The impact of education reform on the role of secondary school principals in China

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Chapter 2: The changing context for school leaders

1.1 International education reforms ................................................................. 18
   Changing power relationships ................................................................... 21
   Teacher quality and Teacher training ......................................................... 29
   National curriculum and Testing: emphasis on learning .......................... 31
1.2 The changing role of School Leaders and School Leadership development in the West...34
   The changing role of principals ................................................................. 34
   National standards .................................................................................... 35
   School leadership development in the West .............................................. 37
   The emphasis on transformational leadership ........................................... 39
   Instructional Leadership ............................................................................ 42
   Distributed leadership .............................................................................. 45
1.3 Leading Educational change .................................................................... 49

Chapter 2: The changing context in China .................................................... 53
2.1 Culture and tradition in China and their influence on approaches to leadership in schools
   Key aspects of Confucian philosophy ......................................................... 53
   Leadership in politics ................................................................................. 56
   Educational leadership in China between 1980s and early 1990s ............ 59
2.2 Current issues ............................................................................................ 64
2.3 Deciding on the research focus and questions ........................................... 70

Chapter 3 Planning the Inquiry ..................................................................... 74
3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 74
3.2 Areas of Interest ....................................................................................... 74
3.3 Choosing a research approach ................................................................. 76
   Philosophical approach ............................................................................. 76
   The interpretive paradigm ........................................................................ 78
   Qualitative Inquiry ................................................................................... 79
   Research strategy for this study ............................................................... 80
   Why small-scale research ....................................................................... 82
3.4 Planning the Inquiry ............................................................................... 83
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AfL</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>BELMAS</td>
<td>British Educational Leadership, Management &amp; Administration Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>China Communism Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSSO</td>
<td>Council of Chief State School Officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>National College Entrance Examination</td>
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<td>COMPED</td>
<td>Computers in Education Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIMS</td>
<td>First International Mathematics Study</td>
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<td>SIMS</td>
<td>Second International Mathematics Study</td>
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<td>SISS</td>
<td>Second International Science Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>Education Reform Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>FWIMF</td>
<td>Far West Lab Instructional Management Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERM</td>
<td>Global Educational Reform Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEA</td>
<td>Evaluation of Educational Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHTL</td>
<td>Learning How to Learn</td>
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<td>MPG</td>
<td>Making Good Progress</td>
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<td>NCTM</td>
<td>National Council of Teachers of mathematics</td>
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<td>NTCSSP</td>
<td>National Training Centre of Secondary School Principals in Shanghai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ofsted</td>
<td>The Office for Standards in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIRLS</td>
<td>Progress in International Reading Literacy Study</td>
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<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<td>PQPG</td>
<td>Principal Quality Practice Guideline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>QCARF</td>
<td>Queensland Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Framework in Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBM</td>
<td>School-Based Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>SITES0M1</td>
<td>Education Study Module1</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSE</td>
<td>Secondary School Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIMMES</td>
<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
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<td>TIMSS</td>
<td>International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
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Abstract

Title: The impact of education reform on the role of secondary school principals in China

The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Yifen xu

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Worldwide, school principals, especially those in secondary schools, have felt increased pressure in their roles as many countries press for higher levels of student attainment. At the same time, education reforms and, in many systems, increased delegation to school leaders, have greatly increased principals’ responsibilities and made the job much more complicated. Given their strategic importance, it is not surprising that the role of principals has attracted great attention since the 1990s.

The central focus of this thesis was an investigation and analysis of the impact of recent education reforms on the role of secondary school principals in China. At the time of writing no clear picture of the expectations placed on principals in China exists, though there is no doubt that these expectation are greatly increased. The aim of the study was to investigate principals’ own views of their role, their main activities and priorities, and the main influences on these. Consideration was also given to the major challenge or problems confronting school principals, and to identify similarities and differences between the principals’ roles and attitudes in China and in the West.

Naturalistic qualitative methods were used to investigate the experiences of 28 school leaders regarding how their role has developed in China during this period of major education reforms. Semi-structured interviews and shadowing these principals as they went about their work were the main methods of data collection drawn on in this study. Further information was extracted from documents about training policies and programmes accessible via official websites. Thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted, to identify key themes and issues.

The analysis suggests that school principals encounter new challenges as ‘curriculum leaders’, in developing with their staff new pedagogies that shift the balance away from ‘teaching’ onto ‘learning’, and in dealing with the expectation of multiple stakeholders. It also emerged that the principals felt that they did not have sufficient autonomy to lead their schools as they would wish, which restricted curriculum development.

Regarding the key findings, the main worry of the principals was with poor student attainment. Under the ‘high-stakes’ testing system, invisible pressure is exerted on the school for improving test results. The quality of education has never been subject to so much scrutiny from such a wide range of stakeholders, including parents, the community, and employers. As a result, the role of principals has become more complicated, and they are under increasing pressure from higher expectations amongst those both in and outside of the school. Leadership development has been embraced as an important factor in meeting those expectations. However, the thesis argues that there is not sufficient training provided for principals to develop their skills to meet these expectations.

Keywords: education reform, principals’ role, Confucian traditions, China
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First I would like to thank the principals who gave so generously of their time to take part in the research interviews. Without their insights I could not have completed this study.

I am truly indebted to my supervisor- Professor Mel West. This thesis would not have been completed without his supervision and critical comments through the whole process of this project. My grateful thanks also for the support I have received from my second supervisor Mel Ainscow who provided helpful advice.

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Introduction

In this chapter, I will seek to explain why I undertook this study, and its potential significance. I will begin by briefly summarizing the research questions that drove the study, so that readers are able to see the starting point for this research (how these questions were developed will be explained in some detail towards the end of the literature review). I will then outline the background and motivation for this work, and outline the theoretical context I began from. This is followed by a brief description of how the thesis is structured, and what will be covered in each chapter.

Research Questions

The research questions are drawn from the gaps I identified after reviewing the literature. This will be a small-scale study, mainly based on the views collected from a sample group of school principals, and the major goal is to map the role of secondary school principals as this is changing under the impact of recent educational reforms in China. Given the limited time and resources available to me for the study, I tried to keep the particular purpose in mind, and identified the following as key areas needing to be investigated through my research questions:

1. What are the main activities and priorities of secondary school principals in China, and what are the main factors currently influencing these activities and priorities?
2. What are the principals’ views on the role they carry out, and the training they receive to prepare them for it?
3. What are major challenge/problems currently confronting principals?
4. To what extent do the principals’ views and approaches reflect the influence of Western ideas and practices, and how well does the application of such ideas and practices fit with the traditional Chinese cultural context?

Context of the study

The curriculum in China, like its political system, has for many years been heavily centralized and dominated by national policies and edicts. Over recent years, a process of decentralization has begun, with the introduction of a three-level curriculum, including a national curriculum, which all schools must follow, a local curriculum, which should reflect the specific character and needs of the community, and a school-based element, that should
be responsive to the particular needs of the school’s students. In an attempt to move away from the traditional teacher-centred classroom, there has also been new emphasis on developing ‘student-centred’ approaches, where student development is the heart of the school development and student independent learning is highly emphasized. Thus, in the late 1990s, the Ministry of Education of China introduced the first significant curriculum reform for over thirty years. Its stated aim was to develop a curriculum and an approach to learning for the 21st century (MoE 2013). This nation-wide reform covers a broad range of education provisions, including the required six years of primary education and six years of secondary education (three-year junior high school plus three-year senior high school). It has fundamentally challenged the traditional approach in schools, changing the structure of the curriculum, promoting the development of independent learners in the classroom, and putting new emphasis on meeting individuals’ needs. It means that teachers cannot teach by simply copying their past experience, since new circumstances mean this may no longer be relevant.

Of course, since the ‘opening up’ of China, Shanghai has been somewhat different, in terms of the curriculum development and testing, from the rest of the country. The central government has delegated powers to Shanghai Municipal Education Committee to develop their own curriculum to meet the local needs. They have earned some autonomy, for example to design a local test for post-school enrolment, rather than rely on the national College Entrance Exams (CEE). Shanghai education is comparatively more developed than in other areas, especially in the middle and west of China. For instance, by autumn 2004, Shanghai education Committee had drawn up the ‘Shanghai mainstream primary and secondary schools’ curriculum programme’ and ‘Curriculum standards’ for about 20 subjects in seven learning domains, which showed that Shanghai had entered a new phase of full implementation of the curriculum reform. In terms of the characteristics of the new curriculum in Shanghai its aims are:

- to establish the concept of student-centred curriculum development,
- to develop moral education as a core of curriculum, to achieve its objectives with a focus on the improvement of students’ creativity and their ability to solve practical problems;
- to integrate the subjects of the curriculum and to strengthen the links between curriculum content and students’ real lives, to promote awareness of the social technology development;
• and to advocate independent, cooperative and inquiry–based learning in schools, supported by formative assessment. (SHMEC 2001)

In recent years, to reduce the importance of test scores and lessen students’ academic workloads, Shanghai has pioneered the implementation of ‘green evaluation’, on a trial basis in primary and secondary schools since 2011. In fact, following the success of the trial in Shanghai schools, the government has decided to promote the ‘green evaluation’ more widely across China since 2013 (MOE 2013). Under the ‘green evaluation’ policy, the Shanghai Department of Education has issued curriculum programme guidelines, where the most important policies encompass the following so-called ‘red line criteria’ (Zhao 2012):

• **The class hours** for all curriculum in total will be fixed between 33-35 courses per week; The school should carry out **three levels of curriculum** including **national curriculum, local curriculum, school-based curriculum** and ensure **minimum 1 hour for sports or outdoor activities** each day;

• **Teaching textbooks** must be approved by Shanghai Education Commission and **extra supplementary material is excluded** from the booklists approved by Shanghai Education Commission should **not be purchased** for students through the school;

• **Regarding curriculum implementation**, examination subjects should not occupy non-examination subject’ lessons; foundation-based curriculum should not occupy inquiry programme (e.g. expanded curriculum and exploring curriculum);

• **Regarding student attainment**, students’ test results should not be disclosed in public.

These basic criteria indicate the direction of the government’s efforts to ensure students’ all-round development, by increasing their non-academic activities and reducing their academic workloads. They also show that the required changes pose big new challenges to the way that schools and teachers have traditionally worked in China. School principals will have to lead this process of profound educational change, developing their teachers as well as themselves and their schools to meet the expectations of the new curriculum guidance. Clearly, principal development has to be given more attention.
But this is a huge problem. Until now, in China there is only one National Training Centre for secondary school principals, which is located in Shanghai. All the national training programmes are conducted in short periods of full-time, consisting of residential training for secondary school principals at this centre. This means that only a tiny proportion of principals receive the nationally approved training programme, and these limited numbers are mostly made up of outstanding principals that are recommended to attend the national training because they meet the criteria stated by the government. While almost all school principals can receive some training at different levels in their own regions, the national programme seems like some sort of reward for excellent principals, rather than a serious effort to develop the generation of principals that will lead 21st century schooling in China.

While local provision varies in availability and quality, training for secondary principals in Shanghai is among the best, and is comparatively open and diverse in terms of the models and teaching methods. In 2004 the "Shanghai master principals’ (mingxiao Zhang, 名校长) and master teachers’ (mingshi, 名师) training project" was launched, known as the ‘double masters/elites’ project (‘shuangming’ gongcheng, ‘双名’工程) for short. The “Shanghai-California Shadow Programme” and the Master’s in Education in Nanyang Technological University, Singapore are both quite influential and successful programmes in Shanghai. Shanghai therefore has become more open to international ideas on education.

Evidently, principals are encountering new features and new challenges in their role of leading teaching and learning. For instance, new features have emerged in teaching activities: the classroom is focused on students’ needs and less teacher-dependent, but based on ‘independent learning’, collaboration and group work are applied and encouraged especially in problem-solving activities, and there is more emphasis on the development of skills (especially work skills) alongside knowledge.

Because of these educational reforms, principals have gained new powers and responsibilities, and attract high expectations from various stakeholders, including the policymakers, the local educational authorities, parents and the community to implement the reform successfully in the school. It is hard for principals to challenge teachers’ traditional practices and beliefs, which are characterized by teaching to the text and improving school performance in the national test results, and to implement such far-reaching educational change. It is even harder when the testing is not changed. This study looks at the experiences
and views of secondary school principals at this time of change, asking what challenges they face and what might be done to support them in meeting these challenges.

**Theoretical framework**

This research is conducted with a fundamental belief that school leaders are key players with an important role in ‘effective schools’. Much attention has been given to ‘their impact on levels of students’ learning (Day et al. 2008, Hallinger 2005), and sufficient research has been done to reinforce the relationships between effective leadership and school development. In a series of studies seeking to understand what aspects of schooling ‘make the difference’, and to identify the key features of an ‘effective’ school, leadership arises consistently as a major factor for success. Such findings have been drawn from a broad range of countries and diverse school contexts (Hallinger and Heck 2002). By the late 1970s, there was clear research evidence from western countries that schools make a difference to student learning and over the following 30 years, an increasing amount of evidence has been accumulated to demonstrate the impact that schooling can have on student achievement (Hopkins 2003). The research evidence consistently demonstrated the significant effects of such leadership on school conditions and students’ learning (Leithwood and Jantzi 2006). Though there is not a clear explanation of how this works, there is still a strong belief that school principals somehow influence what students achieve, and that effective education leadership influences learning improvement (Leithwood et al. 2004).

Besides student learning improvement, the importance of the role of school leaders is emphasised in large-scale, sustainable education reform (Fullan 2002). As Lee and Pang (2011, p.331) commented: ‘the primary importance of educational leadership for the success of any educational institution and educational reform is universally recognized’. Vice-versa, it can be inferred that any failure of reform may be attributed to ineffective performance by school leaders. For these reasons, educational leadership has gained more attention.

Huber (2004) noted that the importance of the role of school leaders tends to be agreed internationally, despite that fact that the role varies greatly between countries and systems. In many countries, such as in England, the education system is relatively self-managed and decentralised, so it is clear that many leadership and management decisions are taken at a school level (Day et al. 2008). It is not surprising therefore that educational leadership has been at the centre of theoretical interest and debate (Southworth 1999, p.50, 17). However, while there seems to be general agreement about the importance of principals, there is much
less agreement about what it is they do that influences the development of their schools Southworth (1998a). Principal development has been identified as a vital approach to achieve leadership effectiveness. The influx of Western ideas and practices has an impact on leadership development in China. However, the challenge here is to identify leadership skills, attributes and approaches to leadership development that can be applied in a Chinese context, to ensure that leadership is successful but without artificially linking success to western ideas.

**Importance and purpose of the study**

Mounting evidence has been put forward to demonstrate that the principals play a key role in effective schools; but again defining the role of the principals in the process is something many writers have struggled with. Perhaps this is because the role of principals is contextually determined. If the situation has changed, there is no doubt that the leader’s role needs to be changed too. As Southworth (1993, p.79) points out, leadership is ‘more complex, subtle and interactive than our analytical categories convey’. He also reminds us that, apart from descriptions of leadership in action, we also need to know more details about leaders at work. It means that we need to know how leadership is developed in the real world.

Recently, the role of school principals has been going through a period of change in many countries, as education reforms are placing more emphasis on school performance and increasing levels of school leader accountability (Duke and Reck 2003). At the same time, education reforms and, in many systems, increased delegation to school leaders, have greatly increased principals’ responsibilities and made the job much more complicated. The pace of change is also a problem with many principals unsure about what to do; new principals are struggling with old issues, while experienced principals are unable to copy their past experience since new circumstances mean this may no longer be relevant (Southworth 1998).

It can be seen that with increasing recognition on the importance of schools, along with high expectations of each country’s educational provision, great emphasis has been put on the role of leaders (Mulford 2003). Therefore, Mulford concluded that schools leaders have taken on more complicated roles and are being pulled in many different directions associated with too large a workload. For instance, in England and Wales, the profound changes in the function and role of the principals since the Education Reform Act of 1988 witnessed significant changes in the management of state education, especially along with the devolution of power to schools in terms of finance and resource managed at the school level (Moore et al. 2002).
Similarly, in China, great changes have taken place after the Open and Reform policy of 1978 and education is changing rapidly. Many principals are struggling with these changes and are daunted by the challenges confronting them. At the same time there are increasing pressures on the principals, especially in secondary schools, as curriculum reform, high-stakes testing, and the political and social pressures put a heavy burden on principals and accountability spreads throughout the system. Meanwhile, as China has become more open to international education reforms since the late 1970s (Deng and Guo 2007), western ideas and approaches to leadership have become more popular.

There is no clear picture of the expectations placed on principals in China, as unlike in many other countries until very recently there were no prescribed national standards for school principals. Even national standards for elementary and junior middle school principals in China were not published until 2013, while this study began in 2011; and there are still no standards for high school principals in China. There has also been little systematic research into the role of Chinese secondary principals, and limited understanding of how western theories of leadership might be applied in China, although these have influenced training programmes. This study aims to map the role of secondary school principals as it is changing under the impact of reforms, to identify key factors that are influencing the principal’s role in these changes, and to see how far the changes are resulting in the application of Western ideas and approaches to leadership within Chinese schools, and what benefits and/or problems such approaches bring. This study was conducted utilising qualitative inquiry methods grounded in an interpretive approach in a small-scale study conducted in Shanghai (see further discussion of methods in chapter3).

**Significance for educational practice, policy or theory**

The study was conducted in a sensitive period when China was in transition, and when the quality of education had never been before subject to so much scrutiny from so many stakeholders. Principals are under pressure from higher expectations from those both in and outside of the school. The complexities and challenges confronting the school leaders of the future under such remarkable social change and new guidance of educational reforms have little reference points from the past. Leadership development has been embraced as an important factor in meeting those expectations. One of significant points of this study, is that it will provide insights into the current leadership preparation and development in secondary schools in Shanghai. The outcomes of this study will contribute to the international literature
with a description of leadership development of Chinese secondary principals. By looking at the similarities and differences between principals’ development in China and published research findings from the West, the study will contribute to understanding how and where Western theories of leadership might be applied in China. In addition, data was collected using methods that are quite novel in China. Even the interviewing of principals about their work is not common, and shadowing the principals has rarely been used in the field of educational leadership research in China. It may contribute to the further development of these methods in Chinese education research, which tends to use largely quantitative approaches and depends heavily on surveys.

**Organization of the thesis and explaining the chapters**

The thesis following this introduction is divided into seven chapters. The first two chapters contain the literature review. The purpose of these two chapters is to provide a summary of the available international academic research, which is relevant to the topic, and to identify the gap in the academic work that this study may be able to fill. **Chapter one** starts by providing a picture of the international educational movements and policies over the past twenty years or so, and clarifies that a clear set of international trends can be identified in the educational reforms adopted in different countries. In the second section, a discussion follows on how these trends have significant impacted on the educational policies as well as on the role of principals. Three major leadership theories in the West have been prominent alongside these trends, which will be discussed in more detail in this chapter. Since change is the only certainty, it is crucial for principals to know something about leading educational change, which is considered in the third section. Chapter one offers a brief overview of the impact of educational reforms on the role of school principals internationally.

**Chapter two** continues to look at the changing context in China. China, of course, is influenced by the international trends and has seen a period of reforms in recent years. It seems that what we currently see in China are many of the issues we have seen in the West arising from reforms there. However, China has a long history and a long tradition of Confucianism as well as its one party political system. These are closely bound together and have significant impact on education and its leadership. **Chapter two** looks into how these factors influence leadership thinking and practice in China and the influence on approaches to leadership in schools. Finally it goes through the current issues or problems confronting the
school principals. The research questions driving this work will be extracted from the problems identified in the current context of the schools in China.

**Chapter three outlines the planning and research design.** In this Chapter, I will explain the rationale for carrying out the study and the procedures followed in order to collect and analyse the data. I will provide explanation for the methodological stance and justify the design that underpins my data collection activities. Thus, I describe my thinking about research design, data collection and data analysis, as well as other issues of concern, such as sampling, ethics, trustworthiness and reliability. I hope this will demonstrate that the empirical research carried out was systematic and involved a planned approach.

Naturalistic, qualitative methods were applied in this research. The research was designed with a particular focus of investigating the changing role of secondary principals in China guided by key research questions, but there was no particular hypothesis and I was comfortable about altering the focus as new information makes it relevant to do so. This study was designed and conducted with open mind, being critical and self critical when looking for ‘meanings’ in the data collected.

**Chapters Four & Five** present the main findings that came out of the data. The main findings from this study were drawn from a number of data sources, including documentary analysis, interviews with school principals and shadowing of principals at work. **Chapter four** will focuses on recent policies and Ministry directives directly affecting secondary schools, as it draws on the documentary sources to explain the changing education landscape and the new priorities and pressures this brings to the work of school principals. The purpose of presenting policy changes is to give a brief context of the findings drawn from the data. This helps readers to better understand the findings, especially those who know little about China. While **Chapter five** will explain the nine key themes that emerged in the data, the second part of my findings. In addition, as theoretical coding was applied as a means of data analysis, to identify key categories, 'improving teaching and learning' and 'curriculum development' are identified as major areas of concern. Some key problems confronting the principals are also identified within the data. In this section, findings are presented with many detailed quotes. This is to allow readers to ‘hear’ the interviewees’ own voices. Essentially, this chapter presents what principals told me about their work.

**Chapter Six** discusses these findings and offers some conclusions. The Chapter goes on to discuss what may be behind the findings and what wider implications the data may have. I
discuss the major patterns and themes in the data that are shared by the majority of those interviewed, identifying similarities and differences and comparing these to published literature.

Chapter seven provides some recommendations on leadership development, and reflects on the westernization of leadership practices applied in schools in China. This is then followed by brief conclusions, identifying implications of this study for future research, policy, and practice. The chapter ends with a personal reflection on the researcher’s journey while carrying out this study.
Chapter 1: The changing context for school leaders

In this chapter, I will briefly review the main features of the large-scale international education reforms that have spread widely over recent years. Some significant international trends or patterns can be identified, most importantly the introduction of measures devolving or extending accountability to school level, which has greatly altered school leaders’ roles and relationships. This has been accompanied by increased interest in international comparisons (e.g., TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA), close scrutiny of teacher quality and, in many countries, the move towards a national curriculum and associated national testing systems, as all of these things make it easier for governments to hold schools to account for their performance, while conveniently distancing themselves from this. Inevitably, the role occupied by principals has been changed significantly by these developments. At the same time, school leadership models and theories have been put forward, though these are largely ‘borrowed’ from mainstream management research, ‘re-branded’ using school-friendly language and recycled within the education community. Among these, transformational leadership, so-called instructional leadership, and distributed leadership seem to have been the most influential. In this climate of accountability and competition based on performance, leading educational change has also become a key requirement for school leaders as governments press for ever higher standards.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of recent education reforms, seeking to identify the main patterns and trends. It then considers how these reforms have altered the role filled by school leaders, and outlines the theories that seem to have shaped training for leadership roles in many countries. Finally, it considers the challenges associated with the continuing appetite in many systems for educational change.

1.1 International education reforms

Reviewing recent literature about education system development, it seems that implementing large-scale education reform has been irresistible to many governments, and widely supported by other stakeholders. Widespread educational reforms have taken place over the last twenty years, and reform has been moved to centre stage by governments everywhere,
because governments want to use policy levers to signal their commitment to improving educational outcomes (Earl et al. 2003).

The focus of reform varies, as does the timescale involved in different countries, though there are clear trends. Fullan (2009) conducted a review of large-scale reforms (e.g. US, England and Finland) and categorized them as falling into several periods. He suggested that the U.S launched a large-scale national curriculum reform in the late 1950s and through the 1960 seeking to encourage innovation to achieve improved outcomes, though the result was not impressive. Elmore (1996) also pointed out that the curriculum reforms of that period failed to translate the “powerful ideas” into broad-scale changes in practice. It seemed that reform went beyond the schools’ capacity to convert ideas into practice. Orr (2009) criticized that there was too much reform, but not enough change, despite all the major reform ideas of the last decades in the USA.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, policies tended to target improving the quality of education in schools (Earl et al. 2003). At the same time, in the 1980s, the focus on curriculum development was underpinned by the belief that good ideas would ‘travel, of their own volition’ into classrooms (Elmore 1996, p.10). Later, Earl et al. (2003) summarized that ‘national or province/state level reforms in the 1990s typically focused on legislated changes in such things as governance, curriculum and accountability’ (p.8) and ‘more recently, reforms share a common focus on changing classroom practice and improving pupil achievement’. However, Both Earl et al. (2003) and Fullan (2009) commented that few reforms achieved much progress, especially before the interest in large-scale reform was renewed when accountability became the driving force. Even them, as Earl et al. (2003, p.11) explained, this did not guarantee success. For instance in England, they commented that this was due to ‘strong accountability measures but little supporting resources or training provided for schools to meet the high expectations’. From 1997 to 2002, in England, a further reform was launched with a new focus, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLNS) to improve the attainment of 11 year-olds in all of its 20,000 primary schools (Fullan 2009). Leithwood et al. (2002) argued that NLNS was actually taking placing because of both international and national contexts, with policy levers used to foster a performance-based culture in schools. Consequently, student testing policies were adopted along with the attendant measures for pushing schools to become more accountable for student outcomes. Both Fullan (2009) and Leithwood et al. (2002) recognized that there were many critics of the narrow testing processes, and remarked that this top-down strategy failed to capture the
hearts and minds of school principals and teachers. Nevertheless, it is clear that holding schools accountable for the performance of their students—typically as judged by high-stakes testing regimes—has become a feature of systems all over the world, and is now just part of the education landscape. This has significantly altered the relationship between schools and their communities, and in some cases between school leaders and teachers, as governments continue to provoke increased expectations from parents and the press for ‘results’ weighs ever more heavily on schools.

Alongside the process of large-scale reforms in the western countries, Asian countries have to some extent followed up and copied the international trends. Education reform in Asia has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers (i.e Cheng and Walker 2008; Hallinger 2011a, 2011b) and they identified that a period of active education reform has also taken place in South-east Asia over the past 20 years, with a focus initially on expanding access to 12 years of free public schooling then shifting to improving educational quality (Carnoy 2003; Hallinger, 2010; Pennington 1999; Sangnapaboworn, 2007) (cited in Hallinger and Lee 2013). For instance, Hallinger and Lee pointed out that in Thailand, school principals (i.e. secondary schools) were expected to change their role to become instructional leaders rather than system managers since 1999. Governments’ efforts to change schooling were substantial, but it seems not that straightforward to change the role of principals, with major barriers arising from long traditions and resistance to managerial and political roles. As Hallinger and Lee (2013) suggested, that sustained school change needs a ‘comprehensive, sophisticated and long-term human resource strategy’ (p.21)—including the development of school leaders able to manage the process

Overviewing the large-scale educational reforms of this period, there is some convergence despite national differences and priorities. For example, there seems broad agreement that high quality teachers are a critical force for change, and that collaboration between school leaders and teachers is a crucial partnership to achieve improvements in student learning. As Leithwood et al. (2002) concluded, most large-scale reform strategies have attempted to influence teaching and learning by making schools more accountable for student performance, while the background to change and reform is shaped by globalization, demographic trends, and socio-political trends (Boyd 2000), especially in the 21st Century.

Consequently, ‘the reform movement’, which is ‘holding professionals to account became a world-wide trend in education’ (Hoyle and Wallace 2007, p.9). Looking at these reforms
across time and countries, a clear set of trends can be identified, all of which reinforce the climate of accountability. These include a preoccupation with international benchmarking, renewed emphasis on teacher preparation and quality, even in developed countries where teacher training systems are well established, and the introduction of national curriculum and testing regimes.

**Changing power relationships**

One of the significant aspects of increased accountability, with the movement towards decentralizing ‘control’ to school level (Leithwood, et al. 1999) is the impact this has on power relationships within education systems. Hoyle and Wallace (2007) identified that the beginning of the accountability movement in the UK dates back to James Callaghan’s Ruskin speech in 1976 when began to replace ‘a combination of market and bureaucratic patterns of accountability’ centred control of schools. As they explained further:

“The strategy of change that emerged was one of greatly increased central determination of policy in relation to health, education and the social services, supported by a range of institutions of accountability, with the responsibility for the implementation of policy vested in strengthened management at the organizational level” (p.10).

Thus decentralization of decision-making takes place and accountability is spread everywhere, alongside the devolution of authority to the school level. Leithwood (2001, p.222) argued that when “decentralization of decision-making is used for purpose of increasing accountability”, one of its central aims often is to increase the voice of those who are being marginalized in decision-making’. In education, increasing authority is delegated by the government to school principals to enable decision-making at the school level. The question is what such increased ‘accountability’ does? Some argue that it shifts attention from the government on to the school, and the result is that while governments take credit for ‘success’, claiming this because their policies are right, ‘failure’ is blamed on the school!

The main spread of the accountability movement can be tracked to when education started adopting the ideas of marketization in the 1980s. According to Goldspink (2007), increased marketization has greatly influenced school education over the past two decades, especially in developed countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and Canada who have applied private sector management practices and market-type mechanisms to public administration. This is because such management methods are seen as useful ‘neutral technical approaches’ to break bureaucratic preoccupation with ‘processes’ as the key to improving organizational efficiency, and reflects the managerialist desire to shift to an
outcome focus rather than a process-orientated bureaucracy. This can be identified as the
driver of ‘devolution’, as Goldspink (2007) explained that

“This includes devolution of responsibility to middle managers for budgetary and
administrative functions and a change from process conformity to output delivery fro
accountability…” (p.29)

However, it has been argued that many education reforms have not been efficient in practice,
partly due to the influence of business thinking (e.g. Public Choice, Agency theory, etc.) on
educational reforms. That is because ‘free’ markets alone are inappropriate for the delivery of
a public education system (Goldspink 2007). This because a public system of education
should seek to reduce inequities and compensate for socio-economic disadvantage, and this is
not easily done through competition and the operation of market forces. While some
stakeholders have become more powerful in this new environment, others, particularly those
already disadvantaged, may have become even more marginalised.

Notwithstanding, devolution has increasingly featured in reforms and has sometimes
extended to increasing opportunities even for teachers to participate in decision-making.
Levinson et al. (2013) review a range of literature and confirm the importance of the
involvement of teachers in producing substantive and successful transformations in school
systems. They suggest as one example of a high-performing educational system Finland, who
owe their success to teachers given sufficient trust as highly trained professionals and
allowed great autonomy to develop local teaching approaches and to make their own
decisions regarding the curriculum. Levinson et al. (2013) also pointed out that in the reform
of secondary education throughout the world, however, relatively little attention is given to
teachers or to their active participation in the development of curriculum and policy reforms.
Nevertheless, the challenge of teacher participation in the reform process has not been met in
most national educational systems. What Levinson and his colleagues underline is the
importance of teachers’ meaningful participation in the process of reform, and they call for
more autonomy for teachers’ in the classroom. As they argued, supported by Hiatt-Michael
(2001), unless appropriate structures and resources are put in place, commensurate with the
goals of reform, authentic learning communities will not be established, with teachers as full
professional partners (Levinson et al. 2013).

Equally, students’ voices have been recognized as having significant impact on high student
performance. According to Levin (2000), in the 1960s and 1970s, student involvement was
advocated to extend political participation and then democracy. But unfortunately, this appeal
seemed to weaken around the mid 1970s. Levin also pointed out that the significant role of student involvement has attained less interest in the last few years, but he believes that school reforms can never be genuinely successful without students’ involvement. Although students’ voices seem still not strong within policy formulation, their importance has been becoming increasingly obvious to the extent that neither leaders nor teachers should ignore them, Levin claims.

Despite widespread changes in power relationships within education systems, not all comment regarding devolution or decentralization has been positive. As Wong (2000) pointed out, the decentralization of urban school districts has dominated the policy process, but seems to have attracted many critics who have questioned its efficiency asking whether district-wide leadership lacks the capacity or the political will to implement outcome-based accountability. Bache (2003) also viewed education policies in England and recognized that the Labour government have accelerated the process of reform despite greater fragmentation of policy-making, with a proliferation of ‘cross-sector and multi-level participation’. However, he argued that such fragmentation could reduce the governance efficiency and suggested education policy and management should be a key priority of central government.

Despite public dissatisfaction the 1988 UK reform grew and spread out, accelerating since the middle of 1990s. However, a new framework for education governance, such as in Chicago, has been described as the integrated governance reform (Wong 2000), which means the integration of accountability and authority at the district and/or the state levels, which tends to reverse the trend of decentralization. This pattern of integrated governance in school reforms arises from the failure of market forces in improving student performance and it has been argued that such intervention is necessary to improve schools, especially in low-performance areas. Integrated governance is designed to promote greater policy coherence and establish effective frameworks through its focus on low-performing schools and their students. It is argued that integrated governance should not be simply understood as re-centralization of authority, because the schools retain some flexibility regarding how regulatory components are approached.

In addition, Goldspink (2007) reminds us that the governance of education is complicated, with many stakeholders (e.g. school, locality, interest group, policy centre, university and professional association) involved and has argued that the failure of decades of reform stems from too many ‘conventional managerial and economic derived theories and ideologies’
He goes on to analyze educational reform with critical insights from a ‘loosely coupled’ and ‘complex systems’ perspectives. Loosely-coupled systems suggests those stakeholders need rich multidimensional relationships, which is similar to Ingersoll’s (1993) embedded assumptions approach. Another parallel approach is to view organization as complex systems as Goldspink (2007) pointed out. Complex systems are ‘systems comprising large numbers of stakeholders in highly connected webs and can display both high levels of order and disorder’. Order plays a significant role in ‘micro-structuring processes that provide for robust self-organization’ (p.42). Such a perspective or theory, as Goldspink pointed out, implies and reminds people to understand that systems are multi-dimensional. Based on these two perspectives, Goldspink (2007) concluded that viewing schools as a loosely-coupled complex systems suggests so called- ‘arms-length or devolved’ institutional arrangements along with low command/high trust systems to facilitate self-reinforcing cycles based on ‘deep commitment, open learning, and responsible action’. He argued would ‘educational systems demonstrate considerable robustness and resilience in the face of both environmental and intended change’ (p.44).

These considerations seem to indicate it is necessary to establish reciprocal relationships within reformed education systems, including important stakeholders, such as teachers. Gunter (2008), concerned with teacher professionalism, suggested collaborative work among practitioners and researchers as well as parents, teachers, governors should be established in ‘whatever networked relationships they can employ and work together to monitor and evaluate the operation and implications of educational models in use, and where necessary, to change them’ (p.267). While this seems a long way from the top-down reform processes that have significantly altered relationships within systems, it does seem to describe what most stakeholders look for. As Goldspink (2007) concluded, trust-based relationships and the building of congruent behaviour patterns can strengthen intrinsic motivation and innovation at a local level, which is vital to find solutions to wider institutional problems. The debate over devolution and governance may not be straightforward but the essential question is how to find the balance between control and delegation to establish a smooth and ‘golden-distance’ system of governance.

From the above it seems that accountability is spread everywhere, though it the extent which the school leaders are held directly accountable for the school performance does vary between countries. Now a further question to consider is: ‘does accountability make schools more efficient?’ The answer is uncertain, as there is insufficient evidence. However, it can be
clearly identified that the increased accountability within system relationships spreading internationally over the past twenty years has altered power relationships, making these more complicated. One example of this is that school leaders are in many ways more powerful than they were, and are much more in control of their own schools and less influenced by local political structures, yet curiously they are also more vulnerable, because of their accountability to the school’s many stakeholders.

International comparisons

International comparisons seems irresistible to politicians and policy makers and have become both an important driver of reforms and a stick used to beat schools. The impetus of international comparisons is due to a several key factors, such as ‘the formation of larger international economic groups, geo-political shifts, the relative ease of international transportation, the development of information technology.’ (Adamson 2012, p.641). Adamson also pointed out that these factors ‘encouraged greater interests in the inter-relationship between the global trends and the local responses’ (p.641). Similarly, in education, Crossley and Jarvis (2000) commented that there is increasing attention given to international comparative research arising from factors including ‘the influence of globalization upon all dimensions of society and social policy world-wide’ especially since 1977’ (p.261).

Since the late 1980s, well before those international assessment tools such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) were available, politicians had started to make comparisons of educational system performance. For instance, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 1958 claims that one of their significant purposes is such comparisons provide ‘international benchmarks to assist policymakers in identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of their education systems’ (IEA).

It is necessary to briefly review the history of IEA and the broader spectrum of influential international studies from varying interests. With the Pilot Twelve-Country Study conducted in 1960 the IEA attained encouraging findings for collaborative research and cross-national studies, and these gave rise to the First International Mathematics Study (FIMS) conducted in 1964 in 12 countries with a sample of 13-year-old and final-year secondary students. Later on, more governments have become interested in those internal tests, such as the Second
International Mathematics Study (SIMS) in 20 countries in 1980-1982, and the Second International Science Study (SISS) in 24 countries in 1983-1984. The Reading Literacy Study (1990-1991) was recognized as a milestone for IEA in terms of the amount and the quality of data collected in 32 countries and its focus on both student achievement and educational contexts, with background information. Of course, the international comparisons have altered somewhat over time. For instance, in the 1990s, there was the global change, driven by the forces of information and communication technology (Crossley and Jarvis 2000), which led widespread teaching of computing in schools as IT began to play a more significant role in school education (Leithwood et al. 1999), resulting in a series of comparative IT studies, such as Computers in Education Study (COMPED) with two-phase conducted in 1989 and 1992, and the Second Information Technology in Education Study Module1 (SITES M1) in 1998-1999 and SITES-M2 (2001), and so on.

In recent years, IEA’s cycle of studies in basic school subjects regarding education system performance assessment has been identified with continuous increases in interest from increasing number of countries. For instance, over 60 education systems joined the third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2011 and more than 45 education systems took part in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Martins and Mullis 2013).

Besides IEA, PISA since 2000 has attracted most international interest along with considerable criticism. It is a triennial international survey to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge (e.g. in mathematics, reading literacy, and science) studies, particularly students near the end of compulsory education. It is argued that PISA results provide a picture of school systems’ performance in each participant country, and people are able to see differences via these comparisons. PISA data can boost or shame countries for their performances in those three domains and permits ‘fair’ comparisons, according to OECD who administrate the tests (OECD 2013). However, small shifts in relative position often lead to unwarranted political interest and reaction. For instance, the Finland school system has been criticized because of the country’s drop from 6th best in mathematics in 2009 to 12th three years later. An earlier example is Japan’s PISA ranking dropping down, which brought public panic over Japan’s decline in international education standing (Zhao 2014). This is strongly defended against by some, such as Sahlberg (2013) who argue that the global league tables should not be used for such purposes. However, as he
also pointed out the common way to report PISA results encourage such simplistic comparisons.

As Sahlberg (2013, online source) commented, it seems PISA ‘attains more criticism from the later launch of the fifth PISA results due to the issues with cross-country comparison and the dominant role that PISA plays in determining priorities for national education policies’. Zhao (2014) agreed that many Western nations, particularly the USA, England, and Australia, have not scored well and but also whether this is helpful information. Governments seem to start copying other systems instead of developing their own systems. Zhao (2014) even criticized that PISA hinders Asian education systems from introducing reforms (e.g. in China) that can cultivate a more diverse, creative, and entrepreneurial citizenry. In other words, as he expressed:

‘the PISA does not only have the effect of discouraging East Asian systems from abandoning their old paradigm, but also luring Western countries to fix the old paradigm by shaming them for not having been as perfectly obsolete as their Asian counterparts.’ (Zhao 2014, online source)

Other criticism is spearheaded at the test questions and the data analysis model. It is argued that there are several shortcomings of PISA itself. For instance, Stewart (2013) commented that, first of all, it only tests students every three years, and is not a longitudinal study, so it fails to see the progress of students. It is like a ‘black box’, so people know little about what goes on inside in terms of the validity of findings. In terms of the questions design, there is considerable doubt how these can be standardised across so many languages. For instance, not all questions are actually focused on reading or maths (Alach 2013. One of the strongest criticisms (from Keriner) relates to flaws in methodology in terms of variation in questions in different countries and data interpretation with ‘dodgy questions’ (e.g., Stewart 2013; Downs 2013; Wilby 2013). They all pointed out that the Rasch model chosen to analyse data actually is the ‘wrong’ model. The criticisms of the analysis model was based on the reality that PISA offer questions with ‘different degrees of difficulty in different countries’, which means that every country has different questions tested with their students. However, the Rasch model is mostly suitable in perfect/equal conditions when ‘students of the similar ability answer the same questions’ (Stewart 2013). Those critics raise further questions about the criteria PISA use to assign appropriate questions to students in each country.

OECD seems reluctant to accept that PISA is flawed and needs be improved to achieve better validity. Nevertheless, it can act as a mirror to help a particular country reflect on the
performance of its own educational system, although it often causes ‘a war of words’. For instance, Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg (2013) reviewed PISA data and commented that Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM) is built on wrong premises observing that choice, competition and accountability have spread like a ‘virus’ and “infect” education systems as they travel around the world (e.g. the USA, England, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden and Chile)’. Of course, the issue of the autonomy of teachers is not just prompted by PISA results but has been around for some time. As Darling-Hammond (2010) argued, the USA has led learning orientated schooling, but has been undermined by testing and has failed to redesign a system to support a 21st-century schooling enterprise (Cited in Anderson 2013). The ‘war of words’ arising from PISA implies that PISA data is not sufficient on its own to identify problems, either education systems or to indicate ‘solutions’. Notwithstanding, as Anderson (2013) argued that ‘perhaps the most meaningful lesson that PISA offers is that there is a way forward, though the path requires political courage’ (p.376).

PISA results, of course, have had some positive impact on the direction of education improvement. We can start by looking at why some countries do well in PISA, or what they do well at. For instance, it is revealed that equity in learning opportunities and outcomes is vital to successful school performance, such as in Shanghai where top international PISA rankings in Maths and Science were achieved with a small gap in students’ performance both in 2009 and 2012 (NCSL 2013). This pushes the politicians, in for example, the USA and UK governments to make changes and reforms to improve the education of poor and disadvantaged students, though as yet there is little evidence of real improvement in these countries (Boyd 2000). PISA results can also encourage school systems to consider their responsibility for dealing with the issues of diversity, unity, citizenship and social values in multicultural societies.

Obviously, international assessment tool bring advantages and disadvantages, but international comparisons are likely to remain a feature of the landscape. The OECD Secretary-General concluded that PISA is ‘a powerful tool that countries and economies can use to fine-tune their education policies’ (OECD 2014, p.4), despite it raises any questions from critics who are sceptical of international tests and ask exactly how international comparisons help countries and economies to adjust educational systems. Nevertheless, arguments about international comparisons indicate that only flexible and resilient standards set for teaching and testing is likely to help improve school performance. Simultaneously,
collaboration between the school, teachers, and other agencies to improve organizational efficiency is equally important, and sometimes competition damages cooperation.

It is evident that international comparisons are now a feature of education contexts and exert increasing influence on national policies. Although there is little evidence to link the best results in international tests (e.g. PISA) to national economic development, the pressure of international comparisons on governments to examine the performance of their own systems is intense. Inevitably, this filters down to school level and schools are placed under great pressure over student progress, particularly in numeracy and literacy, which form the core of international testing systems. This in turn places further pressure on school leaders to maximise test student test scores, perhaps even at the expense of wider educational goals that might be more appropriate for particular students. Thus accountability and testing systems both pressure school leaders to focus on the measurable outcomes of schooling, rather than the broader purposes of education.

**Teacher quality and Teacher training**

The quality of teachers has been identified as another essential factor to achieve successful reforms in a wide range of countries, such as in the USA (Stronge and Tucker 2003; Stronge 2006). Consequently there has been recent interest in investigating possible impacts of teacher professional development on school improvement, leading both researchers and policymakers to focus on understanding the effectiveness of increasing teacher quality in improving the quality of students learning (Opfer et al. 2011). For instance, in the UK, Gunter (2008) reviewed the reforms in the Thatcher and Blair governments which both focused on the improvement of the professionalism of teachers. This focused resulted, among other initiatives, in National Standards for teachers, and subsequently for teacher training, both ‘revised’ a number of times. Also, Hoyle and Wallace (2007) reviewed educational reform over the past 30 years in the UK. They concluded that more temperate leadership and management is necessary with less managerial activity but with a primary focus on supporting teacher development for local improvement. As they pointed out ‘the endemic irony of a gap between intention and outcome has been exacerbated by the particular strategy of reform that has been adopted’ (p.10). Temperate leadership and management should train and support teachers endeavour to improve pupils’ learning in the contingent circumstances of their individual classrooms. But the demand for improvement teacher quality has spread all over the world. For instance, Levinson et al. (2013) describe
“Mexico’s mass expansion of secondary-level vocational education in the 1970s and 1980s and identified that this demanded increasing numbers of high qualified teachers. Therefore, ‘teacher quality and teacher training have moved to the top of the secondary reform agenda, and most reform efforts have attempted to engage teachers as participants in policy formation rather than as mere executor of prescript curriculum’”. (p.3)

Teaching and learning quality has been brought to the cusp of national initiatives, and is underlined in national curriculum frameworks in many countries. Hargreaves (2010) argued that highly qualified teachers are crucial to ensure high performance. By reviewing literature on teacher professional development and teaching and teacher education over ten years, key themes emerge. These include developing “teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth” (Avalos 2011, p.20). Hargreaves (2010) also argued that teachers can only learn if they can go outside of their working surroundings. Meanwhile, he stressed that it is necessary to provide supporting conditions and leave some space for their creativity rather than to prescribe and standardize. Similarly, James and McCormick (2009) pointed out that a key challenge for leadership is to ‘create’ the space and climate for school staff to reflect on and share aspects of their practice, and they found that this helps teachers to apply teaching approaches that increase learning autonomy and make learning explicit, but reduce focus on performance. Teaching practices encouraged are associated with formative assessment or ‘assessment for learning’ (AfL) (ARG 1999). Quite a few researchers (eg.Hung and Yeh 2013; Borko et al. 2010) point out that it is necessary to improve the quality of teacher professional development by developing a model situated in practice and focused on students’ learning. Broko et al. (2010) suggested it should provide ‘a long-term, inquiry or learner-centred structure that supports teachers as they collaboratively develop the professional knowledge they need to use in their own contexts’ (p.548).

However, it is argued that the issue of teacher development arising from policy environments that are centred on ‘standardized examination results and restricted notions of teacher accountability’ restrict opportunities for teachers to ‘renew imaginatively their teaching through collaborative work amongst themselves’ (Avalos 2011). Sequentially, the pressure for higher examination scores pushes teachers to make all efforts to achieve higher student attainment in the areas targeted by their education systems, which raise the previous arguments on the drawbacks of testing systems that dominate schooling.

In summary, recognition of the importance of a high quality teaching force for student performance is widespread, and many countries have endeavoured to strengthen their teacher
preparation and development systems. However, some warn that efforts have focused too much around improving teaching for test outcomes, rather than focusing on students’ broader needs or even the teachers’ own development needs. In this context, it has become increasingly important that school leaders continue to encourage their teachers to develop all of their skills, and not simply to ‘teach to the test’. Schools cannot develop unless teachers are developing too, and development involves risks. It is the school leaders that must provide an environment that encourages teachers to experiment.

**National curriculum and Testing: emphasis on learning**

‘Learning’ has increasingly replaced teaching as the main focus of attention in improvement. It is argued that for school pupils learning how to learn (LHTL) promotes learning (James and McCormick 2009). According to them, with increasing focus on developing capability of learning, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is an emphasis on the use of ‘assessment for learning’ (AfL) which is based on the idea that ‘students will improve most if they understand the aim of their learning, where they are in relation to this aim and how they can achieve the aim (or close the gap in their knowledge)’ (NFER, EURYDICE 2009, p.2). Generally, as the most governments claim, the feedback attained from assessment will be used to improve the learning. This has been broadly applied with various forms of international tests as aforementioned, such as PISA, IEA, TIMSS, PIRLS, mostly for lower grades of pupils.

To achieve learning goals, what many governments do is to set new standards as part of the reforms. Leithwood et al. (2002) reviewed some examples of large-scale reforms, which were often accompanied by developing new curriculum frameworks. To some extent, these revisions reflect changing political and educational influences. For instance, in the UK, the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 introduced explicitly ‘stated standards for schools and students, public accountability local school management, and a degree of parental choice in selecting schools for children through the National Curriculum and, alongside it, a set of assessment arrangements’ (NFER, EURYDICE 2009, p.5). However, with the increasing criticism of the curriculum, a series of changes have taken place in terms of content, test materials and assessment aims. Mounting emphasis is put on school accountability and summative assessment to meet individual needs, such as the Making Good Progress (MPG) in 2007/2008, which aims to provide a best fit for students’ learning (Ibid 2009).
Besides new approaches to learning and assessment, there has been an influential learning theory based on ‘learning through doing’, which pushes governments to change frameworks or structures of curriculum. One major change in curriculum is that increasing attention is paid to progressive integrated curricular development with a focus on real life problems and issues, rather than discipline-based content, for example in the USA (Lam et al. 2013). According to Lam with his colleagues’ research, this trend is also witnessed in similar shifts in schools in Asian countries, such as China, which have adopted integrated curricula to develop the learning of ‘21st century skills’ such as problem solving and its higher relevance to students’ daily life. This shows that governments may be willing to challenge a high-stake examination culture and a long history of discipline-based school curriculum, by introducing, for example, integrated Science or integrated vocational subjects.

Of course, as Lam & Chan (2011) pointed out, the integrated curriculum has both critics and advocates, along with series of implementation problems of integrated programmes. For instance, it is criticized that it fails to develop students’ abilities to master subject-based content because disciplinary lines are blurred (Lam et al. 2013). But is this better than the integration of cross-disciplinary in a systematic and logical way which would be useful to develop students’ abilities in solving problems from multi-perspectives and gaining knowledge through the learning process in a productive way? On that respect, it may not be difficult to understand what Davies & Bansel (2007) have argued: that the tenacity of subject-based curricula has been reinforced by global trends towards neo-liberalism, while McKenna & Richardson (2009) explained that neo-liberalism is ‘embodied in standards-based reforms, high-stake examinations, accountability and ranking, and discourses focused on excellence’ (cited in Lam et al. 2013, p.25).

Learning has been identified and increasingly emphasized in the national curriculum frameworks in many countries. For instance, school improvement and curriculum development has been at the centre of attention over the past 25 years in the UK (Gunter 2008 p.262). During the 1980s and early 1990s, disadvantaged pupils’ achievement was low, and increasing accountability was applied through the National Curriculum and the National Assessment scheme. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) was established with powers to inspect school performance. The National Curriculum aims to provide the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens and provide ‘an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons to promote the
Similarly, the Queensland Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Framework in Australia (QCARF), seeks to maximize the capacity of all students to achieve the Queensland Curriculum. The QCARF set out essential learning and standards and ‘monitor and assess individual student achievement and evaluate it against statewide and national standards, regularly using collaborative process to support teachers in making consistent judgments’ (Queensland Government 2008, P.3). In Mexico, significant reform in secondary education was demanded by the early 1990s. In 1993, along with new aims for educational outcome improvements, Levinson et al. (2013) commented that the following normal school reforms were identified with ambitious and comprehensive objectives with a greater emphasis on ‘subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and pedagogical practice, all at once’. Although Levinson with his colleagues think Mexico set quite ambitious targets, it can be identified that the government was keen to improve learning outcomes. This strong will is also represented in New Zealand’s national curriculum, which specified learning outcomes requiring that students be measured against (Leithwood et al. 2002).

So within a prescribed national curriculum, most often the focus is moving to the student learning experiences and identifying approaches to ensure students engagement in worthwhile learning activities in classrooms and schools (Grundy 2002). This has also led student assessment changes in some instances with a tendency to evaluate students’ learning progress in a formative way though this shift is less marked. Such assessment is more open with a focus on students’ comprehensive capacities rather than mere test scores. For instance, in England, teacher assessment for students’ performance covers student attainment, progress and even class observations (James and McCormick 2009). But still, it was the case that national tests failed to provide multi-choice items, or assess the major constructs in subjects like mathematics. The National Council of Teachers of mathematics (NCTM) in the USA have appealed for a national assessment process that is open, visible, and accessible to everyone (Smith and Smith 2010), and teachers in many countries would support this idea.

To sum up, education has changed dramatically with continuous reforms over decades. Sadly, many reforms have failed to achieve their targets, such as No Child Left Behind, the failure of which Fullan (2009) attributes to financial support constraints, a test-oriented teaching culture, and the lack of teacher commitment. Fullan has also summarized the aspects of
education he feels need to be improved if future reforms are to have more success in the USA. These include addressing the lower qualification level of teachers in the USA reported by OECD, improving the quality of those recruited into teaching, and placing greater emphasis on teachers’ capacity to work with less advantaged students to close the gap in student achievement. In the meanwhile, education goals and assessment processes should be made more transparent to the public, in terms of both results and practices. This view echoes Stringfield (2002), who pointed to two fundamental challenges facing western education systems: to develop a better product or service and to bring that higher quality product or service to scale. Crucially, leadership quality and the effectiveness of leadership development programmes were identified as the key variables to improvement if the above requirements are to be met.

1.2 The changing role of School Leaders and School Leadership development in the West

Evidently, these international educational reforms along with those common trends identified have had a significant impact on every aspect of schools. Among these, the role of school leaders has been changing quite rapidly. The evolving role of school leaders tends to be a significant impetus for producing National Standards for the role of headteachers/principals across many countries. Such standards attempt to describe the competencies that school leaders require in order to fulfil the new expectations placed on them. These competencies are in turn derived from the theories of educational leadership that have emerged and gained currency since the early 1990s, when the reform movement gathered pace. Since that time a bewildering range of books on school leadership have been, and indeed continue to be published. However, while slightly different terms are used, and each year brings a new angle, the same three fundamental perspectives tend to recur in various disguises. In this section, I will consider how the principals’ role has been changing and how school leadership development has been shaped in the West by these major theoretical approaches, namely transformational leadership, instructional leadership and distributed leadership. Then I will briefly discuss leading change, as change seems to have become the only thing that school leaders can predict with any confidence.

The changing role of principals

Mounting evidence shows the remarkable changes in educational contexts, and subsequently, principals’ roles have changed as well. It is pointed out that the role of school principals has evolved over the past half-century (Alberta Education 2009). Since the 1980s, the principals...
have had to take on various roles such as a buildings manager, administrator, politician, change agent, and instructional leader (Smith and Andrews 1989). Most recently, the role of school principals has been going through a further period of change in many countries, as education reforms are placing more emphasis on school performance and increasing school leader pressures and accountability (Duke et al. 2003).

At the same time, education reforms and, in many systems, increased delegation to school leaders, have greatly increased principals’ responsibilities and made the job much more complicated. Educational reform has been widespread large in scale. From America (Baltimore, USA) to Europe (Birmingham, England) to Asia (Beijing, China), huge changes in the way teaching is approached and school management is discharged have taken place at unprecedented pace (Stringfield 2002). The role of principals or school leaders is changing all over the world, becoming more complicated. The pace of change is also a problem with many principals unsure about what to do; and new principals struggling with old issues, while experienced principals are unable to copy their past experience since new circumstances mean this may no longer be relevant (Southworth 1998). As Ordonez (2007) argued, this is partly due to increasingly heterogeneous groups produced by the forces of globalization and increasingly flexible work objectives arising from fast changing circumstances, which makes the school leader’s role more challenging and requires them to re-orient their thinking and behaviour in certain areas. So the role of principals has become more complex. Bottery (2001) stressed that it is necessary to contextualise it in specific situations to provide an accurate and explicit definition of the roles and responsibilities of school principals. However, Weindling and Earley (1986) argued that there were not sufficient studies investigating the role of the principals in times of change. The current research has moved on to how leaders manage the change and complexity they face (Harris 2003). It reminds us that there is more attention to be given to the role of principals as it is changing than we have perhaps realised, especially in China.

National standards

As the role of principals has been changing, governments have endeavoured to make explicit the roles of principals in terms of their responsibilities, skills or actions requirements. Therefore, the national standards for school principals become important.

It is clear that most governments hold the rationale that successful leadership can play a significant role in improving student learning (Leithwood et al. 2004). To improve student-
learning outcomes, governments tend to put increasing accountability on school leadership. To ensure principals can provide professional leadership and management for a school, which is also set as the core role of school principals, governments have made significant efforts to set national standards for principals. Another purpose of such standards is to provide guidelines for their preparation for their professional development and learning. Learning is centred on national standards, such as in England, Alberta and Ontario (e.g. NCSL 2004; Alberta Education 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education 2007). For instance, the Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principal set by British Columbia is considered as the major tool for personal growth plans for self-appraisal on their current strengths and areas (BCPVPA Standards Committee 2013).

Looking at details of national standards, for instance, in England the NCSL, on behalf of the government has revised *National Standards for Headteachers* covering six key areas. These areas are strung together address the central elements in the role of principals, which include the responsibility for setting the vision of the school, raising the quality of learning and teaching, effective relationships and communication, effective organisation and management, securing accountability and community development. The standards emphasize that a vision for the school is the important starting point for effective principals. At the same time, the emphasis is firmly linked to the quality of education the school provides, so leading teaching and promoting learning and student achievement are the major responsibilities and everything else is set around these key priorities (DfES 2007).

Interestingly, international patterns can be identified here as well. Sets of Standards are generally similar to other countries’. There is a consensus on the importance of effective leadership in school improvement and a clear focus on quality of teaching and learning. If one looks at Canada, like Alberta Province, the Principal Quality Practice Guideline (PQPG) emphasizes one of the significant role of principals is managing teaching and learning within the school to ensure students have the best possible opportunities to learn (*Alberta Education* 2009). The Alberta PQPG set seven leadership dimensions that all school leaders are expected to commit to. These seven dimensions are quite similar to standards for principals in England, which embraces fostering effective relationships, embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, developing and facilitating leadership, managing school operations and resources and understanding and responding to the larger societal context. Those key areas can also be identified in Ontario leadership framework for principals and vice principals (2007). Similarly, in Australia, the Australian
Professional Standard for Principals (Aitsl, 2013) has been developed to define the role of the principal and unify the professional standards nationally and improve the quality of school leadership in improving learning outcomes. It also proposes several key leadership requirements particularly in the role of the principal, encompassing leading and teaching, developing self and others, leading the management of the school and engaging and working with the community. But one of the requirements that seems particular is specifying leading improvement, innovation and change, which is quite new compared to Standards in other areas or countries.

These standards have attracted both positive and negative comments. For instance, in England, as Orchard (2010) pointed out, on the one hand, they are helpful for the school governors and local education authorities, identifying expectations on principals through these standards, and also it assists with training programmes. On the other hand, some critics have commented on the ambiguous use of ‘effectiveness’, and on the validity of the key outcomes identified. And even there are arguments that standards are not developed for principals, but for ‘school leaders’- whoever these might be (Orchard 2010). This difference between the traditional view of the principal as the person in charge of the school and the more recent conceptualisation of ‘school leadership’ has been commented on often in the literature (West and Ainscow 1991; MacBeath et al. 2003; Spillane et al. 2004).

Again, these critical comments back up that change becomes the new certainty. Now changes seem to get little time to be put into place before the next change comes along. Notwithstanding, these Standards are intended to make explicitly the role of principals and improve the quality of school leadership thereby improving learning outcomes. School leadership effective has attained much attention.

**School leadership development in the West**

Since the 1980s, when education reforms placed more emphasis in the West on the school principal’s role, interest in leader effectiveness in schools has grown rapidly. Prior to the 1990s, there is little research on approaches to leadership in education. Leithwood et al. (1999) specified that positive educational change should be accompanied with effective educational leadership. Along with varying emphasis on educational reforms, fashions in leadership have emerged and shifted from one to another at certain time, but major areas of interest include transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership and moral/ethical leadership.
The first phenomenon of school leadership development was the change in education that the delegated power /autonomy to the school from the central government. This enabled school leaders to manage schools at the local level. This was called school self management (a term mainly used in Europe, especially in UK) or school-based management (SBM, a term used in some countries like the United States), which attained many researchers’ attention across the world.

According to Caldwell and Spinks (1998), since the early 1990s, changes have taken place in education system globally and decentralization has been spread out into all aspects of education, which influence curriculum, tests and budget at school levels. In England, the 1988 Education Reform Act was passed, giving all schools control over their own budgets. Canada, as a pioneer of school self-management, even went further to have a system with empowerment at the student level. Caldwell and Spinks (1988) described school self-management as a shift in power from central governments to schools. The authority decentralization is limited to administrative rather than political power. However, the school has power to control finance, curriculum, personnel and facilities but not national policies. They defined school self-management as ‘a school in a system of education where there has been significant and consistent decentralisation to the school level of authority to make decisions related to the allocation of resources’ (1992, p.4). Caldwell and Spinks (1998) clarified that a self-managing school is not a completely autonomous school, but a school that can control the allocation of resources within ‘a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities’ (p.5). This is also supported by Cheung and Cheng (1996) who argued that self-management in schools happens at the group level and the individual staff level as well as the school level.

Notwithstanding, decentralization and decision-making are the heart of school-based or site-based management (SBM) (Leithwood and Menzies 1998), though it is not a simple process in terms of shared decision-making, as leaders may fear losing power and teachers may not be ready for it. However, if the government provides clearer guidance under school self-management the school is empowered with mandates and resources, and teachers are encouraged and supported to make decisions, these changes will not backfire on them (Jenni 1991). Similarly, Davies (1976) argued that power is an expandable rather than a limited commodity. It will increase the impact and influence of top school administrators and elected school boards, if decentralized decision-making is based on the criterion of collaboration. Simultaneously, those approaches or changes to school management have made the role of
principals more complicated, as principals used to focus more on teaching and learning but now they have to take on more administrative work. Their roles have been spread out to embrace budget plans, look after facilities, and so on. Nevertheless, the development and the theory of school self-management have played a significant role in the development of school leadership.

The emphasis on transformational leadership

Education systems have become much more complex as reforms have spread, but there is clearly no ready-made or universally applicable leadership model, which can be used as a panacea in all situations. This may be why Leithwood et al. (1999) criticized that much of the research on leadership is still largely influenced by approaches that emphasize technical and replicable approaches to leadership. Instead, they propose that rather than fostering fixed approaches in changing educational systems, effectively managing how people feel and tapping into intrinsic motivation are the essential tools for leadership effectiveness. It is a people-centred activity, not a technical function. This is where so-called transformational leadership becomes relevant.

Since the 1960s, the debate between transactional and transformational leadership has featured often in the topic of educational leadership. Transactional leadership has been given more attention until the early 1980s when ‘school management’ was a hot topic. Transformational leadership has attained researchers’ attention in the late 1980s (Leithwood et al. 1999), as emphasis moved to leading rather than managing schools. These two types of leadership also attained many researchers’ attention as a controversial topic in the field. For instance, Letihwood et al. (1999) reviewed Burns’(1978) leadership and found that the transformational and transactional practices as opposite ends of the leadership continuum. On the contrary, Bass argued transactional and transformational forms of leadership built on one another. Although they present a different view on these two types of leadership, most writers agree that transactional and transformational leadership have different strengths. Hopkins (2003) argued that transactional leadership is considered as the most suitable approach to a static systems and communities, as the transactional leader’s priority is to protect and manage the organizational structure and process. While transformational leadership emerged as an alternative approach to effective leadership to take account into the complex and dynamic changes taking place, such as cultural changes (Harris et al. 2003). Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) showed a preference for transformational leadership and insisted that it has been
considered as the more appropriate model, more congruent with the needs of cultural change. To the extent that transformational leadership is applied to change the context and challenge the status quo, this type of leadership seems more compelling in a rapidly developing educational environment.

Therefore, transformational leadership theory has been quite influential, especially in the 1990s. It is seen as a leadership style which enhances the motivation, morale and performance of followers and also leads to positive changes in the school culture. Leithwood (1992) defines transformational leadership with a central focus on the commitments and capacities of organizational members. In addition, leadership is combined with management in education, the same as in business. Neither of them can stand alone to improve performance. Sergiovanni (2001) also agrees with the combination, and argues that it can augment leadership effectiveness. It is hard to separate influence from power. The school leaders are required to be able as both academic experts and non-academic entrepreneurs. On the one hand, their role is to lead teaching and learning to improve students’ performance. On the other hand, they need to know about marketing and how to advertise their schools to attract parents and students. School leadership focuses on the impact of leadership on students and teachers and organizations. By reviewing transformational leadership research between 1996 and 2005, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) found that this type of leadership had uniformly positive effects on characteristics of students. Also, transformational school leaders cared about teachers’ job satisfaction, enhanced teacher practices, and pedagogical quality, and so on, and the results showed positive relationship between transformational leadership and those variables. However transformational leadership was criticized that it was still in a development stage, and they strongly suggested increased theoretically informed evidence from practice needed to inform leadership thinking.

What do empirical studies tell us about transformational leadership? In Leithwood and Jantzi’s (1990) study, collaboration and problem solving are emphasized in transformational leadership and it is also important to investigate how transformational leaders look for work patterns with teachers to develop better solutions to problems. They also pointed out that, in the theory of transformational leadership, differences are appreciated as resources for school effectiveness, as long as they can be drawn together. Building collaborative culture in schools is essential for transformational leaders to improve school effectiveness. In that sense, Transformational leaders need flexible strategies and to leave space for improvement and ‘creation’. However, it was pointed out that governments set centralised/controlled education
objectives that reduced the possibility of realising a genuinely transformational education and leadership (Bottery 2001, p.216).

To evaluate transformational leadership, several aspects needed to be addressed. First of all, in contingency theories, everything ‘depends’. In addition, the government policy should be made to provide enough space for leadership practice to develop in different situations, while it was pointed out that governments prefer centralised/controlled education goals reduced the possibility of realising a genuinely transformational education and leadership (Bottery 2001). Transformational leadership is suitable to relatively unstable situations where leaders need to challenge the status quo and make changes. Secondly, according to the core theories of transformational leadership, diversity is a resource and collaboration is required. This may need leaders to focus on relationships between them and their staff members. It is argued that transformational leadership is imbued with characteristics of moral leadership due to leaders caring for followers’ needs (Burns 1978). It is not surprising to see that moral aspects of leadership are highly emphasized in education. As Sergiovanni (2001) also stressed ‘whenever there is an unequal distribution of power between two people, the relationship becomes a moral one’ (p.13). Because of those significant features of transformational leadership, Hallinger (2005) commented that transformational notions have been found in many effective school-based leaders. To an extent, school leadership is comparatively complicated due to the complexity of the world of schooling and chaotic leadership in the early stage of school leadership development. It may remind us that the contextual or contingent characteristic of school leadership needs be considered.

Day and his colleague’s refer to leadership practices intended to deal with this complexity as post-transformational leadership (Day et al. 2000). This extends the transformational approach to managing some of the dilemmas and tensions that will inevitably be encountered, and emphasizes that leadership action should be constant and consistent in these circumstances. In addition, of course, leadership effectiveness depends on situations. Approaches that work perfectly well in one situation may be completely ineffective in another, as no single leadership style can serve in all circumstances (Yukl 2006). A combination of authoritative direction, democratic empowerment, affinitive bonding and coaching are all needed (Fullan 2001). The attraction of transitional leadership theory is that it is sufficiently elastic to accommodate all these behaviours as effective in their proper place.
**Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership is one of the oldest, school specific leadership theories, and has been in and out of fashion several times since its original application in the effective schools movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Horng and Loeb 2010). Hallinger (2003) reflected that the two most effective leadership approaches suitable for principals involved instructional leadership and transformational leadership and that effectiveness or suitability of either is identified with reference to the situation at hand. The concept of *instructional leadership* has attained both researchers’ and school leaders’ attention since the late of 1970s, and it has been particularly influential in the USA (Leithwood 1992 and Hallinger 1992a). In this approach, emphasis is given to the principal as a leader of teaching, learning and classroom practice (Heck and Marcoulides 1993) and research suggests it as an essential basis for leader authority; briefly the improvement of teaching and learning in schools requires school leaders who are themselves experienced classroom practitioners whose expertise is acknowledged by their staff (Hallinger and Lee 2013). Many research studies have centred on the principal as an instructional leader, who is mainly concerned with the effects of classroom practices on students, and assume that the principal plays a significant role in promoting instructional improvement (Heck and Marcoulides 1993). Such instructional leaders are considered as a powerful force, that can change their school and improve their school effectiveness.

The studies of instructional leaders have been mainly in the United States, where a handful of evidence-based research studies have been conducted (e.g. Leithwood 1992, Leithwood and Jantzi 2006, Hallinger 1992a, Smith and Andrews 1989, Heck and Marcoulides 1993), perhaps because USA is a system where there is less devolution to schools. Hallinger (2005) added that instructional leadership has been overwhelmed by the trend of school restructuring and transformational leadership during the mid-1990s, but it is back in the public’s attention, since the mounting emphasis on accountability in the twenty-first century.

The concept of instructional leadership can be tracked to the USA in the mid-20th century. Edmonds is considered as the pioneer who developed instructional leadership based on the ‘instructional effective elementary school’ (Edmonds 1979). According to researchers such as Hallinger (1992), and Leithwood & Montgomery (1982), and Hallinger (1992, p.37) argued that Edmonds’ theories that ‘instructional leadership is a characteristic of instructionally-effective schools’ gave ‘impetus to all for principals to engage more actively in leading the school’s instructional programme and in focusing staff attention on student outcomes’.
Learning seems to be the chief concern of instructional leaders (see Hallinger and Lee (2013), Hallinger and Murphy 1985). The Far West Lab Instructional Management Framework (FWIMF), as Hallinger and Lee (2013) argued, underpinned the exercise of principal leadership within the context of the school. This model indicates several variables (i.e. community context, institutional context, personal characteristics) that shape principal leadership practice, and principal leadership has impact on student outcomes through mediating variables (for example, learning climate and instructional organization). Another conceptual framework is PIMRS Model of Instructional Leadership which was proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) with three dimensions for defining and measuring the instructional leadership role of the principals: defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger and Lee 2013, p.10). These two modes both emphasize the importance of creating a learning climate, along with instructional management. Although neither explains how the principal has direct impact on student outcomes, nevertheless the role of the principal towards learning climate establishment seems essential to students’ outcomes, and thereby they are closely related indirectly.

In instructional leadership, such as in Edmonds’ (1979) research, some key themes like equity and moral integrity can be identified as vital aspects of instructional leadership. Equity in educational opportunity was considered as a key aim of school improvement, so his concern was mainly given to poor pupils who could get additional instructional support. He defined effective schools as the meaning of effective teaching and instructionally effective for poor children. In this sense, it is not difficult to understand that instructional effectiveness is at the heart of school effectiveness, and sequentially leaders who play a key role in school effectiveness are described as instructional leaders. Equity underpins the theory of instructional leadership. Another influential theory of instructional leadership is elaborated by Smith and Andrews (1989). They proposed a central theme in instructional leadership, which instructional leaders should “have great moral, ethical, and legal obligations to create good schools-places where all children can achieve their full potential and receive an equal opportunity to succeed in society” (Smith and Andrews 1989, p.V). In addition, they identified four key qualities of instructional leaders, as resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence.

Among the qualities of leaders, a large number of researchers agree that the description of role of instructional leadership is that the instructional principal must have high expectations...
of both teachers and students (Hallinger 1992a; Hallinger and Murphy 1985; Leithwood and Montgomery 1982; Edmonds 1979). Instructional leaders intervene to bring about instructional improvements directly with teachers through supervising and evaluating instruction and coordinating the school’s curriculum. As Leithwood et al. (1999) explained, instructional leaders assume that the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities with students directly influence student development, so their purpose is to enhance effectiveness of teachers’ classroom practices to increase the growth of students.

Overall, the movement of instructional leadership during the 1980s was not as optimistic as observers might wish. It is argued that traditional definition of instructional leadership was narrowly focused on curriculum and classroom instruction and time spent on day-to-day instructional activities is often negatively related to teacher and parent assessments (Horng and Loeb 2010). Therefore it was suggested that school leaders should rather lead organizational management for instructional improvement to increase student learning outcomes.

Hallinger (1992) suggested that there are a number of reasons that show constraints on the implementation of the instructional leadership practice. First, principals often find it difficult to assume their instructional responsibilities in a serious manner, due to the gap between their expectations and the reality of administrative management, and they are unable to put instructional leadership theory into practice at the school site. Second, many principals, especially those who have spanned the different eras of the ‘school managers’ and ‘instructional leaders’ did not recognize the priority of classroom practice, so the ambiguity of goals and the low degree of importance attached reduced interest in classroom-based activity. It is true that school principals have to be tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity in their work, but the lack of a common set of school goals makes their job more difficult and inefficient. This seems to be at odds with what Hallinger and Murphy (1985) earlier stated, that instructionally effective schools often have clearly defined goals that focus on student achievement.

A third factor is that in the USA decision-making by school principals was not substantial, as district supervisors retained authority over many aspects of school life. Moreover, the movement of restructuring schools during the rigidly prescriptive reforms of the early 1980s failed to meet the desired ends for students, which made principals feel even more ambiguous about their work. Hallinger (2005) explained that one constraint on the development of useful
school leadership theory arises from the complexity of school organizations, which has often been glossed over, in reporting findings for policy and training purposes. This implies that instructional leadership might be the ‘best’ idea available, rather than the best basis for school leadership, but it has remained a popular approach in the absence of more compelling descriptions of what might constitute effective principal behaviour.

Nevertheless, there are positive impacts of instructional leadership. For instance, instructional leadership brings a belief that school development needs to be improved along with teacher and student development, so the concept of capacity-building is related to the development of the self and to adding value. It has improved both teachers and students’ feelings of professional self worth. In this sense, it could be argued that instructional leadership goes beyond the bureaucratic and entrepreneurial leadership theories that underpin much of leadership practice (Harris 2003), as it stresses the importance of individual development and value. Perhaps it is this that has enabled instructional leadership to maintain its significance in the theory and practice of school leadership.

**Distributed leadership**

As outlined above, since the 1980s, leadership practice has increasingly been seen as an essential dimension of effective schooling and more recently researchers have shifted their perspectives from studying leadership influence on goals and structures onto practice, and have focused on what it is leaders do that makes a difference (Heck and Hallinger 1999). As the leadership within the school has come under more scrutiny, so-called *distributed leadership* theory has emerged as it was acknowledged that the individual capacity of the school principal is limited, and that in reality a range of staff members participate in the leadership process. This approach, it is argued, makes good use of multiple levels of leadership to fulfil tasks at different levels (Spillane 2006). While distributed leadership has rapidly become a popular concept with educational leadership writers and trainers, it is not clear what, if anything, is new here. As West (2010) points out, it seems strange that it took so long for schools to realise that organisations that are externally accountable for their actions generally need to create internal accountability patterns that ensure there is a clear accountability chain inside the organisation too. Nor is it clear why, having made this discovery, the description of this principle- creating an accountability chain through the delegation of authority- which has been exhaustively explained in mainstream management
literature over the past century—needed the term *distributed leadership* attached to it. Nevertheless, this simple and rather obvious principle of organisational structure has been taken up enthusiastically by the international education community.

Gronn (2002) commented that distributed leadership appears to be a movement with growing influence since the early 1990s. Especially where there are increasing arguments about the limited autonomy of teachers managing and leading teaching, the voice of devolution has become stronger (e.g. Levinson et al. 2013 and Goldspink 2007). Therefore, it is even argued that distributed leadership is not a new leadership style but it is mainly to spread responsibility and authority. For instance, instructional authority can be delegated to other people who are able to take charge of it, and this is what titles like ‘subject director’ means (Harris 2003). According to Gronn (2002), collecting evidence about advocacy of distributed leadership, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Elmore (2002), it is believed that distribution of the authority to lead is one of the key factors in successful school reforms and institutional re-design.

In terms of the concept of distributed leadership, it has been invested with a variety of meanings, but there is no easy way to find an explicit definitions rather there are similar but different notions (Bennett et al. 2003, Spillane et al. 2004). Nevertheless, it does not mean that it is impossible to capture central themes. According to Gronn (2002), Gibb (1954) started the claim that leadership can be a function of a group and he believed that school leadership should be shared by a group, necessarily passing from one to another as the situation changes. It is not difficult to develop a picture of ‘the group qualities’ rather than ‘individuals’ and this is stressed in distributed leadership. Later, Gibb (1968) strongly emphasized that effective leadership embraced a number of the qualities of the followers. Gibb’s definition of distributed leadership is taken as the departure point to define this type of leadership in a number of different versions (also see Gronn 2000). Spillane (2006, p.26) pointed out that distributed leadership offers ‘a framework for thinking about leadership in an alternative way and defined its practice as constructed in the interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations’.

Gronn (2000) and Spillane et al (2001) also confirmed the emphasis on interactional practice in the description of distributed leadership. Gronn (2002) outlined a new conception of leadership by reviewing other theories. He argued that concreted forms of distributed leadership are closely related to emerging patterns of interdependence. In addition, he
considered activity theory as ‘a helpful vehicle for tracking changing divisions of labour, and connecting the actions of agents to the enabling and constraining organisational structures which contextualise their work’ (p.692). What Gronn (2002) believed is that the outcome of group work is greater than the sum of the individual actions, namely concerted action. According to his notion, Bennett et al. (2003) defined distributed leadership as ‘an emergent property existing in relationships, rather than an activity carried out by an individual or individuals’ (p.10). From above description and argument, interactions between leaders and followers are key elements of distributed leadership and teamwork becomes vital to achieve effective leadership.

It is argued that the definition of distributed leadership overlaps concepts of other types of leadership like participative leadership and teacher leadership, but it circulates a clear idea that school leadership effectiveness is about sharing and approving group qualities strung together. Harris (2003) argued that teacher leadership proposed as a form of distributed leadership shows actual practice in distributed leadership in schools. It is concerned with ideas of collective action and empowerment and shared agency. However, it lacks an explicit approach to teacher leadership on the extent to which power will be distributed and how they share it, although there is agreement on some main facets including leading teaching and learning, taking an operational task and sharing making decisions. However, West (1998) criticized that the term ‘empowerment of teachers’ was little more than a description of arrangements for extending internal accountability and control that had always been in place and argued that teachers should be centrally involved in identifying, planning for and implementing their own improvement programmes (West 1998). Harris (2003) also suggested that teacher leadership should be applicable when teachers are supported with leadership training programme, advocated by leaders and building their confidence as leaders. Hargreaves (2010) learned from other countries like Singapore and Finland, and argued that it should leave appropriate ‘space’ for teachers for developing their own creativity and supporting conditions to improve high quality performance. Therefore building a professional community is put on the agenda to improve teacher leadership.

Harris (2003) commented that teacher leadership should not be under-valued, as research has shown that there is positive link between shared leadership and student outcomes, although further research is needed to provide sufficient evidence. But still not sufficient evidence is provided to prove that distributed authority will show positive links to student achievement. Notwithstanding, Harris and Spillane (2008) proposed that distributed leadership provides an
alternative way to look at the complex interactions in schools and analyse the patterns of interaction, influence and agency. It reminds us that the interaction between leaders and their followers are complex and not less important than other practice. In that sense, distributed leadership is significant in terms of seeing leadership practice differently and illuminating the possibilities for organisational transformation.

Overall, distributed leadership has strong support, encouraging delegation of authority and emphasizing interactions between leaders and followers. Its approach moves leadership forward to be more democratic. The practice of distributed leadership is valuable but may require more a rigorous monitoring system and supporting programme to ensure authentic distributed leadership.

Other leadership approaches—like charismatic leadership, moral and ethical leadership—have all been put forward since 1980s. Sergiovanni (1994) developed his theory of *moral leadership* specifically as a recipe for school leadership, pointing out that schools should stop copying business leadership practice and develop their own context-specific approaches. This can be identified from the development of leadership, such as transformational, instructional or even distributed leadership, which all stress the importance of moral values like equity and caring. Moral leadership seems be spread across the development of different leadership theories. Further, Wong (2001) strongly argued that it is essential to establish trusting relationships between school principals and teachers, otherwise it would be difficult and slow to attain teachers’ active support for educational reforms in schools.

The above sets out a brief summary of the major strands woven into leadership theory in the West, and the influence of these strands on the thinking about and practice of leadership in schools. Though there are many theories put forward in the literature, key trends and principles can be identified that mostly can be traced back to these three seminal theoretical perspectives. What can be drawn from this analysis is that, first of all, as theory has developed the emphasis on relationships has increased. Second, as this emphasis has developed the notion of equality has become increasingly important, which means that no matter whether you are a leader or a staff member, you are all colleagues but with different roles. Of course, there is hierarchy in terms of formal structure, but there is also an expectation that school will be democratic organisations, with everyone playing their part. Because of this, leaders and followers are able to enjoy emotional closeness rather than merely work in the same place. Consequently, people are free to speak freely and critical and
self-critical comments are encouraged. This means that western people tend not be afraid to voice different views. On the contrary, they are making efforts to improve the way things are done by sharing different views. Conflict about ideas is seen as healthy, and is encouraged.

1.3 Leading Educational change

A further influence on thinking about school leadership in these times of rapid reforms is the ability to recognize the need for and manage the processes of educational change. As Wallace (1998) pointed out, we may unwittingly apply interventions or employ strategies based on yesterday’s comprehension of needs, without recognizing the increasing pace and complexity of educational change in recent years. Change seems to take place with rocket speed, both planned change resulting from educational policies, and unplanned change originating in the period of rapid social and economic change that has propelled the world into the 21st century. Hargreaves (1998) argued that ‘education prepares the generations of the future, and educational change is therefore front and centre of all the talk about change in general’ (p.558). There is no doubt that schools and school systems have found it difficult to meet this challenge.

But do people know enough about change? Since 1990s, change has attracted researchers’ (e.g. Fullan, and Leithwood) attention and lot of focus has been given to investigate the meaning of change, the reason that change occurs, and how best to deal with change. To understand educational change, it may be necessary to make sense of the meaning of change, to learn how to manage change and know the effect and prediction of the change in future.

Fullan (2001) defined that when there are disturbances needing a response, changes occur. It is true in most cases. For instance, when the organization works with low effectiveness and people are indulged in what they are used to; there is need to make changes. Repeatedly, Fullan (1998 and 1999) has argued that it does not necessarily mean that we can be passive and wait for the system to change. In recognising the complexity of change and that it is ‘non-linear and that systems are not all that coherent’, it is necessary to ‘develop our own individual capacities to learn and to keep on learning, and not to let the vicissitudes of change get us down’ (Fullan 1998, p.224). What Fullan emphasized is that it is necessary to meet initial change to avoid the potential disturbances.

In terms of managing change, Fullan (1999) suggested that change needs to take into account moral purpose, and to cope with complexity because the education field is considered as a
complex and deep moral enterprise. Change means dynamics, complexity and evolution. When Fullan (1999) encouraged us to make conflict and diversity our friends, it means that we should not fear or avoid them, for we have to face these issues. Smoothness and harmony is only genuinely enjoyable, when conflict is resolved and diversity accommodated.

Hargreaves (1998, 2005) also noted that educational change is often treated as a rational, cognitive process in pursuit of rational, cognitive ends, and the emotional dimension is mostly neglected. He continued to emphasize the importance of emotional consideration, as arguing that emotions are at the heart of teaching and there is correlation between positive emotion and good teaching. This shows that a school leader must take serious account of people’s resistance and seek to understand both their negative and positive reaction, so the leader can be able to explain the reform or the change explicitly along with an attractive blueprint and obtain their support. The different voices or even disagreements might not be negative, and therefore it is possible to forge new agreements. After working through the discomfort and achieving new agreement, a smooth relationship between the leaders and the staff members appears. This type of relationship can be solid for a long time and push reform forward. Otherwise conflict tends to be hidden, but it does not go away and can appear at any time to block progress (Fullan 1999).

Further, Fullan (2001) takes a fable as an example to explain the complexity of change needing ‘slow knowing’. The fable about the hare and the tortoise race tells us that ‘slow and steady’ can be the winner. That fable explains why Fullan does not favour immediate and reflexive response to the disturbance of change, as he was worried that quick decisions would lead to an ‘unmanaged’ situation, and bring more problems as a result. However, it may be necessary to think of not leaving it too late. If disturbances are left too long, procrastination can cause its own problems. Notwithstanding, all ‘disturbances’ need to be analysed in the context, and some matters are urgent and require quick decisions. In this case, ‘slow knowing’ means no immediate solution.

As it is seen, managing change is complicated, but maybe when leaders understand all of the factors contributing to impetus of the change process it will be easier to manage. Fullan (2011) stated that the nature of change hinges on effective implementation, and so considering all factors related to characteristics of the change including need, clarity, complexity, quality or practicality, and the local context involving the school district, principals, the role of teachers is important (Fullan 2001). Planning needs to take into account
the local context and culture. In addition, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) and Louis and Kruse (1995) found that ‘the professional community formed by collaboration shows positive correlation with student performance’ based on evidence provided in their study (cited in Fullan 1999, p.31). Collaboration is associated with a positive impact on the change process and seems to be considered as essential to improve leadership effectiveness in terms of change.

However, collaboration is not easy to attain and even harder to maintain, especially when there are diverse and complex situations confronting leaders, and the extent which all groups of interests need to be considered. Achieving collaboration may require working through fierce conflicts. Leaders may need to handle their own anxiety arising from sweeping away obstacles to achieving mutual interests. This issue is identified by Puusa et al. (2013, p.175) who conclude that ‘change affects the leadership at the behavioural level’. But at the same time, they remind that organizational change is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Regarding change management, they suggest that it is necessary to maintain some practices from the past and to make sure the old practices selected can be linked smoothly with the implication of the new. What they argue is that the past is not necessarily completely wrong, and change should not be simply interpreted as abandonment of the past and creation of a complete new future.

To sum up, it is recognized that change is inevitable for the development of the society. It is necessary to draw attention to change and understand that it is not that straightforward. The nature of change makes the change process complicated. For instance, dilemmas need to be resolved, such as ‘autocracy versus democracy’ (Fullan 2001). There are no fixed, successful characteristics of leadership, as they vary according to circumstances and over time. For future of educational change, it is necessary to note that even if there are some useful potential characteristics for leaders, these characteristics cannot guarantee effective leadership or success. This may fit in with contingency theories in that ‘it all depends’! Regarding leading change, it is quite challenging in terms of the complications of the process. Change needs to be measured, to make decisions taking account of the complexity of situations. There is rarely linear change, but a more complex situation arises. Leaders should apply slow knowing and consider different situations to work out new patterns. Therefore, leaders are not born but nurtured, as leaders are fostered in the context. In this sense, change could produce a successful leader or destroy everything. This will depend on to what extent that leaders understand change and are able to lead it.
This is chapter has offered a brief review of the forces acting on the school principal’s role, stemming from the impact of educational reforms internationally. It has also described some of the ways which this has altered over the recent years. Despite national differences and priorities in educational reforms, there is some convergence; most governments want to use reform strategies (policy levers) to influence teaching and learning by making schools more accountable for student performance. Evidence for this situation is shown by the trends identified from reforms over the decades, as well as in National Standards published in many countries. Within these Standards, one of the assumptions is improving the quality of school leadership leads to improving learning outcomes. School leadership effectiveness has become crucial to lead positive educational change. This is one of the main reasons school leadership effectiveness has attained much attention since the 1980s. Theories of leadership have been developed and changed. Overall, change has become the only certainty in the development of education, but change is not straightforward. Principals must make sense of the change process, and know about leading educational change, so they can set directions for the school. The next chapter looks at the situation in China. Some of what has happened in the West can also be identified in China since the ‘open and reform’ movement of the 1990s, though of course there are also many differences.
Chapter 2: The changing context in China

In explaining the new context for Chinese schools and reviewing the current issues, it is necessary to remember that China has a long history of education, stretching back over 5000 years, and also has a long tradition of Confucianism. These are very closely bound together; therefore it is necessary to start from there. Another important factor there is the one party system that has been in place since 1949, and its influence on all aspects of Chinese society. Nevertheless recent years have seen a period of reforms in China, social and political reforms that have had enormous implications for schools. It seems that what we have see currently in China are many of the issues we see arising from reforms in the West, such as increasing accountability, curriculum reform and competition between schools. Although the history in China and in the western countries is rather different, when we come to look at the issues they are very similar; and I will detail these below. At the end of the chapter, I set out the questions that drive this research.

2.1 Culture and tradition in China and their influence on approaches to leadership in schools

Key aspects of Confucian philosophy

The impact of culture on leadership is apparent. A critical comment is made that educational leadership in mainland China is confronted by the dilemma between traditional Confucian ethics and values (e.g. hierarchical lines, collectivism, self-cultivation) and the new global values, such as decentralization, efficiency and accountability (Lee and Pang 2011; Pang 2004). This is true to some degree; Chinese thinking on leadership, like its culture, has its roots in more than two thousand years of Confucianism, mingled over the centuries with notions of social order derived from emperors with absolute power, and more recently from the orthodoxy and hierarchy of the Party. Culture is at the heart of people’s behaviour and attitudes. Sangren (2000) pointed out that action can only be meaningful when it is inspired by people’s intentions regarding their understandings of relevant cultural and social contexts. In China, Confucianism has significant influence on Chinese history as well as in the contemporary society, and it is this that lends meaning to intentions. As Wong (2001, p.309) argued, even ‘Chinese scholars are influenced by Confucianism and tend to exhibit a pragmatic approach to life.’
Therefore, it is necessary to understand the context of educational leadership in China by briefly reviewing key aspects of Confucian philosophy which also underpin the ways Chinese people make sense of events and interactions.

There are two important ‘virtues’ in Confucian ethics, faithfulness (chung) and altruism (shu) (Wong 2001). These have become seminal moral norms and play a significant role in disciplining Chinese people’s behaviours, especially in family relationships, by subordinates towards superiors, and so on. Key strands of Confucianism are strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respecting of elders by their children (and in traditional interpretations, of husbands by their wives), and the family as a basis for ideal government. ‘San gang’ (the three cardinal guides- rulers guide subjects, fathers guide sons and husbands guide wives) and ‘wulun (ren, yi, li, zhi, xin’, the five constant virtues including benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity) are the basis of Confucianism and the feudal ethical codes. Each virtue embraces a richness of meaning. For instance, the definition of ‘Li’, according to Chen (2011), has been recently criticised that it implies inequity, as it expresses hierarchy and power difference. On the other hand, it also emphasizes ‘equity’, seen in the idiom-li shang wang lai (etiquette requires reciprocity). At the same time, Confucianism is developed with the principle ‘Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself” (Source: the Analects, or lunyu).

Of course, there is much less systematic, published research about leadership in China than we find in the West; instead there are the biographical and autobiographical accounts of important leaders, from which ‘wisdom’ can be deduced. In reinforcing Confucian values, these writings also stress a number of virtues important for the development of society.

Fernandes (2004) points out that individual perfection through self-cultivation becomes the first aim of leadership, which requires leaders to be very cautious and to think, to speak, and to act carefully. In Confucianism, hard work and the quest for self-improvement emerges as the key attributes of leaders, who need to be good role models to obtain the respect and trust from followers. Not surprising, Wong (2001, p.316) argued, based on Hodgkinson’s (1991, 1996) interpretation on educational leadership as a moral art, ‘from the Chinese perspective, it is more than a moral art: it is a moral art in action’ Chen (2011) also noted that the development of the human person, and moral self-cultivation is emphasized in Confucianism. In that sense, it is not difficult to understand that Confucian leaders hold high expectations from the community, and they are expected to show high aspirations and self-control and to
be a good model to followers (Fernandes 2004). However, it is argued that the overemphasis of ‘morality’ but less focus on skills may hinder the development of ‘science’ (Ma 2001). Ma also pointed out that the moral themes ignore personality, the extent which leaders need to be tactical, often refusing to be pinned down on anything, and even pretending to yield to the public’s appetite.

A second aim of leadership is social harmony through exemplary conduct. It means that the society will have little dissent and is ruled by virtue. Thus moral consciousness is essential in school leadership and loyalty is stressed (Chen 2011). In Confucianism, hierarchy is similar to the meaning of ‘equity’ in the sense that it is established to maintain social stability. For instance, there must be an emperor in charge of the subjects. In wulun, quite interestingly, it is expected the leaders remain equal to their subjects to achieve a harmonious community. However, on the other hand, hierarchical relationship can be identified from the relationships exemplified in wulun, especially in the first four relationships. Obviously, the term guanxi is not easily to be interpreted, though it carries some similarity to networks/relationships in the West. As Hui and Graen (1997) explained, guanxi describes a particular tie between people, guided by these moral codes. They concluded that Chinese notion of guanxi is essential to social stability because “people are born into many important networks, or guanxi, interactions within networks” (p.456). It can be identified that guanxi is a seminal philosophy in terms of relationships, and still has fundamental impact on networks in modern China, though much of what is achieved through guanxi might be described as undue influence, or even corruption in the West

Confucianism also had much to say about political and social organization, arguing that power and authority must be respected. According to Confucius, the use of authority and power are essential for social development. Confucianism, with its five fundamental relationships (e.g. rulers guide subjects, fathers guide sons and husbands guide wives) was unavoidably bound up with the social structure and political system of imperial China. This has also been evidenced by studies of politicized Confucianism exemplified by the Ancient Text Classics school (guwen jingxue) of the Han dynasty, which states the “sacred status and absolute authority of the emperor” stressed as “an ideology serving only the interest of the rulers” and this became a “dominant strand in Confucianism for most of the time after the Han dynasty” (Chen 2011, p.207). Today these complex customs and cultural expectations have been formalized into state power, along with authoritarian relationships, and with rigid social hierarchies (Chan 2011). The emphasis on authority is self-evident. To maintain
authority, leaders must create ‘power distance’ by retaining mystery (Ma 2001). Ma expressed further that, in the ancient China, leaders were considered as people able to do anything, expertise in leadership was considered as universal, able to lead regardless of context, and the meaning of leadership was usually distorted to underline authority, to keep the status quo and to forbid diversity in order to retain social stability.

**Leadership in politics**

It can be seen that these key aspects of Confucian philosophy have been reflected in leadership in politics somewhat. Harmony, authority, collectivism and central planning can be readily identified in terms of the characteristics of political leadership. Of course, the art of political leadership is more complicated. China is established on a one-party centralized system. The China Communism Party (CCP), consisting of party elites leads the country and represents the ‘masses’ interests. To investigate the characteristics of the leadership in changing political times, it is necessary to review key political strategies along with the leadership transition from the era of Mao-Zedung, via Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao.

Mao is the founder of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). His politics, known as Maoism, aim to establish social harmony through a top-down centralized regime. Mao applied Confucianism through ‘four Cardinal Guides’, that is the individual is subordinate to the organization, the minority is subordinate to the majority, the lower level is subordinate to the higher level, and the entire party membership is subordinate to the Central Committee. Mao explained these hierarchical relationships as collectivism. These are intended to ensure social stability for social harmony and to establish authority as well (Gong 1989). They are helpful to enable the political leaders to manage the country. For instance, the central planning becomes legitimated policy, generally ‘the five-year plan’- for the social development in the following years. The aim of the plan is normally fixed until targets are reached. But a complementary plan may be made when necessary to deal with issues arising within the planning period (Zheng et al. 2013).

The era of Deng was considered as a fundamental transition from closed Maoist China to modern China, with a series of important reforms. Substantial reforms or actions were made to improve democracy in several aspects, since the Reform and Open Policy of 1978. One of Deng’s outstanding achievements was to build up intra-party democracy and to lead ‘leadership transition’. Intra-party democracy is regarded as the lifeblood of the Party and
plays a significant and exemplary role in the people’s democracy (Lin 2004) and also aims to build new leadership with efforts at ‘institution building’ (Pittinsky and Zhu 2005). Further, Deng Xiaoping abolished the life-tenure system of the state presidency. Age and term limits were formally applied to the leadership transition at the 16th congress (Lin 2004).

Although Deng still used force or coercion in some instances, he made much effort to diminish the arbitrary repression of the Maoist era and enliven the social and professional lives of Chinese people from many walks of life. His political strategies were unavoidably influenced by Chinese traditional philosophy. As Shambaugh (1993) analysed, Deng chose an eclectic way by selectively borrowing ‘yong’ while attempting to protect Chinese cultural essence (li) and his political strategies did not curtail the attendant accoutrements of great power status. His authority was not reduced, in terms of leadership. From Mao’s ‘heroism’ to Deng’s ‘transformation’, Shambaugh (1993) commented that Maoist represents transactional leadership, while Deng’s leadership tends to be transformational within a series of new reforms that led to the modernisation of China. Although it may need more investigation to see to the extent which Western leadership theories are equivalent to those in China, at least it can be argued that Deng put more efforts to challenge the status quo and to promote a social market economy instead of a planned economy. In addition, it is even argued that, in the era of Deng, there seemed to be a strong rejection of Western democracy since it was considered that the individual was valued over the group, which would lead to an end of Collectivism. However, Deng’s ideology is marked as the economic modernization of China (Chang 1996), and since then, China is more open to Western ideas and has adopted some Western approaches, such as marketization, enterprization, and so on.

Subsequently, Jiang was determined to rectify the drawbacks of the earlier reforms programme and to put forward marketization development in a more comprehensive way (Dittmer 2003). In 1992, the 14th Congress of the CCP, endorsed the principle of “introducing the socialist market economy” (Mok and Wat 1998). President Hu Jintao’s succession is the first president to have a smooth power transition, not due to the death of the former president. Later on, Bipartisanship is developed as the formation of two political factions within the CCP to enhance ‘intra-democracy’ through competing with each other for power, influence, and policy initiatives. It means that the new leader has to establish equilibrium between opposing interests. The coalition is mainly led by the two factions with one from former president Jiang and his protege as the elitist coalition, and with another one
led by former president Hu and premier Wen, the populist coalition (Li 2005). This can be identified as efforts to establish more democratic leadership.

Briefly, these key Chinese leaders have had great influence on policies and strategies of leadership in China, though it can be seen that leadership in China is heavily influenced by China’s cultural traditions with its emphasis on morality and on collectivist values (Pittinsky and Zhu 2005). Nevertheless, China has been more open to the international ideas especially since 1978. Its open policies and motivation to learn new things have been bringing China to the threshold of great international power. The 16th Party Congress in November 2002 is considered as a significant transition to leadership succession in China. Consequently, leadership transition has become a more interesting topic since then (Dittmer 2003, Pittinsky and Zhu 2005).

There are of course many challenges confronting Chinese leaders, including leadership of the CCP, and its transformation into an ‘institutionalized ruling party’, problems of the post-Mao leadership’s strategy of ‘eudemonic legitimacy’, the corruption of CCP members and the economic pressures from high unemployment (Pittinsky and Zhu 2005). It is argued, (e.g. by Kang Xiaoguo) that these current major problems will not be solved by implanting Western democratization that will give rise to new problems, such as ‘political instability and risks of secession arising from ethnic conflicts as the case of the former Soviet Union’ and so change should be gradually introduced along with the progress in economic development (cited in Chen 2011). It is a truth that economic development underpins the social development.

Further, according to Pittinsky and Zhu (2005), they proposed deep thought-provoking questions by reviewing contemporary public leadership in China. For instance, “In the next half-century, what kind of Chinese political leaders will world leaders confront? To what extent will they resemble their counterparts in the West?” (p.936) In future research, it is necessary to generate deeper insights into the relationships between Chinese culture and leadership in China.

To sum up, under Confucianism and the traditional Chinese cultural context, leadership in China is keen to discourage criticism, avoiding conflict in an endeavour to promote harmony. Differences tend to threaten authority and to break stability, and uncertainty about goals and priorities is avoided. Integration is at the heart of Chinese culture therefore people are trying their best to avoid conflict, especially open disagreement. In that sense, all people including
leaders and followers are bound by values such as harmony and loyalty, which are considered to be of prime importance.

It is hard for school principals to break free from these traditional values in the way they manage their schools, as even if they would like to adopt more modern approaches that reflect the trend towards a more open society, many teachers have been brought up with Confucian values, and resist changes. Schools seem to be the best place to embed culture through education and to influence younger generation. Wong (2001) pointed out:

‘There is also a persistent desire, reflected in many different cultures, to inculcate a nationalist ethos in the younger generation. Schools exhibit prevalent cultural values in both the hidden and overt curricula.’ (P.313)

In the following section, it looks at the influence on approaches to educational leadership in China between 1980s and early 1990s, when people started to pay much more attention to the role of principals in schools.

**Educational leadership in China between 1980s and early 1990s**

Principals have played a significant role in successful educational reform and school improvement in China. This is more obvious in the Asia-Pacific region, where principals are seen as ‘critical for effective policy implementation and the achievement of external accountability goals’ (Zheng et al. 2013). But both Yin et al. (2014) and Lee and Pang (2011) pointed out that there is little research on education in China, especially regarding leadership. As Yin et al. (2014) discovered, there are sufficient studies about leadership problems in quite a lot Western countries, whereas comparatively few studies about the dilemmas experienced by leaders of change during the reform process in China.

In the early years after the People’s Republic of China was established, it is difficult to find writings on the role of principals or educational leadership generally. In the context of a heavily centralised educational system, school management was mainly controlled by the school party secretary, and the role of principals was very limited. In most of cases, the principals had to do what they were told by the local authority (Jiang 2006). The Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and 1970s, exacerbated this problem, as a large number of education professionals were sent to work on the land, and the educational system endured a period of chaos.
The Reform and Open Policy of 1978 brought China into a new era, with the development of a market economy that has also changed educational structures (Mok 2000). Since the 1980s, the centralized system has begun to break down, although schooling in politics and ideology were for some time still considered more important than courses like maths. By the end of 1980s, Gasper (1989) pointed out that ideological content has been less emphasized than academic subjects in secondary education. Nevertheless, the role of leaders has not become a subject to attract people’s attention until 1980s (Qiu 2008). In addition, this section briefly reviews the context of educational reforms, especially between 1980s and early 1990s, but it does not discuss too many details of policies or governmental documents regarding school leadership, which will be considered in the next chapter.

In recognizing the constraints on principals to improve the quality of education at the school level arising from very limited power, until 1992 with a legal framework of ‘Provisional Regulations for the Establishment of People Run School of Higher Education’, the diversity of school systems has been flourishing, and private educational institutions have tended to be popular in China, especially in large cities (Mok and Wat 1998). Mok also pointed out that another significant change the government made was to recognize the role of “minban” (private, non-governmental funded) education systems and mechanisms issued in the most recent Higher Education Law in 1998. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has endeavoured to reduce its involvement in provision of educational services in a direct way (Mok 2000). It is pointed out that the “zhong dian school” (key/private school) system led to great competitiveness among schools in the early 1960s and later in the 1980s, particularly at secondary level which is a key stage for the university entrance preparation (Gasper 1989). The diversification of school system raises competition in terms of the quality and quantity of students in schools, which also put higher expectations on schools to maintain high quality of education with more focus on student attainment within the context of a rapid expansion of mass education.

This may explain how strong market forces have affected educational development since the adoption of a socialist market system in the 1990s. Under the new context, the role of principals in China has been defined as policy-makers, organizers, coordinators, managers, and communicators. Officially, principals are encouraged to take risks, to challenge the status quo and to be innovative (Zhu 1995), though these things are in conflict with Confucian principles. Notwithstanding, a key role of principals is considered to be leading ideological
and moral education, and principals are expected to develop a vision for the school that inspires staff and students alike (Xu 1995).

Simultaneously, principals have experienced higher expectations from the community, who expect that principals should challenge the status quo, take risks, and be inspiring leaders (Yang 1994). This is agreed by Zhang (2010), he also commented that the principals have tended to play a significant role in school management and school performance. This has an impact on the principals’ role in a number of ways, such as leading curriculum development, leading staff development, principal training programmes and the school budget management, and so on.

The qualification of principals seems to have become a major topic during the middle of 1980s, especially when the ‘principal responsibility for school development’ mechanism (xiaozhang fuze zhi, 校长负责制) was proposed after 1985 (Zhang and Wang 2007). One of outcomes of some research on qualifications of principals was ‘Qualifications of Principals’ published by Ministry of Education in China in 1987. As political ideology was still deeply ingrained in education in 1980s and politics greatly influenced education, moral education was at the heart of teaching (Bush et al. 1998; Tsang 2000). For instance, Ran (2008) summarized that a knowledge base relating to psychological health and moral education were seen as significant qualifications of the principals, but the ‘party route’ (luxian) was an important guidance to assist the principals to lead a successful school. (In terms of the details of key polices issued by the government, these will be picked up under key themes and discussed separately in a following chapter)

These qualification requirements moved principals’ professional development forward through training programmes and support from the government. Top-down centralization, associated with political ideologies were the significant features in principal development until the mid of 1990s, and largely determined the tenor of the training activity and formal certification with the primary purpose for the improvement of the ‘political calibre and professional quality of principals, to equip them with ‘profound’ Marxist theoretical knowledge and ‘political quality’ (Zheng et al. 2013. P.489). In keeping with this emphasis, in the 1990s the Principals training programmes were based on a heavily didactic approach. Training was generally conducted by ‘teaching’ a group of principals in the classroom, organizing lectures, and showing videos of teaching practice. In terms of the method of training, the trainer endeavoured to model political ideologies, teaching, and management, so
they tried to model what they wanted principals to do, which was to be clearly in control (Li 1994).

It is not difficult to see that such content and methods applied in training programmes recalls the tendency for the Party ideological dominance and the methods seem to be dependent on spoon-fed pedagogy. Wu (2009) reviewed the training programmes over the past thirty years and concluded that these were largely based on old traditional concepts, with a ‘cramming’ (teaching to the text) system, and little individual support so that the management systems were not well developed and the theoretical research is lagging far behind practical needs. In terms of the training assessment the national standards for assessment of principals’ training are also not well clarified, nor do they match well with principals needs. This model of training was almost copied from general staff development programmes in education. During non-contact time, teachers were got together to prepare lessons, as collectivism was emphasized and strengthened in every aspect possible (Bush, Coleman and Si 1998). It can be identified that staff development and mentoring was based on the master-apprentice model which has roots in Confucianism.

It can also be identified that one of constraints hindering principal development was financial restriction in the 1980s and 1990s. Most of schools were poorly resourced by English standards (Bush et al. 1998). Wu (2009) also pointed out that there is not enough funding to support training programmes, which makes it difficult to provide effective development for principals. National funding support for education seemed not to be reaching the minimum necessary level, especially before 1990s. In a sense, it restricted principal development. But it is undoubted that educational development is closely related to economic development and educational policy is mostly dependent on the potential impact on the economy (Bush et al. 1998). This implies the economy underpins educational development, and it determines the level of resources made available.

Another constraint to principals’ leadership development arises from very limited autonomy granted to principals. Nearly everything was determined by the government. For instance, the government even sets national syllabus to guide way the textbook contents are to be taught, so that schools just follow the syllabus and teach and assess students with little flexibility at the school level. Human resource management was also controlled by the external authorities, and only a small number of school principals were able to appoint their own staff. Principals themselves were all appointed and got promoted by the Local Educational
Authority. As Lin (2004) argued, one of the drawbacks of the educational system was that principals had limited power under a highly centralized system. Principals had no real power but still had too much pressure from ‘high-stakes testing’. In that sense, as in the West, student attainment was used to assess whether a school was successful or not, though this is a simplistic approach. Lin (2004) suggested that the school system needed reform to encourage aspiring principals by ensuring that the principal’s contribution was acknowledged and not just students’ performance, which can be influenced by many factors outside the school.

Another significant feature during 1980s and early 1990s was that the major qualifications of principals seemed focused on morals and political philosophy, which is unique and very different from the West. Scott (1990) even argued that it is not necessary to require a principal to have teaching experience, whereas teaching experience is considered the basis of being a good principal in China. Some schools in the United States have appointed principals by looking at their qualification in management or business. They tend to define the best school principals with regarding their capabilities of leading the school improvement, rather than being the best teacher, which may be a more sensible approach, but is not at all the case in China.

Notwithstanding, several features are captured in the process of school leadership development in China. The increase in authority and power they have acquired in recent years can be associated with and in some ways reinforces Confucian notions of leadership, at a time when hierarchy has become looser in current society. In society, leaders in many contexts are struggling with the twin demands for increased effectiveness and greater sharing of their power with others. The worry of losing authority is a common one in Chinese social structures, and it is ironic that school principals have had a genuine increase in their authority over the school at a time when leaders in other contexts feel that their authority is being undermined by social change. But over many years, interactions between colleagues in schools, especially in the complicated relationships between leaders and teachers have become more subtle; keeping some distance has been deliberate for so long, that it becomes an unconscious behaviour. Moral responsibility remains at the heart of educational leadership and school principals are expected to set a clear example through self-cultivation and improvement. This may also create distance between leaders and their staff. And most schools reflect the tensions within the system in China, the pull of more decentralised, open management on one side and the worry of allowing power to become too diluted on the other. It may not be surprising to find in many schools that the principal and the party secretary act
as a coalition. The direction of the school will mostly be determined by whose voice is stronger, but with a moderate approach when there is divergence.

2.2 Current issues

As it has been identified, there were many issues confronting principals in the 1980s and 1990s. It can also be identified that the role of principals has been changing and the changing role has continued since 1990s. Since then, especially the end of 1990s, one of the biggest changes is making principals become school managers, comfortable to be someone who does not need to teach in the school, but manages the work of others. These and other changes confront principals with new challenges.

In fact, the issues facing principals currently are mainly arising from recent education reforms. To achieve high quality education, the Chinese government has been initiating further reforms, such as the Secondary School Education (SSE) curriculum reform in mainland of China, under the pressure and criticism of ‘test-orientated’ system with its extraordinary emphasis on students’ results in public examinations, especially the national College Entrance Examination (CEE) under the high-stakes testing system. The SSE curriculum is quite influential on all aspects of education. With its emphasis on ‘curriculum integration, decentralization, formative evaluation, innovative teaching approaches and the cultivation of generic skills’ emphasized in the national curriculum reform’ it sets new challenges (Yin et al. 2014).

Recently, in 2013, Chinese Ministry of Education launched another major reform-‘green evaluation’ to reduce the impact of testing on education processes. This policy has spread across the nation after quite positive feedback from a two-year (2011 and 2012) trial in schools in Shanghai. This reform aims to reduce the importance of test scores and the academic burden on students and to change the evaluation standards, and provide clear direction for curriculum development and implementation (Zhao 2012). For instance, specific curriculum objectives are set in the following aspects: knowledge goals with a focus on experiential learning, strategic knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge; capability goals, focused on students independence, cognitive ability, practical operating ability and capabilities of information gathering and processing; emotional learning goals that emphasize students' self-confidence, curiosity, responsibility, and finally to develop their personalities.
Under these educational reforms, the role of principals in China has stretched and principals are variously described as educators, leaders, managers and organizers. However, these descriptions do not always match with the way principals perceive themselves (Jiang 2006). Jiang found that principals spend too much time on basic administrative tasks and felt constrained in managing their schools due to continuing centralization of decisions. School leaders found there was a considerable gap between the reform requirements and the examination culture and this dilemma brought school leaders great uncertainty and confusion, which lasted for the whole first cycle of reform in the preliminary periods from 2004-2007 (Yin et al. 2014).

Thus one challenge confronting principals during the educational reforms is that their role has become much more complicated, with multiple expectations on them as leaders, educationalists, managers, and public servants. In Zhang’s (2010) study, she found that most principals have commented that they face significant challenges, including increasing accountability, implementing the new curriculum, applying technology (ICT) in education, shaping shared visions, building relationships between the school and parents, seeking for support or professional development and achieving aims of the school. One common view is that ‘a good principal means a good school’ and principals play a key role in school development (Li 2009), but this also implies that weak school performance indicates a poor principal. This emphasized the important role of the principals in school improvement, but simultaneously, it undoubtedly puts high pressure on the principals.

First of all, increasing accountability has been placed on principals. In the context of curriculum reform, principals are subject to higher expectations and are expected to be practitioners, pioneers, leaders for leading teacher professional development and student development (Tang 2009; Wang 2007; Zheng 2007). However, it seems that principals still have only limited autonomy to manage their schools (Jiang 2006; Sun 2009). Principals seem not to feel confident to challenge the status quo or to take further steps of to change school management. That may be because those principals feel reluctant to take risks, due to the fear of punishment for failure in the end, as those who make final decisions will take responsibility for all (Sun 2009).

A second challenge confronts principals, arising from the higher expectations of the stakeholders, such as the community, the parents and students (Sun 2009). This is argued by Zhang (2011) who pointed out that as a secondary principal herself she felt much pressure
from all directions. This may partly reflect the particular culture of China. As NCSL’s (2013, p.9) report based on investigation of schools in Shanghai and Ningbo, pointed out, ‘parental engagement and investment in education drive the system. Parents accept school policies and decisions, even offering support or sponsorship’. In return, they expect their children can attain maximum benefit from the school, such as extra support for their children’s progress, developing their talents, increasing their opportunities.

In addition, principals face increasing workloads. Some of them still have teaching tasks, which also increases principals’ workloads. Some people argue that the principal’s teaching task overweighs their leading task, which may disrupt the role of principals as manager of the school (Hong 2007). Even if it is argued that teaching tasks have been reduced, this does not mean that principals take less responsibility for teaching. That is because the principals have to carry out quite a lot of class observations both formally and informally, and have to give feedback to teachers (Dong and Xie 2010; Ran 2008).

Another significant issue identified is that the latest curriculum reform is not well matched with the national testing, which Yin et al. (2014) identified as a big dilemma confronting the school principals. On the one hand, the government decentralizes power to the school and encourages creative teaching and ‘quality education’. Principals have been endeavouring to lead curriculum development with the new guidance of the curriculum and agree that it is necessary to develop new subjects to improve students’ development with regard to students’ individual needs. However, there is still a tendency that more emphasis is given to academic learning, as well as tight student discipline in Chinese schools (Lee and Pang 2011). Student attainment and especially the enrolment rate (shengxuelv, 升学率) is still a crucial benchmark to measure whether a school is successful or not (Suen and Yu 2006). In that sense, principals are worried that the school-based curriculum may distract students who have less time to prepare for national entrance exams (Jiang 2006). And still, to some extent, principals have to take measures to achieve higher enrolment rates as a priority. For instance, some schools even try to persuade disadvantaged students to take alternative exams, instead of the national college entrance examination, to enhance the overall enrolment rate (Zhang 2011). Under the old traditional high-stake testing, this makes principals feel reluctant to combine new curriculum guidance with the old testing system. Consequently, teaching materials and techniques tend to be orientated around the test instead of the students’ needs. Quite a few studies show that it is necessary to change the testing system, but it will never be
easy to find an alternative assessment or to develop an alternative testing system in a complicated context in such a large country (Jiang 2006; Wu 2011).

In terms of curriculum development, it is argued that principals tend to have insufficient experience of leading curriculum development (Zhao and Shi 2013). Firstly, the principals failed to build up particular areas of the curriculum at the school level, but just tried to copy other schools’ activities. Secondly, it shows that school principals may interpret new curriculum development too literally, targeting the quantity but not the quality. Some schools even develop more than one hundred subjects without regard to students’ needs, and principals showing poor leadership in curriculum development are constrained by their old traditional visions (Zhang 2010). But also, Zhang argued, a number of principals feel reluctant to lead curriculum development due to their limited knowledge of curriculum development activities. Consequently, in some schools, new curriculum development tends to be non-systematic curriculum development and even ends up with chaotic curriculum structures. However, Walker et al. (2011) did not agree with the poor curriculum leadership and argued that it is the government who have sent ambiguous messages to principals under the strong influence of the principal appraisal and accountability systems as well as the test-oriented culture that are to blame (cited in Lee and Pang 2011). It seems that there is a need to investigate leadership of curriculum development further. At least, it implies that principals have been struggling with leading new curriculum development, partly due to a lack of support.

It is argued that ‘only well-conceived and well-designed training will enhance the capability of principals’ (Zheng et al. 2013). Many principal training programmes have been launched since the end of 1980s. Various themes in principal training in China reflect the dynamics of changing practices and shifting local contexts (Chen et al. 2011). They pointed out that these themes vary from the ‘general supervisor training’ to ‘mentoring, coaching and induction’, and even ‘clinical supervision’. Interestingly, Zheng et al. (2013, p.500) argued that “despite recent shifts in policy emphasis, the state retains firm control of almost all aspects that shape the definition and enactment of principal development”.

Reviewing the training programmes for principals, multiple models of training programme have been developed, especially in developed areas in China. For instance, in order to make up the gap arising from the shortage of excellent principals and teachers aged around 50, Shanghai has started training programme called ‘double masters/elites ’(‘shuang ming’ gong
cheng, ‘双名工程) established in 2006 (Zhang 2011) including the ‘Shanghai-California shadowing principals’ programme. This programme which enables Chinese principals to visit California to observe American principals at work and shadow them for a few weeks and then discuss issues together has proved very popular. Other opportunities include one following a leadership development course offered by an Australian university in China, from which most participants emphasized the importance of assimilating good ideas from Western theories on leadership while maintaining the essence of national and local culture. It is also suggested that future leadership development programmes could be improved with a focus on “intercultural understanding and awareness of societal and local contexts” (Lee and Pang 2011, p.339).

But the fact is that principals are generally appointed by the local authority, and most training for the role only becomes available after appointment (Chen et al. 2011). Some Principals find it is difficult to get time to leave work for improving themselves through development after promotion. In that sense, their knowledge of leadership fails to be developed as it might (Wang 2012). While most areas do provide some training, questions have been raised about how useful this is. It is argued that the training programmes provided are often without systematic structure, or relevant professional knowledge. The content of such programmes has been criticized as too rigid and insufficiently aligned with the context of the particular school, and the assessment of principals’ development is rarely formative and fails to give useful feedback (Zheng 2005). It tends to be general training rather than addressing specific skills. Regarding practice, it is comparatively weak, as most practice for principals is mainly conducted in a form of observation (Sun 2009). Regarding training programmes, Xiao and Li (2011) point out that principals lack strong motivation and a large number of principals are not willing to attend any training programme at all. This situation is clearly worrying, when principals generally rely on post-appointment training or no training at all to develop the skills needed to meet the many challenges outlined above.

However, on the other hand, there are shortcomings in the training programmes available. It seems that the training programmes are still dominated by theoretical learning and principals still have limited chance to engage in more practical projects and discussions. In the sense, it is not difficult to see that principals’ assessment is completed by how many credits they have got from their courses attended. It means that their knowledge is often out of date and lags behind the pace of changing situations. This may explain the current circumstances, where
principals tend to run their schools with a preference for management activities, rather than leadership.

In addition, closed principals’ recruitment and uncertain tenure terms seem have quite a significant impact on the quality of those in post. Regarding principals recruitment, there is still open competition but they are traditionally appointed mainly according to their achievement in teaching and ‘research’, but rarely for capacity of management (Hong 2007). Therefore, those who focus on teaching research are generally considered as good candidates for principalship (Kuang 2007). It is not denied that some schools are open to all qualified candidates in some developed cities, but still quite a limited number. Another issue is that there is not clear law about principals’ tenure terms, although it is clear that it is not life-tenure system. Some principals even argued that their career is in the hands of the local authority, so it is important to build good relationships between their school and the local authority (Sun 2009). In reality, few people would take risks to make fundamental change or be the ‘first person to try tomatoes’! It may not be surprising to understand that principals have not strong motivation to be successful leaders but they feel more comfortable and enjoy being seen as ‘master teachers’ (Zhang 2011).

Other issues facing principals are partly caused by the restrictions of traditions, such as hierarchical relationships rooted in Confucianism. In China, school leaders are heavily influenced by the local cultural and societal context because they serve and are financed by their provinces and local authorities (Law 2012 cited in Yin 2014). Good relationships normally build up close ‘guanxi’ (networks), which may benefit both partners. In that regard, principals must build up good relationships with their local authorities to gain their support. Within school, principals try to behave as a facilitator, but at the same time, they hang onto power to retain the traditional hierarchical distance. How to understand with ‘guanxi’ is subtle, and is often only understood within networks. Principals have been struggling with such complicated relationships, to the extent they are unsure whether to treat teachers as subordinates or colleagues, or how they share their power with other members of the school staff.

Another traditional restriction is from the unique feature of educational management and leadership when a dual system of authority and control exists, comprising of the principal and the local communist Party Secretary (Pisapia and Lin 2011). They have separate roles. The principals take responsibility for everything that happens in the school but plays the role of an
educational leader, while the Party Secretary as a political or ideological leaders takes up the second position (Lee and Pang 2011). Principals tend to be in an awkward position to make decisions when the party committee secretaries disagree with them (Zhang 2011). Such situations may be more likely determined by whether the principal or the Party Secretary holds more trust and authority within the school. But the status of principals tends to be improved recently, to an equal position with party secretaries, especially in elementary and secondary schools, which is not like the past when the party secretaries were in charge of everything during 1960s (He 2009).

To sum up, the current challenges in education in China arise mainly from more emphasis on a teacher-centred rather than student-centred approach, while the reforms seeks to reverse this (Zhao and Shi 2013; Xu 2013) and management still overweighs leadership (Cheng 2004). Principals in China are still with limited power. They are not always happy to do what they are told, but they have to. Consequently, teachers may have to do what they are told by principals. To some extent, principals’ authority is associated more with their power rather than influence because Chinese principals tend to care more about the traditional hierarchical distance and perceive themselves as ‘leaders’ but not ‘servants’ of the school, when compared to principals’ definition of their roles, in, for example, the United Sates (Zhang 2011). Under the pyramid power system, obviously, students as the bottom of the pyramid are hardly heard in terms of their voice or needs. Power distance appears between principals and teachers too. Actually teachers even obey principals in order to avoid direct conflicts, ‘punishment’ or to seek for promotion. But Zhang (2011) pointed out that on the other hand, it is commented that principals tend to take advantage of their power to misuse their authority due to the limitations of an ineffective monitoring system. Zhang’s comments on principals’ misusing the power might be subjective, due to insufficient evidence, but he makes a good point, that there is in need to establish effective monitoring system to secure professional accountability among principals.

2.3 Deciding on the research focus and questions

From my review of literature, in relation to both international development and the situation in China, several key elements have emerged. What can be learned is, for instance, that more recently, the role of school principals has been going through a period of change in many countries, as education reforms are placing more emphasis on school performance and increasing school leader accountability levels (Duke et al. 2003). Education is undergoing
unprecedented changes under the impact of international trends, such as prevailing international comparisons, the demand for better quality teachers and national curriculum and testing regimes in many countries. Simultaneously, the role of school principals is becoming ever more complicated. Even in China there are similar reforms taking place. As Yin et al. (2014, p.304) commented, “educational reforms in one country can hardly be exempt from the influence of educational policies and practices in other countries, especially the Western world”. Although we have a different education system with much more centralized and top-down management, as noted above there are issues concerning leadership which might be shared and improved by better understanding, and practice in China still has some way to develop.

However, there is little research on educational leadership in China, although China has attracted interest from around the world, especially since the performance of Shanghai released in PISA league tables both in 2009 and 2012. As it is pointed out, major interest is focused on what Chinese principals do to lead high performing schools and how they are trained to do it. But unfortunately, as Huang and Wiseman (2011) note, “there is little research on systematic analysis in either English or Chinese literature to inform wider debate on this topic” (cited in Zheng et al. 2011, p.485).

In previous research regarding school principals in China, more attention was given to what principals should do, rather than identifying principals’ changing roles and the skills needed to carry these out. Even where the changing role of principals has received some attention, those studies are based on speculations rather than empirical research (Sun 2009, Li 2009 and Zhang 2010). They have a tendency to seek descriptions of the ideal principal and little consideration is given to the complicated work context (Zhang 2011). Even those few empirical studies available, unfortunately, have findings without systematic data analysis. Weakness in methodology tends to be a drawback in studies on school leadership in China. My study aims to produce empirical data subject to rigorous and systematic analysis, in order to overcome the deficiency of methodology applied in this area in China.

In addition, few studies consider leadership in relation to the traditional culture of Confucianism, as one significant perspective to look at educational leadership practices. Furthermore, I could find no studies focusing on the relationship between the characteristics of the Chinese political system and educational leadership in China. There are significant questions that need to seek answers, such as “how do the various societal and institutional
cultures in China affect public leaders’ behaviours?” and “to what extent does deviation from cultural norms enhance or obstruct the effectiveness of leadership?” (Pittinsky and Zhu 2005, p.936)

There is no clear picture of the expectations placed on principals in China, as unlike many countries there are actually no prescribed national standards for secondary school principals. Even national standards for elementary and junior middle school principals in China were not published until 2013, while this study began in 2011, and there are still no standards for high school principals in China. There has also been little systematic inquiry into the impact of education reform on the role of Chinese secondary principals, and there is only limited understanding of how Western theories of leadership might be applied in China, though these have influenced training programmes. However, most studies of secondary educational leadership focus on theoretical analysis, or argue about qualifications but do not pursue evidence-based research.

With the gap I identified above, this study aims to map the role of secondary school principals as it is changing under the impact of reforms, to identify key factors that are influencing the principal’s role in these changes, and to see how far the changes are resulting in the application of Western ideas and approaches to leadership within Chinese schools, and what benefits and/or problems such approaches bring. Robson (2002) reminded us that when we undertake research the focus must be do-able in terms of the time and resources that the researcher has available. Both time and resources are limited here; therefore I carried out a small-scale study based on the views of a sample of principals, plus observations of what principals do and how they plan their daily activities in a typical day in half a dozen case-study schools. This study seeks to explore the perceptions principals have on their current role. In particular, it will seek what they see as their priorities and what are the major obstacles to achieving these priorities. Consequently, it will gather information describing what principals do and think, in order to put forward a detailed picture of the principal’s role in Chinese secondary schools today, a topic not well explored in the previous research.

With this purpose in mind, the research questions focused on the following key areas:

1. What are the main activities and priorities of secondary school principals in China, and what are the main influences on these activities and priorities?

2. What are principal’s views on their role, and the training they receive to prepare them for it?
3. What are major challenge/problems confronting principals?

I am also hoping to be able to gather some data regarding a fourth issue,

4. To what extent do the principals’ views and approaches reflect the influence of Western ideas and practices, and how well do the application of such ideas and practices fit with the traditional Chinese cultural context?

In the remainder of this study, I explore these questions further, gathering the views of a sample of principals. This study sample is drawn from principals attending the National Training Programme for Secondary Principals in Shanghai, and also from Shanghai secondary schools. The next chapter will describe how the study was planned.
Chapter 3 Planning the Inquiry

3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I will describe how the inquiry supporting this study was planned. But first, I will give a brief overview of this study. It was based on interviews and observations with a sample of 28 school principals selected from those attending training at the National Training Centre and from school principals working in Shanghai. It focused on the impact of recent education reforms on the role of the principal, seeking to identify changes in role, key factors influencing these changes, and in the process looking at differences and similarities between Western ideas and approaches and leadership practice within Chinese schools. Also, again, by looking at the similarities and differences between the principals’ roles and attitudes in China and published research findings from the West, it aimed to develop an understanding of how and where Western practices might be applied in China. In what follows I explain the rationale for carrying out the study and the procedures followed in order to collect and analyse the data. I also describe the ethical procedures that were followed, and the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

In seeking to explain the methodological stance and justify the design that underpins my data collection activities, I will start from the key areas of interest that came out from my initial reading, and the initial questions that guided this inquiry. First, I considered what sorts of data would be needed to answer these questions. Once the kinds of data required had been identified, the next step was to clarify the methodological stance I would adopt in this study, as the stance of the researcher reflects the philosophy underpinning the research, and dictates the research methods that will be used. I then go on to outline how the data was collected, and how I sought to make sense of my findings. Thus, I describe my thinking about research design, data collection and data analysis, as well as other issues of concern, such as sampling, ethics, trustworthiness and reliability. I hope this will demonstrate that the empirical research carried out was systematic, and involved a planned approach with the consequent analysis grounded in the data collected (Morrison 2007).

3.2 Areas of Interest

As mentioned in the literature review chapters, there are a number of key areas of interest to be explored in this study, arising from the questions posed regarding impact of education...
reforms on the role of secondary school principals in China. When I came to think about what in detail, I would need to find out about, I identified these key areas as follows:

1. The main activities and priorities of secondary school principals in China.
2. The main factors currently influencing these activities and priorities.
3. Principals’ views on their role, and on their training for this role.
4. The major challenges/problems currently confronting school principals.
5. The extent to which principals’ roles and attitudes are influenced by traditional culture, and to what extent principals are open to Western ideas on leadership that challenge these traditions.

 Obviously, to investigate these things, I needed to consider what data was needed, and how I would gather and analyse this. I recognised that it would not be possible to answer these questions without exploring what is happening in schools, in terms of policies, policy changes and the context. It also needed data about what principals do, what they think and the problems they experience. In an attempt to generate concrete information on these issues, I focused specifically on some key questions, as follows:

1. How would principals describe their roles?
2. What would principals identify as the most important aspects of their role as a principal?
3. How do principals plan their working day, and what activities do they spend most of their time on?
4. What are their priorities and what are the obstacles to achieving their priorities?
5. What support or training programmes for principals are available, and how would they evaluate these?
6. How did principals feel the changes—like the new curriculum reform and national policies— influence the way they carry out the job?
7. What do principals think are the big challenges facing them at present?

These questions were strategic questions to guide this inquiry and also were used to seek answers for my research questions as mentioned in the previous chapter. These questions were explored further from the principals’ views on their roles, supported by my observations of what they do in their own schools, to capture a picture of their work routines, and to see whether the emphasis they place within the role is different from the way the role is described in official policies and in published papers.
3.3 Choosing a research approach

Philosophical approach

When people carry out research, they are influenced by assumptions about knowledge (Swann and Pratt 2003). Morrison (2007) also argued that any research enquiry is full of challenges and uncertainties regarding how the ‘right’ methods can be identified and conclusions reached. Morrison explained that tension may be related to key two questions:

“What is the relation between what we see and understand [our claims to ‘know’ and our theories of knowledge or epistemology] and that which is reality [our sense of being or ontology]?” (P.18)

“In other words, how do we go about creating knowledge about the world in which we live? (McKenzie 1997, p.9)” (cited in Morrison 2007, p.18)

Morrison (2007) thus argues that epistemology is central to research endeavour. All researchers must ask what forms of ‘knowing’ can be generated, about how through this we might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings, and also how one can sort out what is to be regarded as 'true' from what is to be regarded as 'false' (Cohen, et al. 2000). Nevertheless, people, especially practical researchers should avoid taking extreme positions on the issue of 'Whether knowledge is something which can be acquired on the one hand, or is something which has to be personally experienced on the other' (Burrell and Morgan 1979, P.1-2).

Educational researchers do bring a wide range of theoretical perspectives to their work and the widest of these is ontology (Morrison 2007). From an ontological disposition, research is concerned with ‘the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated’. From this perspective, research explores whether knowledge is ‘out there’ in the world or it is created by one's own mind'. (Cohen, et al. 2000, P.6)

Another aspect that has been often discussed is methodology. As Morrison (2007) argued, this is also crucial because it provides a rationale for the ways in which researchers conduct their research activities. He argued that methodology is much more than the methods, and techniques or tools for research, like ‘conducting an interview’ or ‘keeping a research diary’, but that it provides insights into the researcher’s deep thinking, for example the reasons for ‘conducting an interview’. Quite often, arguments arising around methodology are due to whether people favour idiographic or nomothetic approaches. Those who prefer ideographic methods would be more likely, for example, to choose interviews and argue that interviews
provide a ‘more informed’ basis for claiming knowledge than for example a questionnaire could provide. This approach stresses:

“…the importance of letting one’s subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation.” (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p.6)

From this description, this would be a suitable approach to apply by those seeking exploration and discovery in the natural setting.

These assumptions are all branched off into two dimensions depending on subjectivist or objectivist approaches. Cohen, et al. (2000) described these two approaches:

“Objectivists prefer realism and believe that the world exists and is knowable as it really is. Organizations are real entities with a life of their own. Subjectivists are more idealistic and perceive the world exists but different people construe it in very different ways. Organizations are invented social reality.” (p.9)

Cohen et al. (2000) explained that positivism may be characterized by its claim that science provides us with the clearest possible ideal of knowledge, but interpretivism seeks for multiple and rich understanding, rather than a single ‘truth’.

As Briggs and Coleman (2007) pointed out, these paradigms discussed above have been most influential in the researchers’ work. These arguments about the different assumptions and relationships are used by many researchers to shape a research approach. However, it has been argued that these arguments often overlook human interactions in favour of ‘scientific methods’. I would not make strong claims regarding the way I build knowledge of the world. The ‘war’ between positivism and subjectivism is well established and it seems that so long as researchers present their own stance for their research that is fine. They need to explain why the epistemology they choose is the best fit in terms of the nature and the purpose of their research and they cannot expect more. Instead of describing my epistemological stance as either positivism or subjectivism, I have to say it depends on the context, and it is affected by my own experiences. The world may exist passively, but probably the world as it is experienced is more important!

Of course, not all researchers work from the same beliefs about the nature of reality. Notwithstanding, it is critical here to base the choice of research approach on a best fit for the study at hand. This study is designed and was conducted with open mind, being critical and self critical when looking for ‘meanings’ in the data collected. I did not have any specific hypothesis before the research. In contrast, I wanted to seek for principals' own perspectives when describing their own roles and any issues emerging from their roles. I do not deny that
principals construe their role in different ways, but I am more interested in where they share
the same views, and where there are clear differences, and what factors are behind those
similarities and differences.

The interpretive paradigm

The purpose for this research outlined above and my stance on research helped me to select
the interpretive paradigm as ‘best fit’ for this research. As Glaser (2007) explained, a
paradigm is a way of viewing the world, which will influence the way you investigate the
world. It is essential to clarify the selected paradigm when conducting and reporting research,
to show the reader the way you look at the world.

Interpretive researchers believe that ‘reality’ is actually a construct of the human mind. There
can be different understandings of what is ‘real’ because of differences in perception, in
interpretation and in language. As Bassey (1999) pointed out:

“Interpretive researchers recognise that by asking questions or by observing they may change
the situation which they are studying. The data collected by interpretive researchers are
usually verbal: fieldwork notes, diaries and transcripts and reports of conversations. In the
sense, they are usually richer, in a language sense, than positivist data.” (p.43)

Of course, such an approach can provide more richness in terms of meanings, than positivist
inquiry. Hunt (1989) noted that Ozanne and Hudson use "interpretive" to identify naturalistic,
humanistic and interpretive (N-H-I) inquiry, but "interpretive" may not accurately denote all
the characteristics of N-H-I inquiry. In that sense, interpretive seems to encompass features of
naturalistic inquiry.

Lincoln and Guba 1985 commented:

“‘Naturalistic Inquiry’ (NI) deals with a fundamental problem about ‘the concept of truth’ for
‘a systematic set of beliefs, together with their accompanying methods, a paradigm.’ “(cited in
Glaser 2007, p114)

Naturalist inquiry begins with a particular focus in mind (however tenuous) but has no
qualms about altering that focus as new information makes it appropriate to do so (Lincoln
and Guba 1985, P.229). Naturalist evaluation tends to be credible to participants because ‘it
gives life-like interpretations of their experiences’, though criticisms of ‘the naturalistic
approach are the high cost of conducting properly specified responsive evaluation and the
lack of accepted criteria of validity’ (Levacic 1990, p.212). Nevertheless, as Guba and
Lincoln (1981) argued, credibility can be obtained by a rigorous research design that includes
‘means of prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation and checking findings with subjects and other researchers’ (p212, cited in Levacic 1990).

In this study, a naturalistic approach was suitable for exploring the principals’ experiences and catching these in their own words. The research was designed with a focus on investigating the changing role of secondary principals in China. Though guided by key research questions, there was no particular hypothesis and I was comfortable about altering the focus as new information makes it appropriate to do so. This research was conducted from the stance of the interpretive research paradigm, believing qualitative research was most suitable for the data required. In this study, I proposed to tap into the principals’ experiences and opinions on their roles by holding face-to-face interviews, and by observing some of them at their work. In this sense, the fieldwork activities allowed probing and further questions when necessary, and confirming the researcher’s understanding with the participants was relatively straightforward.

**Qualitative Inquiry**

Qualitative methods were chose for this research. In education, qualitative research is frequently described as naturalistic because it tries to capture what happens in natural settings (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). It is useful to briefly consider the definition of qualitative research, and explain the reasons for choosing this approach for this study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) note:

“…the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.” (p.14)

This research, seeks personal, subjective and unique knowledge obtained from the opinions of secondary school principals. Therefore, considering the options for this research, qualitative methods seem most appropriate. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), qualitative investigators believe that strategies such as in-depth interviewing and observations can enable them to get closer to the participants’ perspectives. As they explained further, qualitative researchers can build close relationships with the participants, and thereby are able to obtain the rich descriptive data they believe is valuable. Taking Denzin and Lincoln’s (2008) argument, it can be further argued that qualitative researchers endeavour to gather details to improve reliability, and present their accounts to others to judge for themselves.
In addition, qualitative methods are particularly useful when seeking for “exploration, discovery, and inductive logic” (Patton 1987). To this extent, it is appropriate to use naturalistic qualitative methods in this study, as it is seeking to explore principals’ descriptions of their own roles and what they do in their daily life in the school, and to see how their different views shape their behaviour in the real world (Cohen et al. 2007). Though I tried to be critical when I analysed what they told me, mainly I was trying to understand what they think and what they do, and how this compares with what the school leadership literature reports. As aforementioned, since I have no hypotheses about what they should be thinking, this study adopted an interpretive perspective. Based on the nature of the inquiry and the research questions, the study seeks to identify patterns in the way Chinese principals carry out their jobs and explain their roles, for the prime purpose of adding to current understanding.

**Research strategy for this study**

Once qualitative research had been identified as a best fit in this study, the next step was to choose a research strategy. As outlined, since this is qualitative research, the strategy most suitable for this study is supplied by a naturalistic approach that is often associated with small-scale empirical inquiry. But before starting the fieldwork, I sought to clarify my understanding of the research process. In terms of definitions of research, Bassey (1999) provided a useful general statement:

> “Educational research is systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and wisdom about the experience and nurture of personal and social development towards worthwhile living and the acquisition, development, transmission, conservation, discovery and renewal of worthwhile culture.” (P.39)

Bearing this in mind, I endeavoured to carry out my research in a ‘systematic’ way, by involving ‘the planning and integration of design, process and outcomes’ in a process of connectedness (Briggs and Coleman 2007). To be ‘critical’ and ‘self-critical’, I aimed to ensure each stage of research would be transparent and was ‘open to the scrutiny and judgment of others’. My reflection and re-assessment was required throughout the whole process of the research. To help with this, I kept research diaries, and regularly reviewed my notes, together with keeping my mind open to suggestion from my supervisors and even the participants.

Additionally, Bassey (1999) categorised research into the following main types: empirical research, theoretical research, evaluation research and action research. But it is criticised that
there is not a clear boundary between these types of research and approaches often overlap (Macaulay 2008). Nevertheless, being aware of research classification problems helped me to judge a suitable research approach. To gather information about ‘changes’ and ‘roles’, I would need to ask relevant people or observe events. Therefore, though I could use published sources, there had to be some original empirical data gathering. As it is defined:

“Where questions are asked of people, observations made of events and descriptions taken of artefacts, by researchers who are using their sense to collect data and their intelligence to ensure that it is done systematically by trustworthy procedures, critically analysed and wisely interpreted, with fair conclusions drawn.” (Bassey 1999, p.40)

This type of research – empirical research would enable me to talk to participants or observe them, to inquiry into practical priorities and identify the main activities of the principals and to gather their views on leadership in the changing context. Empirical research involves data collection in the form of words without any assumptions in advance. Therefore it can fit a flexible design which “evolves during data collection, and data are typically non-numerical (usually in the form of words)” (Robson 2002, p.87).

Robson (2002) summarized three traditional flexible design research strategies: case study, ethnographic study and grounded theory study. A case study focuses on a single ‘case’ or a small number of related ‘cases’ of a situation, individual or group that are of interest or concern. The data is generally gathered through techniques including observations, interviews and documentary search.

Robson (2002) even argued that all enquiries are case studies in one sense and explained:

“...they typically take place in a specific setting, or small range of settings, context is viewed as important, and there is commonly an interest in the setting in its own right.” (p.185)

Bassey (1999, p.47) suggested:

“One of essential characteristics of case study is that sufficient data are collected for researchers to be able to explore significant features of the case and to put forward interpretations for what is observed. Another essential feature is that the study is conducted mainly in its natural context. Case study is study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings.” (p.47)

In terms of the purpose of a case study, Bassey (1999, p.28) commented:

“Many researchers using case study methods are concerned neither with social theory nor with evaluative judgement, but rather with the understanding of educational action...They are concerned to enrich the thinking and discourse of educators either
To sum up, this research was carried out with a sample of secondary school principals from a local district in Shanghai and from the National Training Centre for Secondary Principals located in Shanghai, but these cases are all related in that they are recognized as the principals representing the best leadership practice in their own regions. For the sake of time, it was not possible to spend a long period being immersed in each setting, and that was not necessary in this study. Even though there was an intention to observe what principals do at work, I did not expect to develop new theory from such a small-scale study, and the purpose of the observations were mostly to familiarise myself with their working situations so I would better understand what they said to me in the interviews.

**Why small-scale research**

In the beginning of this chapter, I clarified that this is a small-scale study involving a limited sample. As Seale (1999) argued, making methodological decisions is a craft skill, which be learned through practice. He suggested researchers should experiment with methodology in small scale studies that help to ‘guard against more obvious errors’ rather than take risks in larger projects that can ‘create anxieties that hinder practice’ as a relatively inexperienced researcher. In this sense, the best solution seemed to develop my research along the line Lincoln (1993) suggested, with “the search for grand narratives…… replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations” (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p.22). Or it could be regarded as the study of a singularity, which Bassey (1994, p.47) defined as “research into particular events”; where again limited ambitions seem appropriate.

Of course, small-scale research may be challenged for its validity, generalizability, and reliability, but that does not necessarily blot out its value. As aforementioned, there are certain ways to offset this, such as transparent procedures, use of thick description, triangulation, and so on. In the research I attempted to follow the above criteria to achieve rigour in the findings. The participants were principals with ‘good’ leadership practice. What they have experienced in terms of their changing role and their reflection on this are therefore particularly interesting. Reporting these views and reflections allows readers to reflect on the specific problems and specific situations themselves, though I will of course offer my own analysis. It may also inspire ideas to move research forward. In addition, this study applies
multiple methods, including interviews, observations and shadowing, to provide rich data to contribute the ‘thick description’ advocated in small-scale study.

Having clarified my stance in this research and selected the strategies to be used, the next step is to outline what I actually did and how I planned the inquiry.

3.4 Planning the Inquiry

The Sample

Sampling is a very important aspect of the research design, to avoid wasting time with an inappropriate population. Logically, the larger the sample, the greater the reliability for any generalization that is attempted. However, it is not practical or possible to study everything (Robson 2002), especially in a big country like China with its huge population, so purposeful sampling is vital. Manoharan (2009) argued that “cluster sampling is a frequently used, and usually is more practical, than random sampling method” (p.25). One method of sampling is the multi-stage sampling, which employs more than one filter to sample the population depending upon the situation. In this study, for instance, the first sampling was to select the secondary school principals attending the National Training Programme in a university in Shanghai, and then to identify some of these for the interview programme. Finally a small sample located in schools in a relatively developed district in Shanghai were added.

The data collection was divided into two phases, and it was gathered from two sources. The first source is based at the National Training Centre of Secondary School Principals in Shanghai (NTCSSP)-designated by the Ministry of Education. Principals from all parts of the country attend these training programmes, and I hoped to achieve a representative sample from those who were attending the particular programme I engaged with. A sample of participants was interviewed to gather their views about the role of principals, and their experiences. In all, this sample was expected to be comprised of around 20 interviewees including principals and teaching staff in that centre. In the second phase, the sample was targeted on four principals as well as five or six teachers from each case study school in a developed district in Shanghai. The first group was self-selecting, in that they volunteered to take part, and the second group were nominated on the basis of their performance by their municipal education authority.

These two groups were chosen as representing best practice of leadership China- the National training programmes are open only to ‘elites’, while the school system in Shanghai would be
considered amongst the best in the country. Shanghai is also a place that I am familiar with after a few years’ study and one year work experience there. The first group of principals from the broader population at the national level would be used to gather and map perceptions, while the second group enabled me to look at what principals actually do. It was expected that such a sample would include some of the more advantaged school leaders, but would also have individuals well-schooled in the traditional approach to leadership.

Further participants involved in the study also included representatives from policy-makers, local governors, and principal trainers. Teachers also participated in the case-study schools. Although the data from teachers and policy-makers was not considered as the main data to be analysed, their evidence would undoubtedly contribute to better understanding, adding multiple-perspectives to the principals’ opinions on their role. The participants involved in this study are as follows:

- Total interviewees:
  28 principals and three vice principals, 21 teachers, four principal trainers, one bureau deputy director in the local bureau of education

- Shadowing four principals, each for five days, but segmented due to the principals’ schedules (i.e three days in a week and two days in next week) and interviewing 5-6 teachers in each case study school

**Interviews, shadowing, observations and documentary research management**

After the samples were identified, multiple instruments for gathering data were drawn up for this study, such as interview schedules, observation schedules and shadowing plans. In this section, I described how I managed these instruments and reflect on the issues involved.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) noted that participant observations and in-depth interviewing are the best-known representatives of techniques of qualitative research. These two methods seem to ‘fit’ qualitative research. Stake (2010) argued that qualitative research is generally experiential research and relies on personal judgment to assert how something works. Personal judgment is largely based on experience obtained from experiential research. In that sense, qualitative research is usually focused on understanding a particular situation, rather than reaching general social science understandings.
Packer (2011) pointed out that interviews are a ubiquitous approach to data collection throughout the social sciences. The purpose of the qualitative interview is to gather the subjective experiences of the interviewees who are allowed to speak for themselves freely. To some extent, the qualitative interview has limitations regarding its subjectivity and also possible bias on the part of the interviewer. In that sense, the interview as a research technique is frequently challenged regarding validity, and it is true that good observations and interviews take lots of time and cost much to develop.

In terms of types of interviews, Robson (2002) categorized three types of interviews: fully structured interview, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Comparatively, the second type- the semi-structured interview is most often used because of its combination of flexibility and focus. In the semi-structured interview, interviewees are allowed to speak freely rather than constrained by fixed questions, the order of questions to answer or prepared topics during conversation (Packer 2011). It is also guided by the predetermined questions but it is more flexible. Robson (2002) argued that questions and question order can all to be changed to fit the particular interviewee in the real situation to achieve effective conversation. In semi-structured interviews, questions are not asked in a fixed way, but more in a conversation with probing and follow-up. In addition, Hennink, et al. (2011) defined that an in-depth interview is described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’; to gain insight into certain issues and it is usually best achieved by a semi-structured interview. In-depth interviews are typically used to seek individual personal experiences on a specific issues or topics. A number of researchers, (e.g., Wengraft 2001) identify that in-depth interviews can be used to collect narratives about people’s lives, that can usually be tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

These features in the semi-structured interview are helpful to create an interactive and comfortable conversation with the participants, in depth. In this research, the participants were almost all school principals, a quite high position which may bring some power distance between them with the student researcher. Therefore, a list of questions or issues were used as an interview guide (see Appendices 2, 3 & 5), to assure best use was made of the limited time available in the interview situation and provide a framework that could help me to develop questions and ask questions sequentially. Some questions were intended to help to open the principals’ mouths and make them feel comfortable to talk more, like ‘how do you plan your day’. At the same time, the interviewees in answering the questions were encouraged to address their own concerns, in greater depth whenever necessary.
Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages of interviews. Robson (2002) listed advantages of interviews, especially face-to-face interviews. It allows interviewers ask questions directly; therefore it is possible to modify one’s line of enquiry. In addition, there are some features that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot attain, such as “following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives with techniques. i.e. probe or prompt.” On the other hand, it takes time to prepare for interviews. You have to make arrangement to negotiate access to participants, and visit the participants. Also, you have to be prepared for changes to arrangements made by participants, and coping with “rescheduling appointments to cover absences and crises takes more time” (Robson 2002). In addition, it could be challenging to create a productive conversation, as in-depth interviews need skills to establish rapport and use motivational probes (Hennink, et al. 2011). Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state that good interviews are conducted as a comfortable conversation, so that interviewers talk freely about their points of view, providing descriptive data, and the researcher is able to develop insights as the interviewees interpret some aspect of the experience. Good interviews do not happen without efforts and they need to be conducted by interviewers who are well prepared and have good interpersonal skills. Consequently, transcribing and subsequent analyses are time-killers, and need more organizing skills here.

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) concluded, the role of interviewers is to pace the interview and keep it productive. It needs the interviewers to have a sense of what is significant in the information this interviewee can provide. Therefore, instrument design must fit the participants. Instrument design, such as question guides, is crucial to achieve an effective interview. In terms of structures of the interview guide, they often include an introduction, opening questions, key questions and closing questions (e.g., Appendices 2 & 3). Robson (2002) suggests some tips for question design, so as not to confuse interviewees and advises avoiding the following question types; long questions, double-barrelled questions, leading questions and biased questions. Some techniques, such as probes and prompts, are always useful to lead a productive interview. To conduct a good interview, of course, ambiguous questions and responses are not helpful. Stake (2010) suggested that questions be similar in form but it is better to include various item types to relieve potential boredom. By common consensus, questions should be addressed immediately to the interviewee. Hennink, et al. (2011) argue that questions are “often phrased in the colloquial language or used local phrases that will be easily understood by their interviewees” (p.118).
In terms of question design, Hennink et al. (2011) also remind us that normally, attitudes are not easy to obtain from interviews by asking interviewees directly. They suggested that alternatively, researchers can categorize the concept framework with subheadings of topics or concepts. If your interview is seeking to identify attitudes, you can ask about certain components regarding attitudes. For instance, in this study, by recognizing that some principals seemed to feel a bit reluctant to offer negative comments towards the training programme they attended, I changed the question asking: ‘how do you suggest the training programme could be improved’, instead of asking directly if they felt it was a good programme.

Overall, there were two principles applied to design the questions. The first one, as Spradley (1979, P.37) noted, is that “researchers must pose questions explicitly to avoid confusing understanding”. Explicit and relevant questions were aimed at in this study. Alternative words or paraphrasing were used when it was noticed that participants might find it difficult to respond or needed further prompting. For instance, instead of asking about their ‘main activities’ as a principal, I asked them: ‘what are you normally busy with?’ ‘What do you spend most of your time on?’

The second criterion is that the research questions and interview questions should be connected logically. In the beginning, some questions were designed to be easier to understand but not give the interviewee too much pressure, such as ‘can you describe the context of the school?’, ‘tell me about your career path?’, ‘Can you tell me about your experience as a principal’, and so on. But it is not good to leave all the important questions for the end of the interview. In addition, Maxwell (2005) noted that it is necessary to try to anticipate how the questions will actually work in practice and take the side of the interviewee to imagine your possible reaction and response.

However, even if well prepared, there are still issues that can emerge to make interviewing more difficult. Packer (2011) argued that qualitative research in practice shows an asymmetry of power and control, which is not an equitable kind of interaction. The interviewers actually assign themselves a supporting role but rather play a large part in controlling the interaction. But, to be honest, researchers are normally under pressure to gather rich data within limited time. It is difficult to balance the equity in terms of complete freedom for both partners. In this study, the asymmetry of power may be significant in a relationship between a junior
researcher and a school principal who possesses much power and a high position in the society, though at the same time, the researcher poses no threat.

To handle procedure issues in interviews, as Hennink, et al. (2011) pointed out, one of key characteristics of qualitative data collection is to ‘use the key issues that are identified in one interview to refine questions and topical probes in a following interview’ (p.111). Therefore, it is useful to keep notes or make a short summary of the issues that emerged from the previous interviews and keep this in mind. These key issues can be used as new topics to guide the later interviews. To some extent most researchers feel that the later interviews seem better structured and with more richness of data.

By bearing these in mind, to have a productive first interview, the researcher has endeavoured to be well prepared, by conducting a literature review as well as talking to professors specialized in educational leadership, and also helping in activities or projects involving school principals in Shanghai to become more familiar with what is happening in schools in China. The researcher also spent a few days observing the training programme. Those efforts all contributed to productive interviews later, by minimizing the potential power distance and the principals did not give any impression that they were conscious of this status. Although the researcher was quite cautious to pose questions in the beginning, she soon became more confident to create a comfortable conversation.

Last but not least, at this stage of interview management, preliminary analysis of interviewing data was considered to avoid the potential problems of data-overload. That is because by doing interviews as the main method for data collection, sequentially, it means that there is massive amount of data to deal with. Bearing Kvale’s (1996) words in mind, Robson (2002) also reminded that researchers should think through analysis of large amounts of interview data before you commit yourself to the data collection, otherwise it will be too late. He offers some tips from Kvale (1996) to deal with mounds of data in the earlier stage of data collection, which is very helpful. Firstly, you should think about methods of interview management to seek for data in a coherent and creative way. Secondly, you should have techniques to lead interviewees to share what you want to know in an unwitting way. Lastly, you have to convince interviewees they can contribute to extending your knowledge of the phenomena you are investigating. If you are able to think through those questions ahead of time and are prepared to achieve those targets, you may not be confused or panic in front of
the large amount of data collected. Analysis process will become clearer as these techniques and considerations are strung together to produce more purposeful data.

Another method applied in this study was observation, more accurately, non-participant observation. Observation is defined as

“...a research method that enables researchers to systematically observe and record people’s behaviour, actions, and interactions to understand people’s behaviour within their own social-cultural setting.” (Moyles 2007, p.173)

Molyes (2007) argued that when conducting non-participant observation, researchers endeavour to be invisible, like a ‘fly-on-the wall’ in the ‘natural’ setting. Simultaneously, it is argued that observation needs to be combined with other methods, such as interviews, or focus groups to achieve a full picture of what is happening. Otherwise, observation may only capture a certain picture of what is going on with the frequency or duration of observed events. In this research, I aimed to observe what activities were included in the principals’ training programme, thus non-participant observation was the best-fit.

Besides observation of the training applied in this study, shadowing was used too. In terms of shadowing, it is described that researcher closely follows a member of an organization over an extended period time (McDonald 2005). Moyles (2007) argued that it is observational research, though others may not perceive it as such. She suggested that shadowing would be an appropriate method in “matching the expectations of a role with the actual daily fulfilment of that role” (p.248). In this study, shadowing is an appropriate and useful method for observing a principal’s typical day as well as the activities he/she attended to as the role was carried out (See Appendix4 for more details regarding shadowing procedure).

There are strengths and limitation regarding observation. In terms of the strengths, it provides familiarity with cultural milieu, explains behaviour, and reveals unspoken rules of behaviour. It is less intrusive than interview methods, and can provide insight into people’s interactions. It needs repeated immersion in the setting, so it is time consuming, and recording field notes is cumbersome as simultaneously observing and recording can be difficult. Field notes may be subjective; researchers need to refrain from interpretation, and of course, it needs skilled observers. Perhaps, to conduct observation, some practice is generally demanded. But practice is most necessary when you need to work out times for observing particular activities. In this study, which is to observe the principal’s typical day to day activities and
behaviours, it was not necessary to make precise measurements, so I did not practise, but learned as I repeated the process.

Some authors call non-participant observation ‘fly on the wall’, which means that they blend into the background and do not influence what you are observing, though observers are often part of the situation they observe and so may influence the situation by their presence, which is sometimes called observer effect or ‘Hawthorne effect’ (Mulhall 2003). Of course, as Moyles (2007) pointed out, there may be observer effects that are difficult to eliminate due to people’s attitudes or concerns. However, in this research, the observer as a student researcher tended to be less likely to have influence or pose ‘threats’ to those outstanding school principals. The purpose of the observation of the training programme aimed to know more about the principals’ experience and opinions regarding leadership and school management that were shared in the class. On the other hand, it also intended to build up rapport with potential participants for the later interviews and help become familiar with their language and ‘milieu’. Similarly, when shadowing principals in school, the researcher did not have influence on the situation and had agreed in advance to withdraw from any situation the principal felt not suitable to observe. I also conducted a free conversation with participating principals at the end of each day, but tried not to disturb them during their working time. Nevertheless, bearing those effects and bias in mind, it is helpful to design observation instruments rigorously. In addition, it is necessary to seek for advice from peers or supervisors and I have endeavoured to do peer checking or talk to my supervisor when I was unsure how to proceed.

When I take notes, I tried to write notes continuously while using sketches or drawings to improve the detail of field notes, labelling each field note with a date, time, and place, describing the actual setting I was observing, and focusing on how people moved around and behaved in the setting. In this research, an observation framework (see Appendix 4) was made in advance, which guided the observation systematically with particular points of focus rather than randomly responding to what was seen. Stake (2009) argued that a new researcher generally worries too much about the accuracy of the record, but for an observer, the priority is to be clear about ‘what is happening, to see it, to hear it, to try to make sense of it’ (p. 94). Taking his suggestion, a field diary was used as an alternative way to record my thoughts and reflections on what was observed, and it also included the my own hunches, ideas, feelings, and personal views (see Appendix 14).
Besides the above methods, documentary research was drawn on in this study to analysing government policies and policy changes which would contribute to the context of the main findings. Fitzgerald (2007) argued:

“…for social science researchers, documents offer a form of voice; a voice on past events and activities that provides a level of insight for the reader into these events, activities and participants” (p.280).

Documentary research seeks to gather data regarding the context of government policy changes relevant to the main findings deduced from participants’ comments. It also provides a better understanding of the context for readers. In particular, as it is a cross-cultural study, it seems necessary to describe as complete a picture as possible to readers who may not be familiar with China. Researchers need to consider their responsibility to minimize the misunderstandings among readers. There are also other issues arising from cross-cultural study, that will be identified in a later section.

Triangulation methods have been applied across these techniques. However, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) commented, generally the later activities (e.g. interviews, observations) will become more structured as time passes. As they explained, techniques and experiences sharpen over time. To some extent, it is true. That is why it is essential to be well prepared. Notwithstanding, I had been trained in research skills and did not have to start with a blank paper.

Other activities during the procedures of data collection are also quite important to researchers who need to report them, such as data recording and transcription. Regarding data recording modes, ‘fidelity’ and ‘structure’ are the two key dimensions being considered in this study. It is argued that audio or video recording contributes to fidelity as those recordings can provide the original data to readers. But also, field-notes are necessary in case the digital recorders encountered technical difficulties. For instance, in this study, during the first interview, the digital recorder was off. But the data was recorded based on my memory as well as the field notes. Luckily, the interview notes could be sent to the participant who returned the notes with his checking. In terms of structure, data recording modes were constructed with more detailed and specific interview and observational protocols. It involved a process of reflecting and refining the questions or instruments.

Regarding transcription, it cannot be simply produced by typing what is recorded. Gibson and Brown (2009) believed that it is a way that researchers specify “some particular features of
the data that are relevant to their analytic purpose and find an effective way to represent those features” (p.110). In that sense, through transcription, researchers are able to set a path through a given set of data and to produce an “analytic focus”. They also remind us that it is necessary to regularly revisit the original data to check the accuracy and appropriateness of the transcription. Before doing the transcription, I believed that it was better to make some brief summary of the interview and listen to the recording until I could understand the whole conversation, like a story in a narrative way. Notes were taken for almost all interviews in this study, and almost all the interviews were also recorded with consent of the participants, which was very helpful for accurate information, and understanding of the conversations. On the other hand, the notes also provided a shortcut for looking through the massive amounts of data transcripts produce.

Some issues always emerge in transcription. For instance, Gibson and Brown (2009) argued that it is possible that researchers may change meaning through their forms of representation, so it is necessary to double-check transcripts against the original recording to capture missed nuance and contextual meanings. In line with Gibson and Brown’s (2009) suggestion, I felt that it was also “helpful to wait a few days between producing an initial transcription and checking through it” (p.120). In this study, all recording was transcribed, including some helpful notes or memos, made at the time, like facial expression and even some signs of mood (for example laughing), these details were helpful to think of the scene in details and to become ‘immersed’ in the data.

Another issue, often mentioned in the research methods literature, is how to deal with punctuation in the transcription. It is not significant issue in this study, as oral mandarin generally uses quite short sentences, which is not like English language with complicated structures. Notwithstanding, peer checking is necessary. For instance, an English speaker who also studies leadership and has conducted a great number of interviews on leadership checked the transcriptions with me, and also they were shown to the supervisor for advice.

In this study, the data was collected in Mandarin. The data were also analysed in that language, to increase reliability. Therefore, the transcripts are not translated into English word by word, but only the main quotes selected to support the findings in the form of ‘the interviewees’ voice’. A sample of transcripts can be found in Appendix 9, where it was translated into English. The rest were burnt onto CD available for supervisors and examiners only, should they require them.
To sum up, in this study cross-cultural and translation issues cannot be overlooked. It might not be easy to achieve mutual understandings across different cultures. Translation can also change the meaning in some cases. I used peer checking on confusing parts, and had regular discussion with Prof. Zhou from East China Normal University, a fluent English speaker distinguished with broad knowledge of education in China, who agreed to act as an adviser during the fieldwork. And also, one Education lecturer who speaks native mandarin and fluent English has been helping when I encountered problems. In addition, the first two interview transcriptions that were translated in English were scrutinized by my supervisor and the ambiguous parts were discussed, which has been very helpful to the later transcription and translation.

Data Analysis

As I clarified, I started preliminary analysis during data collection process and had thought through the analysis of massive amounts of interview data before I committed myself to the data collection. Now, I will explain how I analysed data transcripts after the data collection process, and how I arrived at interpretation. In this section, I will elaborate the coding framework, along with qualitative analysis issues, and then describe the process of coding and briefly describe the procedures used.

It is important to decide on the techniques for analysing the data at the same time as the choice of method for the data collection (Macaulay 2008, p.101). Different methods are suitable to particular types of data. Taking Dey’s example that the way of making the omelette involves breaking eggs, he argues that the core of qualitative analysis too involves ‘breaking data down into bits and describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect’. (Dey 1993, p.30) He also suggested that the significance of data analysis is to structure data into meaningful categories rather than to imitate measurement. So, for instance, thematic analysis is an approach to analysing data using the creation and application of ‘codes’ to the data to find meaningful categories. It is one of the first analytic techniques used in qualitative studies (Buetow 2010). Thematic analysis is an approach which identifies themes in the mind before the final data analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) defined, thematic analysis is:

“A qualitative analytic method for ‘identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail.’”(p.79)
It can save a lot of time when reducing the data, if we know the focus or the topics that are contained within, which offers a systematic way of analysis, rather than wandering through the masses of information to look for themes. To this extent, thematic analysis tends to be a suitable method to engage initially with the data, before a more detailed coding is attempted.

A large number of researchers agree that the initial stage of qualitative data analysis is the identification of key themes and patterns and this essentially is a descriptive process (see Willig 2001; Dey 1993; Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Miles and Huberman 1994). This means that the categories in the early stages of coding are at a low level of abstraction and such categories are largely descriptive of the phenomena identified in the data (Willig 2001). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) consider that coding is a means of generating concepts from data and so enables us to review what our data are saying:

“Initial coding, then, should help us to identify themes, patterns, events, and actions that are of interest to the researcher and that provide a means of organizing data sets.” (p.32)

In this study, an explicit conceptual framework and research questions allowed an initial coding framework, which was applied to the first interview transcript, and this helped to test out and tease out categories. But as Silverman (2001) pointed out, there is no perfect transcription or analysis approach. He also agreed with Atkinson’s view and noted that the disadvantage of coding schemes is that they are based upon a given set of categories which may limit a ‘powerful conceptual grid’. Coding offers a systematic approach, but also can miss some important information out of the categories chosen.

Silverman (2001) addressed two main issues in qualitative analysis. Qualitative research is sometimes challenged over the problem of reliability, because it does not draw on strong and systematic evidence, but instead relies on limited data extracts. Regarding the level of complexity and variety in qualitative data, it is not difficult to understand that researchers might feel overwhelmed by massive amounts of data. It is therefore a big challenge for researchers to reduce the volume of data, while noticing and coding the main themes and structuring these in an appropriate framework contributing to the essence of what the data reveal. Such a complicated process of data analysis aims to enable the important themes buried in the data to emerge, though it is a slow and painstaking process.

Another issue in the qualitative analysis is that researchers can sometimes wander too far from their data. For instance, they analyse in ways which might be very relevant to the research questions, but are not supported by the data produced in their studies. Vice-versa,
they may analyse the data without regard to the research questions. And we should note that qualitative analysis requires that you ask about how confident you are with your data analysis, or does the meaning come out without personal imagination? Of course, confidence can be boosted from developing a rigorous research design and analysis method.

Regarding coding massive amounts of data, this is very time consuming. Quite a number of computer packages, are now available, such as NVivo, for coding qualitative data from interviews and observations. These may help with data storage, searching and retrieval, which is very useful. However, it often takes more time to master the package than it would potentially save. In addition, in this study, all the data was collected in Mandarin so I would have to translate the words and lose their richness to encode them using a computer programme. Besides, Macaulay (2008) argued that the advantage of manual coding is that it allows for thinking time, ‘time to imagine the concepts behind the data, and time with the information seemed too important to lose’ (p.101). It is true that it requires the researcher to go carefully through the transcripts for manual coding, but this approach seems to provide a better understanding of the context. Quite often themes that are quite surprising but may not be detected by software can emerge. In that sense, the repeated reading of the data was an important part of the analysis in this research, and this could be lost with the use of a computer package. It was therefore decided not to use a computer package to support the analysis of the data in this research.

How best to code manually? Morse and Richards (2002, p. 110) commented that the purpose of coding is to get “from unstructured and messy data to ideas about what is going on”, and suggested that “analytic coding is more a process of reflection on concepts and their relations” (p.229). Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) set out the six phases of conducting thematic analysis:

1. **Becoming familiar with the data.**

2. **Generating initial codes.**

3. **Searching for themes.**

4. **Reviewing themes.**

5. **Defining and naming themes.**

6. **Producing the report.**
These contain quite complicated processes of data description, including comparing, omitting and adding new themes. As Dey (1993) noted, it is a spiral intended to identify important themes. He suggested two approaches to comparative analysis. One is to compare data bits assigned to different categories, and the other is done in the opposite way with comparison of data bits assigned to a single category. Dey (1993) described the analytical procedure of connecting concepts as equivalent to the process of ‘putting mortar between building blocks’. It means this process is to arrange the separate concepts as a unit. Of course, finding patterns in that coding then becomes a challenge.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested some criteria to achieve the rigour of the data analysis from the stage of transcription to the write-up for producing the report. It includes careful transcription, along with punctuation conventions, avoidance of ‘anecdotal’ approach, congruence between extracts and analytic claims, and so on. For instance, to avoid anecdotalism, all the codes from each interview were summarized in a table under the main theme, which was helpful to look at the patterns of frequency and irregularity to achieve stable judgment (See appendices 10 & 11). In addition, they remind us that the researcher should play an active role in the research process. Simultaneously, the researcher should keep a good fit between what they claim to do, and what is shown to have been done.

Simultaneously, I also kept eyes open for new categories that might emerge in the data. This approach was borrowed from ‘Grounded Theory’. Grounded theory is an alternative way to do data analysis that assumes you have no idea about the main themes or categories before you analyse data so you have to read and analyse the data and then pick the categories that fit best. Grounded Theory has its strengths in “both the process of category identification and integration (as method) and its product (as theory)” (Willig 2001, p.33) and has been widely used in qualitative data analysis, because it is not only an approach to analysing data, but also it contributes to the generation of theory. Of course, we are not seeking to achieve a new theory from this small-scale enquiry, but the approach is still helpful. It is useful to use coding combined with some strategies from Grounded Theory to exhaust the categories’ full analytic potential and to interpret deeply what the informants want to say. For instance, there are some key themes and subthemes that emerged from the data with assistance from the above techniques as follows:

1. Role of principal
2. Training (support)
3. Impact of reforms
   - Curriculum
   - Structures/accountability
   - Managing teaching/learning
4. Social change
5. Views on leadership
6. Problems/challenges

Of course, new themes, or subthemes emerged in each key theme. For instance, in terms of
the role of the principals, several subthemes emerged and they made sense of the data bits.
These were ‘educational philosophy’, ‘leading curriculum development’, ‘teaching and
learning’, ‘teacher development’ and ‘managing organizations’ and ‘culture’. These are all
discussed in the following chapter in more detail.

What needs to be clarified is that the process of coding is not merely reducing the data. It is
as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argued, more about asking oneself questions about the data.
These questions helped to develop lines of speculation and hypothesis formation. Retrieving
data is necessary because there might be a danger in terms of misunderstanding the data or
losing the sense that they are ‘accounts’ when it is abstracted from its original context (Dey
1993; Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Member checking is needed too -through my supervisor. It
is argued that reliability should be considered across the study, stage by stage, even from
designing the research framework, and during the data collection, including instruments (e.g.
interview schedules). In this study, my supervisor has been scrutinizing the research design as
well as the results of my analysis. Regarding the findings, my supervisor has checked each of
the first three transcriptions and subsequently moderated my coded interviews. After three of
the interviews, I modified old codes and added new themes to the coding schedule and
refined this further after the fourth interview. Once all the interviews were coded, key themes
were retrieved from the original data with techniques of splitting and merging across themes
and within the same themes and so on. It is a cycle which needs retrieval of marked data
segments to ensure reliability and fidelity to the original data.

Notwithstanding, as Willig (2001) defined, theoretical coding involves a coding paradigm
which helps the researcher to be sensitive when seeking to make explicit connections
between categories and sub-categories. An open-mind and sensitivity is what the researcher
must bear in mind across the whole process of this study, including data analysis.
3.5 Ethical consideration, trustworthiness and the generalization issue

Ethical consideration

High quality research is marked by a worthy topic, methodological rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaning coherence (Tracy 2010). From the very early stage of this enquiry preparation, it was important to address ethical issues related to what the researcher was going to do in the study. Research risk and ethics assessment were discussed with supervisors. It is vital to give serious thought to this point (Robson 2002). Introduction letters and consent forms were produced, based on The Data Protection Act and the University Data Protection Policy as well as the Ethical Practice Policy and Guidance of the University of Manchester. The introduction letter included the purpose, the aim and other vital details of this study and, with a consent form, these were sent to all the participants in advance. With the information given in advance, the participants knew about my project and they would not be too anxious during participation and they could feel free to decide whether they were willing to take a part or not.

When negotiating interviews with those principals who agreed to participate in the study, the anonymity and confidentiality of all parties was assured. Participants were also informed of the ethical guidelines within which the research was framed, and their written consent to participate in the study was requested. An informed Consent Form (copies both in Mandarin and English are appended, see Appendix 8) was distributed to all participants, and signed copies were collected from them before interviews were conducted. Following the advice from Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), I ensured that the participants understood the purpose of my study and how I proposed to handle any data collected, and their consent was obtained prior to their participation in the study. Therefore I feel that all participants were aware of the ethical criteria informing the study and its methods. The information sheets used (See Appendices 6 and 7) were prepared and sent out to the participants well in advance, and included a brief introduction to my project and what role they would play in it. As for the interview process itself, records retained were coded so that participants were not identified by name, and no personal information containing identifying factors was recorded. Although, I had prepared carefully in advance and explained my study and the purpose of the conversation to the participants, attaining their trust and gaining permission to make digital recordings of the interviews is a more complex business, and there were still two or three principals that felt reluctant to be recorded during interviews. Nevertheless, I did get
permission to use a digital recorder for the interviews from almost all of the participants. However, if the participant was reluctant to be recorded, I was happy to go along with this, as during the interviews, it is important to create a comfortable conversation and to establish an atmosphere where participants feel free to talk, and probing and even explicit questions can be posed. I did not want to compromise this by doing anything that participants might not be comfortable with. 

As was pointed out in the introduction letter, when I had finished the study, I was happy to share the finding with all those who participated, should they be interested in seeing these. The identification of individual participants is, of course, not possible from the reporting of this study.

Other issues associated with interviews, such as the possibility that interviewees might tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, were considered. However, as I am simply a student researcher who has little influence on the principals and no connections with their school communities, it seemed unlikely that my questions would seem threatening or that they would be nervous about what they said to me. Besides, the topics covered in the interviews were quite general, and there was little that could be thought sensitive. Even so, as was earlier clarified, when I noticed that some of the participants seemed somewhat reluctant to comment on the training programme they were attending, especially to make less positive comments, I did not push them. Nevertheless, I could see from what they did say that though there were aspects of the national training programme that they found quite dull, and other parts that they felt were over theoretical, it is quite difficult for them to go against the tradition of not criticizing, especially not criticizing official bodies. When I sensed this, I changed the line of questioning, asking: ‘how do you suggest the training programme could be improved’. The participants seemed more comfortable answering this question, than listing dissatisfaction with the current programme. In addition, I even got one or two participants’ response to the transcripts of the interviews in the beginning of data collection. Once or twice I asked supplementary questions when I sent back the transcripts to check that I understood. I got their answers when I had a second chance of meeting them.

But there might be still some issues arising from the relationships between a student researcher and the principals that I could not easily overcome- in China High school principals are important people who are seen as very powerful, while a research student has very little status. I needed to think how to manage the conversation without giving the feeling to the interviewees that they were being managed, and I needed strategies to deal with those
who tended to dominate the conversation, making speeches instead of answering questions. At first I found this quite difficult, but the interview schedule helped me to pull them back when the participants talked too far away from the main topics, and over time I learnt how to steer the conversation better, saying things like: ‘that is very interesting, now can you tell me about…’ or ‘I can see that you have thought a lot about that, tell me what do you think about…..’. In fact, in the end it was less difficult than I had anticipated, and the Principals were really very helpful most of the time.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is the key to the quality of the findings. As previously mentioned a challenge within qualitative research is the validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) restated the criteria for ‘rigour’ and ‘trustworthiness’, including credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Anfara et al. 2002). The methodological skill and sensitivity, and training of the researcher somewhat prove the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Patton 1987). This means that the researcher should be capable of professional research with appropriate skills and training. I as the researcher had previously completed a research dissertation for my master’s degree in Educational Research Methods, which was also the pilot study for this thesis. The experience obtained from the pilot study-dissertation helped develop my skills in research. It can be seen that every stage of the study has been considered carefully and shown in detail to be transparent.

Bassey (1999 p.74) pointed out that ‘researchers are expected to be truthful in data collection, analysis and the reporting of findings.’ Although the quotation or description cannot speak for themselves as correct, it helps to reduce the errors at least. The data should be checked by those who provide data, though unfortunately many show little interest in it. But it seems that the sooner the transcription is presented, the greater the chances of a good member check. In this study, the findings have been presented with many detailed quotes. This could contribute to improved reliability. In terms of member checking, I was able to go back to interview some participants, asking further questions and double checking confusing parts which contained important information. Morrison (2007a) suggested that ‘research diaries provide a tool for charting both progress and critical research moments’ (p.297). I have been keeping research diaries, especially during the stage of data collection, by noting down the typical accounts and writing self-reflection. This has been helpful for reflection on the process and
improving the rigour of the research, which also contributes to the reliability of findings and conclusions.

Qualitative research is sometimes challenged regarding validity because of its subjectivity, so it may reflect bias on the part of the interviewer. To enhance the validity of qualitative research, Lewis (2009) recommended some checklists, often used by constructivists and naturalists, including triangulation, member checking, and the use of thick, rich description. As he explained, in-depth description of the research setting, the participants, and the themes, can present the entire picture, thus transporting the reader into the environment, setting and situations, and these all contribute to increase the validity.

In this study, it can be seen that I have endeavoured to report each stage in much detail, being transparent and leaving it to the reader to judge. I have also clarified my stance regarding the philosophy of the research regarding ontology and epistemology. Looking through this study, the literature review is closely linked to the research questions and has been refined to connect with key themes emerged in the findings. Each step, such as sampling, instrument design and refining interview questions has been rigorously considered and discussed with peers and my supervisor before it was carried out. Regarding the findings, there was a great deal of pure description in the report. The purpose of this description is to ‘let the reader know what happened and what it was like from the participants’ point of view to be in the study’ (Patton 1987, p.147). In this study, in-depth interviewing and thick description of data somewhat improve the objective judgment. This study was conducted by mixed methods drawing on thematic coding and grounded theory approaches which can also make up for the disadvantages of a single method or approach.

Triangulation is another of the main strategies for trustworthiness, as it not only contributes to credibility, but also is commonly used for establishing reliability and validity (Lincoln and Guba 1985). As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue, triangulation can contribute greatly to validation and others agree (eg. Denzin 1989a and 1989b; Fielding & Fielding 1986; Flick 1992). They agreed with Flick that triangulation and the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers all help (Flick 1992).

In this study, different sources, such as interview data, observation notes, as well as policy documentations were gathered. In addition, the triangulation methods have been applied in the study methods where appropriate, e.g. interviews, non-participant observations, shadowing and documentations searching.
Generalization

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) pointed out that ‘generalizability’ is another common problem associated with qualitative research. They also noted that a common approach to generalizability of qualitative research is that researchers let other researchers see the evidence for themselves, so it is then left to them to judge what its significance may be. Similarly, Pring (2012) stresses that:

‘generalisation can be made but they are inevitably tentative provisiona, open to interpretation, not necessarily applicable to all individuals, some of whom might come from very different backgrounds with very different ways of seeing the social and moral worlds...’ (P.11)

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) also argue, purposive sampling can enhance transferability. In this study, the sample was chosen based on the purposive principle. The sharing of the research process at each step also helps readers to decide how reliable the data is and how trustworthy are the findings. The findings were drawn from a number of participants who represent the ‘best’ leadership practice in China. What they face or are challenged by will confront those principals in less developed schools in less developed areas of China in the future. Although issues derived from a sample may not represent the whole population, it would be foolish if they were ignored. That is because an issue should not be only judged by its current impact, but also its potential influence of spreading out on a larger scale.

As Stake (1995) argued:

“We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does... but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself.” (P.8)

In this study, clearly, the research questions are not limited in relevance to these particular subjects. But nor is the study looking to over-generalize from the experience of such a small-scale sample. Rather it is presented as an illuminative study, leaving others to decide themselves how general the views of these principals might be (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). Similarly, Pring (2012) argued that it is also left to be judged by others what insights there may be here that shed light on the way school leadership is developing in China.
3.6 Conclusion

To summarize, this chapter has discussed the methodology and methods used to investigate the key research questions of this study. It is naturalistic qualitative research. With purposive intent, the sample was located in a relatively developed area in the mainland of China. The data was mainly gathered from 28 secondary school principals along with observation notes through semi-structured interview, observation, shadowing and other data from documentary research. Nine main themes have been identified in the findings. In the chapter that follows these will be presented and discussed.
Chapter 4 Findings (from the analysis of documentary sources)

As was pointed out at the end of the last chapter, the main findings from this study were drawn from a number of data sources, including documentary analysis, interviews with school principals and shadowing of principals at work. Before looking at what the principals had say about their roles and how these are changing, it will be helpful to contextualize this by examining what can be gleaned from a review of key documents, chiefly those relating to important recent policy changes in the Chinese education system. This chapter will seek to provide this, as it draws on the documentary sources to explain the changing education landscape and the new priorities and pressures this brings to the work of school principals. Hopefully this will help readers, especially those who know little about China, to understand the significance of the changes taking place.

Documentary research provided the main sources for material presented here. The chapter focuses on recent policies and Ministry directives directly affecting secondary schools. This includes changes to the regulations relating to the role of school principals and guidelines issued for principal preparation and training programmes. It also looks at measures that have increased accountability at school level, at the increasing pace of curriculum change over the past dozen years, and the recent and in many ways radical new focus on the quality of student experience and its relationship to their learning within schools.

4.1 The changing role of school principals

Modern China has gone through three stages: the early period following the PRC’s foundation, the period from 1966 to 1976 during the Cultural Revolution and a new ‘open door’ policy in China (Reform and Opening-up Policy) since 1978. Here I focus on key policy changes since 1979.

At the beginning of the new People’s Republic of China, established in 1949, there was no written ‘rules’ issued regarding the role of principals, though this was very much influenced by the role of the school’s party secretary. During the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to 1976, the entire country was thrown into unprecedented turmoil which left schools in chaos. The title of School Principal did not actually exist at the time, when they became "Directors of
Revolutionary Committee" instead. Principals were assimilated as defenders of the revolution and of the political system.

Since the new ‘open door’ policy in 1978, the role of principals has changed dramatically. Between 1985 and 1995 in particular, the country introduced a series of reforms and decided to attempt to separate the party and politics from education after proposing the “principal responsibility for school development” mechanism (xiaozhang fuze zhi, 校长负责制) in 1985. In February 1993, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council published the "China Education Reform and Development Programme", which required explicitly that “the secondary and elementary schools will apply the legislation”. This school management system was also written into state education law. In 1995, in the "People's Republic of China Education Law", Article 30 clearly stipulates:

“The principals’ appointment and dismissal should follow the state regulations. Principals are in charge of managing teaching along with other educational administration within their schools.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

Regarding specific provisions for the principal’s roles or responsibilities, the State Board of Education issued guidance on "National Principals Qualifications and Job Requirements (Trial)" in June 1991, which included the main duties of principals with a stress on political influence:

“Fully obey and implement the Party and the government's education guidance, policies and regulations, and consciously resist the tendency to violate education policies, laws and regulations in various ways.” (National Principals Qualifications and Job Requirements (Trial) 1991, http://www.moe.gov.cn)

Obviously, terms such as “fully implement” and “consciously resist” imply that principals played an “enforcer” role and that they had to “follow the national teaching plans and syllabus” according to this guidance. The "National Principals Qualifications and Job Requirements (Trial)" has been used for more than 20 years, although the role of principals has continuously changed since then, and there were no national standards for principals introduced until 2013.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education finally issued the "Compulsory School Principals' Professional Standards" (Standards), which comprised three dimensions, including: professional understanding and knowledge, professional qualities and strategies, and lastly professional competence and action, which interpreted principals’ professional standards as follows:

Within these standards, both students’ and teachers’ individual needs are emphasized. For instance, it is stated that the principals should understand “students’ individual needs” and “curriculum changes, curriculum development and implementation, and knowledge of curriculum evaluation” (Standards 2013). In addition, it is emphasized that the principals should lead teacher professional development programmes according to “teachers’ individual needs, strengthening the training of young teachers, supporting teacher exchanges between schools, and promoting information technology in teacher professional development.” (Standards 2013, http://www.moe.gov.cn).

All in all, it can be said that the role of principals has evolved and become much more complicated compared to 20 years ago. Training programmes have been put in place to support the development of the principal’s role.

4.2 Principal preparation and support since the 1980s

As mentioned in the literature review, principal training was launched at the end of the 1980s and has received more attention since then. In the late 1980s, national training was set up for both primary and secondary school principals. The national training centre for secondary principals (middle and senior high school principals) was set up at a university in Shanghai in 1989 and was opened to secondary principals in 1990. Not many people can attend these courses, which recruit ‘elite principals’, but the models has been copied to an extent in the provinces. Now, almost all school principals can receive some training.

In 1989, the State Education Commission Documents (No. 027) noted the establishment of the National Education Training Centre for Secondary School Principals and stated that the overall planning and training requirements were “mainly in the short-term period of full-time training for secondary school principals, teaching them about the education policy of the party and state policies, laws and regulations as well as educational theories, and school management knowledge.”(No.027)

But the training programme has continued to develop. According to documentary videos from the National Training Centre, recorded between 1989 and 2009, the types of training experience have become more diverse. For example, training models have been developed in
various forms including scenario simulation, seminars, follow-up services, on-site teaching, case studies, discussion and questions, experience sharing, and so on.

The first legislative documentation regarding principals’ training, promulgated in 1999, was called "Primary and Middle School Principals’ Training Rules" (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education Order No. 8) (Training Rules No.8, for short). Training content and programme, training institutions and qualifications were clearly defined:

“Article VI: the training is to develop primary and middle school principals’ capacity and competency. The main contents include political theory, ideological and moral cultivation, education policies and regulations, modern educational theories and practice, the school management theory and practice of modern educational technology, humanities and social science knowledge, and so on.” (Training Rules No.8 1999, http://www.moe.gov.cn).

The training programme for principals was quite centralized. For instance, Article X clearly articulates “the State Council administrative department of education is in charge of macro-management of the national training school principals, such as trainers’ assignment.” (Training Rules No.8 1999).

But the contents and forms of the principal training programme have been subject to constant changes, reflecting greater diversity and flexibility. In 2013, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE) documentation (Teacher [2013] No. 3), the government issued the "Compulsory School Principals' Professional Standards" (‘Standards’, for short). It stated that the principals’ training programme should be improved according to the “professional standards”. “Standards” can help to adjust training programmes as well as training materials tailored for the principals, the "professional standards" being important guidance for compulsory school principals’ training.

Since “Standards” was enacted, a series of documents on principal training have been issued, focused on improving the quality of the programme. For instance, the Ministry of Education (Teacher [2013] No. 11) published “Ministry of Education Suggestions on Further Strengthening the Training of School Principals” on August 29, 2013. In the document, the training suggested a focus on principals’ professional development, and their capability improvement. It detailed provisions of tailored training contents, learner-centred training methods, and innovative training mechanisms to meet principals’ individual needs. For instance, in terms of innovation of the training mechanism, Article VI says:

“Developing an innovative training mechanism to stimulate the vitality of principal training: all training institutes should actively explore training mechanisms for the principals to allow
them to independently select training and learning to meet their individual needs, and develop a menu as well as an information-based services platform for principals to provide diverse choices.” (Teacher [2013] No. 11, http://www.moe.gov.cn).

The two articles above emphasize that principals, as trainees, play a significant role in their own learning. This is mainly reflected in the efforts to provide a greater choice of training course options for principals. According to the articles, it is encouraged that training schemes are allocated on an open “bidding mechanism”, with the merit-based selection principle, so that only qualified professional training institutions can win approval to conduct training for principals, and “share resources” among them. In addition, there should be “quality assurance”, and “training evaluation” consists of “expert making on-site assessment”, trainees’ anonymous feedback, and a third-party evaluation.

Interestingly, training assessment results are linked to funds allocation. It is not difficult to see the government's determination to establish an incentive scheme for principals’ training. In addition, more measures have been taken to improve the principals’ training in disadvantaged schools.

The changes that occurred in the training of principles have of course been driven by wider educational change, such as the curriculum reforms, though one of significant purposes of principal training remains to help them improve the quality of education in schools. The following section will look at curriculum legislation and its changes.

4.3 Curriculum legislation and its changes

The curriculum in China with its emphasis on political development was very centralized and dominated by the national government. It fundamentally changed when new curriculum reforms were introduced in the late 1990s. In 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education initiated the eighth round of national curriculum reforms, which has been the most influential reform with a wide range of changes encompassing both primary and secondary education. It has become very influential in every aspect of curriculum development, teaching and learning improvement in particular, and has been implemented in schools since around 2004. The new curriculum guidance was introduced alongside some key polices and it changed the structure, content, pedagogy, evaluation and management of the curriculum in all aspects. Three major changes in the curriculum have been the result of the reforms, including changes in the structure of the curriculum, improvements to meet the requirements of independent learners in the classroom, and measures to address individual needs.
The changes in the structure of the curriculum put more emphasis on the importance of different subjects which resulted in 2001 in changes to the traditional curriculum. For instance, some marginalized subjects, i.e., calligraphy, have been given more attention. This was endorsed in "Guidelines for Primary and Secondary Education Calligraphy" (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Guidelines’) (Basic Education Two [2013] No.1).

Under the new curriculum guidance, traditional subjects were changed and regrouped. For instance, the “Basic Education Reform Programme (Trial)”, promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2001, stated that comprehensive practical activities from primary to high schools are to be set as compulsory courses, which should include:

“Information technology education, study alongside research, community service and social practices, and physical labour and technical education.” (Basic Education Reform Programme(Trial), http://www.moe.gov.cn)

After the Reform new subjects continue to emerge. Where technology and art have appeared as new subjects, art and music and painting have become independent subjects. Foreign languages, English, and ‘new’ languages such as Japanese and Russian, have been added to the curriculum. Schools are encouraged to offer two or more foreign languages, if possible.

Physical Education "PE" has received more attention. In the governmental documentation, “Full-time Mainstream High School Lesson Plan (Experimental) (revised) ((January 31, 2000) Basic Education [2000] No.3), it is stated that:

“In order to develop students’ health, both physically and psychologically, schools must implement the provisions of the State Council in 1990 approving the issuance of the ‘School Sports Regulations’...to ensure that students have an hour a day for sports activities (including physical education).”( http://www.moe.gov.cn)

The "most critical" change in the high school curriculum is that students are entitled to select some courses. However, the students must complete the compulsory courses, and then select other options. To some extent, they can say "I study what I like the best."

The second big reform has focused on improving independent learning in classrooms, making students less reliant on the teacher. This is explicitly evidenced in the Ministry of Education's issuance of the "Basic Education Reform Programme (Trial)" in 2001; for instance, “to change the classes with too much emphasis on knowledge repetition, it encourages students’ independent learning, taking initiative to explore, gather and deal with data.”(http://www.moe.gov.cn)
The third reform is about meeting individual students’ needs, as evidenced by the Ministry of Education’s (2001) issuance of the "Basic Education Reform Programme (Trial)", which stated that:

“Changing the old curriculum associated with complex, difficult, partial, old content and ... focusing on students’ interest and experience, providing the necessary basic knowledge and skills for students’ lifelong learning.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

4.4 Teaching and learning

Under a series of fundamental reforms (e.g. Curriculum Reform and Green Evaluation), school leaders are required to challenge the traditional/formal classroom characterized by teaching to the text as well as improving school performances measured by the national testing results. Principals encounter new features and new challenges in their role of leading teaching and learning. Firstly, new features have emerged in teaching activities: the classroom is focused on students’ needs and less teacher dependent but based on “independent learning”, and “collaboration/group work” is encouraged especially in problem-solving activities and the development of skills (especially work skills alongside knowledge) is stressed. This is evidenced by statements in several key documentations as below

Firstly, in 2001, the Ministry of Education issued the "Basic Education Reform Programme (Trial)", which added specific requirements to the teaching process, mainly with “student-centred” teaching methods. As it stated:

“Teachers should actively interact with students for mutual development...Teachers should respect students’ personality, pay attention to their differences to meet individual needs. Teachers should create a learning environment where students actively participate in learning and stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

At the same time, the improvement of teachers' professional development and training has been put on the agenda along with the series of reforms. The General Office of the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education issued “Notice of the Implementation of the National Training Programme for Nursery, Primary and Secondary School Teachers in 2014” (Department of Teachers [2014] No.1), which proposed that:

“To improve continuing professional development of teachers at different stages and to meet teachers’ needs, it is necessary to systematically design a training programme at different levels and even multi-year training, according to the law of teacher professional development.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)
In addition, technology has been highlighted for application in teacher training:

“It needs to use a network training programme effectively and implement hybrid training. Developing the network of the community training project will be one of the significant factors to be considered in funding application.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

It is clear from the above policies that the quality of teaching has been given greater attention by the government. The quality of teaching needs to be improved to meet students’ individual needs. This has also become part of principals’ accountabilities.

4.5 Changes in principals’ accountability

In terms of principals’ accountability, one of the key changes has been that the party secretary stood back from taking responsibility for education and principals are now primarily accountable for school performance. As mentioned above, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council (February 1993) published the "China Education Reform and Development Programme" which required explicitly that the secondary and primary schools apply the “principals responsible for school development" legislation. This school management system was also written into the state education law in the "People's Republic of China Education Law" in Article 30. Principals are accountable for the quality of teaching and learning along with other educational administrators within their schools.

The second key change is that principals are accountable for the school budget and financial management, as the joint Ministry of Finance/Ministry of Education issuance of the "primary and secondary school finance system" (Finance and Education [2012] No. 489) stipulated in Article V:

“Primary and secondary school principals are responsible for the financial management system. Under the leadership of the school principals, the school finance department manages financial activities.... Principals are responsible for running the non-profit school campus canteen and accountable for the school canteen’s transparent financial management.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

Principal accountability has been increased by making them accountable for more things within their schools and by making them increasingly accountable to a wider range of stakeholders, including the school staff, parents, and even the community, as education is more open to the public. This is evidenced through the issuance by the Ministry of Education of the “Ministry of Education’s suggestion on promoting the primary and secondary information disclosure (2010)”, which stated that:

“Schools should establish a sound system of information disclosure mechanism. Principals are accountable to information disclosure, to strengthen the leadership of the school
information disclosure, and to adopt effective measures to improve the transparency of school information.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

It specifically pointed out that the school principals are accountable to parents and teachers regarding their questions and needs. In addition, it specified that:

“To those involving state secrets, personal privacy or sensitive matters that might endanger the security and stability of the campus if information is shown in public, schools are not be able to disclose them.” (http://www.moe.gov.cn)

4.6 The changing context in Shanghai

Above is about what is happening in China on a nation-wide level, but Shanghai is a little bit different. In Shanghai education is comparatively more developed than in other areas, especially when compared to central and western China, and major differences can be identified in the development of principal training and the progress of curriculum reforms along with their impact on curriculum development, teacher development and teaching and learning.

In terms of principal training in the Shanghai area, there are many training centres for local principals at the local district level. In 2004 the "Shanghai master principals’ (mingxiaozhang, 名校长) and master teachers’ (mingshi, 名师) training project" was launched, known as the ‘double masters/elites’ project (‘shuangming’ gongcheng, ‘双名’工程) for short, which has been quite an influential training model. The project has lasted a few years and provides various training models to principals, covering:

“1) local based learning: symposium or workshop training associated with specific topics, school observations; 2) practical activities: problem solving training regarding trainee’s working experience; 3 ) professional degree study: to encourage trainees to study a Master’s in Education, or even to go to a different country (territory) for a master's degree; 4) Outcome exchange and exhibition: regularly held "double masters" project forum for trainees, encouraging trainees to actively participate in the city, inter-provincial and international related academic activities.”(http://www.shmec.gov.cn)

International exchange is largely supported by the local government in Shanghai. For instance, the document of “Shanghai Education Commission [2004] no.106” articulates recommendations for international cooperation in training programmes. There are two main international projects, the “Shanghai-California Shadow Programme” and the Master’s in Education in Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, which have both been quite influential.
The “Shanghai-California Shadow Programme” is an international training project for school principals and a cooperative venture between the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission and the California School Boards Association, which began in 2005. Principals are sent to California for a short period of four weeks, sometimes as long as six weeks. During their visit, Shanghai principals shadow their local counterparts through participation in the various meetings of the school, observing classes, and attending student activities, while also talking to the principals individually, visiting the district schools and attending the school district meetings, and finding out about the school district board’s functions and management system.

Regarding the Master’s degree programme, more details can be found in the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission’s document (Shanghai Education Commission (2012) (no.17)), published on 29 March, 2012. A Master’s degree needs to be completed in three stages within one and a half years. For instance, in the first phase, principals have to complete basic courses at the National Training Centre for Secondary Principals, located in Shanghai. In the second phase, they go to complete the Master’s course at Nanyang Technological University for one academic year. And finally, in the third phase, they have to go back to the National Training Centre for advanced training. Thus, overall, the preparation and training for principals in Shanghai seems more open to international ideas than in other less developed areas, although the number of principals that can benefit from this is still limited.

Schools in Shanghai have also been ahead of other areas in terms of educational development. For instance, in terms of curriculum legislation and its changes, the local authorities in Shanghai have been actively developing programmes to promote 'student-centred' curriculum reform. By autumn 2004 educational authorities in Shanghai had completed the preparation of the "Shanghai mainstream primary and secondary schools’ curriculum programme (draft)" and “Curriculum standards for each subject (draft)”. On 3 December, 2004, the Shanghai City Board of Education formally announced the 20 kinds of "Curriculum standards (draft)" in seven learning domains for Shanghai primary and secondary schools, which showed that Shanghai had entered a new phase of full implementation of the curriculum reform.

The local policy regarding the "Shanghai mainstream schools’ curriculum programme", emphasizes “students' learning experiences”, “the development of student-centred education”, “the core of 'moral education'”, “changing the way of students' learning” with a
focus on developing students’ “innovative spirit and practical skills”, and “strengthening the integration of curriculum, promoting and integrating different courses”.

At the same time, in an effort to promote improvements in teaching and learning at the local level, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission developed the "Curriculum standards (draft)" for schools, replacing the original "syllabus" guide for teaching and evaluation, in 2004. Curriculum standards have shifted the emphasis from the traditional "syllabus" merely focusing on “instructing teachers to teach” to focusing on various considerations of both the “teachers to teach” and “students to learn”. This core idea underpins new teaching approaches and evaluation. “Student-centred approaches” and “independent learning” have been highlighted. Student assessment has been reformed with a stress on formative assessment of their learning process. For instance, the “Shanghai Municipal Education Commission reviews on the primary stage of implementation and evaluation based on education curriculum standards” (Hu, BoE Base (2013) No. 59) states:

“In the daily teaching activities, the focus should be given to students’ formative assessment. This demands teachers assess students through classroom observations with a focus on students’ behaviours in their problem-solving processes, such as students’ capability of expressing ideas, exploring, practical activities achievement and their works exhibition, and so on. It is necessary to develop comprehensive student assessments embracing students’ knowledge, learning methods, attitudes, interests and habits.” (http://www.shmec.gov.cn)

In recent years, to reduce the importance of test scores and students’ academic workloads, Shanghai has pioneered the implementation of ‘green evaluation’ on a trial basis in primary and secondary schools in Shanghai. The ‘green evaluation’ proposes to set standards of students’ assessment based on ten criteria, as follows:

“Students' academic levels, student motivation, students' academic burdens, teacher-student relationship, teaching methods index, principals' curriculum leadership, socio-economic background on student academic performance impact, students' moral behaviours, the health of students, and student multi-year progress (e.g., study motivation, relationships with teachers, academic workload) index.” (http://www.shmec.gov.cn)

With the success of this trial in Shanghai schools, the government decided to promote the ‘green evaluation’ to other of parts of China in 2013.

Overall, Shanghai schools have gone ahead in many aspects of educational development compared to other areas in China and Shanghai principals have relatively more opportunities to get access to new developments including those from abroad than principals in less developed areas. On the other hand, school principals now have to deal with higher expectations.
Self-evidently, the principal’s role has become more complicated by the mounting accountability put on principals. A series of reforms have been initiated by the government along with a change of focus on various aspects of education, and in particular the new curriculum reforms have produced new policies to improve the quality of education and student development. Besides highlighting the importance of students’ individual needs, the government endeavours to recognize the efforts to support principals and meet their needs too. However, though this is all intended to improve the school system, it has direct impact on the work of school principals. The next chapter will look at what principals have to say about their roles, and how they feel the changes in education have influenced the job.
Chapter 5 Findings (from the interview data)

In this chapter, I present the main findings drawn from the interview data. As previously mentioned, my interviews produced a huge amount of data—far too much to report it all here. Therefore, I carried out an initial thematic analysis of the transcripts and then repeated the process working on the reduced data to check that I had identified the most important themes. Though this was very time-consuming, I felt that, in the end, I was able to capture the key issues that emerged from the data collected. I was aware that these did not always match the original research questions, because while analyzing the data some things emerged that I had not previously considered, but were obviously important to the school principals. However, I felt that it was sensible to report all the main findings, whether they matched with the research questions or not. It is often the case in naturalistic inquiry that new questions emerge along the way, or factors that were not predicted emerge from the data. This will be discussed further in the final section where I reflect on the methodology, but here I will remind the reader what my initial question areas were, so that the findings can be seen alongside these.

There were five key areas of interest derived from the review of literature and refined and tested through interviews:

1. The main activities and priorities of secondary school principals in China.
2. The main factors currently influencing these activities and priorities.
3. Principals’ views on their role, and on their training for this role.
4. The major challenges/problems currently confronting school principals.
5. The extent to which principals’ roles and attitudes are influenced by traditional culture, and to what extent principals are open to Western ideas on leadership that challenge these traditions.

The findings will be presented and structured using the key areas of interest. However, data concerning the last area was not obtained directly from the interview data, but through my own observations and analysis. This will be discussed drawing on my observation and analysis in the next chapter. Here, I will provide a summary of nine key themes that emerged in the data. As I explained earlier, initially I used theoretical coding as the main data analysis approach, to identify the key categories. Re-analysis and refinement of categories confirmed that data relating to these key categories were shared across majority of the interviewees. I
have identified these as: changing role, principal preparation and support, the impact of reforms on the curriculum, managing teaching and learning, leading teacher development, the increasing accountability burden, the impact of the social change on education, the way principals lead their colleagues, and the problems and challenges confronting principals. Below, I look at each one in some detail.

5.1 The changing role of school principals

The role of secondary school principals in China has undergone dramatic change since ‘the new China’, and especially since the introduction of the ‘open door’ policy in China (Reform and Opening-up Policy) the principal’s role has become more complex and diversified. These, therefore, are exciting times as new features emerge and new challenges are encountered, especially when education in China is undergoing fundamental reforms since the promulgation of the ‘National Medium and Long-term Plan for Education Reform and Development’ in 2010. This section is going to look at the way in which principals define and understand their role, taking into account the implications of the recent national policy shift emphasizing the need to address students’ individual learning needs.

Whilst reviewing principals’ views on their role, it is clear that principals see their role as both “traditional” and very complex. They describe their work as involving “massive” and “increasing pressure” and recognize that both student and teacher development are significant to school development. Terms such as “multiple” and “complicated” were often used by principals, however, their views on the role mostly focus on “political aspects”, values, citizenship, cohesion and harmony. A number of key aspects were focused on, with the following themes:

Theme 1: Developing an educational philosophy and turning it into a vision for the school

Theme 2: Leading curriculum development and teaching and learning (T/L)

Theme 3: Leading teacher development

Theme 4: Managing the school’s organization and culture.

When asked to define the role of principals, most of the Interviewees described their role as a “designer” of a “blueprint” (e.g., Interviewees 9 and 12) and as leaders of school development (e.g., Interviewees 15 and 17). As the principals explain, as a designer, he/she
“has to develop an educational philosophy” (e.g. Interviewee 3) and turn it into a vision for the school, with two of the interviewees explicitly describing their role as:

“As a principal, I think, he/she must be a leader leading values. As the famous Russian educationist Sukhomlinski said, it is necessary to develop educational philosophy. I totally agree with him and I think it is very important to focus on educational philosophy leadership as a principal.” (Interviewee 22)

This is supported by another principal who stressed that:

“To be honest, I have made a lot of effort to lead educational philosophy. I think, we all must agree on a consensus in terms of educational philosophy, otherwise it becomes very difficult to strengthen the cohesion of all the staff in the school.” (Interviewee 13)

The focus on educational philosophy that principals develop varies in different school contexts. For instance, one of the interviewees described the particular context of his school as being one with a majority of students from ethnic minority groups. “Equality” and “patriotism” were key terms in relation to the educational philosophy this Interviewee developed. He recounted how:

“As a principal, my priority is delivering our governmental ideology to those pupils and also to parents and even to the whole community. Let those students from minority ethnic groups realize that our central government cares for and helps them. So, as a principal, the most important role is an educational philosophy leader leading students’ development in terms of their values to become loyal guardians of our country. In the daily learning activities, what we focus on is making those students from ethnic group backgrounds be aware of equity, respect and national cohesion.” (Interviewee 6)

Some of the interviewees interpreted their role regarding leading educational philosophy as having the purpose of influencing students’ and staff members’ behaviour by creating a shared-vision. As he explained:

“Firstly, I think, educational philosophy or valued-based leadership is very significant. The priority of the principal is to be leading educational philosophy. At the same time, principals must endeavour to change the traditional way of thinking/behaviours of both middle managers and teachers. Then, principals need to create a school environment with shared values to support the cohesion by binding everyone together.” (Interviewee 1)
These principals seemed to argue that developing educational philosophy is a means, not an end, and that it needs to be turned into a vision for the school. This was echoed by other interviewees, with two of them notably articulating that:

“A principal is a designer and a planner for the blueprint of school development. And then he/she must be also an educational philosopher as well as a preacher. If you only have a planned blueprint, but you couldn’t put it to everyone’s hearts or into their brains, or ears or be accepted by them, and then fail to turn it into action, this blueprint will become something still hanging on the wall, or just your fantasy. You must be able to persuade each teacher to accept it…” (Interviewee 12)

“I think the most important thing is to create shared values. You can’t only rely on rules. Principals need to try to make their educational philosophy be shared by all the staff, who then deliver it to the students.” (Interviewee 4)

Many participants focused on making a school vision and plan. Simultaneously, quite a few principals stressed “it is essential to ensure that visions and plans suit the school context in terms of student as well as teacher development” (e.g., Interviewee 17). Many of the principals recognized that “one of their priorities as a principal” is to “create a shared vision for the school” (e.g., Interviewee 4) and make sure “all the staff members are happy to accept it, then articulate that vision to the students” (e.g., Interviewee 26). This needs to be based on the educational philosophy, although, as they said, it is not that easy to influence people’s values or beliefs. Once the vision has been created, principals need to lead the curriculum development and teaching and learning as well as student development, as emphasized by the interviewees.

Since the second phase of curriculum reform in 2005, curriculum development has received much attention from the school and educational authorities. Once again, much was said here regarding “the role of leading curriculum reform” and quite a few of the principals defined it as “one of the important roles” (e.g., Interviewee 3). Some key quotes from interviewees highlighting this and describing their roles in leading curriculum development are below, and this will be further explored in relation to the impact of reforms on the curriculum. But here is an example of one principal who described her role like that:

“In terms of educational leadership, I think there are several important domains. For instance, leading curriculum development, I think this is one of the important roles.” (Interviewee 8)
This element of the role was also discussed in terms of two explanatory reasons regarding the importance of leading curriculum development. As one of the interviewees recounted:

“I think you must develop yourself as a professional principal, and then you may be able to lead curriculum development professionally. The mission of the school is developing students, isn’t it? It can’t be completed without curriculum development. So as a principal, you have to be capable of leading curriculum development.” (Interviewee 26)

The two interviewees above stressed that leading the curriculum is a very important aspect of their work as a principal. This may be partly due to the new curriculum reforms, which grant principals with more autonomy to develop the curriculum. As one of the interviewees recounted:

“For instance, we used to teach based on the textbook. But now we can do more beyond the textbook. The most important thing is, under the new curriculum framework, we can develop our curriculum and teaching behaviours to meet our students’ needs with regard to the visions of our school development. So, I have to say the most important role is leading curriculum development.” (Interviewee 5)

The majority had similar views, recognising the importance of leading curriculum, which was explained thus:

“That is to say, first of all, you have to be a leader in the construction of the school curriculum, but from our personal view, we may be more concerned about the organization and management of teaching, and in fact, this is indeed a very important role of the principals.”(Interviewee 8)

This principal stated that leading curriculum development is one of the most important roles as a principal, but what concerned her most is still managing teaching and learning. There were many comments here of the importance of managing teaching and learning, and leading and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning through classroom observations. For example, the majority of the interviewees were convinced about its significance (Interviewees 15 & 10). They also claimed that they spent most of their time on teaching and learning, which is also the central task of the school, with one interviewee adding that:

“As a principal, you definitely need to think about the school development as a whole, and you will leave specific tasks to your subordinates, i.e. teaching, moral education...As you know, under the principal responsibility for school development mechanism (xiaozhang fuzeezhi), the principal is the legal representative, isn’t he/she? He/she will become the primary person to take responsibility for the school. As a principal, you must manage the
Quite a few of the principals talked about their role in managing teaching and learning by explaining time spent on classroom observations, which they think is one of the most important ways of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. An example being one participant, who explained:

“I think one of our key roles is managing teaching and learning. We need to go to the classroom and observe lessons, and attend workshops on teaching and learning. So we have to be concerned about everything. Of course, our priority is given to managing teaching and learning and spending time with students.” (Interviewee 9)

This informant stressed the importance of classroom observation, as it creates opportunities to get to know students as well as teachers. As one of the interviewees said, “the purpose of classroom observations is to improve the quality of teaching and learning” (Interviewee 1) for “the best student development” (Interviewee 9).

In terms of student development, several principals saw this as one of their important roles, too. “The status of student development is in the same position as teacher and school development” (Interviewee 9). At least six principals confirmed leading student development as one of their most significant roles. The transition of the principal’s role is influenced by the policy of curriculum reform as well as any changes the principals make themselves in terms of educational philosophy. Three principals offer evidence of this:

“The third role of the principal is improving student development. Since the curriculum reforms, you have to develop a tailored curriculum to meet students’ individual needs, taking diversities into account in terms of their learning level.” (Interviewee 4)

“As a principal, I think my focus is people’s development. So my educational philosophy is serving people and improving their development. So we need to develop students with healthy and positive ambitions.” (Interviewee 15)

“In fact, in terms of the core role, I think it is something to do with students’ development. Some people think that students are products of the school. I don’t think it is a comprehensive explanation. I would argue that they are ‘works’ which involve emotional feelings, not like ‘products’ without any feelings involved.” (Interviewee 14)
The first principal emphasized the impact of the new curriculum on his role, while the last two principals tended to communicate their educational philosophy as treating students as adults. But several principals expressed concerns about the broader range of student development, such as “students’ personalities, capacities and morals” (Interviewee 25) and both their “physical and psychological development” (Interviewee 8).

Of course, the quality of teaching and learning cannot be improved without the quality teachers. Another significant role of the principals defined by the interviewees is “leading teacher development”, which also concerns them greatly (Interviewee 2). As one interviewee explained, “teachers are at the heart of the school” (Interviewee 4). Other Interviewees, such as 25 and 26, also raised this matter and they defined one of their roles as “leading teacher development”, to which more attention should be paid.

The commitment of the interviewees to remain tightly focused on their mission to lead teacher development was further communicated through the following comments on teacher development:

“I concentrate on the construction of teachers’ development ... for example, teaching improvement, and teacher accreditation.” (Interviewee 10)

Another principal summarized three general approaches to teacher development within and outside of the school, which was also touched upon by other interviewees:

“One of the most important tasks as a principal is leading teacher development and teacher training. In our school, there is a set of approaches to teacher development. The first one is school-based training, including full time training at a certain time and self-training associated with the school support and guidance. The second way is to encourage teachers to explore problems in their own teaching practice by doing action research. Such research is different from those conducted in the universities or other academic research and it is primarily practical research. The last one is that we take teachers outside of the school for academic field trips.” (Interviewee 5)

In addition to recognising the importance of leading teacher development, it was quite surprising to hear that several interviewees commented that one of their roles is that of being “a learner”. Although not all interviewees recognized it, it is still necessary to remember that some principals are committed to their role to continue professional development. It is an important role, as one of them explained:
“Nowadays, I think a principal is also a learner. Everything is changing all the time. We will only be able to manage the school through constant learning, so we can accommodate the changing community and situations.” (Interviewee 16)

“If you ask what is the principal’s responsibility on earth, as I mentioned before, I think the first responsibility of the principals is learning. That means that the principals must learn to learn. As a principal, this is both your responsibility and role.” (Interviewee 21)

As a learner, it means that principals should know how to learn. Simultaneously, he criticized and repeated several times that:

“As a principal, the priority is thinking about the big things. But unfortunately, a lot of principals have poor learning capacity.” (Interviewee 21)

This interviewee showed a particular interest in learning. Regarding improving principal development, this interviewee suggested four key points:

“You must endeavour to accomplish the following four steps including: put your thoughts into action; bear in mind what has been done; organize what has been remembered; and understand what has been organized.” (Interviewee 21)

These two interviewees stressed that it is important to recognize that one of the principals’ roles is as a learner. As Interviewee 21 argued, a “prerequisite of being a successful principal” is the ability to learn.

Whilst talking to principals, a lot of the conversation was about managing schools, and quite a few informants defined their role as “a manager” (e.g., Interviewee 13). As Interviewee 16 emphasized, principals firstly need to manage the school. One interviewee (Interviewee 7) succinctly commented “it is necessary to set norms to ensure accomplishing something”. Many principals described their roles as managers, though for different reasons. For some, management is perceived as a more efficient way of implementing government policies within organisations and strengthening the community. This was raised explicitly during the interviews by several of the principals, expressing views from different perspectives:

“As a principal, he/she has to think about how to run a good school rather than a business, as the people perceive it. Nowadays, it is proposed that the principal should be a leader, not just a manager, but the principal cannot deny one of his/her role as a manager, can he/she? A principal is expected as a leader who leading teachers, students and school development. But in fact, even if you try to be a leader, you feel almost like I'm speaking in academic terms and talk big, but actually it may has no practical effect. That is only for speaking. To be honest, in terms of school management, it is still more to do with management (rather than leadership).” (Interviewee 25)
“I think, when we talk about the role of the secondary principals, we are managers. There are a lot of things that need to be managed. You have to ensure implementing governmental policies and monitor them in the school. You have to manage and handle organizing complicated things. So I think, my priority is given to management of the school.” (Interviewee 16)

In recognizing the importance of their managing role, principals try to manage the school as an organization by concerning themselves with things like strengthening the community, building up positive relationships, seeking the best resources for the school, and budget management and raising teachers’ well-being. It seems more complicated in the context of China’s complicated guanxi (network-bound) culture (Interviewee 4). This was hinted at by several of the principals, but two of them were explicit:

“I want to say as a principal we need to adjust to the surrounding environment and sustain a safe and healthy school environment. You know, in China, you have to build up networks with other organizations outside of the school and cope with maintaining those relationships. We are in a community associated with strong family ties (renqing). So you have to go outside of the school and build up good networks. That is the typical character of our culture in China.” (Interviewee 4)

“To be honest, what takes up most of the principal’s time, I think, is dealing with all the sorts of relationships with different groups, such as parents, students and even the local educational authorities. You need to communicate and talk to parents and students. You have to search for resources for students through the local authorities.” (Interviewee 8)

In terms of managing relationships, the interviewees commented that their role was to handle all sorts of relationships with the broader community.

“We have to cope with external organizations such as the local tax bureau, fire service and the neighbour community. We also need to take notice of the dining room and student dormitories (note: quite a lot of high schools are boarding schools). So all sorts of responsibility just make you feel confused with your real responsibility. So if you ask me about my responsibility, I need to know what is my real responsibility, don’t I?” (Interviewee 9)

Interviewee 8 mentioned Chinese culture, explaining that “China is a renqing society”. “Renqing” is a unique term in Chinese cultures, equivalent to the reciprocal relationship in the social exchange process. Interviewee 9 stressed that “too many responsibilities when managing the organization made him confused about his primary responsibilities”. In short, the majority of the interviewees see the managerial role as necessary to keep the school running smoothly.
For some at least, management is more to do with norms or policing, as mentioned earlier by Interviewee 7, who commented that norms are the basis for management. But not all of the informants were of this position, one of them arguing that “norms may not work efficiently without the culture being established in the organization”.

Similarly, one of the informants stressed the important role of leading school culture by noting how:

“No, culture has become the most popular term in the school. Regarding culture, it is something that can strengthen the whole of the staff’s cohesion and produce shared values in the school... After the norms and regulations are in place, what I am working on is culture establishment.” (Interviewee 13)

This interviewee clearly articulated that culture is vital to the development of shared values, which the school leaders have endeavoured to achieve. Once again, several principals agreed that it is essential to establish the school culture, but they admitted that it is not easy to achieve and is time consuming. The difficulties of establishing culture that confront principals, especially new principals, were also referred to by one interviewee:

“In terms of the role of the principals, we must consider the period of the principal’s service. For instance, to a newly-appointed principal in a school, his/her role is to sort out chaos or handle issues that currently exist in the school. But some more experienced principals, they may concentrate on establishing culture. So there are different stages of the role of the principals. So to a new principal, I think, he/she needs to manage the transition from the culture left by the previous principal. In his/her first three years of being a principal in a new school, of course, it is unavoidable that he/she may encounter some conflicts.” (Interviewee 8)

This interviewee stressed that steps were needed to establish the school culture and she reminded us that principals should set relevant priorities within the school context. Another principal held a similar opinion on the role of principals and leading school culture, commenting that:

“Principals are mostly concerned with school contexts, and then set their priorities based on their situations. To a new principal, he/she may need to do some basic things, i.e. setting new norms. While an old principal with school norms that have established for many years, he/she needs to focus on establishing a culture.” (Interviewee 25)

The two principals above pointed out culture establishment may need to be based on agreed norms. Though principals rarely offered insights into the problems of the culture in schools in China, one principal pointed out:
“In terms of the type of leadership, there tend to be a more authoritarian management style. That is because principals transplant the role of leadership in the family to the school, which can be called ‘the role of dislocation’. Chinese traditional culture is based on blood-based kinship. Such a kinship is a parent-child relationship. That is to say, the principals apply their roles as a parent or as a mother at home into the school, which is not applicable or fair to teachers. The authoritarianism is mostly likely arising from this, so called ‘role dislocation’.” (Interviewee 21)

Interviewee 21 expressed the fact that school culture in China tends to be established by principals in a similar way to building up a family. Nevertheless, principals showed different concerns about culture establishment, even while they all tended to stress its importance and its impact on school development. This is because principals have recognized that while the rules form the basis for ensuring the smooth running of the organization, these are not sufficient for fundamental school development. To some extent, principals need support to establish school culture.

5.2 Principal preparation and support

In this section, the comments received from the principals, with half attending the national training programme and the rest having gone through the national training programme and other local training, are grouped into positive comments and less positive comments or suggestions towards the training improvement.

First of all, what are the principals mostly interested in and enjoy about the training programme? Quite a few of the interviewees confirmed what they liked in training included things like group discussions, practical activities (e.g., school visiting), problem solving (e.g., case studies), and they also appreciated feedback from trainers as well as peers. What most of the interviewees benefited from in the training was the opportunities provided to them to learn from peers, broaden their knowledge, inspire deep thinking, stimulate self-reflection and even motivate self-learning.

The overall comments on the principal training tended to be more positive, especially the advanced training programme (you yan ban, 优研班), which was open to outstanding principals. One of the greatest benefits mentioned by principals is that they learned a lot from their peers. The term “brainstorming” was mentioned by several of the interviewees, which indicated that the training pushed interviewees’ “deep thinking” and “stimulating
reflection” about their own work. Therefore, it “expanded their horizons” in terms of their perspectives on educational improvement. Many principals confirmed that it was a good opportunity for “self-reflection” because usually they are busy with work, handling emergencies and daily school operations and have no time to sit down and contemplate.

Firstly, peer communication was mentioned by the majority of the principals, who considered it as an efficient way to inspire and brainstorm. Quite a few principals pointed out they both enjoyed and learned from talking to their colleagues. It was also stated by the majority of the interviewees that they received more benefit from the interaction and “invisible competition” among peers once they were all engaged in discussion. An example being one principal, who explained:

“For example, to encourage everyone being engaged in discussions, I started making some comments. You need to break the ice and then everyone may be encouraged to go to jump into the water. That’s it. So I would say that training has the effect of strengthening sharing ideas between principals. Such exchanges will allow you to see the differences or merits and demerits from each other. Or you can say it may generate a kind of competition among them. If such competition can push forward school improvement in a positive way, it is a good way to motivate principals, right? In that sense, I think that kind of competition is positive.” (Interviewee 7)

This principal felt that one of the good things about training is that it can strengthen communication among principals. Of course, principals have benefited from such peer communication, enjoying more benefits from the improved communication, such as “inspiration”, “brainstorming”, and so on. In other words, it is hard for anyone to work alone “behind a closed door” (e.g. Interviewee 12). This was raised explicitly during interviews by several of the interviewees, most notably two of them, who explained:

“There are some things that you may not be able to get if you work alone ‘behind a closed door’ (bi men zao che). Only communication or even conflicts can create wisdom. When you know some theories, read some books, and listen to some reports, in the meantime, you have to attend some discussions around some topics, which can bring about some brainstorming. Personally I think case studies, or even debating, are really helpful.” (Interviewee 12)

“If a person works in one place for a long time, his/her thoughts may be restricted by the limited context. So you should communicate with other people. A person's intelligence is limited; because of this, you can make use of other people’s wisdom, right? By knowing some of the others experience or cases, it may provide an illuminating insight into your mind, right? It is good. If you don’t have a chance to see what other people do in their schools, you will never know about them. But if you can see or hear others’ cases, you will see they are very inspiring.” (Interviewee 10)
Sharing experience is useful, depending on having a “good learning community” consisting of outstanding trainees and the trainers, which was mentioned by one interviewee:

“Especially when there are so many outstanding principals gathering in the same class and are led by professional experts and supervisors. We improve our own development by sharing ideas. That is a very high level of training team including those experts and supervisors who can lead each of us to become well developed.” (Interviewee 2)

These two interviewees believed that individual knowledge is limited but it can be enlarged with assistance from others. This is probably even more convincing, if the communication is shared among the best principals in a class along with “experts’ feedback” (Interviewee 2). Although such open discussions may “expose people’s defects”, it benefits the principals themselves (Interviewee 3). In confirming the benefit of peer discussions, the interviewees seemed to be open to listen to different voices and felt that it was a good way to develop themselves. But in the culture of modesty and etiquette (e.g. with an emphasis on harmony) in China, people tend to be subtle when they give critical feedback to their colleagues.

Besides “borrowing others’ intelligence” (Interviewee 10), as one of the interviewees (Interviewee 5) commented, “people could borrow others’ eyes and thoughts to broaden your horizons”. Through such ‘brain-storming’ discussions and communication, several of the interviewees were convinced that they learned new things and their “horizons were widened” (e.g., Interviewee 1), with one saying:

“Firstly, it widens our horizons because experts can bring the latest information from both at home and abroad, such as “the flipped classroom”, “Khan Academy”, and “the current reform of teaching in Korea”. Secondly, you can collect good experience, and good examples from brother schools.” (Interviewee 12)

As mentioned earlier in the text, most of the national training is full time, which means principals have to be away from their schools for a period of time. Many of the interviewees who attended this kind of training felt that they treasured “the quiet moment that was good for self-reflection of their work” (e.g., Interviewee 1), and helped them to “calm down, review their work and think of the future goals” (e.g. Interviewee 3). The belief that principals benefited from the “quiet moment of self-reflection” provided by the training programme was mentioned by several of the interviewees, but articulated forcefully by three of them:

“Only with such a learning environment, am I able to calm down and to systematically think through what I want to pursue in the end. For example, the training programme I am
attending, one of its purposes is to develop school principals’ educational philosophy. So we shared ideas together, which helped us to think deeply about what goals we pursue in the future in terms of the educational development. So, sharing ideas is very useful.” (Interviewee 4)

“Regarding this training programme for improving principals’ educational philosophy development, personally, I think it is very interesting, though I have not developed any ideas yet. But everyone needed to share their ideas, which is a very good way to inspire each other. ... I have started to keep asking myself: ‘What kind of school do you want to develop?’ Secondly, ‘what kind of person do you want to develop in your school in the end?’” (Interviewee 9)

“In addition, as principals, when we stop work to study by reading some books and listening to some classes, we tend to link what we learned with our work, consciously or unconsciously. However, through this training process, you can recognize that you may have different thoughts on teaching methods, and I think the whole process ... such a systematic learning process with a clear framework, objectives, has an impact on me in terms of reviewing my work... which is very helpful.” (Interviewee 25)

In addition, as interviewee 25 commented, “systematic learning can also stimulate reflection and make changes in terms of the way learners are used to thinking or acting”. Once again, the interviewees (e.g., Interviewee 14) confirmed that they needed “systematic learning along with self-reflection on their work”.

Notwithstanding this, learning seems essential for the improvement of principals’ development. This was brought up by several of the principals, with one principal emphasizing, “you can always learn from masters, peers, other colleagues and then keep summary and reflection of your work, which is very useful” (Interviewee 4). Once again, this is evidenced through one of the principals, frankly explaining their thoughts:

“However, I have to say, the training itself does not improve your own development. Although, you have to recognize the training pushes you to learn more. Trainees may not agree with the trainer’s views, but trainees are indeed influenced by those comments. These different voices will stimulate trainees to review or even change their educational philosophy....”(Interviewee 7)

This principal expressed the belief that principals do not benefit from the training itself but that it can provide an impetus for principals to learn. He continued to suggest that there was low motivation for self-learning among most of the principals:

“To be honest, most principals lack motivation for learning new things or accepting new ideas. So if you ask me whether we can benefit from training? I have to say, if there were to be no training, maybe only a few principals would take the initiative to update their views or knowledge.” (Interviewee 7)
It is evident from the above comments that each of the principals clearly articulated their thoughts on the benefits of the training programme, which many felt had contributed to their development. The overall response to the learning environment created by the training centre was very positive, and all interviewees agreed that they learned from shared ideas and peer reviews as well as the trainers’ feedback to contribute to self-reflection and self-development.

Of course, besides those benefits, there were also some less positive comments received from the participants. These comments seem to have arisen from the participants who felt their individual needs had failed to be met and expected more individual support. Those who were not satisfied with the training firstly commented that there is not sufficient training provided to principals, especially new or acting principals, with one saying:

“Before I became a principal, to be honest, I did not attend any training. I think I worked on my own. I feel now if a young teacher goes directly to become the principal, I would suggest some support is provided to help him/her get on with the role of principal. For instance, it may be better to have an experienced principal to mentor/coach his/her work.” (Interviewee 22)

Secondly, what principals expected were more practical activities (school visiting), individual support, problem-solving and more options on the training programme to meet their individual needs. These expectations were brought up explicitly during the interviews by several of the interviewees, but notably articulated by one of them:

“For example, what I would expect is if there were two weeks arranged for us to visit some schools and shadow the principals, it would be very helpful. For example, xxx High School is a very well-known school in China. We hope that we could go to visit that school and shadow the principal for around two weeks. I mean, on the one hand, we invite people to come to visit our schools and show what we do and what problems we encounter in the school. On the other hand, I hope I can have opportunities to get myself immersed in those outstanding schools and know more about them, especially the school culture.” (Interviewee 3)

This interviewee felt that principal development would be better improved through seeing what other school principals do. Simultaneously, this interviewee suggested more individual support by inviting people to her school. This thought was also evidenced by another principal:

“If we can invite the instructors/mentors to come to our own schools to diagnose problems and contribute some advice, it would be very helpful in terms of the school development. Then it would be also helpful if instructors could provide advice for resolving the practical problems. The current support is not sufficient; personally, I think it may be because there are too many trainees but fewer experts/trainers. But if only they could improve the training (in that way) ...” (Interviewee 2)
This interviewee also pointed out that one problem is that there was not sufficient support to meet their individual needs. This issue was also raised by another of the interviewees:

“I think, firstly, it might be better to have a relatively small number of people in one classroom. In addition, it would be good if there is a menu of training modules provided to us, so we can have options to choose based on our individual needs. Secondly, regarding practical problem-solving training, it would be good to have more opportunities to visit some schools with better performance. In addition, I think it would be better to learn through examples, I mean, an opportunity for us to show each schools’ results/achievements, such as school-based curriculum development. I think it would be more helpful.” (Interviewee 17)

Besides the insufficient training opportunities, some interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with other aspects of the training. Although this was evident from several of the responses, the factors the interviewees pointed out typically reveal problems common to many training programmes, that is that training content features too many theories, or that traditional teaching approaches seem focused on teaching to the test, which is not helpful to principals learning to solve practical problems. For example, one interviewee states:

“To be honest, some experts only teach theories and have less experience of school management. The lectures are relatively empty … I think if those experts could combine the theories and practice together, it would be more useful.” (Interviewee26)

This issue was also raised by another participant with some critical comments about the trainers:

“To be honest, even if some professors are invited by the national training centre, they may be not confident enough to argue with principals face to face. That is because they are completely cut off from school activities…they do not understand basic/elementary education. And they are not even able to answer some of the principals’ questions. I have to say this is the greatest tragedy.”(Interviewee 21)

This interviewee speaks in the first person with a seemingly emotional connection to the question and the comments are in contrast to those of other principals who showed respect to the trainers. Once again, the principal believes that the current training programme is disappointing in terms of the programme/modules:

“If we look at the training method, I have to conclude that it is just kind of feeding knowledge to trainees. Or we can simply say that he/she (the trainer) is a very poor repeater, as even his/her repeating is incomplete. … For instance, whatever we discuss, i.e. quality education, people seem to understand they should be improved in the classroom. That is to say, whatever
the quality of education or skills is claimed, it all will be transmitted into knowledge and learned in the classroom. And then, people start memorizing what is taught in the classroom and prepare for the exam at the end. This is so called, the whole process of training. When you pass the exam, it means that you have achieved the quality standards. In fact, this is one of the biggest drawbacks of Chinese education (repeated twice). So, this mode of thinking is also embodied in the principal training. Regarding the training programme, it can be interpreted that improving principal leadership is equivalent to reading books. This is a common issue in most of the training programmes, even at the national training centre.”(Interviewee 21)

The repeated use of the phrases “the biggest tragedy” and “biggest drawbacks” demonstrated the interviewee’s dissatisfaction, or even disappointment, with the training methods used. This exposes a typical old style training programme in which trainees are examined by “how well they repeat the knowledge that they are taught”. He sends a clear message that the local authorities and the training centres focus too much on knowledge accumulation, which is not helping to improve principals’ practical skills. He urges for “a fundamental reflection on training programme design”. If principals are not able to apply what they learn to practice in their school contexts, it seems an expensive waste of resources.

Nevertheless, the overall response towards training was comparatively positive in terms of the benefits gained from both training programme activities and peers. At the same time, it is clear from the above comments that there felt to be a mismatch of training content and methods with needs, and insufficient attention to problem-solving approaches. Such critical comments are not new, but are quite typical issues where the trainers are lacking work experience in schools and stick to traditional teaching methods with a ‘trainer-centred’ approach.

5.3 The impact of reforms on the curriculum

Curriculum reform can be traced to the 1990s, but the impact of the reform on schools has been more significant since the 21st century. Principals have been encouraged to develop school-based curricula to meet the goals of curriculum reform, and to shift away from traditional methods, mainly focused on textbooks. According to the participants, one of biggest differences since the curriculum reform is that three levels of curriculum have emerged. The purpose of these three levels is to better meet students’ individual needs, which is the main goal of the curriculum reform. This was evidenced by the majority of the interviewees, with one explaining it as follows:
“The national curriculum used to be the only curriculum to be applied in the school. After the reform, it has been expanded to three levels of curriculum: the national curriculum, the local curriculum and school-based curriculum. Regarding the school-based curriculum, it is stated to be 6 credits to be completed within 18 lessons.” (Interviewee 4)

Under the new curriculum guidance, school principals have been encouraged to challenge the test-oriented tradition in education and establish multiple assessment standards. One interviewee discussed the change:

“Before the curriculum reform, student assessment was singular and merely concerned about test scores in academic tests. But since the reform, the assessment has become more diverse. So students can be successful in different ways, no matter if you are a champion in gaokao (the national college entrance exam), in arts or sports. This is what we should consider after the reform.” (Interviewee 7)

One of the major issues confronting schools is the high-stakes testing system retained through the annual national entrance examination system. This was raised explicitly during the interviews by several of the interviewees, notably by one saying:

“Under the high-stakes testing system, the student assessment is still guided by the national standards rather school-based curriculum, so we have to put the national curriculum in the most important position in our school.” (Interviewee 25)

This interviewee expresses the dominance of the national curriculum and the priority given to preparing students for the national college entrance examination (gaokao). One interviewee even pointed out frankly that the school-based curriculum is merely “decoration” (Interviewee 26) while this exam stays in place. Evidence for this view is shown by the following:

“In terms of the school-based curriculum system, I think there is a long way to carry it out in real life. It is still a kind of decoration. This is because all of the teaching is still based on the national curriculum.” (Interviewee 26)

One interviewee explained in some detail that:

“Under the ‘high-stakes’ testing system, the approach to select the best students is applied with the test-oriented principle. In this sense, if we spend too much time on school-based development with a focus on students’ individual interests, the schools are afraid that it may distract students too much and be no good for maintaining the student attainment. In other words, we have to ensure the student can get the best result in the national test and be able to apply for a good university, and then we may think of the student’s other needs.” (Interviewee 22)
Although those participants said that these issues cannot be expected to be solved in a short time, quite a few of the participants recognized that their role now includes the development of the school-based curriculum. This participant also said that it is essential for principals to lead curriculum development to expand specific areas within his school context:

“Firstly, you must accomplish the tasks of the national curriculum and tasks for preparing the national tests. In the meantime, you have to develop the school-based curriculum to meet students’ individual needs, which may become specific areas in the curriculum within the context of your school. This is also one of the important roles as a principal.” (Interviewee 8)

Once again, in terms of the school-based curriculum, this was also mentioned by another interviewee, who explained how to combine it with the national curriculum:

“Regarding curriculum development, first of all, we need to understand the contents of the national textbooks and deliver them to students by applying appropriate and effective teaching methods. In addition, we have to develop extended curriculum development (school-based curriculum development), such as drama appreciation.” (Interviewee 24)

This interviewee succinctly but explicitly explained the purpose of the curriculum reform and its process. The interviewee recognized that, by developing new curricula, the schools aim to cater for students of all abilities. In addition, another goal is to make better use of resources according to the new curriculum guidance. This was noted by one of the interviewees:

“Since curriculum reform, focus has been given to making good use of curriculum resources. In fact, the process of curriculum development involves the utilizing and managing resources as well as changes, right? For instance, in terms of the subject – Chinese - we divide it into several modules and assess these modules individually. So we teach a subject in the form of modules by reorganizing the textbook rather passively following the content fixed in the national curriculum. Consequently, the lesson plans have to be changed.” (Interviewee 7)

To make good use of resources, interviewees mentioned that they would like to develop interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary programmes. They make every effort to integrate different disciplines into a whole. One principal pointed out that they ‘have endeavoured to integrate cross-disciplines with a focused theme for five years.’ She listed some programmes developed along different themes, such as ‘Olympics, environmental protection and the World Exhibition, and so on’. (Interviewee 19)

Although not in direct reply to the question of resources utilization, quite a few of the principals described how they develop a new curriculum by combining other disciplines.
Notwithstanding the importance of the national curriculum and the demands of entrance exams, ‘individual needs’ is one of key changes in emphasis under the curriculum reform. This was raised by many principals, with three explicitly telling how:

“The core theme of the school-based curriculum is that you have to reorganize the national curriculum based on students’ needs in your own school. For instance, if you are a quite disadvantaged school, of course, you have to reduce the difficulty of the curriculum. But if it is Shanghai xxx School (considered to be one of the best high schools in China), they may need to add new extra content according to students’ needs. Teachers will have to change and tailor the textbooks. The school-based curriculum is developed, by adding or deleting some content in the textbooks.” (Interviewee 21)

In addition, as already mentioned, the multiple perspectives of student assessment have been highlighted. This was raised by one of the interviewees expressing his focus on appropriate student assessment by selecting the best test papers for students. As this interviewee explained:

“In terms of the test design, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to create new questions but you must learn how to select and organize them. There must be something you need to pay attention to, such as reliability, the degree of difficulty, the efficiency of the test and the questions. In our school, the students are not the best. So the national curriculum standards may be a bit high for our students. We have to cut out some content from the national curriculum. So if students think something is too difficult to understand, they can give up. We will make sure students must learn what they can manage and teachers must teach what they can teach.” (Interviewee 7)

This principal showed a particular concern about assessment with regard to students with lower abilities. In addition, schools need to consider students’ interests for when developing programmes, such as ‘demonstration experiments, group-work experiments and exploration experiments, and literature appreciation (e.g. ‘A Dream in Red Mansions)’ (Interviewee 4). Some of them were determined to “develop a curriculum with regard to students’ interests and practical needs” (Interviewee 4) and ensure “student attainment improvement” and simultaneously “make students happy” (Interviewee 15).

This was mentioned by several of the interviewees, notably one who explained:

“We are concerned with students’ all-round development with regard to curriculum development and classroom activities. So what we do is that we develop a programme based on students’ interests judged by numbers of students signing in, such as the inter-disciplinary programme.” (Interviewee 2)
Besides students’ interests, the importance of caring for psychological health and wellbeing has been highlighted in students’ development. This was mentioned by several interviewees, but notably three said:

“We have opened psychological health courses and have one class each week. In the meantime, we also have a psychological health education centre equipped with a counsellor. In the centre, there are also psychological activity rooms and separate rooms where teachers talk to students confidentially and support them with advice or suggest some solutions. In terms of physical activities, we ensure that students have one-hour outdoor activities (according to the educational policy). To encourage everyone to do more exercises, we organize activities every year, i.e., a sports festival.” (Interviewee 26)

Under the student-centred programme, some new subjects have emerged and previously marginalized subjects have been highlighted as important courses. For instance, the status of ‘moral education’ has been improved. Quite a few principals have emphasized moral education is vital to improve all-round student development, but one articulated the point forcefully:

“Moral education is the heart of student development. If you have no knowledge of morals, personally I think, you are a useless person, even if your academic score is high. So we give priority to moral development in terms of student development. So we endeavour to develop moral education via curriculum development and improve it through daily teaching and learning.” (Interviewee 16)

Regarding moral education development, some informants argued that it “should be more meaningful if moral education could be spread out across the daily school activities (e.g., graduation ceremony)” (Interviewee 22), or even “with the assistance of linking to some common topics, e.g. historical buildings, historically important persons, to improve students’ moral education”. One interviewee gave more information:

“If you can embed moral education into daily school activities and develop them with the conceptualization of curriculum, you can achieve more than merely through empty preaching.” (Interviewee 22)

Those activities mentioned by the principals can be labelled as ‘extra-curricular’ or ‘co-curricular activity’ and there is no assessment required for students. The interviewees quoted above held the belief that “moral education” plays a significant role in student development, and should be developed as part of the ‘curriculum’. It could also be interpreted that the curriculum might encompass academic and non-academic programmes.
The interviewees’ responses regarding curriculum development seemed to challenge the old traditional curriculum by their emphasis on the development of the non-academic programmes. They aimed to improve vocational skills and psychological or physical health development of students. Activities that are encouraged to be developed follow the “student interest-centred” principle. One principal described some non-academic programmes tailored for students to improve their vocational skills as below:

“We have non-academic activities that students can attend if they like. There are different societies, fieldwork trips, visiting factories and so on. But we try to develop these activities in the way we do with the curriculum. Or, we can say that all activities could be considered as ‘broad curriculum’.” (Interviewee 21)

This was supported by another interviewee, listing some activities used to develop students’ non-academic capabilities:

“For instance, during National Day, we take students to the bus stops and let them remind people to wait for the bus in a queue.... I also take students to some rural areas, but also to some more developed countries as part of our study tours every year.” (Interviewee 5)

Similarly, some of principals felt students’ should have opportunities to develop their artistic interests or sporting skills:

“Besides academic achievement, I think students should have other expertise. For instance, in school sports days, students must be good at playing basketball, Ping-Pong, football or badminton. Alternatively, you can be good at singing, playing music, playing the guitar/piano, or drawing. I mean, students should have at least one expertise.” (Interviewee 20)

As can be seen, many principals consider that the curriculum has been developed to meet students’ individual needs. Almost all of them recognized that it is necessary to develop the curriculum based on students’ interests and to improve students’ non-academic capabilities, including “sense of social responsibility and gratitude, the spirit of love, and ability to get things done” (Interviewee 5), though they cannot ignore the pressures arising from the high-stakes testing system. The ‘student-centred’ emphasis has also pushed the schools to pay more attention to the improvement of teaching and learning, which also gives new focus to the principals’ activities. This will be explained in more detail by the following section.

5.4 Impact of reforms on managing teaching and learning
According to the interviews, it is clear that principals are very concerned about their responsibilities in relation to teaching and learning. It can be clearly identified that, under the new curriculum, the schools have been encouraged to start thinking of and reviewing the way they teach. One interviewee commented on the core theme of the curriculum reform and suggested that it is crucial to redefine the relationships between teachers and students:

“The core of the curriculum is redefining the relationship between teachers and students. I think the most important thing is improving such a relationship. Curriculum is only a platform or a tool. Curriculum development can’t stand alone without this relationship, and it can be evaluated by students’ satisfaction level. If everyone is convinced that students are at the heart of the learning activities, it is vital to improve equal and positive relationships between teachers and students.” (Interviewee 21)

Similarly, another interviewee spoke about the belief that the status of students needs to be changed:

“What is the real goal of the curriculum reform? When we think about what we should do. I don’t think students should change but we are teachers. Because the core of the new curriculum reform is changing the way that students learn, encouraging them to be more independent and cooperative. So we teachers should not be in charge of the class. Teachers should put the students at the centre. The role of the teacher is a facilitator to inspire students’ independent learning. To be this kind of role, it could be a major challenge confronting teachers. Because, first of all, teachers have to be able to know what students are willing to learn and then facilitate them to learn it. To be honest, it is difficult to handle the change, as teachers have got used to spoon-fed educational methods.” (Interviewee 4)

This interviewee underlined that that school should change the current situation, in which teachers dominate in the classroom, to better meet students’ needs. In terms of new classroom management, one of the principals spoke about working towards establishing an efficient classroom:

“We are making every effort to build an efficient, democratic, inspiring classroom...” (Interviewee 20)

Another suggested how such effective classrooms might be established:

“To change the traditional teaching strategies, first of all, we have to reduce the amount of time teachers are talking in the classroom. So we should encourage students to discuss and ask questions. We just try to follow a kind of model that leads students to learn independently first, and then we will discuss suitable teaching strategies based on students’ feedback. And then, we apply the best teaching approaches to improve teaching and learning.” (Interviewee 12)
This interviewee expressed the importance of students’ learning. Another described the classroom he was trying to create:

“It is established through the students’ activities. It should be students’ learning centred in terms of construction of the classroom, not teachers telling students what to do.” (Interviewee 13)

Each of these interviewees clearly articulates their personal belief in the commitment to create more effective classrooms with improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. In order to achieve such a goal, one of the interviewees has been working on the quality of teachers’ lesson plans. Although this was not brought up in other interviews, it is very interesting to see how he has challenged the status quo and endeavoured to meet the goal of the new curriculum reform in some detail:

“For example, in terms of teaching and research activities, such as lesson plans, I am concerned how should teachers prepare?... I remind teachers, especially experienced teachers, that it is no good copying things in accordance with their previous experience. They still have to be groundbreaking. I encourage teachers to make lesson plans together through the network, e.g., a group of five people with each sharing a part of a task. In the following year, they cannot then copy plans from the previous year. I have high expectations for teachers and push them to regroup a few lessons as one unit and make a plan at the unit level. In the third year, teachers are called upon to write the syllabus based on national curriculum guidance.” (Interviewee 1)

To monitor the quality of teaching and learning, interviewees talked about various strategies, such as classroom observations, and so on. There was a consensus that principals spent quite a lot of their time on classroom observations (e.g., Interviewee 9). To get to know what is happening in the classrooms, the principals even set goals regarding the frequency they will observe classes, eg. “60 classes per year” (Interviewee 11), or “two classes per day” (Interviewee 3).

This point was raised by the majority of the principals as being a significant aspect of the role of improving the quality of teaching:

“You must be immersed in the teaching activities in your school. For instance, you have to get into the classroom and attend teaching research meetings to know the urgent issues of teaching and all other relevant aspects of teaching and learning. In addition, you should try to spend time with students as you can. Our priority is given to student development. So I think the school, teachers and students should be tied together as a unit/trinity.” (Interviewee 9)
One question that might arise from the above response is whether the principal observing a few classes is sufficient to understand the quality of teaching in the school, let alone improve this, especially as not all of the interviewees were in the position to set targets for classroom observations every year. However, one interviewee suggested both students and some senior staff members should take part in classroom observation:

“I have prepared the student-led group who will observe teachers’ lessons along with their comments. The administrative leader-led group is also prepared to walk into the school and classrooms. Both of these two groups will gather a large amount of information for me. Sequentially, I will be able to make a more accurate judgment. Because I don’t judge it only based on my eyes. I mean, if I did it on my own, for instance, in our school, there are around 300 teachers. Even if I went to observe each of his or her lessons every day, I would have to spend 300 days. If I listen to three classes per day, I still need to listen to 100 days, right?” (Interviewee 7)

This interviewee is not the only one who makes use of the staff teams for observing classes. Similarly, one principal shared what he did in terms of classroom observations in more detail:

“In our school, I set up a few groups for the specific task of classroom observations. One of the groups’ main tasks is to observe other teachers’ lessons with the purpose of identifying problems. They will observe around 10 lessons per week or two lessons per day. We explain to teachers that these observers come to help them rather than inspect them or put them down. When teachers understand the purpose of classroom observations, they tend to be more willing to welcome observers.” (Interviewee 1)

Instead of observing classes in person, one interviewee made notes with an assistant from video records. This is explained by one of the interviewees as follows:

“Nowadays, when I go to observe lessons, I will just switch on the video and it will make records of the whole lessons automatically. So I encouraged teachers to make a video of their own lessons and go back to watch the video and reflect on them.” (Interviewee 12)

From the extracts quoted above, it can be seen that the views on the classroom observations vary. As interviewee 1 emphasized, one of the main purposes of classroom observations is identifying problems/issues in the teaching. One of the interviewees recounted how to use the results of classroom observations to monitor the quality of teaching and learning:

“From the students’ reaction and feedback, gathered from classroom observations, the report will be published. When we release the observation report to the public, we will omit the name of the teacher or even subjects, leaving only the class number and the time of the class. Still, it is not difficult for teachers to find out the comments from their own classes. If some classes are frequently shown negative comments, the teachers themselves may ask why his/her
class is always being identified with problems, but not in other subjects. So it may remind teachers that it is not the fault of the students but rather their own individual problem.” (Interviewee 7)

Of course, some principals suggested that it is also important to find out what teachers do well in the classroom. But with what are these principals mostly concerned when they do observations? Above, as Interviewee 7 referred to “students’ reaction and feedback” as a significant indication to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Once again, this was raised by several of the interviewees, but notably expressed by two:

“Because students are the direct beneficiaries or victims, depending on whether the quality of their education is good or poor. Therefore, I think the quality of teaching and learning should be judged mostly by the student's learning experience. If teachers can evaluate students, and then vice versa, teachers can also be evaluated by them. So, responsibility should be reciprocal. First of all, equivalent responsibility refers to equal relationships between teachers and students. And then it can contribute to educational equity.” (Interviewee 21)

Similarly, another interviewee commented on the significance of students’ feedback in classroom observations:

“...Feedback from classes is mainly focused on the learning atmosphere, effectiveness of activities and students’ reaction, teachers’ verbal language in terms of the capability of expression, and students' satisfaction/enjoyment. So a lot of aspects need to be paid attention to. You know, the teachers’ perspectives are different from students’ and principals’, so we try to gather different perspectives to judge a teacher, which I think is quite significant.” (Interviewee 20)

The two principals quoted above suggested that they should focus on students’ feedback when they observe classes, which is significant for the quality of teaching and learning. One of the reasons, as Interviewee 20 suggested, “that teacher appraisal needs to be completed from different perspectives”. This is because, as one defined, a good teacher does not necessarily mean that it is sufficient to be judged by “his/her performance in the classroom but also other attributes, such as reliability, tolerance, love, organizational skills, and so on.” (Interviewee 26)

Teacher appraisals were also mentioned by several of the principals, but notably stressed by two:

“In terms of teacher appraisal, I think it should be a comprehensive appraisal. First of all, teachers’ ethics are quite significant. And we also look at their professional skills, their work
attitude and teamwork capability. So these multi-dimensional aspects need to be considered.” (Interviewee 2)

Similarly, another argued that it is necessary to set expectations for teacher performance, as one principal explained in some detail:

“Therefore, I proposed teaching performance appraisal criteria. Under the criteria, I told the teacher that it consists of ten standards directly from teachers, ten criteria from teachers’ re-evaluation, five criteria from students’ feedback, and the last ten criteria from student-leaders’ comments. Therefore, there are four dimensions from four groups of evaluators, which are quite diverse. These become the norms/regulations agreed by all staff as well as students in the school. I will give you an example. In terms of the teaching performance in political ideology, there are explicit expectations on teachers. Regarding teaching effectiveness, I will look at how many positive comments they receive and in how many research activities they participate. There will be an overall score summed up at the end. Then it also leaves around ten percent or five percent of the teacher performance appraisal to be scored by the professional educational assessors, which is also helpful to adjust extreme scores.” (Interviewee 7)

It can be identified that principals have adopted many strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. Among other strategies, the principals mentioned talking to teachers as well as students was also important. One principal pointed out that “it is vital to be with students and talk to them to know what they really think” (Interviewee 6). As one of the Interviewees explained, he did it not only to “get to know each other better but also build up rapport for good relationships” (Interviewee 17).

The informants quoted above emphasized the importance of listening to students. In fact, schools are also open to parents and encourage them to participate in improving school development, although only one or two principals talked about parents’ participation regarding teaching improvement. Here is one example in which a principal did mention that parents are invited to the school’s open days:

“On the second Tuesday of each month, it is an open day for parents. Parents can come and observe classes in the classrooms and our laboratories. If there are some student activities, they are permitted to take part. So we try to show everything to parents and let them know what is going on in the school. So when we develop new programmes or projects, parents tend to show better understanding and more support. Otherwise, parents know little about the school, so it may become difficult to attain their trust.” (Interviewee 3)

Another principal indicated that nowadays, schools do not work on their own, but tend to have more connections and cooperation with other schools and even become part of a school community with their partner-schools, focused on effective teaching and learning:
“Like this year, we became an alliance community with our partner-schools, which is called the secondary education teaching union. Generally, the meeting is held regularly at the level of the province in a form of demonstrating lessons and experts’ presentations. It provides a platform to principals, who can exchange ideas. For instance, we discuss effective teaching approaches improvement under the new curriculum guidance. We explore teaching effectiveness through demonstrating the same lessons but with different approaches. Generally, there are around ten schools in a union.” (Interviewee 2)

To sum up, when reviewing comments about the quality of teaching and learning, most of the principals agreed that students’ needs have been paid more attention. One of reasons for this that can be identified is that the government’s definition of student development has been expanded from simple student attainment to include meeting students’ individual needs, which is explicitly mentioned in the government policies, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

5.5 Leading teacher development

Underlining the importance of improving the quality of teaching and learning, leading teacher development has become one of the significant roles of the principals. This was stressed by the majority of the principals. In the previous section, the principals have demonstrated that teacher behaviour needs to change to meet students’ needs under the new curriculum. It is not possible to ‘change’ the experience of students in the classroom unless the behaviour of teachers also changes. Therefore, changing teacher behaviour is a key priority, and teacher development is the best way to achieve this. Much was said during the interviews regarding support or training provided by the principals for teachers’ development.

Firstly, the significance of teacher development for the quality of educational development was raised by many of the principals. One (e.g., Interviewee 11) even claimed “only first-class teachers can develop the best students”. Therefore, the professional development of teachers is crucial to students’ development. Also, due to the role of the teacher carrying out teaching in practice, teachers’ development is vital to push forward reform. This is evidenced by one of the interviewees explaining the significance of leading teacher development in pushing forward curriculum reform:

“The core of curriculum reform is improving the quality of teaching and learning and moral education. The teacher’s professional development is essential for this to be achieved. Teaching and moral educational reforms, I think these two things must be completed through teachers..” (Interviewee 1)
In addition, teachers themselves are in need of improving their professional development. An example being one interviewee, who explained:

“As a principal, one of the important roles is to be concerned with the development of teachers. For instance, if you just put a teacher’s head down to pull a cart, then later, he/she definitely has burnout. He/she may lose passion to work. What we do in our school is trying to make them always have a feeling of achievement and the potential or hope for better achievement, so that he/she is happy to come to work every day. As a result, teachers may have less stress. So our input to teacher development is actually showing that we can help them with achievement, especially younger teachers.” (Interviewee 8)

Many the principals expressed they have endeavored to lead teacher development by providing training/support. Of course, there are other strategies, such as intrinsic and extrinsic incentives, and care for teachers’ welfare. But a teacher training programme was raised by most of those interviewed as one significant approach to improving teachers’ development (e.g., Interviewee10). This mainly involves school-based training, teacher professional programmes or promotion programmes, advanced training or studying abroad (e.g., visiting scholars, academic trips). One principal explained the need of training to teachers as follows:

“The basic prerequisite for school development is to improve the professional level of teachers. Right? How to improve their development? If you leave a teacher in the same situation for a long time without any change, or you close doors, I don’t think teacher development can be improved in that way. For professional development training, teachers have to go out and improve their professional skills to broaden their horizons, but also to accept something new ... I mean, when you try to recommend a new concept, the teacher cannot accept it immediately. Yes, I have to say, regarding a new concept... You cannot beat this idea into teachers’ heads. So what you have to do is to try to let them go out to see, feel, and experience by themselves.” (Interviewee 10)

This principal emphasized the importance of widening teachers’ horizons and suggested increased training opportunities for teachers. Once again, the principal believed that the school should provide a platform for teacher development in various forms, such as conferences/workshops, coaching schemes, academic trips, and so on, to provide training or other opportunities to teachers in order to broaden their knowledge. As he explained:

“For example, if there is a conference invitation to me, I will consider offering the opportunity to teachers. My development platform is actually open to our teachers. Alternatively, if I learn something new from outside, I would like to share it with the teachers. So, I have to say, a lot of teachers in the school gain a wider range of experience via these kinds of platforms, including international foreign exchange opportunities. So we invite foreign teachers as well as students to come and visit our school and we organize activities
Interviewee 10 commented that “it is essential to improve teacher development through training programmes, which can contribute to the expansion of teachers’ horizons and to accepting new policies or ideas”. Interviewee 23 felt that it is vital to provide or create opportunities for teachers by “providing various platforms for their development”. Another reasons for improving teacher development is to meet teachers’ individual needs. This was raised by several of the interviewees. For example, one interviewee explained:

“For example, for art teachers, we usually send them to attend teacher training courses specifically related to the subject they will teach. In other words, if we develop a new course, the teacher must go through the relevant training. For example, if a biology teacher wants to develop a new course regarding floristry, he/she has to attend floristry-training courses. That is because even if he/she has got knowledge of plants but he/she lacks knowledge of the floristry arts. So they must receive special training before teaching this course. Other examples, such as tea ceremonies, need to be done in the same way.” (Interviewee 27)

This interviewee gave an example of the training programme the school provided for teachers who need to teach new materials or subjects. In addition, in terms of teachers’ other needs, such as their promotion/career development programme, this has been identified by several of the principals who helped teachers to make a plan and achieve the goal (e.g., Interviewee 22:

Similarly, one principal described a programme for younger teachers’ development:

“This year, I made a plan for teachers’ professional development, especially for the young teachers. Firstly, young teachers teach with the assistance of ‘backbone’/master (gu gan, more experienced) teachers. In the meantime, I try to provide ample opportunities for teachers to attend relevant training programmes. So I would recommend them to learn new things through training. Then, in three to five years, they may become 'backbones' to coach the younger teachers.” (Interviewee 13)

This interviewee actually explained the ‘mentoring/coaching’ mechanism as experienced teachers leading younger teachers. Actually the quotes above from the interviewees described the support/training programme for teachers’ professional development in various ways. Recently, it has become more popular to send teachers abroad for further study or to send teachers for a study tour both at home and abroad. This was mentioned by a few of the interviewees, with one of them notably remarking:
“Regarding teacher training, there used to be few opportunities. But nowadays, there are more chances for the teachers to go abroad, such as being a visiting scholar. It means that if you are a senior or quite accomplished teacher, you will be more likely to get the opportunity to go to some universities or schools either in China or abroad for further study for a period of time, i.e., a half or one year. To be honest, it is a great opportunity, as you actually will take a very big step in terms of teachers’ advanced professional development.” (Interviewee 14)

The belief of Interviewee 14 is that it is necessary and helpful to leave the workplace for a new learning environment, though this kind of opportunity tends to be given with priority to more experienced teachers. Once again, the interviewee believes that those teachers benefit from such a supporting programme. Another interviewee also stated, in some detail:

“I quite often take my teachers to go out across the country and even worldwide. We call it ‘a study tour’. When we go to visit a school, we focus on their teaching activities in the classroom or the culture construction of the school. However, you know, this kind of study tour is often perceived as junket tour (gongfei lvyou, a tour founded by the government). In fact, if you can tell him/her a clear purpose of the tour by setting specific aims and ask the teacher to search materials ahead of time, they will be clear of what they need to achieve within their visit. It will become more meaningful and purposeful when they go to see Western culture as well as the education. For instance, regarding a democratic classroom, teachers need to explore what a democratic class is in advance before they go to observe such classrooms.” (Interviewee 5)

This principal distinguished his study tour from a ‘junket’ tour by explaining the latter is funded by the government and often perceived to be for fun due to its loosely-defined goals, and as a result, it has got quite a bad reputation. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why this principal stressed the study tour is well organized along with having clear goals to make sure teachers benefit from it.

In addition to the support to teachers, teachers’ motivation is significant in improving their professional development. To boost teachers’ motivation, quite a few of the principals expressed the opinion that it needs extrinsic and intrinsic incentives as well as care for teachers. One of the principals summarized the situation in terms of motivating teachers with four concise points:

“I encourage and motivate teachers with four principles which refer to caring for teachers in their daily work, appreciating their efforts, showing concern for their needs, and valuing their achievement.” (Interviewee 21)
In terms of extrinsic and intrinsic incentives, several of the interviewees referred to meeting both teachers’ living needs and academic needs, one of them explaining:

“In terms of teachers’ incentives, the first one is intrinsic motivation towards teachers’ academic goals, and the second is the appropriate extrinsic incentive (e.g., bonus). First of all, it is important to motivate teachers to achieve the school’s development goals and objectives as the priority. So I told teachers, student achievement, teacher achievement, can actually be combined as one unit as they are correlative to each other. So, I always tell my staff, you (teachers) should not think your efforts will receive fewer returns...Actually the success of your students will also help you to become a successful teacher, so it is a reciprocal relationship. Anyway, you have to motivate him/her (the teacher), and then offer some appropriate treat.” (Interviewee 11)

This interviewee expressed a belief that the relationships between teachers and students were reciprocal, which can motivate teachers intrinsically. At the same time, extrinsic motivation, for example an appropriate bonus, was the crucial inducement. On the other hand, it is necessary to “release teachers’ pressure, cheer them up when they are down and appreciate their efforts in a positive way” (Interviewee 20). This was a point also raised by other interviewees, with one explaining:

“You have to learn to lead your team to win the ‘war’; what you must avoid is when your team fails to win, is to punish them. On the contrary, you must be clear about the teachers’ diverse emotional needs, and cheer them up. I think, at this point, you do need to play as a ‘dustbin’ when necessary.” (Interviewee 14)

Interviewee 14 used a metaphor to demonstrate how the role of the principal could be as a sort of “dustbin”, which means that the principal may have to be open to both teachers’ complaining or other emotional releases. These two principals are both concerned about releasing teachers’ pressure and meeting their emotional needs.

In addition, the principals are committed to motivating teachers and to remain tightly focused on their mission to make teachers feel comfortable in the school. Caring is crucial to achieve this, such as for teachers’ wellbeing, happiness and even personal needs. Activities are organized by the school, including “gyms, entertainment (e.g., dancing, karaoke singing)” (Interviewee 20) and other events. One interviewee explained in some detail:

“We set the ‘teacher happiness index’ as our one of educational goals five years ago. I organized a series of school-based activities, such as reading activities. In addition, there are some non-academic activities to enrich teachers’ lives. For example, Monday nights, yoga for the female teachers, Tuesdays - table tennis and calligraphy for the primary teachers, Wednesdays - chalk carving, Thursdays – ballroom dance, Fridays - choir. These activities are all optional, so teachers can feel free to join in with what they like. So all we do is to try to enhance teachers’ happiness. Also, we are the first school to open a cafe for teachers. This
By commenting the coffee may taste differently if it is not free, this principal seemed to show how well he understood teachers and tried to make them feel comfortable in the school. What principals try to achieve is to “make teachers relax” and to show care for teachers and even “their families” (Interviewee 20).

In summary, the importance of teacher development was highlighted by the majority of the interviewees. It is clear from the comments above that the principals are very concerned about their responsibilities in leading teacher development. Teachers benefit from such training programme opportunities or other support in terms of their professional development if they are open-minded to new ideas and motivated to work better. Care seems significant in maintaining teachers’ motivations.

5.6 Impact of reforms on structure and accountability

One more significant impact of reforms is on schools’ organisation structures and principals’ accountability. Since the educational reforms, especially in the 21st century, schools’ structures have been reformed in multiple forms and funded by different sponsors, especially secondary schools. School principals have been accountable to different groups and for different things. Therefore, they are confronted with mounting accountabilities. There are specific aspects of accountability that concern principals and these can be seen in the interview data, as follows:

1. To whom or for what are school principals accountable?

2. How do principals come across ‘professional accountability’?

3. In terms of accountability and authority, are they balanced?

Gathering information from interviewees, in China, there are several types of schools in terms of the structural arrangements for managing schools. Who school leaders are accountable to depends on the sponsors of the school. This was mentioned by several of the interviewees, for example:
“In China, there are several types of schools in terms of the structure of school management. Generally, for public schools, there are three major sponsors, such as, the city Board of Education, the local Bureau of Education, and the provincial Board of Education. For instance, if the school is sponsored by the local Bureau of Education, the school is funded by them. ... Our school is funded by the city Board of Education, so I must be accountable to them.” (Interviewee 10)

There are quite a few schools run by and attached to universities. As one interviewee told:

“Our school is founded by a university so I have to be accountable to this university. It is not much to do with the local government.” (Interviewee 5)

In some cases, it is more complicated. If schools are sponsored by the Ministry of Finance of the People’s Republic of China, then they may need to be accountable to the central government directly.

It is clear from above comments that school management structures vary. In recent years, there is new type of structural arrangement– trusteeship between schools. In the UK, the terms ‘lead school’ and ‘accelerator school’ have been more familiar to people. Trustees are entitled to have much autonomy in managing their entrusted schools, such as autonomy over personnel management. They can nominate the principals and middle managers in their partner schools.

As one principal stated:

“Our school was founded in 1904 and has a 108-year history. It is one of the top schools in China. We have got a number of disadvantaged or newly opened schools delegated to us by the local authority to support them. For example, we are assigned to manage Human Resources, such as new teacher recruitment, in those entrusted schools.” (Interviewee 26)

As can be seen, because schools have different sponsors, they are accountable for different things. Generally, principals have to be accountable for what is provided or expected by the sponsor. This was mentioned by several of the interviewees, one of them explaining:

“Regarding the local educational authority (LEA) who delegates power to me, I must be accountable to them. I help them look after everything, such as budget management, school facilities, all staff and students and school security. In addition, one more thing I think is quite important is that I make every effort to establish a harmonious school...” (Interviewee 8)

2. How do principals deal with ‘professional accountability’?
Nearly all the principals recognize that they are accountable to the sponsor for school performance. Regarding professional accountability, many of them commented that their “accountability is connected with teachers’ development” (e.g., Interviewee 5), and “curriculum development” (Interviewee 8). This was also highlighted by several of the interviewees, with two commenting:

“… One of the important responsibilities of the principal is to be concerned with the development of teachers.” (Interviewee 8)

“You may notice the governmental policy. One of our roles is defined as the leader of curriculum development; we must be accountable for curriculum development.” (Interviewee 12)

One of the interviewees even commented that “we must be accountable to students’ development, to improve education development to meet their needs” (Interviewee 9). This is evidenced through one principal’s comments:

“I must be accountable to two groups of people including students and the LEA. First of all, I must be accountable to the LEA, otherwise I may be dismissed. In the meantime, I have to be accountable to students; otherwise I am not a qualified principal. We must remember that whatever we do is to improve students’ development. For instance, we improve teachers’ development, which is actually in order to improve students’ development as the final aim.” (Interviewee 2)

In terms of students’ development, as one principal explained, students “enjoy and learn” at school (Interviewee 12). Of course, if teachers “are enjoying their job” then both students and teachers are happy (Interviewee 20). The quotes from the above interviewees recognize that they should be professionally accountable to students’ as well as for teachers’ development. In addition, under the impact of social changes, many of the interviewees pointed out that there are higher expectations from parents. Some principals argued that they are “more open to parents and involve them in school activities or even consider their feedback on curriculum development” (Interviewee 3), which implies that they have to be accountable to parents for students’ development too.

3. In terms of accountability and authority, are these balanced?

By looking at what the principals had to say about their accountability, the next question is: in terms of principals’ accountability and authority, do these balance?
It seemed that the principals had much to say on this topic. Many principals argued that they have been confronted with mounting accountability but with less autonomy. This was highlighted by several of the principals, but notably expressed by the following two remarks:

“I feel there is much pressure on me as the principal because I have to take responsibility for everything. I am the first person responsible for the school management, i.e. fire protection, school safety, and I have to prepare for all sorts of things like ‘Model School’ inspections from the LEA, ‘hygiene inspection’, or other inspections from other agencies. In the past, principals were also the primary person to take responsibility of the school development (di ye ren ren), but they had less accountability to take on.” (Interviewee 22)

Another principal shared the same opinion, commenting that:

“There is no difference in terms of a principal’s power and responsibilities between nowadays and the last century, but the principals’ responsibilities are more complicated now. For instance, a principal has to ensure school safety, hygiene inspections, and even be accountable to developing a modern city.” (Interviewee 10)

It seems that the increasing accountability put on principals does not necessarily mean that principals have been granted more autonomy. In contrast, many of the interviewees felt they have limited power. For instance, what principals were mostly concerned about is they have limited say in the hiring of personnel. This was mentioned explicitly during the interviews by many of the principals, three expressing their views as follows:

“In terms of teacher recruitment, generally, the LEA organize the tests and make the final decisions, so we find it is difficult to select what kind of teachers we really need in our school.” (Interviewee 26)

Another principal stated that they have much less power compared to what principals used to have:

“Principals used to have power in five aspects, such as personnel. But nowadays, they don’t have that much power. In most schools, principals don’t have the power to select teachers. If they need a new teacher, they have to recruit him/her via the LEA who will send one to the school.” (Interviewee 10)

Another complained that he felt helpless regarding personnel management matters:

“We have limited autonomy of personnel management. In terms of teacher recruitment, we are not entitled to select new staff. We have to apply for the number of teachers we need and then the LEA (the sponsor) allocate the relevant teachers to us, although the LEA will try to meet our needs. So we can’t sack teachers who we think are not qualified. What we can do is to provide training programmes to those less qualified teachers to improve their professional development.” (Interviewee 2)
However, not all schools are equally restricted in recruiting new staff. Interestingly, this principal commented that school principals in more developed areas have more autonomy. This was also raised by one of the principals who is from a very developed district, both in economic and academic terms, Shanghai:

“In some counties, the LEA may make final decisions on new teacher selections. But we are different. In our district, we schools can almost make the final decision. So basically, there are three stages regarding teacher recruitment. Of course, those candidates we select will have to attend a test organized by the LEA. Generally speaking, the test is quite easy, such as an academic test, health check and psychological test, so almost all can pass the tests.” (Interviewee 17)

Of course, as mentioned earlier, there are different types of schools. For instance, if the school is funded by a university, they may have less intervention from the local authority. This was illustrated by one principal stating that:

“For example, our school is sponsored by the local university. We have autonomy of personnel including selecting and sacking of teachers.” (Interviewee 5)

The Interviewees quoted above stated that principals have limited autonomy. This also happens with some other accountabilities, both in terms of teaching and learning development and curriculum development:

“For instance, in terms of lesson plans, the local educational authorities will check and only allow handwritten plans rather than electronic ones. You know, the information technology is quite well developed, why can the electronic lesson plans not be accepted? In addition, there are fixed formats in lesson plans in terms of the focus and the difficulty of each lesson. In this sense, teachers have no autonomy to plan their lessons at all.” (Interviewee 26)

“The national curriculum dominates the text books and assigns the curriculum and course schedule. The school-based curriculum is generally limited to one hour per week.” (Interviewee 21)

It is not difficult to see from the above responses that the interviewees feel an imbalance between their accountability and autonomy. What they hope is to be delegated more autonomy, with one commenting:

“To be honest, we don’t expect those issues will be sorted out soon. What I really want to say is that we need more space and autonomy to develop education at the school level. So we hope
that there will be less intervention from outside of the school, so we can attain more autonomy to manage the school in accordance with the norms of educational development.” (Interviewee 26)

Not all of the principals were in this position. It is quite surprising to hear that there are principals being critical of limited power and pressure from a different perspective. As one principal argued:

“In terms of the principal’s power, such as budget management, personnel management, I don’t know why people are so keen to take in charge of these things. Because I think our priority should be given to educational management and ideological leadership. I would argue that, in some cases, some principals even misuse their power. For instance, they reduce time for students’ non-academic activities regardless of the national curriculum guidance, as they are only concerned with students’ achievement. So, I have to say, some principals have a bias on their power.” (Interviewee 15)

Similarly, one interviewee recounted:

“We always hear that some principals say that it is hard to challenge the status quo. But I would argue that you are still able to make some decisions as a principal. If you like, you can still do something that can have impact on yourself, your teachers and students in a small range. So it is no good blaming others, i.e., pressure attained from the community or the others.” (Interviewee 23)

The first extract argues that principals do not seem to make good use of their power with priority given to student development. The claims that the big challenge arises from principals themselves and whether they are keen to change or challenge the status quo as the champion of their school.

Notwithstanding, the majority of the interviewees have argued that they felt they were struggling with increasing accountability but with limited authority. Such an imbalance makes it is hard for principals to make the interventions required to improve educational outcomes.

5.7 The impact of the social change on education

The changes in priorities that principals expressed above actually show that Chinese society is changing. China is in transition, and the quality of education has never been subject to so much scrutiny from so many stakeholders as now. Principals are under pressure from higher
expectations from those both inside and outside of the school. This issue was raised by the majority of those interviewed. The factors raised by them embrace several major changes in people’s attitudes to education, making education more transparent to the public and raising higher the expectations on schools from parents, students and the community.

So, people’s attitudes to education have been changing. First, expectations of the quality of education in schools from the broader community have become higher. Many principals referred to this, but it was notably expressed by two:

“To be honest, our school infrastructure has been enhanced. Our teacher qualifications have been definitely improved. However, people are still unsatisfied with our education. That means that their expectations of education have been transmitted from quantity to quality… people now have higher expectations of school principals. They are more concerned about the process of the education, such as student pressure, student workloads, maximising students’ potential development, student physical health, and so on.” (Interviewee 25)

“Nowadays, we are encouraged to respect people’s humanism and lives, and treat students as people. So we have to develop our education to ensure students enjoy and learn, and we used to have less consciousness of the spiritual dimensions of student development… This means the accountability has been put on the principals. So we principals have to improve the quality of education.” (Interviewee 15)

At the same time, parents also place higher expectations on their children’s education and hope schools can achieve more than just good academic results (Interviewee 10). This issue was also raised by the majority of those interviewed, with one saying:

“Parents’ expectations of their children have been changing. Of course, they hope that their children can achieve good results in terms of students’ attainment. But they have other expectations. For example, they are more concerned that their children are happy and enjoy school life. What they hope is their children are happy and feel comfortable at school and also can achieve higher scores in the exams.” (Interviewee 1)

One possible reason behind the higher expectations from parents was mentioned by interviewees, the one-child policy (Interviewee 25). He explained:

“Under the one-child policy, the parents invest hope that their only child is able to apply for a good university, but without too much hard work. They expect the school to deliver this…..” (Interviewee 25)

In addition, such higher expectations have something to do with the policy changes, such as the recent massification of education and the multiple skills demanded of young people under market forces in China, with one principal recounting:

“Since the end of the 1990s, higher education has been developed with the massification of education in China. So it is not as difficult for students to apply for university as it used to be. We have to be concerned about student development for their future rather than merely
test scores. Nowadays, graduates may find it more difficult to get a job without any special skills/expertise. That is why I proposed that we must develop students with a concept of lifelong learning.” (Interviewee 20)

Interviewee 20 explained that the massification of education and has made gaining a job more competitive. Success in exams does not necessarily guarantee a good job for the future and there is a need to develop students’ practical and work skills. Obviously, parents have become more concerned about the quality of education and what is going on in schools, as evidenced here:

“I will show you a message, which was sent to me by a parent: ‘Thanks for your efforts to lead the school being so successful. However, in terms of the subject of history in class 17, I have to say there is a big problem. The teacher fails to take responsibility for the students. In order to ensure students achieving good results in the national college entrance examination in the future, please take some strategies to save history!’ This parent sent the same message to me twice!” (Interviewee 7)

Interviewee 7 repeated that “this parent sent the same message twice” in a stressed tone and talked about “parents’ higher expectation of schools”. This was also mentioned by half of the interviewees, who perceived that this was partly due to a stronger sense of their ‘rights’. These days, parents seem to defend their rights much more strongly in many aspects, for example students’ safety (Interviewee 13). This issue was raised by quite a few of the interviewees, with one remarking:

“People used to have less awareness of their ‘rights’ but they are much stronger to defend their rights today. Nowadays, everyone is aware of their ‘rights’. Students have stronger awareness of their rights too. They used not to think about such things… In the past, if a student was injured when he/she played football neither their parents nor the student would think the school should take responsibility for it. They wouldn’t ask for compensation. They did not complain. They do now.” (Interviewee 10)

Once again there is evidence of the belief that principals have to be concerned about parents’ ‘rights’ and to meet their needs. Otherwise, parents will complain. This was also raised by another one of the interviewees:

“Nowadays, we have to improve student development. In the meanwhile, we have to meet students’ individual needs. If we fail to meet their needs, the parents may go to complain via the media or the relevant institutions.” (Interviewee 11)

In addition, the fact is students have been changing. “They tend to form higher expectations of the quality of their education and always believe they can achieve more” (e.g., Interviewee
10). They have much stronger views about their individual ‘rights’ too. “Students with broader access to this knowledge make the school’s job more challenging” (Interviewee 2).

Principals are changing too. They are concerned more now about both students’ and teachers’ happiness (e.g., Interviewee 20), with one example being a principal who explained:

“I think what I endeavour to do now is to improve our school to create a comfortable learning environment so students are happy to study and our staff are happy to work here.” (Interviewee 12)

It is clear from the above comments, that principals hold the belief that the circumstances in education are changing. Some of the principals are struggling to cope with complex change, especially in a less supportive environment. Much was said on this topic, but notably articulated strongly by these three extracts:

“So overviewing the whole education, the external environment is not positive. For example, parents and students used to show more respect to schools. Both students and parents had genuine reverence and respect for teachers. But now, when I attempt to sort out students’ safety and care for them as I can, I promise it is genuine care for them. People seem to believe that I do it because I am worried about the punishment.” (Interviewee 7)

“I think there is something wrong with the circumstances of education. People’s views on education tend to be commercial, including our parents’. Parents used to support and trust the school very much. However, parents show little respect for schools. So, they perceive they are the customers at the top. If any ‘injury’ or other ‘accidents’ happens to the students, some parents even enquire into the possibilities of compensation they might receive from the school. Alternatively, they attempt to seek potential profits from which their children can benefit in the national exam results. If you ask me what the major change is in terms of the role of the principals, I have to say that we take too many responsibilities from parents and the community beyond our role.” (Interviewee 8)

“So you can see the whole environment of education is quite bad. It seems that everyone can intervene in education and criticize it. People including parents and the community believe that they are ‘educationalists’. So there are too many critics from the outside of the school, which has significant (emphasized) impact on school development.” (Interviewee 26)

Because of the new transparency of education, this is even taken advantage of by the media, which they report the news with a priority given to their ‘profits’. This was further raised by one of the interviewees:

“If we look at today’s media, they tend to put more negative impact on education. They are even not interested in articulating good news in the school. Even the journalists themselves admit that good news in the school is less attractive to the public.” (Interviewee 7)
There is a clear question arising from the above comments: regarding the students’ development, how much responsibility should the school take? One of the interviewees expressed her views very clearly:

“To be honest, I think the school, parents and the community should share the responsibility of education. However, it seems that the school works alone to take all the responsibility for education. I think parents do have a significant impact on their children education. Parents should probably take 70% of responsibility for their children’s development. So we believe that the family has a significant impact on children’s achievements.” (Interviewee 2)

The two interviewees above articulated their less than positive attitude to the media, due to its perceived negative impact on education. There is also a clear message from the interviewees that it is necessary to enhance the environment of education. When gathering information, it can be seen that it is more complicated to develop education in terms of the impact of the social change on education. Principals withstand a lot of pressure from parents, the community and the media.

5.8 Principals’ views on the way they lead their schools

Principals’ views on leadership are based on their own experiences and reflect personal style. This theme was not like others gathered in response to specific questions, and the two terms ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ were frequently used by the interviewees in their responses, though the latter term tended to appear more often. Gathering together these references, several key themes emerge from the data collected, including:

- The importance of building positive relationships with followers and strong networks
- Winning trust (via good character, academic skills) and being prepared to delegate
- Management (Democracy, disciplines)
- Establishing a positive school culture

It was repeatedly argued that it is essential to build positive relationships with followers to achieve effective leadership by the majority of the principals, who stressed that it is vital to build these relationships with subordinates by working with them, caring for them and encouraging them. As one principal noted:

“I think it is important to spend time in the school. When students and teachers see their principal is quite often around the school, they will feel a bit more supported.”  (Interviewee 6)

Another interviewee agreed who recounted how:
“When I became the principal of the school, first of all, I took all efforts to become a member of the school community by working with all staff members closely. I think, you must make all efforts to become a colleague and prove that you are a person who is genuine trying to help them and to improve the school rather than become as a someone who is superior than them.” (Interviewee 22)

Good relationships can only be maintained by deliberate efforts. Quite a few of the interviewees indicated that they took an interest in both the professional development and even the personal life of their staff (e.g. Interviewee 5) and endeavoured to establish ‘positive relationships among teachers’ and a ‘comfortable atmosphere’ (Interviewee 16). This was notably articulated by one:

“As a principal, you should create a genuine cooperative work atmosphere. So what I try to ensure is that teachers’ achievement is assessed not simply based on their student attainment, I mean student test scores.” (Interviewee 1)

The theme of caring for teachers can be captured from most of the participants’ responses, but interestingly, one principal added that more care should be given to weaker colleagues, for example, even the school cleaners (Interviewee 23).

Building positive relationships with subordinates is an important requirement, yet on the other hand, most of the interviewees believed that it is necessary to keep a certain distance between the principal and the subordinates, to avoid being too close to them, though one exception to this is that of the interviewee who explained:

“What I can’t agree with is that principals should not make friends with their staff members. Some say if you make friends with them, you may build too close a relationship with them. But I don’t believe this. Even if I make friends with teachers, it doesn’t necessarily mean that I can’t manage them. So if you are trying to keep a distance from teachers, you will be possibly perceived as a harsh person.” (Interviewee 16)

Interviewee 16 clearly articulated that getting close to the staff or even building friendship with them does not necessarily threaten the principals’ power or authority. Perhaps, it could be argued that trust underpins positive relationships, which was raised by other Interviewees too.

Almost all of the principals said or at least implied that their priority is to create trust as the basis for effective leadership. They admitted that “it takes time to achieve this” (Interviewee 8). First of all, principals think they can gain trust from their followers, or influence them by
“acknowledging individual personalities”, “accepting differences” (Interviewee2) and their academic skills. They have different qualities that they can bring to improve the quality of education and the school’s development. To achieve this, principals should be “genuine” (Interviewee 16) and “open-minded”. This was raised by a few of the Interviewees, but notably articulated by two explaining:

“I think, first of all, you must win the trust of your subordinates, which I think is very important. Secondly, you must be genuine, and take all efforts to develop the school. You need to give all your attention to teacher and student development, and facilitate these processes rather than insist on your own way.” (Interviewee 22)

“I think, a good principal must be open to people with differences or diversities in terms of their ideas or behaviours, and achieve shared visions while maintaining differences. So then everyone can work for the mutual goals. It is no good if the leader lacks trust from the followers so that they can’t move forward in the same direction. What you have to do is to increase teachers’ sense of belongingness in the school.” (Interviewee 25)

Besides identifying these traits with effective leadership, most of the interviewees agreed that it tends to be easier to manage teachers if they themselves can teach well and have a record of success in the classroom (Interviewee 11). One explained this:

“When I was the vice principal, I did a few things. But that was one thing that I had to improve: the quality of education in my own classroom. So I taught Grade 1, 2 and 3 in the senior high schools for six years. My class attained the best outcomes in terms of the National College Entrance Exams among ten classes. So, such outcomes would convince a lot of people of my professional teaching, and proved that I am capable of doing the job.” (Interviewee 12)

This interviewee expressed the view that principals must be accomplished teachers, and her personal experience was that you need to excel in teaching activities to be successful as a school leader, and she stressed that this probably needed to be done before she became a principal.

Above principals stated how to win trust from colleagues from their own perspectives. Vice-versa, principals should trust colleagues too. This is evidenced through several of the interviewees who stress the importance of trust and the distribution of their authority for effective leadership on the school.

“As a principal, what I have been endeavoring to achieve is a model of school management which allows me to do less and become less important...First of all, you must give 100% trust to your team and love your students. In the meanwhile, when they make some mistakes, you must be genuine to share the responsibility and help them.” (Interviewee 14)
The message here is that, trust is essential to effective leadership and it needs to be mutual trust between principals and staff members. This interviewee stressed trust is a prerequisite of sharing authority with others. Of course, where there is delegation, monitoring is required:

“As a principal, you must be able to deliver explicit assignment/tasks to your vice principal who will take responsibility of the process of implementation of strategies in the school. In the meanwhile, you should be able to get access to the feedback and analyse it, so you know what is going on in the implementation process. So you'd better to make sure the distribution mechanism goes smoothly in every stage.” (Interviewee 5)

This principal stressed delegation must be associated with monitoring to ensure that authority is used appropriately. Notwithstanding, as one of the principals (Interviewee 3) commented, “distribution of authority contributes to effective leadership, and holds the whole community together”.

However, as most of the interviewees pointed out, it is not sufficient to rely on leadership alone to improve the school. Some of the principals argued that “management associated with democracy” (e.g. Interviewee 19) is a “necessary supplement of and even equivalent to leadership”. This was raised by quite a few of the interviewees, but expressed as follows by two of them:

“When I was thinking how to influence our teachers, I think I must set norms first. It is because I believe some norms must be compulsory to the teachers to obey. I don’t agree that teachers can teach in a way whatever they prefer, which I think is too arbitrary. That is why I said you must use empowering norms in addition to leadership. I think leadership is one of the strategies to manage the school... For example, regarding values, i.e. the governmental and Party policies, everyone must follow them without any question. I think it should be disciplines first and then education. You can’t merely rely on leadership.” (Interviewee 7)

“In the past 15 years, I have managed to develop this school from a very disadvantaged school to a more advantaged school. I owed this to good management along with norms. The process you use the power is a kind of that of management. For example, in our school, I set regulations that ensure every one is clear what they need to do.” (Interviewee 21)

The commitment of the interviewees to remain tightly focused on their role is to manage and lead the school. But not all of the interviewees were in this position. The one exception to this is that of the principals who explained how:

“When you talk about leadership, to be honest, it is something to do with guidance and direction. ‘Management’, I personally think it is at a low-level of leadership. Guidance and direction is at a high-level. So principals need to have capacity of leadership.” (Interviewee 23)
There are different views on school management, whether more supporting management or leadership, but these responses seem to indicate that principals have paid much attention to managing the school in an effective way.

There is a clear message that it is complicated to manage a school efficiently. School culture is considered a crucial factor to improve and maintain effective leadership, although getting the culture right is described as quite a big challenge. This was raised during the interviews by several of the interviewees while explaining their views. There were different approaches to developing the organizational culture in different schools too, according to the way the principal managed the school. Quite a few principals were interested in strategies to develop a shared vision for the school. But this is not a simple process, and some may resist, or struggle with new ideas, as the following two extracts demonstrate:

“It takes time to get the staff’s trust and understanding. So it is a long process, because it needs time to put your visions into practice and it may cause new problems during that time. And it is reasonable to give some time to colleagues to think over those new ideas. Colleagues will not take the initiative or be willing to take action until they are convinced by your visions. Only when my ideas are accepted by teachers who then take action, can they affect the lives of the students.” (Interviewee 7)

“When I was the principal in this school in the beginning. In the first year, I was endeavoring to find out what was strong in the existing school and preserving it. So I focused on preserving the school culture in the first year. In the following year, I started exploring new strategies to improve the school and think what we should do next. In the third year, based on what was discovered in the previous years, I was thinking it was the right time to make plans, such as a three or five-year plan including short-term targets, long-terms goals, I was ready to change the culture in the school.” (Interviewee 20)

Interviewee 20 explained that it takes time to establish school culture and it is no good to just throw away what was established by the former principal. But, of course, it is not so easy to establish a different culture. Any changes challenge the status quo or the old culture, which cannot be dismantled in a short time. As one principal explained in some detail:

“The school culture or the type of school leadership will be established in part through the way principals solve problems and deal with conflicts. Therefore, as a principal, he/she may find it is quite difficult to deal with relationships. If you blindly meet people’s needs, it will establish an organizational culture that those who are always demanding and complaining may get more than those who are comparatively quiet. So, it is not difficult to understand that some teachers may think it is not fair...if you are an authoritarian principal, your staff members may tend to be quite reserved and obey orders.” (Interviewee 8)
Each of these principals clearly articulates their personal belief in the importance of school culture, and all argue that it is central to effective leadership, but that it is more complicated to establish a supportive culture. This may require principals to be “wise” and “visionary” (Interviewee 23) or “investigating problems” and “setting appropriate school goals” (Interviewee 25). One principal gave an explicit explanation of ‘wise principals’:

“In terms of leaders’ influence, it is developed by power together with his/her good character. If a leader’s influence is negative, it will reduce your authority. In that case, the followers may pretend to follow their leader but not be convinced by what leaders say. So, when we define ‘wise principals’, we can say that they are capable of managing the integration of their knowledge and experience, and using them flexibly in the context. So I think those kinds of principals are really with wisdom not like empirical principals who only focus on doing without first thinking or reflection, or so called ‘academic’ principals who merely rely on theories.” (Interviewee 21)

Combining the complexity and arguments of leadership effectiveness, the ‘wise principal’ may need to deal with complicated relationships, such as authority and influence. Although traditional views on leadership are still prevalent with the importance of authority and discipline, modern leadership qualities, such as trust, equity and even democracy have been stressed by many of the interviewees.

5.9 Problems and challenges confronting principals

When analysing information from the responses, a number of problems and challenges confronting the principals are identified. What the principals felt most difficult to handle can be narrowed down to a number of issues, such as implementing and managing change, the testing issue and higher expectations from stakeholders. These problems and challenges are described in this section.

1. Implementing and managing change

Firstly, in terms of the problem of implementing and managing change, there is “the difficulty with curriculum and staff development” (Interviewee 3). This is hard to achieve because of a lack of resources, of appropriately qualified and trained teachers and inadequate support from the local educational authorities. In addition, “it is hard to challenge the status quo because it is difficult to change teachers, especially experienced teachers” (Interviewee 19). One explained how:

“From my point of view, I have to say only few teachers were able to accept the new conceptualization of the curriculum. If they couldn’t accept it, they may not be ready to make any changes. But it is quite difficult to change them in a short period of time. As you know, those teachers have taught for 10, 20, or even more years. Teachers have got used to the
way they have been teaching by teaching to the text and telling everything to students, which is actually cramming education that we call in China." (Interviewee 13)

Managing the change of teacher behaviour is a challenge when staff are unwilling to cooperate. On the other hand, teachers who lack appropriate training and teaching resources are quite disadvantaged. This was raised by several of the interviewees, as follows

“In our school, the main challenge is a lack of professional teacher teams with specific qualifications. It would be a big challenge to us to improve teacher development in a short time. If you want to develop specific areas in the curriculum at the school level, you must have a team who are full of passion to explore new teaching approaches and innovation. In a sense, developing teaching specialties for specific areas in curriculum is quite challenging.” (Interviewee 12)

Teacher development is one of the challenges confronting principals. When schools do not have curriculum materials, it is hard to develop school-based curricula. This was further raised by one of the interviewees in explaining how:

“But the problem is, we don’t have experience in compilation of the School Curriculum, right? Or how do I design the school-based curriculum? Regarding the selection of the content of the curriculum, the classroom organization, implementation of school-based curriculum, and evaluation, and so on, many of our teachers still feel hard to get these done due to a lack of experience.” (Interviewee 17)

The fact that the two interviewees above felt that they need qualified teachers along with more resources demonstrated there is a need for more support for the schools. Even the principals felt that they themselves “lack experience in leading curriculum development” (Interviewee 9). Once again, this was raised by one interviewee in explaining how:

“To be honest, my capacity is limited. I hope some experts can guide our school to develop curriculum construction in both theoretical aspects and the actual operation process. To be honest, there is no prominent teacher who is a professional in new curriculum development. Last Saturday, I was in a secondary school and talked with the principal. We all felt that we are in a situation where the blind lead the blind.” (Interviewee 19)

Interviewee 17 recounted that the challenge confronting the school is that they do not have materials to develop a school-based curriculum—the only books available seem to be official textbooks for the official curriculum. Interviewee 19 explicitly expressed that they need support in curriculum development. Some of the principals even pointed out that the limited autonomy in terms of curriculum development that the local authority or the government has delegated to them, makes their job very difficult. This was further constrained by the amount of time available:
“The national curriculum dominates the textbooks and assigns the curriculum programme and course schedule. The school-based curriculum is generally limited to one hour per week.” (Interviewee 21)

As this interviewee expressed, time has become a big issue since the curriculum reform. This interviewee argued with further explanation in some detail:

“When you have to complete more tasks in less time, the only way you can try is to modify the structure of the textbooks and break the logic. Because of the logic being broken, teachers seem to struggle with finding an effective teaching approach and they have to copy what they used to teach. Unfortunately, students’ workloads are heavier and even lost in illogical arrangements for lesson plans made by teachers. This is one of the biggest failures of curriculum reform, I have to say.” (Interviewee 21)

This interviewee spoke powerfully and emotionally about curriculum reform indicating that it was very difficult to develop a meaningful school-based curriculum with such limited autonomy and resources, under the pressure of increased accountability.

This principal is not the only one who pointed out the worrying problems associated with curriculum reform. Many of the principals commented that they felt there are ‘too many interventions’. Take one principals’ viewpoint, for example, expressing how:

“I think students vary in terms of their learning ability in different schools. So, if you set five math lessons each week in every school, some disadvantaged schools may need more time to complete the same tasks, don’t they? So, I think the government may need to reduce intervention and manage education in a more distant way rather getting involved in too much detail.” (Interviewee 26)

Interviewee 26 argued that it is reasonable to leave schools to develop the curriculum in response to the different levels of students’ ability at school level. Nevertheless, from the above comments, the principals appeared to recognize that one of their biggest challenges in managing the change is to improve teacher and curriculum development.

2. High-stakes testing issues

Managing the change is difficult, but what makes it more difficult is the fact that the testing system has not been changed. Regarding the challenges arising from a high-stakes testing system, for instance, the testing seems mismatched against the new goals targeting the quality of education, which has put principals in quite an awkward position to ‘meet both the goals of the practical needs (e.g. testing needs) and the quality of educational ideas’ (Interviewee 2). Nine of the interviewees explicitly noted that it is one of the biggest challenges confronting them, but notably expressed by four:
“In terms of the problems, first of all, there is a big gap between educational ideals and the reality. I think, to be honest, the most serious pressure confronting principals is how we keep a balance between the ideals and the reality of educational goals and how we survive.” (Interviewee 26)

“The biggest challenge is our educational goal that doesn’t match well with the expectations of the community. People try to use a fixed benchmark (test results) to assess all students, so we school principals have to give priority to meeting the goal of the testing. So our long-term goal of student development in the future 10 or 20 years will not match the current goal set by the community.” (Interviewee 6)

“On the one hand, the LEA demands good test results. On the other hand, we have to develop a school-based curriculum to achieve student all-round development. So, principals are stuck in a difficult position. I think the conflict can never be eliminated unless the testing system is changed. I have to say, such challenges unavoidably confront every principal.” (Interviewee 21)

“Under the high-stakes testing system, if the selection of best students remains the same, I have to give my priority to the national college entrance examination (gaokao, 高考) preparation to make sure all the students can get the best scores to apply for best universities they can. And then, developing students’ innovation becomes the second thing with which to be concerned. So, in the future years, this is the major challenge I have to face.” (Interviewee 22)

The four principals above all stress that the goal of the quality of education does not seem to match the narrow student assessment in the testing system nor the expectations of the community. But it is interesting that quite a few of them claimed that “the pressure mainly arose from parents’ high expectations of the test results” (Interviewee 3). This was articulated strongly by two interviewees:

“Currently, the biggest challenge we face is arising from improving the student attainment in the national exams, especially in the high schools. This pressure is mainly from the parents who push the Local Educational Authority (LEA) to put higher expectations on schools.” (Interviewee 4)

“So one of our biggest challenges is improving students’ test results in the national examinations (gaokao). In the next one or two years, it will not be fundamentally changed in a short term. Our pressure is not only from the local authority (LEA), but also a lot from external pressure in the community. People's expectations of the test results in the national college entrance examination will not be reduced in a short time and it is what we are mostly concerned about.” (Interviewee 11)

It is obvious from Interviewees 4 and 11 that the principals have to make it their priority to improve the students’ test results to meet parents’ higher expectations. But not all the interviewees took this position. The one exception to this is that of the Interviewee who explained how:
“In fact, I think Chinese principals themselves take too many responsibilities beyond their accountability. Principals are over responsible for the social expectations and face too much pressure arising from the test results (e.g. shengxuelv, 升学率). Yes. I have to say student attainment is still the main benchmark to measure whether you are a successful principal or not, and that is why some principals struggle with it. But if principals assume that student attainment cannot be improved without high-intensity test training, they will feel reluctant to try organizing other non-academic activities for students. However, I think that students will benefit more from attending such activities. Some principals don’t want to do these because they assume that they don’t have enough time to spend on such ‘low efficient’ activities.” (Interviewee 5)

Another principal agreed, explicitly arguing that:

“People quite often say it is hard to improve the quality of education. I think, it is neither the students’ nor the teachers’ fault. It is not the parents’ fault either. Of course, I have to say it has something to do with those people’s attitudes, but I would argue that it is more to do with the principal’s decisions. It is up to the principals whether they want to develop their schools for material gains or the quality of education. That could be a big challenge.” (Interviewee 23)

Notwithstanding, the majority of the principals referred to problems they encountered arising from the goals of the quality of education not being matched against the mono-standard of test-oriented student assessment. People’s main expectations of education are still rooted in tradition.

3. Higher expectations of stakeholders

As revealed above, stakeholders have greatly increased expectations. The fact that the change in government policy tells the school they should change the way they teach and the way they work with children, but at the same time still achieve the same exam results, creates huge pressure. In addition, the government makes many interventions on education, which hinders the principals’ ability to improve school development. This issue was raised by a few of the interviewees, but explicitly expressed by two:

“In fact, the biggest challenge is derived from the LEA. I mean quite a lot of their actions, policies, and even schemes disobey the norms of educational development, which hinder the principals in developing the school. This is the biggest challenge confronting principals. Under the circumstance, if principals want to survive, they have to maintain an appropriate or subtle distance from the LEA. If there is too much distance, the LEA do not feel they are in charge of you, and the conflicts may occur. So I think, this is the biggest problems principals need to handle.” (Interviewee 21)

This was evidenced by one of the interviewees sharing his personal experience in explaining how:

“I have to say, as a principal, I get much higher expectations from the local authority and the community. Actually it really takes a lot of time to meet those expectations. As I mentioned
earlier, I was in xxx high school. I spent six years there improving the school development. But actually people couldn’t wait that long. It is something like if I planted some sweet potatoes today, people expect that they can pick the fruit tomorrow!” (Interviewee 7)

These two principals express that it is quite challenging to deal with the pressure from the local government and the community. Interviewee 21 even suggested that a certain “distance” between principals and the local government is required to survive. Interviewee 7 felt that people seem only concerned with the targets, whether the school can meet its targets or how long it will take, but have less interest in the process of educational development. Simultaneously, principals are expected to be leaders with a skills repertoire including ‘leading curriculum development, cultural development and moral development, and so on’. (Interviewee 8).

In addition, “other stakeholders (e.g. the Health Bureau, Bureau of Environmental Protection and the relevant educational administrative institutes)” inspect schools, all paying attention to several aspects where “high expectations” are a driving force (Interviewee 26). Under this scrutiny the school has become “a vulnerable organization” (Interviewee 2). This causes school principals to feel that it is a growing challenge to cope with such complicated relationships (Interviewee 8).

In recognizing the impact of higher expectations from the stakeholders, the challenge for these principals is to break the norms of the expected traditional systems of leadership. This point was further raised by several of them, and two explained how:

“Challenging? I think the biggest challenge is to break the current spiral constraints and gain more power to develop education in their way. The educational system, the impact of the community seems to constrain the implementation of many reforms.” (Interviewee 25)

“I think we as educationalists should be confident with a sense of self-respect in order to develop education in our own way. But at the same time, we have to bear continuous criticisms and constraints arising from the system or the government. This kind of pressure will not be mitigated in the next 10 or 20 years.” (Interviewee 14)

To sum up, the issues outlined above were what those about which the principals were mostly concerned, and these are namely managing change, dealing with a high-stake testing regime which has not been changed, and conducting education with more openness and transparency than has ever been before. Therefore, parents know more about schools and school performance, and this brings new pressure. Parents now expect to know how their children are doing, and how the school is doing. They can compare schools and everybody knows
what is going on. Therefore, the pressure from the stakeholders, parents and the local bureau of education is higher than ever. These are all major issues confronting today's principals.

In the following chapter, I will discuss what the findings detailed above tell us about the changing role of the secondary school principal in modern China.
Chapter 6 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings presented in the previous chapter. First, I make acknowledgment of the limitations of this study. It is a small-scale research study and the evidence is necessarily limited. Secondly, I go on to discuss what may be behind the findings and what implications lie under the data. The discussion is structured by comparing the major patterns and themes in the data that are shared by the majority of the principals, identifying similarities and differences and comparing them to the literature. In this discussion, the literature reviewed served as a starting point for the analysis, and the key areas of interest arise from the research questions posed in this study, which were used to interrogate the interview data. The similarities and differences described in “challenges facing principals” highlighted in chapter five also provide reference points for the analysis; these have been helpful in drawing out key issues and concerns. Remembering that my data is based on a small sample, here I will attempt to summarise what I found out. There are five key issues I will discuss in some detail: social change within China; the influence of international trends: the change in emphasis in Chinese schooling from teaching to learning: what happens when Confucian thinking about leadership meets with western ideas, and the issues of and problems behind the training and preparation of school principals.

6.1 Limitations

As I clarified in the beginning, before discussing the findings from this study, it is necessary to remind the reader that this was a small study with a small sample from one municipality in the mainland of China, a huge country with uneven development. But as initially discussed in chapter three that dealt with research design, its primary aim is not to summarize school leadership practices, but rather to look at how this role is changing in ‘modern’ China. This is why this small sample was selected from a relatively developed area where the economy and educational development is further advanced than in most other parts of China. In other words, it could be argued that this sample represents the best practice of leadership in mainland China. Nevertheless, we should try and understand the sample itself, and the picture it presents of the challenges confronting these modern principals in China. As was seen in chapter five that presented the findings, various similarities and differences emerged in the principals' opinions and also one or two surprises were encountered.
In addition, this study focused on the school principals’ role as it is changing under the education reform process, especially in the past 15 years, during which profound social change has taken place. People have become more interested in schooling, and also schools have become more transparent to the public. Principals have to take on new responsibilities for what is happening in the school. This study, however, does not take into account the views of the policy-makers themselves, except as expressed in the policies, though these could be considered key participants in any subsequent research where the process of moving from a transformational state to that of sustainability can be assessed, and the impact of policy measured. The students, their parents and the broader community will also have views relevant to this research, because the quality of education has never before been scrutinized by so many stakeholders, but their views were beyond the scope of this study. These are limitations of this study. And then I will move on discussion of the findings.

6.2 Discussion of the findings

The five key points above are in fact closely related to the social change process in China. The government decided 20 years ago to move to a market economy, and since then most of the social changes that have taken place in China have followed the economic transformation. When the market economy operates on a global scale, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the traditional "Chinese ways" as competing approaches and ideas from outside enter the country. I will explain who the social changes have impact on education, especially on relationships among the stakeholders.

Social change within China

The pace of social and economic change in China, particularly in places like Shanghai, is unprecedented. The term-‘social transition’ has gained much attention. As one principal commented, social transition refers to the move from planned economy to market economy, closed to open, and internationalization. All has happened at the same time and at breakneck speed. The result is huge social and economic change in China that is without precedent in the West, and as the society changes, so also do the parents’, students’ and teachers’ views on education, and of course it has had a profound influence on principals’ views. Everyone seems a little confused: twenty years ago, everybody knew his or her place. They knew what they were supposed to think and to say. Now with the new freedoms, things have become more complicated.
As pointed out in Chapter Two, in line with Wong’s (2001) interpretation of the impact of Confucian ethics on people’s behaviors, within Confucian traditions teachers were greatly admired, and respected in the society, for example, by national teachers’ day, when everybody genuinely celebrated their teachers. Now this is changing as China is in transition. People have begun to think of education as a product, and they see themselves as customers, who can complain when they think schools are not serving them properly. Higher expectations of schools from parents, students and the community are due to a stronger sense of their ‘rights’. The increasing pressure on school principals has been convinced in the initial literature review (Sun 2009; Zhang 2011). The quality of education has never been subject to so much scrutiny from so many stakeholders, including parents, the community, and employers. In this new context, school principals face new challenges, confronted by higher expectations but with limited autonomy of school management.

As can be identified from the findings with respect to three big issues: managing change, living with the high-stake testing regime which has not been changed, and making the performance of schools more open and transparent than ever before, pressures on principals have greatly increased. Parents know much more about schools, and about school performance and they can compare schools. Therefore scrutiny by the key stakeholders, parents, and the education bureau is higher than ever! As noted earlier, the voice of parents has become much stronger and their willingness to question schools and become more involved in education, coupled with their higher expectations of their children’s progress are quite new phenomena in China (NCSL 2013). The evidence from the interviews suggests that increased burden on school principals has a lot to do with change, the testing system, and lastly, with the fact that everybody knows what is going on.

During this period of rapid social change, relentless competition and newly transparent schooling, the initial findings from the data indicated that principals have become more accountable to the parents, in terms of information disclosure and they need to respond to their questions. But the principals commented that it seems that everyone can intervene in education now, regardless of whether or not they have any expertise. This has made principals’ work more difficult, especially when the principals’ increase in accountability does not seem in balance with their autonomy, as discussed in the previous section. Principals feel that in many areas their hands are tied, but nevertheless they are held accountable. This issue seems common to many countries. The principals’ increased accountability seems a key driving force for reforms (Fullan 2009), though the result is not always satisfactory due to the
imbalance between the accountability measures introduced and the support available to the principals (Earl et al. 2003).

One of the consequences of openness and transparency of schooling is that parents, the community as well as the local authority all place higher expectations on schools. As one principal commented, the local authority puts pressure on schools to meet people’s (i.e. parents) needs. It is not difficult to understand, if schools have to supply a product to customers (parents), their priority is, of course, to supply a product that will satisfy parents’ needs. Parents used to trust their children to the school, and respect and support what schools did. Nowadays, parents and the community as a whole have become more interested in education. Simultaneously, it is clear they have become much more judgmental, frequently criticizing and fault-finding.

In fact, when the principals talked about the impact of social changes on the school, most of them pointed out that parents’ voices have been stronger and placed higher expectation on the schools. Generally, people have higher expectations of schools because that they hope their children can do better. But still, people’s higher expectations focus on gaokao results, which have become the main challenge confronting principals. What parents are still most concerned with is whether their children get high grades in the national exam. Just like in the West, exam performance is seen as a proxy for effective schooling (Fullan 2009). Thus, there is generally more complaining where student's attainments are low.

The openness and transparency of schooling has also brought more external intervention into schools. Does the external intervention or inspection help to improve the quality of education? The principals’ responses suggest, they tend to have more negative experiences regarding external inspection. Increased scrutiny comes from various organizations, including academic institutions (e.g. educational administrative organizations), education bureaux or even governmental watchdog Offices (for maintaining school charges and monitoring ethics). The frequency of inspections disturbs schools’ normal activities, as schools have to prepare quite a lot of documentation and routines are disrupted. But principals claim that little positive assistance comes from all this scrutiny, just more criticism.

At the same time, other challenges occur in parts of China where children are coming into school from the different cultures, bringing along their parents’ different views and opinions. This seems in line with what (Boyd 2012) stressed, regarding the influence of demographic trends and social-political trends on educational change. In some areas in Shanghai there are
a lot of migrants who were absent 20 years ago but who have since moved in, seeking employment. The migrant's children bring new problems and often quite different cultural practices and expectations, although the teacher corps itself has not changed. Of course, all of these migrants are ‘Chinese’; but as China is a vast country it embraces many cultural minorities, and there exist therefore huge differences in attitudes and expectations between the prosperous East coast cities and in the still largely rural central areas. These has been a significant population movement from West to East, which brings a diversity to Shanghai classrooms which teachers have not previously had to face.

The demands placed on principals arising from the increasing migrant population are all seen through the lens of student attainment arising from the high-stakes testing system. This is partly because the testing system does not sit easily with the goal of the ‘quality’ of education as mentioned before. This problem is what both Leithwood et al. 2002 and Fullan (2009) have described as top-down strategies along with a narrow testing process which fails to capture what school principals and teachers’ believe is important in educational development. Teachers feel it is difficult to balance between ‘diversity’ and ‘all-fit-in’ under the dominating high-stakes testing system. School leaders are subject to more pressure because people now use two benchmarks, the quality of education and test results to measure if a school is successful or not. ‘Quality of education’ is seen as necessary by parents, but they are more concerned that their children can get the best test scores and apply for the best university. On the one hand, parents expect the school can improve all-around development for students, but on the other hand, they are worried that non-academic activities may distract their children from the hard study needed to achieve the best in the national testing. As some principals stressed, the major pressure is from parents who are anxious to see their children succeed, even if they are not sure what ‘success’ means. Besides this, education tends to be open to scrutiny from a wider community, which has become another big issue that principals have to contend with.

Increasingly, China has been driven by international trends. Some of these are helpful, but some are really just inappropriate. For instance, one that has been good for China has been the need to cater for minorities, developing education policy for ethnic minority groups that reflect their own cultures and help them to sustain these, such as setting up minority universities, and addressing the issues in some secondary schools. That is something that was done because of pressures from outside the country. In general people think that we should respect minorities as it shows equity. However, in China, what worries people is that
these same developments or policies have broken down what used to be called "harmony". That is new and that is worrying, because ‘harmony’ is at the heart of Confucian culture. This is not surprising, when considering that it is cultural and social contexts that lend meanings to people’s intentions (Sangren 2000). The influx of so much scrutiny along with the invisible pressure arising from student attainment, creates less trust among stakeholders. Therefore, one of the biggest difficulties confronting principals now is how to establish positive relationships with the various and diverse external interested parties. This becomes extremely important when dealing with such complicated relationships and raises problems about how to build up good ‘guanxi’ in a society where people were born into many important networks which remain significant determinants of their thinking and actions (Hui and Graen 1997).

Obviously, the social change process has significant impact on schools. As one principal (Interviewee 5) commented, the economy underpins educational development, people’s attitudes to education are based on a belief that education is the way to change their children’s lives, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. When people do not have to worry about their livelihoods with governmental pensions assured, they may change their mind about education and stop pushing their children working hard for the best test scores, but in the meantime, ‘results’ are all ‘important’. This will not be fundamentally changed in a short term.

Since change is not avoidable, the best thing is to learn to live with it, and to change too. This is what many principals were struggling with. Leading the educational change necessary to reflect the social changes that are taking place is a further challenge confronting school leaders. Hargreaves (1998) has even argued that managing educational change is the primary tasks in terms of social change in general. From the initial review of the literature, for instance, Fullan (1998, 1999) reminds us that when people know little about the meaning of ‘change’ in terms of its complexity and profound impact, chaos and conflict can follow. That is because change is rarely a straightforward or rational process. It is necessary to be able to make sense of change. This has been evidenced by one of the principals who emphasized the importance of identifying potential risks arising from change and avoiding them. In terms of managing change, Fullan (1999) encourages us to make conflict and diversity our friends. Hargreaves (1998) emphasizes the importance of emotional consideration when leading change. Fullan (2001) recommends ‘slow knowing’ with reference to the fable about the hare and the tortoise. But as one of the principals said, ‘slow knowing’ strategies may not satisfy
expectations because people hope that issues can be solved in a short time, and education can be improved over night!

What can be concluded here is a reminder that changes in society precipitate changes in schooling, but that managing such change requires knowledge of the past as well as a vision of the future if it is to succeed. This is particularly necessary in terms of changing people’s traditional attitudes to educational development, taking into account Chinese culture and its 5000 years of history of education and its long tradition of Confucianism. For instance, Confucianism advocates stories and proverbs such as ‘Practice becomes habit which eventually becomes beautiful’ (equivalent translation in Mandarin ‘shu neng sheng qiao, qin ke bu zhuo’ (NCSL 2013). NCSL (2013) believed that the intensity of students’ concentration in class is partly due to this Chinese cultural heritage. Although the more modern sayings sound quite attractive too, such as ‘It is better to travel ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books’, managing the old and the new together is what matters. Therefore ‘slow knowing’ seems more likely to lead change in China, despite the impatience of parents and politicians.

The above issues arising from social change in China and new demands on school, especially parent’s attitudes are never easy to manage. It is harder still when teachers maintain their traditional beliefs about education. This is not difficult to understand, if we remember Hargreaves (1998, 2005) reminded us that change is not a rational process, and the emotional dimension needs to be considered. But on the other hand, they are now able to see what happens in the West with the advent of the Internet and therefore much more aware of, and much more interested in what is going on outside China. In education, educational reforms are moving around the world and the world is now open. The next section will discuss the impact of international trends on educational policy in China.

The influence of international trends

Looking at my findings, one thing that stands out is that nowadays international policy trends are influencing developments in China. One example of how China’s openness to international influences is exposing principals to new problems can be found in their comments on the impact of the standards and testing movement. Looking back at the literature review, it described how the world is changing and how large-scale education reforms have been spreading from country to country (e.g. Fullan 2009; Earl et al. 2003;
Leithwood et al. 2002; Cheng and Walker 2008; Hallinger 2011a, 2011b; Hallinger and Lee 2013; Hoyle and Wallace 2007). There are trends clearly visible internationally, relating to accountability, testing and national standards. All of these developments have been mirrored in China. Evidence from this study shows that the Chinese educational system is becoming much more in step with what is happening internationally in terms of the reform and that the Chinese school leaders are joining the growing army of leaders all over the world. This is as Yin et al. (2014) commented, because educational reforms in one country are unavoidably influenced by educational policies and practices in other countries. Inevitably, similar issues dominate their thinking, especially the accountability movement, high-stake testing and a shortage of higher quality teachers, which has significant impact in schools in China too. For instance, since the government enacted ‘prioritized principals responsibility for school development’ mechanism (xiaozhang fuze zhi, 校长负责制) in the first round of large-scale reforms in schools in China.

Regarding accountability movement, according to the documentary research ("People's Republic of China Education Law" in 1995), China has proposed a policy of delegating greater authority to principals to manage their schools. Since the early 1990s, principals have become more accountable for school performance (Zhang and Wang 2007). This is virtually keeping the same pace as the international accountability movements with their emphasis on devolution or decentralization since the 1980s (Leithwood et al. 1999). Principals’ accountability has been further increased in the new curriculum reforms (Yin et al. 2014; Zhang 2011) and nowadays principals are expected to fulfill multiple-roles, such as lead practitioners, innovators, leading teacher professional development and bearing ultimate responsibility for student development (Tang 2009; Wang 2007; Zheng 2007)

One of questions raised in the literature review was: what is the impact of school level accountability? Does it, as some writers argue (e.g. Hoyle and Wallace 2007) engage all professionals in educational development? Or as Leithwood (2001) argued, is the purpose of increasing accountability to increase voices from participants being heard through decentralization of decision-making? Or is it, as others argued, just the governments’ ‘trick’ to shift the blame for poor schooling from the public to the school, especially when the outcomes of education do not match expectations?

Of course, there is not sufficient evidence to answer the question in the findings obtained from the interviewees in this study. But there are some important concerns raised by
principals. What mostly concerned them is how they feel constrained to manage their schools with the limited power delegated to them (Tang 2009, Wang 2007, Zheng 2007 and Jiang 2006). Of course, ‘earned-autonomy’ seems a popular notion across all countries. It is the same in China. The best schools seem to be rewarded with more autonomy. This can be deduced, for example, from the principals’ views on their autonomy regarding teacher selection. The successful schools in the East tend to have more autonomy to select their staff, compared to those in the less developed areas, i.e. in the northwest. But still, principals have limited authority over budget management, personnel management, and curriculum development. Many principals mentioned that, when they want to purchase even basic essentials for the school, they have first to report to the local authority, and then await approval, and use ‘approved’ suppliers.

In the meanwhile it is a requirement to make education more transparent, as identified in the documentary data which mentioned that schools should establish a sound system of information (issued by Ministry of Education in China (2010) and consequently principals are accountable for information disclosure to the public when necessary. This may reflect the government endeavours to build up positive relationships among all stakeholders by sharing information that enables monitoring or scrutinizing the school’s performance. However as a result, quite often, school leaders are the first to be blamed when things are perceived to be going wrong. Spreading accountability is supposed to share decision-making and responsibilities, but rarely do people share responsibilities when things go wrong! Therefore, feeling accountable for everything, principals tend to be reluctant to take risks, eliminating fear of ‘punishment’ due to failure, which was also mentioned earlier in the literature review by Sun (2009). There are quite a few principals who comment on this, calling it a ‘bad environment’, which hinders rather than improves educational development. It is difficult for principals to manage the school with what are still limited powers under a highly centralized system (Liu 2004).

A second question from the literature was: does accountability make schools more efficient? It is difficult to find strong evidence for this either from the current Chinese literature or from the findings obtained in this study. Some scholars (e.g. Wong 2000) argue that it is unlikely that decentralization could improve efficiency, if there is a lack of capacity at school level. In such circumstances, the result may be little more than ‘greater fragmentation of policy-making’ (Bache 2003). Goldspink (2007) reminds us to view an organization as a complex system and argues that governance is more complicated when there are too many ‘agents’.
Success really depends on how stakeholders collaborate and govern the organization. If devolution is simply delegating authority to people who can do whatever they like, coordination will be lacking. Sharing decisions and responsibilities should be allocated appropriately, which may contribute to organization and efficient management. But without being clear about these matters, delegation may only confuse principals who are not sure what they have to be accountable for. It can be identified from the government documents that principals seem to be accountable for everything in the school and the boundary of the accountability is quite difficult to define. This may explain why some principals (e.g., Interviewee 9) argue that they are not sure what they are accountable for. As one principal expressed, he needs to be clear about his role before becoming accountable. At present, there seems to be many uncertainties about who can and who should make decisions, and without clear authority there can be no clear accountability. Such uncertainty seems widespread, which makes the principals’ role more complicated.

Another international trend that has spread into China concerns standards and testing. Under the ‘high-stakes’ testing system, invisible pressure is exerted on the school from student attainment levels, which as in many other countries, are used as the main benchmark to measure whether a school is successful or not. In China, academic learning is still the main focus in schools (Lee and Pang 2011) despite policy changes, and student attainment is still regarded by most as the key measure in the assessment of the school performance (Suen and Yu 2006). That is perhaps one of the reasons which explain why international comparisons are quite popular, such as PISA, although it is alleged that those kinds of international tests have drawbacks which fail to measure the effectiveness of educational systems (e.g. Stewart 2013; Downs 2013; Wilby 2013; Sahlberg 2013). One of pitfalls of such ‘comparisons’ is that it delivers a message to the governments that tests are the most important tool to measure school performance, which may erode efforts to break old norms for criteria of student assessment. Instead, schools tend to follow the ‘criteria’ to get the best result in the international tests. For instance, ‘China’ has done quite well in the past two PISA rounds (although it cannot represent the whole country by only looking at a limited sample of students in Shanghai which is well ahead of most parts of China in terms of education and economic development). But whether such comparisons discourage systems abandoning their old paradigm, as some people caution (e.g. Zhao 2014), and hinder the introduction of their educational reforms aiming to cultivate a more diverse, creative, and entrepreneurial citizenry? It seems that governments are quite happy to shame those who do not perform well.
in the test. Of course, what these tests tell us about the quality of systems if anything, is hotly debated, as is the presumed link between the performance of education systems and the performance of the economy, which is what really interests governments. There is not sufficient evidence to prove such a link. Nevertheless, such comparisons increase pressure on principals, and the government could use PISA and other international benchmarks to criticize schools, despite the uncertain relationship between education and economic performance.

But obviously, principals are more concerned about the national exams, because results mean a lot to them. Principals are even worried that other measures are a distraction that could influence students away from concentrating on the national entrance exams (Jiang 2006). It seems quite clear that the principal’s priority is to improve student attainment, demonstrated by higher exam results under the high-stakes testing system, which was confirmed by several principals and also identified in the literature review (e.g., Suen and Yu 2006). But why do principals think that this makes their jobs more difficult or complicated? It can be identified that one of the reasons is that what parents or the local authority expect from ‘quality education’ seems not closely matched to standards of student assessment in the testing system. This is quite a big dilemma confronting the school principal, which was again mentioned earlier in the literature review by Yin et al (2014). From this, it was identified that the national curriculum reform emphasized ‘curriculum integration, decentralization, formative evaluation, innovative teaching approaches and the cultivation of generic skills’ (Yin et al. 2014). Therefore, school principals have to make all efforts to meet these goals. It is clear that it is necessary to develop confident and competent students rather than simply to improve their test scores, which do not guarantee them a good life in the future.

But still the key stakeholders, including the community and the local authority and even parents, look mainly at student attainment to measure whether a school is successful or not. Reflecting on the principals’ comments, it seems that the main challenge is arising from parents’ and the community’s high expectations regarding the national exam results, which pushes the school to prioritize the tests. It is hard to challenge the ‘test-orientated’ teaching approaches or to convince teachers to change as the reform policy suggests they should, when test results matter so much. According to principals’ comments on the dominance of the national tests, the pressure arising from the test results passes a message to principals that any non-academic activities seem to be obstacles on the road to students’ academic achievement.
Only a few interviewees valued those different activities as the reform policy suggests they should.

With increasing criticism arising from the drawbacks of the high-stakes testing system (Lin 2004), the government has recognized it is necessary to address this in China. A series of reforms, especially the recent ‘green evaluation’ mentioned in the context of findings, aims to reduce the importance of the exam results, but to what extent this will challenge the dominance of the national exams is still unknown.

A question raised by principals, but left unsolved, is whether the high-stakes testing can be fundamentally changed or should even be abandoned? Some argued that the national exam provides an equal opportunity to every student to enter and to achieve the best result so they can apply for the best university. But whether the system is equally ‘fair’ to everyone is another matter. Those who criticize the testing system point out that it often destroys students’ other potential to be developed, although they are still searching for a better alternative to the current student assessment (Jiang 2006). As Wu (2011) argued, it is not easy to ensure an equitable scheme due to the complicated context in a country with a big population and diverse cultures. Every principal just have to live with the mismatch between the goals of the national testing and that of new curriculum guidance. It is such ‘dilemmas’ and ‘uncertainty’ that make the principals’ jobs more complicated.

In the world outside of China high-stake testing and accountability has gained much attention, but in China teacher quality has perhaps received more attention. This is because there are many untrained teachers in parts of the country and there seems a general shortage of trained teachers. And of the many teachers who are already trained, many need new skills to meet the new expectations. As identified from the literature review, the importance of teacher professional development has been argued by many researchers (Hung and Yeh 2013; Borko et al. 2010; Hargreaves 2010). It seems that principals recognized that it is important to lead self and teacher development to catch up with the pace of social change, which has been evidenced through comments obtained from principals who believe that teacher development is at the heart of the school development. In China, this has been emphasized since the second phase of curriculum reform with a focus on improving ‘student-centred teaching approaches’.

One of the challenges confronting principals in China is that there is a lack of qualified teachers able to meet the new curriculum guidance, as well as insufficient support or training.
programmes provided for serving teachers. But, in China principals have insufficient experience of leading curriculum development (Zhao and Shi 2013). In the interviews, quite a few principals found the new curriculum difficult to handle because as they illustrated there is a lack of qualified teachers who are capable of developing the new curriculum with a student-centred teaching approach. Another factor is that even the principals themselves are not confident to lead new curriculum development. This is backed up by the literature, for example, by Zhang (2010), who pointed out how many principals have limited knowledge of new curriculum implementation. This happens when teachers are still the same, in the same school, but the curriculum is changed. Effectively, change de-skills the current teaching force.

Breaking habits is never an easy thing to manage. It is not easy to change teachers’ behaviour, especially those who have been teaching for quite a long time with the old traditional teaching approach (Interviewee 19). But it does not necessary mean that young teachers tend to be easier to handle, as one principal worried about the low quality of the teaching corps consisting of young teachers with less experience who may feel quite intimidated when required to handle multiple-tasks and diversities in terms of students’ learning and cultural backgrounds.

Nevertheless, principals seemed to recognize that it is not possible to ‘change’ the experience/role of students in the classroom, unless the behaviour of teachers also changes. Therefore changing teacher behaviour is a key priority, and teacher development is the best way to accomplish this. Combining the arguments from the literature review (eg. Opfer et al. 2011; Hung and Yeh 2013; Borko et al. 2010) along with the findings, it seems clear that teachers’ development plays a significant role in school improvement and teacher development is the prerequisite for student development.

As Levinson et al. (2013) pointed out that the demand for improvement in teacher quality has spread all over the world. It seems the same in schools in China. In recognizing the importance of this, the principals have endeavoured to improve teacher development by providing teacher training programmes or other support. Interestingly, principals are accountable for teacher quality, but they are mostly not entitled to select the staff they need or to sack under-performing teachers. As one of the principals (Interviewee 2) recounted, the principal has only limited autonomy, especially in Chinese public schools. For instance, if they want to recruit new staff, they need to select candidates via the local authority and this
becomes even more bureaucratic in the less developed areas in China. Therefore they tend to put all their efforts into in-service teacher training and development, as they have little influence on recruitment.

Looking at ways to improve teacher development from the data, first of all, it is obvious that teacher appraisal is one of the significant approaches to teacher quality improvement. Teacher appraisal is conducted in various forms, such as classroom observations and setting criteria for teacher performance. The criteria embrace quite a broad spectrum rather than merely test scores, and include students’ engagement, classroom management, moral behaviour and even care for students, both in the classroom and outside the classroom. This fits with so-called formative assessment approaches or ‘assessment for learning’ suggested by ARG (1999) or the learner-centred structure for supporting teacher development within their own contexts (Broko et al. 2010). For instance, in terms of classroom observations, this is seen by principals as necessary to identify teachers’ weaknesses as well as strengths, and to provide suggestions for further support to enhance their teaching as well as feedback on current performance. As one principal emphasized, the purpose of the class observations is to help teachers rather than put them down, though it is understood that teachers seem quite stressed by the activity. Overall, the transformational approach that principals adopted to monitor the quality of teaching and learning with multi-approaches of classroom observations along with comprehensive teacher appraisal is considered vital. These transformational actions are aimed at improving the quality of teachers to enhance students’ learning. This could indicate that school principals in China seem to take some approaches and ideas from transformational leadership theory in the west, as principals show concern for the commitments and capacities of their staff members (Leithwood 1992), and they worry about teachers’ job satisfaction due to changes in teaching practices, and the pressure for increased pedagogical quality (Leithwood and Jantzi 2005)

The most common programmes to support teacher development encompass the development of national standards, a school-based training programmes, a mentoring system- especially for new teachers, and action research/participatory research by teachers in the school. This again can capture some characteristics of transformational leadership theory described in the West, where transformational leaders focus on problem-solving and look to work with teachers to develop better solutions to problems.
By looking back at the national standards for primary and junior middle principals analysed earlier, it is not difficult to see that these six standards referred to the standards of international conventions, such as the Standards in England and the United States to develop standards describing the principal professional duties and then specifically addressing elements from professional qualities and actions; but they also reflect the national specific context, such as emphasizing moral education and cultural traditions. Standards show that the principals in China are "accountable to teacher professional development ... to pay attention to every teacher’s development and to leading teacher professional development programmes according to teachers’ individual needs, strengthening training of young teachers, supporting teachers’ exchanges cross schools, and promoting information technology in teacher professional development." (MOE 2013)

In the meanwhile, principals endeavour to send their staff members for further training to different organizations at home or abroad, which undoubtedly shows that they are open to different ideas including western education. At the same time, they hope that teachers after training or advanced learning in a different environment have broadened their horizons and become more open-minded to new ideas. This can be deduced from some principals (e.g. Interviewee 23) who argued that when teachers have chances to see new practices in education, they tend to be more willing to accept new ideas. This seems congruent with Hargreaves’ (2010) idea that teachers really learn most from outside their own classrooms by connecting with other teachers.

Reviewing the interview data, it can be identified that teacher development has not been constrained in the traditional way with a focus on teaching knowledge accumulation, but that it occurs in various forms. Simultaneously, principals seem to realize that it is far more important to motivate teachers at work, and to expand their views on the quality of teaching by creating opportunities for them to get access to what happens in other schools, both at home and abroad. Hargreaves Moreover, principals tend to encourage their staff to boost their confidence and strengthen their intrinsic motivation. Teachers’ job satisfaction has become one of the principals’ priorities to achieve and it is even set as one of the school goals in some cases. Working environments have gained more attention and been recognized as an essential part of school culture to establish a comfortable milieu for teachers and students. For instance, quite a few principals tend to make all efforts to enhance the infrastructure with better facilities (e.g. gyms or a coffee room), which have only recently become more popular. Teacher’s wellbeing has received more attention, and is considered as vital to retain teachers
and improve teachers’ happiness. These efforts show people-centered activities through which principals endeavour to build up good relationships with the teachers by meeting their needs and improving their professional development opportunities. Leithwood et al. (1999 argued that school leaders should see managing how people feel and tapping into intrinsic motivations as an important tasks, which fits these principals’ behaviors quite well.)

But still it is not easy to improve the quality of teachers. Principals articulate problems of improving the teaching workforce arising from both subjective and objective factors. Many teachers still favour traditional/formal classrooms themselves arguing that these lead to better student behaviour and test results. Additionally, many teachers are struggling with new curriculum and approaches due to lack of appropriate training. Developing teachers’ conceptualization of teaching as meeting individual needs is clearly a major challenge. However, the limited autonomy delegated to schools and the lack of direct support for policy changes also emerge as factors that influence the quality of education provided. Of course, under the high-stakes testing system, teacher development cannot easily be separated from enhancing exam results. As Avalos (2011) argued, teacher development is constrained by ‘standardized examination results and restricted notions of teacher accountability ’, which also happens in China. This implies that it causes more competition but less collaborative work. It is true that principals rarely talked about teacher collaboration or peer support, but more about mentoring schemes open especially to new teachers. Little collaborative work happens between schools and even schools and local universities, as one of the principals mentioned that there are few opportunities for establishing partnerships between the school and the university, although they seem to be eager to work closely with universities. In addition, although there are more opportunities for teachers’ themselves to pursue professional development, it tends to be only the best teachers that take these. Those who are struggling with teaching or in schools that are comparatively disadvantaged seem have less external support.

Despite these problems, there do seem to be some schools where there is greater clarity and the devolved authority/accountability is promoting more promising practices. For example, the principals expressed that they introduced middle managers and delegate authority to them and gathered teachers’ opinions. Students’ voices are heard through their feedback, and classroom observations. Some schools even invited student leadership to play a role in teacher appraisal. It seems that principals are gradually developing the internal accountability patterns required to assure an effective organization, though as West (2010) argued, it took
them rather a long time to recognize the need for this. Gronn (2002) believed that distribution of the authority is one of the key factors for success in school reforms and institutional re-design. His argument that the outcomes from a work group is greater than the sum of the individual action is in line with ‘collectivism’ approved by Chinese culture. But the difference is that hierarchy in China is equally important. This is demonstrated by the principals admitting that they still retain the final decision-making authority. Nevertheless, it does show positive progress, especially in terms of teacher leadership as a form of distributed leadership (see Harris 2003). Teachers are also encouraged to experiment with their teaching practice in the classroom to a certain level, which was supported by the majority of the principals, though the extent varies.

It can be identified then that China has been influenced by the external forces of international educational change, such as the accountability movements alongside decentralization, high-stake testing and a shortage of higher quality of teachers. Of course, these have had significant impact on the internal process of the reform in China. The next section will focus on the change of teaching and learning in schools that is taking place.

**The change in emphasis in Chinese schooling from teaching to learning**

Current reforms are actually reaching inside the school and affect the way teachers do their work as well as the way we expect children to be treated within school. All that is taking place against a background of historic values and traditions, which many believe have worked quite well. The traditional Chinese system is not perceived as inefficient and actually seems very good, so it is even harder for teachers to do things differently. Nevertheless, the policy is clear. But one cannot expect people to do a job for which they lack the skills. As briefly touched upon in the last section, the issue of the low quality of the teaching workforce is exacerbated because of the new curriculum guidance under the curriculum reform. That is because the core of the curriculum reform is a shift in focus from teaching to learning, and focusing more on individual student development.

In China, since the second period of curriculum reform in the 21st century, student learning has been put at the centre of the agenda. It is emphasised that there should be a shift to learning away from the teacher dominated classrooms of the past. As quoted before, James and McCormick (2009) argued that it is necessary to understand the meaning of ‘learning’ and both teachers and students need to learn how to learn. The recent national policy shifts emphasize the need to address students’ individual learning needs. In many countries,
principals seem to play the role of instructional leader and student learning becomes their chief concern (see Hallinger and Lee 2013). This pushes principals to engage more in activities relating to the school’s instructional programme and to focus staff attention on student outcomes (Hallinger 1992; Leithwood & Montgomery 1982; Hallinger 1992).

However, new approaches to teaching and learning precipitated by recent reforms contrast with teaching patterns in traditional classrooms. It is not difficult to understand the problems arising from this that are encountered within schools, particularly by school leaders, as they seek to challenge established ways of working while maintaining attainment levels in their schools. New reforms require teachers to teach the children in front of them, not teach the books. Teachers should teach those things to children, that they need to equip themselves to face the challenges in their lives in modern China. This is very difficult for teachers. But the evidence is that once teachers get used to it, they enjoy it. That is because, at the same time, it is boring to teach the same book every year. But as they move through the transition, it can be frightening and cause them anxiety and worry. Teachers need encouragement to work through this, and principals must supply this encouragement.

In terms of the established traditional ways of working, this has several specific features, such as traditional/formal classrooms with ‘teacher-centred’ approaches, textbooks focused on teaching and assessment, national testing determining student futures, and so on. Consequently, one of students’ responsibilities is to know the ‘specific answers’ required to do well in the national tests. Under the reform, the new situation could be described as classrooms that are focused on students’ needs, using less teacher dependent approaches and promoting ‘independent learning’. This demands collaboration and groupwork, especially in problem-solving activities (e.g. science), to develop students’ skills, especially skills that are needed in the workplace, alongside knowledge. As was stated in the initial literature review, the current challenges in education in China arise mainly from the emphasis on a teacher-centred rather than student-centred approach, while the reforms seek to reverse this (Zhao and Shi 2013; Xu 2013). Similarly, the management of the school still overweighs notions of leadership (Cheng 2004). These become substantial issues when we look at the new situations required by the reform in detail.

In the new situation, first of all, then, the classroom must be focused on students’ needs, which, as quite a few principals mentioned, is necessary to ‘return the classroom to students’. What they actually meant is that they endeavour to tailor teaching approaches to meet
students’ individual needs in various ways, such as reducing the difficulty of the content by restructuring the textbook, integrating new resources alongside textbooks and even improving the quality of test design. This can explain why the definition of curriculum has been extended to cover a wider range of learning resources, which have until now been rather restricted in some specific areas, i.e. Chinese, English or Maths. The schools appear to have been given more autonomy to plan their own lessons and teaching activities. Increasingly interest is given to making lesson plans in schools, especially since the government policies (e.g. ‘Notice of the Ministry of Education (teaching base [2003] No. 6) encouraged schools to develop a school-based curriculum.

In recognizing the importance of meeting students’ needs, it means that the traditional teaching approach with teachers controlling everything in the classroom is being challenged. This is evidenced by one of the interviewees (Interviewee 21) who commented that the core of the new curriculum is redefining the teacher-student relationship and this principal even argued that such relationships are at the heart of the school, and everything else is around this relationship in the school. However, this was a minority view as not many of the interviewees recognized that the relationships between teachers and students needs to be adjusted, although the majority of principals do recognize that it is necessary to meet individuals’ needs by applying ‘student-centred’ approaches. It seems that not every principal understands comprehensively the meanings of ‘student-centred’ or ‘students’ individual needs’! That may explain why some of the principals criticized that quite a lot of schools try to develop their school-based curriculum by introducing new ‘standardised’ activities- it seems that spontaneity in the classroom worries them.

A second significant change is to develop students’ independent learning, which was set out in the governmental documentation in "Basic Education Reform Programme (Trial)" in 2001, to reduce students’ passive learning and make them more active learners. Questioning is encouraged instead of ‘spoon-feeding’ students in the classroom. As one of the principals (Interviewee 12) indicated, principals endeavour to encourage students as well as teachers to ask questions. It is believed by many principals that teachers should encourage students to talk more in class and move away from passive listening and accepting what they are being told. The meaning of learning has changed, and requires more than memorizing simple facts.

But why is independent learning seen as a challenge confronting school leaders and teachers? Is it because teachers fear changes which may make them lose ‘control’ under the new
Some of the principals pointed out that many teachers tend to prefer the traditional ‘spoon-feeding’ teaching methods, which are perceived as more effective approaches, not least because of the high-stakes testing system. On the other hand, it can be identified that the concern of teachers arising from being less dominant in the classroom is that it makes them feel that they are losing authority, and being questioned by students makes this worse. Teachers were used to play the role of delivering knowledge and even represent ‘knowledge messengers’. Of course, as earlier discussed in the literature review, it can be clearly seen that teachers are also quite influenced by the Chinese culture and Confucianism with its hierarchic relationships. This tells teachers to be well equipped with a rich ‘knowledge resource’ and with that to establish their authority. But the reform encourages schools to challenge these traditions and even reverses the relationships between teachers and students by promoting students’ independence. This means that students can question themselves as well as their teachers. There may not necessarily be ‘right answers’ from teachers. Sometimes these are no right answers at all. Therefore, teachers should be more prepared for difficult questions asked by students and be more flexible in their teaching approaches. All this causes anxiety for teachers! The teachers’ jobs become more challenging and uncertain due to students’ more demanding behaviour. This can be seen as the main reason that school principals feel that it is quite difficult to get teachers to change as suggested in the new curriculum guidance.

However, despite teachers’ resistance, new learning activities are demanded, encouraging student independent learning. These can be developed by students’ collaboration/groupwork with a focus on problem-solving activities. This is emphasized in the government’s documentation of "Basic Education Reform Programme (Trial)" in 2001, which seeks to develop the ability of students to obtain new knowledge, analyse and solve problems as well as the ability to share and cooperate with peers. Quite a few of the principals recognized the importance of improving students’ problem-solving skills via practical activities, such as fieldwork studies, laboratory experiments, and so on, and were keen to see these expand in their schools.

These activities that improve students’ ability of problem solving, also remind schools to develop students’ skills, especially work related skills alongside knowledge. This is demonstrated in the Shanghai mainstream schools’ curriculum programme, which stresses that a change in the way of students’ learning, with a focus on developing students' 'innovative spirit and practical skills' is needed. As some of principals recognized, it is
necessary to develop students’ skills, which will serve them in life rather than merely in the national testing systems. Another principal (Interviewee 20) explained that even attending a good university does not guarantee a good life in the future and therefore it is necessary to develop students’ expertise beyond narrow academic achievements, such as through sport or music experiences. Student activities are developed both inside and outside of the school. Fieldwork activities have become more popular and are conducted in various forms, such as study tours both at home and abroad (Interviewee 5). These activities encourage students to work in a team as well as independently to complete a project based on specific topics, such as history exploration in Nanjing and so on. One of principals even argued those non-academic skills actually show a positive correlation with their academic skills development, although not every principal would like to take the risks of reducing students’ time spent on academic subjects.

These new features tend to make one of principals’ roles more significant in leading curriculum reforms and require principals to focus on teaching and learning management. The Chinese government has endeavoured to keep pace with international trends and to develop national standards for principals, which was discussed in the literature review. Chinese principals must keep the same pace with western principals demonstrating high expectations of both teachers and students (Hallinger 1992a; Hallinger and Murphy 1985; Leithwood and Montgomery 1982; Edmonds 1979). From ‘compulsory school principals’ professional standards’ issued in 2013, standards show the increased responsibilities compared with what principals used to take on, with the political ideology no longer set as the priority, though still stressed in other areas, such as managing the organization. From the standards, it can be identified that principals are expected to cope with a more demanding role and to challenge traditional classroom practices. For instance, one area identified, in ‘leading teaching and learning’ states that, the principal should ‘consider “students’ individual needs”, and know ‘new curriculum’s changes, understanding the differences, relevant knowledge of curriculum development and implementation and knowledge of curriculum evaluation, policies towards supplementary materials for the textbooks, as well as the experience from domestic and foreign teaching reform of curriculum evaluation.’ It is not difficult to see that these six standards are trying to live up to the standards of international conventions, such as the ‘Standards’ in England and the United States. They describe the principal’s professional duties and then specifically address elements of professional qualities and actions; but they also reflect the specific national context, such as emphasizing moral
education and establishing educational culture. Such descriptions and requirements expect principals to improve their instructional role by more clearly defining goals that focus on student achievement (Hallinger and Murphy 1985).

However, the six standards do not always match with what principals perceive as their roles. As it is argued in the literature review, it seems that principals spend much time on basic administrative tasks (Jiang 2006) and feel constrained in managing their schools due to continuing centralization of decisions (Sun 2009). While standards presume the principals’ instructional responsibilities regarding leading teaching and learning, it is as Hallinger (1992) earlier argued that there is a gap between the principals’ expectations and the reality of their work which involves more administration and management. As previously noted, some people even argue that the principal’s increasing workloads, including teaching, overweights their leadership task and other daily management activities, which may disrupt the role of principals as manager of the school (Hong 2007; Dong and Xie 2010; Ran 2008).

These may be the reasons that principals fail to prioritize their role in leading curriculum development and teaching and learning. Furthermore, from my study, many principals felt that there is a lack of knowledge and little capability to lead curriculum development in their schools, which was also pointed out by Zhang (2010). This implies that principals themselves need further training to improve their knowledge of curriculum development as well as to develop their skills for leading teaching and learning using ‘student-centred’ approaches.

At the same time, the issue which Walker et al. (2011) pointed out is that despite reforms the governmental guidance still has a tendency to emphasize the test-oriented outcomes in China (Lee and Pang 2011). Yin et al. (2014) also identified that a dilemma confronting school principals is that the most recent curriculum reforms are not well matched with the national testing regime. This has been illustrated through the fact that one interviewee states that limited time is allocated to school-based curriculum development while the national curriculum is still quite dominating. School-based curriculum development was originally proposed to enable the school to better meet their students’ individual needs. But as one of the principals questioned, how likely is this when the national curriculum still dominates and the government assigns the curriculum and testing schedules? Consequently, it creates extra work for the schools to cope with not only the national testing but also to develop specific areas in the curriculum to meet students’ individual needs at the school level.
Another significant challenge is that the government demands all schools to do the same things, because the schools vary in terms of students’ backgrounds and learning levels. As one of the principals summarized, only those who are good at academic subjects have time to complete a school-based curriculum, while students who are struggling with national curriculum find less or even no time to manage a school-based curriculum because they need to spend all their time preparing for the high-stakes testing system. Although, the gap between disadvantaged students and advantaged students seems comparatively small in the outstanding outcomes of PISA (2009) in Shanghai schools (NCSL 2013), it needs to be remembered that it is not possible to tell whether an educational system is successful or not based on PISA results only, due to the limitations of the PISA programme outlined earlier. In fact, many principals emphasize the importance of the student resource, which implies that the variation in students’ learning levels has some impact on the implementation of the new curriculum guidance. Of course, Shanghai is a more developed area with advanced educational development, well ahead of most of China, especially the southwest and the central areas. Nevertheless, reducing the gap in terms of student performance has been a major concern for many countries. In England, for instance, a ‘student premium’ programme has been developed to guarantee help for children, especially those entitled with FSM (free school meal) to achieve equity in education, which is also highlighted in PISA. But as yet, China has no such measures, and schools must struggle on their own.

Overall, the emphasis of reforms shifting from teaching to learning and focusing on individuals, requires fundamental change in terms of the relationships between teachers and students to achieve more equal relationships and encourage independence at the same time as reform. It pushes school leaders to improve the ‘professional accountability’ of teachers regarding relationships with or responsibilities towards students and colleagues. The role of principals is not only to manage the school, it seems, but to manage relationships with the school staff too, and those between the school and the community. Beyond that, principals are teachers, the heads who have responsibilities to the teaching profession. To some extent the concern is that principals who endeavour to be effective school leaders must take into account the ‘why’, ‘how’, and ‘when’, not just the ‘what’ of the curriculum. Therefore, principals must not become cut off from teaching activities, preaching ‘efficient classrooms’ without visiting them, but rather see themselves as leading teaching effectiveness too. This is quite challenging, as the findings show that principals are restricted by their limited autonomy (Jiang 2006; Sun 2009) which does not seem to match what they are accountable
for. It would appear that there is a long way to go before meeting all student individuals’ needs becomes the first priority for school principals.

It is clear from the principals’ comments in their group reports, that making change in education is not easy and is usually a time-consuming process. This reflects the points made by both Fullan (1999) and Hargreaves (1998, 2005) regarding the complexity of change and the time it takes to embed. Reforms require breaking conventions and making changes. Changes may cause pain or trouble to teachers as one principal summarized: “if we think about teachers who have become used over many years to old habits and behaviour, it could be difficult for them now to challenge themselves to adapt. As principals, we must be ambitious and should not fear taking risks when making changes, as long as we keep sharp mind to cope with any potential issues.”

It seems also that there has not been sufficient training to meet the principals’ needs (Wang 2012). As previously discussed, one of biggest challenges confronting principals is leading curriculum development. Although there was a training programme organized to introduce the new curriculum guidance at the early stage of the new curriculum reform, there is not sufficient training tailored for principals to develop their skills in leading curriculum development, especially school-based curriculum development. The new curriculum reform has been launched since the end of the 1990s, but it seems that principals still have found it quite difficult to take on these new roles of either leading school-based curriculum development or teacher development. This may indicate to policy makers and trainers that more attention should be given to principals’ skills improvement in training programmes, and to put emphasis on the skills needed to mange reforms at school level.

Of course changes which highlight ‘individuals needs’ seem to have some deviation from the ‘collectivism’ and ‘all-fit-in’ customary in Chinese traditional culture which is based on Confucianism. ‘Individuals needs’ seems is paid more attention in the West. This ‘westernization’ of schooling has significant impact on school principals, and it provides clear evidence that modern China is moving close to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, Confucianism of leadership is deeply rooted, especially in the political cadres. The following section explains some of the tensions this creates.
Western conceptions of leadership and the traditions of Confucianism

By reviewing the leadership literature, differences between leadership in the West and in China are self-evident, but there are also some similarities here, which I will mention first. Both western principals and Chinese principals have seen significant increases in the scope of their roles and their responsibilities over recent years. Both have also seen significant increases in the extent to which they are held personally responsible for the success of their schools, and success is increasingly measured by student attainment levels in national tests. Ensuring that the school is responsive to the needs of its students, rather ‘teaching to the test’, is a challenge to school leaders in both cultures, and extending leadership beyond the boundaries of the school into the school’s communities is also a common expectation.

However, there are also significant differences in the assumptions about how organizations function, and about relationships between leaders and followers within organizations. Among these are:

Power distance relationships- in Western schools there is an expectation of equity and psychological closeness between principals and teachers, with authority based on specific knowledge rather than position, and the use of position-based authority avoided wherever possible. In Chinese culture teachers most often expect their principal to‘know best’, and expect to be given instruction/direction from above.

Individualism versus collectivism- in Western culture individualism is encouraged and differences are celebrated. In China the traditional culture emphasizes harmony and ‘fitting in’ is often considered more important than ‘standing out’.

Attitudes to criticism- in Chinese culture there is an emphasis on self-criticism and self – improvement, and a reluctance to be critical of superiors and traditions. In Western culture individuals are encouraged to challenge the status quo, to ‘think outside the box’, and even new or junior members of staff feel relatively free to challenge how things are done.

Risk-taking and uncertainty- There seems to be a strong desire to avoid uncertainty within the Chinese cultural context- people like plans, and do not like to take risks. In the West, it is often said that high risks bring high rewards, and there is a pre-disposition for change that encourages experimentation.
Are these differences essentially cultural? The short answer is ‘yes’, though the reasons are complex. Perhaps it is because of the unique political culture in China, with a one-party government in such a big country, and the emphasis on centralisation, harmony, and respect for authority (which also have a paradoxical influence on more progressive school leaders who are trying to get close to their staff!). However, while there are cultural differences, there are also pressures from an increasingly global world community. China’s cultural heritage has survived for three thousand years, but will it survive for another hundred?

Above are set out key differences emerging from the initial literature review in terms of leadership in the West and in China. What are principals’ views on their role and leadership? Do they agree? Looking at what the government documents emphasized 20 years ago, these were political aspects to the role as well as a requirement of, ‘virtues’ and ‘individual perfections’. For instance, National Principals Qualifications and Job Requirements (Trial)’ (1991) explicitly emphasized that the principals must ‘fully implement’ policies, ‘consciously resist’ inappropriate influence, support ‘the communist orientation’. But since the turn of the century, the focus in the role of principals has been shifted more to academic aspects, though still with emphasis around ‘values’, citizenship, cohesion, harmony and so on. Two questions arise:

1) What particular beliefs and practices of public leaders are endorsed or rejected only in China?

2) To what extent does deviation from cultural norms enhance or obstruct the effectiveness of leadership?

Obviously, quite a few beliefs are endorsed by school leaders in China. Moral education is the core to self-cultivation in Confucianism. As Pittinsky and Zhu (2005) identified, China’s cultural traditions emphasize morality and collectivist values. Moral leadership is considered as one of the significant requirements from a principal, which has been underlined by the majority of the interviewees. This can be backed up also by the initial literature review and the government document analysis. Morality is even considered as one of the significant qualifications for principals (Ran 2008). This is because they are expected to be able to lead moral education and to develop a vision for the school that inspires staff and students alike (Xu 1995). Articulating the school’s education philosophy has been understood by most of the principals as a significant role as a school principal. Once again, from the government document, ‘National Principals Qualifications and Job Requirements (Trial)’ (1991), it can be
clearly identified that one of the principals’ key functions is to lead moral education and to develop students with a focus on their philosophical, political and moral development. The importance of moral leadership has never been reduced but has become difficult to sustain as ‘moral values’ eroded by impact of fast development of marketization and modernization of the society. In the recent governmental documentation, ‘National Standards’ (MOE 2013) for elementary school principals, moral leadership continues to be emphasized.

Simultaneously, good character is emphasized as a crucial element to be a successful leader, according to the evidence gathered from the principals, which they think they should maintain to win trust from teachers and enhance their influence. ‘Good character’ is generally understood by the principals as the ‘moral self-cultivation’ that Chen (2011) pointed out and which is emphasized in Confucianism. This reflects the Confucian culture that Fernandes (2004) described, where individual perfection through self-cultivation becomes the first aim of leadership. Confucian leaders enjoy high expectations from the community and are expected to be a good role model (Fernandes 2004). Thus, educational leadership becomes a moral function in China (Wong 2001). In this sense, it is not surprising that the principals also recognized that only authentic relationships, with appropriate respect and care to teachers, can be solid and beneficial to school development. This, as Wong (2001) strongly argued is essential to establish trust-based relationships between school principals and teachers, though the principals in China tend to win trust initially from their academic achievements as accomplished teachers, which to some extent may lead people to delay their acknowledgement of leadership qualities. They want to be model teachers too.

‘Harmony’ is generally the key value that principals endeavour to achieve at the heart of their school culture. Harmony leads to ‘fitting in’ and allows the principal to guide staff and students along a path in the same direction and achieve the same high level. Though this might always be the most effective strategy, it is the one most favoured. But it must be recognized that ‘all-fit-in’ seems to ignore students’ individual needs.

Deviation from traditional norms has developed new features in leadership. As noted in the initial literature review, the role of principals has been changing. For instance, new practices, such as distributing power and offering instructional leadership have been developed and gained much attention since the new curriculum reform. Distributed leadership has been developed to overcome the limited individual capacity and to make good use of multiple levels of leadership to fulfil tasks at different levels in the school (Spillane 2006). It is
encouraged to share power in China. There is a growing belief that principals distributing power to their followers, even to students and trusting them, offers a better model of school management, although it seems to conflict with ‘five fundamental relationships’ stated in Confucianism. This seems to echo what Lee and Pang (2011) and Pang (2004) identified as the dilemma between traditional Confucian ethics and values (e.g. hierarchical lines, collectivism, self-cultivation) and the new global values, such as decentralization, efficiency and accountability, that confronts educational leadership in mainland China.

Another deviation from cultural norms is arising from the challenge to the dominant status of teachers in the classroom. In China, teachers tend to be centred in the teaching and learning activities, in the situation where students are quite dependent on teachers. However, the new curriculum guidance with the highlighting of instructional leadership tend to push schools to develop a more ‘student-centred’ teaching approach which does match what Confucianism preach as: ‘teach students with their aptitude’ (yincaishijiao, 因材施教) and seems a deviation from ‘collectivism’ with its tendency to ‘fitting in’ strategies applied in both politics and education in China over the years.

From the above, several significant characteristics of leadership in Chinese culture can be identified along with the findings obtained from the principals.

1) Individual’ needs being ignored

Under Confucianism and a political culture with an over-emphasis on collectivism, individuals are comparatively ignored. As previously noted by Ma (2001), leaders tend to dislike to be pinned down on anything, nor do they like to yield to public demand, though this is as often rooted in personality factors as much as any larger sense of moral guidance. This has heavily influenced every aspect of Chinese life, including education. In schools, students’ individual needs have not been seen as that important; ‘fitting-in’ has been perceived as the goal of both teaching and learning. People are less likely to be ‘the first person to try tomatoes’. ‘Student-centred’ teaching approaches have been launched since the curriculum reform around the end of the 1990s, but progress has been limited to date. Both teachers and school leaders find it is difficult to change practices though reasons vary, due to combination of factors. Even students are struggling to make their own voices heard in public, especially when they have different voices from others’ or from teachers. However, this emphasis on individual learning does not mean collectivism is completely wrong. For instance, one of the
advantages that can be identified by the priority given to collectivism is to save time to complete tasks, as people work together towards a common goal. In addition, as discussed earlier, western democracy can be criticized for sometimes over-valuing individualism. In fact, as Chang (1996) pointed out, China is now more open to western ideas by adopting marketization, enterprise, and so on. Quite a few of the principals suggested that democratic leadership, equal relationships with mutual respect and care for both teachers’ and students’ individual needs were things they hoped to develop over time—though it would need time.

2) Overemphasis of ‘morality’ and ‘self-perfection’

In the traditional culture, the importance of ‘morality’ tends to be somewhat over-emphasized. As Chen (2011) noted, moral consciousness is essential in school leadership and loyalty is stressed. In the western countries this has been comparatively less important, although Sergiovanni (1994) has argued for ‘moral leadership’ in schools, which distinguishes educational leadership from business leadership explicitly because of its moral purposes, and also argues that ‘moral’ leaders take care of their followers’ needs (Burns 1978). More often moral leadership seems be a theme across the development of other leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and so on. In China, because of the heavy pressure from ‘moral leaders’ who must set a clear example and a fitting set of norms, leaders tend to behave mostly the same way. As one of the principals strongly expressed, as a principal she has to become a successful leader of curriculum development, developing a teaching and learning repertoire and cultural leadership and so on, because these are the pressures principals have to cope with. Ma (2001) worried that such pressures might mean principals yield to the public’s appetites. This may be true to some extent because it reflects Chinese attitudes to criticism, which is generally avoided if at all possible. For instance, from those who attend the national training programme, principals tend to be quite cautious to comment on others and the trainers are the same. In addition, it can also be seen that the principal's references to their relationships with all stakeholders including the local authorities, teachers and parents are quite subtle. This is partly due to their sense of ‘self-perfection’. It is also an acknowledgment that criticism that is too direct may make people feel shamed and lose face, and ‘face’ is even more important than life in traditional Chinese culture. Although China has been more open, ‘self-perfection’ is still a guiding principle for leaders.

3) Complexity of ‘guanxi’ impacting on the role of principals
A third typical feature of Chinese culture is the complexity of ‘guanxi’, which is heavily influenced by those five fundamental relationships emphasized in Confucianism that have been seminally influencing leadership behaviour in China. Guanxi in Confucianism is significant to hold people together in the community. Guanxi is essential to social stability and still has a fundamental impact on networks in modern China (Hui and Graen 1997). Principals frankly commented that they have to spend quite a lot of time on dealing with establishing positive relationships with teachers and students within the school but also strengthening networks with the local authority, the other agencies, i.e. Bureau of Commodity Price, as well as relationships with parents and broader communities. This has become one of challenges confronting principals who need to deal with all sorts of relationships. One of the interviewees mentioned that some school leaders even transplant their behaviour in their family into the school management role. As he explained, Chinese traditional culture is a kind of blood-based kinship. Therefore, some school leaders perceive that relationships between parent-child, or husbands and wives, are equivalent to the relationships between principals and teachers, or teachers and students.

Still, power and authority are substantial entities, and must be respected. This reflects Confucianism, underlining hierarchical relationships and the ‘four Cardinal Guides’, and also Mao’s philosophy of hierarchical relationships held together by collectivism to ensure social stability for social harmony and to establish clear authority, as discussed by Gong (1989). It may also explain why a number of principals in the training programme tend to be quite cautious to question trainers directly or to give negative comments, though they do discuss issues among peers. The term ‘expert’ is frequently used by principals, to show respect to their trainers, those professors, governors, educationalists, or sometimes even experienced senior teachers and principals who conduct the training programme. Such subtle relationships can also be identified within schools, between school leaders and teachers as well as teachers and students. On the one hand, school principals seem keen to distribute power to their teachers. On the other hand, teachers tend not to be ready or even willing to take on more responsibilities, and often perceive that it is not their job to think about school management problems. In addition, some principals do not trust teachers to take on the responsibility beyond the teachers’ role, or worry that sharing power may reduce their authority and they may lose control. That perhaps is why some of the heads commented that they have to make all final decisions and take responsibility for everything that happens within the school. It is controversial issue, especially under the top-down system. This reflects a similar philosophy.
among leadership in politics. As Shambaugh (1993) analysed, Deng’s political strategies combined ‘yong’ with ‘li’ from Chinese cultural traditions to establish his great power status.

In China, many people feel tired of the demands of complex relationships and maintaining networks, but no one can altogether ignore them. Some people do benefit from ‘guanxi’ they build up with others, though they have to make a lot of efforts to maintain this. But it makes the role of principals somewhat more complex. Principals are asking for more support to cope with issues emerging from complex relationships.

The training and preparation of school principals

As it has been described, the role of principals has become complicated, and principals are under pressure from higher expectations from those both in and outside of the school. Leadership development has been embraced as an important factor in meeting those expectations. I summarize what the most of the interviewees concerned with the training. It seems that principals need to be systematically prepared and trained for their new role they have to play. More training is needed, and should be open to all principals or those likely to be promoted.

Topics mentioned by interviewees in the training programme covers quite a broad range of topics, many of them theoretical. The focus in training tends to be given to the importance of accumulating knowledge relevant to the role, while relatively little attention is paid to skills and capabilities principals need to have to carry out their role. For instance, according to principals, it seems that the training programme focuses on technical aspects of leadership. This has been identified by quite a few of researchers in their previous studies. For instance, Ma (2001) reported that a ‘recipe’ for leadership seems to be offered, with the assumption that those who follow the ‘recipe’ will be able to lead the school effectively. In addition, the initial literature review notes Leithwood (1999)’s criticism of leadership research, it is not difficult to say that technical and replicable approaches to leadership have been over emphasized. There seems to be insufficient attention given to ‘people-centred’ approaches to leadership; though the people involved are the key variable. Even if there are training activities addressing the development of skills and capabilities, these are only organized when principals all feel that they have difficulties with a particular task (Interviewee 22). This may need both trainers and trainees to refocus on current training programme with more attention to the ‘leadership skills’ as well as the relationship between ‘knowledge’ and ‘capability’.
As one of the trainers recognized, one current issue is the lack of a systematic training programme. For instance, principals hope to develop a set of programmes to be available to trainees, which is expected to be similar to what a university provides with different modules for students to choose from. However, not all of those interviewees believed that training was non-systematic as Zheng (2005) criticized. Several interviewees who attended a ‘masters’ course in Singapore had positive comments, and pointed out that such a long term-training programme was quite systematic, which helped them to stand back from the working context and to reflect and to encourage their critical thinking by viewing things from a different perspective. But the question is how many principals can benefit from such opportunities, with regard to the ‘elite-prioritized’ principle.

From what these principals told me, teaching methods have expanded from ‘spoon-fed’ pedagogy to paying attention to trainees’ views, by creating opportunities for trainees to discuss problems they encountered, though ‘knowledge transfers’ is still significant in terms of teaching methods. New training methods, such as mentoring, coaching and even ‘shadowing’ have emerged or have become more popular in recent years, though coaching or mentoring methods have sometimes been used to share principals’ experience since 1990s (Li 1994). Mentoring, what is also called-apprenticeship- in China has been used more broadly to train new principals. However, it seems that the role is that of a non-participant observer. But it is rare to hear that the experienced principals come to the new principal’s school and mentor him/her and then the new principal takes the responsibility and learns in practice. It is not like in the western countries, such as England who often place the trainees in difficult schools to solve real problems as part of training and testing whether they have developed their skills and judgement.

Assessment is mainly conducted through the form of writing reports regarding their feelings about the training or some test papers consisting of multiple questions. Though principals confirmed that school visits were arranged as well as other activities such as listening to reports in the classroom, there is little to say about the relevant assessment regarding those activities. These may prove what Zheng (2005) pointed out that the weakness of the assessment of the training is that non formative assessment seems to give little useful feedback.

However, there is also a shortage of experienced trainers and mentors too, while a clear idea of what forms of training are needed is emerging, this does not mean the problem can be
solved quickly. Actually, only a very small proportion of the current stock of principals ever gets the opportunity to attend these new style national training programmes, and if there are problems finding trainers to staff these programmes, then training the trainers must be a real priority!

What are other factors that render the current training programme unsystematic or inefficient? As one of the principals observed, it might be important to agree the starting point to transform the training programme to support principals in an efficient way throughout the country. This can be achieved by National Standards for principals. One of purposes of standards for principals is to provide guidelines for the preparation and professional development of school leaders (Alberta Education 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education 2007). But in China, there was no national standard for principals until 2013. Then the Ministry of Education issued a document on school principals’ professional standards - "compulsory school principals' professional standards" and announced that the Standards would act as reference points to enhance the professional development of principals. Of course, it would be difficult to arrange training programmes for principals without a clear picture of the role of principals, and although a set of documents has been issued about the responsibilities and regulations for school principals, these are not especially helpful.

In addition, there is centralised principals’ recruitment and uncertain tenure, which mean that the principals’ careers are largely determined by the government of the local authorities. Principals seem to be quite cautious to change or to take risks, because they worry about possible consequences of failure. This makes them reluctant to plunge into the reforms, and principles are less enthusiastic than they otherwise might be.

The overall response to the learning environment created by the National training centre was very positive, though again only very limited number of ‘elites’ can benefit from there. Principals said that they learned from shared ideas and peer reviews as well as the trainers’ inputs, which all contribute to self-reflection and self-development. They found real problem-solving activities the most interesting. As one of the trainers explained, what they do is to go to the trainees’ schools to help the principal and teachers solve their current problems. Each of these principals clearly articulated their personal satisfaction with the training programme, with a tendency to prefer practical and problem-solving activities. The principals still considered that a change in the way training is delivered is necessary. Notwithstanding, some positive responses to the comments on the training programme have also been expressed by
the principals, such as ‘horizons broadened by experts’, ‘learning from peers’ and ‘problem-solving activities’ and ‘discussing real problems’.

What can be learned about the current national training programme from the principals’ comments? Several key points emerge. Firstly, ‘loose-tight-loose’ could describe the status of the training programme. It means that the training programme has got loose goals, tight content and methods and loose assessment. Second, although trainees are exposed to diverse topics along with different training methods, independent learning is still not a significant element of the programme. Third, the trainees themselves are selected because they are ‘elite’ principals- are these the most important group to be taught?

1) Loose-tight loose training programme

Again, Loose-tight-loose policies are applied in training programmes. Loose goals but tight regulations of training forms and content, and then loose assessment, which seems to fail to meet the principals’ individual needs. Training programmes are still quite closed despite the ‘open market’. In most cases, the training programmes, especially the national training programme is still managed under the top-down system, which means that there are limited or fixed training organizations entitled by the government to provide training courses according to the governmental guidance. This is in line with what is detailed in the literature review, that some researchers (e.g. Zheng et al. 2013) argue that the state remains in firm control of principal development, in terms of the definition and enactment. As one of the principals commented generally the training programmes seem to have no clear goal, though there are certain key topics. Very few training programmes were credited with clear goals by the principals. The trainers or training centres are almost fixed, and have to be approved by the government.

Trainee selection has to follow a certain hierarchy. Yin (2014) explained the situation quite explicitly, that in China, school leaders serve and are financed by their provinces and local authorities. The training programme is a full time course and there is only one national training centre for secondary principals, located in Shanghai. Principals come from all parts of the country. That means that those who attend to the training have to be away from their school for a certain period. Actually quite a few of the principals felt that is quite difficult for them to be out of their school, though some of them were quite confident to leave the school to their assistants or vice principals. There isn't a systematic training scheme with options
available to trainees to select what they need. Consequently, as one of the interviewees pointed out, the training modules provided have little flexibility and limited options.

In terms of the training methods, the training models used have expanded to various forms, including scenario simulation, seminars, follow-up services, on-site teaching, case studies, discussion and questions, case studies, experience sharing and so on. Nevertheless, the various forms all seem to be constrained by the traditional cramming approach, because they tend to transfer knowledge or experience rather than developing problem-solving skills. Reporting and presenting seems still the main training activities, even where there are some practical activities. This seems quite congruent with Wu’s (2009) conclusion that the training programmes over the past thirty years were largely based on old traditional concepts, using the same ‘cramming’ (teaching to the test) system used in schools, and with little individual support provided and with theoretical research lagging far behind practical needs. For instance, visiting schools is carried out in a format whereby a group of trainees go to listen to the principal report on their school development. Not every principal would be able to ask questions, or discuss issues with the school leader in any depth. This issue is not new. Sun (2009) pointed out that the common practice for school visits is that they are conducted as a form of observation, almost non-participative observation. It may not be that surprising, therefore, as Xiao and Li (2011) previously noted, that principals lack strong motivation to attend any training programme.

Almost all training programmes are non-degree courses, but still participants have to complete certain tasks by writing summary reports in terms of their reflections on both themselves and the training programme. There are no evidence-based criteria for marking. Non-problem diagnostic analysis or placement is required to test their problem-solving skills. This has been previously mentioned in the literature review, that the assessment of principals’ development is rarely formative and most often fails to give useful feedback (Zheng 2005).

2) Passive learning along with questioning skills neglected

It has been clear from what the principals reported and my own observation – that the training still tends to be associated with traditional ‘knowledge-centred’ approaches rather than problem-solving. Independent learning, along with questioning skills, have not been genuinely applied in the training programme.
As one principal commented, the issue is that people perceive that learning equals acquiring new knowledge. The training starts from the knowledge accumulated through 'ability level' and emphasizes ‘right answers’. Competency tends to be considered as synonymous to ‘knowledge’ in China, therefore, if you want to improve ‘skills’ or ‘competency’ in a certain area, you have to join classes in the classroom. The belief is that ‘skills’ can be developed by learning about some techniques, rather than practicing them. This is similar to the idea that teachers with excellent teaching achievement can be perceived as good candidates for principalship in China (Kuang 2007), as they may think and teaching techniques can be transferred into leadership approaches. To some extent, that may be why one of the principals described the current training programme as ‘the biggest tragedy’, with the ‘biggest drawback’ a typical old style training programme conducted in the form of ‘passing on knowledge, taking lectures’ and ‘memorizing and finally repeating knowledge. Trainees are examined by how accurately they repeat the knowledge that they are taught’, which was seen as not helpful to principal development. Consequently, the principals who complete the training programme would either ‘recite the knowledge’ or ‘completely copy ideas from other situations’.

Questioning and discussion gives everyone an equal opportunity to think and discuss in depth and to engage in a reflective process, which can avoid simplistic solutions. It stimulates critical thinking or seeking alternative perspectives to solve problems in a different way. However questioning is not a natural skill which people are born with, but it is something that need to be developed. This is perhaps why it is quite common to hear critical comments or recommendations through group discussions, whereas questioning skills are not normally highlighted, even in group work. This suits the ‘harmony’ philosophy discussed earlier in the section on Confucianism and leadership. That may be why some of the principals commented that what ‘experts’ said was less applicable to solve real problems in real life. Generally, the principals felt they would benefit more from questioning and seeking answers to real problems. This has been evidenced through the principals’ group reports and their reflections on the training programme. As one of the group report shared, principals have also changed their perspectives on educational development by attending the training. In the beginning, they felt that they were clear about their educational ideology, but often this was challenged during the programme and they had shifted to some extent by the end of the programme. They commented that they benefited from the training programme, which provided opportunities to share ideas and be questioned, and sometimes push them to review
what they have done. At the same time, most of the principals who attended such training programmes felt quite challenged by being questioned or criticized, though they appreciated the progress they made through that process. This is partly due to ‘individual perfection’ and ‘harmony’ goals set for Confucian leaders (Fernandes 2004; Chen 2011). But under principals’ rather undefined tenure terms in China, some principals even argued that it is important to build good relationships between the school and the local authority because their own future lies in the hands of the local authority (Sun 2009), and completing the ‘top-down’ national training programme is very helpful here, as it bestows status. School leaders are heavily influenced by the local cultural and societal context (Yin 2014) and it is clear they still worry quite a lot about their local standing.

To sum up, whatever variety of training is offered, there is no big difference if they are all conducted in a ‘passive learning’ environment. This mirrors the problem of introducing ‘independent learning’ in schools; it also needs to be applied in the principal training programme. Questioning is essential to improve independent thinking, which really needs to be given more attention by everyone, including both trainers and trainees.

3) Elite-oriented selection for trainees

For national training programmes, generally principals are selected or nominated by the local authority. This is not surprising, since the state is in control. But it seems that the selection system for these programmes favours the best principals who may least need them. For instance, the principals attending the NTCSP were selected from all parts of the country to attend the advanced training programme because they have already been identified as the best principals in the local counties (Zhang 2011). The most positive comments made by the principals about this training programme related to the open group discussions among peers. This may not be surprised if these are all skilled and experienced principals. Others, ‘double elites’ programme (‘shuang ming’ gong cheng, ‘双名工程’) are open to ‘elite’ principals as well as master teachers and a one year degree course is open to a certain number of principals, also with an ‘elites – prioritized’ selection principle, at a University in Singapore that offers a master’s degree in school management. This programme was launched in 2008. Despite the limited number of principals who can benefit from such advanced programmes, it is necessary to take account of “intercultural understanding and awareness of societal and local contexts” as suggested by Lee and Pang (2011). This is because the capability of principals can only be developed by ‘well-conceived and well-designed training’ (Zheng et
al. 2013), and while it can be valuable to look at experience elsewhere, maybe we need to concentrate on providing more basic training in China first.

From the interviewees’ descriptions of various forms and opportunities for training provided to improve principals’ development or advanced study opportunities both at home and abroad, it seems that only the most successful principals or teachers tend to be selected. Elite education tends to be still significant in educational development and gains quite a lot attention from the government. It seems that the ones who are already doing a good job may get the chance to go abroad, like Singapore! It is almost like giving a reward to those principals. But there are some other principals who have very little training who are struggling. The class leading system does not work well here. This has been copied in teacher training. It is not a very effective system that all the best teachers are concentrated in the cities and in the west of China we find the poorest qualified and many un-qualified teachers, and the gap between the west and the east is growing. Schools in Shanghai are pulling further ahead. This is a worrying trend. The diverging economic progress between those areas is also threatening the Chinese ideas of harmony because it creates imbalance. One obvious result is internal migration. Although the government has attempted to reduce the gap, the difference between the best and the worst is still quite large. But in some western countries like England, they use the best principals to do training, and they have strategies to attract the best principals and teachers to the areas of greatest need. Same such system is needed in China, or the gap in education and economic progress between East and West will grow ever wider.

Of course, it is rooted in Chinese culture that those who are already good are rewarded and they get the chance to learn more. According to Confucianism, ‘individual perfection’ through ‘self-cultivation’ becomes the first aim to leadership in China (e.g. Fernandes 2004; Chen 2011). Wong (2001) also commented that educational leadership in China is more than a management task. This means that school leaders need to set a good role model to obtain the respect and trust from teachers and students. Due to the culture and higher expectations on leaders, this may explain why those who are already strong principals still have more opportunities to receive the best training to improve them further and provide excellent role models. Another purpose is that the government expect to maintain social harmony through rewarding exemplary conduct, which is also evidenced in literature review and comments from the interviewees. However, it may be that ‘role models’ are no longer the best way to secure ‘harmony’-let alone to improve schools. In the new China, there are many kinds of new role models emerging -not all of these models promote harmony and social cohesion. At
the same time, it seems there could be a better strategy for developing school leaders than expecting the majority to ‘catch’ improvements from contact with these elite principals.

In fact more recently, the government has been endeavouring to provide support in a broader range of areas to benefit more people. The term ‘equity’, emphasized in Confucianism, has been considered here. For instance, the scope of training is also extended, 'to carry out training for all the principals. Focus on strengthening the rural areas, the contiguous dense deprived areas with special difficulties, as well as principal training in ethnic minority areas, to put more efforts into improving the disadvantaged school principals’ training' (MOE 2013). But this has only been the case since 2013, when a document was issued by the Ministry of Education (Teacher [2013] No. 11) towards ‘Ministry of Education views on further strengthening the training of school principals’ on August 29, 2013. This encourages local authorities to actively explore training mechanisms for the principals and to allow them to independently select training programmes. It also suggests developing a training menu, as well as an information-based services platform for principals to provide diverse choices satisfying individual needs. To what extent this bottom-up approach to training programmes can succeed, is still uncertain.

Reviewing the discussion of the findings, the changes, such as student-centred teaching approaches, school-based curriculum development or transparent relationships in education arising from social changes might all be good things in a long term, but at the moment, they are causing problems for the schools and big problems for teachers. The main challenges confronting school leaders can be summarized as: coming to terms with ‘professional accountability’, a lack of knowledge and experience regarding school level curriculum development (e.g., less support for central curriculum development instructions), challenging and changing teachers’ traditional teaching beliefs and approaches, struggling to balance quality of education and student attainment, the difficulties created by too much external interference, and coping with the more complex relationships including management accountability to parents, the community and the local authorities, and other agencies that are emerging. Actually these are difficult problems and it is really a hard time to be a principal in China. These principals are working at a time when the job is much more difficult than it was 30 years ago. But the development of the education system needs a new generation of principals who can meet these challenges, and all need to consider. So we need to ask: What can be done to support principals?
Chapter 7 Recommendations and conclusions

In this chapter, I offer some recommendations regarding leadership development, and some reflections on the westernization of leadership practices in Chinese schools, together with the problems this can bring. This is followed by brief conclusions, identifying implications of this study for future research, policy, and practice. The chapter ends with a personal reflection on the researcher’s journey during this study, which she hopes will give a picture of how her own learning has developed along the way.

7.1 Recommendations

For principal training

In terms of recommendations for principal training, there are five areas to be considered to improve principal development. The trainers need to put more efforts on developing principals’ soft skills of communication and motivation, more practical emphasis on training in real school-based situations, creating more opportunities for peer learning, making better use of new technologies and developing programmes with context-based learning.

Firstly, regarding the recent reforms in China, new policies are creating new problems in schools that principals have not been prepared for. In the new climate of ‘openness’, principals are expected to communicate these policies to teachers and explain them. To do this effectively they need to be able communicate with and reassure staff members, and motivate them to implement the required changes in their classrooms. These are not easy tasks, as the changes imply that teachers will alter their classroom behaviour, and work in a quite different way with their students. In a way, the staff may feel de-skilled by what is happening. The principals need to recognize that it is very hard for teachers to recognize the need for change. Probably, until recent years, he/she was seen to be a good teacher and everybody praised them. Now they may be told that they have to put away their methods that served them well for many years, and establish new practices and relationships in the classroom.

It may not be surprising that many principals emphasized that it is quite hard to do this, and to bring about changes in the teachers’ attitudes and behaviours, especially when dealing with experienced teachers. The importance of principals being more people-centred and gaining
strong interpersonal skills was evidenced through the literature review, which perhaps shows that the authority of the principal has been waning in many countries, and the way forward is through persuasion and inspiration rather than telling people what to do. However, because of the top-down culture in China, it could be more important here to principals to inspire staff members. It is also evident from the challenges described by the principals that they are struggling to cope with the more complex relationships both inside and outside of school that the reforms have brought. That reflects the breakdown of traditional hierarchy relationships in China. Consequently, more attention needs to be given to interpersonal relations and communication with work colleagues. The principals in this sample want less attention on technical things, like regulations, that principals can read by themselves and they think it is easier to learn those things. However, it is harder to learn the soft skills of management. Also, as described by some of the principals the biggest challenge is that educational goals do not altogether match with the expectations from the community, evidently, they also need to communicate better with the community and the parents.

Because many teachers are de-skilled and are struggling with new curriculum guidance, it becomes vital to motivate teachers to accept the change and be willing to change themselves. That is what principals felt hardest to cope with, and they commented often that teachers felt reluctant to change the status quo in the classroom when the testing system is almost the same. But the principals recognize those teachers’ motivations, especially intrinsic incentives are essential to implement the reform programme. Obviously, principals need skills in motivating their staff members to improve educational development. The first recommendation therefore is that training programmes for principals review the content of the training, and give more attention to personal and interpersonal skills, and to strategies to motivate teachers and make them feel more comfortable with change.

Secondly, it is evident that principals feel they are learning more from practical activities but they have insufficient opportunities for such activities. There need to be more school-based practical activities to be arranged for them. Principals would like opportunities for spending more time at each other’s schools, or maybe just local schools, looking at real issues and problems, and less time in class listening to lectures. They say they learn more from solving practical problems rather than theoretical discussion. Even the trainers that run the course think this is true although they have not done anything about it. However, if trainers could arrange small groups of principals visiting each other’s schools then relationships among principals could be built up during such activities and could be maintained during the
classroom training. For instance, if principals were to be organised in groups of three so that they can visit two other’s schools, they will understand their counterpart's problems a little better. Also the principals may keep in contact after the training is finished once they have established these relationships. Although frequently trainers take principals to visit schools, principals want more and they want different sorts of visits. They prefer going in small groups, where they can talk in detail with the principals and not to go out in groups of 20 or even more where they never get chance to ask anything. Often they just watch a presentation in the school instead of being in the classroom. That is not what they mean by seeing practice, as that is just another organized activity. So the second recommendation is that training programmes make better use of school visits and use them to promote group work and problem solving skills by focusing on a real problem, and reduce time spent on just listening to another principal talk about his/her school.

Thirdly, what is obvious from the interviews was that principals learn from each other more than they do from the trainers. Therefore peer learning is very important to principals’ development and it creates opportunities for deep learning based on experience. That is about building their psychological health when they feel they are not working on their own. Small group learning activity mentioned above is one sort of peer learning. Principals can learn from visiting each other’s schools and looking at each other’s problems, which is a good format for peer learning. But the issue here is peer learning, not going on visits. The trainers need to plan for peer learning opportunities regularly during the programme, and not think that they always need to be controlling things. Actually the principals are quite ready to organise some sessions by themselves, maybe looking at common problems or new developments that they will all have to introduce in their schools. The third recommendation is that the programme gives some time each week to activities that facilitate peer learning which can also strengthen relationships and perhaps lead to networks between the principals.

Fourthly, principal training needs to make better use of new technologies. In terms of on-line support, it has not been widely used. Actually within their daily work, principals do not have many people whom they can talk to. If there was established a virtual space created for principals where they are able to talk to each other, and to share their concerns and exchange ideas, then that will be a helpful professional network, and it may also benefit their mental health. What can be created with the assistance of technology, for instance, is a website, and blog (e.g., Wechat, quite popular in China, a twitter-like) communication space where heads
can go on line and discuss their problems with each other and get advice from one another. 
And even if they are not seeking answers, the facility allows principals to interact with 
principals and to begin to build a virtual learning community. Such a space does not require 
much mediating, though maybe some administration, as the principals can easily mediate or 
control themselves. Several principals told me they would welcome such opportunity, and 
while they do not believe that they can find certain answers, they do want to talk to other 
principals who might have similar problems. Therefore, if there is a conversation space 
provided for principals, they would appreciate it, and therefore my **fourth recommendation** 
is that the Principals’ Training Centre sets up such an online facility for programme 
members and even maintains that after the programme ends.

The fifth issue is about the need for a context-based training programme to be developed. As 
has been discussed, in the new China individual needs are recognised. Just as one size does 
not fit all students, one size does not fit all principals. From what the principals are saying is 
they come from all over the country to the national training centre. They come from different 
backgrounds and different communities. They come from rich areas and poor areas, from 
farming districts and factory districts. These principals all have different problems and face 
different challenges. They want to know about solving problems in their own situations and 
circumstances. What they need less is general training courses designed in the ministry. Of 
course, some problems are common to all, but many more are specific to their own 
circumstances, which is why principals want to invite colleagues to visit their schools by 
asking first what problems they encounter in the school at the moment. They want also a 
programme that meets their individual needs, as well as updates on general developments and 
policies. A more bottom-up training programme is recommended, maybe not every bit 
planned before the principals actually arrive and allow them to say what problems they face. 
**So a further recommendation is that more flexible programmes are designed, so that 
there is close match between the needs of the principals in the programme and the 
content of the programme.**

In addition to these particular recommendations there might be a checklist for the trainers, 
that they can use when they plan and work on the future principals’ training. The best people 
to draw up the checklist are the principals themselves, but my summary starting list is below:

- Set clear goals and adopt formative assessment
- Develop principals’ soft skills to improve interpersonal and communication behaviour
• Promote independent learning by encouraging questioning skills
• Use more practical activities and small group work in the training programme
• Introduce on-line support for principals, i.e. virtual conversation space for them to communicate and discuss problems among themselves
• Developing context-based training programme to meet principals’ individual needs
• Provide more opportunities to principal from disadvantaged areas rather than using training as a reward for the best principals.

In addition, the training programme for principals may need to be opened to the market to allow competition for providing the best training programme that can be supported by the government. Traditionally, there are two national training centres—one is for elementary school principals and the other one is for the secondary school principals, which are placed by the government in the two main teacher universities—Beijing and Shanghai, and are delegated to run the programmes. If training for principals could be put into the market for a certain level of competition, it may give impetus for better or more flexible training programmes tailored for principals to meet their individual needs. For instance, school-university partnerships may need to be encouraged so more centres for training could be offered more locally. In a big country like China this could be really useful.

Above is what can be recommended for future principals’ training. Again, developing ‘learner-centred’ training stands out, because all efforts should be put into meeting the principals’ needs. Below, I will look at questions that have been in my mind since I started this study; what can be learned from western approaches to leadership, and what problems may come from applying western ideas to Chinese schools.

**Westernization of leadership approaches in Chinese schools**

This section will reflect on what this study has to say about the application of westernisation of leadership approaches in Chinese schools and will in particular look at two aspects: application of western ideas and problems it may bring. The first is what can be learned from the development of school leadership practice in Western countries. There are four key areas in western practice that may be useful to Chinese leadership development, namely: increasing diversity, nurturing individual student development, promoting critical thinking and managing more complex relationships between principals and their staff members as the
traditional power/distance relationship changes. The second aspect is to consider which adopted practices coming from the West may appear to cause problems. Three significant issues were identified in the study; the first is whether in China people are still suspicious of individualism- is it better than collectivism? Secondly, people are concerned about taking risks. In traditional culture, people generally do what they are told- therefore, is risk-taking by principals necessary or wise? Thirdly, some principals worry about whether they will lose their authority in more equal relationships with their colleagues. Will this weaken school management? Those questions are discussed in more detail below.

There are a number of ideas in Western leadership theories that could be applied fairly easily to Chinese schools. The most prominent among these is that Chinese schools ought to learn to accept differences and appreciate diversity rather than pressing all to ‘fit in’. In some sense, diversity’ should be considered as a resource rather than an obstacle to educational development. This needs both school leaders and teachers to recognise that students are different and not all of them can be equally good at academic subjects. Pushing all students to work for the same goals and achieve the same level of learning outcome is difficult to both students and teachers, and is also somewhat wasteful. Not all can succeed on the same ‘academic’ path, and in China those who do not ‘succeed’ are likely to be called ‘failures’. Would it not be better if they were to follow another path where they can succeed too? The government has embarked on reform of education assessment and is working towards quality of education for students. One example is the recently released ‘green evaluation’ (2013) which endeavours to assess students by taking into account individual’s needs. This is one strategy to reduce the importance of the national test. Although the impact of 'green evaluation' on education is uncertain, it can be seen as a positive step. Similarly, school leaders may also need to be encouraged to listen to different voices in the staff group, and accept different opinions and disagreements rather than decide between them. For a long time movement within China was restricted inside and entry from outside was blocked, which resulted in stable communities in fixed populations. Now this is changing, and while most of the migrants are still Chinese, China being a huge continent-like country, the differences between Chinese people from different areas are quite marked. This is not just a reflection on minority areas, as for example people in Shanghai speak Mandarin with an accent that visitors from Beijing find hard to understand. The future will bring more movement of people, and we need to learn from Western countries that diversity can be very positive.
Secondly, schools need to encourage methods to raise the self-esteem of individuals by promoting individual development. Traditionally, the emphasis has been on collectivism and individuals were seen as comparatively less important. Consequently, individuals’ needs tended to be ignored. Highlighting individuals’ needs is contrary to collectivism. The latter tends to make people follow and behave according to social norms, rather than make them stand out by doing things differently. A well-known old saying in China illustrates this nicely: "Do not stand up to stick your head out" (qiang da chu tou niao, 枪打出头鸟). Consequently, in schools, students try to fit in, tend to seek the ‘right’ answers, and do not like uncertainty. This of course makes things easier for the teacher, but it does not encourage the development of the children’s individual talent. We have to try and make things a bit harder for the teachers, and encourage the children to be different, and not to feel bad to be different, but positive about being themselves.

Therefore, thirdly, schooling should encourage alternative ideas, amongst the teachers and the students, and promote critical thinking. Although to be fair critical thinking has been encouraged in schools for some time, but has so far not achieved the desired outcome. One of the main reasons for the latter is that there has been insufficient effort applied to ‘student-centred’ teaching approaches in schools. If this were to increase, then students can find their own voice without standing out.

Lastly, whilst thinking about how and what to adopt from western leadership styles it may be considered that there is a need to develop more equal relationships and psychological closeness between principals and teachers by reducing the power/distance relationship. As the preliminary findings identified, recently more school leaders have started to share power and responsibilities with their staff members and are more collegial in their approach to teachers, but on the other hand, they are worried that such close relationships may threaten their authority. That is why some of the principals suggested that it is not good to become close friends with the staff members. Although not all agreed, the majority of the principals tend to recognize only the working partnership rather than any other close relationships between themselves and the teachers. It is obvious therefore that the power/distance relationships are largely maintained between the school leaders and the teachers. One reason many school leaders still want to keep some distance between themselves and their staff members is adherence to the old traditions, which put a high value on aiming for ‘self-perfection’. Distance can create some mystery, which helps to maintain the image of the
principal making a lonely journey towards ‘perfection’. But in today’s educational environment everybody may have to recognize that the school leader’s main priority is to provide effective leadership, rather than being the ‘best’ in everything. Over-emphasis on self-perfection in China often makes it difficult to develop the kind of relaxed relationship between Principals and teachers we see in the West.

Of course, there are other traditions that may conflict with western leadership. For instance, if there is too much emphasis on ‘individualism’, people, especially the policy makers may be afraid that it will replace collectivism and lead to more disagreements. Also, Chinese people traditionally tend to avoid criticism of leaders and are not inclined to take risks. Chinese worry about ‘face’—even more than their life in some cases. Criticism becomes a subtle business when you do not want anyone to lose face, and people tend to be cautious about what words to use when they want to express different ideas, especially in situations where a large power-distance between the parties is perceived. Another reason for criticism generally not being approved of is that it is seen as personal, rather than a way of looking for better solutions. There is the perception in some quarters that critical thinking equals fundamental disagreement with the person, who is criticised. In terms of risk-taking, people are less likely to take risks because they are afraid of failure, and even punishment. When people have less fear of punishment arising from failure and are able to get support, they may be more willing to take risks. As discussed previously in the section on the training programme, success tends to be rewarded excessively, but failure can result in hard consequences. In addition, developing notions of equity and psychological closeness may threaten the authority structure. My study concluded from a review of the literature, that western school leaders’ authority is based on specific knowledge and skills rather than position, but in the Chinese situation the leader may have to show the authority of the position itself. Still, in Chinese culture, teachers’ expectations of the school principals are that principals should ‘know best’ and deliver wise instruction and direction. Such high expectations on school principals unavoidably create some distance between leaders and teachers. Too much emphasis on equity and psychological closeness may break down ‘the mystery’ and ‘self-perfection’ image of school leaders in traditional Chinese culture.

It is clear from the above discussion that some ideas and practice from western thinking on leadership can be applied successfully in Chinese schools. But they can only work efficiently in a Chinese context when traditional values and relationships are not threatened. If problems are created by Westernization, it can only bring conflicts. Chinese principals tend to avoid
conflicts as much as they can, so this may mean that they try not to deviate too far from traditional ideas.

7.2 Conclusions

Finally in this section, I want to conclude this study by providing an overview of the research that was carried out. My research has investigated the views of 28 school principals, three vice principals and four trainers (two of these were also local governors) to explore and map key elements of the role of secondary principals as it is changing in China, including what they see as their most important activities, the main priorities, the major challenges they face and what principals think about their role. By investigating these key areas, factors influencing these activities and priorities also came to light. I hope that my research has clarified what the concerns of modern principals are, and shed light on the ongoing challenges that they encounter in their work. The key drivers that influence the changing role of principals, first identified in the initial literature review and further brought into focus through the interviews with and observations by the principals, has provided a framework which can be used as a starting point for further leadership development in secondary schools. At the same time the outcomes of this study will hopefully fill a gap in the international literature where there exist a paucity of research into the daily activities of the Chinese principals and what are their main concerns. The complexities of change confronting the school leaders of the future in times of such remarkable social transformation as well as new guidance concerning educational reforms have no precedence in recent Chinese history. Secondary school leaders are serving as pathfinders, leaders of their time, transforming Chinese schools and learning how to effect change in a system that had been stable for very many years.

I hope that the first-hand accounts of current secondary principals involved in this research can be used to reframe practice and help to develop future leaders as part of the national school leadership agenda, thereby paving the way of future leadership development in schools. It may be especially useful for principal training and enhance the preparedness of the Chinese principals of the future. Furthermore, this study reveals what principals think about the national training, which has until now received little scrutiny in previous research into school leadership in China.

Also, by looking at the similarities and differences between the principal’s roles and attitudes in China and published research findings from the West, and combining these with findings
obtained from the empirical study, it offers some reflections about westernization of leadership in Chinese school, which provide a base for more comprehensive thinking about the influence of the culture on leadership, and contributes to an understanding of how and where Western theories of leadership might be applied in China and how well they fit with each other.

Finally, this study contributes to the research methodologies used to explore principals’ roles in China. Specifically, shadowing the principals, which is sometimes called a ‘fly on the wall’ approach, has not been much used in the field of educational leadership in China. The opportunity to use the experience gained from such a method, together with the researcher’s reflections on its usefulness may encourage future researchers to carry out further work of this kind and to refine and improve this approach. The closeness between the researcher and the principals this method generated provides opportunities to achieve mutual understanding in terms of both the research goals and the principal’s work. It may contribute to the development of methods of research used to study educational leadership in China. This type of research might be strengthened if it not only uses qualitative methodologies, as my study has, but incorporates quantitative methods too. Perhaps future research can start to gain insight and quantify how widespread my research findings might be, both in Shanghai secondary schools and elsewhere in China. Notwithstanding, I learned a lot from this work and I think it has been very useful and I hope it will be useful to others. But I am very much aware there is more work to be done.

One of my most significant observations is that the relationship between Chinese culture and leadership in China cannot be ignored. As can be learned from this study, although the social change in China is remarkable and has a significant impact on education, Confucianism remains very deeply rooted. This study was conducted by taking into account the impact of culture on leadership, but it was not its main focus. The relationship between Chinese culture and leadership in China may well merit further investigation, in particular to identify how the various societal and institutional cultures in China affect school leaders’ behaviours and to what extent deviation from cultural norms enhance or obstruct the effectiveness of school leadership. Having investigated the westernization of leadership versus Confucianism, two further questions arise, namely whether in the near future Chinese school leaders will begin to mix with their colleagues in the West, as European, Australian and US school principals do now? And following on from this, whether principals will continue to take ideas from the
West- or -even more interesting- will western principals be looking at China for inspiration in the field of leadership development’

In addition, what can be drawn out from the discussion and conclusions of principals’ training is that the specific actions undertaken by principals to build school culture are comparatively weak although it is seen by the principals as essential to improve school development. Therefore I recommend that, future research should explore what principals really mean by ‘school culture’, and what sorts of activities develop or inhibit its development?

7.3 Postscript

While conducting this research, I was fortunate to receive a bursary from the British Education Leadership and Management Association (BELMAS). This helped me with fieldwork expenses, but a condition of the award was that I make regular reports to BELMAS about my progress. I finish with an extract from one of my reports, as it reminds me what is really behind the work I present here.

As was indicated in the previous progress report, a substantial part of the academic year so far was spent back in China carrying out fieldwork activities. I have been engaged in data collection in Shanghai from last August (2012) until the end of February this year (2013). My initial plan had been to spend four months, from September until December (2012) on the fieldwork, but the grant from BELMAS enabled me to extend these plans. This was extremely valuable, as I was able to remain in the field until the end of February, enabling me to spend more time on both shadowing and interviewing school principals and even supporting me to revisit some participants in the end. As a result of the initial period of voluntary work, I was able to gain a much clearer understanding of one of the most developed district in Shanghai, its strengths and weaknesses, and the problems facing its schools, and also to develop relationships with key staff in the district’s principal training section, who were able to facilitate my introduction to principals and my access into schools. A further advantage of the goodwill built up during this period was that I was able to shadow principals in their schools and to interview a larger sample than I had anticipated would be possible in my original plans. The main gain however was for the shadowing activity. Because of the additional time for planning and data gathering I was able to spend five days in each of five schools (not whole weeks, because the principals’ schedules made that impossible, but five full days, nonetheless) shadowing the principals before interviewing
them about their roles, priorities and the difficulties they face. I was also able to return to these schools, where five or six teachers were interviewed in each case about their perceptions of the role and priorities of the principal.

The second main source for the data collection was from principals attending the national training programme at the National Training Centre for Secondary School Principals, which is located in Shanghai. Again, the opportunity to visit the Centre and discuss my project with staff in August was extremely useful, and I was able to conduct interviews with 14 principals in two blocks of time, one coming right at the beginning in September 2012, and one towards the end of the National Training Programme for Secondary Principals in Nov. 2012. In between these two periods when interviews took place, I was able to attend some of the National Training sessions, as well developing my contacts in a district and giving space for me to trial and reflect on the methods, instruments and questions I was using and to identify potential issues for further inquiry in the later interviews.

To get more familiar with what was going on in the schools in that district, I was also able to attend other activities during the period of data collection that complemented my inquiries. While working with the district I have attended and organized workshops and training programmes. For instance, in the beginning of September, 2012, I attended International Forum on Teacher Education, in Shanghai, China and went to several seminars on school leadership. I also attended a four-day training programme for younger school leaders from 1st to 4th Nov, 2012, which is called ‘Dreams+Teams’. It was designed to help local tutors to plan and deliver leadership training programme to young leaders in their local schools. During this programme, I mixed with and talked to teachers responsible for leadership development from different schools across that district, getting to know more about their schools and their school principals. This event also helped me to get access to a number of schools to interview principals.

There is an annual ‘Academic Festival’ in the district and one I attended was with the theme of ‘Improving Core Competition in Education in the district’ in Nov. 14th, 2012. I have attended some interesting workshops, such as the Best Practice for Principals workshop and got a chance to talk with principals there. Most of the audience were the school principals and assistant principals from schools in that district, but there were also some other principals from schools in Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces. Those schools are in comparatively disadvantaged areas and have been supported by the district over recent years.
In total, there are now more than 50 participants taking part in my interview programme, including 28 principals and three vice principals, 21 teachers, four trainers from the National training Centre, and the bureau deputy director in that district bureau of education. I have to say, it is not easy and even quite tough for a research student to plan a study and especially when the participants are almost all school principals who have higher hierarchical position. That required more preparation from the start, including the instruments, negotiating access to participants, managing change and handling power-distance conversations. I found that some tension arose from changes and rearrangements with participants. By keeping research diaries, I have been able to reflect during the research process, especially in the stage of data collection. I have recognized that it is the time issue of carrying out empirical research I needed to handle, which involves other participants, when plans may not always work out and the researcher him/herself has to manage last-minute changes, as at times changes seem to be the only certainty.

Lastly, I will share some reflections on the research process itself. I will focus on how the various elements were pulled together, enabling me to gain a rich picture of the principals role, and to identify data relevant to my research questions. As I earlier clarified, I hope that a first-hand account of the experience gained using such methods together with my reflections on their usefulness, may encourage future researchers to carry out further work of this kind and to refine and improve these approaches, which are still not common in Chinese education research.

Of course, it was not always easy to collect the data I was looking for, sometimes this was quite difficult. To give some idea of the problems and frustrations and also how I tried to get around these, I will refer to some extracts from my research diaries. I can identify many comments like ‘wasted all morning’, or ‘spent all day there and only got to speak to one person’, and I note that quite regularly the scheduled appointment was changed or even cancelled at the last minute. Like any empirical researcher, I had to deal with these problems.

But even though I experienced these problems, it was still a valuable learning experience, because it underlined what I had been told when completing my research training: it always takes longer than you expect! Therefore, I did come to expect these frustrations, and became quite good at finding alternative ways to usefully fill my time- there is always something to work on. And of course, there were good days when the research diary says ‘really good interviews today’, or ‘very interesting conversation, and I was invited to visit the school’.
In fact, anticipating some difficulties in the field, I started negotiating access to the potential interviewees since 2011, and I had already gained permission for collecting information from my two main data sources before my transfer panel. But despite this, my research did not get off to a smooth start. At the time when I arrived back in Shanghai to begin, I was expecting to start an internship in a local authority that had already given me permission. However, when I presented myself in July, I was told that there was not much to do during summer holiday and I had to wait until September before I could begin to make contacts and build relationships. I was very frustrated by this, because the initial plan was totally changed. Then I recognized that I must do something useful, instead of wasting the time.

I tried to contact anybody who could help my research. For instance, I contacted a director in an institute of educational management from my previous University in Shanghai. This person was an absolute stranger, but was kind enough to help me to build a link with the National Training Centre for secondary school principals. Though I had previously contacted this Centre, this gave me a personal contact there. So I had another contact for collecting my data in the national training centre. However when I went to visit the director of the training centre, I was again told that the training programme would not start until September. Then I was again thinking how to make good use of the summer holiday. What I did then was to contact a professor who is quite well-known in the field of school leadership in China and also led the national project for national standards for elementary school principals. He wrote quite a lot of books about leadership and school management. I contacted him and expressed that I was really looking forward to meeting him in person. Luckily I got a positive response and was permitted to go to meet him in his office. I was very fortunate, that he was willing to spend some time talking with a research student, as in China such important people are often very conscious of status, but he was extremely helpful, and I benefited greatly from his kindness. He seemed to warm to me during the interview, and he was very generous to give me quite a few books to read and also introduced me to colleagues who would be willing to talk me.

When I came back in Manchester, I wrote an email to these persons who helped me, to thank them for their assistance. To my surprise one of them even offered me a job in a teacher-training institute in a city in mainland of China! It was quite an attractive offer, but sadly I had to tell him that I was still at least one more year away from completing my research and being able to take a job. In fact that was not only time I was offered a job. When I was doing volunteer work in the teacher education institute in a district in Shanghai which was also
another main data source, the office colleagues quite appreciated my work and encouraged me to apply for a job there too. Even when I talked to the deputy director and the director in that institute, they suggested I could think about working in the principal training centre. This seemed strange, because I have not worked in a school, but it shows how the people I was meeting while doing my fieldwork were very interested in the approach I was using, which was quite novel—especially the shadowing, so much so that they felt it would be useful to employ someone who could use such methods.

However, as I waited until September, I was not thinking about jobs, just that I could not collect my data as I had planned. But I learned another thing from this: plans often just do not work out in practice, and a researcher needs to learn how to cope with changes. Firstly, the person form local authority who helped me to make contacts with some principals for my research suggested that I change my plan when she recognized that it was quite difficult to queue up principals to interview, as I had imagined. Also, in order to get a better feel for what they were telling me, she suggested I might interview some vice-principals and even middle-managers rather than just principals. In fact, this turned out to be very good advice. I did talk to quite number of staff from several of the schools, and while I did not use this as primary data for my research, there is no doubt that it provided helpful background information, and helped me to a better understanding of what the principals were saying to me in the interviews. And also, it became clear that shadowing a principal for a day per week over series of weeks, as I had originally intended, was not the way to build rapport. It would be better to shadow them for a number of days at one time. I decided to do this after I talked to my supervisor, who reminded me that the original plan was drawn up because it was thought that the principals would not like me following them for a whole week. It turned out that they preferred this—at least in principle, although having agreed to this it was more fragmented in reality due to the principal’s schedules. This was not the first time that I discovered that what the principals said they preferred did not always match with the reality. But I shadowed some principals for a few days in one week and another few days in a different week, and it worked out fine. But I remained determined that my research would to focus on the role of the principal and not all the school leaders. I was encouraged by my supervisor to focus on what could be done, rather than letting changed plans distract me. One example of this is quoted from an email, when he told me:

“The first priority is getting data. Plans often donnot work out. Don’t worry too much about your plans now. Take what is there! Get your participants talking about their work. They will
talk about what they care about or worry about most. Worrying about how it needs to be written up is a problem for later. 12/09/2013”

So as I continued collecting data, I remembered that appointments could be changed, in fact change becomes the only certainty! As reported above, sometimes I spent a whole day only for one interview. and quite a few times I was told that the appointment was cancelled only at the last minute. I wrote in my diary:

“I realize that plans often cannot work out, as distractions always turn up. I was planning to shadow a school principal tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, however I have had to delay it. I had to delay it because I was told to give some help to people who helped me build up some networks with the school principals. I was thinking that it is fair that you can only get something by giving something to others. As a research student, sometimes I feel that I have lower status and have to rely on people, and then I have to accept what they give to me and just be happy to take what I can have. That is the reality.

In the meanwhile, I am not stopping to seek for all opportunities to collect data. I also realize that it is not possible to shadow a school principal for a whole week, so I need to fit with the school principal’s available time and may have to shadow them for few days per week during a short period. 23/10/2012”

Of course, there were also better days. On some good days, for example, I interviewed 2 or 3 persons in one day, though I did not get home until nearly midnight. Quite often, I started the day quite early, as I had to manage more than three hours even four hours of travel every day to visit the interviewees. That was another challenge I had to cope with. I lived a bit far from the centre and Shanghai is such a big city. Sometimes I had to get up before 5 am to arrive at the school around 7 am. The principals quite often started their day even earlier. By the time I got home most nights it was almost 7 pm. So it was quite long day working during this period, but this is very common in China, particularly in big cities.

Even so, some principals were moved by my passion and efforts, so they tended to be more willing to talk to me and to show me things in their schools. When I realized that I could cope with most problems I encountered, I became more calm. I wrote in my diary and told myself that:

“Looking back to the date when I started preparing the fieldwork one month ago, plans have been changed to fit the reality during the process of the data collection. If you do not want to
be put in a passive position that will hinder your research progress, you have to make changes to fit the new context. That is the life. That is the real research! By doing research, I benefit from learning about change in theory but also in the life. When the door is closed, you should seek for other doors may open to you. Research is not a linear thinking process, neither the life. 24/10/2012”

Thus I came to terms with disruption to my plans, learning to be more flexible, to take opportunities when they were available, and that often unplanned meetings or events are as informative as the things you have been planning.

I think it might also be appropriate to write a brief summary of how to gain the confidence from the participants. First of all, I recognized that it is essential to have some knowledge in the field so I could be able to talk easily to the principals. Therefore, I got into the habit to check the Education District website to know the updated news every day and to understand the general background of education development in the District. I talked to people who are teachers, academics, the local authorities staff and principals at every opportunity in the office, workshops and schools. My ears were gradually filled with more and more from talking to these people and observing in the school. I had gradually realized that they liked to talk more when they were responded to appropriately.

As I earlier mentioned I tried to attend any activity which I think is useful to do my research, such as workshops and training programme for the local school principals and ‘Academic Festival’ in the local district and so on. These kinds of activities I attended gave me opportunities to know more people and talk to them and to gather more information about what was going on in the schools. I was able to fix some appointments with the principals and teachers to subsequently interview them and visit their schools. The following extracts from my diary was written when I planned to interview the principals from the national training programme after observing the programme for some days.

“One spent a whole day to observe the training programme for the secondary school principals. Today’s programme was designed for principals to talk about their perspectives on education development and school management, using their own cases. .... In addition, I have been staying with them for the whole day and listening to what principals talked during the breaks. This pre-preparation was quite helpful to build up closer relationships with participants. I am not a total stranger there now. When I talked to principals, they were quite talkative with me, and told me stories and examples. 26/11/2012”
It was important to suit the participants’ preferences, in terms of time and the venue. As I recorded that:

“The ways to collect data have become multiple. For example, I conducted informal interviews when I was walking around the school with the principal, or even when the principals were having lunch or dinner. I even talked to a school principal while travelling with him on the way to the airport in a taxi and at the airport waiting for check in. 05/12/2012”

I always offered any help I could to meet the participants’ needs. I tried to give some little help when I was observing the programme in the National Training Centre, even helping out by printing and photocopying documents. That was partly the reason they allowed me to go back to observe the second phase of the training programme for principals that took place later in the year. Another example, when I shadowed a principal, I was asked to help the principal prepare a presentation she had to make. I read it very carefully and gave her some comments. Actually I was able to listen to her presentation in the workshop and she was quite confident. The principal was very happy about that and this helped me to carry out a relaxed visit to her school, and make other interview arrangements with some of her staff.

Therefore, it is important to be reliable and genuine to attain people’s trust I think. These contacts I developed also helped me to use snowball-sampling strategies for data collection, because they were happy to introduce me to or even arrange interviews for me with other potential informants. I remember one principal quite appreciated my research and my hard work, and I discovered that she is also studying for her Ph.D. So when I tried to ask her to recommend one or two principals who would be good informants she was happy to help me. And she did help me to get two more principals to take a part in my research. I was also able to go back to visit her school for a second time and went to see her again to say thanks before I came back in Manchester. She even suggested that I could write to her if I had more questions after I returned to England.

Snowball sampling created new opportunities to get access to more participants. For instance, the person who initially helped me to get contact with principals felt a bit reluctant to contact a school principal I particularly wanted to interview. But I did not give up. I knew another staff member working in the local authority, and she did her master’s degree in the same university where I did my master’s. I asked her whether she could contact some principals she knew to ask for permission for me to visit them. She even took me to visit one school. I
was very happy to talk to that principal who I found was very visionary and intelligent. We had a lunch together and of course, I had then had more chances to interview to him.

There are also practical aspects to the ethical considerations to bear in mind when carrying out research. I knew I needed to deal with any potential sensitive topics properly if they arose. To be honest, I rarely encountered this kind of problem, only once or twice. For instance, I recounted in my diary on one occasion that:

“I went to a quite good high school to interview a principal who I have been endeavoring to interview for some time. It was quite a nice conversation. Well, when we talked about the impact of the new policies on his work, the participant mentioned that he would talk more if the conversation was not recorded. I said I could switch off the digital recorder. I was happy he was quite straightforward. I know that some principals are still quite cautious about their comments, whoever they are speaking to. As we all know, we just finished 18th CPC National Congress. There are some new policies on education, and many people are unsure about them. It is hard to get honest views. 25/12/2012 (ethical considerations)”

The factors mentioned above were all part of my efforts, and all helped to generate rich and relevant data I need for this research. What is interesting is that each of them is a small thing, and might not be thought important. But in fact, all these small things together make a big difference. I learned while doing fieldwork that such small things can make a big difference to the quality of relationships, and that relationships make a big difference to the quality of discussion with research participants.

I also benefited from keeping in touch with my supervisor and reporting my progress to him regularly when I was away. I could get his helpful suggestion when he knew what I was doing and what problems I was experiencing. I personally like quoting some useful comments from my supervisor and kept it in my diary, things like:

“Response from my supervisor: I think that you are finding out quite a lot about how schools really work and also about what Chinese principals do and think, but of course this is not happening very neatly, but don’t worry…. I think that you are probably developing a picture of what school leaders do, and of the main pressures that they are aware of. It might be that the best interviews you get are the last ones you do, because you know more about the issues and what you want to ask each time. But it can be quite frustrating, I know. You must make
sure that you are keeping good records of what you are doing, so that you are getting as much data as possible recorded at the time. 08/11/2012”

As it can be seen, the research diary helped me to reflect on my research while I was doing it. This added more rigorous thinking along the whole journey. When I could finally sit down to analyze the data I obtained from the participants, writing a diary with my reflections partly contributed to the thematic analysis of such a massive data set.

When I looked back the interviews, I can say that I was learning as I went along. Obviously, I did gain more information in the later interviews than in the earlier ones. I can see I was asking slightly different questions, because I was learning. Looking back these data as I discussed in the last chapter, these data answered some of the questions, perhaps most of the questions, though it does not answer others as well as I hoped. This is because I could not really find out about some things. Nevertheless, the findings also have information in them that I had not been looking for it when I started, which is very interesting. For example, the participants were telling me about the problems of bringing about changes in teachers’ behavior because of the impact of ‘responding to teaching the children not the curriculum’. That is the kind of issue that came out as I went along that was not there when I started out. My research diaries also recorded some of my thoughts at the stage of data analysis. One example records:

“I have to say it is quite time-consuming process, managing huge amounts of data and making sense of them. But I have been surprised and even got excited by what the principals said. For example, the impact of social change on education and reforms, I found out quite a bit about conflicts between traditional cultural values and the reform programme. To be honest, when I was in China I lived through it but I did not notice it. But when I came to do this research, suddenly the importance of social change in China became clear. I understood that. And the principals were mainly concerned about leading teacher development to help teachers shift from a ‘teacher-centred’ to a ‘student-centred’ approach, which is also one of the biggest challenge facing them. These are things I did not expect to focus on in my research questions until, they emerged from the data… 15/11/2013”

When I look back, I can see my research diary get better and stronger and deeper over time. I have seen a lot, heard a lot, and hope I have learned a lot these past four years, and I am grateful for the assistance that so many people have given to help me develop as an education researcher during my time in Manchester.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Observation schedule for classes

The National Training programme for secondary principals in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Field Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
<td>What are the lesson objectives?</td>
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<td>Teaching strategies and principals response</td>
<td>What teaching methods are used?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What activities they do in the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How the teacher engages principals?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are principals active in the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How the teacher interacts with principals?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning materials</td>
<td>What kind of materials or learning resources they use?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
<td>How is the learning environment created by the teacher?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2 Semi-structured Interview guide for principals

Participants: 6-8 principals who attend the National training programme
Time: around one hour

Note: I will collect the Consent form with their signatures and will explain that our interview is completely anonymous and no records of your personal information will be involved. I also will ask for permission to audio record.

Questions around:

Introduction

1. Can you briefly describe your job and your career path before becoming a principal?

2. How would you describe the principal’s role?
Experience being a principal
3. What do you think are the most important aspects of your role as a principal?

4. What are your priorities and what are obstacles to achieving your priorities?

5. How do you think the changes like new curriculum reform and other changes influence on the way you carry your job?

6. What do you think are the big challenges facing principals at present?

7. What are your opinions on and approaches to leadership?

8. What do you think about western views on leadership? Is there any difference from leadership in China?

Summary
9. What do you think are the most important qualities in a principal?

10. Is there something else you want to say about the role of principals?

Thanks! If you have more questions, or more things want to share with me, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone or even face to face conversations.

Appendix 2 in Mandarin 半结构式访谈
参与者：中学校长培训中心
时间：大约 30-60 分钟
声明：此次访谈是建立在被访者们的自愿参与的基础上的。本人也将声明访谈完全是匿名的。任何个人信息都不会泄露或公布。访谈录音也会先争取他们的同意，录音的目的是为了更全面的理解被访者们的观点陈述。
主要话题：
导入部分：
关于培训的话题
1. 您是自愿来参加培训的还是通过选拔过来的？您什么时候开始并结束这次培训？
2. 您接受了哪些方面的培训？
3. 您最感兴趣的培训是什么？
4. 您觉得校长培训对您哪方面成长最有帮助？您对当前校长培训模式有什么看法吗？

关于中学校长职责及角色的相关话题：
5. 过去校长的工作方式是怎样的？现在校长的工作方式又是怎样的？
6. 现在校长承担的责任是否比以前多了？主要体现在哪些方面？
7. 您认为我国中学校长的角色是什么？
8. 其中最重要的角色是什么？

关于校长工作模式的相关话题
9. 校长一般忙于什么事务？
10. 哪些事情占用校长最多的时间？
11. 您觉得其中哪些事情是没必要花那么多时间做的？
12. 如果可以改变目前的校长工作模式的话，您觉得应该怎么去改？
13. 您认为对校长来说哪些是最重要的事情？在您优先考虑去做一些重要事务时，您所面临哪些困难呢? (举例)
14. 您认为未来几年中，校长所面临的最大挑战是什么？

小结
15. 您认为校长最重要的素质是什么？
16. 关于中学校长角色，您还有什么需要补充的吗？

谢谢！如果您过后还有什么问题或想法想与我分享，请跟我联系（email:yifenxu@gmail.com，手机：15800838599）或面谈。

其它校长半结构式访谈
参与者：中学校长
时间：大约 30-60 分钟
声明：此次访谈是建立在被访者们的自愿参与的基础上的。本人也将声明访谈完全是匿名的。任何个人信息都不会泄漏或公布。访谈录音也会先争取他们的同意，录音的目的是为了更全面的理解被访者们的观点陈述。
主要话题：
导入部分：
1. 您能简单介绍一下您的学校情况及您近两年的工作变动吗？

关于中学校长角色的相关话题：
2. 您认为我国中学校长的角色是什么？
3. 其中最重要的角色是什么？

关于校长工作模式的相关话题
4. 校长一般忙于什么事务？
5. 哪些事情占用校长最多的时间？
6. 您觉得其中哪些事情是没必要做的？
7. 如果可以改变目前的校长工作模式的话，您觉得应该怎么去改？
8. 您认为哪些是对校长这一职位来说是最重要的事情？您怎么确保您把时间花在您认为最重要的事情上？
9. 在您优先考虑去做一些重要事务时，您所面临哪些困难呢？（举例）
10. 您认为未来几年中，校长所面临的最大挑战是什么？

小结

11. 您认为校长最重要的素质是什么？
12. 关于中学校长角色，您还有什么需要补充的吗？

谢谢！如果您过后还有什么问题或想法想与我分享，请跟我联系（徐以芬 email:yifenxu@gmail.com，手机：15800838599）或面谈。

Appendix3  Semi-structured Interview guide for principal trainers

Participants: 3-4 principal trainers
Time: 40-60 minutes
Note: I will collect the Consent form with their signatures and will explain that our interview is completely anonymous and no records of your personal information will be involved. I also will ask for permission to audio record.

Questions around:

Introduction
1. Can you briefly describe your job and your career path before becoming a principal trainer？可以简单介绍一下您的工作及最近几年的工作变迁吗？
2. How would you describe youe role？您是怎么看待您的角色的？

About the training programme
3. What sorts of programme do you offer? What topics?你们提供的培训有哪些？涉及哪些话题？
4. What are teaching methods do you use? What is the length of the training for principals?使用怎样的教学方式？培训的长度一般多少？
5. Is there any accreditation? 怎么评估校长？
6. How are its trainees selected? Where are the trainers recruited from?如何选择被培训的校长们？培训者是一般从哪来招聘来的？
7. What are the qualities of a good trainer? 您认为优秀的培训者应该具备的素质？
8. What do you think about the current training/development available to school principals? Nationally? In the local district? 您是怎么看待目前所提供给校长们的培训的？一般而言？或就您当地情况而言？
9. Do you think it is sufficient to meet their needs? 这些培训满足了培训者的需求了吗？

Summary
10. What changes have you seen in the way principals are trained over the recent years? 最近几年您所看到的校长培训的方式有哪些变化？
11. If you could wave a magic wand and change the way principals in China are trained for their job, what would you do differently? 假如您手中有一个魔棒，您可以改变校长培训的方式，您最想如何去改变？

Thanks! If you have more questions, or more things want to share with me, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone or even face to face conversations. 谢谢！如果您过后还有什么问题或想法想与我分享，请跟我联系（徐以芬 email:yifenxu@gmail.com，手机：15800838599）或面谈。

Appendix 4 observing principals schedule—4 principals will be chosen from 4-5 secondary schools in Shanghai
Observing principals guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Field note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When do the principals start and finish their work during the daytime?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do principals usually do when they start their work in the morning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of people the principals will meet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the principals focus on in the meeting with their staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are most frequent activities the principal attend?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are other activities out of the school the principals have to attend?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5 Semi-structured interview guide –4 principals after a few weeks’ observing

The interviews with the principals from 4 sample schools will be conducted with the same principles of ethical considering, so confidentiality will be completely considered. Each interview will run around one hour and I hope to get permission to audio record.
A list of questions will embrace:
How do you plan your day?
What are your priorities as a principal? How have they been changed by recent education reform?
Are there problems/obstacles that prevent you from working as you would like?
How do you think about your working patterns? Is there something you hope to change?
Is there anything else you want to comment on the role of principals?
Other questions will be asked based on the observations

Appendix 5 in Mandarin
半结构式访谈-在结束为期几周的观察校长之后对校长分别所做的访谈
对校长的访谈同样会遵守研究道德的相关原则，所以会充分考虑到其隐私权。每次访谈大约1个小时，并希望得到允许进行录音。
所涉及的问题将会包括以下几点:

1. 您是怎么规划您的一天的工作的?

2. 您认为校长的首要工作是什么? 这些首要工作是否因现在的教育改革而有所改变或影响呢?

3. 有没有一些困难或问题影响了您想要的那种工作呢?

4. 对您的工作模式您有什么看法吗? 有没有期待有所改变?

5. 关于校长角色您还有什么需要补充或评论的吗?

Appendix 6 Information sheet to participants
Introductory Letter 1 (for interviews principals)
Dear Principal,
I am currently a PhD student at the School of Education in the University of Manchester. To fulfil my PhD study, I have to write a thesis and go back to our country to do field work. I am interested in educational leadership and school improvement, so I have chosen ‘investigating the role of secondary school principals in China’ for my dissertation. As part of this study, I am going to interview 6-8 secondary school principals about their experiences of headship. The interviews will take around an hour. For the location of interview, I am happy with any place convenient to you. I would like to ask if you are willing to be interviewed for this study. Your participation and opinion will be greatly valued. However, I respect every participant who wants to withdraw, if you feel uncomfortable during the participation in my study.
Interview data will be processed systematically and analysed for use in the thesis, though neither participants nor their schools will be identified by name. In fact, the Data Protection Act and the University Data Protection Policy require all data is handled confidentially and securely. So confidentiality is guaranteed that no names or personal information will be kept records. When I finish this study, I will be delighted to share or report the finding to you, if you are interested in these. For my better understanding, I would like to audio-record the interview. The recording will be deleted after the research is completed. Looking forward to your permission. Thanks very much! Yours sincerely, Yifen Xu

Contact information:
Email: yifenxu@gmail.com
Mobile number: 07513006731

Appendix 6 in Mandarin
介绍信
尊敬的校长：
您好！
首先，请允许自我介绍一下。我是英国曼彻斯特大学教育学院的在读博士生。此次信件，也是为了我的博士论文在国内的调研事宜。我因对教育领导力和学校发展比较感兴趣，所以我拟定了‘探讨当前中学校长角色’为我的博士论文的话题。作为论文研究的其中一块，我将要采访 6-8 位中学校长探讨他们领导职务的经验。访谈时间大约 45-60 分钟。访谈地点，以您的方便而定。所以，在此征询您是否愿意参与我的调研中。您的参与及您宝贵的观点都将对我的论文有非常重要的价值。当然，我也尊重您的应有的权利，当您觉得在我的调研中给您造成不舒适的感觉时，您可以选择暂停或退出。
访谈所得的信息将用于我的博士论文中，但是所有涉及到参与者的个人姓名及学校名字都将是匿名或者是化名代之。事实上，基于数据保护方案及大学数据保护政策的要求，所有的数据都将会安全处理并妥善放置确保为参与者保守机密。所以任何参与者的姓名及个人信息都是保密的。当我完成我的论文后，如果您对我的论文感兴趣，我将非常乐意分享我收集数据后所得的发现及结论部分。
Appendix 7 Introductory Letter2 (for observing principals in their schools and interviewing with them)

Dear Principal,

I am currently a PhD student at the School of Education in the University of Manchester. To fulfil my PhD study, I have to write a thesis and go back to our country to do field work. I am interested in educational leadership and school improvement, so I have chosen ‘investigating the role of secondary school principals in China’ for my dissertation. As part of this study, I am hoping to ‘shadow’ some secondary school principals for a while, to get a feeling for the way their working day is made up. I am looking to spend one day each week during around a week period in school, observing the school principals. By ‘shadowing’ I mean following you during the working day, but I mainly focus on meetings that principals attend to discuss topics related to school management. Of course, if confidential matters arise that it would not be appropriate for me to observe, I would not expect to attend those meetings. The purpose of this research is to familiarize myself with the principal’s typical working day. At the end of each day spent in school, I would have a short conversation with you about the day’s activities and at the end of the eight weeks; I would arrange to conduct a longer, in-depth interview, in which I would hope to have a broader discussion. I would like to ask if you are willing to participate in this study, and would let me ‘shadow’ you. Your participation and opinion will be greatly valued. However, I respect every participant who wants to withdraw, if you feel uncomfortable during the participation in my study.

Interview data will be processed systematically and analysed for use in the dissertation, though neither participants nor their schools will be identified by name. In fact, the Data Protection Act and the University Data Protection Policy require all data is handled confidentially and securely. So confidentiality is guaranteed that no names or personal information will be kept records.

When I finish this study, I will be delighted to share or report the finding to you, if you are interested in these.

For my better understanding, I would like to audio-record the interview. The recording will be deleted after the research is completed.

Looking forward to your permission.

Thanks very much!

Yours sincerely,

Yifen Xu

Contact information:
Email: yifenxu@gmail.com
Mobile number: 07513006731
介绍信（影子校长）
尊敬的校长：
您好！
首先，请允许自我介绍一下。我是英国曼彻斯特大学教育学院的在读博士生。此次信件，也是为了我的博士论文在国内的调研事宜。
我因对教育领导力和学校发展比较感兴趣，所以我拟定了‘探讨当前中学校长角色’为我的博士论文的话题。
作为论文研究的其中一块，我希望能到贵校去做调研，并采用所谓‘影子校长’的方式去感受校长们一天的活动。我希望能到贵校集中跟随校长一周的时间，或者在持续6-8周的时间里，希望每周能有一天的时间去贵学校。确切一点的说，‘影子校长’就是在校长工作日跟随其一天，并记录其活动。而我将主要关注校长所参与的关于学校发展的会议。当然，如果涉及到一些机密性话题，不适合我在场，我将不会出现在其中。
此调研的目的主要是为了熟悉校长们比较有代表性的一天的工作安排。在结束一天的工作之前，若有时间我希望能跟校长们就当天的活动进行简短的交流。而在调研结束时，我期望能与每位校长开展一次比较深入宽泛一些的访谈。
您的参与及您宝贵的观点都将对我的论文有非常重要的价值。当然，我也尊重您的应有的权利，当您觉得在我的调研中给您造成不舒适的感觉时，您可以选择暂停或退出。访谈所得的信息将用于我的博士论文中，但是所有涉及到参与者的个人姓名及学校名字都将是匿名或者是化名代之。
事实上，基于数据保护方案及大学数据保护政策的要求，所有的数据都将会安全处理并妥善放置确保为参与者保守机密。所以任何参与者的姓名及个人信息都是保密的。
当我完成我的论文后，如果您对我的论文感兴趣，我将非常乐意分享我收集数据后所得的发现及结论部分。
最后，想请求一点的是，为了我更好的理解您的观点，请允许我访谈录音。这些录音也将会在我完成我的研究后删除。
期待您的支持！
非常感谢！
徐以芬敬上
联系方式：yifenxu@gmail.com 手机：15800838599（上海），00+44(0)7513006731（英国手机）
Appendix 8 Informed consent form (Both in Mandarin and English)

项目标题：引领中学：教育改革对中国中学校长角色的影响
Project Title: Leading a Chinese secondary school: the impact of education reform on the secondary school principal’s role in China

知情同意书
Informed Consent form

如果您愿意参加访谈，请填一下下面的表格并签字。
If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

1. 我确认我已经了解了此项目的一些信息，并经考虑，探究之后决定参与。
I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. 我知道我的参与是自愿的。所以我也有权在我想退出的时侯退出。
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.

3. 我理解访谈将会被录音
I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded

4. 我同意使用匿名的访谈记录方式
I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

5. 我同意访谈所搜集的相关数据将来会给此访谈者的导师及最后的论文答辩人员看
I agree that any data collected may be passed to two supervisors who will mark the thesis

我同意参与此研究的访谈
I agree to take part in the above project

参与者姓名 Name of participant

日期 Date

签字 Signature

拟定同意书的人 Name of person taking consent

日期 Date

签字 Signature
Appendix 9 Interview transcripts(One example from one complete interview both in Mandarin and English)

Interviewee 8 27/11/2012

The participant has attended the project of shadowing principals and has shadowed principals in a school in USA. When I went to interview her, she just came back from USA and has just become a new principal in a secondary school in Shanghai. She has been a principal for 8 years in a different school in Shanghai before she moves to the current school.

The participant: W
The Researcher: R

Note: I showed the interview schedule to the participant, and I explained that it was not necessary to answer the questions in order and it was more like a free conversation based on the main topic.

R: Would you like to have a look at the schedule for a while?
W: yes.
R: Ok.
W: I was thinking about ‘the role of the school principal’ (a question in the list of interview schedule). The role of the school principal should be defined within the context of education.
W: We cannot define our role as the school principal without regarding the educational context. So, I think that the principal had to manage a lot of administrative stuff in the past. Compared to the school principal in USA, actually, there are some similar aspects in terms of the role of principal in China. It means that the principal used to focus on managing teaching and learning,
R: yes.
W: budget and financial management,
R: yes.
W: dealing with interpersonal issues and building up good relationships with other stakeholders,
W: 还有学校一种人际关系的协调。
R: 对。
W: 包括是和家长，学生的一个互相之间的资源，包括和家长学生的一个交流，沟通。
还有就是跟上级领导你的一种资源的争取。
以前的校长可能还要谋划他的学校的教职工的一个福利问题。
R: 对。
W: 对吧？但是呢，就是说随着时间的这个变化呢，现在的这个校长呢，他可能有更多的时间专注于学校的一个教育教学的管理。
R: 哦。
W: 因为我们从徐汇区来讲，其他区我不太清楚啊，至少从徐汇区来讲，每一所学校他的一个经费的投入，不管是公用经费，还是人员经费，也就是按照一个学校的学生数，学校的规模。
R: 哦，拨给你的？
W: 教育局都是统一的下拨。所以，不存在校长，我还要…以前的学校都还有校办工厂，不知道你知道吧？
R: 哦，我知道。就是说八十年代的时候…
W: 对那个时代的校长，可能他们专门有一部分的经历或者说是学校专门有一个副校长来为学校这块工作要操心，为教师谋福利。那么，现在来讲的，可能就是说，校长这一块的烦恼，就是说没有了啦，他可能比较关注学校的教学管理，专注于学校教师的专业发展。
R: 就是说现在校长，我们不需要去搞一些赞助啊。
W: 嗯，经济类的，不允许的，本身来说，就是不允许的。也就是说赞助什么的，这个可能外地还有，如果是在上海，尤其是徐汇区，校长把主要的精力放在拉赞助。你来了赞助也不能用啊，因为这是违反国家法律法规的。
R: 嗯？可是有些学校跟已经经济开发区
from some economic development zone to set up scholarships in their school.

W: Yes. You can do it. But actually, it is not the main focus to the school principals, especially the public schools like ours. If it is a private school, they may be sponsored by companies. For the public school principals, their accountability is quite clear. The local authorities including Shanghai municipal education commission, and even the government define their role as an educational facilitator.

**Educational leadership embraces some elements, i.e. school curriculum development. It is quite significant role which is also defined as our school principal role.**

R: Is it a most important role as the school principal?

W: Yes. It is. Compared to the school in the past, the schools in nowadays are captured with distinguishing feature. First of all, curriculum development is considered as the priority in the school. In old days, it was neat and tidy in terms of the pedagogy. The curriculum was planned and designed by the government. We had national curriculum and teaching guidance books. But now, it consists of several domains. We have national curriculum. We also can develop school-based curriculum which is considered as our school’s characteristic distinguished from other schools.

R: Yes

W: In that sense, the curriculum development, especially leading curriculum development is actually a big challenge confronting the principals with standing higher expectations. It means that principals have to complete the tasks and achieve the aims of national curriculum to cope with exams, and simultaneously, they have to develop school-based curriculum with regarding students’ needs. In that way, you are
个课程领导的角色来讲，是他的一个很重要的一个角色。这是一个，第二个，就是说可能我们，上海的校长，比较多的就是从一线老师过来。
R: 先是教书。
W: 先是教书，教的相对可以的话，那么他一步步走到，从中层啊，走到校长岗位上。
所以，从我们自身的愿望来说，就是我刚刚讲的这个。就是说他们可能更多的关注校长，就是说，你首先你必须是一个学校课程建设的领导者，但是从我们个人的角度，主观来讲，我们自身对自身的一个人定位，我们更多的可能是一个教学的管理者。
R: 噢。
W: 那么我们本身说，很多校长都是一线老师出身。
R: 哎，您是教什么科目的?
W: 我是教语文的。所以从这个角度来讲呢，我们可能更为关注的是学校当中一个教学的组织和管理，而且事实上，这也确实是校长一个非常重要的角色，定位和职责。因为学校教学管理和组织，其实是学校一个非常重要的工作。
R: 也是占用您很多时间的一个工作?
W: 当然。这其实是占据校长一个很多时间的一个工作。
R: 是不是您目前负责教学这一块?
W: 哎。没有。我目前没有负责教学这一块。因为，是这样的，其实校长、副校长定位不一样。校长在学校里他要负责的几块工作我可以跟你讲一下。他其实是总揽。总揽呢，它主要抓几块，第一个就是学校的课程建设；第二个就是学校的教学管理和组织；第三个就是学校的一个财产财务的管理和组织，那么这是第三块；第四块，就是教师的专业发展；第五个就是协调各种人际关系的关系，这种各种关系包括对上，对家长，对学生，还有老师。有很多块。
R: 是的。如果一个非常优秀的老师，可能他可能就成为了学校的中间领导，然后一步步走到校长岗位上。所以，从我们自身的愿望来说，就是我刚刚讲的这个。就是说他们可能更多的关注校长，就是说，你首先你必须是一个学校课程建设的领导者，但是从我们个人的角度，主观来讲，我们自身对自身的一个人定位，我们更多的可能是一个教学的管理者。
W: So quite a large number of principals are originally front-line teachers.
R: By the way, what did you teach?
W: I was a Chinese Teacher. For that perspective, I would concern more about teaching and learning organization and management. In addition, it is a very important role to principals. Teaching and learning management and organization is very important in the school.
R: Does it take you most of your time?
W: Sure. It does take the principal a lot of time to do it.
W: Do you take charge of teaching and learning?
W: No. I do not take charge of it currently. (She will take the position as the principal in two days)
R: It is because that there are different roles for principals and vice principals. In schools, principals must be responsible for several things and they need to overview everything. Firstly, they should lead curriculum development; secondly, they need to organize and manage teaching and learning; thirdly, they need to manage budget; fourthly, they need to lead teacher professional development; Fifthly, they have to deal with all sorts of interpersonal issues

R: they are teachers in the beginning.
W: Yes. If you are a very good teacher, you may be promoted as the middle leader and then become a principal. Therefore, principal are generally defined as the role of a leader of curriculum development. But from our own perspective, we would rather define us as a manager of teaching and learning.
R: 嗯。  
W: 那么，我觉得还有一个重要的工作，对校长来说就是学校的安全管理。  
R: 对。  
W: 对对吧。还有一个学校的安全管理。  
R: 这个压力还是蛮大的。  
W: 非常大。其实在美国，学校安全管理是校长的一个很重要的一个工作。  
R: 他们也是把安全看做很重要的一块？  
W: 对反对。我们认为，我们把安全放在很重要的位置，可能只是口头的东西。  
W: 就是在整体工作中，只是占一小部分。  
R: 或者是喊的比较多的事情。  
W: 就是在中国的工作中。  
R: 有一点，可能这个防火、消防意识还是蛮重要的。  
W: 他们不仅是防火，还有校园的一些安全建设。  
R: 嗯。  
W: 比如说他们是可以携带枪支的，等等。  
R: 嗯。  
W: 在整体工作中，只是占一小部分。  
W: （谈的是中国的安全工作）  
R: 有一点，可能这个防火、消防意识还是蛮重要的。  
W: 他们不仅是防火，还有校园的一些安全建设。  
R: 嗯。  
W: 比如说他们是可以携带枪支的，等等。  
R: 嗯。  
W: 就是在中国的工作中。  
R: 有一点，可能这个防火、消防意识还是蛮重要的。  
W: 他们不仅是防火，还有校园的一些安全建设。  
R: 嗯。  
W: 但是，其实说，我刚刚讲了，这是校长日常工作中的第一个问题（访谈框架里的一个问题）。校长他有一个一般忙于什么事？其实主要是这几大块的工作。  
R: 啊。  
W: 那么，如果说你我说哪些事情占用校长最多的话，  
R: 嗯。  
W: 那么，现在我也非常客观的跟你讲，其实占用校长，现在来说最多的，我认为就是学校的一个各类人际关系的一个协调或者处理，这个可能占用校长比较多的一个经历和时间。  
R: 比如说，我们校长下达一个什么命令，怎么样让下面的老师做思想工作，理解透彻

and to build up positive relationships with local authorities, parents, students and teachers, as so on.

R: yes.
W: So, I think there is another important responsibility to principals is the school security.  
R: Right.  
W: Right. School security management.  
R: it gives principals quite a lot pressure.  
W: Quite big pressure. In USA, actually, it is quite important for principals to assure school security.  
R: Do principals mostly concern school security?  
W: Yes, yes yes. I think we put school security in a quite important position, but we talk about it more that what we actually do.  
R: Or there is more verbal emphasis.  
W: but it takes quite tinny bite in the whole of school management.  
R: they are very serious about fire protection (in USA)  
W: they do not only care about fire protection, but also the school security.  
R: do they?  
W: i.e. they are allowed to keep guns(in USA). In the sense, it is a bit different from us. Anyway, above tasks, principals need to take whole responsibility.  
R: Yes.  
W: But, actually, I just talked about the first question: what are principals busy with generally? They are busy with above several things I mentioned.  
R: ok.  
W: well, if you ask me what takes principals most of time?  
R: Yes.  

W: So, to be honest, I can be very objectively
去执行是吧？
W：嗯嗯。但是这个其实也要分几步来做 的。第一个就是你讲的这个决策。就是说，决策其实还有决策前，决策当中，决策以后。那么决策前，校长其实是，他怕，校长要有一个酝酿。对吧？
R：嗯嗯。

W：那么，这个酝酿的，就是说，一般来说，如果学校有书记的话（校长书记不是同一个人），校长和书记要进行酝酿。第二个是教务会成员的一个酝酿。那么，一旦行政决策之后呢，其实很多的工作不是校长直接去做，他可能就是说要跟下面的副校长、中层干部有一个很好的沟通。
R：就是说行政会是吧？（每周五的行政例会）
W：对对对。它（行政会）会有一个工作任务的布置，协调和沟通。其实，这个很重要，因为你首先要说服下面的副校长…
R：对。中层。
W：和中层，他首先要跟你达成一个共识。否则的话，你（校长）仅仅是一种命令的话，那么他（指副校长和中层们）在下达的过程中，你仅仅是一种上传下达。也就是说完成…
R：甚至是表面上…去敷衍（执行）
W：对对对。那么，这样下去以后呢，下面再去执行过程当中，它会产生很多的质疑。甚至是说影响执行的一个效果。所以，其实在整个执行过程中，就是说，你刚刚在讲对校长本身的决策来讲，我觉得，他
telling you that building up good relationships with several stakeholders and others and dealing with interpersonal issues take principals quite a lot time.
R: Take an example, when the principal want to order something or to make some plans, they have to make sure the teachers can understand it and persuade them to carry it out?
W: Yes. But it needs some steps to complete it. The fist step is that what you talked about policies/strategies making. When you make policies, you have to do some preparations before the policy making, to think about what you will do during the policy making and after the policy making. Before the policy making, the principal needs to make some preparations, do they?
R: Yes, yes.
W: So, to prepare for the policy making, if there is a separate party secretary, both of the principal and the secretary will discuss together first. And then all the member of middle leaders will gather to discuss it. Once the policy has been made, the principal will leave it to the subordinates to carry it out. The principal may need to discuss with the vice principals and the middle leader in advance.
R: Do you mean the administrative meeting on Fridays?
W: Yes, yes, yes. It (the administrative meeting) mainly covers the tasks assignment, coordination and communication. It is quite important to get the new polices or strategies through the meeting because you need to persuade the vice principals first.
R: Right. The middle leaders
W: and middle leaders. First of all, they (vice principals and middle leaders) need to get consensus with you. Otherwise, what you say is considered as the order, so they will just pass the order to the other subordinates. It means that they complete it…
R: they even just pretend to follow…
她（校长）其实，在整个的决策当中，有许多的事情去做。决策之前，他必须对整个事情也有一个预控，也就是说要了解一个，同样发生一件事情，就是班子会怎么想？

R: 或者是预测哪些矛盾是吧？
W: 对，会有哪些矛盾？是吧，你要有一个风险的预估。
R: 哦。有哪些方面的反对意见？
W: 嗯，对对对，对吧？还有就是，你这个决策以后，就是同样一件事情，你可能会有几套方案。
R: 对。
W: 那么，每一套方案它可能会产生的一个预后风险是什么？这些可能都要做一个预测和评估。
R: 有个前瞻性的。
W: 对对对，有个前瞻性。就这一点很重要，而不仅仅是一件事情，我主观判断一下，大概是这样做，我就这样做下去，这个其实是带来的后续的一个风险是很大，因为现在，整体来讲，不管你这件事情是涉及老师们的，还是涉及到家长的，学生的，实际上他们之间都会产生一种利益上的冲突。那么，这个就是说，他需要校长之前能够对一种很多关系的充分的分析，并且对这种关系，他需要有一个充分的预估。其实这个我认为在学校当中还是占了校长比较多的一个精力。
R: 就是说，这个事情没做之前，我已经想到了这个后果是什么样子的了?
W: 对对对。（Pause for a while）
R: 嗯。
W: 那么，所以呢，就是说，我讲的这个，其实就是说我们目前比较客观的一个现实。
R: 嗯。
W: 但是从另一个角度来说，从我们整个大的背景来说，从我们上级部门对我们要求来讲，其实也许远远不止这些。他们感觉就
是说，做校长，对校长角色定位，有这么几步路要走。第一个，如果你是一个新校长的话，可能就是治乱，或者是摆平很多事情。因为，就是说，当你刚刚走上这个岗位的时候，首先，就是说，你能把这个学校摆摆平，能够甚至是治乱，也就是说你对自己当前的一个角色定位。
R：啊，就是说，分阶段性的一个。
W：对吧，然后呢，你要摆平，可能他首先关注的一个就是当前的学校的整体的制度的建设。
R：嗯。
W：对吧。因为有了这样一个的制度的建设的话，可能，就是很多事情，他都能在一个正常的轨道上运行。
R：是个保障？
W：对。是个保障。那么，可能在我们这所学校呢，其实未必会有这样一个问题。可能整体的一个制度建设比较好。
R：比较完善了。
W：比较完善了。
W：那么，接下来要做的一个事情是什么，其实呢，可能（拖长音，重点强调）就是说，一些做的比较成熟的一些校长，比如说，就像我们孙校长，现在，他马上就退休了，他可能就是说，在后续，如果说，你现在问他的话（校长角色），他可能更专注于文化的立校。
R：对对对。
W：对吧？对学校的立校。他可能就是对自己角色的一个定位的话，就是对学校文化的一个创建。
R：对。
W：文化环境，文化氛围，包括学校的一个精神。这个可能要经过一段时间的提炼，一段时间的建设以后，
R：是。
W：他才能达成的。所以，不同的校长，在
不同的时期，他对自身角色的定位是不一样的。因为，我觉得，对所有校长来讲，他的事务性的工作，就是我刚刚讲的分为几大块的。然后就是说，你在安排校长管理学校整个风格来讲，可能他在不同的阶段，他又不同的角色的认定。

R：嗯。着重点也不一样。
W：嗯。着重点也不一样。
R：可能，您这个着重点，就跟老校长的这个着重点是不一样的。
W：嗯。对。因为就是说，我呢，是这样的。其实我曾经在这所学校待了很长时间。
R：哦。
W：原来就是这所学校的老老师，然后就是做这所学校的中层干部。
R：一步一步的。
W：也做过这所学校的副职。后来调出去，到一所初级中学做了五年的校长。然后调回来以后，其实我的角色是书记不是校长。是书记副校长。
R：Mmhmm.
W：所以，最近吧，我可能就接任校长了。就等于又是把原来校长这个活，要重新接起来。那么，对我来说，应该不存在治乱的问题，因为老校长已经把学校治理的很好了。
R：而且您对这个学校也比较了解。
W：嗯。比较熟悉。但是呢，至少我觉得，应该有一个传承和过渡。
R：对。这个是的。
W：然后呢，就是说原来的一些东西，我觉得，就是说，在原来的基础上怎么把它发扬光大的问题。还有就是说，把原来不足的地方如何去完善的问题。当然对我来讲，我也很客观的说，就是对老师的一个博弈，也就

W：cultural environment, cultural atmosphere and the school’s core spirit. But it needs time to improve and to construct, and
R：Mmhmm.
W：Then he can achieve it. Therefore, different principals in different phases will define their role differently. So, I think, to all principals, their routine work mainly covers those sections I aforementioned. And then when you talk about the principals’ leading style, they may define their role differently in different phases.
R：Right. Their focus is different.
W：Yes. Their focus is different.
R：Just like you who are going to be a new principal in this school soon. (in two days)
W：Yes.
R：Maybe, your focus is different from the old principals’.
W：Yes. Right. As, I mean, me, actually, I have been in this school for a long time.
R：Ok.
W：I was a teacher in this school and then I have become a middle leader.
R：Gradually…
W：I have also been a vice principal in this school. And then I have been appointed as a principal in a different school. Now I am back to this school and my role is Party Secretary and vice principal but not the principal yet.
R：Mmhmm.
W：So, recently, I will become a principal in this school soon. It means that I will take the role which I have taken as a principal before. So, to me, it is not the priority given to manage the chaos because the old principal has managed the school quite well.
R：And you are quite familiar with this school.
W：Yes. I am quite familiar with it. But, I think, at least, it needs some time for passing and transforming the school culture left by the last
是说我也讲了一种各种关系的协调。也就是说，每一位新任的校长，他在走上岗位的起初阶段的1-3年当中，他必然会遇到各种博弈（矛盾）。

R: 是的。

W: 也就是说，包括老校长，学校的文化，学校的风气，他可能就是在这一一次次的博弈中，不是走向这里就是走向那里。它会形成一种风气，一种氛围。

R: 啊，确实是的。只有冲突了，我们去解决了，它可能…

W: 对对对。他可能才能积淀上升为一种文化的东西。

R: 是是是。

W: 对吧?

R: 嗯。

W: 所以呢，就是说，我…这个不带有任何个人色彩的（对接下来的观点的解释），比方说这个学校的校长，他的管理风格是比较柔性的。

R: Mmhmm.

W: 所以呢，就是说，相对来讲，这个老师的思想会比较活跃，文化也比较多元。

R: 嗯。

W: 但是，可能会造成是什么，可能就是说老师之间一种…一种心理上的不平衡。

R: 嗯。

W: 所谓，不平衡，也就是说，干好干坏一个样。

R: 嗯。

W: 我指的是某一种…

R: 对于某一部分人…

W: 每一种管理风格，他都有利有弊。

R: 嗯，对。

principal.

R: Yes. It does.

W: And then, I think, I mean, the problem is how to spread out or develop those existing things (i.e., rules, culture, regulations, etc.) To be honest, I have to say, for me, the challenge is to resolve contradictions with and among teachers. I mean how to deal with various relationships. It means that a new principal will definitely encounter all sorts of contradictions in his/her first one to three years.

R: Yes.

W: It means that, the school principals including experienced principals will lead the school into different directions featured with different culture and atmosphere through problems solving in different ways. It will become some atmosphere or environment in the school after those contradictions.

R: Mmhmm. You are right. When we sort out the contradictions or problems, it can…

W: Yes, yes, yes. It can be developed as the culture.

R: Yes, yes.

W: Am I right?

R: Yes.

W: Therefore, I give you an example. But what I say does not mean anything personally (to be objective or I just want to tell the truth without showing my attitude to it). Take our school principal for example, his leading style is quite gentle.

R: Mmhmm.

W: Ur….So maybe, comparatively, teachers’ thought are encouraged to be more active and the culture is quite multiple.

R: Yes.

W: But, it may cause some problems. Maybe teachers feel not fair.

R: Mmhmm.

W: Unfair, I mean, no matter you do well or not, you are treated as the same.
W: 他不能说你可能有很成功的一种管理风格，他只有好，没有不好的。
R: 对对，这个是。
W: 你比如说，这个校长他比较强势，那么老师可能就是说他比较守规矩。但是可能个性化，创新的东西，它会少一点。
R: 对对对。
W: 基本上就是说，你拨一拨，他就动一动，或者是说，你们领导怎么说，他就怎么做。
R: 嗯。
W: 他缺少一种思想。也就是说不同的校长，他对自身角色定位的不同。尤其是慢慢比较成熟的校长以后，他在做很多年以后，他肯定会积淀下一些东西来。
R: 是的。形成一定的文化。
W: 而这些东西肯定在老师身上反映出来。对。所以呢，我感觉就是说，我认为有几个观点：一个就是说事务性的事情。
R: 嗯。
W: 实际上，我刚刚归纳了五类。这是所有校长他必须都去面对的。都要去做的。我刚刚讲，课程领导，教学的组织管理，人事的一个配备，组织，还有我刚刚讲各类人际关系的一个协调处理，学校的一个安全，财务财产。主要就是这些事务性的工作。
R: Mmhmm.
W: 但是呢，就是说，如果从校长的整个发展过程来讲，一般的校长，他必然会经历一个他有一个打基础的一个过程。有的是治乱，有的是摆平，那么他这当中制度建设就很重要，然后再步入到一个文化的立校。
R: 对。
W: 是吧，那么文化立校，如果做到最高境界的话，可能还不仅仅是文化的立校。那么，就是我们讲的所谓的道德的立校。也就是校长，他可能就是这时候…我们这些校长现在还达不到这种境界。如果说要达到的
话，我们上海中学的唐胜昌你知道吧？
R: 我知道。
W: 唐胜昌校长你知道吧？他可能就做到这一点了。他可以在这所学校，不是凭制度，而是凭一种人格魅力，
R: 影响力，或者是
W: 人格魅力，影响力他来管理这所学校。对吧？
R: 这个难度真的是…
W: 但，这个并不是每个校长都能达到的。
所谓文化，我认为还是处于第二阶段，就是说在校长的慢慢管理下，他逐渐成为一种风气，
R: 大家都遵守的那种模式。
W: 对，这就是不是制度了，这就是某种程度上就是一种潜规则，是一种默契，是一种大家都比较认同的价值取向。那么这个呢，
R: 或是他可能就是用一种人格魅力，用一种影响力，他来管理这所学校。那么，这样一种校长呢，他可能就是更成功一点，更特别一点。
R: 他（上海中学校长）是把一个不太好的学校带到一个这么高级的学校，还是这个学校一直都蛮好的？
W: 这个学校呢，本身来说底子不错，但是有一段时间来说，是走下坡路的。然后，他接管多少年了，从40岁左右，现在都70多了。
R: 一直在做那个学校的校长？
W: 是啊
R: 佩服。
W: 那么，30多年了，他肯定是不一样了。
R: 而且，时间也给了，展示他教师理想实践的一个条件。
W: 对对对。所以说，这个东西，他是靠时
间来积淀的。所以我感觉到，那么，至于你讲的现在校长的责任是不是比以前承担的多了（看所给的访谈的问题框架）？肯定比以前多的多。
R: 呵呵。
W: 我其他的不讲，就是说，现在的校长，他本身来说，现在家长他的维权意识更强了。
R: 对。这一点是大家都提到的。
W: 对吧，维权意识更强了。所以上这一点来说，校长首先来说，他肯定要承担很多来自家长和学生的压力。对吧？
R: 呵呵。
W: 第二个就是校园安全这一块。实际上就是说这个上面的要求，也要，就是相对来说压力大的多。
R: 安全，现在有个趋势来说，就是学生在校外发生的事情也要归到校长身上。
W: 对呀，现在就是频繁的学校的这个意外的事情，那么这些事情，本身来说，其实校长现在就是说，等于发生在校长身上所有的事情。
R: 还包括校外发生在回家的路上的
W: 哦，也就是说只要是你们学校的，老师的，学生的，你都得担起来。所以，这个责任肯定是，现在也加了一块。我们讲，打开校园，实际上就是社区。
R: 对对。
W: 社区，对吧？所以，就是社区来说，我们要承担很多的义务。也就是说社区为学校服务，学校也要为社区服务。所以，我们暑期，包括平时啊，暑期的一些志愿服务，包括家长学校，很多来自于这个接到这个社区的一些工作也都要学校来承担。
R: 呵呵，我还以为你们是自愿去宣传去做。
W: 不存在，因为本身来讲，社区与学校之间的关系都很紧密的，包括你现在评…

has become the principal since he was 40 years old and now he is more than 70.
R: Is he the principal in the same school?
W: Yes.
R: Is he!
W: So, with more than 30 years experience as principal. He must be a bit different.
R: And, I think it is long enough for him to apply his thoughts into practice.
W: Yes, yes. Therefore, culture needs time to be accreted. Well, back to the questions you ask whether the principal take more responsibility than before, I think principals definitely take much more responsibilities than before.
R: Smile.
W: Firstly, I want to talk about parents in nowadays. They have much stronger awareness of their right protection.
R: Yes. A lot of people mention it.
W: Yes. Parents' right awareness stronger. So, in that sense, principals must have a lot of pressure from parents and students, do they?
R: Smile.
W: Secondly, it is about school safety. In fact, school principals stand much pressure from the local authority.
R: Safety. It seems that principals have to take responsibility of whatever happens to students both inside and outside of the school.
W: Yes. There are too many accidents. Principals have to take responsibility for everything.
R: it includes something happening on students’ way home.
W: Yes. It means that you (principals) have to take responsibility for the school, teachers and students. And now, there is more responsibility coming from opening the school to the local community.
R: Right.
W: The community, right? We have to take a lot of responsibility of the community. So, in Summer...
R: But, the community would give you some support, right?
W: Yes, it is reciprocal. Right? On the other hand,
R: You mention this, is it different from the principal's work before?
W: The connection between the community and the school has become closer. For example,
R: And, will the community give you some support?
W: Yes. It is reciprocal. Now, we are applying for 'Shanghai model school'. If you want to get it, you must take some responsibility for the community or do something in the local community. Right? On the other hand,
R: Parents' right protection and safety (I am trying to summarize the pressure and responsibility on the principals).
W: So, 'right protection' and 'safety'. And the responsibility for the local community. I mean the schools are more open to the society. In that sense, we principals take more responsibility than before.
R: Incidentally, do you mean the way principals work is different from they do in old days?
W: I think the school had little connection with the community in old days. But nowadays, principals have to build Party construction, and to interact with the community, which put quite a lot responsibility to the principals.
R: Mmhmm.
W: In addition, the principals have to concern students' enrolment. Therefore, if you want to attract best students to keep good student resource, you have to build up positive relationships with relative people and departments. I am sure there are a lot of things to do.
R: Especially your school, a complete secondary school covering aged 12-18 students. In fact, it is quite challenge in terms of the student enrolment in holiday, besides the normal days, there are some volunteering activities and others for the community which will be taken by the school.
W: Smile. I thought you are willing rather than being told to do it. Peas
W: 你要了解，而且你要拍板啊。你说难听点，你学校要建一所房子，怎么布局啊，怎么安排啊？其实，这样说来，上面的安排，不好意思，可能只能到 11:30，因为 12:30 我也离开这里，如果是不行的话，只能有机会以后再聊，或者怎么样。
R: 好的。
W: 那么，像我们学校有两个校区，一个很远在永嘉路，一个在这边，所以我们平时有些事务性的事情，那边要开会，我们就得赶过去。路上的车程正常的也要半个小时，堵车也要 1 个小时。所以，如果是那边 12:30 有事的话，我可能就 11:30 就要离开这里。所以，现在的校长，和以前的校长相比，我认为，就是说第一，他承担的责任就更重。这个责任重，不仅仅是教育教学。因为本身现在的教育问题很多，社会问题也很多，所以你来来自于就是家长的一个维权啊，校园的一个安全啊，教职工人员工资的一个分配啊，还有包括和社区的一个联络啊等等，实际上都会有很大的压力压在你身上。
R: 是的。
W: 比方说，以前的工资就是国家分配，他有政策，你国家文件下来，他有什么年龄，什么职称，什么工资。
R: 嗯。绩效是吧？
W: 现在绩效，你每年工资都要做方案，怎么来进行分配，这些都占据很大的精力。

269
对，而且这个和美国有很大的不同。资本主义国家，他可能竞争更厉害，但实际上并不是这样。
R: 他们年薪制，更简单的。
W: 我们就发现美国中学的校长他很多的就是管理学校的一个教学和学生的纪律。但是他有一个很大的困扰就是，他要争取经费。这个是我们的优势。
R: 这个是要的。
W: 就好像在这个上面相对压力会很小。但是他们就是说比如说，教师的工资的分配，他就是按照一个年限，你工作的时间，包括你的学历是什么的。所以他就没有那么多的矛盾。而且，现在我跟你讲…
R: 而且，老师之间竞争也没那么激烈的。

W: 对。对对。也就是说校长把很多的精力，我关上门说这句话（悄悄话），也就是说人际关系的协调上，所谓的协调就是说，一个是对外，你要争取资源，这个资源其实并不一定是钱，其实更多的是你学校的机会。
R: 甚至是一种人脉的
W: 对，人脉。比如你评点什么，那么这个部门你搞的定吧

R: 对，我知道。
W: 你这个，当然我不能说领导绝对不公平，但是在这个当中就是机会的问题，就是你能不能争取到机会。
R: 这也是我们的国情。也就是说，我们的条件都差不多，如果我跟你关系更近一点，那么我可能就把机会给你。
W: 对。或者说我对你更熟悉一点。

allocated by the government. According to the policy, people’s salaries are based on their working years, titles.
R: Yes. performance-related pay?
W: Performance-related pay, you have to make assessment standards to pay staff salary, which takes you quite a lot of time to do. And it is quite different from USA. In capitalist countries, it is assumed that their competition must be more fierce, but actually it is not like that.
R: they talk about annual salaries. More simple.
W: We found that American principals spend most of their time on managing teaching and learning and students disciplines. Well, there is most difficult things confronting them is to seek for funding, but we Chinese principals do not worry about it.
R: Yes.
W: We seem to have little pressure on seeking for funding. However, in the USA, the teachers’ salary is paid on the working years, and their educational level. So they have less conflict. What’s more, I want to say…
R: in addition, the competition among teachers is not fierce.
W: Yes. It means that we principals… I want to close the door to talk about it (secretly). We principals spend quite a lot of time on handle and coordinate interpersonal relationships. In terms of interpersonal relationships, I mean the relationship with the local authority. You have to seek for more resource from the local authority, although it may not be financial support. In fact, it is more about good opportunities for your school development.
R: It even refers to good networks.
W: Yes. Networks. For example, if you want to win some honour/awards for your school, can you pursue the relative department to give you the honour?
R: Yes, I know.
W: Of course. I do not mean that the leader does not treat us fairly, but the key point is the
R: 对对对，可以这么说。

W: 对吧。那么同样在条件差不多的情况下，其实就是一个机会的问题。那么我能不能争取到，给学校，给老师争取到一个机会，其实这是很关键的一点。
R: 对。有些老师就是说，我希望能够扩大我们的影响力，为上级搞好关系。
W: 对呀对呀。
R: 他们就直接这样讲的。
W: 对啊。老师也是这么想的。所以，这个压力其实是蛮大的。这是一个，那么另外…
R: 不知道，美国是不是也是这样，校长要负责很多事情，每个方面都得去过问，还是这些直接安排给中层去办就行了。
W: 没有有没有。他们校长是很辛苦的，其实比中学校长还辛苦。他们所有的事情，都要亲力亲为的。他们没有中层。
R: 对。
W: 他没有中层，他只有校长。
R: 您是去的中学是吧?
W: 哎，中学。初中甚至只有校长，没有副校长。大型的校长，配两个助理或者两个副校长，然后他下面没有中层，只有counsellor。 Counsellor 就是像一种顾问一样，它会负责学生的一些课程的安排，还有学籍的事情，其他的事情都是有校长单打独干。
R: 他们就没有教导处，总务处，更没有年级组长，备课组长。
W: 没有。总务处有，专门有一个人管学校的后勤，但是他是社会化的。
R: 噢。
W: 除了有一个人专门在校园里巡视什么的，清洁工啊，维修啊，全部是社会化的。什么坏了，他打电话过来，他（社会的公司负责维修的）要负责几所学校的，他不会负责什么一所学校。

R: It is related to our national context. It means that if you have good relationships with people, you tend to attain more opportunities from them.
W: Yes. Or we can see they know more about you.
R: Yes. You are right.
W: right? So when we are under the same situations, the main point is how to get the opportunity. It is an essential point whether we can get some opportunities for our school and our teachers or not.
R: Yes. Some teachers hope that their principals are able to enhance their school development to be more influential and to keep good relationships with the local authorities.
W: yes, yes.
R: Some teachers said it.
W: Yes. Teachers do hope so. So, the pressure is quite heavy on principals. This is one hand. On the other hand…
R: I am not sure whether American principals are the same with you to take so much responsibilities. They have to intervene everything? Can they ask their middle leaders to do it?
W: No, no. the American principals have a lot of work to do. They have to do everything by themselves as they don’t have middle leaders.
R: Ok.
W: They don’t have middle leaders but only the principal in the school.
R: have u been to secondary schools(The USA)?

W: Yes, secondary schools. In the junior middle school, there is only a principal and no vice principal. For the bigger schools, they may have two principal assistants or two vice principals but no middle leaders. They have counselor. In terms of
R: 像我们的物业管理什么的。
W: 对对。啊。就是说会有这个问题。我认为，然后就是说美国的校长呢，他们的学区，他们叫学区，不叫教育局。他们对校长的定位，不像我们。现在就是说我们之间的矛盾是什么？因为时间不多，我就概而言之的说，美国的校长，他只要完成对学区的任务就可以了，他们的校长没有那么多的专业发展了，怎么回事了。因为他们就是说，其实校长不一定是他们的终身职业。像我去的这个中学校长，前任，他是个警察出身，然后就做校长。
R: 呵呵。
W: 两年之后，老师不满意，然后又换了一个新校长。这个校长呢，是个 businessman，是个生意人。
R: 这个是有的。
W: 对吧。然后，他做了几年教师之后，他因身体不好，做了几年之后，再去应聘校长。他们这些校长取得一种证书后，
R: 他们没有之前培训的？
W: 他有把校长当事业来做，但是更多的是当职业了来做。他可能在这三年之中做校长，三年之后又不是校长了。
R: 呵呵。有变动的。
W: 所以呢，他们这个学区就是要求校长能够执行这个学区的课程，管理好学校的安全，维持好学校的秩序。那么这个就可以了，然后就是老师，更够正常的开课上课，对吧？
R: 呵呵。
teacher in the school. After a few years, he applied for the principal and he did it with regarding his healthy problem. When those principals have got a certificate,  
R: Do they have pre-training?  
W: Some principals consider the principals as their career, but more principals think it is only a job. He may take the role as a principal for only three years and he will look for a different job. (In China, principals are all nominated by the local authority and they rarely change their job. Few principals quit the job)  
R: Yes. There are cases.  
W: So, the school district only asks principals to follow the local curriculum, to assure the school safety and to manage the school in good environment. That is it. And then they may also need to assure that all the teacher can come to the school to give lessons normally and regularly.  
R: Laugh.  
W: They (school districts) do not have higher expectations on elementary education. But our problem is that the local authority put higher expectations on us. So the school principals are pushed to become a good leader for curriculum development and be better to lead school culture construction, and to be a moral leader, which is the role defined by the local authority. But, in fact, we principals mostly concern how many networks do you build and what kind of resource do you have. And then we care whether we are able to manage teachers and to build up good relationships among teachers. In addition, principals also worry about whether they can attain trust from parents and students. So when parents encounter their rights issues, it also challenges principals to see whether they are able to handle it. All of these have become heavy pressure on principals. Principals take more responsibilities.  
R: Are they biggest challenges confronting
R: 是不是也是校长面临的最大的挑战呢？
W: 我认为是最大的挑战。所以作为校长，我们主观的愿望是把最大的精力放在教学管理上，
R: 对对对。
W: 教学组织还有课程建设上。作为老师，其实他们也是希望一心一意把书教好。但是其实，
R: 是的。
W: 作为这个大环境来说，有很多节外生枝的事情，是需要我们（重音强调）去每天处理的。所以，对我们来说，我们可能把想当多的精力放在处理这些事情上。
R: 比如说你去开这个会议啊…
W: 对，比如说我去开校务会，什么会。还有明年我们要全部从那边搬过来了，首先现在家长就反对。他们不愿意，觉得太远。
R: 哦。
W: 那么，你怎么去做他们的工作。
R: 是的，有些老师也反对的。
W: 老师可能也不一定都赞成，所以就是说，你首先我要去开这个会，怎么去做老师工作，还有就是家长，老师的工作做完以后，才能家长的工作。那么，你说这些会，如果说我校长不出席也没有问题，你请下面的中层啊，分管的去…
R: 压不住。
W: 哎，压不住，对呀，这是一个问题，还有一个事情就是你有游离于这些事情之外，那么他们又是什么感受。对吧？然后就是说，很多事情，有些关键的场合，你还是要自己去。对吧？还是要去处理。所以呢，我觉的就是，我们比较多的精力可能都是集中在这件事情上面。
R: 一些琐碎的事情。
W: 对，其实就是一种，我认为啊（强调），就是一种协调。那么，如果哪位校长说，他没有这方面的困扰，那么我只能说，

principals?
W: I think they are biggest challenges. So, as a principal, we ourseflves wish that we could put more attention on managing teaching and learning, and
R: Right, right, right.
W: organizing teaching and learning and curriculum development. As teachers, they hope that they can concentrate themselves on teaching. But actually,
R:Mmhmm.
W: Under the current context, there are quite a lot of things out of our expectation which need us(stressed) to deal with everyday. For us, we probably spend most of time on those things.
R: Take the meeting you mentioned earlier for example?
W: Yes. I have to go for meetings inside and outside of the school. In addition, our junior middle school campus will move here. Parents are moaning and are not willing to come here. They think it is too far away from their home.
R:Mmhmm.
W: So, we have to think about how to handle it and how to talk to parents.
R: Yes. Some teachers may disagree with you either.
W: Not all the teachers are happy with it. So, first of all, I have to hold the meeting to talk to teachers and parents. But when I can manage teachers’ complaining and then move to talk to parents. You see, those meetings, it is fine without me. I can ask the middle leaders to do it...
R: but they may fail to handle it.
W: Yes, they may fail. This is one problem. Another problem is that when you are out of those things, you need to think about how the parents and the teachers feel. Do you? And then, in most of cases, you have to appear in some vital situations. So you still need to face it and to handle it by yourself, do you? So, I think, we spend most of time on
第一他可能下面有很强的副职。
R: 嗯。
W: 对吧？还有一种就是本身来说他可能在比较在一些事务中做一些妥协。
R: 是的。
W: 我觉得，这个当中呢就是说因为每个校长他的底线是不一样，这是一个…
R: 因为跟人打交道。其实是最难最复杂的。
W: 对对对对。还有就是本身来说他可能在比较在一些事务中做一些妥协。
R: 是的。
W: 我觉得，这个当中呢就是说因为每个校长他的底线是不一样，这是个…
R: 因为跟人打交道，其实是最难最复杂的。
W: 对对对对。而且对于校长来说，跟人打交道，他会有很多困惑，如果你一味的去迎合或退让的话，那么你这所学校，其实也会形成一种文化。也就是说…
R: 是。或者是说是一种亚健康。
W: 哎，对对对对。然后，其实老师就会有一种不平衡感。就是说于会哭的孩子有奶吃。（比如去闹去要求的老师，自己的要求就会被得到满足）。
R: 也是一种回避矛盾的一种的一种心理。
W: 对。但是，有时候，如果你就是过于强势的话，那么你会给自己制造很多的
W & R: 麻烦。
W: 因为这些事情都是在我们的周围频繁发生的，对吧？现在老师的维权意识也很强。
R: 对。
W: 他可以通过各种渠道去跟你博弈。
R: 是。
W: 然后，这又会牵涉你很多的精力，对吧？所以，怎么去掌握这个度，我认为（强调）是对校长一个很大的挑战。不管你是…
R: 是的。
W: 我觉的，也需像唐胜昌（上中校长）这样的，你个人完全在这个学校，有掌控力，影响力来说，也需他可能相对游刃有余。
R: 但我相信，他可能在某个阶段也是比较强势的。
W: Of course. He can handle so well because he has done a lot of work before.
R: Yes, that is what I want to say.
W: Right. Otherwise he may not be able to do it so well. **I think you can not attain the authority from suiting/catering for other people.** In most of cases, you have no middle way to take, and you cannot avoid it. When you suit one person, you may offend another one. So, in total, it is really something to do with the principle and it is quite subtle to do it in a proper way. It also decides whether you principal can establish your authority or develop a successful school. In that sense, I think it is quit essential point to get the right principle to deal with issues. **In addition, the school culture and the school atmosphere will be accreted through dealing with all sorts of issues.**
R: The way or attitude you have to deal with issues will unconsciously influence the culture.
W: Yes, yes, yes. Sorry, I am afraid that I have to leave now.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>categories</th>
<th>categories</th>
<th>Interview1 guangzhou he</th>
<th>Interview2 zhongguo-wang</th>
<th>Interview3-nanmo-gao</th>
<th>4-nanyang-yu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The structural arrangement for managing schools</td>
<td>Definition of the role of the school leaders</td>
<td>The definition of the role of the school principal</td>
<td>Training programme to developing themselves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing accountability or pressure</td>
<td>Managing teaching and learning</td>
<td>Managing the school as an organisation – personnel, budget, fund-raising.</td>
<td>The definition of the role of the school principal</td>
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<td>The definition of the role of the school principal</td>
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<td>Role: the most important part of being a principal – leading teaching and learning</td>
<td>The impact of social change (parents, children, community attitudes)</td>
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<td>The impact of social change (parents, children, community attitudes)</td>
<td>The most important part of organisation – personnel being a principal</td>
<td>The impact of social change (parents, children, community attitudes)</td>
<td>School and teacher development</td>
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<td>Differences between China and the West</td>
<td>The contingent leadership</td>
<td>Social culture/traditions</td>
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<td>Managing Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>Main problems/challenges</td>
<td>Establishing organisational culture</td>
<td>Role: the most important part of being a principal</td>
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<td>Competition between schools</td>
<td>Leading curriculum development</td>
<td>Increasing accountability or pressure - ambiguous accountability - unlimited accountability</td>
<td>Managing Teaching and Learning - monitoring the quality of teaching/learning</td>
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<td>School and teacher</td>
<td>Views/Approaches to leadership</td>
<td>Training programme to developing themselves</td>
<td>Relationships - teachers, parents</td>
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<td>Differences (perceived) between China and the West</td>
<td>Establishing organizational culture</td>
<td>Main problems/challenges</td>
<td>Competition with Western education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships - teachers, parents, students, bureau of edu. And others</td>
<td>Increasing accountability or pressure</td>
<td>Competition between schools</td>
<td>With western schools</td>
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<td>Relationships - teachers, parents, students, bureau of edu. And others</td>
<td>Educational policies or changes - influence on school principals</td>
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<td>Main problems/challenges</td>
<td>The impact of social change (parents, children, community attitudes)</td>
<td>The structural arrangement for managing schools - to whom are the school leaders accountable</td>
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<td>Training programme to developing themselves development</td>
<td>Competition between schools for resource</td>
<td>Main problems/challenges</td>
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<td>Appendix 11 <strong>Shared Themes from 28 principals</strong></td>
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**Open themes**

High-stakes testing system
- Parents’ expectations of education with test-orientation
- Student attainment 4

**Regularities /frequencies**

9
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<th>Topic</th>
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<td>Teacher development</td>
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<td>• Remaining teachers</td>
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<td>School improvement</td>
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<td>• Specialist school development</td>
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<td>• Quality education improvement</td>
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<td>• School improvement to achieve the best schools</td>
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<td>• Improve happiness of both students and teachers (?)</td>
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<td>Improving student performance/achievement</td>
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<td>Bureaucratic system intervention</td>
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<td>pressure from the local authority of edu.</td>
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<td>Limited autonomy</td>
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<td>Limited autonomy of personnel and budget management</td>
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<td>Limited autonomy 办学没有自主权 for school management and personnel</td>
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<td>Parents’ expectations of education</td>
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<td>Self development</td>
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<td>Struggling with gap between reality and educational ideals</td>
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<td>Complex circumstance (external context)</td>
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<td>• Social change impact, 社会对教育的一种反作用</td>
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<td>• Education not match with the beat of the social change</td>
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<td>• Bad external context impact on education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Media, internet amplifying negative</td>
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<td>• Competition for best students</td>
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<td>Relationships with teachers, parents, other agencies</td>
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<td>Singularties:</td>
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<td>School safety</td>
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<td>Children with more challenging thought 2 yinchuan and haerbin xiaozhang</td>
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<td>Fund-raising pressure</td>
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Changing traditional teaching approach

Appendix 12 extracts from initial data coding

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
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<tr>
<td>G: 我是教语文。也就是说你刚才讲的一个角色的定位对吧?</td>
<td>Definition of the role</td>
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<tr>
<td>R: 嗯。</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>G: 角色的定位嘛。应该讲校长是一个教育工作者，所以说校长应该是信教的，信教育的，我的意思是。那么，当然校长，他还赋予一些管理的，行政管理的工作。那么，他可能，所以所他的角色呢，可能就更丰富一些了。那么，像我这样子还是，党政，就是一肩挑。那么，可能角色就是更加多一点了。那么，因为我们现在现有的这些教育特色，他像我们这些，比如说财产的管理啊，财务的管理，人事的管理啊，方方面面的，就是说这些行政方面的，你说是信教也可以，当然他和信教是有一些区别的。这些管理的，你作为一个校长也是你的一个工作，感觉上，比较理想的来讲，你应该是关注的比较是教育的一些内在的东西，我自己体会呢，就是可能就是一个领导者和一个管理者的平衡吧。</td>
<td>Managing the school as an organisation – personnel, budget, fund-raising, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: 社会上的。</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>G: 又面对社会上的，面对政府，面对家长，面对各个家庭，面对教师，教师的背后也有一个家庭，所以教师的角色呢就是蛮复杂的，所以这是它的一个复杂性。可是，校长本身来说呢，他是一个信教的人，他是一个搞教育的人，他的核</td>
<td>Complexity of the role</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Role: the most important part of being a principal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student development</td>
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心呢是学生的发展，学生怎么样是更好的来发展。那么我讲呢，就是三位一体---学校、教师，学生。这三者呢，三位一体，学生是最上位的。

R:或者核心的是吧？

G:核心不核心，我现在也讲不出。也不一定都是都围绕着他（学生），怎么讲，我也没想好。反正我觉得就是他一个上位概念。就是没有学生也就没有教师，那么，也就没有学校了。对吧？所以呢，我我是觉得这个三者呢，是三位一体的。那么，没有学校呢，他没有这样一个特定的这样一个场所，时空在这个地方。那么，他这个地方也不会自动的聚集学生，也不会有教师的存在。所以呢，就是说我觉得三位一体、这三位一体呢，彼此的互相关联，彼此的互相依存，他的核心的一个体现，或者本身的一个体现，还是为这个学生的一个发展。因为人的发展，未必是需要学校的。我可以个人传授的，也可以通过其他的一个方式。但是你既然有了一个学校，这样年龄段的一个学生，他有孩子在这个地方，那么它的一个发展，你说是要定位的，这是学校它最根本的。他也就是说，学校本身他要发展教师本身他要发展，但它不是一个最根本的本质的一个体现，最根本的本质的一个体现应该是学生的一个发展。那么，所以呢，作为一个校长呢，你说要牢牢记住，你说角色定位的话呢，学生是如何发展，如何培养的，如何把他们培养的更好。这是一个最关键的一个东西，那么，你为了做到这一点呢，那么你的教师队伍也要有所专业，有所发展。那么，你要考虑这个大的方向，所以刚才讲，它是一个领袖。你作为一个校长，你应该是这个领袖。你应该考虑学校的总体的一个发
展，它的方向，学校的定位，学校的方向。学校发展的节奏，它的一种文化氛围，它的一种样子来激励，怎么样来整体的协调平衡。那么，实际上向管理来讲了，校长还是又是一个管理者，什么叫管理者呢，就是刚才讲到人事阿，课时啊，什么奖惩分配啊，人事考核啊，诸如此类的，规章制度的制定，类似的这些方面。那么招生也好，毕业也好，那么，你作为一个学校，也就是一个基层单位，那么，这个时候呢，又体现在你是一个管理者。那么角色定位，你是管理者多了，那么你可能对宏观的方面，或者对整个学校大局方面可能会有所偏次。那么，你在大的方面把握得很好的话，那么你在具体方面，没有做到位，或者具体措施不行的话呢，那么，很多东西都是空的。我自己讲，就是管理者、领导人的一个平衡。你既不是说你不抓大的一个方向，但是作为一个校长，你毕竟不是来一个层面的一个比较高级的一个干部，或者是什么，那你毕竟还就是在学校，每天你和老师和学生都在见。那么你怎么样把这个事情做到一个实的方面去。

Appendix 13 Data reporting
1. Role of principal
2. Training (support)
3. Impact of reforms
   1) Curriculum
2) Structures/accountability

3) Managing teaching/learning

4) Developing teacher development

4. Impact of the social change

5. Views on the role

6. Problems/challenges

Appendix 14 extracts from my fieldwork research diaries

23/10/2012
I realized that plans often cannot work out as distractions always turn up. I was planning to show a school principal tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, however I had to delay it. The teacher institution where I am doing some help for them and where I can get some help to shadow principals assigned me another task on Thursday and suggested I delay shadowing next week. I was thinking that it is fair that you can only get something with giving something to others. But the thing is that who is in charge and who is stronger to control the exchange. As a research student, I feel that I am in a lighter status to rely on people, and then I have to accept what they give to me and be happy to take what I can have. That is the reality. I am not stopping to seek for any opportunities to collect data. I also realize that it is not possible to shadow a school principal for a whole week, so I need to fit the school principal’s available time and may have to shadow them one or two days per week during a short period…

24/10/2012
In the early morning, I got a call from the school principal who I planned to shadow this afternoon, but he is busy with preparing celebration for the 110th school anniversary in high middle school campus. I was thinking it may not be a good time to shadow him during the period. In that sense, I suggested I shadow him after the school celebration on 10th, Nov. On the other hand, I cannot just being sitting there and passively wait for participants coming to me, so I was thinking other possibilities to shadow other school principals. But I tried to ask the principal whether I could attend their school celebration to know more about the school background. Luckily, he confirmed that I could go to watch the ceremony. Looking back to the date when I started preparing the fieldwork one month ago, plans have been changed to fit the reality along the process of the data collection. If you don’t want to be put in a passive position that will hinder your research progress, you have to make changes to fit the new context. That is the life. That is the real research! By doing research, I benefit from the rigorous thinking in academics but also in the life. When the door is closed, you should seek for other doors may open to you. Research is not a linear thinking process, either the life…