific qualitative framework within which this study operated was symbolic interactionism. At the heart of symbolic interactionism are three principles formulated by Blumer (1969: 2) as follows:

1. Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them[71].
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he[sic] encounters.

The three principles govern, and in turn are governed by, beliefs about the nature of the

[68] Phenomenology advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value and sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality.

[69] Ethnomethodology is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world by concentrating on mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter – the assumptions they make, the conventions they utilize, and the practices they adopt. Ethnomethodology, thus seeks to understand social accomplishments in their own terms; its concern is to understand them from within.

[70] Symbolic interactionism focuses on the world of subjective meanings and the symbols by which they are produced and represented; thus not making any prior assumptions about what is going on in an institution but rather giving priority to the subjects' own accounts. They create a more active image of the human being by rejecting the image of the passive, determined organism.

[71] Blumer (1969) uses 'things' to cover a range of recipients of behaviour from the concrete (that is, people, material objects, and institutions) to the abstract, which includes the situations in which one finds oneself and the principles - in the sense of ideals – that guide human life.

self, meaning and symbols. For symbolic interactionists, the fundamental or essential quality of '*self*'[72] is the human capacity to reflect on things and 'the ability to take oneself as the object of one's attention and thought' (Leary & Tangney, 2003). The reflected self or 'look-glass self' actively reflects on others' appraisal and then constructs the self congruent with the appraisals of others (Tice & Wallace, 2003). The *meaning* of each 'thing', be it abstract or concrete, is acquired from our experience of the world. Because we are in constant engagement with the world, meaning is constantly being modified, if not completely changed. The *symbols*, as the core element in symbolic interactionism, can be non-verbal, but the most important ones are verbal, thus expressed in language. As Woods (1996) notes, 'the internalisation of symbols and meaning patterns and the stimulation of thought through language increases the human being's powers of reflectivity and the ability to see one's self as an object, to make indications towards one's self, and to act as one might towards others'. Language is a major means that actors experience the world.

Thus, the meta-theory of symbolic interactionism is underpinned by these assumptions. First, human beings are active agents who interpret and attach their own meanings to a range of phenomena - such as people, material objects, and abstract concepts - and then act towards them on the basis of these meanings, which are personal to the individual. Second, meanings are social constructs that guide behaviours[73]. In the interactionist image, the behaviour of men and women is 'caused not so much by forces within

[72] Leary and Tangney's (2003) propose three other meanings of the self: i) experiencing subject, in short, the 'I' of the Mead's concept of self, or selfhood in phenomenology. This 'self-as-knower' is the centre of person's experience; ii) beliefs about oneself, the correspondence of 'Me' ('self-as-known') Here the self is an object to itself, subjected to perceptions, thoughts and feelings as an interpretive account of the person; iii) executive agent, which makes the person become a decision-maker or doer. Each of the three meanings guide the person's psyches as different processes: the 'self-as-experiencing subject' guides the attentional processes; the 'self-as-perception' guides the cognitive processes that links the individual with the social world; the 'self-as-acting agent' directs the executive processes as regulation (Ho, 2005).

[73] The interaction between meanings and behaviour has four components: 1) the standard (the self-meanings); 2) a perceptual input of self-relevant meanings from the situation, including how one sees oneself (meaning feedback in the form of reflected appraisals); 3) a process that compares the perceptual input with the standard (the comparators); and 4) output to the environment (meaningful behaviour) that is a result of the comparison (difference)of perceptions of self-meanings with actual self-meanings held in the standard' (Stets and Burke, 2003) . In a case of discrepancy, behaviour would be altered to counteract the situational meanings so as to restore perceptions. In this sense, role behaviours are a means by which one strives to keep perceptions of self-relevant meanings in the situation in line with the meanings held in the identity standard (Stets and Burke, 2003) .

themselves (instincts, drives, needs, etc.) but by what lies in between, a reflective and socially derived interpretation of the internal and external stimuli that are present' (Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds, 1975: 1). Third, the society and the individual are inseparable units. While it may be possible to separate the units analytically, the fundamental assumption is that a complete comprehension of either one demands the comprehension of the other.

Blumer (1969: 6) summarises the theory in several 'root images' that seek to explain the nature of matters such as 'human groups or societies, social interaction, objects, the human being as an actor, human action, and the interconnection of the lines of action':

> [Symbolic interactionism] sees a human society as people engage in living. Such living is a process of ongoing activity in which participants are developing lines of action in the multitudinous situations they encounter. They are caught up in a vast process of interaction in which they have to fit their developing actions to one another. This process of interaction consists in making indications to others of what to do and in interpreting the indications as made by others. They live in worlds of objects and are guided by the meaning of these objects. Their objects, including objects of themselves, are formed, sustained, weakened, and transformed in their interaction with one another. This general process should be seen, of course, in the differentiated character which it necessarily has by virtue of the fact that people cluster in different groups, belong to different associations, and occupy different positions. They accordingly approach each other differently, live in different worlds, and guide themselves by different sets of meanings. Nevertheless, whether one is dealing with a family, a boy's gang, an industrial corporation, or a political party, one must see the activities of the collectivity as being formed through a process of designation and interpretation (pp. 20-21).

In this study, the symbolic interactionist perspective was adopted to deal with a group of people called principals who have to make sense and make meaning of a thing named the 'principalship'. These root images and their interconnections provide the most suitable analytical framework for the present research. By adopting the symbolic interactionist framework, this study recognises the importance of meanings and the nature of social interaction as an interpretive process. Thus, to comprehend one's actions

or the lines of projected actions, it is important and necessary to understand one's scheme of interpretation, that is, the inner defining process of one's actions. This study aims to investigate both how Chinese principals interpret the situation they are faced with and what they do on the basis of their interpretations.

The set of concepts of the *role* helps to operationalise the symbolic interactionist framework in the present study. By virtue of their positions different individuals occupy distinctive *role-sets*; for example, principals have a particular social status with attached role sets. The principalship then is enacted in interaction with the *role parties*, many of whom base their expectations on very different foundations. As suggested by Biddle and Luckmann (1967), when the interactions become cast into a pattern, the meanings involved become embedded as routines in the individual's (in this case, principals') general stock of knowledge. Roles appear 'as soon as a common stock of knowledge containing reciprocal typifications of conduct is in process of formation' and the roles '*represent* the institutional order' (p. 74).

Consequently every putative actor of role X (in the present study, X refers to principal) can be held responsible for abiding by the standards; these standards are like the 'unwritten libretto' of a drama for every individual role performer (p. 92). The realisation of the drama further depends upon the reiterated performance of its prescribed roles by living actors (principals). The actors embody the roles and actualise the drama by representing it on the given stage, although the manner in which the unwritten libretto is manifested in the individual performance may be varied.

Informed by these role concepts, this study adopted a sensitising framework comprised of the concepts such as *role set relationships*, *task priorities*, *stage*, *unwritten libretto* and *performance*. How these concepts helped to guide the data analysis and presentation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Justification for Choosing Symbolic Interactionism as the Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism befits the nature of the present study as this study, aiming to

interpret the social phenomenon of school principalship in a shifting context, needs a framework that can take a number of factors into account. Symbolic interactionism provides the framework in need that enables a recognition of school principals as social actors 'who are free to reflect, choose and decide, [who are] embroiled in constantly changing relationships with many others and [who have to] operate within multiple, often unpredictable contexts which require a wide array of actions and behaviours (Cheung, 2004: 84).

The symbolic interactionist framework is considered suitable for this study for at least three main reasons. First, using the interactionist framework, school principals can be viewed as active agents who act towards 'things' on the basis of the meaning that the 'things' have for them. School principalship is seen as a social phenomenon that needs to be interpreted and acted upon by the principals. These are in line with the epistemological assumptions of the study as stated earlier. Second, one of the major research objectives is to understand how principals interpret their role relationships with their role parties, while a major strength of symbolic interactionism is to delve into human interactions. From the interactionist perspective, school principals are involved in a multitude of interactions with themselves and with many others such as their superiors and subordinates. During these interactions principals make indications to themselves and also to others about who they are and what they will do. They also interpret the indications different people make to them and adjust their actions accordingly. It is through this process of the indication and interpretation that the role perception and role enactment of principals can be revealed. With its focus on human interactions, this theoretical framework is considered particularly relevant.

Third, symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical framework that captures a unique picture of the dynamics of leadership encounters for each principal, coupled with how such relations are related to the broader cultural and social features of a structural order. Interactionism emphasises these school principals as constructors, creators and copers who continually interact with the world. They are both influenced by and influence the world. The examination of the interplay of intersubjective interactions and the structure-

agency nexus within the social, cultural and political relations enables the researcher to 'peel back the "hidden" layers of meaning and reality that lay both laterally across the "here and now" of [leadership] interaction and longitudinally back in time' (Woods, 1992: 365).

In sum, Blumer's (1969) theory of social interactionism provides a suitable theoretical framework for this study. The succeeding sections will focus on more concrete issues such as the choice of research design as well as the data collection and analysis methods.

Choosing the Research Design– Case Study

Based on the research objectives that focus on exploring the interpretive dimensions of school principalship and obtaining detailed knowledge about how principals perceive and enact their roles, a qualitative multiple case study design was employed to conduct the investigation. Robson (1993: 52) defines a case study as a research design that 'involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence'. Qualitative case study design is deemed as appropriate for a number of reasons; these are explored below.

Justification for Choosing the Case Study Design

As Yin (1989: 13) points out, case study is a preferred design 'when "how" or "why" questions are being posed..... [and] when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context'. This strategy enables investigators to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved. In a qualitiative case study, the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (Stake, 1995). The focus of the present study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions pertaining to the role meanings of Chinese school principals; the end product sought by the study is intensive description and interpretation of a contemporary phenomenon. Thus, the case study strategy is appropriate for the study.

The case study design was adopted with the awareness of its possible associated

problems. Unlike a survey that permits generalisations based on 'standardised questions of large, representative samples of individuals', a qualitiative case study tends to limit the scope within which a researcher can generalise claims emerging from the results of the study (Cohen & Manion, 1994: 38). Furthermore, investigators inevitably come to the case study with a unique background that includes related experiences, ideological commitments, and interests in certain issues and concepts (Biddle & Anderson, 1986). Technically, Denscombe (1998) argues that it is difficult to define the boundaries of the case in an absolute or clear-cut fashion. Central to this problem is the difficulty of deciding what sources of data to incorporate in the study and what to exclude.

Despite the shortcomings, a qualitative case study design was employed for its potential to delve deeply into the characteristics of the individual principals who participated in the study. As Denscombe (1998) argues, the case study strategy can delve into sufficient detail to unravel the complexities of a given situation. The approach can also deal with 'the case' as a whole and thus maximise the chance of discovering how the many parts affect each other. Thus, case study offers the opportunity to explain *why* certain outcomes might happen — more than just find out what those outcomes are (Denscombe, 1998; italics as original). Each case, in the context of this study, was a Chinese school principal. Each case was examined in its entirety, which meant that principals were seen in relation to their own work experience, their specific school constituencies, the policy contexts and the societal culture.

Sampling Strategy

In this study, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the research participants. A qualified research participant needed to be a principal of a secondary school. Here secondary schools refer to those with grade 10 to 12 students and encompass two kinds of schools in China: one is called high school (*gaozhong*) that only spans from grade 10 to 12 and another is usually called middle school (*zhongxue*) that has grade 7 to 12 students. The study focuses on secondary school principals for a number of reasons. First, China has a nine-year compulsory education policy, thus students between grades 1 to 9 are enrolled on a catchment area basis. Post-compulsory

enrollment, however, is more flexible and more market-oriented. Principals from these schools, therefore, have to deal with more stakeholders. Second, all the final year secondary school students who want to pursue higher studies have to take the College Entrance Examination, or High Exam (*gaokao*), the result of which is of extreme importance to the students, parents and the reputation of schools. The High Exam is also the point at which many debates of school curriculum and review policies converge. Due to the pressure of the High Exam, worklives of secondary school principals are believed to be particularly fraught with tensions and dilemmas.

Furthermore, considering the relatively small scale of the study and owing to time and access constraints, it is impossible to study principals all over China. The specific site of the research was Shanghai. This decision was made with the awareness of the vast geographical and economic disparities in China. Shanghai, as a metropolitan city, has undergone rapid development and it is relatively advanced compared to other parts of China in terms of the economic development, international exchanges and resident well-being. In this sense, principals in Shanghai are not 'representative' of those across China. Given this caveat, it is also noteworthy that Shanghai, for long, has been an educational experimental zone. Many policies have been put in trial there before they are adopted nationwide. For example, Shanghai started the curriculum reform and principal career-ladder system reform years before they became a national policy. Thus, issues facing Shanghai principals today may encounter principals in the rest parts of China tomorrow. A study that reports Shanghai principals' role conflicts, tensions and dilemmas will have implications for the practice of principals elsewhere in China.

All secondary school principals in Shanghai constituted the 'population' of the research. A form of purposive sampling (Rubin, 1983) was adopted to select the participants. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most if one wants to understand and gain insights (Stake, 1978). In purposive sampling, the goal is to select cases that are likely to be 'information-rich' with respect to the purposes of the study (Patton, 1990). The purpose of the study is to examine how secondary school principals perceive and enact their roles, whether there

are any similarities and differences existing across their role perceptions and enactment, what they are and why. Thus, it was expected that principals with different backgrounds should be included in the sample to help to better understand the similarities and differences among and across the participants. To ensure the variation across the samples, some broad criteria were determined before choosing respondents. The major criteria included the school type and the years of principalship.

In terms of *school type*, the study aimed to ensure a spread of respondents across three cohorts of schools: municipal exemplary, district exemplary and ordinary schools. A policy review in Chapter 2 suggests that school status is an important factor in shaping the immediate institutional context school principals have to deal with. For example, certain types of schools are apparently financially better off; enjoy more privileges in enrolling students and teachers; and have a better 'market' position. Thus, it is important to include principals from all of the three types of schools. Another important criterion considered was *Years of principalship*. The study examined principalship within the quality reform context and argued that quality policies implemented since 1999 represented a leap forward in the direction of the neoliberal reform; thus principals who started the principalship before and after 1999 might experience different levels of change. Due to this consideration, principals with more than ten years of principalship (before 1999) and those with less than ten years of experience (after 1999) were both included.

In meeting the two major criteria, consideration was given to variation in gender, age, prior work and training experience. In this sense, McCall and Wittner's (1990) mosaic metaphor is particularly relevant to the sampling strategy adopted in this study - 'each piece added to a mosaic adds a little to our understanding of the total picture. When many pieces have been placed we can see, more or less clearly, the objects and the people in the picture and their relation to one another. Different pieces contribute different things to our understanding...' The sampling strategy adopted in this study helps to contribute to building a more comprehensive picture of the Chinese school principalship.

Data Collection

There was a hierarchy of data sources. The primary sources were individual principals who supplied raw data through interviews. The secondary sources of data came from documents such as the school WebPages and pamphlets, professional publications of the principals, and biographical and autobiographical accounts as well as published interviews and studies of the principals. Data collection mainly involved the initial documentary analysis of each identified informant, followed by face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Documentary Study

Within the context of this study, some documents were collected and analysed before the interviews. These included website resumes, publications of school principals in professional journals such as *Shanghai Education* and media reports about the schools or school principals. The data obtained from these sources helped to provide some prior knowledge about the research participants before the interviews started. This enabled the researcher 'to talk from a basis of fact and not from speculation' (Blumer, 1969: 42). Furthermore, field notes and documents collected during the school visits were used to supplement interviews. These included, for example, observation notes about the school bulletin, campus environment, principals' office layouts, and school pamphlets and publications presented by principals as gifts.

Compared with interviews, documents generally provide a source of data which is permanent and available in a form that can be checked by others (Denscombe, 1998). Furthermore, documentary research is retrospective in that it can provide information from the past, which helps to provide a longitudinal dimension to the study. Documents can also assist in validating and expanding the data provided by principals in interviews. This provides a check for consistency by ascertaining whether '... the informant's description, interpretation or analysis of an event, experience or issue is consistent'

(Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990: 128). Documents thus help to 'achieve comprehensiveness in data collection' (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1999: 55).

Interviewing

Social scientists agree that interviewing makes the meanings interviewees attribute to a given situation clearer and helps the researcher see situations through the eyes of the participants (Sharp & Howard, 1996). In-depth interviews were employed as the main tool to collect data in the study. Minichiello *et al.* (1990: 87) define in-depth interviewing as '[a] conversation with a specific purpose – a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant's perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words'.

In-depth interviews can be conducted in an *unstructured* or a *semi-structured* format. In this study, interviews were designed to be semi-structured. This form of interview allows sufficient freedom to explore particular issues of concern to individual interviewees. At the same time, some degree of structure helps to ensure that common themes are addressed and that the researcher can be '...confident of getting comparable data across subjects' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992: 97). Following Drever's (1995: 1-17) guidelines for using semi-structured interviews, the ground(s) to be covered and the main questions to be asked were decided prior to the interview sessions. However, the interview schedule did not necessarily determine the conduct of the conversations.

The main justification for using the in-depth semi-structured interview method as the vehicle to collect qualitative data for this particular study includes the following. First of all, as Bascia and Thiessen (2000) note, no statement illustrates feelings better than a vivid story-telling, with the aid of a listener who can 'witness' and thus sensitise to the life of the story teller. Furthermore, the semi-structured approach to interviewing provides the interviewee the chance to answer questions in his/her own words while the interviewer responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on answers given[74] (Drever, 1995: 1& 8). It is also

[74] 'Prompts' are directed towards what individuals known but have not yet mentioned while 'probes' are directed at

possible to clarify questions when the respondents feel perplexed or doubt their interpretation of the questions. Finally, the face-to-face format gives the researcher an opportunity to obtain first hand views of respondents' initial reactions to questions. This allows the researcher to assess the candidness and the frustration level of the respondents (Wang, 2004).

Pilot Study

To test the validity, clarity and effectiveness of the research and interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with two Shanghai principals in July 2006. The interviews took place at the interviewees' offices and were tape-recorded. Some practical tips were obtained from the pilot study – these may be especially pertinent for conducting interviews in Chinese societies.

First, it was important to present the image of a highly motivated researcher who has done her homework before the interview. Some prior knowledge about the principal's previous professional lives can help spur conversation and facilitate the establishment of rapport between the principal and the researcher. Although discussing the interviewees' previous work experience was a useful way to start the conversation, this risked encouraging the interviewees to share overly-detailed accounts of their history, achievments and lives (pur simple, the principals enjoyed talking about themselves) Given that the principals' current worklives were of more interest, the second tip was for the interviewer to stay aware of the time being used and, if necessary, to lead the conversation back to the most relevant issues and questions.

The third tip concerns interview questions. Simple yes/no question simply do not elicit the depth or quality of information needed. As pilot interviews progressed these questions were converted to open-ended questions to encourage respondents to provide more information. It was also important to ask interview questions that were more tailor-made to the particular school context. For example, a question such as 'Your school has

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what people have already said, asking them to clarify and explain, but not just a rule to justify or defend their position (Drever, 1995: 23 &24).

recently received the district exemplary school title (and); what effect would this have on your school?' was more likely to elicit the principals' opinions than a question of 'what do you think of the exemplary school evaluation system?' The pilot testing was also instrumental in helping organise the questions more logically and sensibly. This allowed them to be raised more naturally and comfortably and so avoid unnecessary frustration or abruptness in the flow of participants' thoughts.

Thus, the pilot interviews enabled the researcher to familiarise herself with the interview procedure and refine the interview skills such as establishing rapport, controlling the tempo of the interview and providing timely feedback. They certainly facilitated the development of the interview schedule; this will be discussed in the next section.

The Interview Schedule

The content of the interviews focused on the issues central to the research questions. In the first-round interviews, three broad groups of questions were asked (see Appendix A). The first group concerned the biographical information and work experience of the principal. This helped the researcher understand the critical incidents in respondents' lives and to establish rapport with them. The second group of questions centred on the three quality reform policies. Questions were asked about how they interpreted and implemented these policies, while the specific school context was taken into consideration in raising questions. For example, for principals from municipal exemplary schools questions focused on how they got involved in designing and implementing school development plans. For principals from district exemplary and ordinary schools, the focus was on whether they planned to apply for the higher status title and why. The third group of questions focused on principals' reflection on their roles. They were asked directly to evaluate their relationships with significant others such as local governments, parents and teachers and to reflect on the specific highs, lows and turning points in their worklives, as well as their personal hopes and expectations.

The data collected from the first round interviews was analysed to inform and facilitate the follow-up interviews. These interviews sought to clarify the puzzling or conflicting

issues if any of them were identified in the initial data processing. More importantly, the second interviews aimed to investigate in greater depth the major themes or categories that emerged from the analysis of the first round data. While still allowing for 'new' data to emerge, the more focused approach of the follow-up interviews sought to extract more and deeper data in the identified categories.

All the questions were carefully formulated to ensure that as far as possible that the interviewees would not be led. The open-ended nature of the questions helped to promote a non-threatening atmosphere and allow a lively discussion with the participants during the interview sessions. The interview schedule was used only to provide some sort of structure to the conversations; neither the wording nor the ordering of the questions was fixed. In most cases, the sequence of the questions was totally altered in keeping with the flow of thoughts of different respondents.

All the interviews were recorded with the consent of research participants. It freed the researcher from note-taking and gave the researcher greater opportunity to be 'present' to the individual. However, a notebook was still used to record key words from the participant's responses and any notable changes in facial expression or body languages. All recordings were transcribed verbatim for participants' verification and the transcripts were used for coding and analysis. The next section will discuss and provide justifications for the adoption of qualitative data analysis method. A more detailed account of the data analysis procedures will be presented in the next chapter.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research concentrates on the study of social life in natural settings. Due to its richness and complexity, there are different ways of analysing social life, and therefore, multiple perspectives and practices in the analysis of qualitative data (Punch, 1998). Faced with the multiple choices, it is important to bear in mind that 'methods for the analysis of data need to be systematic, disciplined and able to be seen (and to be seen through, as in "transparent") and described' (p. 195). Given this requirement, data

analysis was guided by Miles and Huberman's (1994) adaptable framework. Within this framework, the study borrowed some specific coding tools (particularly open and axial coding) commonly associated with the grounded theory analysis tradition. The decision to employ open and axial coding was made because they are well-established and systematic coding strategies that can help to ensure standardisation and rigour in the data-analysis process.

The Miles and Huberman's Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) label their approach 'transcendental realism', and their analysis has three main components:

- *Data reduction*. Data reduction occurs continually throughout the analysis. In the early stages, it happens through editing, segmenting and summarising the data. In the middle stages, it happens through coding and memoing, and associated activities such as finding themes, clusters and patterns. In the later stages, it happens through conceptualising and explaining.
- *Data display*. Data displays organise, compress and assemble information. Displays are used at all stages, since they enable data to be organised and summarised, they show what stage the analysis has reached, and they are the basis for further analysis. Good qualitative analysis involves repeated and iterative displays of data.
- *Drawing and verifying conclusions*. While drawing conclusions logically follows reduction and display of data, in fact it takes place more or less concurrently with them. Conclusions are not finalised until all the data are in, and have been analysed. Conclusions will be in the form of propositions, and once they have been drawn, they need to be verified (p. 10-11).

These three components – data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions – gave an overall view of data analysis. In this process, coding, as the concrete activity of labeling data, got the data analysis under way and continued throughout the analysis (Punch, 1998).

Coding

In this study, open coding and axial coding were employed to analyse the data. While using different names, the open and axial coding in the grounded theory tradition is similar in nature to what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as developing descriptive and inferential codes. The initial coding is typically descriptive and of low inference,

whereas the later coding integrate data by using higher-order concepts. The purpose is to contribute to the construction of a meaningful and coherent picture of the data.

Open coding pertains specifically to 'the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 62). The aim of this first analytical step was to identify categories of data and their related properties and dimensions. Open coding started with the transcriptions of the interviews. The interview transcripts, field notes and relevant documents were then broken down line by line and paragraph by paragraph into 'discreet parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The open codes and memos were written on the side of the transcripts as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). These codes were first identified from looking for repetitions and words or phases that carry special meanings for the research participant. Related concepts were then grouped as categories, which, as a higher level of abstraction, have 'more conceptual power' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 65). The two scholars also caution that all the concepts, categories or hypotheses that come out of this coding process should be regarded as provisional, and its function is to 'sensitise the researcher to know what to look for' (p. 94). Table 4.1 provides an example of how open coding was applied to the data.

Ref. No.: 18.04.2007_X/p.2-3

Interview Transcript (Extract)	*Coding (Open)*
We have some required tasks for each teacher. For example, they are required to teach a certain number of classes. They also need to ensure the quality of teaching. Each teacher is also required to submit a research paper. These are required...There are also tasks not required for every teacher. For example, if a teacher also takes the job of a class headteacher, then we will give him/her a sum of additional money as a reward. If your research paper wins a prize, you can also get	*teacher tasks;* *principal's perception of what teachers have to do;* *publication expectations of teachers;* *motivating teachers;* *principal's perception of effective motivation;* *money for motivation;*

money rewards.

A teacher has to meet the criteria. For example, if you teach Mathematics to senior three students, your class has to reach the mean score [of the whole district]. This is a target you have to meet.	*expectation of teacher performance; important performance indicator; exame results;*
When new students are admitted to my school, we enter their scores into the data base and rank them according to their scores. Then we will track their scores they achieve in monthly exams, mid-term and final exams. We may also track the gaps between different classes. In this way, we can see whether and how the teacher has helped students to progress.	*teacher evaluation; quantitative means to evaluate teachers; exam scores as performance indicator; importance of exams;*

Table 4.1 Example of cold notes on an interview transcript

Axial coding followed the open coding. Fractured data obtained through open coding was put back together 'in new ways by making connections between the category and its sub-categories' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 97). Axial coding aims to relate a main category with properties, dimensions and minor affiliated categories with a theoretical memo (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The two authors suggest that researchers go through a complex process to link and further develop the categories. This process consists of performing four distinct analytical steps almost simultaneously. These are:

i. the hypothetical relating of subcategories to a category by means of statements denoting the nature of the relationships between them and the phenomenon – causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, consequences;
ii. the verification of those hypotheses against actual data;
iii. the continued search for the properties of categories and subcategories, and the dimensional locations of data (events, happenings, etc.) indicative of them;
iv. the beginning exploration of variation in phenomena, by comparing each category and its subcategories for different patterns discovered by comparing the dimensional locations of instances of data (p. 107).

In this study, axial coding was used to make connections among the categories and their

sub-categories, and to find patterns, consistency and inconsistency among them. The data analysis was a holistic enterprise in which data management, interpretation cycles, and conceptual frameworks competed and struggled to bring together varied standpoints. This section only serves to introduce the approach to this enterprise, while the major steps and procedures involved in the actual data analysis will be discussed in the next chapter. More detailed account and illustrations of how the categories were developed will also be presented.

It is in the data analysis process that bias, value-ladenness and partisanship can take root. Thus, reflexivity is very important as it can help both the researcher and the reader to understand the competing discourses which shape the way meaning is made.

A Reflective Account of Methodological Issues

Role of the Researcher

Symbolic interactionist research, unlike statistical studies, needs the heavy involvement of the researcher's self (Woods, 1996). When a researcher gathers information in interviews with research participants, he/she also, at the same time, engages in a process of reality construction to which both parties contribute and by which both are affected. As Rubin (1983) comments, the principal and most sensitive research instrument in qualitative research is the researcher. The concept of double hermeneutics was of keen interest with respect to the present study. Double hermeneutic is a process in which 'researchers immerse themselves in the life-world of the other in order to develop a stronger (intersubjective) awareness of the other, while at the same time recognising that one's task as a social scientist requires that one also be able to situate this material within the (ongoing, reconstituionable) conceptual frame of the academic community' (Prus, 1996; cited in Ho, 2005: 54). In the case of this study, participant principals as conversation partners first made sense of their lived experience through a process of interpretation as self-interaction; the researcher then intersubjectively engaged in a separate process of interpreting what the principals interpreted.

Interview, as a kind of social interaction, tends to be affected by personality, moods, interests, experiences, and biases of the researchers. Personal characteristics such as age, position, and even dress and appearance may affect the power-relation between the researcher and interviewee (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). Thus, what needs to be borne in the researcher's mind is the need to recognise and understand the significance and impact of them. As Hofstede (2001: 2) argues, 'there is no such thing as objectivity in the study of social reality: We will always be subjective, but we may at least try to be "intersubjective", pooling and integrating a variety of subjective points of view'.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In establishing trustworthiness, this study adopted the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Credibility

The criterion of 'credibility' refers to the truthfulness of the data. This study adopted both documentary research and multiple rounds of interviews as data collection methods. The prolonged engagements of the researcher with the respondents helped to enhance credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored to ensure 'referential adequacy' and provide a referential benchmark against which later data analyses and interpretations could be compared for adequacy (p. 313). Interview transcripts and summaries of interpretations of the interviews were also sent to participants for 'member checks' (p. 316).

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Cuba (1985), the transferability of the findings of a qualitative study is limited. A qualitative researcher can only 'set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context in which they were found to hold' (p. 316). This gives rise to the importance of the 'thick description', which can assist others to make a judgment as to the possibility of transfer to other contexts (p. 316).

In this study, the primary aim was not to produce generalisations that could be applied to other contexts. Rather, the aim was to seek enlightenment, and thus to develop a theory that explained the phenomenon of how this cohort of secondary school principals perceived and enacted their roles. Moreover, this study adopted purposive sampling to include participants of different backgrounds and characteristics; this helped to enhance transferability. The use of recorded materials, detailed analysis of the interview scripts and field notes could further enhance the 'thickness of descriptions'.

Dependability

To demonstrate the stability and 'trackability' of data and theory development in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985: 319) recommend the use of an 'audit trail'. Such an 'audit trail' should involve: i) raw data; ii) data reduction and analysis products; iii) data reconstruction and synthesis products; iv) process notes; v) materials relating to intentions and dispositions; and vi) instrument development information. This study carefully observed these procedures and preserved a record of interview schedules, recorded tapes, supplementary documents, filed notes, and coding notes.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to 'the extent to which the data and interpretations of the study are grounded in events rather than the inquirer's personal constructions' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 324). In this study, confirmability was addressed through a detailed auditing procedure, triangulation and the keeping of a reflexive journal. The 'audit trail' also allowed the study to be evaluated and confirmed.

Ethical Considerations

The initial invitation letter (see Appendix B) sent to each potential participant contained an assurance that all of their identifying information (such as names of institutions or people) would be protected. Principals were also ensured that they could withdraw from the study at any time; this was to ensure that principals participate on a voluntary basis without any pressure. Each participant was also sent a copy of their interview transcripts and provided with an opportunity to make any corrections. In the data analysis and data

presentation stages, the identity of each principal was not disclosed and each was designated a pseudonym.

Limitations of the Study

Major limitations of the study include the generalisability of research findings, the validity of representation and the language factors involved during the data collection and interpretation.

Regarding the issue of generalisability, as stated in the section of research design, respondents were selected in purposive sampling fashion from secondary schools in a single municipal city. Given the varieties of different levels of schools and the regional disparity in China, generalisation of the findings to the wider population of school principals in China would be problematic. However, as Woods (1996) argues, it is the theory that emerges from data, rather than the data itself, that researchers seek to generalise. The categories, typologies and theoretical models emerging from the data can help explain the realities of Chinese principalship.

A second issue concerns validity. The proposed study mainly relied on individual principals' own accounts and reflections of their experiences. While the principals' own recollections and descriptions could offer first-hand understandings of their lives, the data was, by nature, subjective accounts on the definitions interpreted by respondents. A hidden worry was that those principals might avoid talking anything negative. According to Bredeson (1993: 61), self-report data is always limited 'in that they can be biased in ways that make the respondents look and sound better than they actually are'. It was particularly the case for these seasoned principals who were clearly steeped in the literature and political rhetoric of school improvement. Thus, multiple rounds of interviews were conducted and documents were used to supplement interviews, which helped to cross-check the self reported interview data.

Language issue emerged from the mixture of Mandarin and English adopted in the study.

In most cases, interviews and other interactions were conducted in Mandarin[75] and the documents collected were also mostly in the Chinese language form. This final research report, however, adopts the English language. It meant considerable portion of data had to be translated into English. When translation is involved, it is usually the case that expressions in one language cannot find the exact equivalences in the other. Furthermore, as a native born Chinese, the researcher is not equally bilingual in both Mandarin and English. It has to be recognised that Chinese is still the dominant and preferred language of the researcher in which she can express herself more easily and completely. In this sense, the researcher is not culturally neutral and the data was processed through a cultured mind. The research findings would also, to a certain degree, bear the impact of culture.

In sum, qualitative methodology was used to study the phenomenon of how Chinese principals perceived and enacted their roles. Blumer's symbolic interactionism was adopted as a fitting theoretical framework for the study. Interviews, relevant documents, together with field observations were the data-gathering means. The data analysis was guided by Miles and Huberman's (1994) adaptable framework. The next chapter will give a more detailed account of the participants' background information and data analysis procedures.

[75] One of the principals, Yun, used to be an English teacher. He used some English expressions in the interview and some of the original English words were retained in the data presentation. He can be regarded as an exception.

Chapter 5

Integrating the Data into an Explanatory Framework

This chapter serves two purposes. First, it introduces the background information and major characteristics of the participant principals. This information is necessary to introduce the principals' varied backgrounds. Attention to such variation facilitates analysis and comparison of the data at later stages and maximises the possibility of producing valid and worthwhile findings.

Second, the chapter provides a detailed account of the three major categories that emerged in the data analysis process. While the names of the three categories, *stage*, *unwritten libretto* and *performance*, are adapted from Berger and Luckmann's (1967) thesis about *roles*, their definitions are based on the data collected in the study. The *stage* refers to the personal and school context that facilitates or constrains the way principals perceive and deal with reforms. The *unwritten libretto* refers to the set of institutional rules that all principals have to abide by in order to be accepted as a member of the principal community. The *performance* refers to the manifestation of the set of rules in the case of each individual principal. These result partly from the mediation of personal and organisational factors.

The three categories comprise an explanatory framework that will be used to organise the research findings reported in the next chapter. This chapter aims to lay out the analysis schema and stages as a precursor of the findings presented in Chapter 6.

The chapter has three sections. The first section provides a summary profile of the participant principals. The second section explicates the steps involved in arriving at the major categories and the explanatory framework. The third section summarises this chapter and introduces the major structures of the next chapter.

Participant Principals: A Collective Snapshot

This study is based on the lived experiences of eleven secondary school principals in the context of ongoing education reform in China. The eleven principals were purposively selected to ensure variation among them. Included were highly recognised *ming xiaozhang* (名校长，famous principals) with dazzling records of accomplishments, connections, ranks and titles. But there were also novice principals just starting to establish themselves in the field. Some principals led prestigious schools where parents clambered to be admitted, whereas others worked in lower-status schools which were much less attractive to parents. Also included were principals who started their education careers as early as the 1960s, and were thus called *lao fashi* (老法師, a senior and experienced member in a field, particularly used in Shanghai dialect), as well as principals in their late thirties and early forties, often referred to as *qingnian xiaozhang* (青年校长, young-age principals).

Thus, in terms of the biographic, professional and school backgrounds, the variation among the eleven principals was considered acceptable. Only one female principal was included in the study. This was also acceptable as ten percent roughly approximated the ratio of female secondary school principals in Shanghai. This section provides some basic information and initial impressions about the eleven principals. A summary is presented in Table 5.1.

Name	Gender	Brief Career Experience	Years as Principal	Age	School Type	Main Impressions about the Person[76]
Lin	M	A *laosanjie* student and a *zhiqing*[77] during the Cultural Revolution; Recommended as a *gongnongbing xuesheng*[78] and went back to Shanghai for college education; Became a teacher, a mid-level leader and a vice principal in a suburban high school; Promoted to principal in 1990; Transferred as principal of the present school in 1992	About 17 years (15 years at the present school and 2 years in the previous one)	55-60	-An 'ordinary' school with poor student intake -A school located in extremely low SES area	-A principal with absolute authority in his school (two titles: principal and party secretary); -A principal who struggled to improve the school despite unfavourable school conditions and insufficient external support
Xiu	M	A teacher, mid-level leader and principal in a county located in a neighbouring province; Came to Shanghai to apply for job in an open recruitment organised by the educational bureau of one district; Successful application and	About 17 years (7 years at the present school and 10 years before he came to Shanghai)	45-50	-An 'ordinary' school in the process of applying for the district exemplary school title; -A school getting increasing media and public recognition during Xiu's term	-A principal who saw himself in a 'brand manger' role (he aimed to make his school a recognisable brand); -A principal with a famous slogan: 'Make an ordinary school extraordinary'

[76] This refers to the researcher's first impression of the interviewee - usually what the researcher wrote in her field notes soon after the interview.

[77] *Laosanjie* (老三屆，The old 'three classes' cohort) refers to young students who finished their secondary education from 1966 to 1968. They were deprived of the opportunity to go to college due to the Cultural Revolution. *Zhiqing* (知青, educated young people) refers to the group of young urban people who were sent to the countryside during Mao's era.

[78] *Gongnongbing xuesheng* (工農兵學生，worker-peasant-soldier students) refers to young people who went to college on the basis of recommendation instead of academic performance in exams during the Cultural Revolution.

		assigned as principal of present school in 2000				
Wan	M	A *laosanjie* student and a *zhiqing* during the Cultural Revolution; Came back to Shanghai to be a secondary school teacher; Selected as a reserved cadre (*houbei ganbu*) to attend a two-year educational management diploma program in the mid-1980s; Became a vice principal in an 'ordinary' school; Summoned to work as an officer in the district educational bureau; Assigned as principal of the present school in 1992	About 15 years (1992 to present in one school)	55-60	-A first-tier school in Shanghai; -One of the first schools to gain the municipal exemplary school title	-A highly recognised principal with high public visibility; -A principal with impressive titles, e.g., special-class principal and special-class teacher; - A principal adept at both education theory and practice; - A principal who initiated many school reform programs that spread over to other schools
Luo	M	Started his teaching career before the Cultural Revolution in 1964; Teaching came to a standstill during the 10 year Revolution; Promoted to a mid-level school leader after the Cultural Revolution; Selected as a reserved cadre (*houbei ganbu*) to attend a two-year educational management	About 12 years (7 years at the present school and about 5 years in the other two 'ordinary' schools during the 1990s)	>60[80]	-A school just achieved the municipal exemplary school title in early 2007; -A school attached to a prestigious university	-A principal familiar with major policy changes over the past forty years; -A principal who knew a lot of covert stories about policy implementation due to his age and *jiguan* work experience.

[79] *Jiguan* (機關, the government administrative unit) mainly refers to the district educational bureau in this study.

[80] He is probably the most senior member in the principal team. The stipulated retirement age for male principals in China is 60. Luo is an unusual case. Reasons why he was still in position will be presented in the chapter six.

		diploma program in mid-1980s; Became a principal after two years' work experience in the district education bureau; Went back to work in *jiguan*[79] (district education bureau) for five years; Assigned as principal of the present school in 2000				
Jin	M	Received Normal University education; Went back to the high school he graduated from to be a teacher (located in a county of a neighbouring province); Got the position of the vice principal through open recruitment after working for five years in the school; Promoted to be principal 4 years after becoming the vice principal; Came to Shanghai to apply for job in an open recruitment organised by the educational bureau of one district; Assigned to be vice principal of a municipal exemplary school; Selected to be principal of a municipal exemplary school located in the suburban area in	About 7 years (more than 3 years at the present school and 4 years before he came to Shanghai)	40-45	-A municipal exemplary school located in a suburban district; -One of eleven Modern Boarding High Schools in Shanghai; -A new campus that cost 300 million *yuan* (mainly government funds)	-A principal still in the process of building up his network in Shanghai; -A principal with increasingly clear visions and practical developmental plans for his school

		2004				
Guo	M	A *zhiqing* during the Cultural Revolution; Recommended to be a *gongnongbing xuesheng*[81] and went back to Shanghai for college education; A teacher, mid-level leader and vice principal in one school; Summoned to work in *jiguan* (the district education bureau) from 1994 to early 2001; - Assigned to be principal of the present school in 2001	About 6 years	55-60	-One of the first schools to achieve municipal exemplary school title; -A highly reputable school; -A school with a long history, well-established school culture, and a long list of famous alumni	-A principal with many titles, e.g., district famous principal; -A principal who respected the school tradition -A principal who had good relationships with district educational bureau officials
Xia	F	Received Normal University education; Became a secondary school teacher in her hometown; Took Postgraduate Entrance Exam and came to Shanghai for Master of Education; Worked in the private sector for three years; Applied for a teaching job in a municipal exemplary school; Promoted to be mid-level leader and assistant principal;	About 3 years	40-45	-A newly approved district exemplary school; - A school established in 2002 on the basis of the combination of two schools, but with a new name and new campus; -A school officially attached to a famous university since 2002	-A principal who recognised little gender difference as one of the few female secondary school principals in Shanghai; -A researcher-principal who had a lot of publications

[81] *Gongnongbing xuesheng* (工農兵學生, worker-peasant-soldier students) refers to young people who went to college on the basis of recommendation instead of academic performance in exams during the Cultural Revolution.

		Summoned to work in the district educational bureau; Vice principal and principal of the present school since 2002				
Zhong	M	Teacher, mid-level school leader; Worked in different government offices from 1997 to 1999 in the district; Became vice principal in one school in 1999; Vice principal at the present school two years later; Promoted to be principal in January 2006	1-2 years	45-50	-An 'ordinary' school in the process of applying to become a district exemplary school; -A school newly attached to a famous university in early 2007	-A new principal who mostly inherited the practices of the previous principal and who was navigating his own way
Tan	M	A *laosanjie* student and a *zhiqing* during the Cultural Revolution; Took the College Entrance Exam (*Gaokao*) in 1978 and admitted by Shanghai Normal University; Assigned to work in a municipal key school; promoted to be mid-level leader, assistant principal and vice principal; Summoned to work in the district educational bureau in 1996; Assigned as principal in early 2006 after working for ten years in *jiguan*	1-2 years	55-60	-A district exemplary school; -A school that had experienced a shift from *gongban* (公辦，public school system) to *minban* (民辦，private school system) and back to a *gongban* school	-A new principal but a senior member in the educational sector; -A principal adept at educational theories and policies

Jia	M	Received Normal University education; Teacher and mid-level leader in a district key school; Assigned to be principal of a junior secondary school; Went back to the district key school to be principal; Assigned as principal of the present school as a fire-fighter[82]	About 8 years (about 3 years at the present school and 5 years in the previous ones)	45-50	-A school officially transferred to *minban* during Jia's term; - A school that kept a lot of public school components due to the conflicts arising during the transference	- A principal under siege; - A principal who felt betrayed by the government and misunderstood by the teachers; - A principal who started to question many of his taken-for-granted beliefs
Yun	M	English teacher in another province; English teacher and mid-level leader in a municipal exemplary school in Shanghai; Started doctoral education in a Normal University while a principal in a school in a neighbouring province; Got his PhD degree in 2005 and became the vice dean of a suburban district Teachers College; Assigned to be vice principal of a municipal exemplary school as well as principal of a *minban* junior secondary school	About 4 years (1 at the present school)	40-45	Working simultaneously for two schools: -A *minban* school that boasts high level student achievement and charges high tuition fees (where he works as principal); -A municipal exemplary school and one of eleven Modern Boarding High Schools (where he works as vice principal); - The two schools are neighbours sharing a lot of resources	-A principal with two hats on his head; -A principal who was the highest degree holder among the participants; -A principal with rich theoretical and practical knowledge about education; -A principal viewing Chinese education from a critical perspective

Table 5.1 Participants background information

[82] When I approached him for the second-round interview in early September, 2007, he had just transferred to another district exemplary. However, the data presented in this study was drawn mainly from the first interview.

The table shows that about half of the participants began their principalship before 1999, when the Quality Education reform was introduced, and the other half were appointed after 2000. Lin, Xiu and Wan have been principals for more than fifteen years and can be classified as veteran principals, while Xia, Zhong, Tan and Yun are recent appointees who are in their first three/four years in the role. There is a large variation among participants in terms of the years of principalship.

The participants also cover all the three types of schools: municipal exemplary schools, district exemplary schools and ordinary schools as described in Chapter 3. Wan, Guo, Jin and Luo[83] are principals of the more elitist municipal exemplary schools. Xia and Tan come from district exemplary schools while Lin, Xiu and Zhong are ordinary school principals. In this sense, it seems that Jia and Yun do not fit into any of these categories depending on the factors considered. Jia's school underwent a shift from *gongban* (公办 · public) to *minban* (民办 · private) system[84] and officially lost public school status when the interview was conducted. Yun was principal of a *minban* junior secondary school, but at the same time was also vice principal of a public high school.

Given the differences between the contexts of Jia and Yun and the other principals, they were included in the research as critical or marginal cases. This decision was made for a number of reasons. First, although both of them were formally principals of private, rather than public schools at the time of the interviews, like other participants, they retained close connection with the public sector and local educational bureaus. For example, Jia still attended principal development programs run by the municipal education bureau and had been transferred back to a public school just before the second interview. Yun accepted the appointment of the vice principal in a public school because he was informed by the local government that the current principal was soon to retire

[83] As described in Chapter 3, a school must pass a series of external reviews to achieve the title of the exemplary school. Luo's school recently passed all the evaluation procedures and was about to become a municipal exemplary school during the time of the interview.

[84] In Shanghai, there are many more public high schools than private ones and public high schools are better in quality and more attractive to parents. Thus, a school will become more difficult when it transforms from the 'public' to 'private' status. This will be further elaborated in the next chapter. It is also noteworthy that at the stage of compulsory education (primary and junior secondary education), private schools are not necessary in a disadvantage. They usually can attract many good students as exemplified in Yun's case.

and that he was expected to take the position. As a result of having a foot in both camps, both principals appeared able to live with ambiguity and to switch identities depending on the work situation. Second, the fact that they appeared to be able to operate in both 'camps' enabled them to view and interpret issues, such as the relationship between the state and market and their role as a principal in ways very different from the other participants. Thus, they contributed interesting comparisons and contrasts with the stories told by their more settled colleagues.

This preceding section provided basic information about the participant principals. The next section will outline the analysis stages leading from the unreduced texts to initial categories and to the final major categories – stage, unwritten libretto and performance. The interrelationships between the three categories will also be discussed.

Development of Major Categories and their Inter-relationships

The section provides a detailed account of the main categories. Specifically, it aims to explain how the stage-unwritten libretto-performance framework was developed and why this framework was considered appropriate to capture the major findings of the study.

Steps in Arriving at Major Categories

The purpose of the study was to examine and analyse the worklives of a particular group of Chinese secondary school principals and to construct theoretical models which contribute to our knowledge of how Chinese principals arrange their task priorities and enact their roles based on their interpretation of their work environments. The primary data source comprised a series of intensive face-to-face interviews with eleven secondary school principals. Significant others and critical events were the foci of the study. The three quality reform initiatives detailed in Chapter 2 were brought to the interviews as critical events. These are major school system reforms targeting school review, curriculum, enrollment and examination systems, and the school personnel systems. The interpretations that the principals attached to these critical events and the

significant others they had to deal with in implementing the reforms were assumed to provide meaning and purpose to their worklives, and thus helped to understand their role conceptions. Three steps were taken to arrive at the final categories. The diagram below shows the overall data analysis process.

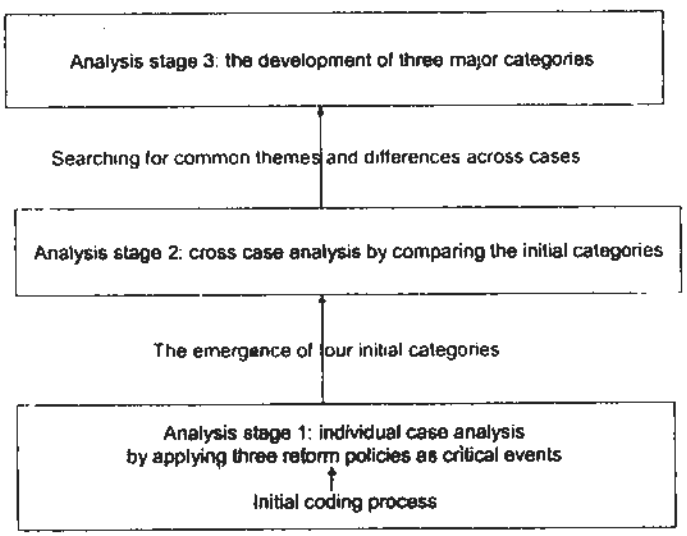

Figure 5.1 The overall analysis process

Analysis Stage 1: individual case analysis by applying three reform policies as critical events

A schema was iteratively developed to analyse each critical event facing each principal. The schema was developed on the basis of the important codes emerging in the initial coding process. It encompassed three major categorising cells. The first cell was concerned with 'who' and 'what' questions. This cell was used to record the 'significant others' principals took into consideration when they interpreted and implemented the reform. It also included the principals' perception of the expectation/s of each of the significant others. The second cell related to 'how' the principals managed/solved/addressed the problems or issues while negotiating the various expectations in implementing the reforms. The final cell concerned the 'why' issue. As such, it focused mainly on the explanations and justifications principals provided for

their decisions and practices; the language they adopted to justify their choices, and the values and assumptions underpinning their decisions.

It should be noted that the aim of the analysis was to elicit simultaneously insights both bounded by and falling outside that provided by the framework. The schema was used for an analytic guide but was not intended to dictate findings. Data expanding or refining the schema was also coded. For example, in applying the schema, it was found that the principals' career stages and their school conditions were highly related to the 'who', 'what', 'how' and 'why' issues they faced. Thus, the personal and school contexts were infused into the schema. The schema used is presented below in Figure 5.2 and exemplified in Figure 5.3.

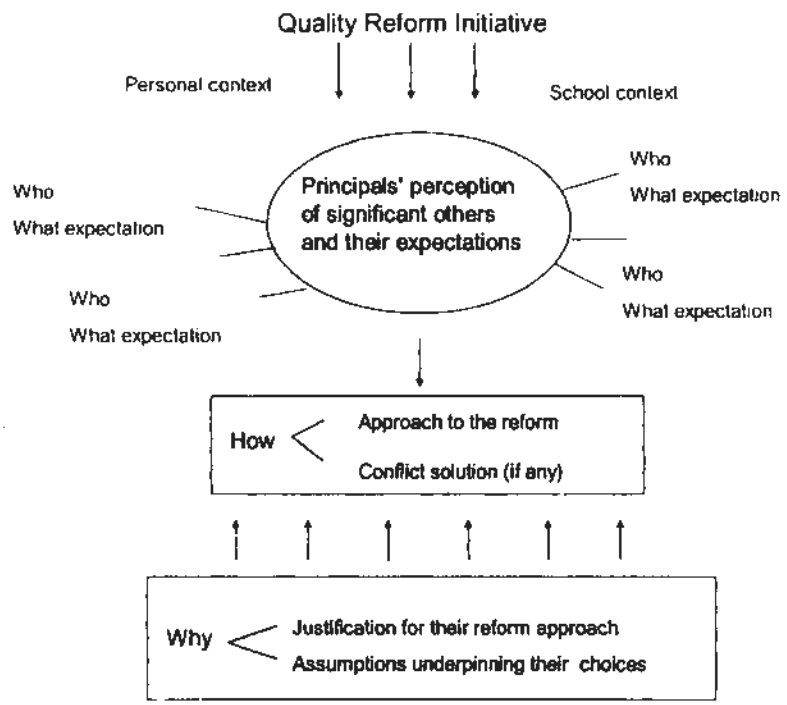

Figure 5.2 The analysis schema developed to analyse critical events facing principals

Figure 5.3 illustrates how one principal, Principal Guo, interpreted and managed one of the quality reform initiatives, curriculum reform.

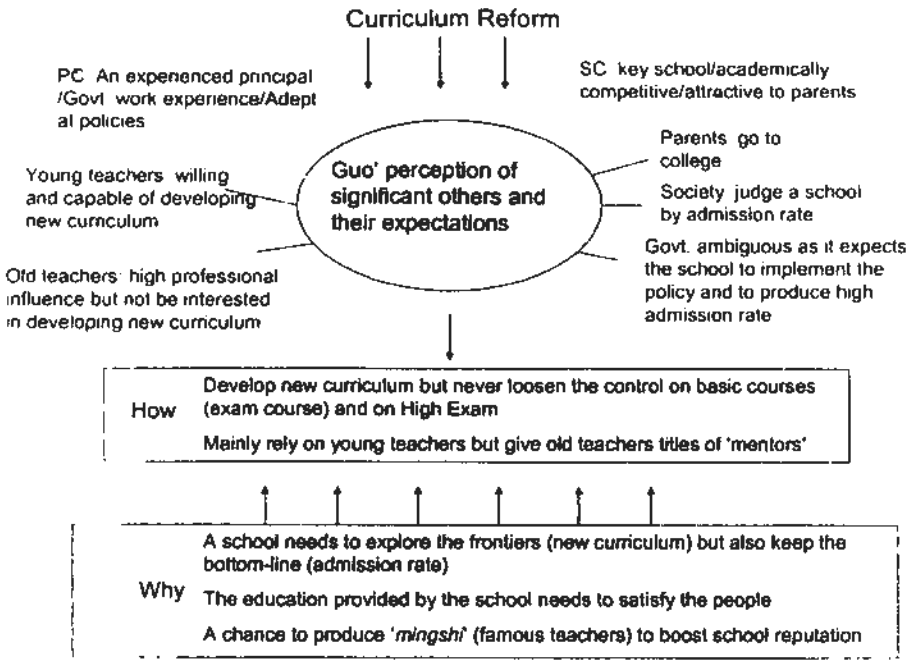

Figure 5.3 An illustration of the use of the analysis schema

As shown in Figure 5.3, Guo admitted that developing new curriculum was both necessary and important because it represented new frontiers the school needed to explore. If done well, the new curriculum could become a marketable brand of a school (品牌) and so boost its reputation. However, he believed the major pressure for adopting new curriculum reform flowed from parental and societal expectations for a consistently high university admission rate. He also recognised that the admission rate was a major criterion when the government evaluated his work as a principal. Thus, pursuing a high admission rate was more important because it was considered the very foundation of a school. In Guo's words, a school 'needs to explore the frontiers, but also has to keep the bottom-line' (前沿不可少，後牆不可倒). Guo further justified his pursuit of a high admission rate by saying that 'a school needs to provide education that satisfies the people' (你要辦人民滿意的教育). His rationale held that since the society and parents were most concerned about the admission rate, it had to be the focus of a principal's work.

Within the school, Guo believed that old and *gugan*[85] (骨幹, backbone) teachers, with recognised strengths in teaching basic courses, might not be motivated to develop new school-based curriculum. Since such teachers preferred to stick to what they were familiar with, he believed that they would resist changes (他要駕輕就熟的，他不要改). As a principal, however, he felt that he had to respect the professional authority of these *gugan* teachers. As a result, he tended to rely on the younger teachers to develop new curriculum but gave *gugan* teachers the titles of mentors. By doing so, he saved the face of *gugan* teachers（給他留足面子）and, at the same time, helped to boost the reputation of the school through the propaganda of '*Sanming*' project ('三名', 'Three-famous' project, i.e., famous teachers, famous curriculum and famous school).

As illustrated in Figure 5.3, the use of the schema aided categorisation and subsequent regrouping of the data. After applying the interpretive schema for each critical event facing each of the principals, some initial categories emerged to regroup the data.

Analysis Stage 2: cross-case analysis by comparing initial categories.

These initial categories helped to regroup the data:

1. Personal and school context;
2. Interpretation of the reform situations, which includes the perception of significant others and their expectations;
3. Approach to reforms and conflicts, which includes the ranking of various significant others, task prioritisaion, the actual strategies to implement reforms and solve conflicts;
4. Justification for and assumptions underpinning principal's choices, which include the language they adopted to justify their choices and the values that underpin these choices.

Given that the purpose of the research is to address a conceptual crevice in our understanding of the principalship in China, the principals as a collective are a major focus. This implies the need to conduct cross-case analysis to identify for patterns of

[85] It is a title granted to teachers who are considered the most competent and outstanding.

more generic issues which relate to the role of the principal. By comparison, many convergent and divergent patterns emerged out of the comparison.

Common themes emerged across cases. The principals shared a common stock of knowledge in terms of, for example, who the significant others involved in implementing the reforms were. In most cases, government officials and agencies were the most prominent audiences when principals addressed reform issues and conflicting role expectations. For example, Lin claimed that 'if you do something your superiors do not endorse, then you risk losing your principal position' (你如果是搞一些上面不認可的事情，你這個校長帽子就摘掉了). Jia believed that many principals tended to succumb to the pressure of High Exam because the government expected them to do so. As he explained, 'they [your supervisors] will let you know that they are unhappy if your school does not do well in the High Exam. They will send you a clear signal that you fail to meet the expectations' (不下指標，但是如果你考得不好的話，他就有話了，他們以明確的信號告訴你你沒考好).[86]

Despite these common themes, the principals also expressed differences in a number of areas - certain factors distinguished individuals within the cohort. For example, although all the principals clearly saw the government as the most prominent audience, those from more elite schools or with longer working experience appeared to have more bargaining power and more selectively followed government instructions instead of doing everything they were told. For example, Xiu, who had been in the position for more than ten years, said he had developed an acute insight of what government tasks he could muddle through. In contrast, Jia, a younger principal, admitted that 'I was obedient. I did whatever my superiors asked me to do (我原來是很聽話的人，領導叫我做什麼，我肯定做). Thus, he agreed with the government decision to accord private status and thus brought his school and himself many difficulties.[87]

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[86] Some other common themes also emerged across cases such as the importance of *guanxi* in a principal's daily work and the adoption of similar language to legitimise the search for the uniqueness (特色) of their school. These will be analysed in more depth in the next chapter.

[87] More data concerning the different patterns across the cases will also be presented in the next chapter.

With the emergence of the common and different themes through cross-case analysis, the next stage analysis set out to resemble clustered data into categories according to the convergent and divergent patterns.

Analysis Stage 3: the development of three major categories

This analysis stage sought to determine the final categories that helped to organise findings. These final categories needed to be able to help provide a holistic picture of the role of the principalship in China. The development of explanatory categories was informed by Berger and Luckmann's (1967) *roles* thesis.

To better understand the emergence of the three categories, it is worth briefly reviewing Berger and Luckmann's (1967) thesis. According to these scholars, all human activity is subject to habitualisation, and any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern. Habitualised actions, then, retain their meaningful character for the individual as the meanings involved become embedded as routines in their general stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For the individual, this knowledge is taken for granted and serves to guide his/her thinking and action. When the habitualised actions of the members of a society, a group or an organisation are typified, this stock of knowledge becomes shared and taken for granted by these members (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For example, all students share a body of knowledge that they need to go to classrooms instead of canteens or dormitories for classes. This means that within the common stock of knowledge are standards of role performance that are accessible by all occupants of a certain role, such as principals.

Consequently, every putative actor of the role can be held responsible for abiding by the standards as they are 'taught' as part of the institutional tradition and used to verify the credentials of all performers and, by the same token, serve as informal controls (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Crow & Glascock, 1995; Crow, 2006). In this sense, by playing the role of the principal, an individual is 'inducted into specific areas of socially objectivated knowledge' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 76) and this knowledge is shared

and available to all principals. Only in this way can the individual principal live in a society with some assurance that they play out their routine social roles, under the eyes of significant others.

Thus, as principals play out their roles, their shared body of knowledge is likened to the *unwritten libretto* of a drama. The 'unwritten libretto' is a stock of internalised knowledge they share and a set of rules and role standards which they abide by and take for granted. The common themes that arose through the cross-case analysis stage were thus assembled under the 'unwritten libretto' category. This category largely promotes our understanding of the collective aspect of the role of the Chinese principals.

However, the unwritten libretto itself cannot make a drama performance. The realisation of the drama depends upon the reiterated performances of its prescribed roles by living actors. The actors embody the roles and actualise the drama by representing it on the given stage. Although the unwritten libretto is shared and available to all the performers of the role, the manner and degree to which it is realised in individual role performance may be varied. As shown earlier, all the principals pointed to the prominent presence of the government in their role-set. The importance of the government was thus a stock of taken-for-granted knowledge as part of the 'unwritten libretto'. However, when the actual performances were examined, it was found that principals with more experience or from more elite schools tended to be more tactful in approaching government officials. Thus, each individual actor might still give different outward role *performance* despite of the similar internalised 'unwritten libretto'. The different themes that arose from the cross-case analysis stage were thus assembled under the 'performance' category. This category promoted our understandings of the way in which the individuals related to the collective.

Given that one of the sub-research questions was to explore whether there were different types of principals in terms of role characteristics, a further aim was to find commonalities out of these differences. For example, as principals with more experience or from better schools appeared to be more tactful in addressing reform issues, they

might be able to be counted as one type of principal. Thus, the typology of principals seemed to be largely shaped by the personal and school context of the principal, in other words, the *stage* of the principal as a role performer.

The stage was shaped significantly by biography and the particularities of the principals' school communities. The biography or school contexts mediated the way principals perceived the possibilities and constraints brought by the quality reforms. The personal context of the individual included, for example, their life stages, career experiences, and beliefs concerning how schools work. The school context consisted of, the demographic, geographic and structural elements in the organisation, such as location, status and type of the school. It also included the people of the organisation. In other words, it was how principals described the role set relationships they were involved with. Thus, data related to the biography and school context was reassembled under the category of 'stage'. This category helped understand the leadership boundaries that principals believed, at least partly, shaped their role.

As a result, the three categories were developed in this study:

- *Stage:* the personal and school context of the principals. For example, the principals' career experience and personal beliefs about education and leadership that may mediate their perception of the possibilities and constraints of the reforms. This dimension also includes the status and types of school and the role set relationships as perceived by each principal.

- *Unwritten libretto:* a set of institutional rules that each principal has to abide by. In other words, it refers to a body of objectivated knowledge shared by principals, not only in the narrower cognitive sense, but also in the sense of the 'knowledge' of norms, values and even emotions. For example, it includes common ways of prioritising significant others and the use of similar language and values to justify choices.

- *Performance:* the subjective appropriation of the body of objectivated knowledge and the manifestation of the institutional order in each individual principal. For example, the more experienced principals adopt more tactful approaches in dealing with the relationship with the government. Furthermore, on the basis of the different performances, it is expected to delineate a typology of the role of the principalship.

The next section will discuss the interrelationships among the major categories.

Inter-Relationships among Major Categories

The three major categories were defined by the data which emerged through talking to the principals: stage, unwritten libretto and performance. A framework comprising these three categories as major components was capable of portraying a general picture of how the Chinese principals perceived and enacted their roles. Inter-relationships were identified among these categories.

First, the stage, in other words, the principals' personal and school contexts, mediated the way they perceived the possibilities and constraints associated with the reforms, and thus influenced their role performances. For example, when it came to the issue of admitting new students, principals from elite schools were worried about how to say no to various influential people who tried to get their children admitted. Principals of ordinary schools, however, worried about how to admit more students through, perhaps, new marketing strategies. Thus, stage is highly related to the performance dimension.

Second, the institutional order as unwritten libretto is realised in performed roles and continuously 'brought to life' through human conduct. Thus, in each individual role performance, the manifestation of the institutional order can be observed. The relationship between the unwritten libretto and individual performance is shown in Figure 5.4:

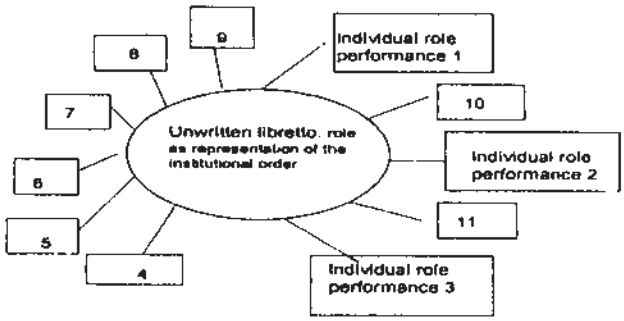

Figure 5.4 The relationship between unwritten libretto and performance.

The example provided earlier illustrates this point. Some principals did exactly what the government told them to do. Others selectively fulfilled some of instead of all the tasks assigned by the government, while the selection was carefully made in order not to offend the government officials. Thus, a common stock of knowledge shared by all these principals seemed to be that the government was a significant other in their role set relationships. Furthermore, the data indicated that those who were more obedient tended to be new principals and in most cases, from ordinary schools while those who were more flexible tended to be more senior both in terms of their career stages and school status. Thus, the unwritten libretto and the stage are also highly related. The adeptness of mastering and applying the unwritten libretto is also shaped by the personal and school context.

Third, when examining individual role performance in relation to both the *stage* and the *unwritten libretto*, the idiosyncrasy is shaped by, first, the seniority of the principal mediated by their career stages and school status; and second, their adeptness at mastering and manipulating the institutional order. As a result, the divergent patterns of role performances can be discerned in the following aspects: personal identities, school context including perceived role set relationships, acquisition of unwritten libretto and reform strategies. On the basis of these patterns, four types of principals were identified.

- *Leading actors.* These principals are carriers of knowledge. In other words these principals are experts in adopting and manipulating the institutional order. They have acute professional insights due to long years' of service at the principal position. The high status of their school also enables them to define wider and more flexible leadership boundaries. They are more likely to initiate changes which in turn may strengthen their fames. These principals are like stars.
- *Supporting actors.* These principals are not senior or sophisticated enough to be speakers of the institution. Their school status also constrains their leadership boundaries. Thus, they are more likely to follow the stars.
- *Opportunists.* These principals are also carriers of knowledge because they have fully internalised the unwritten libretto. However, their school status does not provide them with a visible stage. Despite the adversity these principals can seize every opportunity to strive for high recognition because they can adeptly make use of the institutional order.
- *Marginal actors.* These principals have in a sense been 'thrown out' of the system. This enables them to review and critique some of their previously taken-for-granted knowledge. This does not mean they have a total disillusion in the institutional order. Rather, they still frequently turn to the institutional order for security. Their examples further demonstrate that there are historically constructed 'codes' of behavioural order and norms of interaction that shape the Chinese principalship.

It is important to note that the 'types' identified are approximate representations of clusters of dominant patterns of role performances in a particular group of principals. More in-depth data of the four types of the principals will be presented in the next chapter.

A Summary

The chapter recorded the process of development of the major categories that comprised

an explanatory framework used to organise the research findings. Three analysis stages led to the development of the major categories. These were:

- *Analysis Stage 1*: individual case analysis by applying three reform policies as critical events.
- *Analysis Stage 2:* cross-case analysis by comparing initial categories to search for common and different patterns.
- *Analysis Stage 3:* the development of three major categories with informed Berger and Luckmann's (1967) thesis about roles.

As a result of the three stage analyses, the three major categories were labelled stage, unwritten libretto and performance and the substance of these categories was developed:

- Stage: the personal and school context of the principals
- Unwritten libretto: a set of institutional rules that each principal has to abide by.
- Performance: the manifestation of the institutional order in each individual principal.

On the basis of the divergent patterns of role performances, a typology of the principals' role was drawn up. Four general principal role types identified were labelled leading actors, supporting actors, opportunists and marginal actors.

This chapter has introduced the analysis process only and has not attempted to display the actual data and data analysis – this will be done in Chapter 6 which will report the research findings. Chapter 6 will present the detailed research findings under the major category headings: the stage, the unwritten libretto and the performance.

Chapter 6 Findings

This chapter presents the major research findings and aims to paint a holistic picture of the role of the principalship in China.

Data for this study was drawn from interviews with eleven secondary principals in Shanghai. The demographic backgrounds of these principals were shown in Table 5.1. Three reform initiatives were adopted as critical incidents to guide data collection and analysis. These were: reforms targeting the school review system, curriculum reforms, and school personnel system reforms. The purpose of the study is to examine how principals interprete their work environment and their relationships with significant others when implementing the education reforms. The research attempts to build increased understanding of how principals perceive and enact their roles.

To this end, the analysis moved through three stages. The first stage focused on how each of the principals interpreted and implemented each of the reform initiatives. The second stage entailed cross-case analysis which aimed to identify convergent and divergent patterns by comparing the initial categories which emerged from the earlier single-case analyses. The final stage sought to reassemble data into categories that could help answer the research questions about the role of the Chinese principals. Partly informed by Berger and Luckmann's (1967) role theory, three major categories were used to organise the research findings: *stage*, *unwritten libretto* and *performance*.

The *stage* was shaped mainly by the biography of the principals and the particularities of the school communities they led. Among all these contextual factors, school status was found to be the most important mediator that framed the role set within which each principal was situated. It should be noted that even though the principals had to deal with similar role senders, such as government officials, parents and teachers, the expectations of these role parties certainly varied in different status schools. The study also found that the school context was closely related to the biography of the principals as the more senior principals tended to work in higher-status schools. Thus, the status of

the school was an important component of the school context that shaped the stage of principals.

Despite the mediation exerted by each principal's immediate micro contexts some commonalities were still detected when the eleven cases were pulled together. For example, principals tended to provide similar interpretations of the meanings of reform policies. On the basis of these commonalities, a number of issues arose. One of these was that principals seemed to prioritise tasks in a similar way. In most cases, the government or its representative (the principals' superiors) were important influences on the principals' decision making. Maintaining good relationship (*guanxi*) with the government helped to win resources for schools and promotion opportunities for principals. This knowledge seemed to be presented to each individual principal as given, generally known and socially taken-for-granted. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), this stock of knowledge can be called *unwritten libretto*. In other words these stocks of knowledge formed the instinctive grounds upon which principals put action into practice. In addition to the manipulation of *guanxi*, common themes that arose across cases as part of the unwritten libretto included the importance of maintaining the internal equilibrium or harmony of the school and the need to be keenly aware of how to win resources for the school.

The *performance* section pulls the previous sections together in order to show how the unwritten libretto was played out by different principals as a result of the mediation of their specific stages. The emphasis is on the divergent patterns which emerged from the cross-case analysis. It was found that although the unwritten libretto was presented to each principal as taken-for-granted knowledge, the way they applied and manipulated the knowledge varied among them. The way they applied and manipulated the knowledge was further mediated by their personal contexts, in particular, their years of principalship. It was through the mediation of the micro context that individuals lived out their daily lives and socially constructed their reality through the negotiations, contestations, and resistances to the rules and resources (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). On the basis of these differences, a role typology was developed. Four general 'types' of

principals were: leading actors, supporting actors, opportunists, and marginal actors.

This chapter has four sections. The first three sections respectively present the research findings under these three categories: stage, unwritten libretto and performance, while the final section summarises this chapter.

The Bounded Leadership Stage

There are three types of secondary schools in Shanghai: municipal exemplary school, district exemplary school and ordinary school. These titles mark differentiated teacher and student constituents, teaching quality and student achievement. The data showed that the government, parents and teachers held different expectations of different types of schools - the differences between exemplary and ordinary schools were much starker than other differentiations. Thus, principals working in exemplary schools tended to be involved in a role set relationship different from those working in ordinary schools. Furthermore, school status was strongly related to the personal traits of the principals. Those assigned to work in more elite schools were first, more senior members with longer work experience, and second, more trusted by the school superintendents.

The interwoven school and personal contexts resulted in different role relationships between principals and various stakeholders, set different boundaries for the enactment of their leadership and influenced the ways they saw the possibilities and constraints brought about by the educational reforms. This section explores the organisational and personal dimensions embedded in the immediate micro context that mediated the role performances of the principals.

The Influence of School Status

The school status was an important organisational dimension that mediated the role relationship of different principals. It was found that the important role parties of principals, such as parents, local governments and teachers, held different expectations for principals from different status schools.

School Status and Attractiveness

The status of the school marked their different market positions. Principals working in exemplary and ordinary schools faced different parental pressures and thus adopted different marketing strategies. Principals were unequivocal that the quality of the school determined parental choice. As Xia stated:

> Parents use their feet to select a school. If you are good, they will come; otherwise, they will leave (家長選擇學校他實際上是用自己腳來選擇學校，你好他就來，你不好他就跳).

However, the quality of the school was often interpreted by principals as equating to high student achievement on the High Exam (*gaokao*, National College Entrance Examination). The principals noted that both parents and society used the exam results as the major criterion for judging a school. In this sense, there was a large variation in terms of the quality of the school. For example, while almost one hundred percent of the students in Wan and Guo's municipal exemplary schools could successfully enroll in four-year undergraduate programs, as few as twenty percent from Jia and Lin's ordinary schools could get in. Thus, principals in high and low achieving schools encountered sharply different parental choice issues.

Guo, principal of a famous municipal exemplary school, claimed 'I never have to worry about student admission'. Rather, the major concern of principals of renowned schools was how to deal with the flood of parents who tried to have their children admitted, normally by exerting a range of relational pressures. This caused them considerable consternation. As touched upon in chapter 2 the new student admission policy stipulates that each school is assigned a very limited quota of school-choice students (*zexiaosheng*, those who do not meet the academic entrance requirements but willing to pay additional money to be admitted). There are also rules about the maximum amount these students can be charged. Although these students must still satisfy certain academic benchmarks, these are lower than those normally applied. As this policy sets limitations on the minimum scores students have to meet, the maximum number of students a school can

admit, and the maximum amount of school-choice fee a school can charge, it is called the general principle of 'Three Limits' (三限). However, the quota assigned to renowned schools is too small to satisfy the desire of the large number of parents keen to get their children admitted. Many parents appear willing to donate money to get their children admitted in the hope that they can in turn be admitted to a better university after their three years in high school.

Thus, a commonly used but seldom articulated practice was apparent in schools. Many paying students were admitted by renowned schools in the name of 'auditing' (旁聽生). These students were not counted as school-choice students. Auditing students have already been officially admitted by a less renowned school, usually an ordinary school, but whose parents pay a large sum of money which allows them to 'sit in a good school's classroom'. In a sense, they are 'invisible' students because their names do not appear on the official student register. However, their presence in the school is a huge fund raiser. The power to enrol auditing students is usually in the hands of the principals. For example, Luo admitted that on top of the 35 school-choice students he enrolled he had additional quotas at his disposal[88] (機動指標). When asked whether schools were violating the government policy by doing this, particularly the 'Three Limits' policy, Luo implied that government tacitly endorsed it.

> Interviewer: You mean the government actually knows about [auditing students]?
> Luo: Yes. We have to report our school incomes to the education bureau so they can see it.
> Interviewer: Then how about 'Three Limits' policy?
> Luo: 'Three Limits' is one thing. Auditing students are another [that the policy does not mention] (三限是一件事，三限以外又是一件事)... We can say we completely adhere to the policy. The policy sets the limit of the number of school-choice students; we are not exceeding the number [as these students are called auditing students instead of school-choice students] (我們可以說，學校肯定是完完全全按照上級的政策的，它讓我們不超過人，不超過人). .. Even if [the government] investigated it, we would not be worried. It is

[88] He did not mention the exact number, but implied that a classroom of a top school might sit about 60 students. That was about 10 more than the usual class size and a school usually had 12 to 18 classes in each year group.

because all the schools in Shanghai are doing the same thing. Students are flowing out of bad schools and transferring into good schools (假如要查到另一塊，我們也不（怕），因爲全上海就沒有學校不是這樣，好學校都有進來的，壞學校都有出去的).
Interviewer: Then how will you charge auditing students?
Luo: It depends. For those famous schools everybody wants to squeeze in, not to mention 20,000 or 30,000 *yuan*, students will come even if you charge 50,000 or 100,000 *yuan* (要看啊，好的學校，有名氣的學校，大家拼命要去的，不要說 2 萬 3 萬，5 萬 10 萬都去啊，有的).
Interviewer: Is there a fixed price?
Luo: No fixed price, but there is a price everybody knows. For example, if you want to be an auditing student of XX school (a top one), you have to pay 80,000 *yuan* (不是，但是大家社會上都知道。比如到 XX 中學，8 萬).

Thus, for principals of competitive schools, the additional student admissions places were one of their main avenues of supplementing official funding. It was not, however, the only way renowned school raised additional funds. For example, Luo's school ran a factory which earned the school an annual profit of up to 4,000,000 *yuan*. All the factory's orders came from a large-scale local ship manufacturer. Luo was clearly aware of the exchange relationship between the school and the manufacturer.

We have collaborated for many years. If they gave the same order to others, they might only have to pay 500 *yuan* each. However, they pay us 800 *yuan*. The manufacturer is actually sponsoring and supporting us. Why? What do we have? We have good teaching quality. The cadres of the ship manufacturer need to send their children to a good school. We can admit them (它的幹部的子弟，我們幫他解決，念書的時候). Each year the school solves the admission problems of these children and gets the large order in return. The relationship has thus been strengthened.

Less competitive schools, however, were forced to try much harder to attract students and were somewhat resentful about this. They were certainly aggrieved that society and parents judged a school by the number of student who were admitted to college, but knew they had to live with it. Furthermore, as their schools attracted less able students, they found it more difficult to achieve good results in High Exams – thus the cycle

continued. As a result, the principals of less competitive schools believed they had a harder job than their elite school colleagues and were actually doing a better job.

For example, Lin's school was located in a low SES area populated with poorly educated people and a high crime rate. The students admitted to his school were usually those who scored the lowest on standard examinations. Lin believed that such students should not aim to be admitted to universities. Instead, he held that the school should provide them with a range of vocational courses to help them become craftsmen, hairdressers or repairers upon graduation. However, this did not fit comfortably with societal and parental expectations for the school.

> For a school like ours, I think the more important task is to try to cultivate more (blue-collar) workers for the society. This should be our major task. Our student source determines this task. However, it is incongruent with the value orientation of the society (因爲我的生源决定了我，我要爲社會培養大批的，合格的勞動者，建設者，這應該是我的任務，主要任務。因爲我的生源決定了我，但是我們的價值取向不是這樣子的)。...When it comes to the societal evaluation of a principal's job, the first concern is the school performance in the High Exam.
>
> Most parents only have one child. They all expect their children to go to university and find an office job instead of working as a repairman.

Despite his complaints, Lin was forced to try to meet the societal and parental expectations. He had to maximise the number of students who could go to college even though his student intake worked against this. To use his words:

> The head of the municipal education bureau used to speak at the secondary school principals' conference that the most important thing for a school was the student intake. I cannot agree with this more. (他說一個學校辦的好，辦不好，關鍵是看生源，關鍵是生源。我是非常贊同這句話)。
>
> I once talked to an elite school principal and found that even the poorest student he admitted scored much higher than our best students in the junior high school leaving examinations. However, when it comes to the High Exam, only more than ninety percent of students in

his school can be admitted by four-year undergraduate programs. In our school we help twenty to thirty percent of students go to these programs. What has to be borne in mind is that all their students used to be much better than ours. (我說你的高考本科率也沒有達到100%，只不過 90%多 一點。你還有百分之幾考不進本科， 你要知道你這個百分之幾在我這裏比我最好的還要好。但我每年還有百分之 二十，三十，考上本科勒)。

So I told the principal (of the elite school): 'Do I spend less effort than you?' Without our school, these students might not be able to go to university (我說我這個花的勁比你少嗎，如果沒有我這所學校的話，那就是每年這個百分之二十，三十進不了本科呀).

Thus, performance in the High Exam largely determined the market position of the school, while the High Exam performance itself was strongly related to student intake. In light of this, ordinary school principals recognised that they needed to initiate active marketing strategies in order to compete with the more popular schools for higher performing students. Xiu was one principal who seemed to have a faith in the power of marketing and mentioned this continually during the interviews.

I believed in the development on our own initiatives. Self-initiated development means to orient towards the market. I often say that instead of seeking help from the mayor (referring to the government), sometimes we need to turn to the market. Thus, I run this school as if it were a *min-ban* (private) school. I adopted many marketing strategies to invigorate the school (實際上你主動發展，實際上就是面向市場，我從來，我說找市長還不如找市場。我不是把這個學校當公立學校來辦，我是把公立學校當民辦學校來辦。是用很多市場因素，才能把公立學校辦活，否則就天天找政府，天天要政策).

His most important strategy was to find the 'selling point' (賣點) of the school. Since his school could not compete with others on exam performance, he had to find something that distinguished the school at which it could excel. Since the school had taught Japanese as a foreign language for more than thirty years, he worked to maximise this by changing it into a 'brand' for the school. He then used this 'brand' for marketing. Xiu implemented a number of strategies to 'sell' his idea. For example, he applied to change

the school name from XX Middle School into XX Foreign Languages Middle School. To change the school name he had to get approval from different layers of government - this process took two years. Xiu believed this was worth the time because the new name made the school more easily recognisable. Xiu also established a Japanese Language Research Institute, the first of its type in a secondary school. This in turn, in Xiu's words, highlighted the school's 'brand'. By adopting such strategies, Xiu was proud that his school provided a good teaching quality and learning environment but did not charge high fees (ordinary schools charge lower tuition fees than exemplary schools) (我收费不高，教學品質很高。我收錢不多，環境很好). Thus a vastly increased number of parents attempted to squeeze their children into his school (我生源爆滿).

Although ordinary school principals had to market much more actively to attract students, they did not necessarily regard enrolment as a life-or-death issue. This was probably because the overall system was not purely free-choice as the government still assigned a certain quota to each school. As Jia explained,

> We adopted some strategies, such as advertising our school in some junior high schools and in the community, but these are not the essential forces (但這不是本質的力量). The essential force is the quota system of the government. ..For example, if there are 4,000 junior high school graduates in our district this year, the district education bureau will distribute them among all the high schools. Thus, it will never happen that you cannot admit any students. There will be some coming [to your school] (所以本質上，你不會招不到生，總會有人進來).

As the above data shows, different types of schools had different market positions. Exemplary schools were more favoured by parents in this market because of high student achievement in the High Exam. The major issue facing these principals was how to deal with the flood of parents seeking admission, how to say no to some of them and how to use the admission opportunities in exchange for more resources. For principals of ordinary schools, however, the issue was how to attract more parents and students and how to improve their performance in the High Exam, even given their poor student intake. While principals of elite schools felt they were constrained by the quota assigned

by the government, ordinary schools relied on the quota system to guarantee their enrolment. This was further related to the second difference mediated by the school status the all-important relationship with the government.

School Status and Bureau Relations

Differences in school status generally related to the 'distance' between the principal and the educational bureau officials; this took a number of forms.

Local education bureau officials are the principals' direct superintendents. Their focus was seen as increasingly consumed by quality control. 'Quality', however, tended to be defined according to the input-process-output model of accountability. The model encompassed the numerous dimensions of school education that were amenable to different forms of external audit. Student academic achievement as an output measure was of the greatest concern for local education bureaus. Jia commented on the pressure from the local education bureau to improve High Exam performance:

> Jia: [The local education bureau] does not just give you expectations; they give you a clear message instead. There will be competition between districts; each district also expects to have a higher ranking. Thus the district education bureau will transform their pressure onto principals (不是期望，那是明確目標，是必須的，區和區之間還要比呢，我們這個區今年高考是第幾名，他肯定要把這個壓力轉化到校長身上).
> Interviewer: Will the local education bureau give you an exact admission rate for you to fulfil?
> Jia: They may not. However, they will let you know that they are unhappy if your school does not do well in the High Exam. They will send you a clear signal that you fail to meet the expectations (不下指標，但是如果你考得不好的話，他就有話了，他們以明確的信號告訴你你沒考好).
> Interviewer: Send the signal to the principal?
> Jiang: Yes. On various occasions they will send you this message. ..This is intangible pressure. They will not tell you what you have to do; they just let you know that your school has failed to have a good performance. The performance in the High Exam is an important index of your school quality. As you have not had a good exam performance, then the quality of your school is not high. That is the way they think about the issue (這種壓力是無形的，他沒有說一定

要怎樣，但是他告訴你，你們這次沒考好。而且這就等同於品質，因爲升學率沒考好，所以品質肯定不高了。可以說目前政府官員沒有幾個在這方面有改變的).

Accordingly, schools with good performance on the High Exam tended to face less pressure from their superintendents. For example, Luo mentioned that before the High Exam the educational bureau officials in his district frequently visited schools and talked to principals personally to inform them of what they expected the school to achieve. His school, however, received few such inspections because the school had 'steadily good performance in the High Exam' (一直比較好，比較穩定的學校).

The principal career-ladder system (*zhiji zhi*) was also an obvious indicator of the influence of school status on principal-bureau relations. As explained in chapter 2, the new principal career-ladder system aims to establish a professional ranking system that places greater emphasis on a principal's competence and performance, rather than basing ranking purely on the status of the school. However, despite this, interview data showed that school status continued to significantly influence the professional rankings of principals.

The exemplary school principals included in the study were generally ranked higher than those from ordinary schools. For example, Wan who was principal of a top municipal exemplary school had the highest special-class ranking while Guo and Jin, his municipal exemplary school colleagues were ranked as first-class principals. Although their years of experience probably played a key role in their ranking it was certainly not the only factor. This was borne out by the fact that Lin had also been a principal for more than 15 years but still denied the opportunity to submit an application for a professional ranking. He believed that the government still took careful account of school status when deciding principals' professional rankings. He questioned the fairness of such biases.

> The first time I submitted my application, it did not get passed. I could understand it because [hesitating] our system always prioritises key schools (as ahead of the rest). The second time I was very confident I would pass, but it turned out not. I was unhappy about it. It seems to

> me that the school status decides the [ranking of] the principal. Even for those who do not have a rich experience or strong capability, if their schools are important, they can be granted [a high ranking] (學校決定了你這個校長，你那個資歷很淺的，能力也不怎麼強的，但是他的崗位，他的學校相對重要，他就當了).

Thus, principals in exemplary schools had more opportunity for advancement and higher status than their ordinary school counterparts. This raises the question of who were more likely to become principals of higher status schools. It seemed that municipal exemplary school principals included in the study had worked longer, had more experience and had demonstrated good performance in their previous posts. In Yun's words, a common expectation for an exemplary school was that it be superior to an ordinary school in terms of the teacher, student, and principal competence. In other words, an exemplary school needed a principal 'comparable to its higher status' (認爲一個重點中學應該找一個門當戶對的[校長]). In Yun's case he was selected as vice principal, and therefore the potential successor of the principal of a municipal exemplary school, partly because of his previous work experience and partly because of his PhD degree[89]. As he assumed, 'people would think it is out of their imagination if a PhD degree holder cannot be comparable to the title of a municipal exemplary school principal'(如果一個博士還不門當戶對，有時候人就很難想像).

However, according to Lin, in many cases, years spent as a principal and demonstrated performance were not enough. He strongly believed that if you had a good personal relationship with local government officials then the likelihood of being promoted increased. Li reflected on his failure to get promotion:

> I am not good at dealing with relationships with the superiors and do not have many personal communications with them. My superiors trust my job thus they give me two titles as both the school principal and party secretary. However, it is the trust in my job instead of trusting me as a person. A principal who is most likely to be promoted

[89] During the time of interview, Yun was the vice principal of a municipal exemplary school and principal of a private junior high school. These two schools are not only geographically neighbours but also have strong attachment relations. Yun was named as vice principal because the government expected him to take the position of the principal in a couple of years when the current principal retired.

> is the one who has good personal relationship with superiors and also good work performance. For those with good relationship but no work performance, they can be personally trusted but they may not be promoted. For those who are recognised as capable but not personally attached to superiors, they also will not be promoted. This is the rule of being an official in China. Thus, I have remained in this position for more than ten years [without being transferred to a better school]. My superiors trust my job, but we do not have strong personal attachments (還有呢，就是一種人際關係，我是同上面不善於搞人際關係的，同上面的溝通我是不夠的。那儘管上面對我很放心，因爲像我這樣又做校長，又做書記還是不多的。對我很放心。但是這種放心是工作放心，我和你說，一個人想要受到提拔，他最好同上面的私交很好，工作又很好，他最容易受到提拔，第二種人呢，私交很好，但工作不好，他受到信任，但是沒有提拔，不行，不能做事，對吧？第三種呢，能做事，但是沒有私交。那麼可以放心的叫你工作，但是不會提拔你。這是中國的官場。所以我十幾年來很穩定的。這個位子，上級對我的工作很放心，但是我同上級沒有私交).

Thus, principals with good relationships with the local education bureau seemed to be more trusted, which, in turn, helped them to be assigned to a position in a more important school. An examination into the backgrounds of the principals of the more elite schools found that almost all had worked in the local educational bureau before they were appointed to their current schools[90]. They seemed to be regarded as trusted insiders and able to work more closely with local education bureau officials. For example, Guo mentioned that his relationship with the district education bureau helped him to be named as the district 'famous principal' (*ming xiaozhang*). He understood that he was granted this title because his superintendents needed his support.

> I am granted the title of famous principal because first, I have long work experience. Second, I have been working at the local education bureau for several years, so my superiors know me well. Third, my school has well developed since I became the principal. Why do your superiors make you a famous principal? They want you to help them. (我這個什麼名，幹得時間長，稍微老一點。我講的時間長，是因爲大家對我比較熟，因爲我在機關幹過一段時間，而且這段時間

[90] For example, Wan, Guo and Luo all worked for some years in their district educational bureaus. One exception is Jin as he got the current position through open recruitment. The open recruitment is an emerging form of selecting principals but has not by any means been widely adopted.

以來，學校總的發展還是可以的。所以大家比較客氣，領導讓你當名校長什麼理由，就是讓你幫他)。

> Sometimes the policies of the education bureau cannot be well implemented, then I need to show my support by explaining [to other principals]... Our superintendents approach problems from a more macro perspective, thus those principals who have never worked at the government agencies cannot agree with some policies or understand the superintendents. I can understand our superiors better due to my government working experience. Thus, sometimes I help to persuade [other principals to understand the problems from the angle of the superiors]. (有的時候我覺得他們說的有道理的，我就幫他們說說理由。...他大範圍看問題跟我們有些差異，我覺得很正常的，我在機關幹過，所以碰到問題我覺得可以理解，他從來沒上去過的人，他不會想到這個).

The data indicates that principals working in higher status schools were generally more senior in terms of age and work experience. They also had a closer relationship with the government officials. The good relationship in turn helped them to be appointed to more important schools and work on a more visible stage. As Xiu remarked, it is 'the famous school that makes a famous principal, not the other way round' (是名學校造就了名校長，不一定是名校長造就了名學校).

School Status and Teacher Quality

Differences in school status and market position also resulted in different teacher resources and teacher expectations.

As explained in chapter 2, each teacher in China also has a professional title, such as junior, first and special-class teacher. High-ranking teachers, particularly special-class teachers, are an important resource in any school. However, special-class teachers are unevenly distributed among schools studied. While each municipal exemplary school has three to five special-class teachers, ordinary schools have none. Special-class teachers are carefully protected and highly respected in exemplary schools because their names enhance the school's reputation. Many principals also deliberately cultivate and harness the relationship with these *backbone* teachers in order to enhance their own

authority. For example, in Jin's schools, the offices of the special-class teachers were intentionally located on the same floor of the principal's as a token of respect. His school also gave each of the three special-class teachers a 3,000 *yuan* monthly stipend[91] thus 'they can have this sum of additional money no matter how much and how well they do their job' (不管工作做的多少都比别人多拿了這樣一份工資). Guo gave his special-class teachers 'high-sounding titles' and more discursive power (話語權) in exchange for their loyalty. He interpreted the importance of famous teachers in the following way:

> Guo: When school development reaches a certain stage, we need to give expert or top teachers discursive power in schools.
> Interviewer: Will their discursive power be limited to teaching?
> Guo: It can be wider, but a famous teacher is most influential in the field of teaching. Thus, you need to magnify their role so that their voices can impact your decisions. You need to coordinate their voices with your school management.
> Interviewer: How can they influence the school decision?
> Guo: For example, they will be in charge of the training of younger teachers. They will represent our schools to engage in some external exchange activities with other schools and we may also consult them for some important school issues. Their words will be attached some authority for the school development. Of course, you need to make sure that your words and their words conform to each other. If you cannot make a good coordination and these teachers often disagree with you, you will be in trouble. Thus, you and these teachers need to have a shared discourse and then try to turn it into the public discourse of the school (當然，你要能做好一套，他講的和你講的做的要比較協調，你如果講不好的話，或者做不好的話，老跟你唱反調你也蠻頭痛的，對吧，你也滿頭堂的，關鍵是你要跟他們有話講，讓他們跟你也有話講，而且逐漸逐漸大家可以講到一起，那麼這個話語權就實際上是一個學校的公共話語權).

By contrast, ordinary schools did not seem to attract very good teachers and had to work hard to attract talent from outside the school. Sometimes they had to 'buy in' high-ranking teachers. For example, in Lin's school, there was also a *mingshi* (famous teacher) workshop. Since his school did not have any recognised famous teachers, he recruited three retired special-class teachers and paid them 2,000 *yuan* a month to come to the school once a week. As these retired teachers did not teach in his school, Lin admitted

[91] This sum accounted for 30% to 40% of their monthly income.

that they played a very limited role beyond the symbolic.

Furthermore, it was difficult for ordinary schools to recruit teachers holding higher degrees or those who had graduated from more prestigious universities. Lin employed six Masters Degree holders in his school and paid them an extra 500 *yuan* per month. Lin admitted that these were not the most radical strategies he had ever adopted. Several years ago when he tried to recruit his first Master degree holder, to attract the person he offered a one-bedroom apartment as a lure.

An additional challenge facing ordinary school principals was how to retain the good teachers they already had - this did not appear as much of a challenge for the more privileged schools. Lin recognised that his school had difficulty keeping good teachers because of its low status and disadvantaged location. During the interview he expressed his anger at two teachers he employed from Hubei Province who left and transferred to another Shanghai school after only two years. Although he said it was understandable from the teachers' perspective that they had the right to 'seek a better place', he was obviously extremely frustrated by the turnover of teachers.

The above data indicates that principals in elite and ordinary schools faced sharply different teacher issues. While elite school principals did not have to worry about attracting and retaining good teachers, this was apparently a big challenge for ordinary school leaders. Schools of different status schools were all concerned about the role played by backbone or high-ranking teachers, although their access to such teaching resources varied.

Personal Dimensions and School Status

This section points out that school status is an important mediator that influences interactively the school's market position, parental choice, government support and the faculty make-up. The data further suggests that school status is strongly related to other factors, particularly the years of principalship and relationships with the government. The data indicates that elite school principals tend to have more years of experience and

are more trusted by the school governing bodies. Figure 6.1 illustrates how the school, as the principals' more intimate context, influenced their role set relationships and set the boundaries of their leadership stage.

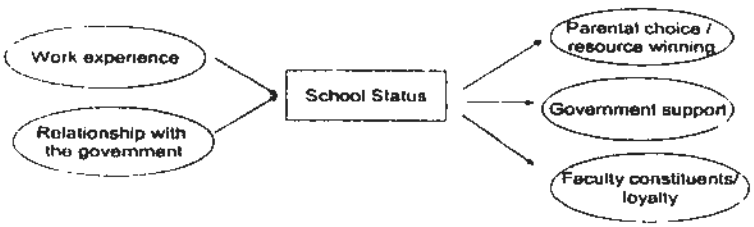

Figure 6.1 Mediating factors of the stage

As the figure shows, school status was a major factor in setting the principals' stages. The school status influenced the role expectation of principals held by parents, external resource sources, government officials and teachers as well as the relationship between principals and these role parties. However, the level of school a principal might be assigned to was mainly determined by, first, the years of work experience, and, second, the closeness of their relationship with government agencies, particularly the local education bureaus.

Thus, the school as an organisation affected principals' lived experiences and their interpretations of the reform environment. However, the data also indicated that there were many commonalities in how principals described the possibilities and constraints accompanying educational reforms. On the basis of these commonalities, a number of issues can be further teased out. These comprise the unwritten libretto of the Chinese principals. In other words, there was a set of tacit knowledge that seemed to be shared by all the Chinese principals. This is discussed in the next section.

The Unwritten Libretto: Role as the Representation of the Institutional Order

This section aims to tease out some of the 'rules of the game' that leaders had to master in order to be a 'principal' in China. These rules were, first, shared by all the principals – these were extracted from the various principal narratives. Second, the rules were presented to principals in subtle and tacit forms, usually as a legacy of the past. In a sense, these 'rules of the games' achieved a subtle, but pervasive and persistent, influence on the consistency with which these inherited 'scripts' were read by successive generations of principals. Third, the rules themselves seem to have become the instinctive grounds of any action and the taken-for-granted knowledge for principals.

This section has three sub-sections. The first sub-section teases out some common interpretations of the possibilities and constraints accompanying the reforms. The second sub-section discusses the major contents of the unwritten libretto. The third sub-section discusses the personal dimensions as an important mediator of the mastery of these implicit rules.

Common Interpretations of the Three Quality Reform Initiatives

Many common interpretations of the three quality reforms emerged from the principals' narratives. This section aims to tease out these common interpretations.

Reform of the School Review System

When the 'exemplary school' policy was first issued, it was seen to pose considerable challenges for established key schools and new opportunities for schools previously classified as 'ordinary'. Principals of previously-designated 'key' schools (the most elite schools) were afraid that they might lose their stature by failing the review while the ordinary school principals expected that some radical changes would reduce the key/ordinary school distinction[92]. For example, although Wan's school was ranked in the

[92] As explained in chapter 2, the practice of categorising key schools and ordinary schools dates back to the 1950s when the young People's Republic was in desperate need of professional talents to rebuild the nation. 'Key schools' were set up to identify and prepare the most promising candidates for higher levels of education (*China Daily*, 27 February 2006). In the state-controlled system, key schools were usually assigned more financial resources and better

top ten to fifteen of all Shanghai senior secondary schools, he was worried that it might not be able to get the title of the municipal exemplary school when the policy was first issued. Wan reflected on the uncertainty:

> Interviewer: Didn't you take it for granted that your school would be selected as municipal exemplary school?
> Wan: No, we did not think so. Our school is not the most famous one in Shanghai...
>
> Interviewer: Were you worried that not all the municipal key schools could retain the titles?
> Wan: Yes. Particularly for schools such as ours (not the best one), the government would not ensure [us to be selected]. We might be deserted (肯定不一定，尤其像我們這類學校，上面是不會保我的，他就把我扔掉了).

Since the policy was instituted almost nine years ago, fifty schools have been awarded municipal exemplary titles. However, little real change has been made to the old key/ordinary school distinction. Luo commented: 'If you read the list of the fifty schools, you may well find that all the previous municipal key schools have become exemplary schools. No one has been excluded.' (原來的市重點有哪個下來了，沒有一個下來的). The only difference is that some previously-designated district key schools managed to be included in the top 50. Luo's school was such an example.

Thus, according to data collected, the new exemplary school review policy did little to reduce the key/ordinary school distinction. Yun used the metaphor of changing hats to refer to the shift from the key school to the exemplary school system. He believed that the new school review was really just a redistribution of resources:

> It is just a change of school titles. It is like a person who used to wear a black hat and now changes to a red hat. The only change it has brought is that some less recognised schools also get the title of the municipal exemplary schools. It is in a sense just a redistribution of resources (它只不過是變了一個名稱，它原來可能戴了一個黑帽

---

teachers, recruited higher-scored students and had better student performances. To overcome the problems caused by the over-concentration of quality resources in a few schools, the central leadership (The State Council, 2001) decided that an exemplary school system should be established to replace the previous key school system.

子，現在戴了個紅帽子，然後呢可能有一些原來稍微差一些的學校躋身於這個實驗性示範性高中，我給你一個不客氣的評價，這只不過是資源的再分配).

Since exemplary schools had better teachers and students, the degree to which these schools could be examples to ordinary schools was also questionable. Yun further questioned the exemplary role played by these schools:

> These schools are not exemplary or experimental. I do not think they play an exemplary role. For example, Shanghai High School (a top school) has the best schoolhouses, the best teachers and admits the highest scored students. I do not have either of them. How can it be an example for my school? [Shanghai High School] is like Bill Gates, while my school is just an ordinary person. There is no comparability between us. I know Bill Gates is better but I am also clear that I may never become him (我並不認爲它真正做到了一個示範作用，比如說上海中學，它給我的示範作用是什麼，我跟它沒法比，它有一流的校舍，它有最好的師資，它也擄去了整個上海最好的學生，我沒有，它對我有什麼示範作用，它仍然是比爾蓋茨，我仍然是大街上的一個普通人，沒有什麼可比的，我知道比爾蓋茨比我好，但我也知道我永遠不可能做到他).

Despite such complaints, principals whose schools underwent the review process admitted that they had some gains. One important benefit according to the principals was that almost all schools had developed their own development plans in line with the new review system. They were also increasingly conscious that schools would be subject to more accountability requirements under the system in the future. As Wan explained:

> [In the process of developing the school plan for the review], we thought, wrote and talked a lot. We understood that we had to form and demonstrate our own educational ethos in the plan. Previously we only needed to write a plan at the beginning of the semester and a summary at the end. The previous plans and summaries were only submitted to our superiors. Today the school development plan has to be publicised. This is the difference (以前就是隨便做做，一個開學計畫，一個期末總結，都是對上的，不是對外的。現在就不一樣了).

Thus, the new school review reform forced principals to think seriously about how to design a development plan that catered to their context. As the plan was available to the public, it also promoted greater transparency. However, principals of lower-status schools recognised that the reform would not help them to compete with higher-level schools on an equal basis, as was part of the policy's original intent. The policy appeared to have done little to change hierarchical differences between schools.

Reform of Curriculum, Enrolment and Examination Systems

Principals were not overly positive about change accompanying the curriculum reform. Even though the policy supposedly granted them more control over curriculum it was in essence a top-down reform and the extent of power devolved to them had clear limitations. As Lin commented:

> In terms of how to design the school curriculum, the government policy has already set a cage for you, with nets and knots. You have to do your job within the framework (比如學校課程如何設置，上面給你畫的就像給你個籠子一樣的，隔了一個網格，你必須怎麼怎麼干).

The new 'reform' curriculum is comprised of three categories of courses: basic, extended and research courses. Principals were given power to develop and design extended and research courses. However, in practice, the three different courses mainly served to over-complicate the curriculum and confuse the principals. Yun said that although he had a PhD in Education, it still took a lot of his effort to understand what extended and research courses actually meant.

In reality, the principals transferred the pressure to reshape the curriculum onto teachers by asking them to develop additional elective courses. As a result, schools now have long lists of elective courses, such as *British* and *American Literature* and *Fun Mathematics* - that can be categorised as extended courses; and *Social Investigation Activities* classified as research courses. One consequence of this is the additional burden placed on students and teachers. This is somewhat disturbing given that one of the major purposes of the curriculum reform was to ease students' course load. In reality, however,

the reform did not alter the importance placed on learning the basics. In China, the basics are the subjects included in central examinations, for example, Chinese, Mathematics, English and Politics. These exam courses continue to dominate curriculum in all schools. What the reform actually did was to add more courses on top of these exam courses. As a result, students have less time for themselves. As Yun reflected:

> An underlying thinking of our education is that we keep feeding our kids in the hope to strengthen their nutrition. It is similar to our belief that more efforts result in more achievement and more input can lead to better output. ...Thus a major problem facing our schools is over education...Our students are not enjoying their school life (我們認爲教育實際上就是你吃飽了再吃一點，我們長久以來都是這個觀點，就是一分耕耘一分收穫，這就是勤奮。因爲我們覺得如果我們不停地加大投入，我們就會產生收益...我們現在大部分教學遇到問題以及學校裏碰到的最大的問題是過度教育...使學生失去了他們的享受).

The principals suggested that the main reason why the curriculum reform did not shift the emphasis on basic courses was because the student examination system remained unchanged. The High Exam remains of the utmost importance. The society, parents and superintendents still evaluate schools in terms of their performance on the High Exam. Principals were very clear about this. Lin's words were representative of their feelings.

> The only criterion the society values in a high school is how many students can go to college. The school superintendents also view the school in this way. Thus, it is meaningless talking about [promoting the all-round development] and cultivating more Lu Ban (a famous craftsman in ancient China) among students (你培養再多的魯班也沒有用). One hundred Lu Ban cannot compare with a *zhuangyuan* (the person who achieves the highest score) in High Exam (你培養一百個魯班，你還不如考一個文科高考，或者理科高考狀元呢).

During a follow-up interview Luo also explained that the district bureau had recently summoned all the high school principals and asked them to put the High Exam scheduled in June as the first priority. In the meeting, the bureau even suggested that principals had better move their working desks to the Senior Three Teachers' Office (希

望你們最後一段時間要怎麼怎麼抓，怎麼怎麼加強，最好校長的辦公桌也搬到高三年級組去). In other words, principals were expected to expend all their effort to monitor and encourage teachers to work towards better student exam scores.

Thus, although the curriculum reform aimed to change the teaching and learning 'process' by adding extended and research courses, it did not touch upon the 'outcome', that is, the exam system. As a result, many principals felt puzzled and uneasy. Yun adopted a metaphor of 'balloon blowing' to refer to the situation:

> We are blowing up a balloon...We put a lot of elements into the balloon and expect them to have some chemical reactions. .. We want students and teachers to be more active in the classrooms. We add in research courses and extensive courses. Then, what happens? We find the outlet of the balloon is the same and the evaluation criterion has not changed. People start to lose confidence in the curriculum reform. We are blowing up the balloon, but there are no other outlets (當我們發現這個出口還是不順暢的時候，這個評價還是沒有改變的時候，大家就會對新課程改革失去信心。我這個氣球在吹，但沒地方釋放). Many people, including principals, cannot understand it.

Recognising that the criteria remained unchanged, principals did not want to risk changing their emphasis on the High Exam. For example, both Guo and Xiu used 'bottom-line' to refer to the High Exam. In their words, if a school loosened its emphasis on the High Exam, then it would weaken its foundation. On the other hand, although many principals remained puzzled by the apparent contradictions accompanying the curriculum reform, they had to implement it. Their perspective appeared to be that it was a national reform and therefore it had to be implemented to demonstrate their fidelity.

Consequently, there was a considerable gap between the purpose for which the policy was designed and its actual effect at the school level. As Lin stated, 'although the state has done a lot to promote the curriculum reform, schools are dealing with it in a much less enthusiastic way' (這個一期課改上面是轟轟烈烈的，下面是馬馬虎虎的，走過場的).

The various education bureaus seem to realise this and thus launched 'research and extensive course design' competitions as a way to motivate the schools. Principals were interested in entering their school's programs in such competitions and winning a prize. As Guo explained, the research and extensive courses were like the frontiers that a school needed to explore because they could become a school 'brand', and thereby boost their reputation. As such, the research and extensive courses were regarded as accessories that could be used for the purpose of advertising. In this case, the effectiveness of the new extended and research courses was questionable. Jin concurred, 'frankly speaking, research courses developed by most schools are not effective. Most research is conducted just for the sake of research (为了研究而研究), or to win competitions'.

Thus, curriculum reform did promote some change in schools, but this did not appear to be deep change. Instead, it was clear that in the principals' eyes, the exam system remained unchanged in terms of form and importance. Principals therefore dared not risk changing traditional teaching and learning practices, especially if they produced good exam results.

Reforms on School Personnel System

As noted earlier, the principal career ladder system was implemented to establish a professional ranking system and a new pay scale for principals. It aimed to encourage principals to become more professional- rather than just bureaucratically-oriented. However, it appears that little real difference has resulted from the reform. The principals suggested that after reform implementation, the principals' 'state-cadre'[93] (*guojia ganbu*) status continued to be valued most. As a result, the principals felt that they were subject to somewhat contradictory instructions. Luo explained that he was continually reminded by various official documents that he was still a 'department-level cadre' (*chuji ganbu*).

[93] The party and government cadre system was equivalent of the public civil service system in many other countries. The term cadre refers to a public official holding a responsible or managerial position, usually full time, in party or government. Each cadre grade is treated differently, with privileges increasing as the grade level rises.

> Interviewer: So [after the reform], you do not have the 'department-level cadre' status, right?
> Luo: I still have.
> Interviewer: You have?
> Luo: I still receive the government notices to attend meetings organised for all the department-level cadres. I also have to fill in forms particularly designed for department-level cadres. (處級幹部開會的時候通知來了要聽報告，處級幹部要填這個廉政申報表格，都要填的).
> Interviewer: All these have been retained?
> Lu: Yes. Like the department-level civil servants, we also have to report to the government details about our family members and report the dates and reasons whenever we go abroad. We are also not allowed to keep our own passports. (處級幹部都是要填表的，家裏情況都要上報，出國情況都要上報，因私護照都要收掉).

Another purpose of the career ladder system was to encourage the transfer of principals from higher-status to lower-status schools. However, it is questionable whether this aim has been achieved. As explicated in earlier sections, it seemed that the government still took careful account of school status when deciding principals' professional rankings. The data showed that principals of higher-status schools tended to have higher professional rankings. Thus, principals expected to be promoted to higher-status schools, which they believed would help them to become more recognisable principals. Jia's words were representative of this:

> If your school is a low-status school, it is more difficult for you to achieve a title of famous principal or special-class principal. You have to work as a principal for 13-15 years and have some demonstrated performances. ..Thus special-class principals in Shanghai are mainly from famous schools... Principals from other schools have more constraints than those from famous schools in terms of student intake, teacher quality and external support and resources. Thus, many principals expect that they can be promoted to a better school by demonstrating some performances to the local government (更多的考慮是，我把這個學校辦得更好一點，然後我得到政府的任命到更高的學校去).

In a sense, principals were 'passively appointed to the position' by the local government. Therefore, the principals' dominant motivators appeared to be the opportunity to be

promoted to a better and higher-level school; the career ladder system itself appeared to do little to motivate principals.

Nor did the career ladder promise additional economic rewards (such as increased salary etc.) for principals. According to the details of the system, a principal receives a fixed annual income in line with their professional ranking as a principal, not as a teacher. The government auditing system ensures that their income does not exceed the stipulated amount. Thus, as noted by Luo and Jia, in some cases a principal's income is less than that of their vice principal[94]. In addition, a certain ranking cannot be retained after a principal has retired. Therefore their pensions are determined by their ranking as teachers (for example, first-class or senior-class teachers) instead of as principals. Thus, the motivational effect of the career ladder system for principals can be questioned.

Besides the principal career ladder system, the personnel reform was also designed to grant principals more autonomy in recruiting, promoting and evaluating teachers. However, in terms of teacher recruitment and promotion, a principals' power is circumscribed by a number of rules. First, the local educational bureau prescribes how many new teachers a school can recruit. In China, each state-recruited teacher has a public *bianzhi* (loosely translated as 'establishment posts' 編制). Thus, a school must have vacant *bianzhi* quota granted to them before they can hire new members. Second, even if a principal selects a preferred candidate after open recruitment, the decision has to be approved by their superintendent. The local education bureau, according to Lin, can veto the candidates proposed by the principal 'by using whatever excuse' (他可以找個什麼理由就給你否決掉). Third, while a principal has more autonomy to promote a mid-level leader, such as the year-group head, vice principals are usually appointed by the local education bureau. The vice principal can be someone the principal 'knows nothing about'.

Firing an under-performing teacher was also difficult for principals for two main reasons.

[94] The income of vice principals was determined by their teacher professional ranking (for example, first-class or special-class teachers) and the school bonus.

First, a principal's decision to fire a teacher must be endorsed by the local education bureau. Second, ending a teacher's contract almost inevitably leads to open conflict between the teacher and the principal. The teacher might seek different channels to *shangfang* (administrative appeal to the higher-level government, 上訪). Government interference was usually the result of *shangfang*. For example, Luo ended a teacher's contract because he was irresponsible and had been the subject of many student and parent complaints. When the teacher was informed of Luo's decision, he sent complaint letters to various government departments raging against his treatment. Since the teacher had a relative who lived in Taiwan, he even appealed to Shanghai People's Political Consultative Office （政協） and Taiwan Affairs Office（對台辦） and these agencies all came to press the school. Although Luo did not succumb to the pressure in the end, this was really a headache for him.

Thus, when teachers' personal interests were threatened, they used *Shangfang* as a way to protect themselves. Being caught between the government and teachers, principals were faced with huge pressure. This happened in Jia's school. Because of financial difficulties, the local government signed a contract with a private investor to transform Jia's school into a private institution. Because of this teachers were faced with the spectre of losing their government employee status. As an 'obedient' principal, Jia did not say no to the government about the shift in status. Because of this, however, the teachers accused Jia of being 'traitor' as he did not protect them from the change. Teachers posted insulting 'small-character posters' （小字報） in the school and on the Internet to attack Jia. They also appealed to the higher government officials to defend their own interests. As a result, the government agreed to the teachers' retaining of their public *bianzhi* for the stability of the school (現在用了一個政策叫"公辦留編",全部保留公辦編制。就是用這麼個辦法，首先把教師先安定下來). Jia gained no credit for this.

The data seems to indicate a number of things about the effect of the personnel reform. First, the principal career ladder did not appear to motivate principals. The principals

believed that their personal professional ranking was strongly related to the hierarchical status of their school. Second, in principle, principals were delegated the power to both appoint and dismiss teachers. However, in reality, the extent of this power was severely limited. Much of the personnel power nominally devolved to principals remained in the hands of the local government. This negatively influenced principals' work and their relationship with teachers.

The principals held that a major challenge was how to motivate and evaluate teachers. A common understanding among principals seemed to be that the most effective way to motivate teachers was to apply material rewards. A popular practice was to give teachers only part of the official salary and use the rest as a bonus to encourage them to shoulder higher workloads. As Zhong admitted:

> Few schools in Shanghai will give teachers their full salary. Some schools may pay 80% of their monthly salaries. Our school gives 50% [and pays the rest on the teaching-hour basis] (上海很少有學校把國家發的全部作爲基本工資，多一點的有 80%，我們現在是 50%).

Recognising that teachers expected a steadily increasing income, most principals demonstrated a strong cost consciousness. As Tan commented:

> You have to keep the cost in your mind. .. Nowadays teachers always expect an increasingly better welfare and the other school expenditures are increasing each year. However, the funding from the education bureau will not increase and it will even decrease with the decreasing number of students. Thus, as principals we have to think about how to get large returns from small investment (以最小的投入取得最大的回報).

Therefore, a challenge facing principals was to maximise school funding and then 'spend the money in the most needed places' (把錢花在刀口上). For example, schools used various material reward schemes to encourage teachers to produce better student performance in exams. In fact, some schools adopted student exam performance as the key criterion to evaluate teachers. In some schools, student performance was the sole criteria. This was the case in Tan's school.

> Tan: For all the newly-admitted senior one students, we enter their scores into the data base and rank them according to their scores. Then we will track the scores they achieve in monthly exams, mid-term and final exams. We may also track the gaps between different classes. In this way, we can see whether and how the teacher has helped students to progress.
> Interviewer: Will you publicise the results?
> Tan: Yes. ..[In this way] if you do not do a good job, it is not me who will blame you. Instead it will be parents, students and your peers.

Thus, in developing and evaluating teachers it seemed that performance-based output models were widely used by principals.

This section has attempted to sort through the main commonalities in terms of principals' opinions about the three education reforms: school review, curriculum and; personnel systems. Table 6.1 illustrates the most pressing concerns identified by principals in relation to the three policies; it also notes 'significant others' which connect the reforms and their concerns.

Reform Initiatives	Significant Others	Important Concerns
School review reforms	**Government agencies**	• **Remains a government-dominated reform;** • **Little change to the key/ordinary school distinction.**
Curriculum reforms	**Government agencies**	• **Contradictory government expectations of both implementing the curriculum reform and pursuing good performance on the High Exam;** • **Priority on High Exam because of the resources this can bring to schools or, conversely, the threats underperformance brings to a school's reputation.**
Personnel reforms	**Government agencies and**	• **Professional ranking seen related to school status;** • **Strong motivation from the opportunity**

	Teachers	**to be promoted to a higher-status school;** • **The power to recruit, promote and dismiss teachers circumscribed by the higher-level government;** • **Performance-based teacher evaluation models adopted.**

Table 6.1 Principals' common interpretation of the three reform initiatives.

The table shows at least three interrelated issues which deserve further attention. First, the government remains the key significant other in principals' interpretation of all three reform initiatives. Thus, relationship building with officials from various government levels is a priority for principals. Second, although principals have limited power over personnel issues, they are expected to maintain school stability and encourage teachers towards better student performance. Third, the data indicated that principals are concerned about winning resources. These include economic resources, such as government funding, or human resources like teachers. These issues will be discussed in the following section.

Being a Principal in China: Important Knowledge

Following earlier discussion, this section aims to explore some of the common knowledge considered important by principals. Common knowledge is captured in three major themes; these are: maintaining *guanxi* with the government, the importance of maintaining internal harmony and the need to win resources.

Maintaining Guanxi with the Government

Maintaining good relationship, or *guanxi*[95], with the government was remarkably important to the principals. Principals were very conscious of their role as a state employee, their accountability to and their dependence on the various government

[95] According to Bell (2000), the emphasis on *guanxi* is on relationships, but that the term 'relationship' means sometime more in Chinese. *Guanxi* is a 'mechanism by which individuals are able to achieve personal, family or business objectives' (p. 133). Luo (1997: 2) defines *guanxi* as 'a concept of drawing on connections in order to secure favors in personal relations. It is an intimate and pervasive relational network in which Chinese culture energetically, subtly and imaginatively engage'.

agencies.

Principals were conscious that their autonomy was circumscribed by the local government. They were held accountable across a broad range of areas. To explain this Lin adopted the somewhat sexist metaphor of 'mothers-in-law' （婆婆） to describe the various government departments. In his view, as the multiple mothers-in-law interfered in school affairs, the principal was burdened by additional responsibilities that distracted them from focusing energy on teaching and learning.

> For example, if a woman teacher gets pregnant and wants to have a second child, it is the responsibility of the principal [to persuade her not to deliver the baby]. Otherwise, the school cannot get the title of *Model Unit*. Is this a principal's responsibility? [Another example], one teacher's family refuses to move from the city residential demolition and eviction; then it is also the principal's responsibility to [persuade them to move]. Is this also the principal's job? (舉個例子，我們哪一個女教師懷孕，是第二胎懷孕的話，你校長要做工作，你校長不做工作的話，你文明單位怎麼算？這個是誰的事情啦？這是我校長管的事嗎？對不對啊？上海市市政動遷，動遷碰到哪一位老師家裏結果沒有配合，也是你校長的責任，校長要做工作，這個是校長的事嗎?)

Given the influence of the 'mothers-in-law', attending meetings organised by various government departments had become an important component of a principal's job. Jin claimed that he had to devote at least one and a half days a week to attending meetings. Luo said few principals could continue to teach because of these interruptions.

> Since I became a principal, I have not conducted any serious teaching. There is no way for me to teach a major subject [Chinese, in his case]. If I teach a major subject, that means five to six teaching hours for one class. However, how can I have this amount of time? Time has to be devoted to attending meetings (你哪有時間上5節，6節呀，開會都忙不過來). If I did teach a major subject, students and parents would complain. It will happen that in the time slots I am scheduled to teach, I receive a conference notice and have to ask for leave. [As I cannot ensure the teaching time], I cannot teach any major subjects.

Furthermore, because of government intervention in school admission, curriculum and personnel issues, principals had little room to innovate. As Lin commented:

> There are a lot of pre-conditions to make a school better. One important condition is the autonomy of the principal. However, what autonomy do we have? Everything has been tightly regulated. If you do something your superiors do not endorse, then you risk losing your principal position (你如果是搞一些上面不認可的事情，你這個校長帽子就摘掉了). However, if you do everything as required, how can there be any school renovation (你如果事事都按照上面要求做的話，你又哪來的創新呢)？

Lin's words reinforced the fact that the principals depended on the government for job security. Chinese schools have long relied on the government to provide funding, students and teachers. This mentality has been little changed today. For example, Jia's school was transformed from a public to the private school that could only admit 'bottom' students. However, Jia did not seem to regard enrolment as a serious issue because the government would always assign a sufficient student quota to his school. As Jia explained:

> Interviewer: Even if you are not an officially public school, the government still assigns you quotas?
> Jia: Yes, it has to, otherwise I cannot survive. I need to enrol students [to support the school] (他必須給我分配，否則我就沒辦法過了。我要招人).

It seemed that an implicit understanding was that the government would not really close down a school or 'dessert' the teachers. As Luo commented:

> If a school were closed down, where should the teachers and students go? Students can be transferred to other schools, but how about the teachers? Teachers will *shangfang* (administrative appeal to the higher government, 上訪). As a result, the district government will have to take care of these teachers [promising to secure their jobs] under the pressure of their superiors (上訪回來區裏做工作，妥善安排). That is what will happen, thus the local government will not risk [to close a school and dismiss teachers] (就這回事，不會有什麼大動作).

This lack of autonomy and the accompanying dependence on the government subjugated principals to a role 'beneath' the government officials – rather than allowing them to be independent professionals. Principals also believed that few government officials regarded the principalship as a professional role. For example, Jia believed that principals were basically expected to do as the government ordered.

> Over the past eight years that I have worked as a principal, I have to say there has been more talk of expanding autonomy. However, the problem is that under our systems, the government does not regard principals as a professional, but an official instead (我們可能對政府來說，把校長作爲一種專業角色的意識還沒有，而是把你作爲政府的一種官員). .. Thus, as a lower-level official, you have to implement whatever orders the government gives you. There is no impetus promoting principal professional development, although we have certain autonomies in terms of, for example, how to run your school and what education ethos to be adopted in the school. Recognising this macro-environment, principals tend to think in this way: since it is always the government who has the final say, why should we fuss to seek any autonomous development? Principals will do what the government asks them to do (但是在這樣的環境下，有不少的校長已經不願從這個角度來思考問題，因爲他覺得何必呢，在動力上就有問題，反正政府說了算，政府怎麼佈置任務，我就怎麼做).

However principals seemed to know how to relate to the government officials. Although they recognised that they were burdened with many unreasonable responsibilities, they tended to shoulder these because of their position as subordinates. They had always to be aware of their location in the various hierarchies.

> Principals today are tired. We have to do a lot that we are not responsible to do...Many of responsibilities of our superiors have been devolved to principals... You have to be responsible for teachers giving birth to extra babies, students getting into troubles, school fires and student public health problems...Thus, as a principal, you have to be clear of your position, the boundary of your power, and your responsibilities. You have to take these responsibilities even if you have disagreements, otherwise you cannot be a principal. If you fail to meet these responsibilities, there will always be others who will take

your seat (我經常開玩笑，計劃生育責任全是你的，學生鬧禍了，責任全是你的。火情第一責任人全是你的。吃飯吃出毛病來了，第一責任人校長。...所以校長某種角度來講，我們要明確自己的位置。在自己的範圍內做好自己的事情，責任，妥善處理好各方面的關係。你要想不明白想不通，你也要去做，要麼不要當。不當校長不要緊，有人還會當，這前赴後繼，這不用擔心).

You have to properly handle the relationship with your superiors. Not making conflicts is acute. You have to keep the feeling to yourself even if you feel wronged (我們要處理的關係，上下關係，我們都要處理好，不要搞得太尖銳。搞得相對柔和一點，有點什麼高興不高興，校長自己消化).

To establish good relationships, principal learned not to openly confront or contradict their superiors. This did not mean that a principal had to strictly adhere to superiors' orders, but the rule was that you can not offend the superiors' authority. As Xiu said, he believed in the policy of 'iron hand in the velvet glove' way (外柔內剛, 外圓內方) even when he had disagreements with his superiors.

[When I have disagreements], I will keep them to myself instead of openly voicing them out (這些事情你只能想在心裏啊，你不能去對抗啊) ... In front of your leaders, you are subordinates and you need to conform to their orders (在領導面前，你是下級，下級服從上級). However, sometimes you may face the choice of conforming to the truth or to the authority. [When you encounter such choices and cannot agree with your superiors], you can tell your superiors that you need to study its feasibility first. By saying so, you are not offending or agreeing with the leaders. They will not feel offended and I will not incur myself troubles (你最多講到一定程度，是服從真理還是服從權威。這個有時要先服從權威再服從真理，有時要先服從真理再服從權威。這個要看怎麼處理，我經常覺得很難處理，有一句話，這句話叫領導這句話我們要認真研究，這句話很中性，認真研究就是我覺得，又不得罪他，但實際上又沒有認同。他也不難過，但是我自己也不被動).

Maintaining good relationship with the government comprised the most important part of the principal knowledge in China. As the above data shows, good relationships with superiors could be used in exchange for position security and additional government

support. Inside the school, good relationships with teachers were also deemed as necessary if a principal wanted to win support and conformity from teachers and to build a harmonious campus.

The Importance of Internal Harmony

Principals emphasised the importance of harmonious interpersonal relationships within the school. For example, Luo commented that 'only when people are working in a harmonious campus can they be emotionally relieved'. Jin emphasised that harmonious relationships gave teachers a sense of belonging. Tan and Jia mentioned that an ideal campus was one where harmony was in-built. Furthermore, the principals believed within an ideal harmonious campus that people were not just loosely attached to each other but actually formed an inseparable, interdependent collective. In other words, harmony was built on commonality and, to a large extent, uniformity. Even though principals expected conformity from teachers, this was not as simple as people doing what they were told unquestionably. Jia interpreted the importance of human relationships and harmony in school:

> [Harmonious interpersonal relationship] is very important. It is something with a strong Chinese characteristic. Our culture determines that we need to learn the art of dealing with people. Human relations are important for Chinese people. If you cannot understand this point, you cannot run your school smoothly. As a principal, you cannot assume that you are always right. If your words cannot be endorsed by your teachers, your orders will not be implemented. ..In dealing with the relationship with teachers, your words and practices need to be legitimate, reasonable and sensible. Only in this way can you win the conformity of teachers. This is Chinese culture (非常重要的。這完全是中國特色的。我們中國的文化也決定我們都很關心的人情世故，世態炎涼，人情在中國人的心目中是非常重要的。如果你不把這個深層次把握住的話，你辦不好學校的，你不要認爲我校長講的這個都是對的。你沒辦法推下去，他就是不認可，這個沒用的，它不認可...所以處理教師問題就是要合法合理合情，你要三者兼備人家才能信服。這就是我們中國人文化的特點).

As Jia mentioned, a principal needed to make 'legitimate, reasonable and sensible' decisions to establish good relations with teachers and to get them to conform. In doing

so, principals had to avoid conflicts with teachers. This was important as open conflicts are perceived as a threat to harmony. For example, since teachers were very concerned about promotion (e.g., from second-class to first-class teachers), principals were extremely reluctant to deliberately hinder a teacher's promotion for no reason. As Luo noted:

> If you meet the application requirements, I will recommend you. I do not want to cause any conflict. If you are an eligible applicant and I do not endorse your application, you will come to [question me]. Why should I incur myself this trouble? (你報，符合要求我會給你報，這個矛盾我不願意，你可以報的人，我說我不讓你報，學校討論了，不讓你報，你不要找我，我自找麻煩幹什麼).

To avoid conflict with teachers, a principal needed to know how to protect the teachers' 'face' (*mianzi*, 面子) and not to threaten their personal interests. For example, Guo mentioned one personnel reform which he initiated in his school. As in many other schools, his predecessor promoted backbone teachers to be mid-level leaders, such as the head of the Teaching Affairs (教務處) or Disciplinary Office (政教處). In such cases, these teachers had to spend considerable time on their mid-level leader jobs and so had little time to 'catch up' with their teaching. As a result, the school ended up with a clumsy leadership structure. To solve this problem, Guo decided to shift the mid-level leaders to teaching posts. By doing so he recognised that two things were important. One was to save the teachers' 'faces' and the other to protect them from economic losses. Thus, Guo gave them the title of 'famous teachers' before moving them to their new posts:

> I named them famous teachers first. The title of famous teacher is not worse than that of the head of the Teaching Affairs Office, is it? Our school only has a couple of famous teachers while there are many more mid-level leaders than famous teachers. Then those named famous teachers would feel they have 'face'. Next you will also have to ensure that they will not have an economic loss. (我首先命名他爲名師對吧，名師比你這個教導主任也不差吧，一個學校沒幾個名師啊，我就是一個，教導主任，中層有十來個，名師就這麼三五個，我也不差吧，面子有了。然後你也不能少他的經濟對吧).

> I give these famous teachers additional bonus. Their total income is higher than before. Then (by shifting from the mid-level leader to the teaching post) they get both fame and fortune (又有名又有利，那怎麼不好呢). School harmony has been maintained, which helps to promote the school personnel reform.

To avoid conflict with teachers the principal also needed to know how to maintain an appropriate distance from different teachers. As Xiu commented:

> The distance between the principal and the teacher needs to be close in some cases and far in others. It depends on specific situations. (這個校長和教師的距離有時候要很緊，有時候要很遠。這個要看具體情況).

> A principal needs to have the intuition [of what is the appropriate distance]. For example, if you want to transfer a teacher out next semester, then do not try to approach the teacher when you meet him/her. The teacher may be in an angry state; approaching him/her will easily cause conflicts. (基本上有這個直覺，你比如說這個老師我下學期要把他調走了，你這個事情你去主動和他親近的話，也不好的，他心理狀態不好的，你去跟他談你自找沒趣。所以這個時候我也不跟他多囉嗦).

To avoid conflict, principals needed to know how to motivate teachers. As established earlier, the most common way to do this was the use of material rewards in order to motivate and retain teachers. However, knowing when and how to allocate such rewards was dependent on what the principals called 'wisdom'. Guo provided a good synthesis of this. His words captured the essence of his colleagues' opinions.

> Today's life has determined that more money can better motivate people. I have developed my policy of when and how to distribute money to teachers. First, it has to depend on specific situations. Second, you have to find and maintain an appropriate tempo to give money. Third, to cater to different purposes, you have to change your policy. For example, the bonus distributed before the Chinese New Year needs to be more equalised among teachers. You give this sum of money to seek the purpose of wishing teachers a harmonious and happy New Year, thus the sum of the bonus shall not vary much among the teachers. If your purpose is to reward their job, then you

> have to differentiate according to their workload and work performance. Thus the purpose is different. What we shall bear in mind is that, first, you cannot overuse this material lever. Second, bonus distribution cannot threaten the harmony of the school. If you overuse the lever and everyone can get the same amount of money despite of the differences in their work performance, then you cannot effectively motivate them. However, if you largely differentiate the bonus, for example, by giving some one thousand while others one hundred without any legitimate reasons, then teachers will be unhappy. Thus, we need to seek a relative equilibrium (要通過發獎金要儘量調動積極性，既不能把錢都發濫了，又不能把錢發得人家都發急了。發濫了是大家幹不幹都有啊，都一樣，發急了是他有我沒有，他拿一千我拿一百，爲什麼，講不清。就著急了，搞得不開心了，這不行，我覺得還是要追求相對平衡和動態管理).

It was widely recognised that to be able to provide material rewards a school had first to have adequate funds available. The principals involved in the study demonstrated a high level of awareness of the importance of winning such resources.

Awareness of the Importance of Winning Resources

Principals were very aware of the importance of obtaining adequate resource. Their logic for this was simple – teachers are the school's most important resource; in order to attract, keep and motivate them, a school needs money to reward them. Therefore, finding money is paramount. As Lin said,

> Nowadays people flow to places and work units that provide higher incomes. This is a consequence brought by the marketisation (現在不是的，現在哪個地方收入高，就到哪個地方去。這是市場化帶來的).

> [To attract good teachers], you have to talk about economic rewards. You cannot expect everybody to work hard and not to ask for any rewards like Lei Feng[96].(那麼這個裏面要有基礎，要有經濟基礎。因爲你不能要求人人都想雷鋒一樣的，講奉獻，講貢獻，不講收入的).

Tan explained that teachers also took their own financial welfare into careful account

[96] Lei Feng is a famous PLA member famous for his selfless service to the people. He died in his twenties in 1960s.

when they evaluated a principal.

> Teachers definitely [take the income they can get at the school into consideration] when they evaluate a principal. For example, if I gave each teacher 500 *yuan* bonus as a celebration for, let's say, International Labour's Day last year, then they would expect me to give them more this year. When I first came to the school, some teachers said that here came a new principal. Then how about giving each teacher 1000 *yuan* as a gift for the first meet? We have nearly 170 staff members. If I distribute each of them 1000 *yuan*, what will be the total sum? You see, you cannot avoid talking about money. (他肯定。比如講五一勞動節，什麼節，他去年發五百塊，他就會講去年五百，今年怎麼樣？有的老師吃飯的時候就講了，校長，你今年總歸多發點啊，多發點，對伐？總歸要有點花頭啊（上海話），我剛來他們就講了，你當校長了，總要給我們點見面禮啊，應該至少一個人發一千塊啊。我們一百六十幾個，一百七十個不到一點，如果一個人發一千塊的話，我就想這是什麼概念。所以我講，你動不動就是錢).

Thus, principals seemed to assume personal responsibility for taking care of teachers as soon as they became principals, just because that was what they were supposed to do. For example, as Xiu reflected:

> If I were not a principal, I would not have to worry about the financial issues. I would expect my principal to give me money. However, since I have taken the position of the principal, that means others will count on me to give them money. Then I have to get more money from different sources. So I have to please others and ask them to donate instead of assuming myself a superior role of an intellectual (但是我做了校長，就是叫我發錢，那我就想法去搞錢了。搞錢你這個角色身份就不能自命清高，認爲我是知識份子，你要去求人家).

Even though the government remained the most important source of funding, principals knew they had to obtain additional resources from other sources. On top of regular recurrent funding (distributed on the basis of student numbers), the government had additional funds to allocate to schools in need. Whether a school had access to this money seemed dependent mainly on the competence of principals to persuade and make good relations with the government. As Xiu said, the key was to make your superiors

believe that your school was worthy of extra investment.

> The government will invest in a school that is worthy of the money. You cannot wait for the government to invest; instead you need to arouse their investment desires (你要讓他產生投資的衝動啊). For example, you can invite the government officials to come when your school has some celebrations or activities. When your school receives visits or inspections from the municipal government, you have to do your best because it concerns the face of your direct leaders, the district government officials.

On top of 'spare' government funds, principals actively tapped different channels for money. For example, although Tan's school was under the district administration, it was located geographically in a town (a smaller unit under the governance of the district). On just the third day of his principalship, he went to visit the township government officials. In return, they gave the school 50,000 *yuan*. This was seen as part of a reciprocal relationship. Tan's visit showed his respect for the office and made the officials feel they had a face (*mianzi*). The money was given in recognition of this new relationship. Tan worked hard during his tenure to strengthen this relationship:

> When the local enterprises have some celebrations, we lend our auditorium for their use; our dancing teams and chorus also perform on their celebration parties. They are very happy about it. This is actually serving the society with the school resources. In return, the school can win a good impression and favourable social evaluation. It is reciprocal. Schools today cannot be isolated from the society...You have to make use of all kinds of resources. Some of them cannot be exchanged for money...because Chinese society emphasises relationships (就是利用各種資源，因爲有些並不是有錢就能換來的東西, [中國]就是講關係，講人情的對伐).

However, good relationships are not cost-free; in fact, they are accompanied by reciprocal expectations and norms. For example, the critical issue of school admission was intimately interwoven with a principal's relational obligations and social exchange. Deciding who to admit was a problem for many principals every summer before the new school year began. This was particularly so for principals of elite schools. They expressed considerable dissonance because of *Tiaozi sheng* (條子生). *Tiaozi sheng* refers

to the groups of students schools are pressed to admit by influential others. Although the elite school principals admitted that they were under pressure from their many relational obligations to admit new students, most were a little evasive (often giving ambiguous answers) about how they dealt with these obligations. For example, Luo admitted that he could still use scores as a criterion for some of these students, but for others, he had to admit them regardless of their results (有的能看[分数]，有的不能看). Jin claimed that he would use formal requirements as his first criteria, but on the basis of this, he also did not want to offend anybody (政策必须放在首位，以此爲前提，儘量赢得各方面的認可). Guo also admitted that admitting certain new students presented a good opportunity to establish and strengthen relationships with influential people who would bring the school 'long-term benefit'.

This section has discussed a number of common issues which emerged from the second stage cross case analysis as mentioned in Chapter 5. There was a body of knowledge which all principals saw as important. The knowledge was comprised of the following components: seeing government as the prominent audience, the importance of internal organisational harmony and the awareness of the importance of winning resources. This body of knowledge indicates that three things are indispensable to a Chinese principal: *guanxi*, harmony and resources. Maintaining good relations (*guanxi)* with the government and other external stakeholders helped principals acquire resources which they could use to maintain relationships with teachers and so build harmonious workplaces.

Although the unwritten libretto was the knowledge shared by principals it seemed that the degree of mastery and application of these implicit rules varied among individual principals. Some personal dimensions, particularly work experience, tended to mediate the mastery and application of the unwritten libretto. The following section uses data to explore this issue.

Personal Dimensions as a Mediator of the Mastery of Unwritten Libretto

Professional insight accumulated with years as a principal. Principals admitted that years of experience equalled enhanced wisdom which, in turn, allowed them to distinguish between what they could/should do or not do. For example, as schools received demands from different government departments, a novice principal tended to try to fulfil them all, while an experienced principal knew how to make informed choices. Jia admitted that when he first became a principal he tried to do everything, but soon found it was not worth his effort. He found that sometimes 'when you submit your finished tasks, they do not even take a look'. He thus began to develop a philosophy of how to deal with all kinds of often conflicting demands.

> There are tens of different departments in the local education bureau and all of them want to pursue some outputs, thus they all want to assign different tasks to schools. A principal is like a needle-eye and the tens of departments are like threads trying to go through the single needle-eye. You just cannot deal with all of them. Thus you have to learn how to integrate and select (政府教育局有很多機構，它的十幾個部門都想在領導面前做出成績，都拼命往下壓任務。如果你這個校長，就像這個針孔一樣，這個線全部要從針孔穿過。你不可能應付那麼多。而且你應付那麼多工作，說老實話你也做不來。你必須想辦法要整合。想辦法要揚棄，想辦法要進行選擇).

Thus, to maintain good relationships with superiors, a principal had to read, sift and differentiate the information contained in superiors' words. As Guo noted:

> When you judge a decision made by your superiors, you have to be clear whether it is a thing, a regulation, a rule or a policy (校長要動腦筋，想清楚，他[上面]講的是一件事，還是一個法，還是一個規則，還是一條政策). If it is a regulation, then you have to follow. ..If it is a thing, then you have to think clearly whether it is a good or bad, big or small issue and, more importantly, whether it will become a once-off or routinised practice. You have to make your own judgement (如果是個法，沒話，說什麼，聽什麼...如果他說的是一件事，你要想想清楚，這件事是好事還是壞事，是大事還是小事，是這件事長遠做的還是只做一次的，那麼你就要用你自己的腦子來判斷).

Xiu also recognised the importance of 'flexibility' in differentiating and prioritising the tasks assigned by the government. He said a principal needed to categorise assigned jobs into 'pentangle tasks [something you need to do beautifully] (什麼事情是要打五角星的事情); triangle tasks [something you need to do well] (什麼事情是要打三角星的事情) and tick tasks [something you just need to finish] (什麼事情是打勾的事情)'. For example, when the municipal-level delegates came to visit his school, it was definitely classified as a pentangle task. If the school makes a good impression on municipal leaders it is actually winning face for the district education bureau officials (要給領導爭面子啊). This is a good way to strengthen multiple relationships.

Xiu believed that knowing how to differentiate the tasks assigned by the government was the very essence of being a principal, but he also recognised that this 'knowledge' was not 'teachable'.

> You have to categorise different tasks. For some issues you can muddle through, but for others, you cannot. Then you have to develop an acute insight and accurate judgement. This is the essence of being a principal. I would say it is tacit knowledge and it is hard to teach or share with others (你要看什麼事情，就是有的漿糊可以搗，有的漿糊是不能搗的。但是你就要看，這就要看你敏銳的洞察力，準確地判斷力，這就是校長的內容了，對人來講，我很多事情，我叫默規則，這個東西教不會你).

Because of the accumulation of a body of tacit knowledge, Xiu automatically knew what to say to superiors according to the occasion. Full mastery and manipulation of the body of tacit knowledge also helped him to be trusted as a principal even though his school was not famous. However, as Xiu said, the tacit knowledge could not be taught, it depended on 'the accumulation of experience'. In Wan's words, it was a process of 'illumination' (悟).

Thus, the unwritten libretto as a set of rules or a body of common knowledge was available to all principals. However, the degree to which principals mastered, applied and manipulated the rules and knowledge was influenced by their years as principal. It

seemed that those who worked longer as a principal - who had been immersed in the system for more years - tended to be able to more tactfully apply and manipulate the rules. Figure 6.2 illustrates the relationship between the unwritten libretto and principals' experien

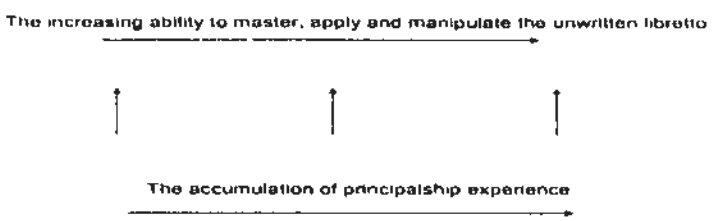

Figure 6.2 The relationship between years of principalship and the unwritten libretto

When the stage and the unwritten libretto dimensions are put together, a matrix is mapped out. The figure has two dimensions. One dimension represents the level of prominence of the stage where principals enact their leadership and the other their level of mastery and manipulation of the unwritten libretto. As the earlier analysis showed, the stage dimension depends mainly on school status while the mastery and application of the unwritten libretto is influenced by the principals' experience. Thus, the matrix can be mapped out as in Figure 6.3.

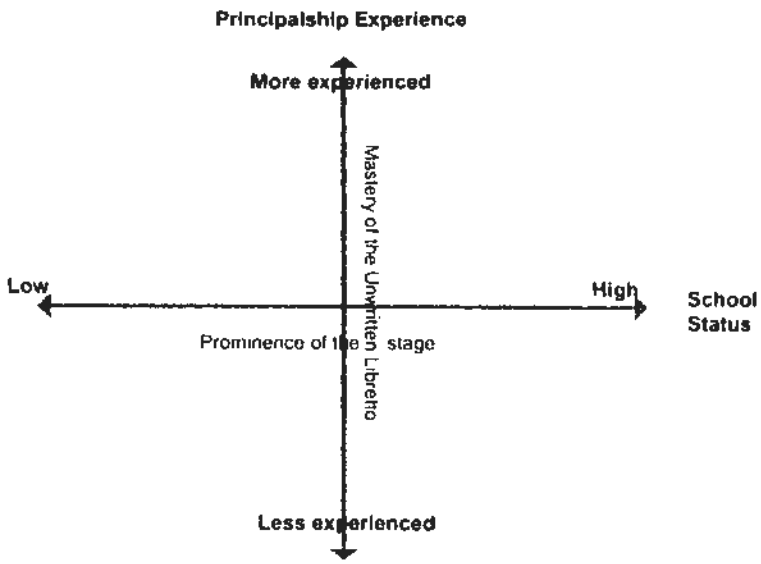

Figure 6.3 A matrix comprised of school status (prominence of the stage) and principalship experience (mastery of the unwritten libretto)

Two aspects shown in figure 6.3 were especially important to understand the role of the Chinese principals. One was the stage that set boundaries for the enactment of leadership and so shaped the role relationships with major role parties. The study showed that perhaps the most important component comprising the stage was the status of the school. This is shown on the horizontal axis in Figure 6.3. The other important aspect was the set of tacit knowledge considered indispensable to be a principal in China. The study found that although the knowledge was presented to principals as given, the degree each principal mastered and manipulated it varied. More senior principals appeared able to more easily manipulate the knowledge. This is shown as the vertical axis in Figure 6.3.

One of the sub-purposes of the study was to pull together a number of emerging patterns by comparing role perceptions and enactment of Chinese principals. Whereas the preceding section synthesised the commonalities under the category of unwritten libretto, the following section will discuss the different patterns and attempt to discern a typology of Chinese principals.

Performance – Building a Typology of Chinese Principalship

This section will present the typology derived from the analysis of the data. The study found that the individual performances of principals were enabled or constrained by their specific stage. This was mainly mediated by the status of their schools. Furthermore, the way each principal enacted their leadership was influenced by the degree of their mastery and manipulation of the unwritten libretto. This was mainly shaped by their experience as a principal.

According to these the principals involved in the study were categorised in terms of how their characteristics or qualities clustered on the continuum of the prominence of the stage (school status) and the mastery of the unwritten libretto (principalship experience) as indicated (see Figure 6.3). A typology consisting of four types of principals emerged by comparing individual performances. They four types are labelled: leading actors, supporting actors, opportunists and marginal actors.

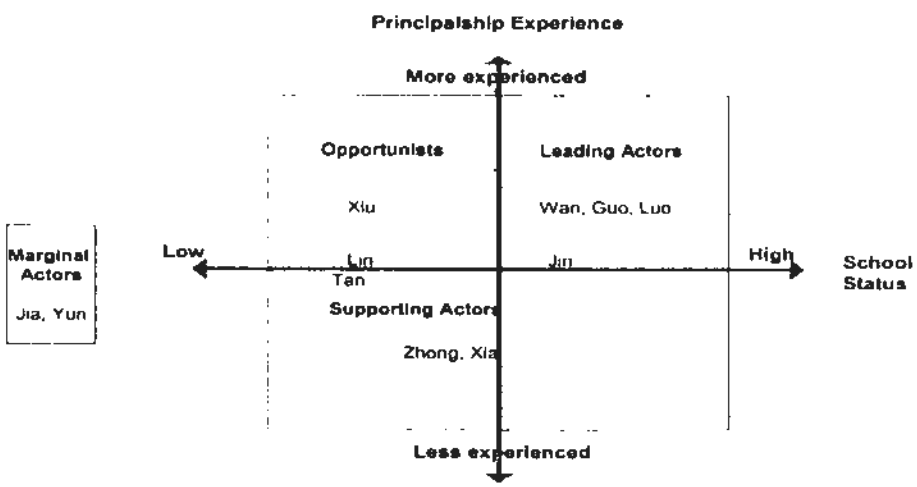

Figure 6.4 A typology of principals

Figure 6.4 shows the four different 'types' of principals which emerged from the data. The first type, *Leading Actors*, referred to principals who worked in the most elite

schools and had been in post for a longer period of time. In other words, they enacted their principalship in a much more recognisable and prominent stage and also demonstrated a high level of the mastery of the unwritten rules - they were like stars. Wan, Guo, Luo and Jin could be classified as leading actors.

The second type of principals, *Supporting Actors*, worked in less prestigious schools and had less experience as a principal. Zhong, Xia and Tan formed this category. These principals were still accumulating experience in the hope of being promoted to more elite schools.

The third type of principals, *Opportunists*, also worked in low-status schools. However, their high level of the mastery of the unwritten rules of how to be a principal in China helped them to work against the constraints of their stage and, in a sense, to become successful principals. Xiu and Lin comprised this type of principal.

The fourth type principals are called *Marginal Actors*. Jia and Yun were marginal actors. It was difficult to categorise these two principals. As explained earlier, Jia's school experienced a fundamental shift from the public to the private system while Yun worked as principal of a private school and as a vice principal of a public school. Their 'marginal' position provided them an opportunity to reflect on the 'mainstream' rules they used to take for granted. It was worth noting that this type of principal could not be positioned within the matrix. It was also found that no principal type was identified in the lower right quadrant. This was because there were no principals leading elite schools but with only a few years of principalship experience.

The next four sub-sections will illustrate how these different types of principals interact with their macro and micro context and use different 'strategies' to construct, reconstruct, and sustain their self and identity in the education reform context. Narratives of four principals, Guo, Tan, Xiu and Jia, were selected as critical and typical illustrations. They were selected as a typical representation of each type with a recognition that variations existed within each type. For example, Jin, Tan and Xia were placed very close to the

conceptual axis forming the matrix. Although Jin served as a principal for seven years he had only fairly recently moved to Shanghai. Thus, he was a relatively less 'known' actor than his counterparts in the quadrant. Similarly, Tan and Xia were located close to the vertical axis because their schools were district exemplary schools. Tan was positioned close to the horizontal bar because of his extensive experience in the education bureau, even though he was still a 'new principal'. By the same token, Xiu was considered more of an 'opportunist' than Lin. Although Lin was a senior principal in a low ranking school he was less successful than Xiu in manipulating the unwritten libretto to increase his visibility.

Before going to the details of the narratives of four typical principals, the following table serves to define and distinguish the four different types.

Type	School Background	Years of Principalship	Major Characteristics	Principals Belonging to the Type
Leading Actors	The most elite schools	Long	- Are more recognised as principals due to their higher school status; - Accumulated rich social and cultural capital; - Intuitively knowledgable of 'proper' relations with different stakeholders; - Consciously avoid overt conflict; - Know how to take advantage of the school status to win more resources for the schools and themselves.	Wan Guo Luo Jin
Supporting Actors	Less elite schools	Short	- Tend to be less visible principals; - Tend to be more anxious to demonstrate their performance and search for the 'uniqueness' of their schools; - Tend to apply performativity measures to monitor and motivate teachers; - Tend to mimic changes initiated by Leading Actors.	Zhong Xia Tan
Opportunists	Less elite, usually ordinary schools	Long	- Seek to actively harness *guanxi* with various role parties; - Are always active in attempting to win additional resources; - Are able to somewhat negate constraints associated with lower school status because of their rich knowledge of the system;	Xiu Lin

			- Know how to seize every opportunity for their school (and themselves) to become more visible.	
Marginal Actors	Usually schools losing their public status	Not necessarily short	- Temporarily work outside the mainstream system; - Suffer from role ambiguity because of fundamental environmental pressures; - Are able to take a different, usually more critical perspective on their previously taken-for-granted knowledge; - Realise only too well (through reflection) that to get ahead they need to play the mainstream game and follow the unwritten rules	Jia Yun

Table 6.2 Four types of principals and their major characteristics

Type 1: Leading Actors

Type 1 principals were carriers of knowledge. In other words, these principals were expert in adopting and manipulating the institutional order. They had acute professional insights due to long years of service in the principal position. The high status of their school also provided them with wider and more flexible leadership boundaries. They were more likely to initiate changes which could in turn reinforce their fame. As elite principals from elite schools, these principals were 'surfers' who could move on top of the waves of reform. Guo was such a principal.

Guo works in a prestigious school in Shanghai. The school has more than one hundred years' history and boasts a rich and active alumnus. Before he was appointed as principal of his current school in 2001, he worked in the district education bureau for six and a half years. Guo believed that the government working experience helped him to think about education issues from a macro perspective. In his opinion, school development could not be separated from the social context:

> The experience working in the education bureau is very meaningful and valuable for my principalship. While working in the education bureau, you were governing different types of schools. Thus, you had to think about problems from a macro perspective and a lot of policies had to take different types of schools into consideration.

> Today, when I come to work in a school, I will think about the school development against the macro social background and from a more far-reaching perspective. When I encounter a specific issue, I can make my own judgement about what I should do and when I should stop [doing it]. （對於今天你站到一個基層單位去具體工作的時候，那你有更多方面的考慮，你也會把這所學校放到整個社會背景上去考慮，你也會把我們要處理的問題站到更長遠的角度去思考，這件事情我應該怎麼做，可以走到哪一步去）.

In a sense, his experience working in government also helped him become a more competent 'policy reader'. Guo provided an example which he believed illustrated his acute ability to interpret government policy. Municipal exemplary schools in Shanghai used to be able to admit students from other provinces and charge each of them 50,000 *yuan*. This provided additional income, thus most were enthusiastic about it. However, Guo saw that the reform would not last for very long. It finally turned out that the national Ministry of Education ended the policy in 2006. Guo attributed his acute judgement about this issue to his government working experience.

> I am clear that the policy would not last long, because I have been working at *jiguan*. I know it will not be a long-term policy. We plan it as a short-term practice. Thus, the money we have made from this over the past few years cannot be used up (當然了，我很清楚，因爲我在機關幹過，我知道這個事情大概會怎麼樣。它不是長期政策，那我們就準備好打它這幾年仗，打下來的錢，也就是賺下來的錢，也不要一下子用光).

Although the school made some money out of admitting students from outside Shanghai, Guo only used part of it as bonuses for teachers, He saved most of it for 'later and long-term use'. (一部分麼，要發給大家是吧， 一部分麼要放一放，晚點發， 一部分麼要放長一點，長遠發). Guo was very proud of his acute judgement about this policy because it was his judgement that prevented potential conflict within the school. If he had used all of the money for teacher bonuses he risked elevating their expectations to an unsustainable level. To use his words:

> If you increase their income to a high level and there is a sudden

> decrease, teachers will blame you. They will not blame those up the hierarchical ladder [although it is them who stop the policy]. They will be dissatisfied with you because you give them a decrease instead of an increase of income. They will forget they have already got a lot [before the policy ends]. (所以有錢的時候你如果把他拔得很高，一下子跌下來，老百姓不就罵你了麼。沒有人會罵上面的，肯定是罵你，你這個校長怎麼搞的，人家都在漲工資，我們這裏還在減工資啊。他忘記了，他原來拿多了，他忘了).

The example showed that Guo was highly aware of the importance of conflict avoidance and harmony maintenance. Guo believed that a major part of a principal's job was to mediate the myriad of complex relationships in the school in order to reach a balanced state. To reach such a balance, a principal needed to 'know' his proper relationship with others as well as the proper ways of dealing with these relationships.

> What's your management for? It's for a good coordination. What's the coordination for? It is to reach a balance. (你管理搞半天是爲了什麼，就是爲了好好協調，協調是爲了什麼，協調就是爲了平衡麼).

> [As a principal], you have to deal with different relationships. Then you need to know your proper position. When communicating with teachers, do not push too much to give them the impression that you are a superior. When talking to students, do not try to put on an authority face. When dealing with the relationship with your superiors, do not be too obedient and do everything as told. So you need to react differently in different situations. (你要處理好好多關係。要擺正自己的位置，不要把自己看成怎麼樣怎麼樣。再跟老師交流，不要把自己看成領導，在跟學生交流不要把自己看成權威.在跟領導交流不要把自己看成沒用。把自己看成沒用，它講什麼就是什麼。所以在不同的情況下，要有不同的反應).

Knowing how to conduct himself in the various relationships was no easy task and required him to draw on his accumulated principalship experience and wisdom. For example, Guo developed a principle for dealing with his superiors. He called it 'a combination of a fixed standpoint and flexible strategies' (就是要把原則的堅定性和策略的靈活性結合起來來對待我們所面臨的困難問題). He believed that in principle, a principal needed to follow the orders from top as long as they met the legal and ethical

requirements. However, a principal might have to be flexible in implementing specific orders.

> In dealing with specific issues, two things you need to avoid: not to listen to your superiors and one hundred percent faithfully follow them. According to my understanding, if you do not listen to your superiors, then you violate the discipline...However, if you faithfully follow them, you will be accused of only emphasising upward accountability. ..When you have mastered this principle of 'a combination of a fixed standpoint and flexible strategies', you can take active initiatives. Sometimes when you have full legitimateness, you can even actively say no to your superiors. You can tell them that different schools have specific situation. Other schools might able to implement the order because of their specific school context. But you [the superiors] cannot expect us to do as much as they do because our school might have very different context. (在具體問題上，對上有的話是不能不聽，也不能全聽，按照我的理解，不聽違紀，...但都聽了呢，就是唯上，如果我剛才原則守住了，靈活性掌握了，我就可以化被動爲主動，...你這個事情是不對的，沒道理的。什麼道理？教育什麼規律，學校什麼特點，學校什麼狀態，你這種規律學校做不下來的，我做不下來，別人能做你讓他做，你也不要盯著我一定要我跟他一樣做).

Similarly, when dealing with relationships with teachers, he had a set of principles. Using these principles he adopted different strategies to deal with different teachers. His main guiding principle was that 'you need to trust the teacher if you hired him/her' (用人不疑，疑人不用). He used the example of classroom observation, and explained how he tried to understand teachers from their point of view and avoided openly criticising them.

> There might be a lot of reasons why young teachers fail to give a successful lecture. It could be inadequate preparation, lack of experience. It might also be related to the fact that you [the principal] were sitting in the classroom. (有些時候有些年輕老師他這節課沒有上好，一方面跟他準備不足有關係，一方面和他經驗有關係，還有一方面和你坐在那裏也有關係).

> I do not go to audit a teacher's class without noticing. In evaluating a teacher, the principal's role is like a doctor. When you find the

> teacher's problems, you need to tell him/her what danger this disease (problem) will bring and what medicine should be taken. It does not matter if teachers do not listen to me. Even as a patient, you may not one hundred percent faithfully follow the doctor's instruction, but in most cases, you will listen to the doctor (所以我不是象人家的隨機抽查那樣的，對老師的診斷，評價，應該多種手段預防，哪怕講講這個病應該怎麼樣，會到什麼程度，發展下去會怎麼樣，應該吃什麼藥，如果他不聽也不要緊，醫生讓你吃藥你不吃可以吧也可以的吧。但是你一般都聽的吧).

If he did find that a teacher was not doing a good job, Guo would not openly criticise them. Instead, he would meet with them in private and usually give them further chances to improve:

> You hire the teacher because you trust him/her. If they fail to meet your expectation, you need to talk to them. If there is still no improvement, you need to let them know it. You do not have to say that he/she is definitely wrong. Instead, just let them know that their way of doing is not fit with the requirement of this school, although it might be fit with that of other schools. Thus, you do not have to judge whether the teacher is right or wrong. You need to let them know that if they still want to work in our school, their conducts have to be well coordinated with the requirements of this school. (你相信他的，你用他，如果幾件事做得不行，你跟他交流過了，還不行，那你就可以評價他有哪幾件事情做的不好，我跟你談了以後或者給了你哪種條件你沒有明顯改觀，我也不要講你一定錯，但最起碼你不適應我們這裏的對事情處理的要求，你的方法換個地方行的通的也許啊，在我這裏不符合我這裏的要求啊，不符合我們學校的文化要求，不符合我們學校的管理要求啊，不符合我們這裏老師對事情的判斷，價值判斷，我也不講你對不對，你要在這裏幹就要跟這裏協調起來，不協調你怎麼在這裏幹啊).

Guo believed in being approachable and flexible. He explained that principals were different from factory managers. In factories, he claimed, managers monitored workers working on 'dead products', while principals had to motivate living individuals to work on 'living products' (我覺得當校長的，親和力是重要的，因爲我們幹的活不是工廠裏幹的活，工廠裏是活人幹死活，我們是活人幹活活，你用死辦法去管住他是幹不出好活的). Thus, Guo used flexible strategies with different teachers. For example,

he encouraged teachers to experiment with their teaching approaches. Teachers were expected to involve students in a way of research-based learning （研究性學習）. However, Guo did not force old teachers to change.

> Different teachers grew up in different times and have different growing and learning experience. You have to allow them to retain some of their particular styles. Those old teachers can also deliver a successful class with only a book and a piece of chalk. (任何人的發展都是在時代條件下進行的，不同的人的成長經歷可能不同，而且我覺得要允許保留他有個性的東西。你不要一刀切，老教師你不要看，一支粉筆，一本書，他照樣把課上得有聲有色).

> Furthermore, as students are changing, it is no good if you do not make any change. Teachers will gradually realise this point. Then they will gradually change. For example, they may organise students to discuss why certain solutions are wrong. Then he is actually organising a kind of research-based learning. (而且你現在真要好，你的物件變了，你一點不變物件變了你也教不好。就是這個概念，他也會一點點去體會的啊，他還是那樣搖搖頭講，他也要變，他要調角度，改物件，他叫大家一起討論這道題錯在哪里，爲什麼錯，不就是一種研究性學習麼).

Thus, Guo was clear about the importance of coordinating all kinds of relationships. He also acquired the ability to deal the range of relationships important to a principal.

> Now you have to run your school in the open system. A school is related to various stakeholders such as superintendents, different government agencies and neighbouring enterprises and residents. If [a principal] does not have the awareness and ability to deal wit these relationships, in a sense it will result in a major problem of Chinese education. (因爲現在辦學都開放了，你社會方方面面，上級單位，各級部門，周邊單位，社區居民都會發生各種聯繫。你沒有意識沒有這個能力去處理好這個公共關係問題，其實某種角度來講，也是當代教育的問題).

As an example of 'Leading Actors', Guo embodied these characteristics. First, they seem to have an intuition of how to relate to the higher government, teachers and other stakeholders. Second, they are sophisticated policy readers and can thus set the right

direction for their schools. Third, they seem to always have a sense of conflict avoidance and try to maintain the school harmony. Fourth, they know how to make use of the high status of their schools, in other words, the visibility of their stages, to win more resources for the schools and themselves.

Type 2: Supporting Actors

According to the data, Supporting Actors are neither senior nor sophisticated enough to be recognisable actors. They do not work in the top schools, as a result, their leadership boundaries are restricted by the status of their school. They appear more likely to follow the Leading Actors and mimic the practices of the top schools. Tan is such a principal.

Although not a young man Tan was a new principal. He belonged to the old 'three classes cohort' (*laosanjie*) and was sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. After he came back to Shanghai he took the college entrance examination and was admitted to a Normal University. After graduation, he was assigned as a politics teacher in a municipal key school. He worked there until 1996 when he was summoned to work at the district education bureau. In the education bureau he worked as an office director （办公室主任） and was not appointed as principal until early 2006. Thus, he looked forward to the chance of getting back into schools.

> By working at *jiguan*, you are mainly involved in administrative affairs. You may not know what you have done over the years... You do not have a sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, as a mid-level administrator, you had better keep quiet and not express your views （你只能做事，不能講話）. There are bureau heads and party secretaries above you; how can you freely say something? Under the cadre system of China, a subordinate needs to obediently perform your job (中國的幹部系統就是這樣，你默默無聞，就是貢獻，就是成績)... I like challenges. This is my last chance. Since I come from schools, I hope to go back to schools [before retirement].

Like many other new principals who participated in the study, Tan did not risk initiating much change when he came to school. Instead, he retained most of his predecessor's practices.

> After I came to the school, I recognised the job of my predecessor. I chose not to deny the efforts of previous principals. Even if I have some new ideas, I need to combine them with what the school has already had. .. The first step is to ensure the stability.

When asked what he did after he ensured school stability, he recited a collection of popular and somewhat hackneyed sayings about education.

> First, I need to make the school stable. And then I raise these ideas around the school. Reform and development are complementary. Teaching quality is the lifeline of the school. Teaching should be the central concern of the school.

Tan implemented a set of measures to improve teaching. However, most of these were based on the input-process-output models. In his school, teachers were subjected to a myriad of judgments, measures, comparisons and targets. Material rewards were regarded as the most effective way to motivate the teachers.

> We have some required tasks（规定动作） for each teacher. For example, they are required to teach a certain number of classes. They also need to ensure the quality of teaching. Each teacher is also required to submit a research paper. These are required...There are also tasks not required for every teacher. For example, if a teacher also takes the job of a class headteacher, then we will give him/her a sum of additional money as a reward. If your research paper wins a prize, you can also get money rewards.
>
> A teacher has to meet the criteria. For example, if you teach Mathematics to senior three students, your class has to reach the mean score [of the whole district]. This is a target you have to meet.
>
> When new students are admitted to my school, we enter their scores into the data base and rank them according to their scores. Then we will track their scores they achieve in monthly exams, mid-term and final exams. We may also track the gaps between different classes. In this way, we can see whether and how the teacher has helped students to progress.
>
> All these results will be publicised. If you do not teach well, it will not be me who comes to blame you. Instead, parents, students and your

peers will blame you.

> If a teacher cannot meet the criteria, he/she will be constrained in a lot of aspects. He/she will have less income and be less likely to be promoted.

By using so many measures to monitor and evaluate teacher performance, Tan admitted that, as a principal, he had to focus on improving the school's admission rate. This was seen as 'a summative index when the society evaluates the school quality'. As a new principal, he was pressured to prove his performance. Tan was also under pressure to display the uniqueness of the school. According to his understanding, the character of a school was rooted in its tradition. He used some schools as models, schools which he believed had rich traditions.

> The tradition should be demonstrated in the teaching of the school, in its students and alumni.
>
> One school I admire most is No. 3 Girls' School (a school with a long history). All the girl students graduating from this school bear the similar mark of 'ladies'. This is the character of a school.

Tan, as an example of 'Supporting Actor', exhibits these characteristics. First, these principals are constrained by their stage. In other words, the relatively lower status of their schools cannot help with the visibility of their leadership performance. Second, recognising the constraints of their school context, these principals are more anxious to demonstrate their performances. Thus, they are more anxious in searching for the 'uniqueness' of their schools that they can use to boost the reputation of the schools. They also tend to adopt more performativity measures to monitor and motivate teachers. Third, these principals tend to be relatively more conservative in adopting any new measures to cope with reforms. On the one hand, they are unlike star principals who have accumulated more social and cultural capital that enable them to initiate changes. On the other hand, they are different from the type 3 opportunists who can more creatively exploit the unwritten rules for their own use. Supporting actors are relatively more obedient principals who are waiting for the accumulation of the experiences to enable them to be promoted to a more visible stage – higher-status schools.

Type 3: Opportunists

These principals were also carriers of knowledge because they fully internalised the unwritten rules of how to be a principal in China. However, the status of their schools did not provide them with a visible stage. Despite the adversity, these principals strove to be recognised because they could adeptly use the unwritten rules and knowledge to their advantage. Xiu exemplified the opportunists.

Xiu is not a Shanghai native. In 2000, P district of Shanghai openly recruited school leaders (principals and vice principals) via media advertisements. Xiu applied and was appointed as the principal of an ordinary school in the district. Before moving to Shanghai he had been working as a principal in a neighbouring province for ten years. After he came to Shanghai many of the changes he initiated in his school won him prestigious titles such as 'the first person who eats crabs'[97] and 'an adventurous principal' in media reports. He was invited to speak at many forums, conferences and leader development courses. His school received visits from educators around the nation almost every day. Compared with other ordinary schools, his school received more publicity. As he somewhat immodestly claimed, he managed to 'make an ordinary school extraordinary'.

Xiu demonstrated a strong sense of entrepreneurship. He noted that a principal was like a brand manager, winning resources to help promote the school. He saw the brand as very important indeed. However, he admitted that when he first became a principal in his early thirties, he was prone to be an educator (肯定一開始我教育者的成分還是多一點) and put teaching and curriculum issues as his first priority. He soon encountered difficulties doing this.

> I soon encountered (this problem): I did not have enough funding. Totally relying on the funding of the education bureau could only meet the basic needs of the school. ...I had to motivate my teachers. Spiritual rewards were important but they could not replace material

[97] This usually refers to those who are brave and adventurous.

rewards. I had to make our teachers both spiritually and materially rich. Then I had to get money and win resources (所以我就想，我要去搞錢；這個時候就想去開發社會資源). For example, parents could be an important resource. I could also get resources from the school district and neighbouring enterprises. I invited alumni to our school anniversary celebrations and asked them to donate. I opened a factory within the school. Then my role actually turned into an entrepreneur (這個時候我的角色身份就變成了一個經營者麼).

School is part of the society. A school principal has to be a resource-winner and a mediator of public relations (他是資源的開發者，他應該是一個公共關係的協調者). Then, how to develop the resources? You have to seek sources of resources from both within and without the school.

Thus I have developed the awareness to win multiple resources. ..If I still only focus on the teaching, pedagogy and observation of classes, I may not get recognition by teachers. I have to seek more economic support. Then sometimes I have to change my role [to get in contact with the neighbourhood and parents]. As a public school principal, I also need to frequently go to the local education bureau to establish good relationship with them (還有你公立學校的校長還要跑教育局啊).

Keeping brand awareness foremost in his mind, when he came to the new school his main concern was to identify its uniqueness and then to implement measures to advertise and magnify the uniqueness and turn it into a recognisable brand. He first conducted careful research to identify the speciality of the school and to design a school development plan compatible with this.

I could not transplant my practices in the previous school into the present one in Shanghai because the environment changed.

You had to study the macro environment of Shanghai. Education needs to keep pace with the city development. Shanghai is a metropolitan and it is an internationalised city. Then my school plan has to keep pace with this.

Besides the macro environment, he also developed a clear awareness about the specific micro environment of the school

> The school is not a key school and it does not have a long history that we can boast of. How can the school be distinguished from others? We have to find its distinguished advantage, or uniqueness. What is uniqueness? Uniqueness is something you exclusively have or you particularly excel in. Uniqueness is a stable high-quality resource. (你現在又不是重點中學，你又不是人們覺得你是百年老校。既沒有這個悠久，很悠久的歷史，又不是一個重點中學的檔次，你怎麼能叫走出帝國呢，那必須高出一籌啊，就要錯位發展，錯位發展就是把特色走出來。特色是什麼，特色就是人無我有，人有我優。特色是什麼呢，特色應該是比較穩定的一種優質資源).

> I conducted an on-site investigation before I could properly design the school development route. ... I had to be clear about the advantage and the tradition of the school. Then I found the school taught Japanese as a foreign language since 1972. This was a selling point （賣點） and I had to maximise it and change it into a brand of the school

Xiu implemented a number of strategies to 'sell' his idea. For example, he applied to change the school name from XX Middle School into XX Foreign Languages Middle School. As changing the school name must be approved of different layers of the governments the process took two years. Xiu also established a Japanese Language Research Institute, the very first of its type established in a secondary school. This in turn, in Xiu's words, helped to advertise the brand of the school.

Xiu seemed to be instrumentally oriented and performance-focused. He embraced market values, using words such as 'selling points' and 'market' regularly. However, this did not mean that he did not depend on the government. He was 'multilingual' in the sense that he could move relatively easily between the 'older' language of being a state agent and the 'new' language of school management. He was pragmatic about how to get what he wanted.

> You have to rely on both the government policies and market effectiveness. You cannot give up either of them. I believe in multiple values and I pursue whatever effective and valuable (這個教育局的政策，市場的政策，市場的效能你也要開發啊。這個你不能放棄

的，我是多元的，哪兒有效的，一切有價值的都要去做).

> You need to be clear what the bottleneck is that constrains your school development. If it is the funding problem, then try to get more funding. If it concerns some people, then try to solve their problem. If it is due to policy constraints, then try to get political approval. If it is due to disagreements within the school, then organise a school wide conference to achieve their agreements (制約你的瓶頸是什麼，是經費你就去跑經費，是人就去跑人，是政策你就去跑政策啊，是思想就統一思想，全校開會呀)

Thus, Xiu made a clear mental distinction between the state and the market. By relying on the government, he could 'solve the basic feeding problems of the school' (政府的東西是我基本口糧). If the school wanted more nutrition, he claimed, it had to proactively seek more resources from other channels, mainly from the market. He believed this was the only way the school could be invigorated (是用很多市場因素，才能把公立學校辦活). Xiu believed that the government would provide further support when the school achieved improvement.

> A principal should be clear when and what to report to your superiors. You should not report whenever your school had difficulties. Instead, you might have to report more when your school was running smoothly (無事要多彙報，有事要少彙報)... In this way, the government would regard you as a competent principal and then your superiors would have the desire to invest in your school (讓領導產生投資你們學校的衝動). After all, 'competence determines status' (有作爲才有地位). The government will invest only when they can see some returns (問題是你叫領導他投資要有回報他才投資). You see, the government has invested a lot in my school over the past few years; our new teaching building and new stadium mainly relied on the government funding.

As with many other principals, Xiu admitted that the tight state control constrained his power. However, he also recognised that this was China's 'national condition' (國情). Thus, as a subordinate, he chose not to disagree or confront superiors but instead adopted a more flexible policy for dealing with the government.

> There are too many tasks assigned by the education bureau. We have to deal with a lot of inspections and these tasks and inspections lead us by the nose (教育局的事情太多，就是牽著我鼻子的事情太多，就是應付檢查的事情太多). I would rather that the government not interfere into any school affairs and give us more space. However, you have to accept it because it is the national condition of China (現在沒辦法，這也是中國國情). [Even if you have disagreements], you have to keep them to yourself instead of conflicting with them (這些事情你只能想在心裏啊，你不能去對抗啊).
>
> You have to adapt yourself to the changing conditions. For example, you may not perform some assigned tasks very well, but you need to report to your superiors as if you beautifully did it (我做的時候可能做得很一般，但有可能我向他彙報的時候是五角星，這個事情你也很需要啊，這個叫隨即應變啊). You have to differentiate and make judgements because for some tasks you can muddle through while for others, you cannot. You need to have the acute insight (但是你要看什麼事情，就是有的漿糊可以搗，有的漿糊是不能搗的。但是你就要看，這就要看你敏銳的洞察力，準確地判斷力，這就是校長的內容了).

His flexibility was also demonstrated in dealing with relationships with teachers. Xiu implemented a number of personnel reforms in his school. He recognised that these might threaten some peoples' vested interests, so was extra careful to avoid conflict.

> For example, I encourage teachers to compete for mid-level leader positions. Personnel issues are always sensitive, but I have never caused any conflicts. The policy I adopt is to only open those vacant positions for competition. Those who are already in the mid-level positions will remain safe. Thus, these 'old people' will also support the reform; otherwise they will turn against you (如果統統趴倒，那些老同志也不改革了，給你造反).

Xiu believed that 'shock therapy' would not work when it came to personnel issues in the school. Instead, since the redistribution of interests was involved, he adopted an incremental approach to implementing reform in order to win support.

> You cannot abruptly start a reform. Sometimes you have to make your reform intentions known long before you actually propose a change.

> When the thunders are heard long enough, people would have the anticipation for the rain (光打雷，不下雨). By then your change initiatives will not be so unacceptable.

Xiu believed that a principal needed to keep a proper distance from individual teachers. He believed that he had developed the intuition necessary to know the proper distance to keep between himself and various members of the school community.

He developed this ability on the basis of his accumulated working experience. During the interview, Xiu kept mentioning that much of his knowledge about relationships and 'proper' conduct was not teachable; it was tacit in that it could only be acquired from experience. Over his years as a principal, he stored much of this knowledge and this helped him to deal with new situations.

> I have accumulated a lot. They have been deposited in my brain and become the grounds for decision-making... I have to admit that I subjectively make a lot of decisions [instead of making decisions on the basis of evidence]. However, my decision is guaranteed by the accumulation of my knowledge. Without this body of knowledge, the decisions may be blind. With the support of the deposit of knowledge accumulated over the years, I can make my judgement even if I meet with a new issue. The knowledge helps me to make predictions concerning what will happen to the issue and what I need to do (你有那麼多積累，我就知道這件事情必須怎麼做，它必須走向哪個方向，這就有很強的預測性). That is why my school can keep changing and I can ensure my school to improve in changes.

As demonstrated in Xiu's example, Opportunists have the following characteristics. First, they are adept manipulators of the unwritten rules. They have been deeply rooted in the system and thus can adeptly exploit it for their use. Second, they can actively harness *guanxi* with various role parties. Good relationships with these stakeholders in turn help to win additional resources for schools. Third, they seem to be able to work against the constraints of the lower status of their schools by initiating changes that seize every opportunity for their school (and themselves) to become more visible.

Type 4: Marginal Actors

These principals suffered from role ambiguity because of fundamental environmental changes. In a sense, they were 'thrown out' of the system. Because of this, they could take a different view of much of their previously taken-for-granted knowledge. They were by no means mainstream principals. This section depicts the marginal case of Jia.

Before Jia came to his current school, it had just undergone a transformation from the public to the semi-public and semi-private form. The local education bureau transformed the school in order to gather the money to renovate the schoolhouses. The school could thus charge higher tuition fees. This strategy has become a popular practice over the past few years as a way to alleviate financial pressures on the local government. Jia was judged by the local education bureau as 'effective', which was probably why he was assigned to the school. They wanted him to facilitate the smooth transformation of the school.

Jia appreciated the trust of his superiors. He believed that it was his responsibility to help with the school transformation as he had always been 'obedient'.

> I used to be an obedient principal. I did whatever my superiors asked me to do (我原來是很聽話的人，領導叫我做什麼，我肯定做). My superiors said that my school should take the lead to transform; then I did it as they said.
>
> At that time, I thought it was the government trust in us. I did not expect to meet with so many complicated problems later. I did not realise it at all. Take an inappropriate example, I never imagined [the government] as a bad person, thus I never questioned that the government might be wrong（我還認爲這是政府對我們的信任。沒想到後來踏進去，有那麼多複雜的問題。開始我自己都沒有意識到，可能這個例子不是很妥當，我從來沒把你想成壞人，我可能不會從這個角度來想）.

In 2006, the local government decided to further transform the school. It signed a contract with a private entrepreneur and the school status was changed to 'private'. In this way, the local government could stop funding the school and further alleviate their

own financial pressure. However, it became Jia's responsibility to implement the policy and he found himself trapped between many conflicts and tensions.

> First, all the quality schools in Shanghai are public schools. How can you compete with them? Second, you charge a much higher tuition fee than public schools. Why do students come to your school? You can only admit those with the poorest academic records. Third, the identity issue of teachers has not been taken into consideration. There is a difference between the status of public and private school teachers. The school teachers used to have public employee status, thus the transformation really disturbed them.

Teachers reacted strongly against the change. They believed that Jia did not protect the school from the change. Jia underwent strong emotional strain.

> It was suffering. Very painful, but nobody could understand me.
>
> I felt wronged. The pressure from above was that I had to implement the change, but teachers could not understand me. They thought it was me who betrayed the school.
>
> Teachers were against the reform, because it increased their insecurity. ..The government, the teachers and the private investor interpreted the change from different standpoints. I was trapped.
>
> I frequently went to the local government to let them know what was happening in the school. I found that they thought about the issue from a totally different angle. They just wanted me to get it settled and get the school back to the stable state. However, I also personally thought the policy was wrong; then how could I get it settled? Thus, I was in an awkward position. I had to settle the instability problem [to let teachers accept the change], but I felt disturbed and painful. I could not sleep.

After considerable bargaining, the local government agreed to keep 80 public teacher posts for the school. However, more than 30 teachers left the school during the process - most of these were senior teachers. Although open conflict in the school eventually subsided, Jia remained trapped between the multiple expectations of different stakeholders.

> As a principal, I am facing different expectations. First, the government just expects a stable campus. The government does not want the transformation to cause any troubles that would threaten the reputation of the district. Thus, it wants the teachers to live with the reality and the school can be smoothly run. Second, the private investor expects to win profits. He is running the school as an enterprise thus he wants to have economic returns. Third, the teachers expect to have better rewards. They believe that working in the private school is more tiring thus they want to have an increase of income. Fourth, parents pay as high as 5,000 *yuan* yearly tuition fee to come to our school. They expect higher scores and better academic achievements of their children. Although their children are the bottom students in the senior school entrance examination, they still want their children to go to college after three years' high school education. Fifth, because our students are academically poor, most of them do not have a good learning habit. They just want to have a happy and relaxing school life. Thus, I am facing these different expectations: the government expects stability; the private investor expects profits; the teachers expect better income; the parents expect better academic achievements of their children while the students just expect an easy and relaxing school life. Then what can I do? (政府要穩定，老闆要效益，教師要待遇，家長要分數，學生要快樂。校長怎麼辦？)

Because of his experience during the school transformation, Jia believed that he had a type of awakening – what he called an "awakening of independent awareness" (自我意識的覺醒) which drove him to become a more independent thinker (有獨立的思維).

> My independent thinking was formed [after I met with so many difficulties]. Because I was appointed by the government, I used to faithfully adhere to the government demands. However, I start to doubt that the government policy may also get wrong. I used not to have this awareness.

Because of the awakening, Jia said he began to think seriously about leadership issues. In fact, among all the participant principals, Jia was the only one who frequently mentioned the word 'leadership' (領導力).

> Anyway the experience has really pushed me to think about a lot of issues that I never considered (至少這裏面強迫我思考了一般辦學不

會想到的問題。也就是在這個思考過程中，我思考到校長領導力的問題). I start to think about what is principal leadership. For example, I keep thinking how I can smoothly run the school in this unfavourable situation. This is a leadership issue. Furthermore, I have to think about how to improve teaching and learning. My school charges such high fee, I have to try to meet the parents' expectations and improve student learning. This is my responsibility. Thus, I have experienced an awakening of independent awareness. I used not to have [this awareness]. Now I have formed my judgement and I will do what I believe as right. Since we were small, we have been educated to be obedient to the party, to our parents and to our superiors. Now I realise that superiors may also be wrong. The realisation comes a bit too late, but I might never think this way if I had not had this suffering experience (在這個過程，我說是我的一個自我意識的覺醒，這是過去我沒有的，現在我判斷對的問題，會果斷去做，過去不會，因爲我們從小的教育就是聽黨的話，在家聽爸爸媽媽的話，在單位聽領導的話，我們從小就是接受這種教育，現在感覺到領導不一定都是對的。就是太晚了一點。不過沒有這種環境我也不會去想).

I become more proactive. Unlike before, I now proactively think about how to run the school. I used to emphasise on how to deal with the requirements from above; I now try to explore what practices will be good for the school development（這個變化就是主動性更強。主動去考慮學校怎麼辦，這是過去沒有的，這個變化在哪里呢？過去...我只是按照上面的要求把這個擺平就可以了，或者說我只要把學校應付的好就可以了。而現在我會想一想這個學校怎麼會更有利，它的發展應該怎麼弄）.

My independent character has awakened. I used to think about the school issues from others, particularly from superiors' angles. Now I think about school issues from the angle of the school development.

Despite his new awareness, Jia recognised that he could do little to change school's external environment. He could not redress the policy or change the school status. He admitted that 'many of the external conflicts in the school were out of my reach to be solved'. Therefore, he placed increased emphasis on the internal reforms in order to navigate a route to improve the poor level of student learning in the school. He initiated a major classroom teaching reform.

> As a principal, I initiated a classroom teaching reform in the school. I want to investigate how to improve the student learning in a low-banding school. This is what I can do as a principal. I cannot change the way of thinking of my superiors. I cannot interfere into the policy. But I can conduct some teaching experiments inside the school. This is also a manifestation of the principal leadership.

His experience in the school transformation also made him realise the importance of winning teachers' endorsement for his changes. He believed that this awareness also differentiated him from other principals.

> Most principals tend to just perform tasks as required by the government. In implementing a change, they do not take into consideration whether teachers will accept and endorse it. I have realised that getting teachers' endorse is very important, although I have not yet been able to get the support from all the teachers (所有一般共辦學校的校長他們按照政府要求做什麼的話，什麼實驗性、示範性評審，外力驅動，它必須做的，它就會請一些專家來幫他處理，但是他是不是真正落實到教師的心中，他可能還沒考慮這個問題，我們已經想到這個問題，但是還沒有做到落實到教師的心中。我意識到這個問題了我在努力向這個方向靠近。但是我還沒有做到教師都認可這個問題).

Therefore, when Jia started his classroom teaching reform, he tried to encourage teacher participation.

> I keep communicating with my teachers. I try to make them realise the necessity of improving themselves. When they become competent teachers they will never worry about losing jobs. They can by all means find a position. Thus the school improvement reform is not only for the survival of the school, but also for the security of their future.
>
> I first collected documents of those well performing poor schools around the country. I then print the documents and distribute them to teachers. I ask teachers to think about this problem: why these schools can improve under the conditions of poor schoolhouses and bad student intake. By comparing with their own practices, I then ask each teacher to propose an improvement plan.
>
> Each improvement plan has to be first exchanged within the subject

> panels（學科組）. On the basis of the exchanges each subject panel is expected to generate an improvement plan. These plans will be further discussed within the teaching and research groups (教研組). On the basis of the plans raised by each teaching and research group, the next step is to come up with a school improvement plan. And by then teachers are expected to implement this school plan. Thus this is a combined top-down and bottom-up process.
>
> As each teaching and research group has raised their plans, I then have criteria to examine their jobs. These will be an important part of the teacher evaluation.
>
> Against the uncontrollable external environment of the school, [initiating this reform] is what I can do as a principal. By doing so, I think I can live up to the title of the principal (我想這一點我覺得對得起校長這個職位可以這樣講).

Therefore, Jia gradually recovered from the suffering which accompanied the school transformation. He tried to view the suffering as 'an experience and treasure of life' to 'soothe the emotion'. As he said, if he always regarded himself as 'a victim of a policy disaster', he would never 'feel balanced'. Furthermore, by launching the school improvement reform, he wanted his teachers to know that he retained his beliefs and passion and would not give up despite adversity.

However, Jia still had an identity crisis. One of his taken-for-granted beliefs had been shaken, that is, in return to his faithfulness his superiors needed to be responsible for him. He felt his superiors did not give him a clear signal that they would take care of him.

> My superiors did not support me. Maybe according to an unspoken rule（潛規則）of the Chinese people, they do not need to tell me that they will be responsible for me while they will actually do so (可能我們中國人的潛規則不是他要明說對你負責，而是他已經感受到他已經對你負責了). However, I expect clear messages and written stipulations of my role and authorities.

While striving for a clear definition of his identity, Jia became more sophisticated and learned not be one hundred percent faithful.

> You can re-interpret the demands from superiors. Instead of directly

> adhering to the demands, you need to interpret and implement them in the way that fits the school development (它的命令你可以拐彎呀。它的命令你可以用另外一種方式來解決。他的指令你可以用合適學校的發展方式解決).

However, this did not mean that Jia could work as an independent and autonomous principal. By working in a private school, he seemed to have more power than public school principals, particularly in terms of school finance. However, he remained clearly aware that he was still trapped in an iron cage. Due to the tight external control, he believed he could not be called a 'leader'.

> I seem to have more autonomy, but that is because my school is in such a mess that the government does not want to get involved. I am fully aware that my autonomy has boundaries and there are a lot of red lines that I cannot touch or cross. If I touch any of them, I will be dismissed (但是我一不小心觸及哪根紅線，我就可能被貶職。最後還可能被開除).

> In this macro environment, I think a Chinese principal cannot be an effective leader. It is because that a principal does not have a final say in the school development. The school development is still externally determined, particularly by the government. A Chinese principal is unlikely to be a pure school leader. He does not have much power and he even cannot do what he believes as right.

Recognising this situation, Jia still counted on the government to be the saviour of his school. In his words, he was 'a pragmatist'.

> I keep reminding my superiors of the difficulties I have met. Gradually they will feel this is really a problem. When they realise it is a serious problem, they will get solved.

> I am a pragmatist, or an optimistic pragmatist. Our central government is aiming at building a harmonious society. Against this societal environment, I am sure the local government would [come to help with my school] (因爲我相信我們政府的目前大的背景就是建設和諧社會，他不會把我這個學校搞到什麼程度的).

Jia's story provided an interesting case of how a principal reflected on the mainstream

rules after he was 'deserted' by the mainstream system. It was also the case that he demonstrated the power of the mainstream rules. As a result of Jia's reflection, he still believed that he needed to rely on these rules if he wanted to survive as a Chinese principal.

A Summary

This chapter has presented the major research findings under three interrelated categories: stage, unwritten libretto and performances.

The research found that the stage mediated the way principals interpreted the possibilities and constraints accompanying the reforms. The most important mediating dimension of the stage was the status of the school. The higher status schools had far better economic and human resources. Furthermore, principals of higher status schools tended to be those with more experience and who were more trusted by the local government. Thus, principals in higher status schools also tended to have a better relationship with the local government agencies.

Although the different stage mediated the way principals perceived the reforms, many commonalities were identified in the principals' interpretations of the reforms. Among them, the common key words were *guanxi* (relationship), resource and harmony. The study further found that certain knowledge was important to be a Chinese principal. They were: maintaining *guanxi* with the government, keeping internal harmony in the school and being aware of the importance of winning resources. It was also found that although the knowledge was shared by each principal, the degree they mastered and manipulated it varied. Principals with more experience tended to be more adept at manipulating the unwritten knowledge and rules.

A juxtaposition of the stage and the unwritten libretto helped to map out a matrix of different types of principals. This meant that principals could exert their agency (different degree of the mastery and manipulation of the unwritten libretto) and perform

their role. Their performance was enabled or constrained by the stage (the school status). Four types of principals emerged: *Leading Actors* who worked on a highly recognisable stage and demonstrated considerable ability to manipulate the unwritten knowledge; *Supporting Actors* who were constrained by their less recognisable stage and limited years of experiences; *Opportunists* who strived for recognition by adeptly making use of the unwritten rules despite the fact that they worked on a relatively invisible stage; *Marginal Actors* who could reflect on the taken-for-granted mainstream rules as they were temporarily 'thrown out' of the mainstream system.

The next chapter will further interpret the findings and provide a more focused understanding of the role of the principalship in China.

Chapter 7 Discussion

Chapter 6 presented and discussed the main findings of the study. As such, it addressed each of the major research questions. This chapter aims to weave these findings into a clearer, more contextualised fabric in order to gain a more focused understanding of the Chinese principals' roles and lives. In other words, it aims to further interpret the findings and pull them together into a coherent if initial account of what the research tells us about the most salient features of the Chinese princpalship.

This chapter has three sections. The first section summarises the three major tensions faced by the principals. These tensions emerged regularly from the data and influenced almost every aspect of the principals' work. The identification of tensions is a useful way to capture the basic dynamics common to the Chinese principalship. Discussion also further illuminates the initial typology described in Chapter 6 through showing that the shape and management of tensions varies among different principal types.

The second section revisits the issue of accountability facing Chinese principals. This issue emerged as the dominant subtext across the tensions. It was also strongly evident in the principals' unwritten libretto presented in Chapter 6. As suggested by Moos (2005: 309), the question of 'for whom do [they] work?' must continuously be revisited given that principals face ever-more complex demands from a wider array of stakeholders. Thus, the discussion of accountability helps to explain why Chinese principals believe some stakeholders (role parties) are more important than others.

The third and final section pulls together the foregoing discussion to suggest a set of propositions that attempt to capture the contributions made by the study. As such these may form a useful starting point for understanding the Chinese principals in relation to their context.

Major Tensions Facing Chinese Principals

This section discusses the three major tensions which to a large extent circumscribe Chinese principal's lives. The tensions appear dominant across the narratives of the participating principals. They are considered tensions because they simultanenously pressure principals to meet new systemic requirements while also satisfying existing, more time-honoured norms and expectations. Tensions may also result from the conflicting demands of different sources. The identification of the tensions provides realistic insights into the role of the principal. It is noteworthy that the examples provided under each tension are illustrations only. The other examples could be provided. The three major tensions are:

- *The tension between restricted autonomy and expectations to be innovative (chuangxin)*
- *The tension between producing high exam performance and more holistic student development*
- *The tension between traditional role expectations of 'principal as parent' and expectations of 'principal as manager' (and) 'teacher as loyal child' and 'teacher as independent agent'.*

- ***The Tension between Restricted Autonomy and Expectations to Be Innocative (chuangxin)***

The tension came from the top-down pressure to display creativity, initiative and innovation while continuing to work in an environment largely characterised by strict top-down control.

Although the reform policies claimed the devolution of power to school principals, the actual exercise of this power was still circumscribed by government agencies. These higher-level agencies interfered in school affairs in a number of ways. First, in terms of organisational evaluation, the schools and the principals themselves were subject to a set of standardised evaluation criteria. Second, in curriculum terms, students had to take the same high-stake university entrance examinations. Schools therefore had little discretion in terms of the subjects they could offer. Third, decisions of who could be recruited had

to be endorsed by the central agencies.

In short, despite the reform rhetoric, schools were dragged toward uniformity through having to follow similar administrative requirements, adopt standardised syllabus and work towards a similar, almost all-consuming goal – successfully sending more students to universities. As a result of these requirements principals had little room to initiate non-standardised change or experiment with different ways of running their schools. However, at the same time they were also expected to identify and display their initiatives to locate and demonstrate the 'uniqueness' of their schools. The government pressured each school to highlight their distinguishable features. The slogan 'encouraging schools to navigate a way of schooling with their own characteristics' appeared in almost all government policy documents and government leaders' speeches. The competing expectations posed a tension for principals.

Most principals were adamant that it was almost impossible to be 'unique' because of state regulation. As Wan lamented:

> There is a high homogeneity among schools because they are subject to the similar regulations and orders. You have to give the fulfilment of regulations a priority. When you put more time and energy on fulfilling the requirements, there will be fewer self-initiatives of the schools (你要先把規定的東西完成，規定動作一多自然自選動作就會少一些).

Wan's view that there was little room for a school to carve out its uniqueness captured succinctly that of his principal colleagues. Nevertheless, it was more complex than just a lack of discretion and space in that the 'uniqueness' policy was also a top-down requirement. Thus, despite the back stage complaints, principals were forced to demonstrate their support for the policy through their public actions. At the very least they needed to show their superiors that they faithfully adhered to the policy. As Wan indicated, schools needed to develop a well-defined and easily-recognisable slogan and ethos to mark their 'uniqueness', even if 'these were deliberately created by the

principal'（哪怕刻意總結也好）.

Most principals, therefore, were anxious to demonstrate their unique 'markers', but only because they had to. In order to do this, some principals (particularly 'Supporting Actors') became 'wordsmiths' to 'create' unique school slogans. They dug deeply into the school history to uncover features they could magnify or consulted various experts about what kind of 'uniqueness' their schools needed to develop. Others, particularly 'Leading Actors' and 'Opportunists' managed to turn these features into school 'brands' (品牌，in Wan's words) or 'selling points' (賣點，in Xiu's words) and use them cleverly in the media, school publications and campus decorations. For example, in Wan's words, his school had two brands. One was its extra-curricular activity and another its humanity education. These were advertised widely and included in many of Wan's publications under important 'work achievement'. These brands, in turn, helped to advertise his school and make him as a famous principal.

Thus, principals faced conflicting expectations from their superiors. On the one hand, they were still expected to be obedient implementers of the different policies; the schools tended to appear uniform as a result of their obedience. On the other hand, a new expectation was that they needed to develop initiatives to show that their schools were different. Given the overwhelming policy context, all the 'differences', as recognised by principals themselves, could only remain at the surface level. However, a difference was that more veteran principals could adeptly adopt the language of 'uniqueness' to promote their own reputations.

The analysis showed that principals were encouraged to 'create' some difference while ensuring that their schools remained firmly on the common path set by the government. Principals also faced tensions in managing the teaching and learning programs.

- ***The Tension between Producing High Exam Performance and More Holistic Student Development***

This tension related to the conflicting goals of schooling. Specifically, schools faced pressure to send more and more students to universities – a long-standing goal of schooling in China. At the same time they were pressured to promote student initiative and creativity – a new curriculum policy requirement. To further complicate this tension, although govement officials publically advocated the importance of more holistic education, the message they unofficially and more definitely sent to principals was that the exam results were the most important.

The mentality that a child will be a dragon (望子成龍) is deeply rooted in China, as is the importance of education to a better and more secure future. For many years the quality of a secondary school has been determined by the number of students admitted to universities. Parents and broader society judge a school according to this singular criterion. Thus, the almost overriding pressure on principals remains how to sustain or improve their students' performance on the high-stake High Exam.

However, with the introduction of the quality education policies, particularly curriculum reform, schools are encouraged to foster the holistic development of students. More teaching hours are allocated to extended and research courses to cultivate creativity. Principals are pressured to demonstrate that their schools adhere to the curriculum reform.

A real and seemingly unresolvable problem here for principals is that the curriculum reform is not connected to the exam system. The criterion applied generally by society and implicitly by government simply does not match the educational reform. Findings from this study show clearly that principals believed that although government agencies openly advocated the curriculum reform, in private they sent clear messages that schools were expected to gain consistently good results in High Exam – and that this was the priority.

As a result, the principals mimicked the government stance and endorsed the reform in public. On their school website, school achievements in areas defined by curriculum

reform were always highlighted. Likewise, school brochures devoted page after page to the extended and research courses designed by the schools. The articles written by principals themselves often listed the new school curriculum as an important aspect of work achievement. In all, the principals deemed it 'clever' to demonstrate their adherence to the policy. Tan's words captured this:

> In this respect, I will not contradict the municipal education bureau. I am clever. There is nothing to bargain or discuss, because we are a public school. I just need to combine my interpretation with the policy during the process of implementation (這個方面呢，在大的方面，我絕對不會，和市教委，你講什麼，我再講一套。我很聰明的，這沒有什麼好討論的，因爲我是公立學校。我只不過是在它具體實施情況下，把我的理解演化進去).

Thus, despite the open support of the curriculum reform, stories in the real schools appeared to be different. In their daily practice, principals demonstrated a clear sense of priority. The logic was remarkably pragmatic and followed a relatively simple line. First, results in the High Exam were widely known by the public - failure in the Exam would disappoint and alienate parents and their superiors. In other words, achieving good marks on exams consistently was the bottom-line for all schools. Second, the extended and research courses demanded by reforms were not examined; therefore, their effect was unlikely to be detected in the short term. Therefore, the wisest path was to openly preach the virtues of the new curriculum but kept the real emphasis on the High Exam. As Yun said, 'you may find that the curriculum reform is haunted by various deceptions' (你會發現我們現在課程改革很多都在欺騙).

Thus, despite the fact that principals were rhetorically given the power to redesign and manage teaching and learning programs, they had to use this power in a context that continued to value exam results over 'student development', which was much more difficult to evaluate. As a result, principals appeared hesitant to use the curriculum power devolved to them and initiated fewer real changes in its design and pedagogy. This was particularly an issue in lower-status schools. These schools enrolled students with lower academic achievement, but faced similar expectations from parents and

governments that they needed to send more children to universities. Thus, principals from these schools, (mainly 'Supporting Actors') dared not to risk making fundamental changes to teaching modes or curriculum. The elite schools led by 'Leading Actors', to the contrary, tended to initiate some instructional change. These schools boasted the highest-achieving students; they usually did not have to expend additional effort to drill the students for exams as their lower-status counterparts did. For example, over the past decade Wan was on a quest to identify effective learning approach and he launched at least eight instructional experiments. His latest effort was to set up a school-wide quality assurance and a new teaching evaluation system. Many of the changes he initiated were modelled in other schools.

'Opportunists' also worked in schools with lower-achieving students. While emphasising student academic results within schools, these principals managed to create an image that the examination was not their sole focus. For example, every year Xiu's school sent students who were good at singing and dancing on short exchange trips to different countries. For 'Marginal Actors', as shown in Jia's case discussed in the previous chapter, they might adopt the most fundamental bottom-up approaches to change teaching modes. As Jia said, given his school recruited the bottom students, he would have nothing to lose if he risked some instructional experiments.

The analysis showed that as an instructional leader principals' worklife was also fraught with tensions. As principals tended to shift the pressure of producing high exam results to teachers, this inevitably led to another tension for principals in terms of developing teachers.

- ***The Tension between Traditional Role Expectations of 'Principal as Parent' and Expectations of 'Principal as Manager' (and) 'Teacher as Loyal Child' and 'Teacher as Independent Agent'***

This tension came from traditional expectations that principals behave like a caring father and the new performativity requirement of principals as a manager. In China

schools have long been analogised as a family and the principal as the parent – usually the father. Findings indicated that principals were still expected to fullfil this role and take responsibility for both the public and the personal lives of teachers. However, at the same time, reform demands forced them to place greater emphasis on output controls, explicit standards and performance measures. This tension was made even more complicated due to the limited autonomy principals held in dealing with teacher issues and the decreasing dependence of teachers on their leader. Thus, principals as parents were expected to both take good care of and monitor the outputs of children, coupled with the issues of interfering 'mothers-in-law' (婆婆) and increasingly rebellious children.

Teachers' lives in Chinese schools used to be tied to their school as a *danwei*[98]. Teachers therefore had little opportunity to transfer to other schools and most worked in the same school until retirement. Teachers knew each other as family members and individual sacrifice for the organisational and public good was taken for granted (*China Daily, HK Edition*, 22 August 2003). The school principal, as the head of the family, was expected to maintain family harmony and take care of every teacher, particularly when they were faced with difficulty.

Principals involved in the study reacted against what they saw as their more uncertain role in 'the family'. They dislike their role because of the untoward interference of their 'mothers-in-law', i.e., the various government agencies controlling their professional lives. These 'mothers-in-laws', according to the principals, imposed far too many demands on them. For example, they had to be accountable for teachers who gave birth to a second baby, or who refused to cooperate in civil reconstruction. If they failed to persuade the teachers to do the 'right thing', the various government departments accused the principals of incompetence or disloyalty, and/or penalised the school.

[98] *Danwei* is a government-controlled work unit which provided employment and welfare benefits such as free housing and medical care and also monitored employees for political waywardness (*The Economist*, 4 September 2003).

In contrast to the 'principal as parent' mentality among government officials, teachers appeared less dependent on the school and their school leaders than before. Many teachers no longer felt tied to one school. They were increasingly mobile and readily sought employment in higher status schools and with higher incomes. Thus, for principals, and particularly those in less competitive schools, although they were still required to act as a parent, their children were not as obedient as they had once been.

Part of the reason behind deteriorating principal-teacher relationships was the increasing performativity pressure on schools. As principals faced increased pressure to meet central government demands for performance and accountability, they, in turn, pushed teacher to be more productive and closely monitored their performances. For example, many principals chose to adopt exam results as the central criteria for teacher evaluation and manipulated incentives and sanctions to reward high performing teachers and to 'punish' their worse performing colleagues. This practice was more commonly observed among 'Supporting Actors' who appeared to be more anxious to establish their names by demonstrating their performance. For 'Leading Actors' and 'Opportunists', although they were also pressured to adopt such measures they knew that doing so threatened the highly treasured harmonious relationship between the principal and teachers. Thus these principals carefully used incentives and at the same time tried to avoid widening the income gap between teachers and thus increased animosity.

Despite the differences, principals seemed to share the view that material and monetary incentives were the most effective exchange for teachers' loyalty and job performance. The relationship between principals and teachers was thus built upon exchange of favours, which was by no means stable.

In all, tensions between continuity and change, between conjuncture and disjuncture were vividly apparent in the work lives of contemporary Chinese school leaders. As the above analysis showed, while traditional expectations for principals to be obedient to central authorities remained unchanged, new 'reform' expectations pressured them to be

more innovative, more discerning and more creative. While principals were still expected to produce steadily high student performance on high-stake exams, they also had to publically demonstrate their adherence to the new curriculum policies. While they were still expected to play the role of a caring parent, they also had to put on a hard face to impose performance requirements on teachers. This inevitably led to tensions between the various aspects of principals' worklives, either as a direction setter, a curriculum leader or a leading professional in schools.

These major tensions formed bases for the further analysis of the role of the Chinese principalship. The next section will undertake a broader contextualization of the principals' tensions and concerns by connecting them more overtly with wider discourses of accountability.

Accountability Issues Facing Principals

The study found that the principals shared a set of common knowledge - the importance of *guanxi*, internal harmony and resource-winning awareness. Among these components, the role of *guanxi* was overwhelming. Good *guanxi* with important people, particularly superiors, not only secured principals' jobs but provided them with more opportunities for resources. More resources could in turn be used to motivate teachers and prevent internal conflicts, especially given that many principals perceived a mutual exploitative relationship between them and teachers. Furthermore, good *guanxi* with superiors promised principals increased opportunities for promotion to higher-status schools, which would provide easier access to quality resources.

Thus, to be a principal in China, *youren* (有人，loosely translated as who you know and how well you know them) seemed of utmost importance. As a result, one salient feature of Chinese principalship seemed to be their unquestionable emphasis on upward accountability. Data produced strong patterns of commonality among the principals to the question of 'for whom do [they] work?' Among the various stakeholders, superiors

and the higher level government departments and officials were regarded as the most important audience. Upward accountability was taken for granted.

Sugure (2005) suggests that questions about how school principals locate themselves in relation to the mainstream discourse of accountability reflect the socially sanctioned dominance of certain ideologies and subjugation of others. Thus to find out why principals took upward accountability for granted is to note the embeddedness of roles in the larger context and to recognise the societal rationale and historical dynamic of the role of the Chinese principalship. It is an exercise to 'peel back the "hidden" layers of meaning and reality' (Woods, 1992: 365). The following section attempts to do this through discussing three layers.

Layer 1: Emphasis on Upward Accountability as a Pragmatic Concern

One plausible explanation for the preference of upward accountability provided by the principals was that government was their major financial source. Pragmatically, dominant thinking among the principals was that 'I have to listen to whoever funds me' (有奶便是娘，literally translated as 'whoever breastfeeds me is like my mother). Many principals articulated such pragmatic thinking in the interviews. For example, Yun made a clear distinction between the work preferences of the two schools in which he worked.

> In A school (the public school where he works as a vice principal), I get the government money thus no doubt I have to listen to the government. Can I take account in parents? I can, but only if possible. In B school (the private school he works as the principal), can I listen to the government? Yes, but only if possible. (在 A 中，你拿了政府的錢，這個當然要聽政府的，你能考慮家長嗎？能，如果有可能的話，這只能說 if possible, 那麼在 B 中這邊呢，你要聽政府的麼？能, 也是 if possible).

Principals also had to be pragmatic because their career progression (and indeed, maintenance) depended on the government. As Jia reflected:

> Principals are appointed by the government, thus we are required to be

> accountable to our superiors. We need to exert our rights according to the requirements of the state and the government. This is irrefutable (原來我們校長這個職務，目前是由政府任命，所以首先我們要對上，因爲首先政府任命我們，當然首先要按照國家的要求，包括政府的要求來行使自己的權利，這是理所當然的).

Thus, principals counted on their superiors for school resources and career progression. This partly explained why the principals saw upward accountability as the first priority.

Layer 2: Emphasis on Upward Accountability as an Understanding of Their Position in the Hierarchy

The emphasis on upward accountability can also find its root in hierarchical organisation structures and traditional Chinese thinking about power relations.

School principals in China have long been regarded as a 'state cadre' (*guojia ganbu*), which enables them to occupy the lower echelon of the government hierarchy. In the hierarchy the roles of leaders and followers were made clear by formal positions. As principals understood their position was 'beneath' the government officials, the vertical loyalty to superiors appeared to be taken-for-granted. As a result, most principals would not 'make a fuss' or strive to establish their identity as an independent professional. As Jia explained:

> It seems that principals never really think about whether it should be the principal or the government to be held accountable for the school. They do not think there is a need to think about this problem. They believe that it is a way of being responsible for the school by doing whatever they are required by the higher governments. (好像人們沒有思考過到底是校長對學校負責還是政府對學校負責。不會去想，也覺得沒有必要去想這個問題。反正我要履行崗位職責就是對學校負責對不對).

Thus, principals were governed by the logic of power relations based on their understanding of positional power. This also partly accounted for why principals placed upward accountability a priority.

Layer 3: Emphasis on Upward Accountability as Recognition of the Overwhelming Role Played by the State

The contextual analysis presented earlier in this document indicated that schools across the globe are faced with many problems. In broad terms, many of the problems and issues they face can be captured by the invading systemic power flowing from the state and the market. There is increasing emphasis on efficiency, outcomes, productivity and performance as imposed by the state and the market. Principals are increasingly asked to be accountable for market requirements.

The study also found the overwhelming control of systemic power in Chinese schools. What appeared different was that the systemic power imposed on schools was mainly from the state while the market played a more indirect role. It seemed that the state still controlled every aspect of school life. The strong presence of the state and the relatively obscurity of the market also partly explained why principals placed emphasis on upward accountability.

The study found that there was not a free education market in China, at least in the Western-sense. Although parents had more choice than they did previously, schools were not free to admit as many students as they wanted. The number of students a school could enroll was strictly limited by the official quota assigned by the government. Furthermore, schools were not competing with each other on a level playing field. Higher-status schools received more resources and attention from the government. Thus, the differences between higher- and lower- status schools were not only permitted, but were in a sense reinforced by the government.

Furthermore, the market exerted its influence and worked indirectly on schools and principals mainly through the mediator of the state. For example, principals acknowledged the pressure for their students to perform well on the High Exam. However, their major concern was not that poor exam results might result in a worse market status; rather, they were worried that their superiors would place sanctions on the

school if their performance was not up to scratch. Another example is that even the poor-performing schools did not need to worry about student admission. They knew that the government would assign them quotas and ensure their survival. Thus, as Yun stated, "the market has a major influence on the state. However, it influences the schools and principals via the state' (市場對政府的影響是很大的。但是影響到一個學校和校長，是通過政府這個傳媒來影響).

As a result, principals developed a clear priority between the state and the market. For example, even though Xiu was a principal who was able to maximise external resources for school he drew a clear mental distinction between the state and the market. In Xiu's words, by relying on the government, he could 'solve the basic feeding problems of the school' (政府的東西是我基本口糧). If the school wanted more nutrition, he claimed, it had to proactively seek more resources from other channels, mainly from the market. Thus, the school might not be so strong if it could not get resources from the market, but it would definitely starve if it lost the support of the government.

This section has investigated the reasons why Chinese principals tended to give upward accountability a priority. The analysis showed that principals had to toe the government line if they wanted to ensure the financial security of their schools and to have an active and successful career. The upward accountability was also aligned with the traditional cultural norms that the lower occupants need to conform to those higher in the hierarchy. Given the overwhelming state control, the major role played by school principals was that of agent-of-the-state.

The previous two sections have discussed the major tensions and accountabilities facing Chinese principals. The next section will pull together these emerging issues into a list of propositions.

The Role of the Principal in China: Emerging Propositions

These propositions are derived from the findings and are intended to capture the major insights of the study. As such they may be useful not only for understanding the Chinese principalship, but also for comparison with principals in other societies.

- Proposition one. Societal norms play an important part in shaping the role of the principal in China. This influence can be observed in various aspects of the principals' worklives, particularly in terms of respect for positional power and the widespread exercise of the informal power. As a result, principal autonomy to make decisions is both limited and easily swayed by external influences. To a large extent, Chinese principals remain state agents and face considerable external pressure.

The data showed that the principals' work environment was characterised by the various government demands that seemed to formally and relationally regulate every aspect of their work lives. Principals were under pressure to implement the demands. They could negotiate some issues in some cases, but this had to be done carefully in order not to offend their superiors' authority. Thus, principals tended to see themselves as occupants in the hierarchical system where respect for positional power was taken for granted.

Principals' lack of autonomy was further convoluted by the role and influence of traditional Chinese beliefs which place the rule of man (*renzhi*, 人治) above the rule of law (*fazhi*, 法治). As Pye (1991) said, the rule of law in China has traditionally taken second place to the sincerity of officials and the steadfastness of individual leaders in carrying out their programs. Thus, those in important positions could exercise influence on school decision making even if they were not the direct leaders of principals. Conforming to these relationship obligations was also traditionally regarded as the proper and well-mannered way of carrying out their duties. As a result, principals' autonomous power was easily swayed by hierarchical connections and pressures from influential others to accede to their wishes.

- Proposition two. Although Chinese principals perform a similar set of core leadership functions as principals elsewhere, how they enact these functions differs. Reasons why this enactment differs are intimately connected to a multitude of contextual factors. The importance of 'winning resources' to Chinese principals suggests this may form an additional core leadership function.

When examined in relation to Leithwood *et al.*'s (2006) four major leadership functions (setting direction, managing instructional programs, developing people and redesigning the organisation), two issues marked Chinese principals as different. Chinese principals apparently performed these functions within different constraints. The constraints mainly came from the overt state intervention in principals' enactment of these functions. They also came from the fact that Chinese principals had to devote much time to winning resources. Winnig resources was heightened to such a level that it fomed another core leadership function of Chinese principals.

Chinese principals enacted their leadership within an environment marked with less autonomy and more state intervention. The state presence was noticeable when principals performed each of the four core functions. For example, they were encouraged to create school visions and carve school uniqueness, but they were not allowed to navigate the school in directions not conforming with state policy directives. They were asked to initiate curriculum and pedagogical experiments within schools. However, it was also clearly undertood that with the presence of the High Exam as a state policy, no fundamental instructional change would happen. They were given some authority in recruiting, promoting and developing teachers, but many of their decisions had to be endorsed by the higher level government. Principals were granted more space in modifying the school structure, but they were clear it was difficult, if not impossible, to build collaborative processes in a macro context characterised by top-down control.

Furthermore, in the Chinese context relatively less time was devoted to these four leadership functions because Chinese principals had to put particular emphasis on resource-winning. Winning resources was so important that it cost much of the principals' time and formed another core leadership function. Financial aid from the

government could only support the basic needs of schools. It was thus the principals' resource-winning competence that determined the well-being of the schools and teachers. *Guanxi* played an important role in helping principals win resources. A strong attachment with the government could help principals get additional government funding and good relationships with the local enterprises, influential alumni or parents could also bring the school more financial support. Thus, a substantial part of a Chinese principal's working time was devoted to cultivating and maintaining *guanxi* with various people in order to win more resources.

- Proposition three. Principals see teachers as an important resource on which they both rely and exploit. Material incentives are frequently used to motivate and reward teachers. In return for providing job security and monetary incentives, principals expect loyalty, a harmonious campus and good teacher performance.

Teachers were increasingly seen as an important resource needed to produce high student achievement in exams, which in turn boosted the school's reputation. The increasing mobility of teachers also seemed to lead principals to believe that they could no longer take just an authoritarian approach with teachers. Instead, principals consciously nurtured relationships with teachers, mainly through the exchange of utilitarian favours.

Principals believed teachers were driven by material rewards. Thus, monetary incentives were used to motivate teachers towards better performance, particularly in High Exams. Principals began to talk about encouraging more teacher involvement in school decision-making. However, they also seemed to believe that increased participation was not an important concern of teachers; they believed teachers were more focused on the actual benefit (particularly in the form of money) they could earn. By winning more resources to give teachers additional monetary rewards, principals expected teachers to work harmoniously with others and hard for the school.

- Proposition four. Hierarchies exist among principals themselves. In other words, the role of the principal in China is also status-based. This status is built upon

guanxi with their political superiors and access to expansive networks. These in turn relate interactively with school status and years of principalship.

Two dimensions served to differentiate principals. These were school status (where they are) and years of principalship (how well they know the system). The different statuses held by schools influenced their attractiveness to parents and hence the resources they could attract. This status also marked a degree of closeness between principals and higher level governments. Principals of higher status schools tended to be more trusted and had a closer relationship with their superiors. Thus, a major motivation for lower-status principals was to be promoted to a better school through demonstrating their performances and cultivating *guanxi* with their superiors.

Years as a principal was an important dimension that influenced the way principals perceived their roles. Veteran principals had better knowledge of how the system worked. Because they were firmly embedded in the system, it was easier for them than for new principals to locate themselves in its history and so feel confident about how to relate with others. They made better use of their knowledge to win resources for themselves and their schools.

The status of the school and years of principalship were highly related. New principals usually started in lower-status schools while those of elite school served relatively longer period as a principal. However, veteran principals also worked in lower-status schools. Their deep knowledge of how to be a principal in China provided them with options that were simply not available to a new school leader. Thus, two groups of principals seemed to have wider repertoire upon which to draw: principals from higher-status schools and principals with longer years of principalship.

- Proposition five. 'Successful' principals in the Chinese context have a rich store of knowledge of how the system works. A key part of this knowledge is how to cultivate '*guanxi*' with influential people which can, in turn, help to strengthen and promote their position. Although principals are publicly encouraged to be innovative, 'successful' principals know well that they cannot initiate any

fundamental changes without the permission and support of their political superiors.

'Successful' principals in the Chinese context had to be, first of all, recognised and favoured by the system and their superiors. They were those who could adeptly manipulate their rich knowledge about *guanxi* maintaining and resource-winning strategies. Positive *guanxi* with influential people was often accompanied by tangible benefits such as increased funding and career advancement. It could also help principals gain more legitimacy because attachment with influential people was a form of social and cultural capital, at least in the eyes of others.

Furthermore, because of their rich knowledge about the system, these principals were acute policy readers. They seemed to possess the innate ability (intuition) to differentiate negotiable from nonnegotiable issues. Thus, they would make incremental change in negotiable issues but they did it carefully not to challenge the system. These principals were usually held up as role models because of their loyalty, good *guanxi* with their superiors and the change agent role they posed.

In sum, Chinese school principals' worklives were replete with tension and ambiguity. On the surface these are almost identical to those faced by their counterparts in other nations (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005), however the shape and substance of specific issues were different. Chinese principals had to place priority on the fulfilment of the upward accountability. They had to enact their role under 'heavy' external pressure and carefully deal with relationships with various stakeholders. Cultivating *guanxi* and winning resources comprised important components of their worklives. This chapter has thus discussed in more depth the role of the principal in China. The final chapter will summarise the research process, the major findings and some of the implications the research findings hold for understanding the principalship in China.

Chapter 8 Conclusions and Implications

This final chapter has two purposes. One purpose is to briefly revisit the research process and major research findings. This provides an opportunity to collect the findings under and around the research questions and research purposes. Another purpose is to examine the ways the outcome of the study sheds light on the knowledge base of the Chinese principalship, future research in the area and leader development in China.

The final chapter comprises three main sections. Sections one and two summarise the research process and the major findings. Section three discusses the implications of the research findings.

An Overview of the Research Process

The purpose of the study was to understand what principalship looked like from principals' own perspectives. In other words, it aimed to unveil the intricacies of the role played by Chinese principals in a changing context and to delve into the meanings they attached to their work. The central question posed was: Within the broader educational reform context, comprised predominantly of the three 'quality' education reforms implemented since 1999, how do Chinese school principals perceive and enact their roles? And what shapes their perceptions and enactment?

The study was initiated by the conceptual and pragmatic gap identified in the understanding of the principalship in China. The shifting context brought by wave after wave of reform in China calls for reflection on the role of the school principalship. However, few serious studies have delved deeply into the principalship in Mainland China. Thus, there is a need to conduct empirical research to explore principals' experience in the education reform environment in China. The study reported here is an attempt to contribute to what remains a largely unsophisticated knowledge base.

This investigation into the principalship in China was guided by the following set of

questions:

1. How do Chinese school principals perceive their roles?

- How do they interpret the possibilities and constraints of the reform context?
- How do they interpret relationships with key role parties?

2. How do they enact their roles?

- How do they interpret and prioritise the various role expectations and perform on the basis of these perceptions?
- How do they deal with role conflicts?

3. What commonalities and differences exist across the role perceptions and role enactment of these principals?

- Are there any role characteristics which appear common across principals and why are they shared by the principals?
- Are there different types of principals in terms of role characteristics and, if so, what are the main types and why have they developed?

A qualitative methodology, set within the theoretical framework of Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism, was adopted for the study. The framework was chosen because it was considered congruent with the purpose of the study. Using this framework, school principalship was seen as a social phenomenon that needed to be interpreted and acted upon by the principals. The principals were perceived as actors in social contexts, both in the school and/or the broader educational community. Principals interacted with themselves, others and a multitude of ideas, derived meanings from the interactions, and then acted on these meanings. Furthermore, an examination of the interplay between intersubjective interactions helped to 'peel back the "hidden" layers of meaning and reality' (Woods, 1992: 365) and tease out the unwritten rules that regulated principals' actions.

Interviews formed the chief data collection method. A total of eleven principals were selected through a form of purposive sampling. Principals from different backgrounds were selected and particular attention was given to different types of schools and years of experience. Before the interviews commenced, the principals' personal records were collected and analysed to form an initial picture of the cohort. These were drawn from their publications, media interviews and school websites. Most of the interviews were conducted at the principals' schools where school settings could be observed and data collected as efficiently and accurately as possible. Follow-up interviews were also conducted face-to-face or over the telephone during the duration of the research.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) adaptable framework as an analytic guide. Data analysis began with the three predetermined critical events. These were the three 'quality' reform initiatives identified earlier in the thesis. Three steps were taken to determine the final categories. These were:

- *Analysis Stage 1*: individual case analysis by applying three reform policies as critical events.
- *Analysis Stage 2:* cross-case analysis by comparing initial categories to search for common and different patterns.
- *Analysis Stage 3:* the development of three major categories informed by Berger and Luckmann's (1967) thesis about roles.

Through data analysis, three major categories and four principal types emerged. The study also found the major tensions and accountabilities facing principals and came up with a list of propositions of the role of the principalship in China. These constituted the major findings of the study.

Summary of the Major Findings of the Research

The study developed three major categories relevant to the role of the Chinese principalship. They included the stage, unwritten libretto and performance. The *stage*

referred to the personal and school context that mediated the role expectations of principals held by the various role parties who impacted heir work. The *unwritten libretto* referred to the institutional rules that underpinned principals' actions and the unwritten knowledge important to be a principal in China. And the *performance* was the manifestation of the institutional order for each principal that resulted from the mediation accompanying the contextual factors.

The study found that as each principal performed their role within their specific school context; the school constituted the most important *stage* that enabled and constrained their principalship. School status was found to be the most important influence in that it framed the role set within which each principal was situated. It also shaped the role relationships between the principals and important others such as the parents, government officials and teachers. According to the principals' interpretation, the school status also played a major role in their access to all forms of resources, including additional funding and quality teachers.

Despite the influence exerted by each principal's immediate micro contexts a number of commonalities were identified when the eleven cases were pulled together. These common issues, defined as *unwritten libretto* in the study, included maintaining *guanxi* with the government, ensuring internal harmony within the organisation and the need to win resources. The knowledge of these rules was indispensable to be a principal in China and formed the instinctive grounds upon which they based their actions. The study also found that although this stock of knowledge or 'rules of the game' seemed to be internalised by each principal, they were manifested in each principal's *performance* in different ways.

The study found that individual performance was mediated by years as a principal. Given that the more senior principals had been immersed in the system for a longer time, they seemed to be able to exploit and manipulate the unwritten rules more flexibly and tactfully. Furthermore, principal performance had to be presented on a specific stage and thus was either enabled or constrained by the school context in general, and the school

status in particular.

The study also found that the number of years as a principal and the school status were highly related. Principals who had been in post longer were more likely to be promoted to a principalship in an elite school. However, years of service as a principal were a necessary but not sufficient condition to be assigned to work in a higher status school. To work in an elite school, a principal not only had to possess rich experience but also have good relationships (*guanxi*) with senior government officials. In turn, those with good relationships tended to demonstrate a more sophisticated mastery of the unwritten rules and were more capable to manipulate these rules.

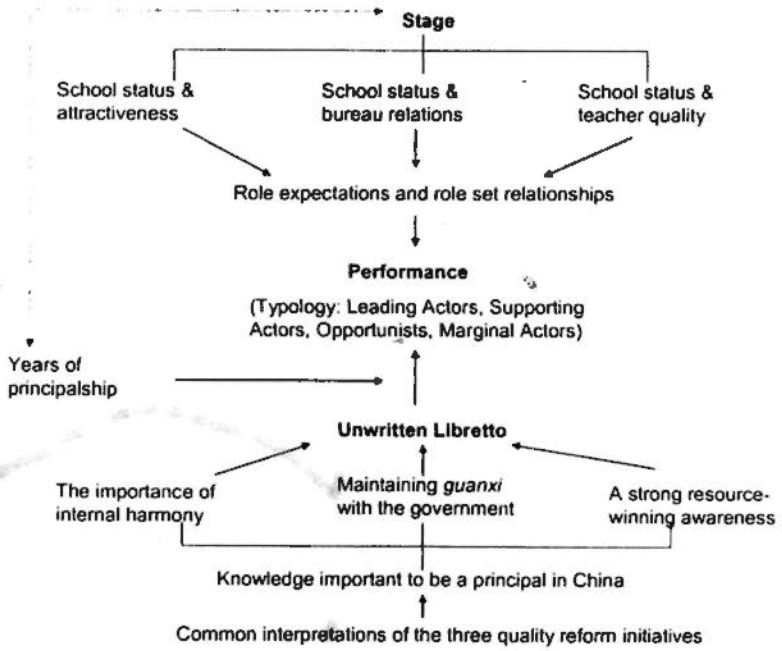

Figure 8.1: Inter-relationships among major categories

Figure 8.1 shows the interplay among the three major categories – stage, unwritten libretto and performance. The figure shows that principal performance is influenced by both the stage – where you are and the unwritten libretto – the knowledge about how to be a principal in China.

The stage influences performance because the school status (where you are) determines

the level of attractiveness and teacher quality of the school, as well as the relationships between the principal and the education bureaus. In other words, where you are plays a role in mediating who you know and your *guanxi* with them. The study also suggests that where you are signifies the closeness between you and influential people, particularly those from the education bureaus.

The unwritten libretto influences performance because principals' knowledge of the rules influences how well they can deal with the key issues encountered in their worklives – the issues involving building *guanxi*, maintainting harmony and winning resource. Among these components of the unwritten libretto, the knowledge of *guanxi* is of utmost importance. Who you know (and the closeness of your *guanxi* with them) may influence where you are (the type of school you are assigned to). Thus, the dimensions of stage and unwritten libretto are highly related. An initial typology emerges when they are pulled together.

Types	Where they are (School status)	Who they know and how close is the *guanxi* (Knowledge of the unwritten libretto)
Leading Actors	High	Sophisticated
Supporting Actors	Lower	Less sophisticated
Opportunists	Lower	Sophisticated
Marginal Actors	Schools losing public status	A different, usually more critical perspective on the previously taken-for-granted knowledge

Table 8.1 Types of principals

As shown in the Table 8.1, all principals from higher status background had sophisticated knowledge of unwritten rules, no cases to the contrary emerged. Furthermore, two principals in the study were classified as 'Marginal Actors'. This was because they had worked temporarily outside the mainstream system and their marginal positions enabled them to adopt a reflexive perspective to view the unwritten rules. A more detailed account of the four types of principals is provided below:

Leading Actors were principals who worked in the most elite schools and had been in post for longer periods of time. In other words, they enacted their roles on a much more

recognisable and prominent stage. They also demonstrated a high level of the mastery of the unwritten rules of how to be a principal in China. They were able to best use and manipulate the unwritten rules for their own and their school's benefit.

Supporting Actors worked in less prestigious schools and usually had less experience as a principal. They were still accumulating experience in the hope of being promoted to more elite schools. They were thus more anxious to prove themselves and their performance as a principal. However, their mastery of the unwritten rules was not sophisticated enough to enable them to creatively exploit the system to make a name for themselves.

Opportunists were also carriers of knowledge like leading actors. They had worked many years as principals. Nevertheless, their schools were not prominent enough to place them in leading actor categories. These principals could work against the constraints associated with a low status school by actively and tactfully exploiting the unwritten rules to make themselves more recognised.

Marginal actors were principals who had begun to reflect on the unwritten knowledge of what it meant to be a 'successful' principal in China. They were mainly principals who had worked outside the mainstream education system temporarily and had thus been labelled somewhat as 'outsiders'. Although reflection led to some critique of the unwritten rules, these principals appeared to know only too well that they had to further 'learn' the rules if they wanted to survive and then prosper as a successful Chinese principal.

After identifying the major categories and the initial typology, a further interpretation of the findings teased out some basic dynamics of the principals in China. Three major tensions emerged regularly from the data and influenced almost every aspect of the principals' work. They are:

- *The tension between restricted autonomy and expectations to be innovative (chuangxin)*

- *The tension between producing high exam performance and more holistic student development*
- *The tension between traditional role expectations of 'principal as parent' and expectations of 'principal as manager' (and) 'teacher as loyal child' and 'teacher as independent agent'*

A dominant subtext across the tensions was the multiple accountabilities confronting the principals. The study found that the principals placed unquestionable emphasis on upward accountability. Among the various stakeholders, superiors and the higher level government departments and officials were regarded as the most important audience. Three layers of explanation were teased out that helped to account for the emphasis on the upward accountability:

Layer 1: Emphasis on upward accountability as a pragmatic concern

Layer 2: Emphasis on upward accountability as an understanding of their position in the hierarchy

Layer 3: Emphasis on upward accountability as recognition of the overwhelming role played by the state

A set of five propositions was further suggested that attempted to capture succinctly the major features of the role of the principalship in China.

- Proposition one. Societal norms play an important part in shaping the role of the principal in China. This influence can be observed in various aspects of the principals' worklives, particularly in terms of respect for positional power and the widespread exercise of the informal power. As a result, principal autonomy to make decisions is both limited and easily swayed by external influences. To a large extent, Chinese principals remain state agents and face considerable external pressure.
- Proposition two. Although Chinese principals perform a similar set of core leadership functions as principals elsewhere, how they enact these functions differs. Reasons why this enactment differs are intimately connected to a multitude of contextual factors. The importance of 'winning resources' to Chinese principals suggests this may form an additional core leadership function.
- Proposition three. Principals see teachers as an important resource on which they both rely and exploit. Material incentives are frequently used to motivate and reward teachers. In return for providing job security and monetary incentives, principals expect loyalty, a harmonious campus and good teacher performance.

- Proposition four. Hierarchies exist among principals themselves. In other words, the role of the principal in China is also status-based. This status is built upon *guanxi* with their political superiors and access to expansive networks. These in turn relate interactively with school status and years of principalship.
- Proposition five. 'Successful' principals in the Chinese context have a rich store of knowledge of how the system works. A key part of this knowledge is how to cultivate '*guanxi*' with influential people which can, in turn, help to strengthen and promote their position. Although principals are publicly encouraged to be innovative, 'successful' principals know well that they cannot initiate any fundamental changes without the permission and support of their political superiors.

Thus, the study arrived at three major categories and a rudimentary typology for understanding the role of the Chinese principalship. The study also found the major tensions and accountability issues facing the principals and suggested a list of propositions that helped explain the principalship in China. Further research is necessary to substantiate these findings. Despite this, the findings hold important implications for knowledge base, futureresearch and practice of principalship in China. The following section will discuss these implications.

Implications of the Study

This section discusses some of the implications of the study for the knowledge base of school principalship in China, for future research in the area and for principal preparation and development programs.

Implications for the Knowledge Base of the Chinese Principalship

As one of the few attempts to empirically understand principals in relation to ongoing socio-political and educational transformations in China, this study holds important implications for addressing the conceptual gap in the understanding of the Chinese principalship.

The findings add to the knowledge base in at least four ways. These are listed below and then expanded further.

- The study attests to the importance of the role of the principal in leading education change in China.
- The study reveals the difficulties of balancing change and continuity as it is encountered by Chinese principals.
- The study indiates a basic list of key concepts that dominate Chinese principals' worklives.
- The deep contextualised accounts of Chinese principals add a much needed dimension to the dominant prescriptive studies in China.

First, the research findings lend credence to the oft-repeated assertion that the role of the principalship is important in a reform era. Although the study found that the power devolved to Chinese principals was limited when compared with their Western counterparts, as in the West, the success of school change still depended largely on the principals themselves. In other words, although the system seemed to place considerable hurdles in how principals could enact worthwhile change, the principals still found ways to cleverly and creatively use the system and help them to be successful. Those who could fully internalise the institutional rules of the system and use this professional insights to cope with the changes were deemed more 'competent' and successful.

Second, the participating principals found themselves in a somewhat unfamiliar cross-fire between change and continuity. On the one hand, as a result of the adoption of policies imported from the West that emphasised accountability, standardisation and performativity, principals were expected to be increasingly accountable for outcomes. On the other hand, many of the traditional expectations of principals, such as caring for and protecting staff, following superiors' directives without question and adhering to the norms associated with *guanxi* endured. Thus, Chinese principals were expected to demonstrate good performance while at the same time being completely loyal to their superiors. They were expected to show initiative and be creative even when granted very limited autonomy. Principals were asked to monitor teachers' performance while continuing to take responsibility for their personal lives. They were subject to the standardised school evaluation criteria while knowing that *guanxi* might play a more

important role in their promotion. They were held accountable for the school outcomes but could not say no to the relationship obligations from significant others when they interfered with their decision making.

Third, the study also found that principals' lives were overwhelmingly dominated by a set of apparently conflicting but deeply connected concepts. These concepts included *guanxi*, resources, academic results and harmony. The logic seemed simple. Maintaining *guanxi* with the government officials and other influential people helped principals win more resources for their schools. With more resources principals could apply extra economic incentives to attract and motivate teachers. Keeping teachers financially satisfied was deemed as essential to keep teachers happy and to motivate them towards higher student exam results. Good student achievement was demanded by government officials, parents, teachers and influential people outside the school and thus helped to maintain the harmony in the organisation. Good results, in turn, became a form of social capital that principals could exchange for more resources from the government and other sources. If a principal could win resources, get good academic results and maintain harmony, he/she was considered competent and successful in the eyes of all important stakeholders.

Fourth, the study re-confirmed the danger of research staying at a prescriptive level in China. As shown in Chapter 3, scholars in China tend to provide prescriptions in a form of idealised practices that are not based on the realities of Chinese schools. Many principals in the study said that such papers did not help them do their job. Instead, they sought empirical insights based on the practical realities and problems of schools and desired a platform where they could exchange their concerns and dilemmas. Guo's words represented this sentiment.

> I think their [scholars] expectations were too high and not reality-based. In the vast land of China there are thousands of principals. How many of them can be educators (*jiaoyu jia*)? At most a couple of them. It is impossible for every principal to be an educator. Then what can we [ordinary principals] do? We have to combine our own interpretations of theories with the school realities and then put them into practice. If our practices go well, we can also publicise them and

> communicate to others what we have done. We want to be able to exchange our interpretations, practices and ideas [instead of being provided unachievable prescriptions] (我覺得這個呢是他們要求太高，期望太高，不符合現實。要教育家，中國這麼大，現在出不了教育家，出教育家也就出幾個，校長千千萬，每個人都成教育家還了得，不可能的，那麼我們怎麼辦呢，我們就實實在在根據學校的情況，學點理論，能夠接觸到的理解了，能夠理解清楚的，去做點實踐，那麼某一天我有了想法，我也可以發表發表我怎麼學的，我怎麼教的，我做了什麼東西，做點實實在在的東西、交流。有什麼事情坐下來以後我覺得應該怎麼樣理解這個事情，談談自己想法不就完了麼。就大家互相交流就完了).

Chapter 3 reported another form of the leadership literature in China that records the stories of famous principals. In that branch of literature, the individuals are often portrayed as omniscient leaders mastering a vast repertoire of leadership skills. The findings of this study challenged this myth of the superprincipal. It found that even the worklives of 'Leading Actors' were fraught with similar tensions, dilemmas, compromises and trade-offs as faced by the other types of principals. What made them appear successful was their deeply-rootedness in the system and the sophisticated acquisition and manipulation of the unwritten rules of how to be a principal in China.

This study confirmed the pivotal role of the principal in a reform environment. This attests to the view that ongoing education change necessitates a reconceptualisation of school principalship in China. Seen in this light, this study presents an attempt to contribute to the process of reconceptualising the Chinese principalship. As one of the first attempts to do this, it adds to the knowledge base of the principalship in general and the Chinese principalship in particular. This is so even though more research is obviously needed to understand such a complex and fluid phenomenon. The next section explores the implications held by this study for future research.

Implications for Future Research

The first part of this section suggests some areas for possible future research and the second discusses the limitations of the study.

Possible Areas for Future Research

In the course of conducting the study, four areas in addition to those noted earlier in the literature review were uncovered. These may constitute fertile ground for future research.

- The first area concerns the range of actors that can have an impact on the principalship.
- The second area relates to geographic differences that may influence role perception and enactment by principals.
- The third area targets the further investigation of the state-market configuration and the agency-structure nexus.
- The fourth area targets more explicit comparisons between Chinese principalship and that of other societies and nations.

First, school principals are obviously not the only important actors involved in school governance in China. The local government, for example, is an important actor. The study showed that the local education bureau was regarded by principals as the most important stakeholder. Both support and pressure emanated from the government and thus caused numerous tensions for the principals. The principals in this study seemed to desire more autonomy and independent decision-making, but their dependence on the local government was so overwhelming and deeply rooted in tradition that this did not happen beyond the popular reform rhetoric. This was not a particularly unexpected finding. However, studying this issue from the 'other side' may provide some useful insights. Given the power of government departments and officials it would be useful to know how local education bureaus view school principalship. More specifically, what qualities do they value most when selecting and promoting principals? And how do they conceive of principal professionalism and autonomy?

A further angle here stems from the fact that the study also did not elicit the views of the other members of the school leadership team, such as vice principals and middle leaders. We know little about what these principals do to achieve the school goals. In other words, the in-school stories were not complete. The research findings seemed to give the impression that the 'instructional leader' aspect of the role was not seen as overly

important to Chinese principals. Until we find out what others think it is difficult to know whether this is true, or whether there are other contextual or cultural explanations. In other words – could the way Chinese principals enact instructional leadership look very different from that suggested in existing literature? Thus, more exploration into the micropolitical and instructional aspects of the role of the Chinese principalship would be useful.

Second, the study showed that school context, particularly school status, was important in that it mediated the principals' interpretation of reform policies and their role relationships. However, all the principals were selected from Shanghai so the findings might neglect factors such as the school location and whether this exerted an impact on principals' role perceptions and enactment. For example, the study suggested that schools in Shanghai share a number of common features that may distinguish them from other places in China. Evidence of this distinction was prominent in the narratives of principals who came to Shanghai as 'outsiders'. Before Xiu and Jin came to Shanghai they had been principals in local key schools in a neighbouring province for some years. They both talked about their struggles in adapting to the 'Shanghai' school culture. For example, Jin recognised there was cultural difference between Shanghai and his previous district.

> There is a cultural difference. In where I come from, people are more supportive and caring to each other. In Shanghai, I find people are just doing their own business and do not care much about others. .. Furthermore, there seems to be more formal and informal norms to conform to in Shanghai. For example, one norm here seems to be that teachers will not work for extra hours [for no pay]. It is not like my previous school. My teachers used to sacrifice their sleeping time to fulfil a school task when they were assigned one.
>
> Shanghai also has its advantages. First, it is more open to a rich source of information. Second, it is influenced by a modern and internationalised educational ethos. Third, you will be recognised if you can demonstrate your capability and good work performance.

These differences need to be recognised and more empirical studies need to be conducted in other parts of the China to enrich our understanding of the role of the

Chinese principalship.

Third, the study attempted to discuss the role of the Chinese principalship in relation to the state-market configuration and the agency-structure nexus. This is one of the major contributions of the study. However, issues around this call for more research for at least two reasons.

The first reason is that China is changing. As a nation it is undergoing economic and socio-political transformation of unprecedented proportions. Principals thus find themselves on the increasingly unsteady ground between the state and the market. More and more policies have flooded into China, often unthinkingly, and principals are increasingly subjected to demands similar to those faced in other societies, but with a very different twist (Walker, 2004; 2007). It seems reasonable to predict a continuous, long-term struggle between an unchallengable yet uncertain state and expanding, more uncontrollable market. This will inevitably impact on the place and job of the principal. Further research in this area would be valuable not only for principals themselves, but also the systems which employ them. Second, this study focuses on individual principals. Although it teases out some underlying institutional structures based on the embeddedness of roles in the larger context, more research is needed to explore institutional structures and to further investigate the dialectic of principal as an agent and the structure in China.

Fourth, this study represents one of the few attempts to stretch beyond the current near-exclusive grounding in Western theory to explore the indigenous Chinese understanding of leadership. The research findings suggested that the way Chinese principals enacted their leadership was different from their Western counterparts given the influence of both societal norms and structural constraints. As such the Western leadership theories might not be able to explain the school realities in China. The concepts such as 'leadership' and 'professional' have to be understood in the organisational context of Chinese schools (Lo, 2008). This study is one of the first few steps to explicate the meanings of 'leadership' in the context of Chinese schools. More research is thus needed

to collect indigenous understandings of leadership and to provide more fertile grounds for cross-cultural comparisons. More comparative research will in turn contribute to leadership understandings in the international arena.

Although considered worthwhile, the study admits a number of limitations – these are discussed below.

Limitations of the Study

There faces at least four important methodological and conceptual limitations.

The first limitation concerns the methodology. Given that the major source of data was self-reported and perception-based interviews, its validity could only be checked through the examination of the internal consistency and triangulation with the documentary data. Thus, if opinions of other school members such as education bureau officials, vice principals, mid-level leaders and teachers could be solicited, the outcomes could be verified more substantially.

A second limitation lies in the number of principals involved. Only eleven principals participated in the study although efforts were made to ensure that they were drawn from different backgrounds. Due to the limited number of principals, the typology developed in the study remains crude and rudimentary even in its final form. The typology might be further expanded if more principals had been included.

The third limitation concerns the generalisability of the study. The research was conducted in one part of China. Given the vast geographic disparity across the nation, it had to be recognised that Shanghai principals might not be 'representative'. However, as a qualitative study, the purpose of the research was to explore the meaning of the role of the principalship instead of applying the findings to the larger population. Although a quantitative study could be designed, the trade-off was that the richness and meaning of the present research might be lost.

The fourth limitation is related to the cross-cultural comparision of the role of the principalship. The study recognised that research conducted in non-Western societies could add to, support or challenge the Anglo-American dominated leadership thinking. However, the major purpose of the present study was not to make a comparison between the Chinese principalship and that of the Western societies. Thus, the cross-cultural comparisons were not explicitly highlighted in the study. However, this research serves as a starting point and more studies conducted in the leadership area in China will facilitate the cross-cultural comparison in the future.

Despite these limitations. the study did unveil multiple aspects of the role of the principalship. As such, it has practical implications for principal preparation and development in China. The following section will address this.

Implications for Principal Preparation and Principal Development

This study found a stock of knowledge that principals shared and regarded as essential for them to perform jobs in China. However, the principals indicated that their knowledge was acquired through practice instead of from formal development programs. The knowledge deemed important by principals is missing or at least incongruent with that conveyed in formal LDP courses. The missing link between what principals are taught and what they do holds implications for three issues: who should deliver the programs, how they should be delivered and what should be delivered.

The first implication concerns formal program providers. Currently programs are usually delivered by Normal University professors and government (usually Education Bureaus at different levels) officials. Professors are responsible for teaching courses on the latest education and leadership theories, while officials lecture on new policy directives. The underlying assumption is that knowledge of the theories and policies will provide the expertise necessary for principals to perform their job. However, as this research shows, what principals need most seems to be the practical wisdom that can help them cope with the various dilemmas and tensions forming their worklives. Both university

professors[99] and government officials[100], nevertheless, appear to have little practical knowledge of what principals' work is like thus cannot address the issues principals find most important.

Furthermore, even if in some cases the providers understand the real issues facing principals they deem it 'politically correct' not to discuss them openly. For instance, the tension principals face between supporting curriculum reform and succumbing to exam pressures is well known to officials. However, the state cadre's job is to ensure, monitor and help principals to implement government policies. Officials therefore insist that 'exam' talk is for private consumption only. By the same token, they choose to emphasise performance as if *guanxi* did not play a role in principals' promotion; stress equality as if a school's status did not determine school affluence; and talk about teacher development as if they had been granted autonomy in teacher issues. As a result, principals feel a lack of empathy with the deliverers. In Jia's words, these experts 'use a different language' from that of principals. Due to the lack of empathy principals attend the development programs just for the sake of being present. As Tan commented, he participated in a week long 'curriculum reform implementation' training program and it was 'a waste of time and distraction from the routine job'.

A good sign is that many programs begin to get senior principals involved as mentors while an accompanying issue is that those invited tend to be high-ranking principals from elite schools. For example, Shanghai Municipal Education Bureau launched a 'Famous Principal Training Project' (*mingxiaozhang peiyang gongcheng*) in 2007. The project aims to train about 500 selected principals within five years. Accordingly eight development bases have been established across the city, each of which is hosted by a special-class (*teji*, the highest professional ranking) principal. The eight mentors, although covering both secondary and primary schools, mainly come from higher-status schools. Compared with university professors and government officials, senior

[99] Most of them stay at universities right after they finish postgraduate studies.
[100] Although some are promoted from principal positions at the district level, most officials at the municipal level are shifted from universities and other government departments.

principals as trainers have undeniable advantages. For example, Jia was selected to participate in the program while Wan, as one of the eight hosts, was his mentor. Jia believed that Wan had a lot of practical wisdom he was yet to accumulate. Most importantly, Wan did not talk about something far away from the school reality and they used 'the same language system'. Despite the advantages, a practical issue was that Wan could not provide any concrete suggestions for Jia's job given their vastly different work environment. Being affluent with the resources that Jia's school earnestly needed, Wan did not have to worry about many of the problems concerned by Jia.

Thus, there needs to be an expansion of program deliverers. More practitioners need to be involved because they embody the knowledge most needed by the program participants. While including the practitioners, program providers also need to bear in mind that expertise and wisdom is not necessarily status-based. Senior principals from all types of schools, whether high- or low- performing schools, may have different but equally important experience to share with the novice principals.

The second implication concerns how to deliver the programs. Most programs are delivered in the form of formal lectures in the university classrooms. In some intensive programs organised by the Shanghai Municipal Government, one instructor has to lecture to hundreds of principals in a big auditorium. This is somewhat paradoxical given that the curriculum reform that principals are supposed to implement advocates a shift of the pedagogical centre from the teachers to the students. While principals are trained towards successful pedagogical change in schools, the training program itself adopts the teacher-centred pedagogy that needs to be abandoned. Then the effectiveness of the programs is questionable.

Furthermore, as the study shows, principals need to sharpen their problem-solving skills so they can tactfully deal with *guanxi*, resource and exam pressure. The form of big classroom and single teacher can hardly satisfy the need. Principals need to be regarded as active learners instead of passive receivers of knowledge. Program providers need to shift from training (*peixun*) to development (*fazhan*) mentality. By adopting a 'training

mentality', programs providers have put too much emphasis on the knowledge impartation from trainers to trainees. Thus the trainer-centred pedagogy has been established and formalised. However, providers need to recognise that the trainers may not have the knowledge needed by the trainees, and principal development is not necessarily restricted to knowledge impartation. In development-oriented programs, the deliverers are not necessarily omniscient scholars who know what principals do not know. Instead the role of the deliverers is to encourage the participation, initiatives and reflection of principals. The mutual instead of one-way communication will benefit both the program deliverers and participants.

The third implication concerns what to deliver in principal learning programs. This issue is closely related who and how to deliver. If there is an expansion of program deliverers and a pedagogical shift, it is believed that the substance of the development programs will accordingly change; it will be more related to school realities. Otherwise, there will not be any significant improvement. The change may not be easily made as it challenges the long-standing Chinese perception of learning and knowledge. These traditionally-held views may hinder the change; they are: teachers know more than students; the authority of teachers cannot be challenged; learning takes place in the form of classroom teaching. Because of these views, professors with rich theoretical knowledge and officials familiar with macro planning are believed to be most suitable 'trainers' while lecturing is the best way to impart knowledge. There is thus a neglect of the actual need of principals and the importance of principal input and peer teaching.

Thus, this study prompted some rethinking of the meaning of learning and knowledge. Learning can take multiple forms. In addition to formal classroom lecture, peer discussion, school visit and personal reflection are also effective ways of learning. Knowledge also takes multiple forms. For Chinese principals, the more important form of knowledge is about how to make best use of the system and the unwritten rules that regulate and constrain their worklives[101]. Thus programs which can help principals

[101] While saying so, it has to be recognised that whether such knowledge can help promote school improvement and student learning is debateable.

acquire and sharpen their practical wisdom and professional insight are needed. Such programs will be more closely connected with school/leader lives.

A Concluding Epilogue

What this study reported was a serious effort to unveil the intricacies of the role played by Chinese principals in a context of change. The findings, the major categories, the interplay among these and the typology all help to partly address the lack of empirical work into the role of the principal in China. The findings also provide some advice for principal development programs in terms of who should deliver the programs, how they should be delivered and what should be delivered.

There is a need to conduct much more research into a wide range of issues related to the Chinese principalship and wider reform environment. Contributions from such research may not only aid the development of Chinese leadership but also heighten international awareness about the principalship across a range of settings.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

I. General Background Information:

1. Years of principalship; years of teaching experience; names of schools you have worked for.
2. What title did you achieve as a teacher (e.g., senior/special class teacher)?
3. Any experience of being a vice principal? Under what circumstances did you get promoted?

II. Experience in the Quality Education Reform:

On Curriculum, Enrollment and Examination Reforms

4. What strategies have you taken to implement the curriculum reform?
5. How do you evaluate the new curriculum? Do you think the new curriculum promotes students' innovative spirits and practical spirits?
6. Do you agree that the curriculum reform grants you more autonomy in terms of curriculum development? Why? What do you think of the influence of the curriculum reform on your role as a curriculum leader?
7. Has your school adopted any marketing strategies in enrolling new students? What do you think of the inter-school competition? Has it increased over the years (any examples)?
8. Does your school have the 'autonomous enrollment' quota? What do you do with this quota? How many school-choice students does your school enroll each year? What do you do with this cohort of students?
9. How was the High Exam result of your school last year? What is your goal for this year? Any strategies have you taken to promote the High Exam performance?
10. In your opinion, is the pressure brought by the High Exam alleviated or strengthened with the adoption of Quality Education policy? Any rewarding policies in your school for teachers whose students have better High Exam performance?

On School Review System

11. What is the current status of your school (e.g., municipal exemplary, district exemplary)? When did your school achieve this status? Is your school planning to apply for the higher-status title? What have you done towards the goal?
12. How do you evaluate the exemplary school system? Do you think it makes much difference to the previous key school system? Has the review for exemplary school helped with the improvement of your school? If yes, in what ways?
13. Did you participate in the design of the 'Quality Education development plan' your school presented to the review committee? How? Who else in your school have participated? Did you find it difficult to encourage them to participate? Why? Have you ever searched for and read other schools' development plans? Why?

On School Personnel System

14. What is your ranking as a principal? When did you get this title? Are you applying for the higher-grade principal title? Do you think the indicators can well benchmark principals?

Who do you think are the most appropriate reviewers of principals' work?

15. What qualities do you value most when promoting a teacher? Are principals given more autonomy in terms of teacher promotion?
16. What professional development programs does your school organise for teachers? What policies does your school adopt to motivate teachers?

III. Reflection on the Role of the Principalship:

On School Ethos and Cultures

17. What is your school ethos (*xiaofeng*)? How did it come into being? How do you understand it? Does it reflect your personal belief of education?

On Structural Arrangements

18. Does your school have a teacher representative council? On what occasions will you consult the council for decision-making? Does your school have a parental council? On what occasions will you consult it?
19. Has your school employed any quality assurance (QA) policy? How does it work?

On Your Role as a Principal

20. What did you expect in terms of how the principalship would be like before you became a principal and what are the reasons for such expectations? Would you please explain why you wanted to become a principal?
21. Please elaborate how you define a good principal, and what it means to you. What would be, in your view, the definition of a good principal understood by your fellow principals?
22. Can you describe your main responsibilities as a principal?
23. Would you please provide an example of critical issues that you regard as typical to depict the kind of dilemmas and conflicts you have experienced as a principal?
24. What has been the most cherishable experience you have had working in this school? What has been the most difficult situation you have ever encountered (please give an example and elaborate how you coped with it)? What sort of issues/problems do you anticipate in the coming years and how would you cope?
25. How do you perceive yourself and your role as a principal? How have your self-perceptions and role perceptions affected your relationships with, for example, your staff and students over the years?

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

To be put on CUHK letterhead

Dear ,

Participation in QIAN Haiyan's PhD Research

I am QIAN Haiyan, a PhD student of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I am writing to ask for your consent to taking part in my PhD study of how senior secondary school principals perceive and enact their principalship roles.

I should be very grateful if I could get your consent and conduct an interview with you in XX. The interview will last for about two hours and it will be scheduled at your convenience. I would be most happy if you could also participate in any follow-up interviews that will be scheduled in XX.

I understand that confidentiality and anonymity are vital principles in this exercise and I would pledge to strictly conform to them: no names of the research participants and concerned schools will ever be disclosed. Time is indeed a very precious resource to you, so I am much indebted to you for your kind assistance.

Yours sincerely,

QIAN Haiyan

尊敬的　　校長：

您好！

我是香港中文大學教育行政與政策系的博士生錢海燕，希望邀請您協助完成我的博士研究計畫。

我的博士研究主要是瞭解在素質教育的政策框架下，中學校長怎樣認識和行使自己的角色，怎樣解讀自己與學校重要持份者如教育行政部門，教師，家長之間的角色關係。我的研究需要採用個案樣本，計畫以深度訪談的方式進行。

訪談預計在 XX 月中上旬開展，全過程約持續 1.5 到 2 小時，具體的時間和地點以您的方便爲准。在獲得您許可的情況下，訪談內容會被錄音。本研究將嚴格遵守研究倫理的要求，保護您的個人資料和訪談內容。如您能接受訪談邀請，我將不勝感激。您可以通過以下方式和我聯繫：上海- xxxxxxxx

香港- xxxxxxxx

電郵：xxxxxxx@cuhk.edu.hk

感謝您在百忙中考慮我的邀請。

錢海燕

二零零七年 XX 月

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