LEADERSHIP CONSTRUCTION:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF TWO
EXEMPLARY FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN URBAN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MAINLAND CHINA

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DECLARATION

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature:

Date:
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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, education systems have undergone unprecedented change due to a variety of economic, social, and political forces (Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther, 2002). The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is no exception. Continuous educational reform at primary and secondary levels in Mainland China has created new challenges and accountabilities for school principals. The important role of principals in primary and secondary schools has been acknowledged in both policy documents and the broader literature (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985; F. Chen, 2005; Chu, 2003; W. Huang, 2005; T. Wang, 2003). Yet, most of the literature on primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China is prescriptive in nature, identifying from the perspectives of researchers and academics what principals should do and how they should enact leadership. Lacking in this research is an awareness of the daily practices and lived experiences of principals. Furthermore, within the small body of writing on primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China, gender is seldom given any attention. To date, only a small number of empirical studies have focused on female principals as a specific category of research (Zen, 2004; Zhong, 2004). This study aimed to explore the professional lives of two female exemplary school principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China. A qualitative exploratory case study was used. Semi-structured interviews with each individual female principal, with six teachers in each of the school sites and with the superintendent of each principal were conducted. Field observations and document analysis were also undertaken to obtain multiple insights about their leadership practices. The conceptual framework was based largely on the theory of Gronn (1999) and incorporated five core leadership practices (vision building, ethical considerations, teaching and learning, power utilisation, and dealing with risks and challenges) taken from the wider literature. The key findings of this study were twofold. Firstly, while the five leadership practices were evident in the leadership of the two principals, this study identified some subtle differences in the way they approached each of them. Secondly, contextual factors such as Chinese
traditional culture, the contemporary societal context, and the school organisational context, in addition to the biographical experiences of each principal were significant factors in shaping the way in which they exercised their leadership practices in the schools.

**Key words:** female leadership; school principal; case study; primary schools; Mainland China
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background of the study

Education systems worldwide have undergone unprecedented change due to a variety of economic, social, and political forces (Limerick, Cunnington, & Crowther, 2002). The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is no exception. Continuous educational reform at primary and secondary levels in Mainland China has created new challenges and accountabilities for school principals, those officers charged with managing schools. Not surprisingly, the important role of principals in primary and secondary schools has been acknowledged in both policy documents and the broader literature, (e.g., Central Committee of the Chinese Community Party, 1985; F. Chen, 2005; Chu, 2003; Chu & Yang, 2002; Guo, 2005; W. Huang, 2005; Jia, 2005; Y. Peng, 2004; Jihua. Wang, 2004; T. Wang, 2003). Yet, the great bulk of the literature on primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China is prescriptive in nature, identifying from the perspectives of researchers and academics what principals should do and how they should enact leadership. Lacking in this research is an awareness of the daily practices and lived experiences of principals.

Within the small body of writing on primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China, gender is seldom given any attention and, to date, little research has focused on female principals as a specific category of research (Zen, 2004; Zhong, 2004). Only a very small number of research studies have specifically focused on aspects of female school principals’ professional lives and leadership. These studies are reviewed in Chapter 3. Thus, a study that takes as its focus the leadership practices of female school principals from Mainland China at this time is assumed to make a significant contribution to the existing research.
It is anticipated that there are in excess of 1,000,000 principals working in Mainland China (H. Yang, 2005), yet there is a lack of nation-wide statistics on the number of male and female school principals working in schools across the country. Statistics taken from 18 districts in Beijing revealed that female principals represented a greater number in primary schools. The statistics demonstrate that 61% of the total number of principals in primary schools in 2005 was female, compared with 31 percent of female principals in secondary schools (Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, 2005). While it is difficult to make any definitive assessment as to the statistical representation of female principals across Mainland China, the limited statistics available do reveal that in the urban area of Beijing at least, women principals are part of the educational landscape. Likewise, the research findings by Coleman, Qiang and Li (1998) about female educational leaders in primary and secondary schools in Shaanxi Province also demonstrated that female school leaders represented a greater number than male school leaders in urban primary schools in their study. Given the significant proportion of female school principals in urban primary schools and limited research about the leadership of female principals, this study was considered appropriate.

A review of the literature on female educational leaders and school leadership in the international academic community exhibits the following research themes. First, is the increasing perception of the importance of female leadership for school excellence in the 21st century (Fecher, 2007; Henderson, 1997; Varley, 2005). Second, is the general consensus that school leadership is constructed within specific organisational contexts and specific social and cultural contexts (Davies, 2005; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Gronn, 1999; Sugrue, 2005b; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). The third theme is that, some researchers have been aware of the need to research female school leaders from different races and class locations to determine if their experiences are qualitatively different from other female leaders (Germany, 2005; Goeller, 1992; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Nicholson, 1999; Pacis, 2005; Turner, 2004). Fourth, is the view that an exploration of school leadership by
listening to school principals’ voices should contribute to a better understanding of school leadership (Day, 2000; Gronn, 1999, 2003; Reynolds, 2002; Sugrue, 2005b). These themes have stimulated the interest for this study and pointed to the need for investigating the experiences of female school principals in Mainland China. For this reason, the current study is an exploration of the leadership construction of two exemplary female principals in an urban location within Mainland China.

1.2 Another driving force for the study

Beside the above-mentioned reasons from literature review, another driving force for the study stemmed from the personal experience of the researcher. In 2003, the researcher participated in a research project on women and science which investigated the status of women in the field of science in Beijing. As one part of the research project, the researcher interviewed several female principals in primary and secondary schools in Beijing regarding their life experiences. The researcher was encouraged by the inspiring experiences of these respondents (L. Zhang, Zhang & Zhong, 2003). Based on that research project, the researcher conducted a master’s degree study on the role perceptions of three female principals in primary schools. In-depth interviews were conducted with them. The research found that their careers as school leaders were fraught with conflicts and challenges. For instance, these female principals confronted psychological conflicts between their roles as principal and those of being a mother and wife. To perform successfully their roles as principal, they had to make many personal and family based sacrifices (Zhong, 2004). The current study, then, builds upon these two research studies. It does this by exploring the leadership practices of two exemplary female principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China.

1.3 Research questions

Sugrue (2005b) made the cogent argument that under a complex organisational milieu in which principals now work, it becomes simplistic and problematic to prescribe what principals should do, and how they should act. Sugrue maintains that
if the principalship is to be understood more fully, then what is required is listening to the voices of principals themselves. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there has been very little research that has explored the leadership practices of female school principals in Mainland China. The current study, therefore, aimed to meet the gap in the literature by listening to the voices of two exemplary female principals in Mainland China, in an attempt to understand their experiences as leaders and their leadership practices. Two broad research questions are posed:

1. What are the leadership practices of each female school principal?
2. What factors have influenced their leadership practices?

The first question is an exploration of the leadership practices of two school principals as they go about their daily work as professional educators. The second question considers the influential factors that have impacted upon the principals’ leadership construction. In order to address the second question, the current research follows the argument of some scholars who claim that leadership is constructed within a specific organisational, societal and cultural context (Davies, 2005; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Gronn, 1999; Sugrue, 2005b; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Therefore, in its process of construction, multiple interconnected factors are said to influence the leadership practices of a principal. Following the work of Gronn (1999), the study identifies the influential factors from the principals’ biographical experiences, and factors from the broader school organisational, societal, and cultural contexts. A conceptual framework which is based on a review of related educational theories was utilised to guide this study (It is discussed in Chapter 3). By investigating the daily leadership practices and the influential factors impacting upon these leadership practices, this study presents a snapshot of the professional lives of two exemplary female principals. A key aim of the study was to provide a clearer picture of female school leadership in primary schools in an urban area within Mainland China.
1.4 Research methodology

To address the two key research questions, an exploratory case study was conducted. According to Yin (2003), exploratory case study is a research approach used to explore a contemporary phenomenon which is inseparable from the context in which it exists. This kind of methodology is suitable for addressing “what”, “how” and “why” type questions. In this study, the researcher aimed to investigate the nature of the professional lives of two female school principals by addressing two research questions: what are their leadership practices in their day-to-day principalship? And what factors have influenced their leadership practices? An exploratory case study suited this research because it asked “what” questions and it was based on a key assumption that the phenomenon is inseparable from the context in which it exists.

In this study, semi-structured interviews with each female school principal were conducted to understand some significant features of her life such as biographical experiences and her leadership practices. A range of document sources about each principal was also collected to provide additional data. To gain multiple perspectives about individual leadership practices, semi-structured interviews with several teachers in each school, and with the superintendent who supervised each female school principal, were also conducted.

1.5 Definitions of key terms

Leadership practice

Some researchers employ the term, leadership style, to describe the way of leading by a leader, which is based on a combination of beliefs, values, preferences, as well as the culture of an organisation (“Leadership styles”, n.d.). In other literature, leadership behavior is used widely to frame the exploration of leadership. In the current study, the term leadership practice was used to refer to five broad activities in which leaders are said to engage. Following the work of Davies (2005), these leadership practices included vision building, ethical considerations, teaching and
learning, power utilisation, and dealing with risks and challenges.

**Principal**

The term *principal* refers to the chief person in authority, such as a leader or the head of certain institutions, especially of a school, who is formally appointed by the superintendent of the school district (Henderson, 1997).

**Exemplary school principal**

The word, *exemplary* means “fit to serve as an example or pattern for imitation” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In line with the definition, the study defines an exemplary school principal as a person in a school principal position who meets two criteria: (a) His or her leadership performance has been recognised by the local educational bureau which is in charge of the administration of school principals, and (b) an exemplary school principal has a reputation in the community.

**Urban primary school**

In this study, an *urban primary school* refers to a primary school located in a Chinese urban district that is characterized by high economic and social development. An urban primary school, rather than a secondary school or rural school, was chosen in this study because of the likelihood of the greater proportion of female principals working within them.

### 1.6 Significance of the study

A strong sentiment in the educational leadership literature is that school leadership is best understood and constructed within a specific context rather than an activity that is prescribed in a leadership textbook (Davies, 2005; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Gronn, 1999, 2003; Northouse, 2004; Sugrue, 2005b; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). This is the position that has been adopted in this study. For this reason, a study that explored the daily practices of school principals within their specific organisational and cultural context was deemed important. The current study is significant in three
main ways.

Firstly, this study is significant because it meets a gap in the research literature. As alluded to earlier in this chapter, there has been a limited number of studies concerned with the leadership of female school principals in Mainland China. Secondly, the study is significant because it used an exploratory case study research methodology to understand the leadership practices and factors impacting upon the leadership practices of two female exemplary principals in urban primary schools. This methodological approach should provide a useful reference for further understanding principals’ practices, and bridge the knowledge gap regarding the study of female educational leaders in Mainland China. Thirdly, an exploration of the leadership construction and the influential factors of the two principals may offer some insights into the nature and purpose of the principalship in Mainland China, and unearth a number of key issues of interest. Thus, given the context of educational reform in Mainland China, the outcomes of the current study are likely to be of benefit not only to the Chinese community in Mainland China but internationally, since the study provide a better understanding of the daily leadership practices of female school principals in Mainland China.

### 1.7 Overview of the study

This chapter began by outlining the background of the study and provided a strong argument for a study that explores the leadership practices of two female primary school principals in Mainland China. Chapter Two, provides a discussion of the broader social and cultural context in which this study is located. Key educational policies that have implications for the current study are identified and discussed. Chapter Three presents a review of the related literature. It is divided into several sections and these include literature and research on primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China, selected literature on female principals from the international community and related theories on educational leadership. Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework for the research is presented and discussed. Chapter Four is a discussion of the research design and methodology that
steers the study. Chapters Five and Chapter Six present an in-depth case study of the two exemplary principals. Following is Chapter Seven, the discussion chapter and Chapter Eight is the summary and conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

2.1 Overview

This study explores the leadership practices of two exemplary female principals in two urban primary schools in Mainland China. To better understand the context in which they were born, currently live and lead their schools, this chapter provides a contextual overview of traditional Chinese culture, Chinese culture and society under the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and education in the PRC. It considers the history of education in the PRC, and the significance of educational reform since the mid 1980s. The discussion of China’s education system provides an overview of the policy context in which school leaders operate.

2.2 A brief introduction to the People’s Republic of China (PRC)

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established on October 1, 1949. It is the fifth largest country in the world with over 1.3 billion people and 56 ethnicities. Ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it has a jurisdiction of over twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macau) (see Figure 2.1). The regions excluding Hong Kong and Macau are collectively referred to as “Mainland China”. Because this study focuses on two urban primary schools in Mainland China, the following discussion does not refer to the two special administrative regions.

To administrate such a large population across this wide land, several levels of administration are used. In hierarchical order, these are the national level, the provincial level, the prefecture level, the county level, the township level, and the village level. In this hierarchical administrative system, the central government of the PRC is the State Council. Other levels of government administer the nation at
the regional and local level. However at the village level, committees are in charge of the production and lives of people in each village. These serve as an organisational division without much importance in terms of political representative power. Since the market oriented economic reform in the late 1970s, the economy of the PRC has rapidly accelerated. Currently in terms of nominal GDP growth, it is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Due to such economic development, China has successfully decreased its poverty rate from 53% in 1981 to 8% in 2001 (The World Bank, n.d.). Furthermore, with its opening up policy and reform, the PRC has also undergone drastic changes in all aspects of society.

Administrative Divisions of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)

![Administrative map of the People’s Republic of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:China_administrative.gif)

**Figure 2.1** The administrative map of the People’s Republic of China

2.3 Traditional Chinese culture

China has a continuous history and rich culture. Its culture has evolved over the centuries and has been shaped by both internal and external forces (Louie, 2008). Before 1900, traditional Chinese culture dominated the organisation of Chinese society. Although since 1900 traditional Chinese culture has been challenged by western culture, it is evident that traditional Chinese culture still exerts an important influence in Chinese society. It is for this reason that this section presents some key insights into traditional Chinese culture.

According to Q. Zhang (2004), traditional Chinese culture can be understood as involving its ideological culture, social systems, literature and other material, and historical and cultural forms (e.g., its historical and cultural relics, its ancient architecture, ancient costumes, its medicine and astronomy). Of importance to the current study is China’s ideological culture since it lays a foundation for understanding the enduring values of Chinese culture. Q. Zhang (2004) argues that ideological culture in ancient China usually includes the philosophy of Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, and Buddhism. In the section that follows, however, a discussion only of the philosophy of Confucianism and Taoism is presented due to its relevance to this study.

Confucianism

Confucianism was initially created by Confucius (551-479 B.C.), an important scholar and teacher who drew together many features of traditional Chinese beliefs known as the “Confucian Analects” (Spence, 1990, p. 59). In Chinese history, Confucianism has firmly established its influence in terms of a system of moral, political and social principles governing Chinese society. From the Han Dynasty (206 B.C – 25) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Confucianism was adopted as the official orthodoxy to guide the governing of the states. In Confucianism, there are three prominent ingredients. The first is considered to be virtue building of
individuals and establishing a morally binding state. According to Confucianism, individual people are encouraged to build virtues of humanity, righteousness, good manners, wisdom, and trustworthiness (Legge, 1983). For Confucius, this virtue building principle should also be adopted by rulers of the state through their rule by benevolence rather than by force. Confucius suggested that every person could become a cultivated person who possesses good virtues and, in turn, a morally binding society could grow through the cultivation of the interior goodness of its people who practise virtuous behavior in their daily lives (Guthrie, 2008; Redding, 1990; Q. Zhang, 2004; Zhi, 2005).

The second important ingredient of Confucianism is its notion of social relations, which is called “wulun” in its doctrines. “Wulun” refers to five cardinal role relations between an emperor and his subject (or boss-subordinate), father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and friend-friend. Except for the last role relation, all the others are characterized by a hierarchical and dominant-subservient relationship (Jia.Wang, 2008). Through this hierarchical structure, Confucianism defined the roles and mutual obligations between individuals, between individuals and the state, between man and woman, and between the old and the young. Following Confucius’ reasoning, at the social level, individuals were supposed to conform to the governing of the state; at the family level, a paternalistic relationship was advocated, in which children were taught to obey parents, and wives were required to comply with their husbands’ wishes. Because of the wide influence of Confucianism, Chinese society has been described as a collectivist society which means it is constructed through morally binding relationships amongst its social members (Redding, 1990).

The third important ingredient relates to education. In Chinese history, it was Confucius who first recruited and then educated students regardless of their social status or class position. However, for Confucius, education did not merely mean knowledge or learning, but the cultivation of individuals. Furthermore, education
was seen to have a political purpose. According to Confucius, people should work and learn diligently in order to cultivate their virtues and to serve the state as officials. Education under Confucianism was an important means of reinforcing moral social relations and selecting excellent scholars to serve the state, thus leading to the stability of a morally binding united society. Due to the prevalence of Confucianism in Chinese society, education was and continues to be valued highly in China.

**Taoism**

In addition to the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, an indigenous Chinese religion, is also seen as a key component of traditional Chinese culture. Its outstanding contribution to traditional Chinese culture is its views about nature and dialectical thinking (Redding, 1990; Jia.Wang, 2008; Q. Zhang, 2004). According to Taoism, *Tao* (the way) is the origin of the universe and the *Tao* generates everything in the world, thus individuals should be in harmony with nature. Taoism focuses on the complementarity and dynamic balance between opposites (Yip, 2004) and explains natural phenomena in a dialectical way. It suggests that opposite phenomena are relative and complementary in essence. According to Taoism, there exists a driving force between opposite poles which can be seen as opportunities in contradistinction.

Based on these contentions, the concept *wu wei* (or non-action) is advocated. It means that individuals should take appropriate action rather than resolve problems through overdoing. Yet, *wu wei* does not mean no activity at all; instead it calls for a natural way of behaviour, where things can be solved in light of the natural principles.

Largely influenced by the philosophy of Confucianism and Taoism, traditional Chinese culture exhibits some characteristics, which can be summarized as an “ethos of humanism” (Q. Zhang, 2004, p.2) and an “ethos of naturalism” (Q. Zhang, 2004,
An ethos of humanism emphasises developing the virtues of people through perseverant self-cultivation and establishing a morally binding unified society. This characteristic demonstrates an emphasis on friendship, proper conduct between people, loyalty from social members to their state, and the filial piety in traditional Chinese culture. An ethos of naturalism demonstrates that traditional Chinese culture underscores harmony between human beings and the nature and the balance between polarized elements.

2.4 Cultural and social context in the PRC (Since 1949)

Because this study is concerned with the professional lives of two female school principals in the PRC, it is necessary to have some understanding about the cultural and social contexts of the PRC. In this section, the cultural and social contexts in the PRC in two timeframes are briefly reviewed: Chinese society from 1949 to 1976 and Chinese society since 1977.

Chinese society from 1949 to 1976

When the Chinese Communist Party took over the governance of the country and established a communist regime with single-party system in 1949, it took a series of measures to consolidate the new regime. Mainly guided by the leadership of Mao Zedong, the politicised national development strategy was underscored (Hsu, 1995). It aimed to spread communist ideology and achieve the control of the CCP over the new regime (Guthrie, 2008; Perry & Selden, 2003). To achieve control of the state-party over every aspect of the society, Chinese society was organised into a hierarchical and reliable social system, which consisted of family, work units (danwei) in urban areas and communes (gongshe) in rural areas, and a state-party (Guthrie, 2008). Unlike traditional Chinese society where individuals lived with their extended families and were located within their clan according to their lineage, under Mao’s regime, individuals lived in nuclear families and were affiliated with different work units in the cities, and individual communes in rural areas. The work unit and commune organised the production and had the responsibility for the social
welfare of people within them. At that time, the work unit and commune constituted the fundamental social institution in Chinese society. The CCP represented and continues to represent the state and controls the governance of the whole country.

Under Mao, individuals were strongly influenced by the national ideology promoted by the party. The fates of individuals were tightly linked with the state through the party membership and party loyalty (Guthrie, 2008). Unlike the traditional Chinese family order in which the father had the absolute authority and husbands had more power than their wives, under Mao’s regime, the loyalty to the party was more important than loyalty to one’s family. Under the new system, family relations between a husband and wife changed and both had an equal position. Under Mao’s regime, urban women were assigned jobs in work units and rural women participated in work within their communes. Thus, women were encouraged to contribute to the construction of the communist country (Bossen, 2008). Through these institutional arrangements, the CCP attempted to establish an egalitarian society.

At this time, communism and Maoism dominated the national ideology and had a significant influence over the ideas of individual Chinese citizens. Traditional Chinese culture and values were regarded as a harmful influence of feudal China under imperial periods and were attacked or destroyed. The ideas of the bourgeoisie were also criticized since they were linked to the ideas and style of foreign capitalism which was seen as a threat to the Communist regime. According to Mao’s views, the new regime needed to construct its own culture which served the proletariat (Lo, 1987). Thus revolution and mass campaigns were launched to establish “an ideologically based egalitarian social order” (Guthrie, 2008, p. 77) in China. This ideological campaign reached its zenith during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Almost all aspects of Chinese society were involved in the proletariat cultural revolutionary campaigns then. Even in schools, a politicised curriculum prevailed and academic knowledge learning decreased since students were required
to participate in labour work in factories or on farms so as to learn from the proletariat (Bergen, 1990). (In the next section, education under Mao’s leadership is specifically discussed).

**Chinese society since 1977**

After the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in late 1976, Chinese society passed into another historical stage. To reconstruct the national economy which was at the edge of ruin after the ten year period of the Cultural Revolution, the central government of the CCP under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, who gained power in late 1978, transferred its focus to economic reconstruction. Since 1978, economic reforms have been gradually implemented. Specifically, the control of the CCP over the economy has decreased and rationalization of the economy in light of the rule of the free market has been advocated. This market-oriented economic reform has changed the social systems established under Mao’s regime (Guthrie, 2008). Unlike the uniform and strict control of the state-party over Chinese society, Chinese society during this period of economic reform was characterized by less state control, greater freedom for individuals, a strong influence of market factors, and was more open to the outside world.

Under the economic reform, in order to stimulate the incentive of local governments some administrative power has been devolved from the central government to regional and local governments (Ash, Ash, & Kueh, 1996; Guthrie, 2008). Regional and local governments are encouraged to find a variety of resources to develop their regional and local economy. Unlike the situation under Mao’s regime, currently the CCP has withdrawn from specific economic activities and administration. Although the CCP still holds strong control over the administration of the country via a variety of social institutions and organisations through its party committees at different levels, removal of the party from the daily management of the state system is a characteristic of current Chinese society (Guthrie, 2008). In current society in Mainland China, regional and local governments play an important role in
developing their local economy. Individuals are also encouraged to participate in the market economy to pursue their own fortune. For instance, peasants are now permitted to keep the surplus of their production and sell it in the market for their own benefit. In urban areas, whereas workers were once bound to work units, they are now permitted to create their own business (Ash et al., 1996; Tang & Parish, 2000). Meanwhile, many responsibilities which used to be taken by the government have been transferred to individual families or individuals. For instance, work units do not provide free housing and medical care any more (Davis, 1989).

In the last three decades, the opening up and the market oriented economic reform of the PRC has contributed to China’s rapid economic growth and improvement of people’s living conditions. However, it also has resulted in some rather drastic changes to Chinese society and culture. One of these changes is the breaking down of the egalitarian social order under Mao’s regime.

Under the market oriented economic reforms, factories and enterprises have set effectiveness and efficiency as their first priority and, in some cases, they reduce employment in order to maintain competitive. Consequently, individuals who are less qualified face the likely prospect of unemployment. Under market competition, women workers more so than their male counterparts have been those to bear the brunt of unemployment (Z. Wang, 2003) because historically most women workers have worked in low-skilled industries (Z. Wang, 2003; Jiang, 2004). Some intellectuals even argue that women should quit their jobs since their physical characteristics make them less suitable than males for some jobs. In light of this view, “women return home” was a prominent message found in official journals and newspapers as a strategy to solve the unemployment issues faced by many state-owned enterprises.

Similar to this view, there is also a discourse of femininity which argues against “Maoist unnatural gender sameness” (Z. Wang, 2003, p.70). Some scholars argue
that the identical national ideology under Mao’s regime concealed women’s femininity. Shaped by these new voices about gender issues and influenced by the market-oriented economic reform, gendered employment practices have become widespread in current Chinese society. Women are mostly found in service sectors, child care and secretarial jobs which are regarded as women’s jobs. Furthermore, due to the decreasing commitment of the state to gender equity, gender discrimination has been and continues to be rampant in current Chinese society (Z. Wang, 2003). This is especially the case for women in rural areas and for women who have little education.

Another change due to market oriented economic reform is considered to be the gradual less influence of the reliable and hierarchical social relations within Chinese society. Although some scholars indicate that one of the prominent features of Chinese society is its emphasis on personal relations and social networks, some empirical studies reveal the place of personal relations and social networks is viewed as less important than personal capability within the current Chinese business community, particularly so for large sized businesses (see Guthrie, 2008). In recent decades, with the integration of the Chinese economy and global economic competition, the competency of individuals and the whole nation has become underscored.

Relating to the emphasis of individual and national competition under current economic reform, another change has been the emphasis given to the role of education to enhance the human capital for the PRC (“Strategic concepts for the development of Chinese education”, 2005). An implication for individuals is that they are required to continually update their knowledge and skills to remain competitive and viable in the employment market. Moreover, the important role of education for individuals has been reinforced by the One Child Policy introduced in Mainland China since 1980s. This policy aims to secure the nation’s economic development by controlling the rate of population growth. At an individual family
level, much attention has been paid to the education of the only child who is nurtured by the parents and four grandparents.

Furthermore, another prominent change to contemporary Chinese society has resulted from the influx of new ways of thinking and new ideas that have been taken up by individuals and institutions. Since the economic reform and the opening up policy in 1978, coupled with less control by the CCP, traditional Chinese culture has been revived. Some positive influences of traditional Chinese culture have been popularized to promote the development of Chinese society (G. Wang & Tang; D.Zhang, 2003; Zheng & Luo, 2003). Meanwhile, a lot of ideas and influences from western countries have also been introduced into China and a great number of Chinese scholars and advanced technicians have been sent to study abroad or conduct academic exchanges (Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1988). For instance, unlike the monopolized perspective of Maoist gender equity, currently feminist ideologies from western societies have been introduced into the Chinese academic community. It is apparent that current Chinese culture demonstrates an integration of traditional Chinese culture and multiple cultures from other countries.

2.5 Education in the PRC

This section specifically presents the educational context of the PRC since 1949. A brief history of education development under two time frames is discussed because both provide a valuable way of understanding the context in which contemporary school principals work today.

As identified previously, China has a long standing tradition of valuing education. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, education has been viewed as an important means to transform society and develop a national economy. However, because of different leadership approaches by the CCP, the national ideology of education and official policies regarding education vary
(Cleverley, 1984; Sautman, 1991). For instance, education under Mao Zedong’s leadership was mostly related to the political needs of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), because education was regarded as an important means to transform the traditional feudal culture and bourgeoisie class to a socialist labour force to serve the proletariat (Bergen, 1990; Lo, 1987). Since the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in late 1978, the focus of leadership of the CCP has gradually transferred to economic reconstruction and the role of education in the national economic development of the nation has been highlighted. Since the 1980s, far-ranging educational reforms have been launched to echo the economic reforms. Currently, the role of education in promoting sustainable economic growth and social progress is further emphasised in China in the face of a knowledge-based economy and global competition.

**A brief history of education in the PRC since 1949**

Education in the PRC since 1949 can be broadly divided into two time frames: from 1949 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976; and the time frame from 1977 to the current time.

**Education: 1949 – 1976**

Mostly guided by the views of Mao Zedong, the leader of the CCP during this period, education in 1949 – 1976 was characterized by a politicised educational ideology. Education in that period aimed to foster citizens who would work towards the development of a newly built socialist country and would serve proletarian politics. During this period, the central government of the CCP advocated that school education should be integrated with labour work on farms and in the factory (Shirk, 1977). The educational policy at the time maintained that students and teachers in schools should learn from workers and the peasants. The aim of this effort was to avoid the tendency of scholars and intellectuals despising manual labour (Bergen, 1990). This politicised educational ideology was radically emphasised during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), in which education was viewed as serving “proletarian politics” and creating a “new socialist person” (Sautman, 1991, p. 676).
During the Cultural Revolution, academic knowledge was devalued and class struggle was prevalent in schools at all levels. Teachers in schools were ranked among class enemies of socialism and, therefore, were “re-educated”. Another prominent example of politicised education was the abolition of entrance examinations to attend university during the Cultural Revolution.

**Education: 1977 – present**

After the demise of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the collapse of the Cultural Revolution, the central government of the CCP switched its focus towards economic reconstruction. This change of economic policy contributed to a change of education policies. Since the late 1970s, education has become more oriented to supporting economic recovery. During the post-Mao Zedong era, the leadership of the CCP has viewed education as the foundation of the Four Modernizations (The four modernizations refer to aspects of agriculture, industry, technology and defense which marked the beginning of the reform era (Spence, 1990)).

The reinstatement of entrance examinations for university in late 1977 can be viewed as important evidence for this change of educational ideology. Reverence for academic knowledge, teachers and intellectuals was reinstated. Scientific and technical knowledge has been assigned the highest priority since the 1980s. Education at all levels has been reconstructed since 1977 in order to foster educated people who can contribute to economic development. Following on from the economic reform since 1978, a series of educational reforms have been officially launched since 1985. To date, these educational reforms are ongoing. With the rapid economic development in the PRC, the crucial role of education in promoting the sustainable progress of China’s economy has been further acknowledged (Kurlantzick, 2007). More than simply a pursuit of meeting goals of education (such as increasing the rate of student enrolments at different levels of education, and decreasing the rate of student attrition), a high quality education for all students at all levels has become the main focus of current Chinese educational reform (Chu, 2008;
Educational reform since 1985

The early years of the educational reforms set the blueprint of the whole educational reform and the last decade witnessed the deepening of educational reform. Generally speaking, commentators of the educational reform claim that it has been successful; however some problems have also emerged during the process (Yixian Li, 2006; Luo, 2007). Currently pro-active actions have been taken to solve the problems (Law, 1998; D.Yang, 2007). To have a holistic understanding of educational reform since 1985, the following sections are presented. They include an interpretation of some related landmark educational policies and regulations, the consequences of the educational reforms, and some of the actions to improve educational reforms. This discussion provides important background information from which to understand school leadership.

Interpretation of landmark educational policies

The official efforts in education to echo the economic reforms since the late 1970s can be initially found in the educational policy, Reform of China's Educational System (1985). This educational document marks the official beginning of the ongoing educational reconstruction in the PRC since the mid 1980s. The document identifies several major problems in the educational system, which include “rigid bureaucratic control over schools and universities, a shortage of physical provision and qualified teachers, and the weakening of political and ideological education” (Law, 1998, p.563). To solve these problems the central government provided guidelines regarding basic education, vocational education, and higher education. The reform initiatives promulgated in this document involve:

1. devolving administrative power and financial responsibility from the central government to the regional government (provincial and municipal levels), local government (county, and town levels) and to schools and universities
particularly;
2. diversifying sources of funding to raise finance for education;
3. implementing the Principal- or President- Responsibility System and restricting the power of the committees of the CCP at all levels of school organisations so as to secure the power of school principals in managing schools or universities;
4. universalising nine-year compulsory education;
5. increasing the proportion of vocational and technical education in secondary education;
6. transforming the employment system of graduates (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985).

As for basic education, devolution of administration from the central government to regional and local governments and universalisation of the nine-year compulsory education are two important reform initiatives highlighted in the document. This educational policy sets the fundamental direction for education at levels in the PRC. To fully implement these educational reforms over the next ten years, the central government of the CCP issued a holistic guiding policy document *Programme for Educational reform and Development in China* (1993). This policy reiterates the themes of the universalisation of basic education, vocationalisation of secondary education, and diversification of funding sources. For basic education, the central government set the aim of universalisation of basic education in eighty-five percent of regions of the whole country until 2000, considering the disparity between regions in terms of their economic and social situations. In particular, the following core tasks for Chinese education development were mentioned in the document, including guaranteeing appropriate funding to each level of education, transforming the educational administrative system, enhancing the capacity of educators, and improving moral education and the quality of education (“Programme for Educational reform and Development in China”, 1993).
Unlike the 1985 educational policy, this document promulgates the specific reform initiatives to guarantee the implementation of educational reform. For instance, it was suggested that quality standards and evaluation mechanisms be established at all level of education; pre-service and in-service training for teachers and principals are emphasised; and specific goals for upgrading the knowledge of teaching and administration staff in schools are also set (e.g., by 1997, principals of all primary and secondary schools are expected to hold principalship certificates recognised by the central government) (Law, 1998).

The enactment of the above two polices which emphasise devolution of educational administration and the incentives of individual schools, makes the role of school principals more prominent. This can be seen from the official enactment of the Principal- or President- Responsibility System which is highlighted in the two documents. This system maintains that school principals are chief executives who are in charge of the main activities and important decision making in schools. The party committee of the Chinese Communist Party at the school level and the Teachers’ Union in schools are to play supervision roles (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985). This policy outlines the role of principals and the role of the secretary of the school party committee of the CCP. The school principal is empowered to manage schools, whereas the secretary of the school party committee of the CCP is responsible for monitoring whether the principal manages the school in light of the general policies of the central government of the CCP.

Considering the important role of school principals in school management, a series of regulations in terms of principals’ qualification and training were issued to guide the school principalship. For instance, *Qualifications and Responsibilities for Principals Candidates and Incumbent Principals* (1991); *Regulations on Implementation of Principle’s Credentials in Primary and Secondary Schools* (1997). *Qualifications and Responsibilities for Principals Candidates and Incumbent Principals* (1991) offers a benchmark for selecting principals for primary and
secondary schools (excluding vocational secondary schools). It states that the candidate for the principalship first and foremost should insist on being led by the Chinese Communist Party, in implementing the policies of the central government of the CCP (Ministry of Education of PRC, 1991). It also says that these candidates should have a solid understanding of national and local policies, mastering knowledge management required for the principalship and some other knowledge related to the principalship. *Regulations on Implementation of Principals’ Credentials in Primary and Secondary Schools* which was issued in 1997 by the State Education Commission of China (in 1998, it was renamed as the Ministry of Education of the PRC) further regulates that principals should hold the Principals’ Credentials before they are assigned to the principalship position (State Education Commission of PRC, 1997).

*Consequences of the educational reforms*

It can be said that the educational achievements of the PRC during the first decade have been remarkable. For instance, the completion rate for primary school graduates increased from 75.9% in 1980 to 86.6% in 1994; the qualifications of teachers and school managers were enhanced. For instance, about 80% of all school principals were trained and awarded with certificates of the principalship by the central government between 1990 and 1995 (Law, 1998). However, some problems have also emerged during the educational reform which have been characterized by devolution of power and financial responsibility to regional and local areas (Ngok, 2007).

The first problem is related to the increasing disparity between different regions (e.g., disparity between developed regions and less developed regions; rural areas and urban cities) and the disparity between schools in the same regions (e.g., between *key schools* and *regular schools*, well performing schools and poor performing schools). Rather than equally distribute resources to schools, the central government distributes the majority of the educational resources to key schools which have a
greater concentration of excellent teachers and superior teaching facilities. The rest of the schools, known as regular schools, do not enjoy the same privileges (Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1988).

According to the educational reform policy of 1985, financial responsibility was mostly devolved to regional and local government. Because there is a great deal of disparity among the regions, this has translated into some regions receiving greater amounts of funding than others. For instance, education in well developed regions, especially in eastern coastal regions, is better funded than education in inland regions. This educational disparity also exists between urban areas and rural areas due to the poor economic situation in most rural areas in the PRC (Jing.Lin & Ross, 1998; Ngok, 2007). Although according to educational reform policy, regional governments, local governments and individual schools are permitted to raise schooling funds from non-state sectors (e.g., private enterprises) or accept donations from individuals, it is more likely to be difficult for schools in less developed regions to gain educational resources. Therefore, education in rural areas and in less developed regions and localities is far behind due to insufficient schooling funds.

Since the implementation of compulsory education and the abolition of entrance examinations to junior secondary school in 1986 for basic education, the central government has regulated that schools can only enroll students within the schools’ catchment areas. However, in practice, many wealthy families exchange school places in these key schools or prestigious schools outside of their living communities by offering financial support or sponsorship (Law, 1998). Compared with regular schools or schools with fewer students who excel academically, these schools gain considerable funds to improve their schooling facilities and the salary of teachers is greater. The educational disparity among regions and among schools has resulted in drastic inequity among people (D.Yang, 2007).
Related to the first problem, the second problem involves the violation or deviation of national educational policies by regional and local governments. This problem can be exemplified by the following two phenomena. One is the delay of paying teachers salary in some rural areas. As part of the educational reforms, the central government of the CCP devolved educational administration of basic education to regional and local governments. Since most senior secondary schools, junior secondary schools and primary schools are established respectively in counties, townships and villages, the central government thus regulated that the local governments in counties, townships and villages should be accountable for specific administration of these schools such as managing teachers’ salary, recruitment of educational staff and teacher. For some local governments which are in poor areas or in rural areas, they used the earmarked fund for teachers’ salary in other ways and delayed the monthly salary of teachers (Jing.Lin, 1992). Another problem is the abuse of the fee charging system in primary and junior secondary schools. According to the Compulsory Education Law which was enacted in 1986, education at these levels is free of tuition. Except for small amounts of miscellaneous fees approved by the educational authorities, these schools are not permitted to charge students tuition fees. However in practice, many schools have violated the policy and charge students additional fees to help with school maintenance, supplementary classes after schools or during school holidays (Law, 1998). These extra fees add to the financial burden of families especially families with low income (Law, 1998; Jing. Lin & Ross, 1998).

A third problem concerns the quality of education. As an important part of the educational reforms, the national educational plan and quantitative goals for universalizing nine-year compulsory education were set. To meet the national educational goals, some regional and local governments enrolled as many students as possible without providing enough schooling facilities to make sure schooling would be of a quality standard. This had the effect of leading to large sized classes and a short supply of teachers to deliver classes. Like the aforementioned two
problems, the third problem has been caused mostly by a lack of educational resources. As scholars and policy makers in the PRC have recognised, it is a challenging task to improve the education system in a country with such a great population (“National report on universal education”, 2007; D.Yang, 2007).

Actions to improve educational reforms

Educational problems that have emerged in the process of implementing the far-reaching educational reforms have been discussed by scholars (e.g., S. Chen, 1991; Q. Huang, 1991). To solve these problems and improve China’s education and serve the national economic development, some actions have been taken by the central government of the CCP. These actions include increasing control of the central government over educational practices through the enactment of a series of educational laws, further educational reform initiatives focusing on improving education quality and equity, and persistence in political and ideological education. Each of these is now considered.

Institutionalization of education administration: The enactment of education laws

To consolidate the achievement of educational reforms and avoid the issues in the process, the central government of the CCP issued several education laws to rationalize the educational practices of regional and local governments (e.g., Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China (1986), Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China (Revised) (2006), Education Law of the People’s Republic of China (1995), and Teacher Law of the People’s Republic of China (1993)). Compulsory Education Law (1986) legitimates the universalisation of free nine-year education and protects the education rights of all school children, especially the educational rights of girl students (National People’s Congress of PRC, 1986). Teacher Law (1993) provides legal support for teachers and protects teachers’ rights from infraction (National People’s Congress of PRC, 1993). Education Law (1995) sets a more comprehensive legal framework to guide educational practices at all levels (National People’s Congress of PRC, 1995). The
revised Compulsory Educational Law (2006) clarifies the responsibility of central governments with respect to developing basic education (National People’s Congress of PRC, 2006). In this new Compulsory Educational Law, educational equity is highlighted and any violation against this law will be punished. With the enactment of these educational laws, how to manage schools ethically has been highlighted (Chu, 2008; D.Yang, 2007).

Further educational reform initiatives to improve education quality

In addition to these legal efforts to institutionalize education practices, the central government continuously conducts educational reform initiatives at all levels of education so as to improve education quality. This can be seen from the issue of Action Plan to Vitalize Education in the 21st Century in 1998 on the eve of the 21st century. In this action plan, the role of education to influence economic and societal development was reiterated. One of its salient features is that education be strategically accentuated due to the acknowledgement of its role for enhancing the citizenship of the whole nation. In the document, a “Quality education project” was put forward. The main purpose of the project is to improve the quality of education and foster excellent students to meet the challenges of the new millennium. To achieve the purpose, it is promulgated that from 2000 a new modern curriculum framework should be built to transform the shortcomings of traditional teaching and learning styles (Ministry of Education of PRC, 1998). Since the issue of the document, transforming the shortcomings of the traditional curriculum and teaching styles so as to improve the quality of school education was added to the agenda of school principals’ daily work. One of the core tasks of school principals in primary and secondary schools is to implement quality education and curriculum reform (Yufang Li, 2005).

On basis of Action Plan to Vitalize Education in the 21st Century, in June of 1999, the State Council of the Chinese central government further issued another important educational policy: Decision on Deepening Educational reform and
Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999). Since then, Quality Education has been promoted in Chinese society. Quality education is viewed as an antidote for traditional education that merely focuses on fostering the intelligent capacity of students while ignoring other key capacities of students, such as their emotional, social and physical capacities. Implementing quality education at all levels of education is viewed as an important measure to push forward educational reform in China. To achieve initiatives of quality education, enhancing the teaching capacity of teachers and further implementing the educational system reform at various levels are particularly underscored in the document (State Council of PRC, 1999). That is, to achieve the goals of quality education, on one hand, in the aspects of personnel, teachers and administrators have to change their outdated teaching and administration ways. On the other hand, from an institutional aspect, the outdated education system should be transformed to match the reform measures of quality education. The enactment of Decision on Deepening Educational reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999) marks that educational reform in China has reached another stage in its history whereby authentic learning for all students is highlighted.

As a sequential reform initiative of Quality Education, Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education was enacted in 2001. The purpose of the policy is to holistically transform the shortcomings in basic education to prepare qualified citizens for the nation and to provide a good foundation for students’ further education in the future. The basic educational reform embraces reform initiatives on the curriculum framework, teaching and learning approaches, and transforming the administrative system in schools at the basic education level. In this document, transforming the existing principal administrative systems and implementing new recruitment and selection systems are put forward (State Council of PRC, 2001). As one of the principal administrative reform initiatives, the Principalship Position-Rank System is advocated to motivate school principals to improve their performance. The system distinguishes the responsibility between the profession of
principals and that of the officers in government departments. In other words, school principals are regulated in the same manner as government officers in that they share with other officers similar recruitment and selection processes. The Principalship Position-Rank System articulates the accountability of principals in promoting teaching and learning of the schools. With the enactment of Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education, the significant role of school principals in primary and secondary schools has been thoroughly acknowledged.

Persistence in ideological and moral education
Apart from these efforts to improve educational quality and promote educational equity, the central government emphasises the importance of ideological education and moral education in the current reform era. Since the opening up policy and market economic reform era, various ideas have been introduced into China and some of these conflict with traditional Chinese culture and the Chinese communist ideology. These conflicting values have a significant impact on students in schools (J. Yang, 2007). In 1994, to consolidate the national ideology among students, the central government issued a comprehensive policy Guidelines for the implementation for patriotic education (1994). As an important educational activity, students in primary and secondary schools are required to attend the national flag raising assembly every week. Since the enactment of the guidelines, a nation-wide patriotic movement has been launched. For instance, the promotion of 100 books, the showing of 100 films and learning 100 songs on patriotism in primary and secondary schools (“Action plan for patriotic education”, 2006) has been carried out. Furthermore, some parts of traditional Chinese values are incorporated into the national curriculum and taught to students. Under the Education Law, it specifically states that schools have an obligation to promote Chinese socialism and “excellent” Chinese culture and traditions in the PRC. Currently in primary and secondary schools in many regions of the PRC, there is a movement of reading traditional Chinese books and teaching traditional Chinese values (Law, 1998). To some extent, the effort of the central government in promoting moral education demonstrates its
intention to foster excellent citizens imbued with nationalist pride who can contribute to the sustainable development of the nation.

2.6 Summary

Chinese culture, which was largely influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, continues to have a significant influence on current society in Mainland China. In 1949, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China opened another page of China’s history. In the first three decades of the PRC, the politicised national development strategies under Mao Zedong’s leadership were acutely felt. Since 1978, a more economically driven direction, characterized by depoliticised and decentralized economic reforms has been taken. Current society in Mainland China is characterized by less control of the state, more freedom and responsibilities of individuals, a market driven economy, a growth in new ways of thinking, and influences from other cultures.

To support the nation’s economic development and in order to compete on a global stage, the PRC has afforded great attention to education. A plethora of educational reforms has been introduced since the mid 1980s. Among these reforms have been devolution of administration from central government to regional and local governments, changed governance arrangements in school giving school leaders greater decision-making powers, curriculum change, and a strong focus on improving the quality of education for all students. Central to many of these educational reforms has been the identification of the school principal as the key school officer charged with their implementation in an effort to bring about qualitative improvements to learning in their schools. The next chapter considers the broader literature relating to the work and leadership practices of school principals.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Overview

In the previous chapter, the importance of education for China’s economic development and the pivotal role played by school principals within the current Chinese educational reforms were presented by reviewing landmark educational policies in Mainland China. In this chapter, attention is given to the literature and research on school leadership both inside and outside Mainland China. Initially, a brief discussion regarding world-wide educational reform and its impact on the leadership of school principals is provided to help understand the changing contexts of school principals. A discussion of the related literature about Chinese school principals in primary and secondary schools (largely from key databases in Mainland China) is reviewed. Included here is a discussion of a small body of research studies on female school principals from Mainland China. The literature review thus helps to establish the need for a study that focuses on two exemplary female school principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China. The research questions posed in this study are: (a) what are the leadership practices of two exemplary female principals? and (b) what are the factors that have impacted upon their leadership practices? The final parts of the literature review discuss some of the literature about female school principals from the international academic community, related educational theories of importance to this study, and a theoretical framework which guides the study and helps to address the two research questions.

3.2 Changing schooling contexts: implications for the principal

During the last three decades, many countries in the world, including Mainland China, have experienced the impact of wide-ranging social, cultural and political reforms that have influenced both institutions and individuals (Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther, 2002). Dimmock and Walker (2000) point to globalisation as a driving force for many of these reforms. Globalisation is described as “the
tendency for similar policies and practices to spread across … political, cultural and geographical boundaries” (Dimmock & Walker, 2000, p.304). In relation to education, Chapman, Sackney and Aspin (1999) maintain that globalisation has had a huge impact upon education and affected its aims and purposes, the curriculum, the methods of instruction, the leadership, management and administration of education and the assessment and certification across international borders. A summary of some of the key educational reforms to impact upon many countries around the world include the shift to school based management; increasing intervention by governments over the focus and outcomes of education; an emphasis on teacher and principal performance; increased accountability to the school, system and parents; and the marketisation and commodification of education (Chapman et al., 1999). A number of commentators (Beare, 1991; Hallinger, 2003; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998) have made the point that not only have these reforms targeted the management of education (e.g., school based management is a clear example), but also these reforms have had huge implications for the nature, purpose and work of school principals. For instance, the shift to school based management has brought with it greater decision making powers for school principals, increased control over resources and the expectation that schools in cooperation with parents and the wider community will become involved in decision making (Cranston, Ehrich, & Billot, 2003; Leithwood, 1998). While principals have been identified in both policy documents and research as key players who involve others in their school community to engage in collaborative decision making, they remain the persons who are accountable to the system for the school’s performance.

The importance of principal leadership can be found from the large body of literature which investigates school leadership, school effectiveness, and the nature and scope of changes over the last couple of decades (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Stoll & Fink, 1996). A current example of this importance is an ongoing international research program, the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSP), established in 2001 and designed to provide a comprehensive body of research
regarding effective practices of school principals across several countries (including
the PRC and Australia). To date it has conducted more than 65 case studies and
several thousand survey responses (Gurr, 2008). Based on case studies from eight of
these countries (the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Denmark,
Sweden, China, Norway and Canada), Day and Leithwood (2007) have reported part
of the research findings from this international research programme.

One interesting finding from the case studies reported by Day and Leithwood (2007)
is that although the contexts of the eight countries were very different, there were
striking similarities in terms of the successful leadership practices of school
 principals. The differences could be construed in terms of the different political and
social contexts in which principals worked, as well as the different leadership
approaches used including power over to those that were more democratic and
dispersed such as power with. The similarities included similar sets of values,
aspirations and ways of achieving. For instance, the authors distilled five key themes
pertaining to principals’ practices which include passionate commitment and
personal accountability; a strong moral purpose and ability to manage dilemmas;
being other centred and learning centred; making emotional and rational investments;
and emphasising the personal and functional.

Passionately committed and having personal accountability referred to principals
who had positive self-esteem, were enthusiastic and caring, had high expectations
for students and staff, and were strongly values-led. These principals had a desire to
educate the whole person and strong values of fairness for the rights of students. A
strong moral purpose referred to principals who had a strong belief that students
should be taught well and achieve to their best ability. They were principals who
could manage dilemmas and conflicts effectively. Being other centred and learning
focused referred to creating collaborative learning cultures, dispersing leadership
and decision-making, and encouraging trust. Making emotional and rational
investments referred to principals being emotionally understanding when interacting
with others and creating a safe teaching and learning environment. Finally, emphasising the personal and the functional referred to principals who saw schools primarily as “person centred communities” where interpersonal relationships were fostered while at the same time, were cognisant of the need to attend to the functional aspects of school life (i.e. school performance and achievement) (Day & Leithwood, 2007, p.172). As identified in the ISSP, how school principals are leading their schools in the changing educational context has elicited increasing attention of researchers internationally. To understand school principal leadership in the context of Mainland China, the next part of this chapter considers some of the literature and research studies undertaken on the principalship in Mainland China.

3.3 Chinese principals in primary and secondary schools: insights from related literature

The role of school principals in Mainland China has also been highlighted in the broader literature since the commencement of its educational reforms in 1985. This literature falls into three themes and these include: (a) the changing nature of school principalship under the ongoing educational reforms in Mainland China, (b) how school principals manage and lead their schools in the current educational reform context and school principals’ experience of the principalship, and (c) how to effectively promote the professional development of school principals.

Changing nature of school principalship in Mainland China

In the landmark educational policy, Reform of China’s Educational System which was launched in 1985, the Principal- or President- Responsibility System was proposed as one of the important reform initiatives to improve effectiveness of school principals. It officially promulgates that school principals in primary and secondary schools are accountable for specific management and leadership responsibilities while the school secretary of the CCP has reduced control over the specific management of schools (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist
This reform initiative demonstrates the depolitization of China’s education. This new institutional arrangement has created controversy regarding the new role of school principalship.

As for this new role of school principalship, researchers have argued that the school principalship is not equated with an official position within a governmental department as it used to be; rather it should be identified as a professional role in which the person in the principalship should hold credentials to qualify for that position (Chu, 2003; W. Huang, 2005; Jihua.Wang, 2004; T. Wang, 2003). Given the nature of schools as a place for student learning, Chu (2003) argues for viewing school principals as special professionals whose work is to promote the learning of all students. W. Huang (2005) claims that school principalship should be regarded as a managerial profession which has exclusive professional qualifications and skills, systematic selection and an evaluation system.

On the one hand, this changing role of school principals demonstrates less control of the CCP over specific school management and leadership and, on the other hand, it places increasing demands on school principals to lead and manage their schools successfully and creatively rather than simply implement educational policies of the CCP. To a large extent, this changing role of school principals has caused changes to principals’ accountability. Under current educational reform in Mainland China which is characterised by devolution of administrative power and partial financial responsibility to school sites, school principals are accountable for overall school management, including personnel management, financial management, teaching and learning management, and other related activities (Feng, 2003). Due to limited educational funds from the central government, school principals are expected to raise monies by establishing school enterprises to supplement schooling expenses (Law, 1998). Currently, school principals have to divorce themselves from teaching and learning activities to build networks with external communities for support. In addition, the new curriculum reform initiatives in primary and secondary schools
which began in the late 1990s, place further demands on school principals since they are expected to play a crucial role in supervising teaching and learning activities, curriculum development, and offering support to teaching and learning activities (Yufang. Li, 2005). Moreover, to help teachers to enhance their professional capability so as to better implement curriculum reform initiatives, school principals are also expected to organise teachers to conduct research activities in their school sites. These roles are different from school principals before the new curriculum reform. Principals in current schools are expected to play a role as research leader in their schools (Qiu, 2005; Xu, 2005).

The changing role of school principals from official to professional also manifests a change of power utilisation for them. According to the Principal-or President-Responsibility System, school principals are empowered with more authority to manage schools such as managing finance, recruiting and dismissing staff member (Bo, 2005). Thus, school principals currently hold more authority because of their position (Lu, 2003). A number of commentators (e.g., Liu, 2004; Lu, 2003; Mu, 2003; X. Peng, 2003) have identified some issues regarding the implementation of this policy. The first issue is that, many local administrative bureaus devolve accountability to school principals rather than empower them with authority. Thus, the administrative bureaus still have strong control over the specific management of schools. This has lead to increasing pressure placed on school principals (Y. Peng, 2004). Another issue is that some school principals have been said to abuse their power by employing and dismissing teachers and other staff without due process (Lu, 2003). Lu (2003) argues that the supervisory system used to monitor school principals in some regions is very limited and for this reason, principals can sometimes abuse their power.

Lu (2003) illuminates the reasons for the failure of the implementation of Principal-President Responsibility system by referring to the wider Chinese political, economic, cultural context. Similarly, Z. Zhang and Wu (2005) maintain that part of
the reasons for this misuse of power by school principals is that they still tend to regard themselves as “officials” who have authority to control others. They further note that this tendency may be explained by referring to the Chinese cultural tradition whereby serving as an official is valued and admired. These authors suggest that school principals should use less of their authority to control others if they want to achieve effective leadership. They identify other power sources such as personality, expertise and building a collaborative school climate, as ways to achieve influence over staff (Z. Zhang & Wu, 2005).

To further understand power based issues for school principals under the Principal-President Responsible System, Bo (2005) conducted a survey to explore the type of power relationships evident in secondary schools in some of the provinces of Mainland China. Three hundred questionnaires for teachers and 900 questionnaires to students were distributed. Drawing upon the field theory of Pierre Bordieu, Bo discussed five types of power. These include political power (i.e. power relating to the implementation of the ideology of the state and the CCP); administrative power (i.e. authority to organise and manage school tasks); economic power (i.e. capability to access funds and resources in schools); academic power (i.e. expertise of teachers or other staff in terms of teaching and learning); and symbolic power (i.e. power associated with an individual person’s personality or personal relationships and friendship). His findings revealed that (a) these five types of power interplay with each other in school contexts; (b) in the current Chinese school context, political power still exerts an important influence on school members’ behaviours, and this type of power has a strong impact on other types of power; (c) the bureaucratic style of administration still dominates school management which follows a strict hierarchical structure used to organise teachers and other staff members where participation of staff and students is limited; (d) in terms of economic power, school principals and other senior school leaders have more opportunity to decide how to use school funds; (e) academic power in Chinese schools has less influence over staff behaviour and its role is frequently clouded by the other types of power, and (f)
in Chinese schools, personal relationships among people exert an important role in developing people’s power over others.

The aforementioned discussion about the changing nature of school principalship has pointed to the need to improve the administrative systems of school principalship in Mainland China. Some literature has focused on the selection system, recruitment system, and evaluation system of primary and secondary school principals (B.Chen, 2005; Chu & Yang, 2002; Guo, 2005; H. Yang, 2005) as a way of improving the system. For instance, Guo (2005) explores the evaluation system of principals in primary and secondary schools in Mainland China and claims the need to establish an evaluation process with human-oriented, diverse, operationalized measures to measure principals’ capabilities and school performance. According to Guo’s (2005) contention, to effectively evaluate school principals’ management and leadership, teachers and other staff should be involved and their opinions sought about their leaders’ performance. Chu (2003) and H. Yang (2005) suggest that it is necessary to establish a systematic administrative system which includes a recruitment system, accession system, and monitoring and evaluation system. They argue that the systematic administrative system of school principals should secure the selection of qualified candidates for the principalship and thus secure their professional performance.

**Principals’ leadership practices and experiences under the changing context**

A small but growing body of literature has begun to focus on the leadership practices and professional experiences of school principals. In this section, some related literature is reviewed.

**Leadership practices**

G. Chen (1999) investigates the leadership behaviours of school principals in a changing Chinese society. He explores principals’ preferences for using either task or relationship type behaviour. G. Chen found that most school principals in the
sample paid attention to both tasks and relationship behaviours. He points out that the leadership behaviours of school principals is determined by the degree of maturity of the staff, which means high tasks and low relationship type of leadership behaviours should be taken by school principals when the staff are less capable of dealing with their tasks. Consequently, G. Chen maintains that school principals should master more than one kind of leadership approach so as to deal with different situations in their principalship.

Drawing on the research results on organisational behaviour theory in Western countries, Jie. Lin and Wu (1999) explore the situation of communication behaviours between principals and teachers in primary and secondary schools through a survey to 288 school principals and 451 teachers. Their research results reveal that both school principals and teachers in their study perceived that communication was very important and both indicated that the main purpose of communication was to build harmonious personal relationships among staff members. Lin and Wu indicate that this finding demonstrates an important tradition of Chinese society which is to value personal relationships. Their study also found that the way of communication between school principals and their staff was face-to-face formal or an informal interview. However, teachers in the survey indicated that school principals spent more time communicating with their superiors than with themselves.

In another study on the leadership behaviours of primary and secondary schools, F. Chen (2005) identifies five styles of leadership including: (a) arbitrary style of leadership, (b) benevolently dictatorial style, (c) bureaucratic style of leadership, which highlights strict school systems; (d) loose management, and (e) the democratic participation style of leadership. F. Chen found that the second and the third style were frequently exhibited by school principals in primary and secondary schools in Mainland China. Based on this discussion, F. Chen develops a prescriptive set of human-centered leadership behaviours that advocates participant
management.

In addition, some of the writing and research has focused on the ethical dimension of the school principalship. For instance, Xinhua.Wang (1995) claims that it is crucial for school principals to be concerned with the ethical dimension of their work particularly under the Principal-President Responsible System. Xinhua.Wang (1995) points out the strong commitment to education is one of the important ingredients of the ethical requirement of school principalship.

Conclusively, these studies have primarily researched the activities of principals, yet most of them either tend to describe the basic situation of principals’ behaviour or prescribe how principals should behave and what kind of roles they should play. Moreover, it is worth noting that most of the discussions about leadership practices of school principals in Mainland China seldom take gender into consideration. Thus, to assist principals to better administrate their schools, more rigorous and comprehensive empirical research studies are needed.

**Experiences of school principals**

In this section, some salient research literature on school principals in Mainland China is reviewed to help understand their practices. Using a mixed method design J.Zhang (2004) investigates the career experiences of school principals in junior high schools in one of the rural areas in Mainland China. A questionnaire was initially distributed to 40 school principals, and then face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews were conducted with 25 of the participating principals. J. Zhang uses Gronn’s (1999) theory to help identify the career experiences of the principals within the broader context of China. J. Zhang identifies five sources of cultural influence in the society of Mainland China that shaped the leadership formation of these school principals. They include Confucianism, the Cultural Revolution, Communist education, Patriarchal culture and the new economic culture in current reform era of Mainland China. J. Zhang’s (2004) research findings reveal
that (a) Confucianism remains highly valued in China and exerted its influence over the values of these school principals, (b) the Cultural Revolution had a lasting and deeply negative impact on the lives of most of participating school principals, (c) although as a prerequisite of being principal that school principals should have a strong faith in communism and the Communist Party of China, the influence of communism over these school principals was formalistic and limited, and (d) although equality between men and women is an official expectation, in practice men remain dominant in Chinese society and women in educational leadership positions are still underrepresented. Conclusively, J. Zhang’s study demonstrates the strong influence of Chinese culture over the career experiences of the participating school principals. J. Zhang indicates that the influence of Chinese societal culture appears to have had a greater influence on principals than that of family, peer group, and local community.

Another study about the professional experiences and practices of school principals was conducted by Wong. In his study, Wong (2007) interviewed two successful school principals in secondary schools in Shanghai about their professional experiences and how they managed their schools. Interviews were also undertaken with teachers and students in their schools as well as observations of teachers’ classroom delivery. Wong’s study found that (a) although both principals worked in China, their practices were different because of the different organisational contexts and other conditions outside the schools; (b) both shared the same values and knew well the schooling system of China and how to make good use of the system to create opportunity for their schools; (c) both were *top down* managers who had the final decision-making powers in their school although some consultative processes were used to involve teachers in major decisions. As for the third finding, Wong indicates this top down style is consistent with Chinese culture which is identified as “high power distance”, a term used by Hofstede (1991, cited in Wong, 2007). The findings of Wong’s (2007) study demonstrate that Chinese culture exerts an influence over the leadership of school principals.
Professional development of school principals

To improve the professional capability of school principals, great efforts have been given to their professional development since the 1990s. This can be seen from the establishment of two national training centres for primary and secondary schools in 2000, and a network of principal training centres under the structure of three levels of city, province and county. Local normal university and colleges of education, and some educational institutes provide principal training programmes for new school principals, in-service school principals and experienced school principals.

At the early stage of school principal training, the main task of principals training in primary and secondary schools is to inform trainees of basic knowledge on pedagogy, psychology and educational administration. However, with the increasing complexity of principals’ tasks, it was recognised that previous training courses were no longer adequate. As a result, many new training models were presented to improve the training efficiency. Two common features appear in these models. They include an emphasis on meeting the needs of the principals and an emphasis on enhancing the capacity building of principals (Pan & Shu, 2005). Currently, with the increasing accountability of school principals in respect of curriculum reform in Mainland China, the curriculum of the training programmes have been updated by adding in new subjects such as management, computer and information technology, psychology of leadership, curriculum and curriculum reform, quality education and quality of teachers. Some new training approaches have also been incorporated by the training bodies such as excellent school principals are invited to deliver seminar to trainees, and trainees are organised to visit schools both inside and outside Mainland China (Wu & Ehrich, 2009).

To date there are three kinds of training programs used to provide professional development for primary and secondary principals in Mainland China. They are (a) qualification training for new principals which provide trainee basic knowledge and
skills in school management and leadership, (b) improving training for principals who have gained their certification for principalship, and (c) advanced training seminars for selected experienced principals (Wu & Ehrich, 2009)

Professional training programs in Mainland China continue to play an important role in offering up-to-date and relevant professional support and knowledge for school principals in practice.

Summary
Currently, with the increasing recognition of the important role of school principals in Mainland China, many researchers have explored related issues on principalship in primary and secondary schools over the last two decades. However, the research on primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China is still in its infancy. Most of the literature is a loose presentation of arguments without empirical evidence to support; and some of the research studies just simply borrow theories from Western countries, ignoring the context of Chinese society and the daily practices of principals. With the continuous educational reform in primary and secondary schools, more empirical studies on the daily practices of school principals are needed. A deeper understanding about the professional lives of principals in primary and secondary schools is likely to lead to a better understanding of leadership and management in those schools.

It is worth mentioning that most of the literature on primary and secondary principals has tended to view principals neutrally without consideration of the differences between female and male principals. Moreover, in the academic community of Mainland China, only a small number of research studies have been conducted on female school principals. This situation then provides an impetus for the current research study that asks, what are the leadership practices of female school principals?; and what might be the forces that impact upon those practices? In the following section, a small number of studies on female principals in primary
and secondary schools in Mainland China are reviewed to provide shed light upon this issue.

3.4 Research literature about female school principals in Mainland China

Driven by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, much literature and some research studies on females in China has begun to emerge. Female leader has become one of the key research topics by researchers (Jinglin. Wang, 2006). Yet, in the literature on females as leaders, most of it involves female leaders in business and the political arena; only a small body of writing has focused on female leaders in the education area. From a preliminary literature review, four empirical studies on female educational leaders were found. The following section examines these research studies.

Study One

This was a comprehensive study based on a project funded by the British Council and the Chinese Ministry of Education conducted in 1995. Its purpose was to compare the educational situation between Mainland China and the Unite Kingdom (UK). Coleman from the UK and some Chinese academics, Qiang and Li (1998) examined female educational leaders in primary and secondary schools and kindergarten. The results from the research in England and Wales and the results from Shaanxi Province of China were compared. Questionnaires, interviews and some observations of meetings and classroom practices were conducted in three districts in Shaanxi Province. The study involved four types of schools in the rural and urban areas (vocational schools, general secondary schools, primary schools and kindergartens). Altogether 38 respondents including twenty-one males and seventeen females were interviewed to seek their perceptions regarding gender issues. The sample comprised principals, vice principals, deans and teachers. The research
compared the barriers to career progression for females in Shaanxi Province and their counterparts in England and Wales (Coleman, Qiang, & Li, 1998). The research results from the three districts in Shaanxi showed:

1. the majority of managers in secondary and vocational schools were males except for one vocational school in which dance and beauty therapy courses were offered and most staff and students were females;
2. there was a greater incidence of females in senior management positions in primary schools than in secondary or vocational schools, particularly in the urban areas;
3. in rural areas, males were numerically dominant in management positions.

The comparative research study of Coleman et al (1998) indicated that the findings in Shaanxi shared some similarities with those in the UK and elsewhere in Western countries. For instance, the results of both sites showed that the majority of educational managers were males, and major domestic responsibilities were more likely to fall to females. The results also revealed that traditional male characteristics such as aggression and rationality were perceived as characteristics of good leadership by the participants. Furthermore, the research manifested differences between the results of two sites. The data from Shaanxi revealed that female respondents showed much less interest in the management role than those in the West. Both male and female respondents in Shaanxi found that females were not seen to be interested in management (Coleman et al., 1998).

The results of the research demonstrated the perception that females in China were not encouraged to become educational leaders, even though promotion of equality for females in the public sphere was legally established since the 1950s. Coleman et al. (1998) stated:
Despite changes in the legal and social position of women [in China], major changes in attitudes to female managers and to the proportion of women who achieve senior positions in schools are unlikely to occur without addressing the underlying values of patriarchy (p.154).

The above statement implies that there is covert prejudice towards females in management and there is still a long way to go to achieve equality between males and females due to entrenched values of patriarchy. The comparative research has presented part of a situation of females in educational management in China and it has demonstrated that more research studies on females in educational leadership and administration are required.

**Study Two**

The other research studies that are reviewed here are three master’s theses. One of these was a study on the decision-making style of female primary and secondary school principals in Mainland China. It comprehensively explored the decision-making styles of female principals. Focus group interviews and questionnaires were employed in the research. Based on the findings of the focus group interviews which included male and female educational directors, school principals, and teachers, 400 questionnaires were mailed to school principals in Jiangsu, Beijing, and Shanghai. One hundred and forty respondents answered those questionnaires and 134 were valid. Of these 82 were male principals and 52 were female principals. The results indicated the characteristics of female principals’ decision style as “emotional”, “delicate” and “considerate” (Bai, 2004). The research explored female principals’ decision-making style, which offered a lens to view female principals’ leadership. However, the research finding simply presented the status of some female principals’ decision-making style without exploring why they exhibited these kinds of decision-making styles. Therefore, more studies are required to get a deeper understanding of
female principals’ decision-making process.

**Study Three**

The second thesis was a qualitative research study on female principal leadership style and behaviour in a secondary school in Guangdong province. A qualitative case study of a female principal in a secondary school was conducted; in addition, three female principals in other secondary schools were interviewed. Based on the data collected from interviews and observations of the four principals, the researcher explored their leadership philosophies, the characteristics of their leadership styles, and the reasons why they demonstrated these kinds of leadership styles. Furthermore, Zen (2004) compared females’ leadership styles with males’ leadership styles. The researcher identified female principals’ leadership style as cooperative and harmonious relationship creating, and ascribed this kind of working style to the gender characteristics of females such as caring, consideration, kindness, and gentleness, which are acquired during the course of their socialisation.

Zen’s study presented a vivid case to understand females’ leadership style and behaviours. Yet, as Zen (2004) mentioned the analysis about why these female principals exhibited these kinds of leadership was not explored deeply in her thesis study. The construction of female principals’ leadership is likely to be influenced by many factors which may be interwoven with each other in specific organisation contexts and societal cultural contexts (Zhong, 2004), thus in-depth and detailed analyses are needed. Furthermore, there seemed to be a strong tendency in Zen’s research to generalize females’ leadership style and behaviour as cooperative, harmonious, relationship-oriented and power through; while males’ style was described as aggressive, task-oriented and power over. This is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, the results of four female principals cannot represent the situation of all female principals. Secondly, male principals and female principals may manifest different leadership styles in terms of different situations and different tasks (Weiner, 1995), thus it is possible that some female principals may use aggressive and power
over strategies, while some male principals may be cooperative and facilitative. Thirdly, it seems there is a methodological limitation of Zen’s study since she compared female principals’ leadership style with that of their male counterparts’ without conducting the same research procedures.

Study Four
The third master’s thesis was a study on the life experiences and the perceptions of the professional role of three female primary school principals (Zhong, 2004). Zhong’s (2004) study attempted to explore the interplay of gender identity and the perceptions of three female principals’ professional roles. In-depth interviews with three female primary school principals regarding their life stories were conducted over two months. Two female participants were from different regions of Mainland China (Shenzhen and Guangxi and Beijing). All of principals showed their commitment to the research topic. The results revealed that:

1. the different biographies of the three principals’ shaped their gender identity and influenced their leadership perceptions. All of them had grown up in a democratic family and were encouraged to develop both their feminine and masculine sides by their parents. During their formation years, they were excellent students and this contributed to their confidence in their later principalship positions.

2. even though they did not perceive any differences in their daily work as female principals from that of their male counterparts, they acknowledged the conflicts between their family roles as wife and mother and their professional roles as principals. They acknowledged they had to make sacrifices in their family lives to carry out their professional role.

3. in terms of their administration practices, they focused on teaching and learning and played the role as “educator”; they underscored the need to form a harmonious organisation climate like family; and they paid
attention to their own behaviour and modelled this behaviour to teachers and students.

This preliminary study on the life experiences of three female principals investigated how they perceived their roles as principals. However questions such as why did these female principals present these leadership practices and how did other teachers perceive the leadership of the principals were not explored at length. Because the data of this study was only based on the interviews with each of the school principals, an understanding about their leadership was still limited. To better understand the lives of female principals in primary schools, further studies are needed.

Summary

The above studies about Chinese female school principals provided some insights into the professional lives of female school principals in Mainland China. The comparative study of Coleman et al (1998) on some districts in Shaanxi reveals that women are under represented in educational leadership, and prejudice may exist against women’s entering educational leadership positions in Mainland China although men and women are officially announced to be equal by Chinese government. The study by Coleman et al (1998) demonstrated that more studies on female principals are required to further investigate issues about females in educational leadership. Focusing on different aspects of leadership practices of female principals, the three masters’ theses presented an investigation into the lives of female principals in primary and secondary schools. However, all of these masters’ studies did not provide strong evidence about why female principals exhibit these particular sorts of leadership practices. In a sense, there is still limited understanding about the lives of female principals. Under the current ongoing educational reform, what are the lives of female principals and how do they lead their schools? What factors have influenced their leadership practices? What challenges have they confronted and how do they deal with them? To gain a greater
understanding about female school principals, some of the international research literature is reviewed in next section.

3.5 Research on female school principals: international insights

Since the 1970s, research studies on females in educational administration have been conducted in many Western countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia. Some of this research has focused on issues such as the current situation of women in educational administration, the barriers that they have confronted, and their leadership strategies. The literature was dispersed until the advent of Charol Shakeshaft’s (1987) landmark book, “Women in Educational Administration”. Her book synthesised the research literature from dissertations, journal articles, ERIC documents, and unpublished papers on women in educational administration. In that book, Shakeshaft (1987) divided the research literature into six stages, which she referred to as the “evolution of a paradigmatic shift” (p.12).

The studies in the first stage focused on investigating the number of females in educational administration and the situation of their position. In the second stage, researchers explored the successful experiences of excellent females in educational administration. The research literature in the third stage focused on the barriers which female educational leaders have confronted, exploring how they overcame these obstacles. In the fourth stage, researchers listened to the voice of female educational leaders and explored how they constructed their leadership. The fifth stage comprised research that questioned the educational administration knowledge base which is exclusive of the experiences of females. In the sixth stage, drawing on feminist research studies, researchers reflected on theories of educational administration and explored the effects which gender has on organisation, policy making and politics. These researchers advocated reconstructing the educational administration knowledge base based on diversity (Shakeshaft, 1987, 1999).

Following this research emphasis, much subsequent research has been conducted. In the section that follows, only a selection of some of the relevant research literature
on female school principals in primary and secondary schools is reviewed. The literature comes mainly from dissertations, journal articles, ERIC documents from the USA, the UK and Australia. Some key themes including barriers faced by women in educational administration and the leadership behaviors of female principals are considered here.

**Causes of Barriers**

Educational leadership continues to be dominated by males, and the majority of females continue to pursue the teaching profession, although the number of females in educational leadership positions has been increasing in primary schools (Chappell, 2000; Henderson, 1997; Pacis, 2005; Trujillo-Ball, 2003). The causes of the under representation of females in educational leadership continue to be a source of concern for researchers (Mertz & McNeely, 1998 cited in Hilliard, 2000). Many studies have been undertaken to explain the phenomenon. Among the related literature, researchers posit various explanations, such as cultural barriers (Shakeshaft, 1989), sex-role stereotypes (Pounder, 1990), the lack of access by women to power networks, lack of career mobility (Wyatt, 1992), socialisation (Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993), perceived leadership skills of women (Nogay & Bebee, 1997), and leadership styles of females (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992). In her dissertation on the barriers encountered by female high school administrators (including vice principals and principals), Hilliard (2000) reviewed previous literature and concluded that several factors have hindered women from career advancement in educational leadership. These include stereotypes, socialisation, lack of networking and limited mentoring opportunities, limited aspirations, career paths and mobility, and the leadership of female principals. As an illustration, the barrier of stereotypes and gender socialisation are discussed here.

Hilliard (2000) indicates stereotypes are most often cited reasons for the under representation of women in educational administration. Traditionally, the ideal image of leaders in education is the image of males with masculine attributes.
Women tend to be viewed as “lacking assertiveness and leadership ability” (Harder & Waldo, 1983, p. 37, cited in Peters, 2003). Therefore, traditional stereotypes of females and school administrators promote the view that women are less likely to be employed in leadership positions in schools (Pounder, 1990).

Closely related to the above-mentioned factor, socialisation is viewed as another cause for women’s disadvantage and under representation in educational administration. Drawing on ideas from Adkison (1981) and Patterson (1994), Hilliard (2000) posits that women are socialised to behave according to sex based stereotypes and this sex role socialisation process continues to operate in most settings, such as schools and the workplace. The interaction of students and teachers, and the sex-typing of courses and activities relegate girls to subordinate positions. Through the socialisation process, women are socialized to demonstrate passivity, deference, and self-abasement. Thus, from the beginning, women are not well prepared to undertake leadership positions which require more decision making. Even females who have been in educational leadership positions are often viewed as aberrant or deviant since they break the boundary of traditional roles of women. As women leaders in education, they have to participate in school activities at the expense of family and home responsibilities. However, most women administrators, still claim they are the main caregivers. Thus, it is not surprising that these women often encounter strong role conflicts (Goeller, 1992).

**Leadership behaviours of female principals**

Some of the literature revolves around the specific leadership behaviours of female principals in primary and secondary schools. Three key behaviours are discussed within the section.

**Power and leadership**

As a closely connected part of leadership, power used by school principals has been inevitably discussed in much of the literature. Carr (1995) conducted qualitative
research on six Mexican American female principals’ perceptions of leadership, power and caring. In Carr’s (1995) study, six principals from public schools in the Rio Grand Valley region of Texas in USA were interviewed. The study found that:

1. each of the six female principals was willing to devote all of their emotion to working with teachers, students and community;
2. they were willing to foster the climate of learning for teachers and students;
3. they listened to others' opinions and talked with others, and when they made decisions, they kept others in mind;
4. they involved others in transforming schools.

Carr’s (1995) study suggests these female principals tended to share power with members and in their schools they accentuated listening to students and teachers.

In a phenomenological study on the leadership of principals, Fennell (1996) explored leadership and power of female school principals. As part of her longitudinal study of principals’ experience, Fennell researched leadership and power through exploring the metaphors used by four elementary female principals in Canada. The study data were collected by interviews with teachers, in-depth interviews with four female principals, observations and reflective notes. Leadership and power were described as a “steering wheel”, “volcano” (p.8), “shepherd”, “judge” (p.10), “orchestral conductor” “mother bird”, and “water” (p.11) by these principals. By analysing these metaphors, Fennell concluded that each of the four female principals tended to take a facilitative, flexible, nurturing and transformative leadership style, and they empowered teachers, students, parents and others in school communities by encouraging open expression. For these female principals, leadership was a multi-faceted concept, which means all members in schools have the right to play the role of leaders. Based on her study relating to the four female elementary principals, Fennell (1999) further explored power, leadership and gender. In her article, “Power
in the principalship: Four women’s experiences”, Fennell (1999) traced the origin of
the concept of power and further illuminated three formulations of power: “power
over” (p.23), “power through” (p.26) and “power with” (p. 27). Utilising the three
lenses of power, she analysed the experiences of the four women elementary
principals. She indicated that the concepts of relationship and collective power were
emphasised in the four women’s discussion on power. The four women in her study
did acknowledge that their gender had some influence on their perceptions and
exertion of power, since they tended to link power with nurturing and energy.
Noteworthy was the finding that none of the four women expressed that they could
wield their positional power as principal (Fennell, 1999).

These studies resonate with Carol Gilligan’s (1993) assertion that women act with an
ethic of care. Citing Kopiewnicki and Shapiro’s (2001) study of female leadership
style and an ethic of care in schools, Varley (2005) indicated the orientation of an
ethic of care contributes to female leadership behaviours through involvement with
teaching and learning, being children-centered, listening before making decisions
and empowering others.

_Ethic of care: Moral orientation of female principal_

Gilligan’s (1993) theory on women’s moral development has been used to explain
the behaviours of women. Tough-Doogan (2003) drew on Gilligan’s theory and
explored leadership behaviours of female school leaders. She maintained that
morality is encompassed in the role of a leader and an investigation with the
morality of female leadership could benefit an understanding of leadership
behaviours (Tough-Doogan, 2003). Based on Gilligan’s (1993) findings regarding
women’s moral development, Tough-Doogan (2003) conducted a qualitative study
to investigate the moral orientations of female principals and the processes of their
moral reasoning. Specifically, this study examined the moral dilemmas that female
principals face and how the moral perspectives of care and justice influence their
decisions. Gilligan’s “Guide to Reading Narratives of Moral Conflict” was utilised
as a methodological template for the research. Sixty female principals in two regions of Illinois who possessed a doctoral degree and had at least two years’ principalship experience in public schools comprised the potential sample. Seventeen female principals were chosen as participants. In Tough-Doogan’s (2003) study, she found the following areas are the sources of the principals’ dilemmas: (a) Disciplining teachers and staff, (b) Teacher removal, (c) Student needs and protection, (d) Sexual harassment, and (e) Plagiarism. An important finding of this study also indicated that the participants predominately manifested an ethic of care orientation, while there was evidence of a combination of justice and care perspectives in their moral reasoning.

Kropiewnicki (2000) conducted a qualitative study on the ethic of care leadership behaviours of three female principals at an elementary school, a junior high school, and a high school in northeast Pennsylvania in the USA. Through open-ended interviews with the three female principals on their real-life ethical dilemmas, and interviews with three employees at each of the principals’ schools, data were collected. This inductive case study found (a) the three female principals tended to care for others, either students or teachers in their schools; (b) they valued and promoted student centered learning activities; (c) their personal ethics of care affected their professional ethic of care; (d) they shared power with staff when they made decisions; and (e) they were active in and benefited from their professional development (Kropiewnicki, 2000).

Supervisory practices
With the global reconstruction of education, which aims to raise student achievement, accountability for educators has drastically risen. The emphasis on student achievement requires principals to devote much more time and energy to supervising teaching and learning (Varley, 2005). In most research on female principals, female principals are found to spend much time in classrooms and put teaching and learning activities as the first priority in their job (Collard, 2001, 2003;

In Varley’s (2005) study, she focused on exploring female principals’ instructional leadership behaviour under the policy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in a suburban school district in Western Pennsylvania in the USA. In her study, Varley (2005) explored the following aspects relating to instructional leadership: supervision and evaluation, leadership, communication style, power orientation, and ethic of care. Three female elementary principals and twelve female elementary teachers from a suburban school district in Western Pennsylvania were interviewed. The research found these female principals emphasised developing a caring and familial atmosphere in their schools and creating a true community for learners, and under the caring school climate, they took a developmental assessment model to evaluate students and teachers, which was based on growth and collaboration. The findings of Varley’s (2005) research also indicated the potential conflicts between the beliefs of the principals and the NCLB legislation and the effects of NCLB on the practices of the principals and teachers. Varley (2005) revealed profound consistency between the information cited in the literature and the data reported by the three elementary principals and twelve female elementary teachers in the areas of supervision and evaluation, leadership, communication style, power orientation, and ethic of care.

Another research study which focused on leadership behaviour found some similar findings. In her case study, Turner (2004) explored female leadership behaviours of four female principals in an urban district in north western Houston. The participants of her study were from middle schools and nine grade campuses, among which two were African American and two were European American. From a feminist and interpretive lens, Turner (2004) attempted to find out how these women interpreted their leadership in a current multicultural school context. Data were collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews, and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The events, beliefs, and perceptions of these female principals comprised the main data sources of her study. The results indicate (a) these female principals’ personal
characteristics contributed to their success, for instance, “high aspirations and expectations for students, a caring and nurturing approach and being empathetic and supportive” (p.128); (b) these female principals utilised many forms of leading but they shared a commonality of inclusiveness, care, collaboration and concerning students; and (c) in order to meet the diversity of students, they preferred to ensure the equality for all students (Turner, 2004).

Summary
With the increasing recognition of the importance of women in educational administration, the research literature relating to leadership and gender has greatly increased, especially in Western academic community. Therefore, it seems impossible to clearly divide the literature into categories. This may result from the complexity of the leadership practices of school principals. However, a rough division is possible and useful, since it can provide some guides for subsequent study. As for the relating literature in the West, which has been researched in the study, two research orientations were identified. Firstly, some researchers maintain differences in leadership behaviours can be the product of interactions of multiple factors relating to school leaders and therefore it is needed to explore female leadership from other diverse perspectives, such as race, class, individual identity and the interactions of multi factors, rather than merely from gender (Blackmore, 1999; Boone, 2004; Collard, 2001, 2007; Reynolds, 2002; Turner, 2004). Secondly, exploring females’ leadership behaviours from their own perspectives and experiences is viewed as a sound way of exploring this (Fennell, 1996, 1999; Harding, 1987). The two broad classifications of research orientations prompt the researcher to ask: What are the lives of female principals in the context of Chinese society and culture? What are the leadership practices of these female principals? What factors have influenced their leadership construction? To find some potential answers to these questions, the following theories of educational leadership are reviewed. Combining insights from these theories, a theoretical framework of the study is presented.
3.6 Educational leadership theory

In the discussion that follows, some approaches to school leadership in primary and secondary schools are reviewed to generate the main dimensions of school leadership. It then moves to examine two educational leadership approaches which highlight the importance of biographical experiences of individual leaders, namely passionate principalship and educational leadership as a career. Following this, a recently developed educational leadership approach, educational leadership from a cultural perspective, is reviewed to justify the importance of investigating educational leadership by understanding organisational contexts and social and cultural contexts. Finally, some contentions about educational leadership from a feminist perspective are reviewed.

3.6.1 Overview of school leadership

Educational reconstruction and reform have placed the leadership of school principals into the centre of discussion. Some approaches to educational leadership which specifically developed in the contexts of primary and secondary school organisations have been put forward. Davies’ (2005) edited book presents a collection of works by experts from the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia in the field of school leadership as an overview of the major approaches to school leadership. These theories of school leadership encompassed strategic leadership, transformational leadership, invitational leadership, ethical leadership, learning-centered leadership, constructivist leadership, poetical and political leadership, emotional leadership, entrepreneurial leadership, distributed leadership and sustainable leadership. In some school leadership literature, scholars use different terminologies to name approaches to leadership in education, such as moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992). This section reviews five key dimensions of school leaders’ work following Davies (2005).
Learning, teaching and building a learning community

The first dimension relates to an emphasis on teaching, learning and learning community. The emphasis on teaching and learning and building a community is indicative of schools being different from other organisations such as businesses. Schools are places that are responsible for providing systematic learning and teaching and their primary task is to offer instruction (Davies, 2005; Tsemunhu, 2005). School principals, therefore, are required to have broad understandings about teaching and learning and to exert their leadership revolving around teaching and learning so as to promote student learning. This emphasis is prominent in some school leadership approaches such as instructional leadership, learning-centered leadership by Southworth (2005), and constructive leadership by Lambert (2005). Because of their relevance to this study, instructional leadership, learning–centered leadership and constructive leadership are reviewed as follows.

Instructional leadership

The terminology of instructional leadership has been prevalent in North America since the 1980s. Its prevalence responds to the demand of increasing school effectiveness by the public in America. Eldredge (2008) claims that the publication of the Coleman report in 1966, the Effectiveness School Movement in the 1970s and the enactment of A Nation at Risk in 1980s and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 contributed to the focus on teaching and learning by American public school education. In the academic community, much research has been conducted to explore how to improve teaching and learning and the role of school leadership in improving teaching and learning outcomes (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Literature regarding instructional leadership demonstrates that strong instructional leadership is attributed to effective schools and student performance (Eldredge, 2008). As an important force in schools, principals are accountable for exerting instructional leadership in their schools to enhance the learning outcomes of students.
To guide the instructional leadership practices of principals, some researchers have explored the characteristics of instructional leadership (e.g., Edmonds, 1979; Elmore, 2000; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987 cited in Eldredge, 2008). These characteristics of instructional leadership involve principal’s specific classroom instructional practices such as spending time in classroom, overseeing implementation of quality instruction, modelling, supervising and evaluating staff, setting high expectation for students and staff. In addition to these specific instructional practices, principals who practise instructional leadership are also expected to exhibit characteristics like promoting staff professional development, communicating school goals which aim to improve student learning, and creating a collaborative learning climate to enhance the learning of all members in their schools (Eldredge, 2008). DuFour (2002) underscores the importance of instructional leadership in all aspects of student and staff learning while Marzano (2003) claims the necessity for strong attention to curriculum development through the instructional leadership of school principals. Sheppard (1996) points out that promoting teachers’ professional development is the most influential instructional leadership behaviour of leaders. Lambert (2005) indicates the importance of the collaboration of school principals and staff in terms of teaching and learning. These statements about characteristics of instructional leadership present a variety of practices which school leaders should focus on to improve teaching and learning in their schools. Instead of specifying the detailed practices of instructional leaders, Hopkins (2003) synthesises three broad domains of instructional leaders’ practices. The first is to define the values and purposes of the school; the second is to manage the program of teaching and curriculum; and the third is to establish the school as a professional learning community. Regardless of the way in which instructional leadership is conducted, its purpose is to improve the capacity of teaching and learning of teachers and other staff. Blase and Blase (2004) suggest that instructional leadership should help teachers to construct their capacity in teaching and learning and find flexible alternatives to improve student learning. They argue against enforcing rigid procedures and methods on teachers’ teaching. In light of ideas by Blase and Blase (2004), the role of school principal is to create
collaborative learning relationship and promote teacher’s capability of teaching and learning.

*Learning-centered leadership*

Although instructional leadership has been evident in the field of school leadership for some decades, researchers acknowledge that there is lack of research regarding how to implement instructional leadership in practice so as to improve student learning in schools (Eldredge, 2008; Gurr, 2008; Leithwood et al., 1999). This limitation warrants further research to be conducted. Currently researchers maintain that what is required is a broader view of understanding teaching and learning in schools rather than merely focus on classroom instruction (Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Southworth, 2005; Starratt, 1996). The notion of learning-centered leadership has been put forward here.

Based on empirical research on school leadership in practice and insights from relevant literature, Southworth (2005) identifies learning-centered leadership as an important theory. This approach indicates directly and indirectly that the school leader influences teaching and learning in classrooms. Commonly, the influence of the leadership of school principal is indirect because school leaders do not directly give lectures to students. Thus, school principals exert their leadership in teaching and learning through others (Gurr, 2008; Southworth, 2005). To enhance student learning, learning-centered leaders employ three strategies, including modelling, mentoring, and dialogue. Modelling means the learning leader is a role model to others by manifesting his or her strong interest in classroom teaching and learning. Teachers know what is advocated in the school by observing the leadership preference of the principals. Mentoring refers to school principals who provide consistent up-to-date information to support teaching and learning. Dialogue with others is the important process principals use to ensure that they work with teachers collaboratively. Dialogue means school principals and teachers dialogue about professional learning, rather than merely talk. The process of dialogue enhances the
reflection of teachers. In summary this theory of leadership accentuates leaders to be involved in pupil learning, teacher learning, staff learning and organisation learning.

*Constructivist leadership*

Similar to Southworth’s (2005) learning-centered leadership, Lambert (2005) articulates a perspective of constructivist leadership, whereby leadership is defined as a learning process with four components. These are reciprocal, purpose, learning, and community (Lambert, 2005). Reciprocal means to participate in and be responsible for the learning of others and expect others to assume similar responsibility. Purpose means members in schools share a vision and a set of goals about the schooling of students. Learning refers to constructing meaning and knowledge together through dialogue, inquiry and reflection. Community means building a group of people who share common goals and aspirations and care about each other. Compared to learning-centered leadership, Lambert’s (2005) constructivist leadership features the integration of learning, teaching and leading. She maintains that leadership is constructed in the process of teaching, and there are three stages of constructive leadership. The first is “directive” which means an initial period of establishing or initiating collaborative structure. The second is “transitional”, where authority and control are gradually released as teachers gain skills to emerge into leadership. The third is “high capacity” where teachers dominate and the principal plays a role as facilitator (Davies, 2005, p.6) Essentially, the contention of Lambert’s (2005) constructive leadership suggests that leadership exists among people who are involved in the leadership relationship and therefore should be distributed among members in schools. Lambert’s (2005) view demonstrates her contention that all members in schools play a role in constructing learning community.

These approaches to school leadership focus on the core parts of schools, teaching and learning. More than narrowly highlighting the role of school leaders in supervising teaching and learning activities in schools, currently approaches to
school leadership assume a broader role that principals play. This role is one that encourages learning by all members in the school and the integration of leadership, teaching and learning.

*Ethical dimension of school leadership*

The second dimension of school leadership is its moral or ethical dimension. Researchers have indicated that schools are different from other organisations that exist to make a profit and for this reason schools ought to take their moral/ethical obligations seriously (e.g., Duignan & Collins, 2003; Ehrich, 2000; Hodgkinson, 1991; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001; Reitzug, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992, 2006). In a school context, the moral or ethical dimension is evident in school leadership, as Hodgkinson (1991) indicates “values, morals, and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life” (p.11).

Unlike traditional views of educational leadership which mainly rely on mandates, rules and technical-rational authority, Sergiovanni (1992) makes a strong argument that leadership is value-added and has a moral dimension. Within a school context, he specifically claims that the job of the school principal has moral imperatives (Sergiovanni, 2006). He explains that the context for school leadership is ambiguous and abounds in discretion, therefore how school principals handle discretions has moral consequences for the school. Sergiovanni (2006) suggests that school principals should be moral leaders and do the right things for all members. According to Sergiovanni (2006), a key concern of moral leadership is for leaders to achieve school excellence through fostering a shared sacred agreement which bonds everyone as members of a learning community.

Likewise, Starratt (2005) discusses ethical dimensions of school leadership through systematically constructing five levels of ethical enactments that school leaders undertake. The first, the most basic level, is as a human being. This means the leader accepts and respects the intrinsic humanity of other persons, respecting their human
rights. In the second level, the school leader behaves as a citizen-public servant who has the obligation to respect the rights of other citizens and the public order. This requires a school leader to seek the common good rather than his or her individual needs. The third level is the leader acts as an educator. At this level, the school leader takes specific responsibility for providing knowledge to the community; therefore it is needed for a school leader to be familiar with the curricula and various teaching and learning techniques. The ethical enactment at this level is specifically basic for an educational leader since enhancing learning and teaching is a core task in school organisation. The fourth level is as an educational leader. At this level, school leaders have the responsibility to create an equitable organisational context that benefits the development of each student and teacher. The fifth level is as a leader. Drawing on the work of James MacGregor Burns in his book, Leadership (1978), Starratt indicates the fifth level involves more of a transformational ethic, where school leaders call teachers and students to move beyond their self interests to a higher ideal; and based on the previous four levels, leaders proactively engage in creating a more energetic climate to enhance the learning of students.

These five levels of ethics outline the features of ethical leadership. Further, Starratt (2005) concludes three virtues which can assist ethical leadership. They are the virtue of responsibility, authenticity and presence. Starratt (2005) indicates the three interwoven virtues are embedded in the work of a school leader. Incorporating the five levels of ethical enactments and the virtues, Starratt (2005) constructs a model of ethical leadership. The model manifests the contention that ethical leaders should take responsibility as a human, an educator, a leader and a citizen, and then through fully involving schooling activities, he or she enhances the authentic learning of school community. The final purpose of ethical leadership is to contribute to the authentic learning of students, which means with the participation of their heart, mind and imagination, students co-produce knowledge that they will need in the future world (Starratt, 2005).
Utilising power

The third dimension of school leadership is related to power utilisation. This dimension is a core part of leadership. This can be seen from the definition of power and the argument of leadership. In terms of the definition of leadership, Yukl (1994) indicates that although there is a lack of clear definition of leadership, it seems most definitions about leadership reflect the same assumption that leadership involves “a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or group] to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization” (p.3). From a structural functionalist perspective, power has been defined as domination, influence and control (Abbott & Caracheo, 1988 cited in Fennell, 1999). Kreisburg (1992) examines the concept of power and uses these terms power over and power with to discuss the concept. In light of his contentions, power over represents a traditional view of power which means domination, coercion, and manipulation, and fear. Different from power over, power with represents an alternative view about power which is the ability to empower others in decision making (Kreisburg, 1992, cited in Lintner, 2008). In Blase and Anderson’s (1995) discussion about micropolitics in schools, they add another term power through to describe the power situation between power over and power with. Power through, according to them, is manifested through someone rather than involving dominance over someone. Fennell (1999) indicates that in school context power through is often used since it supports the creativity and autonomy needed by teachers. Fennell furthermore points out that school principals are those in positions of leadership who can utilise power through strategies. She exemplifies that there is a power through relationship when principals engage in activities such as facilitating educational activities by providing material resources or professional suggestions, and developing networks for teaching and learning activities inside and outside schools to bring new ideas for school development (Fennell, 1999).

The discussion about the definition of power inevitably relates to the exploration of the base of power. In Lintner’s (2008) research, five bases of power by French and
Raven (1959) were cited. They include (a) coercive power, which is based on the perception that a superior has the ability to publish the subordinates if they fail to conform to the superior’s demands; (b) reward power, which refers to the ability of a superior to reward the subordinates for desired behaviors; (c) legitimate power, which a superior has the authority from his/her position to influence and control the behaviors of subordinates; (d) expert power, which is related to the expertise and job experiences of a superior; and (e) referent power, which is based on subordinates’ desires to follow a superior because of their admiration to the personal characteristics of a superior or because of their personal link with a superior (French & Raven, 1959, cited in Lintner, 2008). In terms of the use of these power bases in school, Drake and Roe (1999) point out these power bases cannot occur in a full form. For instance, coercive power is seldom used in schools due to the nature of school. In addition, reward power tends to be used by school leaders when they award special praise and recognition rather than provide tangible rewards for teachers. Teachers are the persons who hold expertise in teaching and learning. Thus, the legitimate power of school leaders has been lessened due to the professional role of teachers (Drake & Roe, 1999). Drake and Roe maintain that expert power and reference power of school leaders contribute to greater teacher morale and satisfaction.

It may be said that different leadership approaches are based on different types of power relations between the leader and the led. For instance, transactional leadership is mainly based on the assumption that leadership exists in an exchange relationship between the leader and the led. The leader offers tangible and intangible rewards to the led so as to achieve compliance and loyalty. In this approach, power lies in the leader who has positional authority (Lintner, 2008). Different from transactional leadership, other approaches to leadership such as transformational leadership, moral leadership, distributed leadership, and invitational leadership are based on the premise that power is not merely held by the persons with positional authority or those with legitimate power. Furthermore, power does not mean domination or
control over the led.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) maintain that authority and influence associated with transformational leadership are not necessarily held by those in formal administrative positions. Power is attributed by organisational members to whoever is able to inspire their commitments to collective aspirations. Therefore, leadership is not fixed to the person who is formally assigned as head of an organisation. Within this view, teachers and staff in schools are empowered to participate in decision making. Likewise, Novak’s (2005) invitational leadership and Harris’s (2005) distributed leadership also highlight the importance of inclusiveness of organisational members in decision making. The core theme of invitational leadership is based on five assumptions: respect for individuals in the organisation, trust between individuals, and care in the process of leading people, optimism that a better future is possible, and internationality (Novak, 2005). Invitational leadership maintains that leaders work with colleagues in the form of “doing-with” rather than “doing-to” (Davies, 2005, p.4). Similar to the emphasis on involvement of organisation members, distributed leadership further underscores the need to share or distribute leadership practices among teachers. Harris (2005) indicates distributing leadership sources throughout the school community and empowering teachers in the areas of importance to them are likely to contribute to the higher student achievement. In a currently changing school context, distributed leadership is insightful since in school leadership practice it is impossible for a principal to wisely make all the decisions all the time.

Drawing upon the previous discussion of power and leadership, Blase and Anderson (1995) explore the micropolitics of schools through synthesising leadership and power over, power through and power with. According to Blase and Anderson, power over is associated with domination and control relationships between people who occupy disparity of resources. They claim that power through which is an improvement over power over means that leaders exercise their leadership through
motivating individuals and groups to achieve organisational goals, and power with represents the views that leaders are encouraged to empower others to achieve “democratic participation as a right” (p.15). Blase and Anderson use two opposite styles, open and closed leadership style to refer to the ways leaders achieve their ultimate goals. In light of the ultimate goals of leaders, Blase and Anderson use the concepts of transactional and transformative leaders to refer to two groups of goals of leaders. When leaders merely view their roles as “neutral public servants to maintain the status quo” (p.15) and conduct some initiatives to improve the needed parts in their work, their leadership tend to be transactional. Transactional leaders tend to rely on contractual conditions such as employment, discipline and school code of conduct. Blase and Anderson indicate that when leaders exhibit a more active style to transform schools toward a vision, they are regarded as “transformative leaders” (Burns, 1978, citied in Blase & Anderson, 1995).

Synthesising the four points in two continuums and three modes of power, Blase and Anderson develop four approaches to understand power and leadership. They are the closed transactional approach: Authoritarian leadership; closed transformative approach: Adversarial leadership, open transactional approach: Facilitative leadership, and the open transformative style: Democratic/ Empowering leadership.

**Dealing with risks and challenges**

Given the complex context and challenges faced by school leaders, some scholars propose other leadership approaches as a way of endeavouring to understand school leadership. Thus another important dimension of school leadership relates to how school leaders handle risks and challenges within their leadership practices. For instance, Deal (2005) develops poetical and political leadership to echo the complexity of school leadership. Deal (2005) uses two lenses of leaders as politicians and as poets to look at the essential quality of school leadership. These two metaphors reveal that there is an urgent expectation for skilful leaders in today's competitive and complex school context. According to Deal (2005), the political process is a part of organisational life. Political leadership requires leaders be armed
with strategies and tactics of power and conflict. Deal concludes with nine principles for school leaders, they are: (a) “Map the political terrain”, (b) “Consolidate your power base”, (c) “Lay out clear agenda”, (d) “Move when time is ripe”, (e) “Use information as ammunition”, (f) “Use structure as a political asset”, (g) “Befriend opponents”, (h) “Create arena to air and resolve conflict”, and (i) “What is right is often relative” (pp.113-114). The nine principles suggest that school leaders must wisely find the potential issues in organisations and make use of their influence among organisational members to clearly solve conflicts as they emerge. From the other lens, Deal posits the concept of poetic leadership, in which school leaders are required to master the skills to build a positive school culture. He puts forward seven principles to help leaders to build the culture in organisation: revisit and renew historical roots, convey cultural values and beliefs, recognise heroes and heroines, convene and encourage rituals, celebrate key events, speak in picture words, and tell stories (Deal, 2005). Symbolic leadership is said to widen our understanding of school leadership.

Parallel with Deal’s (2005) contention about school leadership, Hentschke and Caldwell (2005) maintain that entrepreneurial leadership is needed in current school organisations which have been influenced by marketisation and harsh competition. This means school principals are expected to behave like CEOs in businesses and run schools like other organisations. In so doing, they should learn how to react to risk and challenge as entrepreneurs and therefore lead their school to survive in a competitive environment. Hentschke and Caldwell (2005) point out that the entrepreneurial leader has the features of tolerance for risk and the desire for personal control, ambition, perseverance and decisiveness. In their statement on entrepreneurial leadership, they suggest that entrepreneurial leadership does not fit all school settings (Hentschke & Caldwell, 2005). While school organisations are neither political arenas nor business organisations, Deal’s (2005) and Hentschke and Caldwell’s (2005) viewpoints reveal one important aspect of school leadership and that is: dealing with risk and challenge is a feature of leaders’ work.
Another dimension of school leadership relates to school vision and the capability of school leaders to develop a shared vision that leads to the sustainable development of schools. As a form of direction setting, vision widely appears in the literature about leadership, especially the literature about strategic leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership (see Davies & Davies, 2005; Leithwood, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Among the literature in school leadership, school effectiveness and school improvement, vision has been regarded as a crucial element for school effectiveness and school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Hallinger and Heck (2002) point out that school principals are expected possess the capability of building school vision so as to face the changing school situation. Grady and LeSourd (1990, cited in Chance, 1992), identify five attributes of a leader with vision, including (a) highly motivated by personal values and beliefs, (b) committed to attaining personal goals, (c) value a prominent, shared school ideology; (d) predisposed toward innovation, (e) visualise a better future.

The importance of vision in terms of successful leadership and school development seems more prominent under the current educational reform wave which is prevalent in the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia and has extended to most of other countries. Researchers have critiqued many of these reform initiatives including national standards, testing and prescribed curricula as short term activities, which cannot lead to sustainable development of schools (Blackmore, 2000; Harris, 2005; Varley, 2005). While standardised reform initiatives may promote teaching and learning to some extent, they cannot result in sustainable development of schools (Davies & Davies, 2005; Harris, 2005). Thus building school vision and developing strategic thinking in school leadership are advocated in many leadership approaches (e.g., transformational leadership, sustainable leadership, and strategic leadership). Commonly, these approaches underscore the necessity of developing a vision to guide school development towards a sustainable future.
Transformational leadership focuses on the importance of vision for the development of school organisations. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) put forward a model of transformational leadership that consists of three broad categories of leadership practices. The first is setting directions, which involves helping staff to develop shared understandings about their schools and vision guiding schools development. With the guidance of the shared vision, organisation members find a sense of identity within their work context. The second is developing a person, which refers to school leaders motivating teachers and staff to effectively translate school mission into action and achieve the high performance of school. Transformational leaders should offer intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support to teachers and staff. The third one is redesigning the organization to build a collective and learning organisation. To create a collaborative learning community, an ongoing refinement of routine and non-routine administrative activities is necessary (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). By following these transformational leadership practices, school principals are said to be facilitating the achievement of long-term development of school organisations.

Likewise, Davies and Davies (2005) put forward strategic leadership as a way to achieve sustainable improvement of schools. They articulate the main themes of strategic leadership. They maintain strategic leadership is more than a detailed strategic plan and can be described as a systematic process which is guided by strategic perspective. Davies and Davies (2005) synthesise that strategic leaders are involved in five activities:

1. Direction setting. It means to set up an organisational framework and direction in the future.
2. Translating strategy into action. This can be achieved through articulating strategies, building common understandings about organisational vision, creating a conceptual or mental map of the future with the organisational members, defining clear outcomes.
3. Aligning the people and the organisation to the strategy. To achieve this, leaders encourage organisational members to participate in the discussion issues of school development. By doing so, both the organisational and personal capacity have been built.

4. Determining effective intervention points. This means strategic leaders should decisively judge when change and what should be abandoned.

5. Developing strategic capabilities. This means strategic leaders develop the fundamental capabilities of the school, such as deep understanding of teaching and learning, assessment system for improving learning, and creativity and team work.

6. Deploying a repertoire of strategic approaches in their schools. This activity means that strategic leaders should take different strategic approaches in different situations. They used different approaches in a sophisticated way to meet the complex needs.

The six activities of strategic leaders share some commonalities with these activities of transformational leaders, which both enable other members, build shared vision, and establish system to help the achievement of school vision. Based on the synthesis of strategic activities, Davies and Davies (2005) propose a model for strategic leadership, which involves a “people wisdom” (p.23), a “contextual wisdom” (p.25), and a “procedural wisdom” (p.26). People wisdom means school leaders should firstly well understand organisational members and encourage and motivate them to be involved in school shared vision. Contextual wisdom means that school leaders should well understand the internal and external contexts of school organisations. The procedural wisdom refers to school leaders who can harness the abilities of others to figure out the strategic approaches to drive the organisation to the desired future. According to Davies and Davies, strategic leaders exhibit the characteristics of dissatisfaction with the present, are able to prioritize their own strategic thinking and learning, are capable of creating mental models to frame their own understanding and practice, and hold powerful and professional
networks.

3.6.2 Passionate principalship

To meet the current demands of globalisation and marketisation, school principals are taking up their responsibilities as leaders, while simultaneously carrying out their duties of management and administration. Under these circumstances, school principals have to learn how to adjust to their new role expectations. The daily professional practices have become more and more complex. Therefore, to understand the daily practices of school leaders, it is necessary to understand how individual school leaders perform their duties. Based on this recognition Sugrue (2005b) put forward ideas regarding passionate principalship, which suggest an understanding of the leadership of school principals by hearing their life histories.

According to Sugrue (2005b), the existent literature on leadership is hazy regarding the purpose of leadership. Most dominant educational leadership theories tend to prescribe a standard for school leaders without considering the experiences of individuals (Sugrue, 2005b). Furthermore Sugrue (2005b) points out that the research on school principals has less value on the practice of principals than indicating the complexity of principals’ profession. These research studies tend to prescribe what leaders in schools should do and what they should not. Sugrue (2005b) claims:

While the research community has been busy documenting the growing complexity of principal’s role and indicating the “do’s and don’ts” of successful school leaders, the principals have been engaged in ongoing “fire-fighting”, trench warfare or occupying the swampy lowlands where dangers and hazards continuously lurk in the shadows of everyday life in schools.(p.4)
It seems the lives of principals are more and more complex and are being criticized by the public (Sugrue, 2005b). Yet, what has been done for the increasing complexities and difficulties confronted by principals is nothing but “prescribing for the ills of society and the responsibilities of the principals to remedy the illness” (Sugrue, 2005b, p.4), silencing the voice of principals who face daily challenges in their practice and suffer with emerging changes in schools. As Sugrue (2005b) indicates, “the prescriptive solution handed down to principals tie their (principals’) hands in several aspects and leave them little room for either negotiation or professional judgment while autonomy becomes something of a romanticized distant memory, belonging to a softer age” (p.4).

Under a changing and diverse context, it seems problematic to prescribe the activities of principals. What can be learnt from educational administration textbooks usually is modified by the practical school context. For principal practice, what is needed are ingenuity, creativity and imagination (Sugrue, 2005a). Through reviewing much of the research literature, Sugrue (2005a) further presents that much of literature tends to develop some standards for school principals to lead their schools. Consequently, it leads to greater homogenization of school provision, ignoring the diversities of school contexts (Sugrue, 2005b).

Sugrue (2005a) advocates, therefore, going back to schools to understand leadership from the perspectives of principals by listening to principals’ life stories. He suggests it is passion that drives school principals to overcome the difficulties in their practice, so it is necessary to provide opportunity for school leaders to articulate their passions in order to better understand the theories under which their value and beliefs are embedded. This will provide a deeper understanding of school leadership. Their former experiences and their biography will help uncover the theories of school principals. Hence, exploring life history might well be a proper means to understand the leadership of school leaders (Sugrue, 2005a).
Similar to Sugrue’s (2005a) viewpoint about exploring school leadership by exploring the biography of school leaders, the following educational approach advocates an investigation of the career progression of individual leaders, which is highly biographically based.

**3.6.3 Educational leadership as a career**

The importance of leadership for organisations has been acknowledged. Therefore, “finding ways to identify and foster leadership is a longstanding preoccupation of leadership scholars” (Gronn, 1999, p.xi). Concurring with some other leadership theorists (Biggart & Hamilton, 1987; Hosking, 1988; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995), Gronn (1999) maintains that leadership exists in the interaction between leaders and followers and it occurs as an ongoing experience. Based on this assertion about leadership, he puts forward a four-stage career model of leadership. Gronn (1999) notes that by exploring the process of individuals aspiring to leadership roles and how they negotiate the various barriers and constraints, and how they make use of opportunities they confront, would help to address what determines who becomes a leader and who does not. The viewpoint of Gronn (1999) about leadership as career offers a useful framework to understand the leadership lives of school leaders.

Gronn’s (1999) contention about educational leadership as a career may come from the viewpoints of Greenfield (1993). Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) critiques the epistemological and ontological assumptions of administration and leadership and is concerned with individual identity, value, emotion and the interaction between these factors with social structures. In line with this viewpoint, Gronn (1999) explores what factors combine to shape the personal attributes that contribute to the leadership of leaders. Gronn (1999) maintains that leaders are born in a particular society and culture, and therefore their leadership is inevitably influenced by culture and society. At a microcosmic level, each individual leader’s life may also influence his/her leadership formation.
According to Gronn (1999), leadership is heavily “context-bound” (p.31), thus approaching leadership from the perspective of career can assist understanding various contexts in which leadership of a leader occurs. Moreover, exploring one’s career can help explain how contextual factors structure a leader’s actions. Gronn (1999) develops a four stages career model of leadership (Figure 2.1), which integrates societal context and cultural context with an individual’s leadership career. The four stages of leadership career include formation, accession, incumbency, and divestiture. Since individual leaders are positioned in a certain society and culture, Gronn’s (1999) model of leadership as career included two rectangles to represent the societal context and cultural context.
The first stage of Gronn’s (1999) career model of leadership is the formation stage. Formation is the preparatory socialisation processes and experiences that serve to shape the sequential leadership position of a leader. The stage of formation ranges from infancy to early adulthood. During that stage, an individual forms his/her character and self identity by three main socialisation institutions: family and their modes of upbringing, schooling and educational agencies, and a variety of peer and
reference groups. Each family transmits key assumptions about proper adult behaviour to its offspring. Schools and other educational agencies educate students according to dominant pedagogical ideologies to achieve desired educational outcomes. In addition, an individual acquires societal norms from communication with peers, friends, and mentors. The media also contributes to the socialisation of the individual. Through socialisation, an individual generates his or her self identity which lays the basis of his or her leadership character. The illumination of the formation stage of Gronn’s (1999) reveals the early growing up experiences may constitute potential factors that influence the leadership of a leader.

The second stage of the career model of leadership is named as accession by Gronn (1999). In this stage, a candidate or aspiring individual displays his/her potential as a leader, and intends to alert gatekeepers, sponsors or persons who are in charge of personnel selection. According to the viewpoints of Gronn (1999), a candidate is assessed in terms of two aspects or criteria. First, the candidate should be the person whose career reputation is unsullied. This means the candidate should be perceived as a reputed person by other persons who are acquainted with him/her. The second criterion is the candidate should be highly credible for the position. That means he/she should match the requirement for that position. These two aspects are the criteria at the level of public perception level. Those are some elements outside the candidate. In Gronn’s (1999) model about accession, he suggests there exists another level and this is the inner self level. The inner level refers to an individual candidate’s psychological construction of oneself as reputable self. Here a candidate develops an individual self belief. In brief, an individual candidate builds a positive sense that he/she believes he/she is capable of that position. Although a candidate usually displays self-assertiveness with high motivation to be a leader, the formative process of self belief is invariably accompanied with self conflicts (Gronn, 1999).

After the two levels of construction, through a process of succession, selection and induction, an individual candidate moves toward role mastery (Gronn, 1999). Gronn
especially mentions that the accession stage can be more difficult for women since they have to take account of children-bearing and rearing. From the accession stage of Gronn (1999), it can be found that two main factors may contribute to the role mastery of a potential leader. They are the candidate personally, and the gatekeeper or sponsor of the position.

The third stage of Gronn’s (1999) model is called incumbency. Gronn (1999) suggests after the accession stage, a candidate has become a leader and developed his/her public personas in the incumbency stage. The leader at this stage is self-actualised and can exhibit his/her potency, ambition, and vision. If he/she can successfully reconcile three core elements of “external constraints”, “situational task demands”, and “opportunities” (p.38), he/she can get psychological fulfillment and satisfaction. Similar to Gronn’s illumination about incumbency stage, Day and Bakioglu (1996) supplement the statement of Gronn’s (1999) by identifying four sub phases of incumbency stage. They are initiation, development, autonomy, and disenchantment (Day & Bakioglu, 1996). The initiation may overlap with the phase of induction of Gronn’s (1999) in accession stage. According to Day and Bakioglu (1996), in the phase of development, a leader has to experience various psychological conflict and wrestle with fear and uncertainty. Only in the autonomy phase can a leader attain role mastery and enjoy psychological fulfillment as that in incumbency stage of Gronn’s (1999). Disenchantment means the phase where a leader would feel sluggish and fatigued, losing professional generativity.

The fourth stage of Gronn’s (1999) model is divestiture. This stage means a leader stops his/her leadership due to aging, illness or lack of fulfillment. A leader at this stage may depart his/ her leadership position voluntarily or involuntarily. Voluntary departure means a leader may plan to quit his/her position, while involuntary departure means a leader has to leave the leadership role due to abolition of the position. The divestiture stage does not necessarily mean that a leader is disenchanted as described by Day and Bakioglu (1996).
The four stages of leadership within a certain societal context and cultural context offers a longitudinal analytical framework for exploring educational leadership. By investigating the career progression of an individual person and the context in which he/she lives, Gronn’s (1999) approach to educational leadership facilitates better understanding of leadership.

3.6.4 Educational leadership from a cultural perspective

As mentioned in Gronn’s (1999) model of educational leadership, culture is one of the important factors that influence the leadership of individuals. Recently some scholars have investigated educational leadership from the perspective of culture (Cheng, 1995; Dimmock & Walker, 2000, 2005; Hallinger & Kantanmara, 2000; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Walker & Dimmock, 2002).

According to Dimmock and Walker (2005), educational leadership is a process that is embedded in a specific society and culture. However, previous studies have ignored the particularities and contextual diversity of leadership. Dimmock and Walker argue that many ideas, policies and practices about leadership have been developed from the Anglo-American context, yet these ideas, policies and practices are not necessarily appropriate to other cultures nor should they be adopted or accepted readily by other cultural contexts (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). They provide three propositions in their research on leadership from the perspective of culture. Firstly, leadership is a “culturally and contextually bounded process” (p.3). Secondly, cultural influence on leadership is “multidimensional, often difficult to discern, subtle and easy to overlook” (p.3). Thirdly, recognizing the relationship between leadership and culture and context will improve the school’s performance.

Based on these propositions, Dimmock and Walker (2005) focus on the interrelationship between leadership and organisational culture, societal culture as
well and develop a cross-cultural school-focused model to help explore educational leadership in different cultural contexts. In this model using three circles, they illuminate the interplay of school internal context and its external contexts, including local community context, and societal cultural contexts. Dimmock and Walker suggest that the societal and cultural context circumscribes the local community and then the local community circumscribes the school organisational context. Within the internal organisational context, they identify four elements of schools as core tasks of school work, including organisational structures, leadership and management, curriculum, and teaching and learning. To explore the organisational context, they categorise six dimensions to depict the organisational context. They are process-outcome oriented; person-task oriented; professional- parochial; open-closed; control and linkage (including three sub-groups, formal-informal, tight-loose, direct and indirect); pragmatic-normative. Paralleled with the six categories of organisational contexts, largely drawing upon the conceptions of Hofstede (1991), they also identify six dimensions to understand societal and cultural contexts circumscribing school organisational context. These dimensions include: (a) power-distributed/ power- concentrated, (b) group-oriented/ self-oriented, (c) consideration/ aggression, (d) proactive/ fatalism, (e) generative/ replicative, (f) limited relationship/ holistic relationship.

From Dimmock and Walker’s (2005) view on educational leadership, insights can be gained that educational leadership is something generated in certain societal cultures and specific school contexts. Dimmock and Walker’s viewpoints resonate the trend existing in research on female principals which maintains that the experiences of diverse female leaders are based on the particular society and context in which they are located (Pacis, 2005; Reynolds, 2002). Since the main subjects of the current study are female school leaders, female educational leadership is specifically reviewed in the next part. The following theoretical approach to educational leadership from a gendered perspective enriches the knowledgebase of educational leadership.
3.6.5 Educational leadership from a feminist perspective

For a long time, educational leadership was dominated by males and the educational knowledge base rested on the experience of males, where the ideal leaders displayed masculine qualities. However due to a number of driving forces including the feminist movement, the number of women in educational administration has increased throughout the world and the importance of female educational leaders has been recognised. Currently, it seems there has been a shift from a hierarchal pyramid of a male model of principal leadership to an interwoven organisational structure that has typically been affiliated with a female model of leadership (Boone, 2004). Some research studies indicate that feminine attributes seem to be associated with the behaviours of effective principals and thus female leaders are more suited for the schools in the 21st century (Boone, 2004).

Usually perceived, the leadership style associated with female leaders includes preferences for democratic, inclusive and collaborative behaviours. Female leaders are viewed as possessing the characteristics of listening, negotiating, sharing information, involving all participants, caring, being honest and respectful, delegating, focusing on a vision, building relationships, taking risks, nurturing, collaborating, using time and resources effectively, providing forums for discussion, and using feedback to improve performance (Helgesen, 1990). Specifically, in the context of schools, Shakeshaft (1989) found that female principals possessed the following features: (a) focus on instructional and educational issues, (b) stress achievement within a supportive environment, (c) stress cooperation, (d) facilitate vision into action (e) monitor and intervene more than men, (f) evaluate student progress more frequently than men.

With these characteristics, females in educational leadership tend to possess some different leadership behaviours from that of their male counterparts. These characteristics have been said to constitute “feminine leadership”. First, female
leaders have more orientation to build relationships and connections (Henderson, 1997). The attribute of caring may contribute to the female leaders’ concern to build relationships and connections. In addition, female leaders’ long time experiences of teaching before being assigned to leadership also lead to this tendency. Shakeshaft (1989) indicated that women experience satisfaction in their work by helping others achieve success through support and validation. Women use the development of these relationships and the resulting group achievement to judge their own success (Helgesen, 1990).

Connected with an emphasis on building relationships and connections, female leaders manifest their tendency to transform and empower others through influence and collaboration (Fennell, 1999; Helgesen, 1990). Female principals typically operate in the power with mode, in which they tend to share emotion, nurture others, talk with others instead of at them, share decision making, and collaborate (Helgesen, 1990; Henderson, 1997).

Thirdly, female educational leaders tend to have an instructional leadership style, which they view instructing teachers and improving students achievement as their first priorities (Collard, 2003; Ozga & Walker, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1995; Weiner, 1995). Shakeshaft (1987) indicated when supervising and evaluating teachers, females were more concerned with a teacher’s technical skills, the academic achievement of students, the teacher’s productivity, and his or her commitment and responsibility to the school than her male counterparts. Cioci, Lee, and Smith (1991) revealed that female principals devoted more of their workday to activities such as observing classrooms and walking in the hallways, communicating with teachers and students, discussing academic content with teachers, and learning about the lives of teachers and students than their male counterparts.

Feminine leadership, which is characterized as more democratic, collaborative, collegial, caring and more concerned about teaching and students, has been
demonstrated as more beneficial to the performance of schools (Helgesen, 1990, Kouzes & Posner, 1987; cited in Henderson, 1997). Growe (2001) maintains that the attributes of females, such as “nurturing”, “being sensitive”, “empathetic”, “intuitive”, “compromising”, “caring”, “cooperative”, and “accommodating” (Growe, 2001, p.46) are increasingly associated with effective administration. Smulyan (2000) concludes, “women principals may have an advantage trying to implement school change; the leadership style described in the literature on effective school restructuring often parallels those attributed to women administrators” (p.36).

Literature about today’s reform efforts frequently refer to the need for leadership skills such as team-building, interconnectedness, group problem-solving and shared decision making. These skills are usually associated with females (Anderson, 1993, cited in Henderson, 1997). Drawing on the viewpoints of Restine (1993) and Ferguson (1980), Henderson (1997) pointed out that it was the time to question the appropriateness of the traditional masculine model of leadership and it was time that females in administration utilise the effectiveness of feminine leadership traits. Furthermore, Henderson indicated that many female traits that had been considered inferior might demonstrate to be valuable assets in 21st Century.

The question of differences in leadership style and preferences based on gender continues to elicit discussions. Yet, there is another kind of voice on style of female leaders. Vail (1999) claims that leadership is a matter of personality and philosophy not gender (Vail, 1999; cited in Boone, 2004). Some researchers maintain that leadership is constructed in specific contexts; therefore leadership difference may not be merely the result of gender difference (Collard, 2001; Reynolds, 2002). This means feminine leadership and masculine leadership is not necessarily associated with females and males respectively, even though early research has demonstrated more female leaders assume feminine leadership, while males have a tendency to exhibit masculine leadership (Shakeshaft, 1989). Blackmore (1999) argued that some of these early research studies polarized gender by highlighting the differences between men and women. Reynolds (2002) suggests that a multidimensional
approach, which examines context ethnicity, and other factors are needed when conducting research regarding leadership style. According to this assertion, the style of leadership may be the result of the interaction of multiple factors within a leader’s practices. Thus it is not sound to only ascribe the difference of female and male principals’ to their gender difference.

Collard’s (2001) research on the difference of perception of leadership of females and males in Victoria, Australia, further demonstrated the contention. The results revealed it was the identity of the schools that led to significant differences between female and male principals’ leadership perceptions rather than the gender difference. One of the findings of a research study on the perception of principalship in Alabama, USA, also revealed that both female and male principals viewed interpersonal and relational skills as important skills for principals. The participant principals, both female and male principals in that study indicated these skills such as “having strong people skills” and “caring about people” were needed for good school principalship (Kochan, Spencer, & Mathews, 1999, p.16). This study showed that male school principals also recognised these characteristics of feminine leadership. The finding is not congruent with some findings that tend to view caring about people and concern with relationships as typical to female leaders (Kropiewnicki, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1995). The controversies lead to further exploration on educational leadership. Regan and Brooks (1995) suggested a balance between masculine and feminine leadership is needed (cited in Boone, 2004). Restine (1993) also notes that many studies have shown there is an integration of male and female characteristics in effective leaders (cited in Boone, 2004). Gupton and Slick (1996) predicts, “. . . the leadership of tomorrow’s schools will be more situational and androgynous in nature” (Slick, 1996, p.113, cited in Boone, 2004).

3.7 Conceptual framework

From the literature review, insights can be gained that many researchers agree that
leadership is an ongoing dynamic process, which is constructed in a specific organisational, societal and cultural context, and some researchers maintain that leaders may exhibit different leadership characteristics due to their gender, race and, class (Cheng, 1995; Davies, 2005; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Gronn, 1999, 2003; Pacis, 2005; Peters, 2003; Reynolds, 2002; Sugrue, 2005b; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Dimmock and Walker (2005) emphasise the need for recognizing the dimension of culture in leadership research. They point out it is necessary to explore educational leadership practices which consider the specific culture in which educational leaders originate. Similar to Dimmock & Walker (2005), Gronn (1999, 2003) goes further and argues that leadership is a career in which individual biography, organisational context, and cultural factors contribute to the formation of an individual’s leadership. He develops a four-stage career model of leadership to investigate the leadership of a leader.

Based on these insights, the current study draws on parts of Gronn’s (1999) four-stage career model of leadership and develops a conceptual framework to guide the investigation of leadership practices of two female principals and the factors impacting upon their leadership practices. In line with Gronn’s (1999) viewpoints, it is argued that significant events in each stage of the career model may lead to helping unravel the investigation of various influential factors on leadership practices. In the first stage, three main elements may contribute to the leadership of a leader. These are the family upbringing schooling and education, and a variety of peer and reference groups. In the second stage, an aspirant leader starts to exhibit their capability of being principal and their performance start to be recognised by gatekeepers and role sponsors.

According to Gronn (1999), there are two types of factors at the inner level and at the public level. At the inner level, self-conflict is accompanied by the development of self-belief of the individual candidate. At the public level, the individual candidate is perceived as a person with a high reputation and credibility. If the
individual candidate meets the two requirements, he/she may enter into the process of succession, selection, and induction, and then finally obtain the leadership position and master the role as a leader. During this stage, factors from the individual self, from others such as the gatekeepers or role sponsors, and factors in the career phases of succession, selection, and induction may constitute potential influential factors that shape individual’s leadership practices. Gronn (1999) suggests that in the incumbency stage, individual leaders have mastered their roles as leaders and could acquire self-actualization if the requirement of the positions match their own personal needs. Gronn (1999) further indicates that the reconciliation of three core elements determines the extent of this psychological fulfillment of individual leaders. These are external constraints, situational task demands, and opportunity. In line with Gronn’s (1999) statement, it can be inferred that investigating the three core elements is likely to unearth some of the influential factors of individual leaders’ leadership in this stage. The fourth stage in Gronn’s (1999) model means termination of the leaders’ leadership. In the current study, this stage is not likely to be considered since the research subjects will be persons who are still in their principalship positions. Therefore, in the conceptual framework the divestiture stage is deleted in the conceptual framework. In the conceptual framework, three circles are connected by two arrows exhibiting the three sequential stages of career of leadership.

Paralleled with Gronn’s (1999) and Dimmock and Walker’s (2005) work, Sugrue (2005b) underscores the need to understand the leadership of principals by examining their daily experiences in specific contexts. The previous sections about approaches to school leadership in the literature review identified and discussed five main dimensions of leadership. They are: (a) Teaching and learning, (b) Ethical considerations, (c) Power utilisation, (d) Dealing with risks and challenges, (e) Vision building.
These five main dimensions of leadership have been included within a small rectangle to exhibit five guiding aspects of leadership practices for this study. The small rectangle and three circles are linked by three left-right arrows to show the interplay between leadership practices and each stage. In this study, the researcher agrees with the viewpoint that leadership is constructed within organisational, societal, and cultural contexts, therefore three larger embedded rectangles are developed to represent the organisational, societal, and cultural contexts. The small rectangle, and the three circles are all placed within these three larger embedded rectangles to denote that individual principal’s leadership career and leadership practices are influenced by the contexts in which he/she is located.

As can be seen from Figure 3.2, the conceptual framework is a synthesis of key selected ideas reviewed in this chapter and the framework draws heavily upon Gronn’s (1999) career model of leadership (see Figure 3.1). The conceptual framework provides the current study with a way to assist in the investigation of leadership practices of female principals and influential factors impacting upon the construction of their leadership practices in the context of Mainland China. (see Figure 3.2)
3.8 Summary

In China, education is construed as a valuable institution by all people and school leadership has been identified as necessary to play a key part in this process. As the foundation for students’ future improvement, much attention has been placed on
education in primary and secondary schools. The importance of school leadership in primary and secondary school has been reiterated. The enactment of several landmark educational policies in China (discussed in Chapter 2) has demonstrated its importance. However existent research studies lack concern about the daily professional life of principals. Apart from this shortcoming, in most of research studies, gender is seldom considered. While some researchers have begun to conduct research on female principals in primary and secondary schools in China, there is still a demand for in-depth investigations about female educational leaders.

In Western countries, the topic of female principals has been widely explored since 1970s. Among the related research literature, much of which has focused on the under-representation of women in educational leadership, the following themes have emerged. They include the barriers encountered by female principals; how female principals supervise teaching and learning, and how they utilise power and communicate with their staff. Recently, there has been a tendency for understanding female educational leaders from other races and from different backgrounds. What are the lives of female educational leaders in the context of China becomes a key question for exploration. To understand the lives of female principals, the current study focuses on exploring the leadership practices of two female principals and the factors that have contributed to the construction of their leadership practices.

In this chapter, some related approaches to educational leadership were discussed in order to more fully understand leadership practices of school principals and the influential factors impacting upon educational leadership. Some scholars put forward various approaches to school leadership such as the eleven approaches to school leadership compiled by Davies (2005). Of these, five types of practices of principals were explored and discussed in this chapter. Focusing on individual leaders, scholars have also suggested that educational leadership can be understood by exploring the biography of individual leaders. For example, passionate leadership following Sugrue’s (2005a) work underscores understanding leadership from the
perspectives of principals by explaining their daily practices. Concentrating on educational leadership as a career is another way of understanding the career progression of proposed leaders. In order to understand female leadership, some scholars advocate exploring leadership from the experiences of female school principals. All of these approaches to educational leadership underscore the central place of leadership practices in context and explore the interplay of the individual and his/her context. In the current study, leadership is viewed as context-bound and constructed in a dynamic process. During the constructive process, multiple factors such as those from the individual’s biography, and the wider societal and cultural context do have an impact on the leadership of educational leader. Synthesising these insights from this literature review, a conceptual framework was developed to support an investigation of the current study. In the next chapter, the research design for the current study is discussed and the choice of methodology and methods of data collection is argued.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY
4.1 Overview

From a review of related literature both in Mainland China and in selected western countries, the significance of conducting a study on leadership practices of female school principals was presented. This chapter makes the argument for the choice of using a qualitative exploratory case study methodology. The chapter begins by illuminating the research questions and then moves to explore the qualitative epistemological and methodological foundations of the study. Following that, it proceeds to discuss the methodology and the appropriateness of the qualitative exploratory case study used in the study. After this discussion, the specific research strategies of the exploratory case study are examined. Finally, the authenticity and reliability of the study, its ethical considerations, and limitations are respectively considered.

4.2 Research questions

Although some qualitative researchers claim to disassociate themselves from the preconceptions of what they will find, most qualitative researchers still suggest having a flexible research design which is based on theoretical assumptions, on data-collection traditions and on generally stated substantive questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). The design is used as a general guide on how to process the research, but it is open to change during the process of study. In order to present an in-depth description of the leadership practices of two exemplary female principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China, two broad research questions were posed in this study. They are: (a) What are the leadership practices of the two female principals? And, (b) What are the factors that have impacted upon their leadership practices? To keep to the openness of the research design, three broad themes that cover these two research questions were developed to assist data collection. These themes encompass (a) the early biographical experience of the principals before accessing the educational field, (b) their career experience from the beginning of a position in the education field to their current
principalship position, and (c) their daily leadership practices in current principalship. These three themes, research questions and conceptual framework are intimately connected. The two research questions are at the center of this structure. The concepts listed in the conceptual framework can be viewed as the components, which exist within the three broad themes. For example, the formation part in the conceptual framework is linked to the first theme, that is early biographical experience; the concepts in the accession part in the conceptual framework are connected to the second theme; the incumbency and the leadership practices part within the conceptual framework are connected to the third theme. Since an individual lives in a societal and cultural context, the societal and cultural context in the conceptual framework can be linked to each of the three themes; and when an individual commences his/her career in an organisation, he/she becomes a person who also lives in an organisational context. Thus, the organisational part in the conceptual framework can be linked to the second and the third themes. Simply put, the three themes may be viewed as a vague and open boundary including the components in the conceptual framework, and both the themes and the conceptual framework serve to investigate the research questions.

4.3 Justification of qualitative exploratory case study

To address the questions of the study, a qualitative exploratory case study was undertaken. Within this section, an overview of qualitative research is firstly discussed, and then the researcher explores the methodology of case study, as well as the rationale of pursuing an exploratory case study.

4.3.1 Overview of qualitative research

*Brief history of qualitative research*
Qualitative research is a field of inquiry with a blending of diverse disciplines, theories, and subject matters, which include traditions mainly associated with interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory, and cultural studies (Chase, 2005). As a research approach, its importance was established by the work of the “Chicago school” in sociology and the works of the scholars such as Boas, Mead, Benedict, and Malinowski in anthropologies in the 1920s and 1930s (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 1). Since the late 1960s, the term “qualitative research” has been used in the social sciences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although controversies constantly accompany this research inquiry, it has become a significant approach with its multiple research paradigms, methodologies and specific methods.

The development of qualitative research has been influenced by ideological and political practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Moreover, its development may also have been the result of the blending of disciplines and the prevalence of many theories, such as symbolic interactionism, constructivism, critical theory, neo-Marxist theory, and feminism since 1970s (Chase, 2005). In different disciplines, researchers conduct qualitative inquiry on the phenomenon in their disciplines from a certain theoretic or several integrated theoretic perspectives.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) summarize three groups of qualitative research traditions, which can be viewed as the basic form of qualitative research. The first group of inquiries investigates lived experience, which is usually conducted in cognitive psychology, phenomenology, phenomenographic research, and life history research. The second group focuses on investigating society and culture, which takes the form of action research, ethnography, cultural studies and critical theory research, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism research. The third type embraces the investigated phenomena of language and communication. Under this group, several research traditions are employed, for instance, narrative analysis, ethnographic content analysis, ethnography of communication, hermeneutics, semiotics, and structuralism and poststructuralism (Gall et al., 2007). Although Gall
et al. do not offer an exhaustive classification about qualitative research, their categorisation research echoes the assertion of Denzin and Lincoln (2005) about the multiple paradigmatic and multiple formed complexity of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out “qualitative research reform encompasses multiple paradigmatic formulations” and “it also includes complex epistemological and ethical criticisms of traditional social science research” (p.x).

**Paradigms of qualitative research**

As qualitative research is an “interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.3), it seems impossible to illuminate each research approach under it. However, as Crotty (2003) indicates, the assumptions about reality that the researcher brings to his/her studies decide the selections of methodology and methods and therefore it may be helpful to examine the basic assumptions of qualitative researchers. Examining the usually taken for granted assumptions of qualitative researchers, can assist in understanding the diverse research approaches under the umbrella of qualitative research. In Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) edited handbook of qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) use the term *paradigm* to refer to the basic belief systems of researchers. They suggest a paradigm includes the ontological question, epistemological question, and methodological question. Revolving around the three levels of questions, they bring forward four paradigms, which represent the basic assumptions of various qualitative research approaches. The four paradigms include the positivist paradigm, postpositivist paradigm, constructivist paradigm, and a paradigm from critical theory and related ideological positions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The positivist paradigm denotes the dominant view in natural science and social science, where researchers who follow this paradigm assume there exists an objective reality that can be apprehended by experimental and manipulative procedures. During the procedures, investigators are required to detach their
subjectivities. Sharing a set of basic beliefs as positivism, the postpositivist paradigm represents those efforts to respond to the criticisms of positivism. The researchers following this paradigm believe reality can only be “imperfectly apprehended due to the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomena” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110). These two paradigms are mainly the basic assumptions of quantitative research. However, during the early years of qualitative research inquiry, qualitative researchers conducted their research under the traditions of positivist and postpositivist traditions. They attempted to “do good positivist research with less rigorous methods and procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.5). The use of quantitative, positivist and postpositivist assumptions has been rejected by researchers who are proponents of constructivism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Opposite to positivism and postpositivist paradigms, Guba and Lincoln (1994) conclude that the constructivist paradigm and paradigm under critical theory are normally viewed as central for most qualitative research traditions. The constructivist paradigm denotes assumptions such as there is no objective reality and social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it. The meaning of social reality is the product of the interaction of investigators and the investigated. Apart from the constructivist paradigm, Guba and Lincoln (1994) use the term “critical theory” to cover those qualitative research traditions under poststructuralism, postmodernism, and a blending of these two (p.109). For the paradigm of critical theory and related ideological positions, reality is assumed to be known in a series of structures which are formulated as real by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors in certain historical periods. Similar to the constructivist paradigm, a paradigm of critical theory and related ideological positions requires a dialectical dialogue between investigators and the subjects of investigation and the findings of research are value mediated. However, different from constructivism, researchers following critical theory and related ideological positions emphasise transforming injustice of social structures and struggle for a
better world (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

From the above discussion on assumptions of qualitative research traditions, an insight can be obtained that although qualitative research manifests multiple forms, essentially most studies under qualitative research share basic epistemological orientations. Many qualitative researchers assume there is no objective reality and the meaning of objects can be obtained with the engagement of the consciousness of human beings, that is to say “what can be known is intertwined with the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object or group” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110). Social reality is constructed in a social environment by different individuals (Gall et al., 2007). Based on these assumptions, qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed reality embedded in the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied. In accordance with these assumptions, qualitative research traditions generally exhibit some common characteristics.

**Characteristics of qualitative research**

Synthesising the statements of Morrison (2002) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) about the features of qualitative research, the main characteristics of qualitative research can be summarised as the following. However, one idea should be kept in mind that not all qualitative research exhibits all the features to an equal degree (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Naturalistic**

Qualitative research underscores exploring phenomena in naturalistic settings. That means qualitative researchers assume that human behavior is significantly influenced by context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Intersubjectivity**

In qualitative research, the subjectivity of research participants is of concern, which means the researcher needs to empathise with research subjects and understand the
research phenomenon from inside (Morrison, 2002). Instead of being detached from what is investigated, researchers reflect and interpret research phenomena from their perspectives on the basis of collected data. Reflectivity is one of the crucial components of qualitative research (Gall et al., 2007).

Inductive
Qualitative research tends to be inductive. This means theory emerges from the bottom up, and “from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.6). Different from quantitative research which has prior hypotheses before the research is conducted, qualitative research may merely begin with some “sensitizing concepts” (Bunmer, 1954, cited in Morrison, 2002) and a “conceptual framework” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.18).

Descriptive
Qualitative research assumes that nothing is trivial and everything has the potential of being a clue to assist in understanding what is investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, data gleaned in qualitative research takes the form of words or pictures so as to present the thick description of the investigated phenomenon.

These four characteristics have relevance for the current study because educational research deploying the methodology of the case study is essentially qualitative in nature (Merriam, 1998). Following convention, the current study is no exception. First, the study investigated the leadership practices of two female primary school principals in the PRC. Here, the research was conducted in Mainland China within the schools of the principals. Hence, the study was naturalistic. In other words, the research was conducted in a natural setting and was not contrived in a laboratory context. Furthermore, the Chinese school context was largely inseparable from the phenomenon under investigation (the two principals’ leadership practices), hence it was necessary for a naturalistic approach in order to accurately assess the behavioral events in an authentic manner. Also, such a naturalistic approach allowed for the use of powerful investigative tools, such as participant observation. Second,
intersubjectivity was critical to the current study. Because of the inseparability of context (Chinese primary school) and phenomenon (principals leadership practices) it was critical that in order for the researcher to understand the phenomenon it was necessary for her to immerse herself within the Chinese school system to develop an empathy with the Chinese principals to shed light on their leadership practices. Not all schools are the same and the particular differences between the two principals’ school needed to be experienced by the researcher so that she could accurately reflect on each principals’ particular educational choices and leadership practices within each specific school context.

The inductive nature of the current study allowed for a flexibility to explore the phenomenon without pre-conceived hypotheses or propositions. Furthermore, qualitative research understands that it is impossible to identify all the possible variables ahead of time (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is mainly concerned about “…insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 10). This is an accurate summation of the intention of the current study. That is, to inductively identify the leadership practices of two principals in Chinese primary school context. Finally, the descriptive nature of the current research study needs to be acknowledged. In order for the phenomenon (leadership practices) to be fully understood, it must be contextualised in as detailed a manner as possible. Such “thick description” provided an important base from which to interpret the complexities of the two principals’ leadership choices and practices.

The appropriateness of qualitative research to the study

Every research tradition has its shortcomings; therefore the guiding rule for selecting methodology is the appropriateness of the methodology to research questions (Gall et al., 2007). Guided by the research questions and the characteristics of qualitative research, the current study follows qualitative research traditions with constructivist epistemological orientations.
The purpose of the current study is to present the leadership practices of two exemplary female principals against a background of educational reform in the PRC. Specifically, the study explores their leadership practices and the influential factors impacting upon and shaping their leadership practices. In this sense, the descriptive and naturalistic features of qualitative research match the purpose of the study. The study assumes that leadership is situation-oriented and constructed in the daily practices of principalship. In the construction process, leadership behaviors may be influenced by multiple factors from individual biography and from the specific contexts of the principals’ experience. Therefore, the meaning of leadership to individual principals cannot be acquired from textbooks of leadership; it is argued that an individual principal’s subjectivity is one of the components of the leadership practice. In short, the study assumes the leadership of principals is acquired in an interactive dynamic system. Thus, at an epistemological level, the study assumes female principals construct their understanding of leadership in their daily practices and their self identity constitutes an integral part of their leadership behavior. In terms of the four paradigms of Guba and Lincoln (1994), the study falls within the constructivist paradigm.

As some feminist researchers have claimed the appropriateness of qualitative research for exploring the experience of females (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Donovan, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Nielsen, 1990), it is therefore pertinent to pursue a qualitative research tradition to understand the professional lives of two exemplary female primary school principals. Drawing on some viewpoints of feminist standpoint which stress a particular view that builds on and from women’s experiences (Harding, 1987), and viewpoints of third world feminists who underscore the different experiences of women from different races and background (Olesen, 1994), the researcher assumes there is interplay between the experiences of these female principals as females and as principals. The qualitative research tradition can assist illuminating the professional lives of these women from their own perspectives, avoiding taken-for granted judgments about the lives of female
To sum up, in order to have a better understanding of the leadership construction process and to holistically present the lives of the two female principals, a qualitative exploratory case study has been advocated. It combines the research methods of qualitative inquiry and the research techniques of the exploratory case study. In the next section, the rationale for using a qualitative exploratory case study methodology is outlined.

4.3.2 Case study

Yin (2003) notes that case study refers to a comprehensive research strategy with an all-encompassing method, which includes the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis. As a comprehensive research method, it has been used in the social sciences, and been widely used in educational research (Gall et al., 2007). Although quantitative researchers who have positivist or post-positivist epistemological orientations also employ case study research, case studies are more likely to be used in qualitative inquiry. Almost any topic or type of phenomenon in qualitative inquiry can be explored by case studies (Gall et al., 2007). Case study has been described as “a basic form of qualitative research” (Gall et al., p.447). Particularly in terms of educational research, the qualitative case study is an ideally-suited means of investigation (Merriam, 1998).

Moreover, case study can be defined as a research strategy which is used to examine one or more instances of phenomena in certain settings (Gall et al., 2007). It is about the particularity and complexity of a single case within important circumstances, which is used to explore the detail of interaction of subjects in their contexts (Stake, 1995). Gall et al. (2007) conclude that case studies have three explicit characteristics: study of particular instances, in-depth study of the case, and study of a phenomenon in its real-life context.
Due to these characteristics, the sample sizes used in case studies are often small. It is because of the small sample size in case study research that the reliability of case study has been questioned. The findings of case study research cannot be generalized to the larger population. However, as Stake (1995) has suggested, the qualitative case study is concerned with exploring phenomena at length and its purpose is not the pursuit of generalization.

Concurring with Fred Erickson’s view that the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its emphasis on interpretation, Stake (1995) further argues that a “good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view of case” (p.12). Case studies under the umbrella of qualitative research share these characteristics, whereby continuous reflective interpretation is carried out throughout the whole research process to maximize an understanding of the research. According to Yin (2003), case studies concern theoretical generalizations or generalizations between similar cases.

Stake (1995) categorised case study into three types and these include intrinsic case study, instrumental case study, and collective study. Intrinsic case study is the intent to explore the particularity of the case itself; instrumental case study aims to accomplish something more than just understanding of the case itself; and collective case studies concern the investigation and coordination of individual instrumental cases. Stake’s (1995) classification explains the possible purposes of the case study. In addition, some scholars divide case studies into several types, such as historical organisational case studies, situational analysis, clinical case study, life history case study, and multi-case studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Burns, 2000). These classifications manifest that with different combinations of research techniques, case studies may exhibit various forms.
Rationale for the use of the exploratory case study

The methodology of the case study is one of many research strategies used in the social sciences, such as experiments, surveys, histories and the analysis of archival documentation (Yin, 2003). The appropriateness of each of these research strategies is contingent upon (a) “the types of research questions posed”, (b) “the degree of control the investigator has over the behavioral events”, and (c) “the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (Yin, 2003, p. 5).

In terms of (a), the research question is pertinent to the adoption of any methodology as a strategy to investigate a phenomenon. Yin (2003) categorises research questions into three main types: “explanatory”, “descriptive” and “exploratory” (p.5). Essentially, when research questions focus on how and why questions then the preferred methodology is the explanatory case study or histories and experiments. Who and where questions are most suited for descriptive case studies or histories, while research questions focusing on what questions the preferred strategy is the exploratory case study or experiments or surveys (Yin, 2003).

The two main research questions posited in the current study rank are “what” questions, i.e., “what are the leadership practices of the two principals” and “what are the factors that have impacted upon their leadership practices”? Following from Yin (2003) an exploratory approach is the preferred research strategy here. Furthermore, the exploratory case study is recommended when very little prior research has been conducted on a phenomenon (Mayer & Greenwood, 1980). In the current study, very little research has been conducted on the leadership practices of outstanding female primary school principals in the context of Mainland China. Hence, the adoption of an exploratory approach here is well justified.

In terms of the degree of control an investigator has over the behavioral events, the case study is the preferred research strategy for the current study. That is, in order to
explore the lives of two female principals in urban primary schools the investigator clearly has no control over the behavioral events, and consequently, in these circumstances, the case study is the preferred research option (Yin, 2003). In terms of the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events, the current study involved the examination of contemporary events, that is, the lives of two outstanding principals and their leadership practices in present day China. Even though case studies and histories can overlap to a certain degree (Yin, 2003), the case study is the preferred option in this context because the techniques of direct observation and interviews can be applied. Indeed, these techniques are considered the strengths of case study research (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2003).

Furthermore, Yin (2003) argues that the case study should be utilised when context is highly important. In the current study, which explored the leadership practices of two school principals in present day Chinese primary schools, the phenomenon of their leadership practices was strongly embedded within the context of the Chinese primary school and, as such, the phenomenon under study and the context in which it occurred were not easily separated. When the phenomenon and the context cannot be clearly distinguished then the case study again is the preferred research methodology (Yin, 2003). In the current study, the boundaries of the phenomenon and the context were not apparent.

In summary, the exploratory case study ranked as the most appropriate methodology for the current study for a number of reasons. First, the research questions were geared toward an exploratory approach. Second, the investigator was limited in the degree of control she could exert over the behavioral events under investigation (the lives of the female school principals). Third, the current study involved a contemporary context allowing for the use of observations and interviews (the strengths of case study research) and fourth, the phenomenon of leadership practice was largely inseparable from the context of the Chinese primary schools. Hence, an exploratory case study was conducted on each of the two female principals. In the
next section, the rationale for adopting multiple cases will be outlined.

**The reason for adopting a two-case study**

As a basic form of qualitative inquiry, most research techniques which are usually employed in qualitative inquiry, such as interview, participant observation, document and artifact analysis, can also be well integrated into case study research to maximize the research purpose. Burns (2000) notes the major strength of the case study approach is the use of multiple sources. The use of multiple sources has very clear advantages over single case studies, such as providing more compelling evidence and adding to the general robustness of the study (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, using two cases instead of just one, the possibility of replicating the findings can arise. Moreover, the contexts of the two cases are likely to be different. This is highly desirable if the findings converge. In such circumstances, the generalizability of the findings can be expanded to the wider community (Yin, 2003).

The purpose of the current study was to holistically present an in-depth description of the professional lives of the two female principals and, therefore, it was necessary to obtain more information about their leadership constructions. Some researchers have noted that two-case studies or multi-case studies can reveal more adequate findings than merely a single case study. Consequently, in this study, two female principal cases were selected. According to the viewpoints of some researchers (Ferguson & Wicke, 1994; Olesen, 1994; Trujillo-Ball, 2003), the experiences of women are different due to their gender, race, and class. Because it is impossible to generalise the life experiences of different women, generalisation is not the concern in the study; however, the use of two cases here does allow for the possibility of replicating the findings to increase the validity of the study.

In addition, the researcher assumes that by integrating exploratory research approaches with two-case studies, an in-depth description of the lives of female principals in the study will be achieved. The following statement of Yin (2003) well
justifies the use of two case studies for the study. Yin (2003) points out:

Case study allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events---such as individual life cycles, organisational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (p.2)

### 4.3.3 Summary

In the current study, a qualitative exploratory case study was used in each case. In addition to interviewing the two female principals to obtain insights from their own perspectives, teachers in each school and a superintendent of the two principals’ were interviewed in order to learn more about each of the female principals from others’ perspectives. Critical to the purpose of presenting a thick and in-depth description of the lives of the two female principals, observations and documents analysis were employed to enrich research data. By conducting qualitative exploratory case studies, the current study attempted to present a slice of the professional lives of female principals in urban primary schools. The methodological approach of the current study is summarized in Figure 4.1.
4.4. Research design

Two exemplary female principals from two primary schools in urban districts in Mainland China were invited to participate. Qualitative exploratory case study was used to investigate their leadership practices in their day-to-day principalship. Semi-structured interviews with the two female school principals about their leadership practices and their life experiences were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate how a group of teachers in each of the schools, and the superintendent of each principal, perceived the leadership practices of the two female principals. In addition, to obtain greater insights about leadership practices of each female principal, participant and non-participant observations were carried out in each of the schools. Documents relating to each female principal, and especially those with respect to her leadership practices, were analysed. In the next section, each of these specific considerations will be discussed in greater detail.
4.4.1 Research sites

The study chose two urban primary schools as sites with females holding the principalship position. One school was a middle sized school by Chinese standards with approximately 800 students and 50 teachers, while the other school was larger and had a population of approximately 5000 students and 300 teachers. The two schools were both located in an urban district in one of the large urban cities in Mainland China. For confidential consideration, a pseudonym, City J and District H were used to name the city and the urban district respectively. City J is famous for its history, culture and education. Within all the districts of City J, District H is one urban district in which many tertiary-level institutions, research institutions, and good performing primary and secondary schools are located. The education in District H usually is viewed as a lead for other districts of City J. Under the circumstance of current educational reform, District H takes an active role in exploring educational reform initiatives to improve its education at all levels.

The reason for choosing two female principals in this urban district of City J was the assumption that these urban primary schools in this city could provide rich data. There is a general consensus that the number of female principals in urban primary schools is relatively greater than those in rural primary schools. Thus, it was easier to select participating female principals in urban primary schools. Moreover, because the district was proactive in implementing the educational reforms and had more good performing schools, it was assumed that it had more successful female school principals. Another reason for selecting primary schools in this district was for convenience. The researcher has some contact with a research institute which is in charge of training the primary school principals and offering professional support for school principals in City J. This helped the researcher access the schools and select the participating principals.
4.4.2 Participants

To select participants for a qualitative case study, purposeful sampling techniques are used. The criteria for sampling qualitative exploratory case study need to be considered. For case study, non-probability sampling is more often applied (Merriam, 1998). Non-probability sampling means there is no guarantee that every one in the population can be selected with equal chances, and therefore the selected sample does not represent the situation of others in the population. Burns (2000) points out that the usual form of non-probability sampling is termed “purposive, purposeful or criterion-based sampling” (p. 178). This means a case is selected because it has some particular attributes to enable researchers to investigate a phenomenon and to achieve the purpose of the research. A qualitative case study particularly requires purposeful sampling (Burns, 2000; Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2003). In this study, the following criteria were applied to assist the selection of participating female school principals:

1. Female principals who are currently working in urban primary schools in District H.
2. Female principals who have been in the principalship for more than five years and have been recognised and are revered as successful principals by leaders in district educational bureau and the community.
3. Female principals who are in the age range between 30 and 50.
4. Female principals who are interested in the current study.

The formation of these criteria was based on the assumption that the principals who have the above characteristics would not only be willing to share their life experiences and leadership practices but also would have a wealth of experiences on which to draw. Because the number of females in urban primary schools is larger than those in secondary school or in rural areas (Coleman, Qiang & Li, 1998), it was therefore more convenient to select female primary principals in urban districts.
Burns (2000) suggests some useful ways of purposeful sampling. For instance, these include selecting a typical and unique case, comprehensively reviewing all available cases before making final decisions, selecting the ones recommended by experts, selecting the case which is easy to access, and selecting another case by participant referral. Since the research relates to the personal life experiences, it is crucial that the researcher and participant can build a friendly and trust relationship. For convenience, easy access and in the spirit of building a friendly and trust relationship with participants, the researcher asked for the help of a professor working in the research institute in District H who had long-term collaboration with the educational bureau of District H and knew some successful female school principals in this district.

Two female school principals who met the criteria were recommended by the professor and with his assistance, the researcher gained their agreement to participate in this study. Through the same channels, the researcher invited one of the superintendents in the educational bureau of District H to participate in the study. Six teachers (three male and three female teachers) working in the school of each female principal were invited to participate in this research voluntarily when the researcher formally accessed each school site. A consent form and the information sheet about the study were given to each participant (see Appendix B, Appendix C).

4.4.3 Data collection procedures

Guided by the research questions, the study collected data based around the three broad themes: the early life experience of each female principal, her career experiences, and her daily leadership practices. The data collection comprised three phases of fieldwork which lasted from April, 2007 to October, 2007. In the first phase, the preliminary phase (April, 2007), the researcher sent a letter (see Appendix A) to the educational bureau of District H to gain the permission to access the two schools. Then the researcher accessed each school to make a workable research plan with each female principal. The main purpose of this phase was to establish
preliminary contact with each female school principal and the teachers in her school and gain their interest in the current study. After this phase, two months of field work which lasted from May to June of 2007 was conducted in the first school. Phase Three data collection was commenced from September to October in 2007 in the second school. In each school, there were three main sources of data collection and these included interviews, semi-participant and non-participant observation and document analysis.

**Semi-structured interviews**

As a methodological term, the interview is regarded as one of the oldest and most widely used research techniques in the social sciences (Coleman & Briggs, 2007). Interviews can be one-to-one in a face-to-face conversation, or it can be a group conversation involving several respondents and one interviewer, or two interviewers who work in partnership to talk with respondents (Coleman & Briggs, 2007). Depending on what questions are going to be investigated, researchers may use structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, or unstructured interviews. Stake (1995) suggests that the interview “is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64).

In the current study, semi-structured interviews were used as a main research technique to glean data about the life experiences and leadership practices of each principal. Burns (2000) states that structured interviews cannot “encapsulate all subtleties and personal interpretations” (p. 425). Therefore, it was anticipated that a more open-ended approach to interviewing may have provided more opportunities for eliciting information about the two principals’ leadership practices and life experiences.

In this study, the interviews with teachers and each school principal were interlaced during the whole fieldwork in each school. During the field work, the researcher participated in most of the school activities and socialized with the staff in order to develop a positive rapport with them. In each school one face to face semi-structured
interview with each of six teachers (three females and three males) was conducted. Each interview with each teacher lasted 30-45 minutes. Since the interviewees preferred not to tape recorded, the researcher took notes during the interview. After each interview, detailed notes were written and numbered. Three face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each school principal were conducted. Each interview lasted 30-50 minutes. When the field work in each school was over, a telephone interview was conducted with the superintendent. The telephone interview with the superintendent lasted about 60 minutes. A summary of the details of the interviews can be found in Appendix D.

The interviews with teachers and superintendent were focused on their perception about the leadership practices of each female school principal. As Coleman and Briggs (2007) have noted, semi-structured interviews allows respondents to express themselves at length, meanwhile it “offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling” (p.149). Interviewees were encouraged to recall some impressive events they knew or they experienced about each school female principal. The interview with each female school principal focused on gleaning data about her early life experiences, her career experiences and her perception about their leadership practices. Each interview focused on each theme. To ensure that there would not be any unease experienced by the principals, it was decided to ask them questions regarding their personal life experiences during the final interview. Thus, the first interview focused on their leadership practices and the second one asked them questions about their career experiences. Most interviews were carried out at the school site, either in the principal’s office or in the conference room. As with the wishes of teachers and the superintendent, both principals requested that their interviews not be tape recorded. For this reason, the researcher took copious notes and typed these notes afterwards. A list of the semi-structured interview questions used with the school principals, teachers and superintendent can be found in Appendix E.

*Semi-Participant observation and non-participant observation*
As another important research technique, observation has been widely used in qualitative research. Since data collected by observation is not limited by participants’ knowledge or memory, observation is viewed as a useful technique to provide an additional source of data for verifying the information obtained by other research techniques (Gall et al., 2007). In the current study, the researcher observed the daily leadership practices of each female principal and the important activities in each school which the school principal attended or hosted. These observations provided another perspective to understand the leadership practices of each female principal.

In the study, “semi-participant observation”, and “non-participant observation” (Coleman & Briggs, 2007, p.177) were conducted. During the field work in each school, the researcher was invited to participate in some school meetings and asked to give some suggestions. So for this kind of situation, the researcher conducted semi-participant observation. In addition, non-participant observations were conducted in each school. The researcher observed some school activities which the principal attended, such as the classroom observations. This is a kind of unstructured form of observation, which the school principals were shadowed and the researcher remained as an unobtrusive observer during the process (Merriam, 1998). Some other school events such as students’ excursions were also observed in a non-participant way, since these school events can help to enrich an understanding of the site. Each time when accessing the school, the researcher made use of the chance to observe the physical environment and potential events in each school. These observations were flexible and constituted non-participant observations. In order not to disturb the daily work of the principal so as to obtain authentic findings in each field setting, the research utilised non-participant observation. During the process of non-participant observations, no video or cassette recorder was used.

According to Gall et al. (2007), field notes are necessary when conducting field study. They indicate field notes should be reflective and descriptive with concrete details or
some sketches. In this study, field notes were taken each time when the researcher accessed to the school sites. A copy of the field note form used in this study is presented in Appendix F.

**Use of Documents**

Patton (2002) suggests that document analysis “provides a behind-the-scenes look at the program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through documents” (p. 307). Documents and other records contain rich information about the culture of an individual or organisation (Patton, 2002). Sometimes documents are used in connection with or in support of the data collected by interview and observation. Recently, researchers have become interested in analysing documents themselves (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

In the study, three main categories of documents were collected. They included: (a) documents relating to each female principal such as newspaper clippings and a monograph about her and her career experiences and leadership approach (In Mainland China, it is not uncommon for primary and secondary school principals to publish, via a monograph, their ideas about educational administration and leadership); (b) documents regarding the school in which she was working during the fieldwork such as published or non-published school newsletters, school albums, or research reports by teachers in each school; and (c) documents about the community in which each school was located and the documents about the educational situation of the district and the whole city. These documents included printed documents, electronic papers on the internet and the website of each school, and audio and video records of the important school events.

The documents were an important part of the overall data collected. Before the researcher visited each school site, she obtained documents from the internet about
the two female school principals and these provided important background information about each female principal and her school. When preliminary data collection commenced, the researcher solicited related documents about the school from each female school principal, and the electronic documents in the school website of each school were concerning during the whole data collection process. During the course of the fieldwork in each school, more documents became available and were analysed. The documents collected for the study were used to provide important demographic, historical and contextual data (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Not only did they provide more information for the study, but they also served to ensure the trustworthiness of interviews and observations (Glesne, 1999).

4.4.4 Data analysis

According to Goodson and Sikes (2001) data analysis means making sense of, or interpreting the data. Interpretation is core in case study data analysis. In the statement of Gall et al. (2007) about the ways of analysing data in a qualitative case study, they suggest interpretational analysis as one of strategies to analyse data. They note interpretational analysis means “a process of examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (p.466). In addition, they suggest a reflective analysis strategy. Reflective analysis refers to a process in which the researcher explains the research phenomenon based on the researchers’ intuition and judgement (Gall et al., 2007). In line with the features of qualitative exploratory case study research, these strategies of data analysis were used in the current study.

In the current study, interpretational analysis with continuous reflection was undertaken to deal with collected data in each case, then after that, a cross-case synthesis was conducted between the two cases. In the study, all the data were recorded in Chinese. For case study researchers, data analysis commences during
data collection (Merriam, 1998). However, time is still required to systemically analyse collected data, since this is one of crucial parts for researchers (Yin, 2003). Following this principle, data analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage of data analysis took place during data collection. Collected documents were selected and numbered. Field notes which were recorded every day during data collection were typed into the computer. Interview notes were transcribed after each interview and saved as word documents. When the data collection was completed, a more systematic data analysis was conducted in the second stage of data analysis.

Each case was dealt with separately. Because of the complexity of accurately translating all transcriptions into English, the data was analysed firstly in Chinese and after that a preliminary Chinese analysis was translated into English. Because NVivo software cannot support Chinese characters, Microsoft word was used to help organise and analyse data. The interview transcription, field notes, and selected documents were coded and segmented. For instance the first interview with a teacher in the first school was coded as “07051715/TPS/Tinter01”. An example of the coding system is listed in Appendix G. After that, all the segmented data were closely read to find the main concepts which were named as “constructs” (Gall et al, 2007, p.466). These constructs were aggregated into broad categories which represented certain meanings. Based on the conceptual framework, a category system (Table 4.1) was built. Then the researcher used the category system to code each segment in the computer file. These categorised segments were grouped. By use of “constant comparison” (Gall et al. 2007, p.469), these categorised segments were grouped into some themes in which each theme could generalize the meaning of some categorised segments. These themes from data analysis were employed to explain the leadership construction of the female principal. For each case, the above analysis procedure was carried out. After finishing the data analysis of each case, “a cross-case synthesis” (Yin, 2003, p.133) was implemented to find any coordination between the two cases. The purpose of the comparison of the two cases was to present a more in-depth understanding about the professional lives of the two female
principals’. Since the nature of the study was to understand the leadership practices of female principals from multiple perspectives, constant reflection on data was carried out during the whole process of data analysis.

*Table 4.1 Category System*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-category Level 1</th>
<th>Sub-category Level 2</th>
<th>Sub-category Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational context (OC)</td>
<td>External context (O-EC)</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Parents; residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal context (O-IC)</td>
<td>School history;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational structure &amp;</td>
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4.4.5 Trustworthiness and authenticity

Establishing validity of qualitative research is another important consideration when conducting a study. Usually the terms “internal validity”, “external validity”, and “reliability”, which are from positivist research traditions, are used to evaluate the quality of research. However, studies guided by a constructive/interpretive epistemological orientation tend to employ “trustworthiness” and “authenticity” to judge the quality of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.114). In other words, the studies under qualitative research have their own techniques to establish validity. As Merriam (1998) points out:

[Rigor] in qualitative research derives from the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions and rich, thick description. (Merriam, 1998, p.151)

Although the validity of case study research has been questioned since it emphasises interpreting experiences of informants from researchers’ perspectives, researchers of case study methodology maintain the perspectives of researchers are useful for understanding the meaning of the experiences of informants, and actually it is inescapable for any researcher to analyse data without his/her individual perspectives. Goodson and Sikes (2001) indicate that instead of the detachment of researchers, researchers are encouraged to develop positive relationships with informants so as to ensure a high quality of research. In this study, it was felt that the personal involvement of the researcher helped to forge friendly relationships with the participants in each school. The researcher’s previous experience as a teacher and her empathy towards them helped them to feel comfortable and relaxed when they were being interviewed. In addition, the researcher’s similar overseas learning experience with one of the principals helped to create a bond with her that lead to
greater cooperation.

Unlike research traditions based on positivist and postpositivist epistemologies, where generalization is one of the criteria for the judgement of the quality of research, exploratory case study research is not concerned with this criterion. Case study research is concerned about how to understand phenomena at length rather than how to generalize research findings. Stake (1995) notes, “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (p.8). Case study research presents in-depth interpretation of phenomena. For case study research, how to obtain sufficient and in-depth data is more important than how to generalize research findings.

Triangulation is one of most useful ways to verify the validity of a study. Glesne (1999) explicates triangulation as “the use of multiple data collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives” (p.32). In this study, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, semi-structured interviews with teachers in each school and the direct supervisor of each female principal at district education bureau level were also used to provide data from other perspectives. Furthermore, observation, documents analysis were conducted to verify the coherence of data collected from interview.

In addition to the use of triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness of the study during data collection, through data analysis the researcher used the strategy of “coding checks” (Gall et al., 2007, p.475). Here the researcher kept on reading data and modifying the categorised system, seeking agreement among the interview transcription, field observation notes, and reflection log. Moreover, the researcher kept email contact with participants and asked them to review the summary of the transcripts for accuracy and completeness.
4.5 Ethical considerations

Qualitative research can be more intrusive than quantitative methods (Patton, 2002). Because the research content involved participants sharing more personal information and their individual experiences, the potential harm to informants may have increased. Although it was impossible to completely predict all potential ethical issues, it was necessary for the researcher to keep two remarks in mind: “informants’ rights” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.90) and “do no harm” (Tisdale, 2004, p.30). In the study, the following was carried out to minimize any negative consequence arising from the study.

The safeguards for the two female principals and other participants during the field work included confidentiality, anonymity and the use of an informed consent form. Before field work, consent forms were submitted to attain permission. The name of the schools and all the participants were replaced by pseudonyms. In addition, during the period of field work, the researcher did not tape record the interviews since the participants preferred not to use tape recorders. Each interview was conducted one-on-one basis in private and secure sites. All the data was stored in a locked filing cabinet. The application for ethics clearance for this study was approved by the Ethics Committee at Queensland University of Technology on March 12, 2006.

4.6 Limitations

Although the qualitative exploratory case study research strategy has been justified as an appropriate research approach for addressing the questions of the study, a number of limitations need to be acknowledged. First, since the data of the case study is highly dependent on the response of the participants, the extent to which the two informants told of these experiences determined the quality of the data. In this study, because the two female school principals had tight and busy working schedules every day, the time to interview with them was limited. Consequently, this
influenced the depth of the data that came from them. An attempt was made to offset this limitation by (a) endeavouring to build a very positive relationship with each principal so that she would be committed to the study, (b) creating more opportunities to observe the principals in action, and (c) relying more heavily on their monographs and other documents.

Secondly, although case study research claims the engagement of the subjectivity of the researcher, the assumptions and bias of the researcher may limit the interpretation of the leadership practices and their experiences. In the current study, the researcher endeavoured to limit her own biases and subjectivity. She did this by using a variety of data and, in this way, the multiple-source data provided multiple perspectives to help the researcher reflect on her individual subjectivity. In addition, the researcher continued to read other related literature in order to enhance her theoretical perspectives so as to facilitate the analysis of the data of the study. Thirdly, since English is the second language of the researcher, the limitation of translation from Chinese into English has to be considered. To minimize this limitation, the researcher enlisted the services of a professional translator to check with the translation of data.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has argued for a qualitative exploratory case study to investigate the leadership practices and experiences of two female principals in the PRC. The methodological choice was determined by the relationship between the research questions of this study, and the nature of the qualitative exploratory case study approach. The qualitative exploratory case study allows for discovery, insight and an understanding of informants' leadership practices and life experiences. In the current study, multiple methods were used to increase the reliability of the findings. Two broad research questions and sub questions within three broad themes were developed to guide the specific implementation of the qualitative exploratory case study approach. Within the methodology of the case study design, the data collection
methods of semi-structured interview, observation, and document analysis was used. The data collection procedures and methods of data analysis were described in this chapter. The researcher has also discussed trustworthiness and authenticity, the ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE CASE OF QIN

5.1 Overview

The aim of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 is to present a case study of two exemplary Chinese female principals, referred to as Qin and Fei (pseudonyms are used throughout the study for participant names and places). Both Qin and Fei were leading primary schools in an urban district of one of the largest cities in Mainland China. The two exploratory case studies provide a rich description of their leadership practices by exploring their biographical experiences and tracing their career experience. This chapter provides a descriptive account of Qin. It begins with the description of the school context in which Qin was working during the fieldwork of this study. This description involves the external community context and the internal organisational context. After this, Qin’s leadership career is traced by presenting her experiences in three stages of her leadership career: formation, accession, and incumbency. Following this is an illustration of Qin’s leadership practices. The last part of the chapter is a summary of these noted aspects of Qin’s leadership.

5.2 Organisational context of Taiyang Primary School (TPS)

This section sets the background of Qin’s leadership practices by briefly describing the external community context of Taiyang Primary School (TPS) and its internal organisational context.

5.2.1 The external community of TPS

Taiyang Primary School, in which Qin was working as principal during the fieldwork of this study, is located in a newly built wealthy residential community in District H of City J. This community was near the centre of the highly technical and scientific zone of the district. Thus employees in electronic information and technological companies, self-employed business persons and academics in
universities comprised the majority of the community. Many well-educated people live in this community which is deemed to be a very attractive place to live. Children of the families in this community were entitled to attend this school because they are the permanent residents in the community. Most of the students of TPS come from literate households and from middle to high socio-economic backgrounds (D1TPS).

The parents of students who attend TPS are said to pay attention to the education of their children and have a high expectation of their children’s performance. For instance, there have been occasions when some parents were seen to directly interfere with the teaching taking place at TPS. Some parents have been known to watch teaching activities on the school playground to make sure teachers were delivering classes properly. There was one incident when parents took photos outside the school’s exterior wall which they used as evidence to blame the teachers for the improper classroom teaching (D2TPS). A couple of teachers who were interviewed commented that parents told them how they should teach specific classes since these parents thought they were more capable and experienced in terms of teaching (07051715/TPS/Tinter01& 07062211/TPS/Tinter03). Not surprisingly, this type of parental interference has caused pressure on teachers (07051715/TPS/Tinter01). In more recent times, however, especially since the assignment of Qin to TPS, more trust and understanding was built between TPS and the community, and TPS also gained some support from the community. Parents of students who are successful in their career were invited to narrate their career experience to the students as a means of motivating them. Today, it seems that parents continue to have some influence over the school. During field work, the researcher observed that Qin held a staff meeting to discuss how to deal with a letter of complaint made by a parent. The complaint related to a teacher who was considered to not have dealt with a conflict between his son and son’s classmates (FN070515TPS).
5.2.2 The internal organisational context of TPS

The description about the organisational context of TPS considers the following components: the school history, its school physical environment, organisational structure and system, curriculum and schooling activities, staff and students.

School history

TPS was a newly established school with five years history when the fieldwork of this study commenced. It is a regular school among over two hundred primary schools in the district. However, it has had a special history which was unusual among the primary schools in the district. During the first two years of its inception, there were serious personal conflicts among teachers. The teachers who had been recruited from different primary schools of the district did not get along with each other and they were split on many issues. The principal at that time, Qin’s predecessor, failed to deal with the conflicts and the situation deteriorated. The school enrollment was low with only 168 students from Year One to Year Six. The parents of the students did not trust the educational quality of TPS. Officers in the district educational bureau often received complaints from teachers and parents of students (D3TPS).

To solve these issues and breathe new life into the school, Qin was assigned as principal. However the issues did not end immediately due to a change of principal. Some teachers opposed the assignment of a new principal to TPS. When the senior officers of the local educational bureau hosted a staff meeting to announce the assignment of Qin to TPS, some teachers publicly protested and refused attending the staff meeting. Qin said she did feel shocked by that occasion even though she had worked in primary schools for more than twenty years (D3TPS). During the first week of Qin’s principalship, some teachers even attempted to protest against the new arrangement by refusing to deliver classes to students (D3TPS). Qin used her network at a local teachers’ university and arranged for some university student
teachers to fill in if those teachers really refused to deliver class (D3TPS). Over the last couple of years, Qin maintained that she had successfully moderated the conflicts among teachers. So much so that in 2006, TPS was awarded a Harmony Prize. This prize was conferred by the district educational bureau to well performing schools that build a harmonious school climate (D4TPS).

School physical environment

TPS is a small sized primary school in which there is only one playground and one five-floor school building. Yet, the school physical environment is impressive. Its school building was especially designed by a group of architects who had worked overseas (D3TPS). The bright and spacious room both inside and outside the classrooms contributed to its distinctive architectural characteristics, which was different from the traditional school buildings with cellular classrooms scattered through China. Each classroom was equipped with modern multi-media facilities and air conditioning and its five function rooms (including a computer room, scientific lab, music room, dancing room, and a students meeting room) were equipped with modern schooling appliances. The decoration of TPS was extraordinary. The walls inside and outside each classroom and the wall along the stairs of classroom areas were decorated by the drawings and paintings of students themselves. Unlike many school libraries with tidy book shelves and lines of desk and chairs, the library of TPS was deliberately decorated as a student friendly place like a fairyland. The columns in the library were decorated as huge colorful pencils; a special reading zone for pupils in lower grades (from Year One to Year Three) had some colorful cushions on which children were encouraged to sit. At the rear of the library, there was a platform for groups of students to hold seminars. The physical environment of TPS demonstrated the student-centered ideas of the school which lies in contrast to many traditional Chinese schools that are more teacher-centered.

Organisational structure and system

The organisational structure of TPS is a two-line combined organisational structure
(see Appendix H), which was largely based on Qin’s ideas that school organisational structure should maintain the routine management and also allow for flexibility to deal with emergent tasks. In Mainland China, many primary schools have four levels of organisational structure. Level one is the highest level and this is where the principal is located. The second level under the principal consists of the senior leaders of each department of the school. The third level includes the subject leaders (such as leaders of Chinese, Mathematics, and English) and grade leaders (from Year One to Year Six). The remaining teaching staff and ancillary staff constitute the fourth level. In TPS, the principal is responsible for two management lines: line one which covers routine school management and involves all staff; and the other line, which comprises four integrated teams linked to departments in the first line.

The management of staff in TPS came under the jurisdiction of the district educational bureau. However, unlike some schools in which principals create school policies to discipline or regulate staff, in TPS there were no additional school regulations. Qin said she trusted all the teachers and there was no need to constrain teachers by rigorous school rules (07060711/TPS/Pinter01). Moreover, unlike many schools in the district in which principals usually made some systematic and specific procedures to motivate and evaluate the performance of the staff members, Qin said she did not evaluate the teachers’ performance. She explained that every teacher had his/ her strengths and weaknesses and it was improper to evaluate and rank teachers’ performance according to some school specific regulations (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). For her, rigorous evaluation procedures would impose pressure on teachers and teachers would worry about being labeled as poor performing. Qin said she awarded whole teams that performed well rather than individual staff members. Moreover, she attempted to guide teachers to neglect monetary rewards and be more concerned about the spiritual acquisition gained from teaching. For Qin, it was evident that she wanted to gradually construct a unique system at TPS rather than copy the system adopted by other schools. For this reason, she did not create new sets of written regulations in TPS even though she
acknowledged it was important to have some regulations to guide the work in TPS (07061513/TPS/Pinter02)

In TPS, the average salary of teachers is only a little above the average salary of other primary school teachers in the district. Qin said she did not pay a considerable salary to attract teachers to work in TPS. She preferred to attract them by the supportive and caring climate of the school rather than the monetary reward (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). Some teachers working at TPS who had dependant children expressed their lack of satisfaction with the salary since they needed to earn much to support their families (FN070608 TPS). Yet, some of the young and unmarried teachers indicated they were quite happy to work in the school since the school climate was relaxed and caring without rigorous systems to regulate them (07062209/TPS/Tinter06). One young female teacher said Qin understood that she lived far from school campus and she was seldom criticized by Qin when she was late for school. The teacher said that in TPS, teachers did not necessarily follow the school rules but what was important was that they ensured student learning (FN070425TPS).

**Curriculum and schooling activities**

In District H, the primary school day begins at 7:50 in the morning and ends at 3:50 in the afternoon from Monday to Thursday. On Fridays, classes begin at 7:50 in the morning and end at 11:40 am. Normally on Friday afternoons, schools organise the students from Year Three to Year Six to participate in a variety of interest groups. There are no classes and school activities for students from Year One to Year Two. The compulsory curricula in the district involve Chinese, Mathematics, English, Music, Arts and drawing, Physical education, and Science and society. As many other public primary schools in the district, TPS served its students with the same national compulsory curricula on the same school days. It organised its students to participate in various schooling activities for all the primary schools in the district, which sponsored by some departments in the local educational bureau, such as
sports meeting, primary student contests of aerobic exercises, and contests of
science and technology. Meanwhile according to the spirit of the ongoing curriculum
reform, which means schools were encouraged to develop their own school based
curriculum. TPS also developed school based curricula to enrich the learning
experiences of students.

During the fieldwork in TPS, it became apparent that the school had two kinds of
school-based curricula. The first one popularized scientific and technological
knowledge among students and fostered their spirit of science. The second one
focused on fostering students’ capability of good communication, and the spirit of
respect and understanding of people from different backgrounds and cultures. The
school-based curricula were carried out usually via lectures given to students as well
as practical activities inside or outside the school (FN070527TPS).

In addition to the two school-based curricula, every Friday afternoon there was no
compulsory curriculum and students from Year Three to Year Six selected to
participate in activities in different interest groups including the dancing group,
painting group, chorus, Ping-pong group and Martial arts group. In TPS, they called
the student group activities on Friday afternoon as “Happy Friday”. Qin said it was
time for students to play happily and freely.

At TPS, these school activities were mainly coordinated by the senior leaders. Qin
supervised all the activities and decided on the action plans. Normally when there
was a school activity, all the teachers became involved in preparing for the activity.
Unlike many schools in the district, most students’ activities in TPS were hosted by
student representatives (FN070509TPS). During the fieldwork in TPS, the
researcher observed that at the national flag rising assembly every Monday morning,
student representatives delivered speeches to their fellow students. This is not a
usual practice in other schools. During physical exercises every day, some students’
leaders were selected to inspect the discipline of each class (FN070518TPS).
In addition, TPS also conducted a series of activities to integrate the resources of community into the work of the school. Some parents who had achieved great success in their career were invited to deliver speeches to students and inspire them by their professional experiences (D3TPS). Furthermore, TPS recruited volunteers from university students in the city to assist in the work of the teachers in each class and offered support to students when they needed. These volunteers and one teacher in TPS with a psychology licence formed a psychological counselling team to help students overcome their anxiety and solve issues with peers.

**Staff**

By the end of the fieldwork, there were 50 teachers and almost ten casually employed staff members at TPS. The average age of staff was 35 years old. Among the fifty teachers, more than half of them were recruited by Qin from different primary schools either in the district or outside the district or other regions in Mainland China. Since District H was famous for its well-developed education and many teachers like to work in the district, it was not difficult for her to recruit experienced teachers. Eighty percent of these teachers hold certification for senior primary school teachers and 12 teachers were awarded as excellent teachers of District H. According to Qin, TPS was not seen to have as many excellent teachers as those key primary schools in the district. Qin acknowledged that the working performance of some teachers in TPS was still not as good as those in key primary schools. Nevertheless she said she was happy with the passion of her teachers. She explained that most of the teachers in TPS liked their job and cared about students with all of their hearts (FN070508TPS).

During the fieldwork in TPS, the researcher observed most teachers in TPS were kind to students and taught them patiently. It was also apparent that staff in TPS were easy-going and open minded to outside visitors. During the time of field work of the research, some other researchers from universities, and domestic and overseas
visitors visited TPS. They were also welcomed by the teachers at TPS. One teacher indicated that communicating with outside researchers and visitors helped her widen her horizons (07060311/TPS/Tinter02). At TPS, the researcher also observed that staff members called each other by their given names or nicknames which demonstrated their close relationship like family members. Sometimes young teachers called the senior female teachers “Sister” and seldom called them by their position title (07062209/TPS/Tinter06). Qin also called the teachers or the senior leaders in the school by their nicknames. It seemed that staff in TPS were happy to work there.

In contrast, some teachers who had been employed from regions outside District H and were not tenured in this district felt much pressure. Because the local government of the district was required to allocate salaries to newly tenured teachers, the local educational bureau strictly controlled the quota of tenured teachers in the schools in the district. For teachers who were not tenured teachers, it meant they could not enjoy any of the bonuses from the district educational bureau or local government. Some experienced teachers from schools outside the district who were working in TPS expressed their anxiety and insecurity (FN070628TPS).

**Students**

Most of the students who attended TPS were from the same residential community in which TPS was located. Overall they were from middle to high socio-economic households. By the end of the field work in TPS, nearly 800 students were enrolled in the school. As a result of the student-centered education and the adoption of new and creative teaching and learning methods in the school, students at TPS appeared happy and not constrained. Teachers were required not to give too many assignments to students in case they might add to extra pressure on students. New teaching methods which cultivated students’ creativity and life-long learning capabilities were especially encouraged. Qin said that parents who wanted their children to learn happily without too much academic pressure chose TPS for their children.
Guided by Qin’s philosophy, there were no strict rules articulated to regulate children’s good behaviours. Qin suggested that good behaviours of students could not be achieved merely by rigid disciplines and the excellent performance of students could not be achieved by piles of homework. Based on her educational philosophy, students appeared relaxed and calm. During the fieldwork in TPS, the researcher could always observe happy and smiling students. After class, students of TPS could be seen to play games loudly and happily throughout the school.

In class, students were not necessarily required to sit in straight lines or to agree with teachers’ views and opinions. On the contrary, children were encouraged to think through and develop their own viewpoints (D4TPS). Some teachers in TPS said the students in TPS were active and passionate most of the time and sometimes they were very naughty (07051113/TPS/Tinter04; 07052715/TPS/Tinter05; 070622/TPS/Tinter06). A senior leader of TPS said an evaluation report regarding the mathematic capability of students in Grade One conducted by the district educational bureau revealed that these students received an outstanding performance in their creative capability (FN070625TPS).

5.3 Leadership career of Qin

To understand Qin’s leadership practice, the researcher interviewed her about her early life experiences. Yet, Qin expressed her puzzlement regarding the connection between her leadership and her biographical experience. However, as she promised she would cooperate with the research, Qin said she would share some aspects of her early life experiences. Along with information from documents such as some public speeches which Qin delivered and information from her monograph based on her research experiences of participating in a national level research project regarding primary students’ education, the following presents aspects of her leadership career by delineating three stages of her career experience. They are formation, accession,
and incumbency.

5.3.1 Formation

Family life and mode of upbringing

Qin was born and reared in a county city of an inland province of Mainland China in the 1960s. She and her two brothers spent a comfortable and happy childhood in the care of their parents. Qin’s father was an ex-serviceman and took the position as head of the local transportation department in her home town. Her mother was a cadre member of a department in the local government. Qin’s childhood took place during the time of the planned economy in Mainland China when the CCP central government controlled the supply of food and necessities and free trade across the whole country (Mackerras, McMillen, & Watson, 1998). However, because her father worked for the local transportation department and had more opportunities to purchase goods, Qin said that she did not suffer from food shortages during her childhood. She also acknowledged that her family had a good reputation and enjoyed a good standard of living in their hometown.

Qin said that her parents cared about her very much and they tried their best to protect her from hurt and distress while at the same time they did not spoil her. Qin described her father as benevolent and seldom angry at her. The only thing that could make her father unhappy was the garish dressing style of women. Qin said her father hated women to wear rings, necklaces and regarded it as mismatch to the style of the proletariat. Following her father’s ideas, Qin has seldom worn rings and necklaces and maintained a simple dressing style. Qin’s mother also cared about her, but she was a little stricter with Qin and appeared to have set high expectations for her. Rather than call her by an ordinary girlish name, her mother particularly selected Qin, since it means a person who is successful and revered by others. Qin said she did not understand her mother’s expectations for her until she was criticized by her mother because at one time she changed her own name to a girlish name.
Qin’s parents did not impose a lot of pressure on her regarding her future life; they hoped Qin could live happily whatever her future career was. Qin said her parents gave her much freedom to do the things she wanted to do. In 1960s and 1970s in China, working in factories was one of the best choices for people. Qin’s parents wanted to find a job for her when she finished her primary education, but Qin preferred to go on to secondary education. Her parents allowed her to study in secondary school. When she finished her secondary education, again her parents respected her wishes and they allowed her to undertake the national entrance examination for universities (this examination was suspended during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)). Finally Qin enrolled in a junior teaching college in her hometown. Her parents perceived that it was also a good choice for girls to take a job as a teacher owing to two vacations with a salary and a relatively small daily workload (07062212/TPS/Pinter03).

Schooling and educational agencies
Most of Qin’s schooling occurred during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China. She recalled that most of her primary life was spent in the activities of military drills and agricultural work in the field without having to experience the pressure of academic learning. Like many of her peers who were socialized to obey the direction of the CCP, Qin obeyed school rules carefully. She was regarded as a good performing girl and was recommended to be the student leader of her school’s Red Guard Group. As for that experience in primary school, Qin indicated that she learnt some useful social life skills although she did not gain as much in terms of academic knowledge.

Qin also obtained her secondary education in her hometown. She said at that time like many other classmates of hers she did not realize the importance of academic knowledge and spent most of her time playing cards with her classmates. However Qin was so impressed by the excellent teaching of her mathematics teacher in
secondary school that she was still able to remember his handsome teaching posture. She said she did not like the teaching gestures of her chemistry teacher since he seldom had eye contact with students in his class. Qin was also regarded as a good performing student in secondary school. She was often honored to host school students’ activities as a student representative. She was also very interested in the performing arts such as singing and dancing, but because her father did not like her to participate in these types of activities, she obeyed his wishes.

When Qin nearly completed her senior secondary school, she participated in the National Entrance Examination for universities and was later enrolled by a junior teaching college in her hometown. She chose to continue her learning in that teachers college although her parents could have easily helped her to find a good position in a factory. During her time at teachers college, she performed very well. In her last year before graduation, Qin was unexpectedly contacted by the principal of a well-known primary school in her hometown. The principal wanted Qin to work in his primary school after her graduation. Qin was excited by the opportunity to work in the best primary school in her hometown. It was in the primary school that Qin commenced her career as a teacher (07062212/TPS/Pinter03).

**Peer and reference group**

In Qin’s career experience, she said she gained much help from and was influenced by some key people. Recalling her schooling in primary and secondary school, she ascribed her capability of reading and logical thinking to a good Chinese teacher in her primary school and an excellent mathematics teacher in her secondary school. She indicated that she was lucky to meet those two teachers in that period of time when less stress was being placed on academic learning (07062212/TPS/Pinter03).

In addition, Qin especially expressed her gratitude to the principal who recruited her to the school where she started her teaching career. She said the principal was a good principal who always supported the staff and treated them as his family members. Under the leadership of the principal, the primary school had a good teaching and
learning legacy. New teachers were coached by senior experienced teachers in a mentor program and teachers were encouraged to share their teaching experience with each other. Qin said she learnt many teaching skills from her mentor and gained much insight from discussions with her colleagues. The friendly and supportive school climate of that primary school impressed Qin and she believed that it was more important to have this type of environment than to be working in first class teaching facilities with modern school buildings. It was in that primary school, Qin won her first prize in teaching and her reputation in her hometown due to her nine years’ diligent work and excellent performance in helping students to achieve high academic scores (D5TPS).

The first nine years of hard work in that primary school contributed to Qin’s prestige in her hometown, but it occupied much time of her personal life as well. Qin’s parents were unhappy that she was fatigued and sacrificed her personal life and decided to help her transfer out of that school to obtain a better position. Qin expressed she also wanted to quit teaching since she felt tired dealing with the work of simply improving the academic scores of students. Qin said she would have quit her teaching career if it had not been for the persuasion of the principal in that primary school. The principal told Qin that she had the potential to be a good teacher and he also promised to send Qin to university to update her knowledge in teaching and learning. Since the principal had a wide social network in the field of education in China, he successfully helped Qin to study for a year in one of the well-known universities in China (D5TPS).

The study in the famous university with a long-standing academic tradition contributed to Qin’s further understanding of teaching and learning. She said she was deeply attracted by the library and the learning climate of that university and cherished the chance of learning. It was also at the university she became acquainted with some famous researchers and professors in the field of education in China. Qin indicated that these researchers helped her widen her horizon in terms of teaching
and learning. After she completed one year study in that university, she returned to her hometown and continued teaching in that primary school. During that period of the same year, her primary school was selected as a research site to conduct a key national research program on improving teaching and learning in primary schools, which was led by the professors in the university where Qin used to learn several months’ ago (D5TPS)

Qin, along with another teacher in that primary school, conducted specific research activities in their classes. More than ten years’ teaching experience in primary schools did not prepare Qin for the academic research skills she needed. Qin said that she did not understand the jargon of academics from universities and did not know how to do research at that time. However, Qin and her colleague worked very hard and tried to explore effective ways to improve students’ learning in schools. Enlightened by early habits of keeping a diary while at college, Qin and her colleague kept on writing down the events about students which they observed in their daily teaching activities. They did not know the value of keeping a diary about students until they attended a presentation where a well-known educational expert acclaimed that what they recorded in their diary about students provided vital material for researchers to reflect on what good education was, and how to improve the students’ learning. Qin said the feedback from that outstanding educational expert encouraged her to continue to keep a teaching journal as an effective way to conduct their research. Qin gradually learnt how to conduct research (D5TPS). She described that research experience as a transformation of her working way as a primary teacher.

5.3.2 Accession

Participating in the research program forced Qin to keep on learning. For her, this was a rewarding journey since it widened her horizon as a primary teacher and contributed to her deep understanding about education (D5TPS). It was also during
the research program, Qin gained career advancement. She was assigned as deputy principal to look after the teaching and learning and research in her primary school. After several years’ hard work, the research program was completed with awarding achievement. As one of the main researchers, Qin won much prestige and awards from the success of the research program. The success of the research program also created further career developmental opportunities for Qin. Qin was nominated as one of the top thousand famous primary and secondary principals in Mainland China and was sent to learn about educational leadership and management in one of the famous universities in China. A year later as a famous excellent teacher in her region, Qin was transferred to the top primary school in her hometown region and assigned as principal of that school.

For Qin herself, she did not anticipate that she would win so much acclaim and she did not aspire to be a principal. She said she just tried her best to perform well in her teaching position and she seldom thought too much about the potential benefits since she did not want to give herself too much pressure (D5TPS). Many persons who are familiar with Qin told the researcher that she is an easy-going person with a modest and kind personality. The teachers in that primary school (the second one in which Qin worked) recognised Qin’s principalship in that school and viewed Qin as their role model and even imitated her dressing style (07062212/TPS/Pinter03).

The career advancement of Qin was smooth. In 2002, a well-known principal in City J (City J is larger than the city in which Qin used to work) offered Qin a position as school principal in the primary school department of his private school. At that time, private schools in Mainland China were in their infancy and normally less recognised by people. However, the private school in City J had a good reputation due to its excellent school performance and the leadership of that well-known principal. For Qin, accepting this job offer was a decision that she needed to think about carefully. She finally decided to accept the position. Most of her driving force for moving to City J was that her son would gain a better education since City J had
a greater number of high performing schools than in her hometown. As a full-time working wife and mother, Qin felt guilty that she did not spend as much time as she wanted to look after her son and husband. Although most of Qin’s students achieved excellent academic performance, her son did not perform well in terms of his academic achievement. Qin claimed that her family was very important to her, so this time she needed to make it up to them (D5TPS).

5.3.3 Incumbency

Qin’s reputation and networks in primary education in China made it easy for her to begin her work in City J. Her principalship in that private school was recognised by both teachers and senior leaders in district educational bureau. Local media in City J reported on her leadership. Three years later, Qin was transferred again. She was assigned to a newly established public school in the district, Taiyang Primary School (TPS). Compared with other public primary schools, TPS was named a regular school with a poor performance at that time. Qin said that she was an obedient person who acted in accordance with the decision made by her senior officers. She assumed the position at TPS while she knew TPS was only a regular primary school in the district (D3TPS).

Serving as principal of TPS for the past four years has been a challenging and rewarding position for Qin. The first year of her principalship in the school was not easy. While she had accumulated some experiences in school leadership, Qin’s reputation did not necessarily bring about recognition by all the staff. To understand the situation of the staff and also to help staff get to know her, for the first two months Qin watched classes of each teacher and discuss teaching and learning with them without holding any staff meetings. She spent most of her time supervising teaching activities and socializing with staff. Teachers gradually became aware of Qin’s working style. After four years’ work in TPS, Qin successfully solved the conflicts between teachers and great changes have taken place in TPS. The
The performance of TPS and the leadership of Qin were recognised by the district educational bureau and parents of students (07102620/BJ/Sinter01). The morale of the staff had improved. Qin noted she felt confident in her leadership of TPS and indicated that she had received much self fulfilment in her principaship in TPS.

5.4 The leadership practices of Qin

Qin started her administrative career in 1992 when she was also a teacher in that primary school where she first worked. Before she was promoted to the best primary school in her hometown province as principal in 2001, she had accomplished the positions as senior leader of all departments and deputy principal in the primary school where she started her teaching career (060817/NM/PPS). At the time of the fieldwork for this research, Qin had assumed the principalship position for six years in three different primary schools. In the next part of this chapter, Qin’s leadership practices in TPS are considered by illuminating five broad categories: vision building, teaching and learning, ethical consideration, power utilisation, dealing with risks and challenges.

5.4.1 Vision building

Using a metaphor, Qin described her principal role as a captain of boat who led all the staff to sail on the boundless sea without knowing the destination. For her, she had the responsibility to encourage staff and lead them forward to achieve the excellence of TPS. But she said she did not have a clear vision for TPS. She made no strategic plan as to what educational leadership books usually suggested. She explained that she was not the sort of person who got used to making plans for the future. What she considered was how to successfully complete current work and whether what currently had been done would lead to better results for the future (07060711/TPS/Pinter01). It seems that she conceived that action was more important than envisioning.
In TPS, the researcher could not find a school strategic plan that specifies the developmental aims of the school. However it became apparent that work at TPS was guided by a common vision which implicitly existed in Qin’s mind. Qin expressed that school should be a place which teacher and students co-generate knowledge and enjoy the happiness of learning (FN070612TPS). For Qin, school was a place in which the principal, teachers, and students interacted with each other and a sense of joy was transmitted from principal through teachers to students (D3TPS). Qin stated the behavior and attitude of teachers could directly affect the growing up of students, therefore principals should make teachers feel happy in school (FN070604TPS). Qin underscored the need to create a harmonious school climate, in which each teacher can feel the caring, respect and support from the principal and their colleagues and then each staff member can work collaboratively for the happy learning experience of each student in TPS.

To achieve her thinking about school, she did take some actions. She organised staff meetings to discuss the future development of TPS. She also asked some professors in educational administration to help the school analyze strengths and weaknesses (D2TPS). Based on the discussion with teachers and other staff, she guided school members to sum up some core values of TPS and some slogans which illuminate the direction of TPS. The core values of TPS are “Everyone is important, everyone plays important roles in TPS”. These slogans about the direction of TPS are stated as following:

TPS strives to be a happy school in which all the students enjoying learning;

TPS strives to prepare all students with scientific and technological knowledge and information technology for competition in the 21st century;

TPS strives to prepare students with the capabilities of international communication and understanding; TPS strives to foster students to be
These core school values and future goals of TPS were practised by Qin and the other staff in TPS. Qin said that she encouraged teachers to think about the core values of their school when there were conflicts between staff members. She said “conflicts exist when people cannot value each other and acknowledge others as significant.” (FN070608TPS) Qin likes to be with students. In her monograph, she wrote: “it is because of you (students) that I love to be a teacher” (D5TPS). In TPS, the researcher often observed that Qin kindly said hello to students or gave them warm hugs. Some staff members said Qin encouraged them to respect and care about all the students and make them experience the joy of learning in the school (07051113/TPS/Tinter04). Qin strove to build a harmonious school climate like family. She talked with teachers in a manner like a close friend with a kind smile. She often called her staff by their nick names (FN070508TPS).

Qin also took some effort to extend the caring and friendship between teachers and students. During the time of fieldwork, the researcher observed that Qin purposefully arranged some school activities to foster a harmonious school climate. One school activity was that the students in Grade Six who would graduate at the end of the summer semester participated in planting a tree on the school campus to remember their life at TPS and the tree was planted to symbolize their deep emotion for TPS (FN070508TPS). Another activity was a graduation ceremony held on campus at the end of the summer semester. At this celebration, Qin conferred a certificate to each student and gave a hug to each graduate. On that day, Qin especially wore a beautiful silk dress to show her best wishes to students (FN070706TPS).

5.4.2 Ethical considerations

It is inevitable that school leaders will be involved in ethical issues in their
leadership. Qin did not mention the word, “ethical”; however, she acknowledged that she met dilemmas in her management and leadership. Qin expressed her dilemma in dealing with some teachers who were ineffective in teaching although they were honest and hard working. She said that according to educational policies in District H she could dismiss these teachers and keep the educational quality of her school. She explained that it was easy for her to recruit other teachers to fill in the vacant positions since teaching positions in District H were well paid and the school performance of TPS was gradually recognised by the community. However she found it was not easy to make that decision. She said she understood the teachers needed their job to support their families and sometimes it was their family responsibilities that distracted them from their teaching work. She said that the life of teachers was not easy. Meanwhile as principal she had the obligation to make sure that the students obtained good education service. To solve the problem, she said she would first try to help these teachers to improve their teaching capabilities. However given her obligation to maintain the schooling quality, she had to follow the policies to dismiss these teachers if some of them still could not improve their teaching performance. Nevertheless, she said she would try to help these teachers to transfer to another non-teaching job in TPS or in other schools. She also expressed that she usually avoided that situation by frequently observing teaching activities in classrooms and taking active measures before things went worse. Qin indicated that she could be punished if teachers made some mistakes in their teaching because it meant she was not performing well her duty as principal. She said that the school principal was accountable for their teachers’ performance.

Qin trusted teachers and believed that essentially they wanted to perform well. She indicated that as a principal she was unwilling to mandate teachers to work harder and to ignore caring about their own families and personal responsibilities. She believed that everybody deserved dignity and respect. She stated that different people have different values about life and career and she should respect their right as humans. (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). Unlike what many other school principals did
in China, Qin did not observe any teacher’s class without notifying the teacher in advance. She stated that nobody wanted to be intruded upon without permission, and classroom observations should be an opportunity for teachers to display their teaching capability and a way for teachers to learn from each other in a collaborative climate (FN070514TPS). She said that principals should not impose extra pressure on teachers.

For Qin, the reasons she insisted on offering a good education for students in her school were related to her care for them and her obligation to the community. During the field work in TPS, the researcher often observed that Qin could easily call out the names of many students and she often said hello to them with kindly smile on her face. Sometimes she gave a warm hug to students and had a chat with them. It seemed there was a tacit rule that all of the children could go to Qin’s office to tell her their issues at any time. The researcher observed that sometimes some students visited her to say hello and share their sweets and snacks with her (FN070508TPS).

Qin did not explicitly state how important education is for Chinese society or for the community, but she practised her duty as a principal carefully. She paid attention to the comments from parents. During the fieldwork, the researcher often observed that Qin had unplanned meetings with parents. Each semester she asked teachers to collect the feedback from parents in terms of school management. She read the anecdotal comments from parents to identify what needed to improve and she responded immediately. Once some parents expressed their concern and complained about the rude manner of a casual cleaner to the students. Qin confirmed the issue and she dismissed that cleaner (FN071022TPS). For the parents of students, Qin was a kind and modest principal whom they revered. The researcher observed that a grandmother of a student of TPS held Qin’s hand and expressed her gratitude to Qin since Qin had shown much concern to her grandson who did not have good health (FN070423TPS).
Qin indicated she had to make tough decisions to dismiss unqualified teachers since the learning of students was more important than teachers’ livelihood. For her, whether students could experience authentic learning and whether students could be cared for by teachers were her priorities and were the focus of some of her ethical dilemmas. To make sure students were learning effectively, she spent a lot of time to discuss pedagogical programmes and the ongoing curriculum reform in China with teachers. She indicated that many teachers in schools misunderstood curriculum reform as the adoption of modern information techniques to deliver classes. During the fieldwork in TPS, a teaching contest was held on the campus. After that contest, Qin had a meeting with all the staff to discuss the classes delivered by all the contestants. She commented that all winners in that contest shared the similarity that they all focused on guiding students to think creatively and figuring out solutions to questions by students’ self-reflection (07060711/TPS/Pinter01). She suggested the classroom interaction between teachers and students should be a process of co-constructing knowledge rather than simply one way asking and answering style (D3TPS).

Providing a school that focused on an authentic pedagogical programme was important for her. In staff meetings, she often stated that she understood that it was easy for teachers to care about talented students or those who had good personalities and to neglect those poor performing or regular students. However she suggested that at the very least, teachers should respect all students and give them equal chances to learn in class and not hurt them either emotionally or physically. One teacher recalled that Qin criticized her harshly since this teacher pointed out a poor performing student to Qin directly in front of that student when Qin asked her which student in her class had difficulty in learning. Qin told her that she might have hurt the feelings of that child to know that he was labeled as poor performing student by his teacher (FN07062016TPS).
She indicated that school should offer a good educational service to the community on the one hand and, on the other hand, principals and teachers should guide the parents to know that all students were important, treated equally and parents could not exchange privileges for their own children by donating books or learning equipment. She said the involvement of parents in school activities was to make good use of parents’ resources to offer a better education service to all the students rather than one or a small number of students (D3TPS). During the field work in TPS, the researcher observed that Qin especially asked one of the researchers who was conducting research in TPS to help write a small brochure for parents to give them some tips about how they can educate their children effectively (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).

5.4.3 Teaching and learning

As a principal who was well-known for high achievement in teaching, Qin was interested in teaching and learning and set them as the first priority in her principalship. Although she had no full-time teaching work since the start of her principalship, she insisted on delivering some classes to students occasionally and carried out research on teaching and learning in her field. As well as being principal at TPS, she was educational advisor to some influential research associations in teaching and learning for primary education as well. She noted that the principalship was a contract position, but being a teacher was a life long job. She said she would like to be a teacher again when she left her position as principal some day in the future. A comment that Qin made that was surprising was that women were better suited to teaching than they were to the principalship even though she knew she was recognised as a good leader (FN070423TPS). It seemed she preferred to work as a teacher than to work as a school principal. The next section considers Qin’s leadership in terms of teaching and learning.
Teaching and learning of the teachers

The first aspect of her leadership in teaching and learning revolved around teachers’ teaching and learning in TPS. Qin indicated it was the excellent work of teachers who finally decided the performance of schools (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). Thus she paid much attention to the teaching and learning of teachers. She said that under the current ongoing curriculum reform in primary and secondary schools in China, the role of principal in instructing teachers’ teaching and learning was the center of a principal’s work (D3TPS). For the role of instructing teachers, she further explained that it was hard to internalize the essence of new teaching and learning methods which were popularized in current Chinese curriculum reform. It may be for this reason that she spent lots of her time in guiding the teaching and learning activities of teachers.

Qin watched the classroom teaching of all teaching staff, coaching them how to improve their teaching efficiency to pursue the success of students in the school. Visiting classrooms was an integral part of her work every day. Using the brief visit of each classroom, Qin knew the situation of teaching and learning in the classroom. She also used the visit as an opportunity to socialize with teaching staff and extend her philosophy of teaching and learning. When she spoke with teachers or staff, she was seen to be smiling.

During the first semester of her principalship in TPS, she co-delivered mathematic classes to students with a teacher in TPS to model how to improve the creative learning of students in class. For teachers, Qin was viewed as a critical friend. She questioned their teaching intentions, probed their thinking and suggested alternatives. Each week, Qin attended the weekly staff meeting of TPS. On these occasions, she watched teachers do presentations about their classroom experience and how they improved their classroom teaching. Qin commented on teachers’ presentation and gave them feedback. She said for the first two years of the principalship in TPS, she gave lectures about teaching and learning during the whole staff meeting, but now
she tried to speak less and give each teacher the chance to present what they have
done in their work so they could learn with and from each other. She commented on
teachers’ presentations in a supportive way and motivated them to do better in their
teaching and learning (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).

To further improve teachers’ teaching capability, she introduced into TPS an
international research program on how to improve teaching and learning. She said
integrating inquiry and teaching and learning of teachers could be an effective way
to promote their professional development (D2TPS). All of the teachers were
involved in the school research program and were encouraged to conduct action
research based on their daily teaching practice and find solutions to their questions
in teaching and learning. A senior leader in the research office of TPS was in charge
of coordinating the research activities in the school and with other researchers in the
research program. Qin suggested to teachers they keep a research journal. Each
month, teachers were encouraged to submit at least four papers about their reflection
on their daily work with students to a senior leader (FN070425TPS). The senior
leader who was in charge of research activities gave suggestions to the teachers. Qin
also read some of the reflective papers to better understand their thinking. Although
it was not compulsory for teachers to submit these reflective papers, Qin strongly
encouraged them to write down their reflections and those who did were rewarded
with an extra bonus. Qin would also attend the research team meetings of teachers
and gave her suggestions to them. During the annual research conference of the
research program, she gave a speech to all of the teachers and extended her
educational philosophy. Teachers in TPS said they were inspired by the speech of
Qin (FN070622TPS). To trace back the school activities, she arranged the staff to
video-tape each of the school activities. For her, these are useful archives which
record the development of TPS (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).

In addition to incorporating inquiry into the teaching and learning of teachers, Qin
created opportunities for teachers to encounter outside learning resources. Qin
indicated that this would widen teachers’ horizon (the Chinese term Qin used was *jian shi mian*) by offering them different perspectives to think about regarding their teaching and learning. Owing to Qin’s reputation in primary education in Mainland China, many school teachers or school principals across the country visited TPS. Normally Qin delivered speeches to the visitors about her understanding of teaching and learning and school management and leadership. All the teachers in TPS were welcomed to attend the meetings to communicate with outside visitors. Moreover Qin created opportunities for teachers to visit other primary schools across China to communicate their teaching experiences to them. Qin denoted these short visiting tours would enrich teachers’ experience. She said that as a teacher he/she should have good skills in presentation and communicating with their colleagues. She said good communication skill with different people was one of the basic skills for teachers. She explained that there could be problems if teachers could not communicate well with their colleagues and other adults (FN070622TPS). In fact, the researcher observed that Qin was an excellent communicator.

Another resource which Qin created for improving teachers’ teaching and learning was the visits by researchers and professors from universities. Qin had wide contacts with researchers and professors in education from universities. These researchers often visited TPS to conduct research. Qin encouraged teachers to communicate with these researchers and learn from them. Qin indicated that the rigorous and diligent working style of these researchers and their modest personality would positively influence her teachers. For Qin, a teacher did not just deliver knowledge to students; he or she should be committed to deliver an open and active attitude to students. Therefore teachers need to communicate with well educated people who possess excellent characteristics such as diligence, honesty, and modesty (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).

While Qin paid attention to teaching and learning activities, she did not insist that teachers follow her instruction directly. She usually inducted teachers to come to
realize what good teaching was. She acknowledged that it normally took time to change the mindset of teachers to improve their teaching and learning activities in schools. She said she was patiently waiting for some teachers to change and improve. It seemed that she did not wait for the professional growth of teachers passively. She strove to develop a climate of learning for teachers. A good example is the well-stocked library at TPS that has plenty of books and journals. The librarian said Qin encouraged teachers to read books and provided as a bonus a subscription to an educational journal according to their interests and needs. She also said one of her responsibilities was to notify teachers of the latest best selling books in education in TPS virtual space (FN070518TPS).

**Learning of students**

Qin’s effort in teachers’ teaching and learning is closely connected to her thinking about students’ learning. For her, it was important for students to learn creatively and happily. She encouraged students to figure out multiple solutions to a problem and question the correct answer given by teachers in class. Qin suggested that teachers should encourage students to become autonomous by allowing them opportunities to think. Qin strove to foster students’ interest in the visiting school library. She especially recruited an experienced librarian with a master’s degree in education to organise the reading activities in the school library. Apart from the reading class in library, which was organised by the Chinese teacher and the librarian, Qin encouraged the librarian to involve students in a variety of learning activities to make good use of the resources of the library. It seems that students liked to read in library. The researcher observed students who finished their lunch and then rushed to the school cafeteria to look for the librarian to open the library again so that they could go there to read (FN070517TPS).

Moreover, Qin maintained that students should learn how to communicate with others in an active, confident and polite manner. Different from many other primary schools, in TPS students host many school activities. When Qin saw some students,
she said to them with a smile, ‘Boys and girls, can you show your classroom to the guests?’ Some students stopped playing games and happily walked in front of these visitors and started to introduce their classroom. Unlike the situation in many other schools, students are often alienated from school visitors or are gathered in classrooms waiting to be visited quietly (FN070607TPS).

Teaching and learning of Qin herself

Although Qin occasionally delivered classes to students in TPS, she mentored teachers across the country to improve their teaching capabilities. Her spare time normally was occupied either by attending conferences regarding curriculum and teaching in China or delivering lectures to teachers outside TPS. Teaching and learning constituted much of Qin’s life. She maintained the habit of reading various types of journals and books. She was able to read quickly and select the parts which may be useful in her work. She said she did not spend time in reading some articles which are wordy and useless. When she got insights from reading, she incorporated her new thinking into the management in TPS. Her assistant told the researcher that Qin would carefully read some books during the long school vacations and the staff usually found some new thinking of Qin and got insights from Qin’s speech given at the first staff meeting each semester. Qin was not self-referential. She learnt from every person around her. She said each person around her was an important source for her to learn. As one of Qin’s friends had said, Qin was smart since she was good at learning from others and drawing on their strengths (FN070605TPS).

5.4.4 Power utilisation

When the researcher asked how Qin viewed her role as school principal, she answered that being principal was only a job like any other position in school and it was a different job description that differentiated the principal position from others. She explained that the principal was empowered with authority to manage the school but he/she should not use the authority to earn his/her own benefit. It seems she
valued her status as an educational expert in teaching more than her role as school principal since she acknowledged that nobody could be school principal for ever (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). As the researcher observed, Qin was powerful among staff at her school and perceived as powerful by people who visited TPS. The staff members in TPS stated they were significantly influenced by Qin and regarded Qin as their “kind mother” and “strict father” (07062016/TPS/Tinter01). Most people who met Qin usually were impressed by her friendly smile and skilful communication style. Her utilisation of power was another salient part of her leadership practices. The way that she used her power could be roughly categorised into two sections, and these are power utilisation with regard to internal staff of TPS; and power utilisation with regard to outside visitors.

**Power utilisation with regard to internal staff**

Qin expressed that the faculty in TPS was not as good performing as those in elite primary schools in the district yet, she believed most of her staff members were diligent and kind teachers. So as the principal and the oldest staff member in TPS, she said she had to strongly guide all the staff in pursuit of excellence for students and the school. It seems she viewed her role in TPS as a guardian. She said she cared about the staff here and tried to create an opportunity for professional development for them. As principal she said she needed to understand the character and needs of each teacher. Qin said like a teacher should know the character of each student in his/her class, as school principal she should know the character of the staff in her school. She said

> You cannot treat all the students in the same way; you cannot treat all the teachers in the same way either. For some teachers, you can yell at them, and you know they won’t be angry with you since they understand what you are doing is good for them. But for some teachers, you can never speak in the
way, you have to speak in soft voice and listen to them with patience.

(07060711/TPS/Pinter01)

Qin was personally respected for her sensitivity to staff. She was caring and kind to each staff member. She lent much money from her own pocket to help a female teacher who had a miserable life after a divorce from her husband. The female teacher respected Qin very much due to her generous help in terms of her personal life (07060311/TPS/Tinter02). The cleaner in TPS also said that Qin was a compassionate person (FN070527TPS). Yet, the teachers and staff also feared Qin. Teachers and staff noted Qin had severely criticized a staff member due to mistakes he made in his work (FN070622TPS).

Qin said that from time to time she had criticized her staff members harshly, but these staff did not complain because they knew she was their critical friend. As she said she took a different way to guide different staff, she used different ways to criticize teachers and senior leaders in her administrative team. Generally she pointed out the mistakes of teachers kindly and artfully without making them feel embarrassed. But she harshly and directly criticized senior leaders in her administrative team. Qin assumed that senior leaders in her team should be more capable than ordinary teaching staff (07060711/TPS/Pinter01). Although these senior leaders never quarreled with Qin, some senior leaders told the researcher that they feared being criticized by Qin and sometimes they did feel depressed (FN070628TPS).

Her power utilisation in TPS could also be seen by the way she coped with the conflicts in TPS. It seemed she avoided dealing with conflict among staff. When there was conflict she tried not to solve the conflict in a simple and arbitrary way. Every day she walked around the campus and socialized with the staff members to see what was happening among teachers. By chatting with them in a friendly way,
she modeled to staff an effective way of communicating with them. On occasion, she acted as a mediator to help the staff members to solve the issues among them. She persuaded teachers to see the positive side of others. She watched the activities in TPS and solved the potential issues or risks between teachers before they got worse (07060711/TPS/Pinter01). The comment of a teacher in TPS could reflect Qin’s leadership. She said “our principal is a gentle and caring principal, but she is also very powerful.” (07052715/TPS/Tinter05)

As the school principal, Qin has the authority to assign senior leaders in her administrative team. Since her principalship in TPS, she gradually supplanted the senior leaders who worked with the previous principal in TPS. She said as a new established school, TPS needed to include some new capable staff members. For instance, currently in her six-member administrative team five senior leaders were newly assigned. She suggested the newly assigned senior leaders from other schools could break the original old way of management and bring new dynamics to the administrative team (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). Furthermore, Qin especially employed her assistant and the senior leader outside City J for the school department of research to work with the other senior leaders who consistently worked in City J. Both were experienced and excellent teachers. The researcher observed that Qin was inclined to dispense many important tasks to the two senior leaders. She acknowledged the good performance of both senior leaders in her team and viewed them as her good helpers. The researcher found the two senior leaders were modest, friendly, diligent and easy going with the other staff in TPS. Usually after work, these two leaders had dinner with some staff of TPS. Even though they were contracted employees and not natives of City J, other staff members in the school respected them.

In addition, the researcher observed the senior leaders seemed to fear expressing their own viewpoints in front of Qin. During administrative meetings which were attended by all of the senior leaders and Qin, when Qin asked senior leaders to
express their opinions about some issues, usually these senior leaders kept silent. One or two of them expressed their points of views to break the silence. But usually only those opinions that were endorsed by Qin were carried out finally. They seldom challenged Qin’s decisions. It seems Qin’s reputation in the field of primary education and the positive changes she has been able to bring to the school enabled her staff to believe that her decisions could be relied upon (FN070628TPS).

Like a benevolent parent, Qin protected TPS by supervising nearly all the work in TPS. She believed what she had done was good for the staff since she was supervising them to improve their working capabilities. Qin indicated she had to lead in this style since most of her staff members were not as capable as she had expected. She expressed that she would gradually empower the staff when they were capable of performing well in their work and she was very happy that at present some of the senior leaders in TPS could make great progress in terms of their working capabilities (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).

Power utilisation with regard to outside people
Due to Qin’s prestige in primary education, groups of teachers and principals across China were introduced to TPS and communicated with Qin to seek her opinions regarding teaching and school management. So another important part of Qin’s work was to meet visitors from China and overseas. Qin indicated it was important to build wide networks with people inside and outside education. During the field work in TPS, the researcher observed most of the communication between Qin and outside visitors was friendly regardless of whether the visitors were important officials or regular teacher visitors.

However, her kind communication style did not mean that she was not exercising her power. It appeared that Qin used her power to dominate the communication process with people. The researcher observed that she dominated the way of communication with outside visitors without making them embarrassed. For
example, at a meeting Qin held for visitors, a principal visitor asked Qin how she utilised the school funding (normally the utilisation of school funds is not public knowledge). Qin responded to the question broadly by saying ‘my financial staff will tell me how to use it’. Then she moved on to another topic. It seemed she avoided confronting acute questions directly (FN070611TPS). Another example which showed Qin’s use of power with outside visitors was the way she organised these meetings. The researcher observed that she usually arranged for her assistant to take notes on the blackboard and interpreted her speech to the visiting audience. Her assistant controlled the duration of meetings, the number of questions asked by visitors, and set the tone of discussion. When he perceived that Qin was a little tired of these discussions, he switched the discussion by guiding the visitors to go around the campus (FN070511TPS).

Furthermore, the researcher observed that Qin did not spend the same energy in meetings with the visitors. Usually she spent more energy on some important meetings such as meetings with influential experts or officials from high ranks, or the meetings she viewed as useful for her school’s development, such as meetings with some researchers from universities. For her, she had to prioritize her tasks and do the most important things in the most careful way (FN070511TPS). Qin was good at delivering speeches and skillfully communicating to different visitors. It seemed she clearly knew how to speak and what to speak about with different people. The comment of one visitor sums up Qin’s way of communication: he said that Qin was a kind and smart principal with philosophical thinking (FN070901TPS).

5.4.5 Dealing with risks and challenges

Although TPS had gained a better school performance since Qin’s assignment to the school, the researcher also observed some problems in the management of TPS. For instance, the teachers were still using a traditional teaching style in their daily work and some teachers still wielded their authority over students although student-
centered teaching was strongly advocated in TPS. During the time of student physical exercise, some physical education teachers rudely pulled out some students out of their queues because they did not do physical exercises carefully. In addition, the researcher found there was a lack of an articulated set of school regulations to guide the work of teachers. Most of the work was conducted in accordance with Qin’s suggestions. For instance, Qin had suggested rewarding the good performing teachers and their teams; however no specific criteria regarding what constituted good performing teams was proposed. Teachers did not clearly know what the criteria were. A teacher told the researcher that teachers in TPS were suddenly asked to commence some school activities from the ideas of Qin which were not scheduled on the school working plan for each semester. The teacher explained that she and other teachers were tired of these emergent tasks (07051113/TPS/Tinter04). Some senior leaders also described their work as busy and tangled (FN070628).

With these observations, the researcher asked Qin to identify the risks or challenges in her principalship in TPS. A little surprised, she said there was no risk and challenge. She acknowledged that there were still many problems that needed to be solved for a better school performance of TPS. She said currently TPS was at its crucial crossroad and how to sustain teachers’ professional passion and further motivate the morale of staff were what she had to consider. However, she did not view these issues as risks and challenges (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). It seemed she preferred to view the challenges in her work as ordinary problems which needed to be solved and she did not want to overemphasise the difficulty in her work.

The researcher asked how Qin was going to deal with these problems in managing TPS. Qin replied that she would continue to do what she had always done in TPS. She would lead teachers to combine inquiry with daily teaching and learning activities. She denoted it was better to carefully implement the existing schooling programme than to carry out some new ways. She also said she did not worry about these problems. She commented that it was impossible to build an outstanding
school without at least ten years of diligent work of the faculty (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). For the risks and challenges in her principalship, Qin took a peaceful attitude to solve them step by step without too much anxiety. For her a peaceful attitude was important. She said she would not force herself to assume the school principal if she found it made her so unhappy since being principal of TPS was not the whole part of her life. She said her family life and her work as educational advisor were also very important (07061513/TPS/Pinter02). As a female principal, she tried to keep her traditional roles as female by showing her femininity. But she also suggested as a female leader she should be decisive and strong-hearted. The suggestions of Qin to a female senior leader in her administrative team demonstrated Qin’s attitude in the face of difficulty as a female principal. Once the female senior leader wept in Qin’s office and complained about the difficulties in her work. Qin listened with her heart and then she suggested that the female senior leader should be strong-minded and not be too weak and vulnerable like a ‘feminine little woman’. Qin indicated that it was easy to be a ‘feminine little woman’, but it was useless to bring those attributes to work (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).

As the principal of a regular primary school which was surrounded by several long-standing key primary schools in the district, Qin acknowledged her accountability. She indicated though that she would not complain about the difficulty she faced in her work since no job was easy in the current society. Qin suggested that the principal should be a spiritual leader for teachers who inspires and leads all staff to overcome difficulties and pursue excellence. She said that the principal should be a person who could always reinforce the confidence of teachers. Qin tended to view the challenges in her principalship as ordinary questions in her work (07061513/TPS/Pinter02).
5.5 Summary

In this section, the case about Qin is summarized by the following three tables. Table 5.1 summarises the organisational context of TPS; Table 5.2 summarises the leadership career of Qin; and Table 5.3 summarises Qin’s leadership practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| External community               | **School history**  
Wealthy residential community;  
Well-educated residents;  
Well-educated students’ parents from middle to high socio-economic background;  
Considerable parents’ attention to school performance |
| Internal organisational context  | **School history**  
Short history  
Staff conflicts  
Now a harmonious school climate |
|                                  | **Physical environment**  
Small sized campus  
Modern designed and spacious rooms  
Children friendly and student-centered decoration |
|                                  | **Organisational structure and systems**  
Two-line combined structure; no rigorous systems |
|                                  | **Curriculum and school activities**  
Two school based curricula;  
“Happy Friday” student interest group;  
Students’ active role;  
Activities to integrate community |
|                                  | **Staff**  
Newly recruited;  
Average age 35;  
Passionate about teaching;  
Easy going and family like staff relations;  
Anxiety of casual employed staff |
|                                  | **Students**  
From high socioeconomic households;  
Active and passionate |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formation</td>
<td>Born in CCP cadre household; experienced good living conditions; caring family environment; little emphasis on academic knowledge during schooling; labor work on farm and military drills; little pressure to learn academic subjects; disciplined, obedient and high performing student; received help from mentors and peers; received opportunities to update teaching and learning skills and build networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accession</td>
<td>Excellent teaching performance lead to public reputation; opportunities to update knowledge in school management and leadership; peaceful and natural attitude to career advancement and achievement; feelings of guilt to little attention given to her family responsibilities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbency</td>
<td>Challenging and rewarding; achieved self-fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision building</strong></td>
<td>No written school strategic plan; guided by Qin’s personal vision: built harmonious school for students; follows initiatives to build common vision: teachers’ participation and educational administration experts’ help; achieve school common vision through daily modeling and school rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical considerations</strong></td>
<td>Strong ethical awareness; respectful and understanding of teachers and their work; active response to parents’ demands; focus on improving teaching and learning and helping students to construct learning experiences; strove to offer authentic learning to all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching &amp; Learning</strong></td>
<td>Strong commitment to teaching; highlighting leadership in teaching and learning; directly coached teachers; involve teachers in an international research program to improve teaching and learning; creating opportunities for teachers to learn from outside visitors, colleagues and educational experts; create learning climate to instill good teaching and learning in teachers and students; children-friendly library to motivate students’ reading; encourage students’ creative learning and foster students’ communicative skills and decent manners; ongoing mentoring of teachers and maintained informed about teaching and learning; maintained the habit of wide reading; learn from other persons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power utilisation</strong></td>
<td>Principalship is a job not privilege; prefer to use her expert power to influence others; use power like “benevolent parent”; know the staff and their needs and work with them in skillful ways; sensitively care about staff; manipulate school management; gradually empower teachers; skilfully deal with people outside school and build network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dealing risks &amp; challenges</strong></td>
<td>View risks and challenges as ordinary problems; not to overemphasise the difficulty in principalship; long time needed to build an outstanding school; peaceful attitude to solve problems; overcome the negative side of femininity; spiritual leader to reinforce teachers’ confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX: THE CASE OF FEI

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents the case of Fei. It uses a similar structure to that used in the preceding chapter. Presented firstly is a discussion of the school organisational context in which Fei’s leadership practices were exercised. It includes the situation of the external community context and the internal organisational context. Three stages of Fei’s leadership career are then described. Following this, Fei’s leadership practices are presented. The last section of this chapter is a summary of the findings about Fei’s leadership.

6.2 Organisational context of Yuying Primary School (YPS)

This section sets the background of Fei’s leadership practices by briefly describing the external community context of YPS and the internal organisational context of YPS.

6.2.1 The external community of YPS

Yuying Primary School (YPS) in which Fei was working as a principal during the fieldwork is a three-campus long-standing key primary school in District H, City J. This original campus which was viewed as the headquarters of YPS offered primary education to two thirds of the students at YPS. Since the history of YPS was largely rooted in the community in which the original campus was located, only the community of original campus is described here.

This community is seen as the centre of the high technology and scientific zone of the district since the majority of key scientific and technological institutes are located there. Most of its population are scholars and researchers of these scientific and technological institutes. This community therefore is famous for its highly educated residents. Children of the families in this community are enrolled at YPS.
and come from highly educated households.

Due to the nature and type of community, high expectations are held by parents regarding the school performance. Some influential senior leaders of the district and the city often visited YPS to show their interest in the school (FN070910YPS). As a well-established key primary school in the community, YPS has developed strong connections with the community and gained a great deal of support from the community. Some research institutes have worked collaboratively with the school to carry out school events in order to enrich student learning experiences. For instance, students in YPS were provided with opportunities to visit some of the key scientific research laboratories in the research institutes (D1YPS). The teachers of information technology at YPS have worked with one of the main IT laboratories and developed the website platform of YPS (FN071012YPS). Moreover, some influential figures who are also parents of the students of YPS are invited as advisors of YPS, and their suggestions have been taken on by the management (D2YPS).

Due to the high expectations for the school by the parents and wider community, there is a strong awareness of staff regarding their accountability. For staff in YPS, they acknowledged that YPS has many resources on one hand, but on the other hand, they also realized the high expectations and pressure they feel from parents and the community (FN070925YPS).

6.2.2 The internal organisational context of YPS

School history

YPS was first established in the late 1940s with only one small sized campus. Like many other key primary schools in the district, YPS was expected to foster and develop a socialist elite starting with primary education. Thus, since it was first established, the quality of teaching and students’ academic performance was consistently emphasised. An excellent school performance and a good reputation
were part of its tradition. Students at YPS usually perform very well on school competitions and gain many awards that enhance the school’s reputation. Not surprisingly, the graduates of YPS are enrolled by key secondary schools in the city (D3YPS).

Because of its consistent excellent school performance, YPS was recognised as one of the most outstanding primary schools by people in the district and even in the city. Residents inside the community and outside the community were eager to get their children enrolled in YPS. To accommodate the growing demand for student placements, in the late 1990s, YPS established a campus in another community, Tianyu campus. Later it established another campus, Tianying campus. This enabled YPS to offer primary education to more than 2000 boarding students who were outside the community of YPS’s original campus. (According to the educational policy in District H, students at primary and secondary level can obtain a free compulsory education in the community in which their households are located. However, if they want to study in schools outside their communities, they are required to pay high fees. In light of this policy, the students from other communities who selected to study in YPS incurred higher fees). However, there was still an increasing need for student placements. With the increasing number of international exchanges in City J, YPS took a stride by establishing an international department in Tianying campus and enrolled international students whose parents were working in the city. By the end of the fieldwork, YPS became one of the largest primary schools in the city with more than 5000 students from Year One to Year Six (D5YPS).

**School physical environment**

Apart from Tianying campus which was newly established in a wealthy residential community, the school buildings of the original campus and Tianyu campus were old fashioned buildings with more than a 20 year old history. Recently according to the regulations of the district regarding school buildings and facilities, YPS
gradually renovated its old school buildings and improved its old school facilities. Like many other urban primary schools in Mainland China, especially in developed metropolises, the schooling facilities of YPS were well equipped. Each classroom was installed with multi-media facilities. A fully furnished library with a great number of books and magazines, modern computer rooms, music and dancing rooms with modern electronic pianos, and scientific and technological labs were equipped in each campus. Computers and information technology were widely used throughout the three campuses. The school website provided enough virtual space for transfer of information among the campuses. The school also established its teaching and learning database on its school website.

The physical environment of the original campus was characterised by its small sized but well-organised school buildings and facilities, and its tidy and beautiful school environment. The physical environment of Tianyu campus was characterized by its pragmatic style and the Tianying campus was characterised by its modern style. In each campus some traditional Chinese idioms and saying were posed on the walls both inside and outside school buildings walls, the student rules were also posted on the blackboards in classrooms to reinforce students’ good manner and behaviours (FN071009 YPS). A more detailed description of each campus is presented in Appendix J.

**Organisational structure and system**

In YPS, the staff were managed by specific systems through a four-level hierarchical structure (Appendix I). Fei, the principal of YPS, was at the top of the hierarchical structure where she led the whole school. She organised her administrative team and transferred school policies and tasks through levels of leaders to the teachers and other staff members.

In YPS, careful systems were used to monitor the daily teaching work of all staff. Each teacher was required to submit a work report to reflect his/her work each
month, each semester and school year. At the end of each semester, all staff were gathered together and attended a teachers’ meeting to share their work over the past semester. During that meeting, they were also required to fill in a questionnaire about school management over the past semester. The feedback from staff was collected and analysed. Each department and senior leader was required to improve their management. In addition, to promote teachers’ professional capacity, a series of specific systems were implemented at YPS. For example, all staff was required to practise Chinese handwriting both in pen and in chalk. During the field work of the research, all Chinese teachers were required to practise their Chinese handwriting in brush pen. Apart from English teachers and computer teachers, all other staff members were also required to master preliminary utilisation of computer and basic communication of oral English (FN071024YPS). Moreover, since Fei’s assignment, all teachers were required to read books and write annotations about the books during the school vacation. To promote the development of young teachers, an apprentice style mentor system was introduced. Experts in different subjects outside YPS were invited to coach the teachers of YPS; experienced teacher in YPS were also invited to help young teachers to deal with their daily teaching work (D6YPS).

In YPS, the salary of staff was commensurate with an individual’s workload, rank and work performance. The average salary of staff of YPS was 5000 YMB (FN070912YPS). In addition to the salary, each week a box of milk and fruit was distributed to all staff members and a considerable number of extra bonuses were given to staff during public holidays. Compared with staff in other primary schools in this district, the monetary income in YPS is considerable (FN071023YPS). Meanwhile the systems and disciplines in YPS were strictly implemented. One senior leader said if staff members made mistakes and caused negative results, they would be punished according to the discipline of the school and district educational bureau (FN070913YPS). For instance, if a staff member was absent from work, his/her salary was deducted for each day. When there were important school events, all staff members were required to wear uniform.
Curriculum and schooling activities

Like many other primary schools in the district, the students and teachers in YPS followed a similar school calendar and organised their schooling activities in accordance with the directions of the district educational bureau. Yet, in order to meet the needs of students of YPS and exhibit the characteristics of the school, a variety of school activities and school based curricula were developed and conducted in YPS. During the field work, YPS offered more than 40 school-based selective curricula to students. For instance, curriculum of Cosmology and Aviation, curriculum of Traditional Chinese Sculpture, curriculum of Chinese Calligraphy, Robot designing and Beijing Opera were among the school-based curricula on offer. All of the students in YPS were involved in these curricula. From Monday to Friday, students followed a national compulsory curriculum, such as Chinese, Mathematics, English, and Music. In the afternoon on Fridays, all students participated in different classes to learn about these school based curricula. In addition, there was a student club on each campus which developed the talents of students in science, electronic technology, and astronomy. The activities of the clubs were the strength of YPS and students often won awards in these aspects. To promote students’ physical capability, intelligent capability, and art capability, each school year, YPS held science festivals, sports festivals, and art festivals for students (D6YPS).

As a traditional elite primary school in the PRC, moral education was especially highlighted in YPS. The national flag raising assembly occurring every Monday was one of the important school events. During that ceremony all the students were required to wear a red scarf and school uniform. The students were also required to sing the national anthem of the PRC and the school song of YPS. All staff members were assigned to each class to look after the students during the assembly. The senior leaders in the department of moral and patriotic education inspected the performance of each class on that occasion. The classes which performed well on that occasion were praised by the senior leaders at the end of the assembly.
Except for the traditional contents of moral education which included patriotism and socialist ideological education, moral education in YPS also embodied the cultivation of daily good behaviours and manners of students. To foster good behaviours and manners, YPS initiated a long-term moral education project across its three campuses. According to the project, all students of YPS were required (a) to communicate with others politely, (b) not to make noises while walking in public areas, and (c) to foster good personal sanitary habits. Specific rules regarding manners and behaviours for students in different grades were made and students in each class were required to recite these rules. Teachers were responsible for inspecting the daily behaviour of students in light of the moral project (FN070925YPS).

In YPS, there were also some schooling activities for teachers. Apart from routine teaching and learning activities, teachers were involved in various activities to promote their professional development. In YPS two teachers’ teaching competitions were held each school year, and teachers were organised to participate in teaching and learning competitions at different levels. Moreover, all the teachers in YPS were required to participate in various levels of research programmes (such as research programmes led by researchers and scholars outside YPS, and some school based research programmes independently conducted by teachers of YPS) to further explore their teaching and learning. Teaching staff were divided into different research groups based on their research interest. Each Tuesday, teaching staff from the same subject area discussed teaching plans and curriculum development in their field. Since 2007, a teachers’ forum regarding teaching and research was held to encourage teachers to discuss some specially selected educational topics at the end of each semester (D0610pspeech). In addition, a teachers’ entertainment performance to celebrate New Year in the last week of December was also an important school event. Fei indicated that this was a good opportunity for teachers to socialize with each other.
Staff
During fieldwork of the research, YPS had nearly 300 staff members including teaching staff and ancillary staff members. Half of the teachers had won various teaching awards either in the district or in the city. Some teachers had achieved prizes in national teaching competitions (D6YPS). As viewed as one of the best primary schools in the district, YPS had attracted an excellent group of teachers from other schools both inside and outside the district. Meanwhile, YPS also created various opportunities for teachers to enhance their professional development and they were encouraged to compete for various teaching awards (FN070917YPS). Some teachers told the researcher that they were proud to work in the school not only because of its good salary package but also because of its reputation and professional development opportunities (FN070925YPS). As the researcher observed that most staff members of YPS worked collaboratively, some teachers also said they gained much achievement in their work due to the support of colleagues in YPS.

Yet, staff in YPS also expressed some comments regarding their work. For instance, teachers stated that the workload in YPS was intense and their work in YPS was competitive. One senior leader said she often worked from seven in the morning to seven in the evening and she went to bed after work without dinner (FN071017YPS). Another senior leader who had a young dependant child said she always felt sleepy every day. Some teachers expressed the same feeling (FN071009YPS). During fieldwork in YPS, the researcher observed teachers seldom had a chance to chat although they were polite and friendly to each other. Most of the time, they were busy delivering classes, checking the assignments of students, or preparing for the next class. One senior leader said that each staff member in YPS worked very hard since nobody wanted to lose their job at YPS (FN071023YPS). As a school with very good reputation and plentiful funds, YPS is able to recruit excellent teachers to supplant poor performing staff. One teacher who worked in YPS for over ten years expressed his worry about teachers’ working conditions. He said an intensified
workload and a rigid educational management in Mainland China had deprived teachers of creativity and autonomy (FN070916YPS).

**Students**

The students of YPS were scattered across the school’s three campuses. By the end of the fieldwork of this study, there were approximately 5000 students attending YPS. Of these, more than half studied on the original campus and these students tended to be children of residents from the impressive community famous for its constellation of intellectuals. As the researcher observed, these students exhibited a sophisticated and confident manner and seemed very knowledgeable. However, they kept a polite distance from outside visitors. In Tianyu campus, all the students were boarders and most of them came from wealthy households where their parents were busy with their business and had no time to look after them. Yet, these parents valued education and wanted their children to get an excellent education. Unlike the students on original campus, these students appeared a little shy, docile and dependent; and it is possible that because they were away from their parents, they were very close to their teachers. In Tianying campus, there was also a small number of boarding students from wealthy households like those in Tianyu campus, and the rest of its students were from households living in the wealthy residential community in which Tianying campus was located. The researcher observed that these children were also polite and confident like those on the original campus.

Overall, the researcher found the students at YPS were polite and friendly. Most students voluntarily said hello to teachers and outside visitors when they met each other on campus. Their academic performance was better than many other students in the district. In many students’ competitions, the students in YPS were usually champions. In YPS, students are guided by teachers to participate in various school activities in an orderly manner. The students in YPS were carefully looked after by staff of YPS. Since the researcher was not encouraged to contact students without the permission of the senior leaders of YPS, the researcher did not have any
conversations with students.

6.3 Leadership career of Fei

Fei was reluctant to tell the researcher too much detailed information about her career experience as a teacher and as a principal. She also stated that there was no need to say too much about her biographical experience as this research was to focus on her leadership practices. As the researcher observed during fieldwork, most of the time, Fei talked with staff about her or their work rather than personal matters. It seemed that she did not want to connect her personal life with her principal work. In regard to her early personal life, Fei avoided talking too much but she acknowledged it was relaxed and happy. She preferred to answer structured questions since she thought it would be more efficient (07101014/YPS/Pinter02). The following is a synthesis of data from the interview with her, documents about her, field notes, and interviews with other staff members of YPS. In the following part, her leadership career is divided into three stages, the first of which is formation.

6.3.1 Formation

Family life and mode of upbringing

Fei was born in a family of four children in City J, in the 1960s. She had two brothers and one older sister. She did not tell the researcher what job her parents did, but it seemed that the living conditions of her family were good at that time. Even though she was born in the period of the Cultural Revolution in the PRC, her family life had not been drastically affected. She said her father was educated in a private school before the establishment of the PRC and was good at Chinese calligraphy. Perhaps due to her father’s educational background, he required all of his children to practise Chinese calligraphy in brush pen and urged them to read books during their leisure time. Although academic knowledge was not highlighted in Chinese schooling and society during the time of her childhood, Fei’s father was strict with the study of his children.
Her parents also instilled in her and her siblings discipline and hard work. For instance, her parents told them to keep the house tidy and clean. At the eve of New Year, there was a tradition in her family that all the children were required to polish the furniture. She said polishing the antique bronze clock of her family was her task since her mother said she was the most careful child in the family. She said one of the happiest moments each year was the time after her mother or sister did up her hair in two long pigtails at New Year eve. She said her mother always took good care of her without asking her to do chores. Her life with her parents and siblings was happy and peaceful. She said she still remembered the situation when her father and all the children helped her mother learn to ride a bicycle (07101014/YPS/Pinter02).

**Schooling and educational agencies**

As for her experience as a student in primary and secondary schools, Fei did not speak much. It seems there was no impressive event during that period. However, one event which she still could remember was the experience where she directed a group of peers to perform a drama in their residential community and their performance was applauded by all in the audience. She told the researcher that she was good at Chinese and public speaking. Her paper usually was read by teachers as an example. Her teacher always evaluated her as confident girl.

When she finished secondary school, she attended Teacher College in City J to study as a Chinese teacher. Her parents expected her to be a doctor since her elder sister and her brother-in-law were already teachers. However, she became a teacher in primary school. She was unwilling to explain why she chose to study in that Teacher Colleges and become a teacher. She answered directly that she did not want to speak more about her personal life.

**Peer and reference group**

Fei said it was impossible for an individual person to successfully complete a task.
She acknowledged she gained much help from many people around her. She said her siblings who were currently leaders in their own field often gave her some suggestions in school management. She said she kept in touch with her classmates who undertook a Master’s degree with her. These classmates were currently successful in their work. She often gained inspiration from them. However, Fei was reluctant to specify who helped her in her career and in what way. The information in this part is limited.

6.3.2 Accession

Before Fei was assigned to work as principal of YPS, she had worked in the school for nearly 20 years. During the early years of her work at YPS, she was a Chinese teacher. Her excellent performance in teaching won her the title of District Advanced Teacher in 1992. Four years after that, she started her managerial work as assistant principal and deputy director of the department of teaching and learning of YPS. During this period, she maintained a strong commitment of learning. She attended a university to undertake a Master’s course in educational management. In 1998, she was promoted to deputy principal who was responsible for Chinese teaching activities. Her performance in management was recognised by the principal of YPS and senior leaders in the district. In early 2000, she was sent to America to study educational administration. After she completed the one year study in America, she returned to work in YPS as deputy principal. In 2003, when her predecessor retired, she was assigned as the principal of the school. She implied that she did not aspire to the position of principal; she was just selected by her superiors in the district due to her qualifications. Yet, Fei acknowledged she was an ambitious woman and she always pursued excellence in her career. Her conviction was that women should have their own career and this made her keep on learning and updating her knowledge.
While Fei was regarded as the most suitable candidate for the position, Fei also experienced a tough time during the first three years of her principalship. At that time, some members of the staff doubted whether she could maintain the prosperity of YPS. She worked extremely hard to earn her reputation among teachers and staff. She did feel frustrated when she was misunderstood by other staff in terms of management and leadership. As a principal of a long-standing excellent elite school, she said she had to face much working pressure. She spent a great deal of time in thinking of the future development of the school. During that time, she had several sleepless nights. She said as a woman she also had family responsibilities with a husband and child to look after. For her, family and work were both important. Instead of complaining of the double burden she bore, she adjusted her own attitude and always kept positive thinking (FN071025YPS). She acknowledged although as female principal she had to work even harder than her male counterparts, she attempted to deal with problems and challenges actively. She said she changed her clothes every day to remind herself that every day was a new day and the difficulties would be overcome day by day. She said essentially “nobody could help you solve the problems except yourself.” When she was stressed, she read a novel or listened to music. Because she had limited time to look after her family members, she employed a housemaid to do the chores. But she also cooked for her family members when she was free. During holidays, she went to the cinema with her husband or sang Karaoke. Since her child has now grown up, Fei does not have to spend as much time looking after her. For Fei, balancing her professional life and family life is important. She also commented that she tried to keep her own hobbies, including singing, dancing and regular yoga sessions (07101014/YPS/Pinter02).

6.3.3 Incumbency

After four years working as principal of YPS, Fei’s leadership moved into a new stage in which she gained a kind of psychological fulfillment. Her work performance was recognised by both superior leaders in the district educational
bureau (07102620/BJ/Sinter01). Most educational experts also praised her management and leadership in YPS. The local media reported the achievement of YPS and her leadership and management. She also widened her influence among staff of YPS. Some senior leaders and teachers said they made great progress and gained much achievement since Fei took over the principalship (FN070923YPS). Fei said she was proud of being the principal of YPS and happy to work in the school. She said she felt energetic when she arrived at YPS even though heaps of tasks were waiting for her (FN071019YPS). The researcher observed that YPS operated effectively even though Fei was not always on the school premises. Fei indicated that the school was on track after her four years’ management and leadership. While there were still some issues that emerged in her work, she expressed that she was confident in making the school better and better. Some staff and Fei herself indicated they were proud to work at YPS. She said she was happy with the progress of staff and her leadership in YPS was rewarding (FN071018YPS).

6.4 The leadership practices of Fei

Before the fieldwork at YPS, Fei had already worked in the principalship for more than five years. Her previous administrative experiences in YPS contributed to her good understanding of the school and its working system. Most of the time, Fei worked on the original campus of YPS. As principal of the whole school, she is responsible for all of the work of YPS although she does not participate in every school activity. What Fei did in managing and leading YPS can be broadly categorised into five sections which are presented next.

6.4.1 Vision building

In Fei’s leadership, leading staff members to clearly understand the vision of the school and to implement the school development strategy plan are prominent practices. She indicated the role of school principals was to set the vision for the school and lead staff to translate the vision into reality. Articulating the vision of
YPS and making specific strategic plans for the school were her priority when she was assigned as principal. She said the reason for doing so was that she found most staff did not have specific aims or plans in their work. She said when she studied abroad she was impressed by the well-organised plans of the schools she visited (07092011/YPS/Pinter01).

Fei said when she was assigned as principal of the school she kept considering what the future of YPS was and how she needed to lead the school to achieve a better performance. She asked for suggestions of some educational experts and some parent advisors. She carefully thought these suggestions through and the situation of YPS. She set a vision for YPS that YPS should become a nation-wide well-known primary school with an international outlook. To achieve the vision, she proposed three strategic projects: the Project of Developing an Excellent School, the Project of Promoting Excellent Teachers, and the Project of Fostering Excellent Students. She discussed her ideas with senior leaders in her management team. She said she conversed with all staff member to hear their ideas about the future of YPS. After several discussions, she and her senior leaders made the draft of school strategic plan of YPS from 2004 to 2010. She said to help all staff understand the plan she held staff meetings to involve them and discuss the strategic plan and then finalize it. She said all staff were motivated by the strategic plan and their morale was stimulated. To achieve the aims of that strategic plan, she urged each campus, each department, each subject, each grade and each staff member to make their own specific plan in light of the whole school plan. She said these plans were used to guide the daily work of each staff member at YPS.

Fei said as principal she should lead all staff to go ahead to reach their goals on their way of professional advancement and the process was like “climbing mountains”. She further denoted it was the same case for their personal life. Namely when one goal in your life was achieved, you should set another goal to motivate yourself (07092011/YPS/Pinter01). In her leadership, she employed the strategic plan to
guide the daily work of YPS. It was evident that all the work in the school was
directed towards realizing the strategic plan: to extend the reputation and excellence
of YPS. To achieve the strategic plan, Fei and her staff members played different
roles. That is, the principal and the senior leaders tried their best to create
opportunities for teachers to become excellent teachers and teachers worked
diligently to achieve the excellence of all the students, and in return the excellent
achievement of students contributed to the excellence of YPS.

It seemed one important role of Fei as school principal was the key representative of
YPS. She secured the public image of the school at all times. She required staff to
pay attention to their manner and language style on public occasions and encouraged
them to speak in a less colloquial language when conversing with visitors outside or
journalists (FN081026YPS). The researcher observed she was dissatisfied that one
teacher spoke with a journalist using colloquial language and asked one of the senior
leaders to remind the teacher to speak using proper language style. For herself, she
always maintained a good public image. She wore tailored clothes. When she
attended important occasions, she always sat elegantly. She usually spoke in a
laconic language in a soft voice. When she made public addresses, she spoke clearly
in a more formal language. Colloquial language was seldom used even though she
used this to converse with her staff. It was obvious that Fei’s language and dress
influenced her staff. The researcher observed that most members of the staff were
dressed well and spoke in a soft voice in a polite manner.

Fei played a significant role in promoting the school and its achievement. Fei held
many schooling events at YPS, which she successfully exhibited the achievement of
teachers and students of YPS. A prominent event which demonstrated Fei’s efforts
in promoting the school was the anniversary of the school in 2004 which was held in
the best conference hall in the city. She insisted on doing so although some senior
leaders suggested her not taking this risk so early in her principalship for fear of
failure of that event. In that anniversary many celebrities who were the alumni of
YPS were invited to attend and all the programs were performed by the current students and staff of YPS. The anniversary was a huge success. It not only promoted the school but also motivated a great sense of pride for the students and staff (0709231520/YPS/Tinter04). One senior leader told the researcher the anniversary event made staff of YPS more confident in terms of their capabilities though it took much energy and time for them to prepare for it. Most staff were proud of being members of the school (FN071025YPS). After the anniversary, Fei organised her administrative team to publish a newsletter to record the school significant events. Since 2004, the achievement of students and teachers has been included in an annual school report and viewed as an important school document. Fei said teachers were proud of having their names appear in this type of school document (07092011/YPS/Pinter01).

Apart from promoting the school’s achievement on the one hand, Fei carefully protected the school on the other hand. She acknowledged that there were some things she did not grant the researcher access to. Sometimes some staff suddenly came to Fei’s office to report work when the researcher was conducting interviews with her. During these times, Fei stood up and went out of her office to meet the staff somewhere else. It seemed she did not want the researcher to know the intimate details of some aspects of the school. When the researcher asked to attend a couple of administrative meetings hosted by Fei, she politely refused (FN070925YPS).

**6.4.2 Ethical considerations**

During field work in YPS, Fei casually mentioned a couple of ethical issues that emerged in her daily practices. Her first ethical issue related to her perception regarding the gap between key primary schools and regular primary schools. As a principal of a school like YPS which had received much support and resources from the local government, she said she felt upset when she visited some regular schools in less developed communities that had insufficient schooling resources. She said
that those students in regular schools should also enjoy the same excellent education as the students of YPS, since all the children deserved an equally good education. She said she took some actions to help those schools. In YPS, some aid projects between YPS and some regular primary schools in less developed communities of the city were carried out. As a part of the projects, some experienced teachers of YPS were organised to deliver classes to these schools and share their teaching resources with their teachers. Some student initiatives between students of YPS and students in those regular schools were also launched to encourage students to care about each other. For Fei, she indicated that she had an obligation to extend excellent education to more children given the inequality between schools.

An ethical dilemma she mentioned related to her caring about teachers as human beings and the intensified accountability they experienced. As an educator with more than 20 years of work experience in YPS, she had a strong commitment to her work here. When she mentioned teachers and students, and the school achievement of YPS, she was glowing. She associated the achievement of YPS with the diligent work of all of the staff. She acknowledged that it was not easy for teachers to work in a school like YPS on which high expectations and much accountability from the community was imposed. As principal, she had to manage the school according to strict guidelines and urge teachers to work diligently to meet their accountability in pursuit of better school performance. She realized that her strict management might impose some extra pressure on teachers, but she indicated she had to use strict systems to manage YPS due to the high expectations from the community. She suggested that a small error at YPS could lead to some serious and negative social consequences. For Fei, she had to carefully fulfill her obligation to the community and make sure parents could trust the excellent education of YPS. Meanwhile she noted that teachers deserved a good relaxed life. To ease the work pressure of teachers, she tried her best to create a friendly and comfortable work environment and climate. During the field work in YPS, the researcher observed Fei showing her care towards teachers by her warm greetings. Furthermore, teachers and other staff
enjoyed free fruit during morning tea time and each week they were offered free milk, fruit and some other daily necessities. Some staff acknowledged that both the salary and bonus at YPS were very good compared with many other schools in the district. Some staff also indicated that they did not have to rush to buy food after work since the school had done this for them.

For Fei, school was a public institute which has the responsibility to socialize and cultivate intelligent citizens for a socialist China. She especially mentioned this responsibility was even more important in the current fast developing and transformative social context of China. She said under these circumstances, teachers and school administrators had to assume more accountability to contribute to the safety, security and nurturing of students during the school day. Therefore, she strove to create a safe, healthy school for all the students who would be successful in the future. She wanted parents to feel comfortable about the school so they could concentrate on their work and not worry unnecessarily about their children’s education (FN070630YPS). Furthermore as principal of a key primary school in an important community, she acknowledged her obligation in imparting socialist and moral values to students. In YPS patriotism and nationalism were especially highlighted in the day to day school activities (FN071015YPS).

6.4.3 Teaching and learning

Learning and teaching activities were central activities in YPS. Achieving a high quality of teachers’ teaching and excellent learning of students was strongly emphasised. Although this was the tradition of YPS, it was also one of the main concerns of Fei. Since she took the principalship of YPS in 2003, she did not have a timetabled teaching commitment. Even so, she irregularly delivered some lectures to students when she did not have too many administrative tasks to face. She viewed teaching in classroom as a chance to know the learning of students. Her leadership in teaching and learning can be summarized into three parts, teaching and learning
of teachers, learning of students, and learning of herself.

**Teaching and learning of the teachers**

Fei did not often coach teachers although she said she tried her best to allocate more time to observe teachers in their classrooms. Each day she went to her office at the original campus at nearly 7:30 in the morning and then she went around all the classrooms on the campus. After that, she met with the director of the campus or other senior leaders on the campus to give directions or suggestions to their work. Then she usually went outside the campus to attend meetings in the district or in the city. In addition, she attended some school events inside or outside YPS and delivered speeches as the representative of YPS. Normally she went back to the original campus of YPS to meet with some senior leaders to know what happened on the campus. Her management and leadership of teachers’ teaching and learning was mostly achieved through her leadership of the senior leaders of YPS and by carefully implementing school management process and activities.

**Exerting the role of senior leaders**

Fei selected and assigned excellent and experienced teachers as department or subject leaders to coach and monitor daily teaching and learning in classrooms. She had regular meetings with all the senior leaders of each department or casual meetings with some senior leaders to listen to their reports and make decisions. She trusted the professional capabilities of each senior leader and said all of her senior leaders of each department were experienced in their field. Therefore, most of the time she did not give too many specific suggestions regarding teaching and learning activities. She stated that one of her principal responsibilities was to maximize the strength of each senior leader and minimize their weakness and then keep them working collaboratively and happily. Some senior leaders said Fei usually coached them how to manage their work effectively and how to work with other colleagues and they noted they improved their managerial capabilities. In addition to motivating senior leaders to work collaboratively, Fei initiated a series of school activities to
promote teachers’ teaching and learning.

*Motive teacher’s teaching and learning through teachers’ reading activities*

Fei said like most teachers in China the teachers of YPS also did not have the habit to keep on learning and updating their knowledge consciously. She said from her own experience she realized continuous learning and reading were very useful for teachers’ professional advancement. For this reason, since her first year of principalship, she launched a series of reading activities in YPS. She encouraged teachers to read books at any time and try to foster the habit of reading. She understood it took time to foster this habit, thus she took year by year reading activities to achieve that aim. In the first year of her principalship, together with her senior leaders, she recommended the classic books written by leading figures in education to make teachers understand the general trends in the education field. In her second year, she asked staff to read classic books regarding educational theory. She said educational theory provided teachers with perspectives to reflect on their daily teaching practices. The third year of her principalship, she encouraged staff to read the books in their own teaching field to make them more skilled in teaching. Since the fourth year of her principalship, she has encouraged teachers to read the classic books in the other fields to widen their horizon. She said teachers should add to their knowledge reserve in all aspects rather than just focus on their own narrow subject field.

To encourage teachers to read, Fei allocated a considerable amount of funds to support these reading activities. Each school year, money was dispensed to purchase new books for teachers and students. She allocated some funds to support teachers’ voluntary reading workshop (07102514/YPS/Pinter03). As a school bonus, she also distributed book coupons for staff to buy books. To maintain the effectiveness of these reading activities, teachers were required to complete book reviews and submit them to the senior leaders of department of teaching and learning of each campus. Some good book reviews were collected and printed out as important school
documents to display the professional advancement of teachers. Moreover at the beginning of each semester, teachers were gathered in groups to discuss the books they had read during school vacations.

Fei regarded reading excellent educational books as an effective way to update teachers’ teaching knowledge. Meanwhile she also suggested that it was a good way to make staff understand her management and leadership since their understanding would be enhanced while reading books (07102514/YPS/Pinter03). During fieldwork, the researcher saw Fei buy several books regarding educational leadership and distributed them to each of the senior leaders in her administrative team (FN071009). Fei insisted on carrying out these reading activities even though some staff expressed the point they intensified their workload. Fei explained ‘at the beginning, teachers think these reading activities as extra workload, but gradually most staff members are aware of the strength of reading. They do see their progress by keeping on reading. The book reviews of our staff are often published in the main educational journals and newspaper.’ Some teachers also expressed that the more they read the more they felt they should read since they were aware how small their knowledge was (07102514/YPS/Pinter03).

Inviting educational experts to offer help

Another school activity which Fei initiated to improve teaching and learning was to invite educational experts and experienced teachers as mentors to support teachers’ teaching and learning. Fei said it was important to invite educational experts to supervise teaching and learning activities of students. She called this activity as “borrowing external intelligence”. Each semester, some well-known educational experts were invited to YPS to deliver lectures or seminars to the staff. Fei said these lectures and seminars promoted the deep thinking of teachers. Moreover some excellent experienced teachers in different subjects were regularly invited to coach the teachers of YPS and some of the talented experienced teachers of YPS were also invited to be mentors of young new teachers to offer help in their teaching and
learning. Although Fei has a wide professional network in the district and the city, she also acknowledged it was easy for YPS to invite educational experts to YPS because of its reputation.

Encouraging teachers to participate in research activities
In recent times, YPS participated in some key educational research programs and it also has independently conducted some research projects. To enhance the teaching and learning of teachers, Fei encouraged teaching staff to combine their own daily teaching activities into these research programs in the school. At the end of each semester, Fei and her administrative team organised staff meetings to report their research progress and outcomes. Some educational experts outside the school were invited to attend the staff meetings to comment on teachers’ research. For Fei, the staff meetings are not only a good opportunity to improve the teachers’ teaching but also they help staff members to socialize with each others (07101014/YPS/Pinter02).

Learning of students
The learning of students is the core task of YPS. As principal of YPS, Fei clearly knew that students’ excellent achievement contributes to the excellence of the whole school. Fei expressed one of the missions of YPS was to foster excellent students. It seemed her first step to foster excellent students is to maintain the high quality of daily learning activities of each class. She utilised specific systems to inspect the results of the learning of students. Teachers were required to make efforts to improve students’ academic achievement through their daily teaching. In addition to these routine learning activities, Fei initiated a series of reading activities to motivate the learning interest of students. She suggested that encouraging students to read good books could help students feel the enjoyment of learning. She said when students felt the beauty of each word and well understood the connotation of each word they would like reading and learning. In YPS, each class has a reading class every week in the school library. Students are required to read and recite a Chinese ancient poem everyday and perform the stories in their textbooks. To further
motivate the interest of reading and learning, Fei has invited some well-known writers of children’s literature to the school to give lectures to students. She said these activities enlarged the horizon of students and stimulated their learning interesting (07101014/YPS/Pinter02). Fei said she would create a school with the smell of books in which every one read books every day.

In addition to encourage students to read books, Fei said the school created many opportunities for students to learn what they wanted to learn. In YPS, there are more than 40 student labs and 100 selective programs. Students with different interests can participate in different learning groups. Fei said YPS strives to foster all-round students. So far, in various students competitions in the district and the city, the students of YPS had achieved many prizes. In light of the vision of YPS, Fei further created many opportunities for students to communicate with students overseas. YPS had organised some student representatives to go abroad to visit primary schools in other countries.

Learning of Fei herself
Fei had a tight schedule every day, but one integral part of her schedule was to read the latest education newspaper or education journal articles. She said these papers kept her informed of the recent educational issues and trends. She said when she read, she usually highlighted some key parts. Fei noted that to better lead YPS she had to keep on reading and learning since everyone in the school was learning. She said she did not have a whole day to read, but she tried to make good use of every minute to read. She said she put different types of books in different rooms in her home so that she could grab a book or magazine to read when she was free.

6.4.4 Power utilisation
Another crucial aspect regarding Fei’s leadership was her utilisation of power as principal of YPS. When she was asked how she viewed her power as principal, she
answered that she did not wield her power like a dictator; she invited staff to participate in school management. She indicated as principal she was supposed to be decisive and rational; however she always maintained her femininity and was sensitive to care for staff members. She did not think her gender role contradicted her principal role. She said if a plan would benefit the students, most staff members and the overall development of school, she would persevere to carry out it decisively even if some staff members might argue against her decision. After four years work as principal in YPS, Fei had gradually established her influence in the school and in the district. Her way of utilising power as principal can be understood in two aspects, power utilisation with regard to internal staff and power utilisation with regard to outside visitors.

**Power utilisation with regard to internal staff**

As the principal of the well-known primary school, Fei has the formal authority due to her structural position as principal of YPS. She has the power to administrate all of the work within the school including personnel, finance, school property and other administrational matters. Moreover, because YPS is a well-known key primary school in the district with abundant resources from the government and the community, her position as principal seems to have given her much more power than that held by principals in other regular primary schools or schools in poor community (07101014/YPS/Pinter02).

Yet, the authority of the principalship in YPS does not automatically bring about influence. In a primary school like YPS in which there are some excellent teachers who are leading figures in their field, the principal may not necessarily be viewed as the ‘hero’ of the school. It seemed that Fei knew this situation well. In her many years of leadership of YPS, she has invited staff to participate in school management. She said all the important projects or plans of YPS were always discussed with staff. A mail box was purposely fixed on the wall of one of school buildings near the foyer of the school to collect suggestions from staff. Annual staff meetings were also held.
to collect feedback from staff in terms of school management. Although Fei stated that she made the final decisions, she drew on the suggestions of staff.

Fei developed an effective administrative team in YPS and she exerted her power by empowering senior leaders in her team. When she was assigned as principal of YPS, she gradually reformed the administrative team by assigning some young and good performing teachers as senior leaders. These senior leaders were not only experienced in their work but also energetic in their work. For Fei, they acted as liaisons between her and other teaching staff. She regularly met with senior leaders to keep her informed of the situation of the whole school. She always brought her mobile phone with her when she was not at her office. She steered the management of the school by these senior leaders, who were surrogates of her authority. Fei worked collaboratively with her team members to monitor the work of each department so that each department operated in synergy. Fei said each of her senior leaders was experienced in his/her field. She encouraged them to exercise their strength, allowing each leader to work individually like project leaders and also to work collaboratively together. She avoided rewarding individuals and valued the work of the whole group.

In addition to working with and through the administrative team, Fei built her power by showing her respect to the long standing tradition of YPS. Although YPS had gained further progress in terms of school development since Fei’s principalship in 2003, Fei at no time suggested that she was better than her predecessor in leading YPS. She glowingly appreciated her predecessor and the faculty of YPS. Even though she was ambitious in transforming the school and creating a prosperous situation for the school, Fei did not completely overthrow the administrative processes and ways of her predecessor. It seemed she clearly realized it was improper to wield her power like a dictator without showing her respect to her predecessor and the tradition of the long standing school.
Apart from Fei’s expertise in management and leadership, her strict and effective working style and her strong-minded personality contributed to her influence among staff. Some senior leaders said Fei was effective and strict with her management; this modelled to them a way to work. It seemed staff understood Fei’s strict management. One senior leader said Fei was strict and set high standards for staff but she was not harsh to staff. One senior leader said he used to make mistakes in his work due to his carelessness and spoke with Fei about it since he felt guilty. He said that Fei did not criticize him harshly except she asked him to rectify his errors as soon as possible. Some senior leaders acknowledged that their management competencies were improved since they were inspired by the working style of Fei’s.

When Fei led YPS, she did not behave like an arbitrary dictator. She appreciated the diligent work of staff and always reminded them to take good care of their health when she had meetings with them. When some members of staff were ill, she asked her administrative leaders to send gifts to comfort them or she visited them in person. One senior leader recalled his surprise and delightful experience in a meeting of communist party members in the school. When he told others that day was his birthday, Fei asked another staff member to buy a birthday cake. He said that it was a lovely surprise (07092116/YPS/Tinter05). It seemed that Fei tried to develop a principal image that was decisive, ambitious and caring as well.

Power utilisation with regard to outside visitors
In YPS, access by outside visitors is required to be scheduled officially with senior leaders who are in charge of the general affairs of each campus. Fei did not attend every meeting with outside visitors, but she attended the important ones that were seen to be beneficial to the school. As principal of YPS, she did not exhibit an arrogant manner when she communicated with visitors; but her confident attitude and her concise but compelling language demonstrated her power in YPS. Even when she met influential figures or senior leaders in the educational bureau, she maintained her self-confident, polite and decisive way. During field work, the
researcher observed a school event which was a useful illustration of the way she utilised her power. A group of researchers led by a famous educational expert visited the school to inspect the research activity of the school. The expert was famous for her critical and rigorous working style. The senior staff who attended the meeting with Fei were upset by the dominating language of the critical expert. At first, the climate of that meeting was a little stressful. The educational expert kept on asking questions in an overwhelming way. But Fei looked confident and she communicated with the expert calmly and responded to the questions of the expert in a soft but firm voice with a smile on her face. Finally, she did not only convince the expert that the research activities in the school were progressing well, but also she took advantage of the chance to properly promote the achievement of the school again.

6.4.5 Dealing with risks and challenges

While the school gradually achieved its goals in the strategic plan and made great progress, Fei clearly knew there were still some gaps in the school’s development. She acknowledged that some of her teaching staff did not teach students properly although most members of the staff in YPS were experienced in preparing teaching plan and delivering classes. There were some teachers who were seen to use out of date teaching methods to teach students. She mentioned that some teaching staff elaborated their teaching plans by utilising multiple media tools to assist teaching and learning, but they ignored the needs of students when they prepared their classes. There was a dearth of interaction between teachers and students in the class of those teachers. She realized those teaching activities contradicted the philosophy of the ongoing curriculum reform in Mainland China, which maintains that teachers have a responsibility to encourage student interest in learning and foster their creative thinking.

While Fei did not say much about the risks faced by the school, the phenomenon which the researcher observed in the school was of concern to Fei. The researcher
observed that teaching staff spent much time preparing for the competition in the district. They had several rehearsals before the competition. It seemed the competition was like a teaching performance for teachers. Students were especially required to obey the classroom discipline during the teaching contest and respond to teachers’ questions actively. One of the senior leaders indicated that there might be some negative aspects to drilling students towards these competitions. However, she indicated that teachers’ teaching skills would be improved by rehearsal teaching before the teaching contest (FN070925YPS).

The researcher observed some phenomena in the school. The researcher saw some teaching staff criticize students. One boy student was pulled away from the queue by his teacher since he did not abide by the school rules. In the school, students were required to obey the rules of the school. Students in YPS were polite, yet they kept a certain distance from their teachers.

In addition, the researcher observed there were some clashes between parents and the school staff. Some parents did not understand the administration of the school. Some staff suggested the parents of the school had much higher expectations for their children and the school and for this reason acted harshly to the staff. The staff had to carefully deal with the complaints of parents without other alternatives. In a staff meeting, the director told teachers to use more positive language when communicating with parents about the performance of their child to avoid clashes with parents.

The challenges Fei had to face were interrelated. How to lessen the working pressure of teaching staff; and how to motivate them to perform better were central issues. While most members of the teaching staff were proud of being members of the school, the intensified work load fatigued them. The competitive working climate pushed them to work harder for better achievement. Fei recognised the work pressure imposed on the staff. She said she tried to develop better working
conditions for staff. Nevertheless, one teacher noted that it was hard to provide a really good education to children under the current administrative system because teachers’ creative competencies were obliterated by the hierarchical administrative system in China.

Fei was unwilling to talk too much about the challenges she met in her work. She acknowledged there was some tough issues, but what she had done to tackle those issues was to concentrate on each task and find solutions to solve them. She said she felt most teachers in the school recognised her leadership and were proud of her and the school.

6.5 Summary

In this section, the case about Fei is summarized in the following three tables. Table 6.1 summarises the organisational context of YPS; Table 6.2 summarises the leadership career of Fei; and Table 6.3 summarises Fei’s leadership practices.
### Table 6.1 Organisational context of YPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External community</strong></td>
<td>Science and high technology centre; constellation of highly educated people; considerable attention, expectations and support from local government and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal organisational context</strong></td>
<td>School history Long standing excellent elite primary school; highlights teaching and students’ academic performance; growing school population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical environment</strong></td>
<td>Three campuses with different physical features; original campus: small but well organised and tidy environment; highlights combination of Chinese traditional culture and Western culture; advanced schooling facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational structure and systems</strong></td>
<td>A four-level hierarchical structure; articulated management system to monitor teaching quality; strictly implemented reward system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum and school activities</strong></td>
<td>A variety of school based curricular; high student participation; student clubs in science, electronics technology and astronomy; highlights moral education; school teaching competition and other teachers’ professional development activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td>A staff of excellent teachers; proud of working in YPS; pressure from intensified workload and competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>Sophisticated, confident manner; outstanding academic performance; kept polite distance from outsider; disciplined and well protected by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation</td>
<td>Born in a traditional literate family; good living conditions; caring family environment that promoted disciple and gaining knowledge; good academic performance and confident; help from her siblings and classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accession</td>
<td>Excellent teaching performance; updated knowledge; Master’s degree in educational administration gained overseas; work hard to earn teachers’ recognition; positive attitude to deal with difficulties; balance professional life and family life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbency</td>
<td>Recognised by staff and upper senior leaders; enjoyed her principalship in YPS; gained self-fulfilment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 6.3 Leadership practices of Fei

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision building</strong></td>
<td>Formal written school vision and strategic plan; involve teachers in the making of the strategic plan; urge teachers to make their individual professional plans on the basis of school strategic plan; use school strategic plan to guide school management; all staff collaboratively work to achieve school goals; undertake specific initiatives to achieve school vision: protect and promote the school’s reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical considerations</strong></td>
<td>Strong awareness of ethical obligations; undertake initiatives to promote education equity; respectful and understanding of teachers and their work; provide teachers with good bonus; accountable for cultivating intelligent students who are nationalistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching &amp; Learning</strong></td>
<td>Highlight teaching and learning; indirectly supervise teaching and learning through experienced senior teacher leaders; careful management system to monitor teaching quality; a series of reading initiatives to facilitate teachers’ professional learning; sought professional support from educational experts in the scholarly community; involve teachers in participating in research programmes; students’ reading initiatives to enhance students’ learning; ongoing learning and reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power utilisation</strong></td>
<td>Invite staff to participate in school management; sensitively care about staff but also maintain a decisive and rational approach; exert her influence through working with senior teacher leaders; steer school management; show her respect to the school tradition; selectively meet outside visitors and skillfully communicate with outside visitors and build networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dealing with risks &amp; challenges</strong></td>
<td>Acknowledged potential problems in YPS; but did not specify these issues; positive attitude to deal with risks and challenges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

7.1 Overview

In this chapter, the findings are discussed in the light of the conceptual framework that largely draws upon the work of Gronn (1999). According to Gronn (1999), leadership is constructed gradually through four stages in the career of individual leaders. These stages are “formation”, “accession”, “incumbency” and “divestiture” (p 33). Gronn (1999) maintains that tracing back life experiences during these different career stages and contextualising within their broader historical, cultural and social context can contribute to an understanding of the leadership of an individual. In this study, the first three stages only are considered here since the fourth stage did not reflect either of the principals’ current career situations.

This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part explores the first two stages of Gronn’s model. These are formation and accession that explore how the early life experiences shaped the two principals’ values and career experiences. The second part responds to the third stage of Gronn’s model, incumbency, and within this stage, Research question 1 is addressed: what are the leadership practices of the two principals. This question is examined through the five key leadership practices principals are said to enact. The third part of this chapter addresses Research question 2 which asks: what are the factors impacting upon the leadership practices of the two principals? It provides a discussion that explores the interplay of the broader contextual factors, the individual biographical factors of the principals and their leadership practices. A key argument in this chapter is that the interplay of these cultural, social, and organisational factors contributes to an understanding of the leadership construction of each female school principal.
7.2. Formation

According to Gronn’s (1999) theory of leadership as career, formation refers to the social and psychological preparatory processes undertaken by an individual leader which contributes to the “scaffolding of a character structure” (p.32). Gronn suggests that formation ranges from infancy to early adulthood. During this stage, three principal institutions shape individual values and character and lay the base for an individual leader. These include: (a) “family and their modes of upbringing”, (b) “schooling and educational agencies”, and (c) “a variety of peers and reference groups” (p.34) such as friends, mentors and consciousness shaping media. The formative experiences of Qin and Fei are now discussed.

Family and modes of upbringing

Gronn (1999) indicates that every family transmits its values and beliefs to its offspring. These values and beliefs held by parents or parental surrogates in a family constitute resources for children to acquire their own understanding about the world. Tracing back the family backgrounds of Qin and Fei, it was evident that their family made an important contribution to the development of their values and beliefs.

Qin was born in a communist cadre family in 1960s in Mainland China. Her parents worked as communist cadres in the local governmental departments. During Qin’s childhood, communism and Maoism dominated the national ideology, and traditional Chinese culture and the ideas of capitalism were criticized strongly. As communist cadres, the way that they socialized Qin was influenced by the prevailing national ideology. For instance Qin’s father did not like her to wear garish clothes because he regarded this as mismatch to the style of the proletariat. It was due to her father’s preference that to this day Qin has maintained a simple dressing style and she admitted to being frugal in her spending habits. Furthermore, it seems the prevailing thoughts about the role of men and women under Mao’s regime also influenced the way Qin’s parents’ raised her. Under Mao’s regime, men and women
were regarded as equal and women were encouraged to participate in hard labour like their male counterparts. The unequal relationship between men and women under traditional patriarchal Chinese society was criticized as an outdated cultural influence by Mao’s regime. Unlike many families in China which favor sons rather than daughters (Xiong, 2004), in Qin’s family she and her brother shared the same love from their parents and she did not feel she was inferior due to her gender. It appeared that her mother was an active influence on her gender socialisation and a strong role model. Unlike traditional Chinese women who stay at home as housewives, Qin’s mother worked as a communist cadre in a governmental department and she had expectations that her daughter would also excel in whatever she did.

Like Qin, Fei was also born during the Cultural Revolution time. However, since her father’s educational background was based in traditional Chinese private schools before the establishment of the PRC, traditional Chinese culture was recognised as important in her family, even though communism was the mainstream ideology during that period. Unlike the situation in Qin’s family, Fei’s family was more representative of a traditional Chinese family. In the family, Fei’s father played the role of an authoritative patriarch, while her mother’s major role was that of nurturer and home keeper. It appears that Fei’s father’s values and beliefs about education did not echo the influence of the prevailing national ideology in Mainland China during the Cultural Revolution. At this time, scientific knowledge and traditional Chinese culture were replaced by the “hyper politicization of education” (Sautman, 1991, p. 670). In Fei’s family, knowledge for the sake of knowledge and learning were emphasised by her father.

**Schooling and educational agencies**

Gronn (1999) indicates that school education is another important institution that shapes values and beliefs. It seems the experiences of Qin and Fei during their schooling did impact upon their development as leaders. Qin’s school education was
consistent with the way of education in her family since she was socialized to obey the direction of the CCP since the “hyperpoliticization of education” (Sautman, 1991, p. 670) was prevalent in schools during her childhood. Gaining knowledge was devalued and students were encouraged to learn through labour work on the farm or in the factory (Sautman, 1991). Qin acknowledged that she had not experienced a systematic academic education. Nevertheless, she reflected that her schooling provided her with an invaluable experience since she acquired a useful non-cognitive capacity. It may be due to this experience that Qin saw the value in both cognitive and non-cognitive capability in her students. Qin’s schooling was spent in a relaxed and unconstrained context. This formative experience may have lead to her value an unconstrained and happy learning environment for children in schools in her work as an educator. Regarding Fei’s schooling, she provided limited information. However, through her brief description about her schooling, she commented that she was a confident student, who was ambitious and pursued excellence in her performance in school.

Peers and Reference groups
According to Gronn’s (1999) theory, the interaction with peers and members of reference groups contribute also to the formation of the leadership of an individual leader. The findings of this study demonstrated that Qin and Fei’s leadership was influenced by interactions with their reference groups. For Qin, the family-like school climate of the first school in which she started her teaching position and the supportive leadership style of the school principal had a significant impact on her values and beliefs about education and school. It may be due to this impact that Qin also valued a harmonious and supportive family like school climate. Furthermore, it seems that Qin’s strong commitment to teaching, learning and research was influenced by the effective teaching and learning legacy of this primary school where she started her teaching career and developed her research skills when working with professors and researchers at the university. Her colleagues in that primary school and the researchers in the university constituted an important
reference group for Qin.

As for Fei, the interactions with her reference groups may also have lead to her valuing education and leadership. Similarly, the strict teaching and learning tradition of the primary school in which she worked as teacher and later as an administrator seemed to play a role in contributing to her strong emphasis on teaching and learning and monitoring its quality. However, in contrast to Qin, whose in-service professional learning was related mainly to teaching and learning, Fei’s in-service professional learning experience was in the field of educational administration and management. Therefore, most of her peers were classmates in a Master’s program in educational administration which she undertook while at university.

7.2.1. Accession

In light of Gronn’s (1999) theory about leadership as career, accession is a stage in which an aspirant leader starts to display her/his performance in terms of leadership and acquires her/his recognition among sponsors or other organisational members. This stage does not end when a candidate is officially assigned to a leadership position; rather it ends when an individual leader masters the role of leadership and can exercise leadership in a sophisticated way, which is the start of the incumbency stage. Gronn argued that an aspirant leader will have to achieve accession at both a public level and inner personal level so that she/ he can succeed in a leadership role. At the public level, an aspirant leader prepares her/ his credentials for a leadership career and acquires the recognition of sponsors or her/ his colleagues. At an inner personal level, an aspirant leader has to prepare her/ him psychologically for the role of leadership. Gronn indicates that an aspirant leader may encounter inner conflicts and then form self-beliefs to deal with the role of leadership. In the leadership as career theory, this stage is crucial for a leader because it further constructs her/ his understanding regarding leadership during the process of self psychological accommodation for the role. These two levels are now considered.
After Qin demonstrated excellent teaching performance in the primary school where she started her teaching career, she gained recognition from her colleagues and her senior leaders. It was at this time that she had an opportunity to return to university to undertake a one-year in-service professional programme. This opportunity could be viewed as a turning point in her career because she started to participate in research activities with her university professors and researchers whose research results regarding teaching and learning had an impact on current curriculum reform in Mainland China. Qin’s research experience not only contributed to her reputation for effective teaching and learning but also triggered her further reflection about what authentic teaching and learning was about. These new ideas about teaching and learning methods, which were advocated by the curriculum reform such as creative learning, and building a learning community, were embedded in Qin’s mind. Qin’s research experiences also helped her to think about what constitutes a good school and shaped her personal vision. Furthermore, her learning and research experiences offered her a chance to build up her network with academics and researchers who were actively conducting research in primary and secondary education. At that time, the research of academics exerted an increasing influence on school based practices. Qin’s network meant that she had easy access to a scholarly community.

The situation in many Chinese primary schools is that school administrators are usually selected from an excellent teacher pool (Wu & Ehrich, 2009). Both Qin and Fei demonstrated outstanding teaching performance and this led to their advancement to the principalship. In spite of the patriarchal system operating in Mainland China that does not always give women the same social messages about promotion as men (Coleman et al., 1998), Qin and Fei were recognised by their superiors and given opportunities for professional development that enhanced their skills and knowledge.
In Mainland China, it is mandatory for principals to undertake a principal training program before they can take up the position (Wu & Ehrich, 2009). Both Qin and Fei undertook these as well as other professional development opportunities sponsored by the Ministry of Education of China. For Qin, these learning opportunities not only provided her with a qualification needed for the principalship but also helped her widen her social network since she met and studied with other excellent school principals across China who were also trainees in that programme. Unlike Qin’s career advancement that was related to her long time research experience in respect of teaching and learning which led to her reputation in her field, Fei’s career advancement resulted from her conscious and active preparation for a leadership position. Since Fei was assigned to an administrative position as director in her school, she kept on updating her knowledge regarding educational administration. Fei’s overseas Master’s degree in educational administration further prepared her for the credential of the principalship.

**Inner level**

At an inner personal level, it seems both Qin and Fei experienced some inner conflicts during the stage of accession. Qin acknowledged that she made many sacrifices in terms of her personal life and family life due to the demands of her career. Even though she stated she had the support from her family, she still felt guilty that she could not look after her family as well as she had wanted. Fei also referred to some conflicts in this regard. This type of inner conflict is not unusual for women who endeavour to juggle career with family (Goeller, 1992; Zhong, 2004). For instance, the Chinese female primary principals interviewed in Zhong’s (2004) study acknowledged conflicts arising between their family role and professional role. Qin also indicated she experienced frustration when she first began conducting research as she was not familiar with research methods and had to learn these new techniques. Currently in Mainland China, teachers’ participation in research activities has been regarded as an effective way to implement curriculum reform initiatives (Yufang. Li, 2005). Thus, Qin’s previous research experience well
prepared her for the new requirement as principal and helped to shape her self-beliefs about the importance of research to improve teaching practice.

While Qin indicated frustration in having to learn how to become a researcher, Fei’s overseas study experience challenged her since she did not have a good command of English when she arrived in the United States. In retrospect, she commented that this learning experience was very rewarding. She was able to acquire not only the recognition of her colleagues and her superiors, but also a strong self-belief in her abilities. It appears that it was this self-belief that she called upon during the accession stage that helped her manage the school.

7.2.2. Summary

The aforementioned discussion has shown that Gronn’s first two stages contributed to Qin and Fei’s personal and professional values about education and school leadership. Qin’s relatively unconstrained family life and care-free schooling experience shaped her views about the importance of creating a harmonious schooling environment for students. Furthermore, many years of teaching and her recognised achievements in both teaching and her research helped her to shape a strong commitment to teaching, learning and research. For Fei, her great emphasis on teaching and learning quality and on learning of traditional Chinese culture in her school can be traced back to her prior experiences. It seemed that her strict family upbringing in accordance with traditional Chinese culture, and the strict teaching and learning tradition she observed in the school in which she worked, helped her to develop her values and views about education and leadership. Moreover, it seems likely that her learning experiences overseas with respect to educational administration shaped her rational and formal leadership approach. The different life experiences of Qin and Fei during these two stages led to their differentiated values regarding education; however these experiences also provided them with similar important values for leadership such as passion, hard work and perseverance. In line
with Gronn’s (1999) work, both Qin and Fei experienced some self conflict during their accession stage, yet, it appeared, that the resolution of this conflict helped them to prepare psychologically for the role of leadership.

7.3. Incumbency: leadership practices

The first two stages of leadership as a career theory contribute to the personal attributes and leadership style of an individual leader (Gronn, 1999). After these two stages, a candidate of leadership comes to the third stage which Gronn has named, “incumbency”. In this stage, a leader can lead the organisation in accordance with her/his understanding of leadership. By the time of this study, Qin and Fei had established themselves as well-recognised and outstanding principals. Both led their school in accordance with their own vision of what schools should be like and had demonstrated effective leadership. In the discussion that follows, Research question 1, which asks, “what are the leadership practices of the two principals”, is now addressed in order to illuminate the way which Qin and Fei led their schools within their incumbency stage.

RQ 1: Leadership practices of the two principals

The theoretical framework identified five key dimensions of leadership practices emanating from the leadership literature that are universal practices for the work of school principals. Not surprisingly, each of the five dimensions, discussed below, was evident in the work of the two principals and thus confirmed the writing and research that these practices are important dimensions of the work of school principals. Identified in the following discussion are some subtle differences in style that emerged between the two principals.

Vision building

Vision has been regarded as one of the crucial factors which lead to school effectiveness and sustainable development (Davies & Davies, 2005; Hallinger &
School principals are therefore expected to play an important role in building school vision to guide school development (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). It was evident that both Qin and Fei took on this role of vision building. Both had personal visions, they guided a common direction with staff, and they used their own approaches to build their visions.

**School vision driven by principals’ personal vision**

Chance (1992) points out that personal values and beliefs underlie the personal vision which is basic to school vision. Importantly, personal visions of school principals play a role in their school vision (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). The findings of this study revealed that the personal visions of Qin and Fei played a crucial role in building their school vision. In Qin’s school, she strove to build a harmonious and happy school where students can enjoy learning and teachers can enjoy teaching. This school vision was strongly influenced by her personal vision about what a good school should be like. For her, schools should be a place characterised by a collegial school climate. Similarly, Fei’s school vision was linked to her personal vision. The school vision of YPS was to make YPS a nation-wide well-known primary school with an international outlook. To large extent, this school vision was also emanated from her personal vision. She indicated that schooling should offer a satisfying educational service to parents and society and educators within the school should assume accountability to socialize students and prepare them for their future successful lives. Thus, she suggested that a safe, healthy and resource-rich schooling environment was important. For her, well-educated students with good manners and high academic achievement constituted important outcomes of an excellent education. Fei’s personal vision played an important role in building the school vision of YPS, however unlike the situation in Qin’s school, the school vision of YPS was not simply emanated from Fei’s personal vision. This is discussed in the section about influential factors.
Highlight building common direction

Vision is usually regarded as the direction for school development. When vision is shared by school members, it leads to their commitment and the sustainable development of the organisation (Davies, 2005; Leithwood, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) indicated that setting directions involves helping staff to develop shared understandings about their schools and vision guiding schools development. They claimed that this common vision can help organisation members find a sense of identity within their work context. The finding of this study revealed that both Qin and Fei were aware of the importance of using common directions to guide school development and both highlighted their role in making directions for their schools. Qin perceived herself as the captain of a ship, and Fei viewed her role of school principal as a goal setter who urged school members to reach their goals.

Different claims about vision and different approaches

While Qin and Fei acknowledged the importance of a common direction for their schools, they held different views and used different approaches to implement their visions. For instance, Qin did not prepare a strategic plan which was articulated and formalised. What she did have was a long term plan (Davies & Davies, 2005) but this was not written down either. Her feeling was that she did not want to restrict the school’s development to a fixed strategic plan since she believed that it was important for teachers to be both creative and spontaneous in their work rather than constrained by a fixed formal document. However, it was evident that Qin’s priorities for education were in keeping with those identified in two seminal national policy documents: Action Plan to Vitalize Education in the 21st Century (1999) and Decision on Deepening Educational reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999) in which improving students’ creative learning capability and curriculum reform are highlighted. In contrast to Qin, Fei highlighted the significance of strategic plans in her leadership. She believed that a specific strategic plan would improve the efficiency of the teachers. She indicated that setting goals
for the school and linking them to teachers’ individual professional development goals would help teachers to make good use of their time.

Because of their different views about vision, Qin and Fei approached its implementation differently. Yet both demonstrated intense commitment to the achievement of their vision. For instance, Qin instilled her personal vision to teachers and other staff through her consistent daily behaviour. She practised what she advocated in her day-to-day interaction with others and modelled this to them. As Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) indicates that it is important for school principals to invite others to participate in building vision, Qin made use of staff meetings to guide teachers and the other staff to reflect on what the constituencies of a good school were and during the process she conveyed her thinking about education to teachers and other staff members. It seemed what Qin did in terms of vision building echoed one of the findings of research by Leithwood et al. (1999) regarding school principals’ leadership in a Central Ontario Secondary School. In their study, they found that principals informally and opportunistically built the vision of the school and conveyed this thinking by their consistent behaviour (Leithwood et al., 1999). In addition, her implicit ways also demonstrated a symbolic means to promote the importance of a collegial and caring school climate for school members. It seems Qin strove to build school vision through fostering the commitment of the staff and her way of building a school vision largely emanated from her own previous experiences as a teacher.

Unlike the informal and naturally evolving approach of Qin, Fei followed a more formal approach to build the school’s vision. She did this by instituting a series of formal initiatives and, by doing so, she translated the school vision into practical and quite immediate individual staff plans (Leithwood, 1999). Another salient initiative Fei used to build school vision was her effort to motivate staff to achieve the school strategic plan. As with Qin, Fei modelled the school vision through her own behaviours. Since the school vision of YPS was to build an internationally reputed
excellent primary school, she paid attention to the school’s public image. She did this not only through her own individual professional image which she projected to teachers and the wider community, but also through the publicising of the achievements of students, teachers and the school. Fei’s decision to hold the 2004 anniversary celebration of YPS in one of the best conference halls in the city demonstrated her commitment to promoting the achievements of YPS.

In summary, although Qin and Fei used a different approach to build their respective school visions, there were some commonalities. For instance, both knew well the importance of building a common direction, both tried to translate the school’s vision into action of the staff by modelling, both tried to foster the acceptance of the school’s vision, and both created high expectations for students and staff in their respective schools. These practices are often cited in leadership literature from western countries regarding vision. For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985, cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) state that three key steps regarding vision building are: articulate a vision, foster acceptance and create high performance and expectations.

**Ethical considerations**

Recently, growing attention has been paid to the ethical dimensions of educational leadership (Chapman et al., 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2005). This may be due in part to the awareness that school leaders should fulfil their obligations in moral and ethical ways as well as the reality that school leaders have to face complex ethical dilemmas in their practice (Duignan & Collins, 2003; Ehrich, 2000; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001; Roche, 1999; Starratt, 1996, 2005). In Mainland China, the restructuring of education due to the educational reforms implemented since 1985, has created a number of ethical dilemmas with which school principals have had to grapple (Jin, 2006; D.Yang, 2006, 2007). The topic of ethics for school leaders has received attention in Mainland China (Xinhua.Wang, 1995) with writers noting that school principals should act with care and justly towards staff and students alike. For instance, an issue discussed by Chinese researchers and
academics in recent years has been how to maintain education equity while promoting education efficiency (e.g., D. Yang, 2006; Jin, 2006).

The findings in the case study indicated that Qin and Fei were aware of their ethical responsibilities even though they did not mention these words. Nevertheless, from their daily practices and the way they interacted with staff and students, their ethical considerations can be understood. Starratt (2005) identifies five key levels of ethical enactments that school leaders undertake. Because Qin’s and Fei’s leadership practices reflected each of these levels, they will now be discussed.

**Enactments as a Human Being**

The present findings showed that both Qin and Fei respected the rights of staff as human beings. This is the first aspect of ethical leadership practice according to Starratt (2005). Both Qin and Fei expressed the view that teachers deserved a safe environment in which to work and both cared about their staff. For example, Qin tried to help those teachers who were ineffective to improve their teaching competencies so that they would not have to face the risk of losing their job, while Fei tried to provide a better work environment for teachers by taking an interest in their personal lives and offering them a considerable salary. Both showed an ethic of care in their interactions with teachers. This finding echoed the classic assertion of Gilligan’s (1993) that women act with an ethic of care, as well as a number of empirical research studies on the practices of women principals (Kropiewnicki, 2000; Tough-Doogan, 2003; Varley, 2005).

**Enactments as citizen – public servant**

According to Starratt (2005), this level maintains that an ethical leader should respect the rights of other citizens, respect public order and serve the public. It was evident in the practices of Qin and Fei that they demonstrated their awareness of their ethical obligation to the public and the community. Qin was open and responsive to parents and paid attention to their feedback in terms of school
management and performance. Not only did Fei realize her public duty to provide a healthy, safe and excellent educational service to the community but also she realized her obligation was to cultivate intelligent students who held socialist and nationalist ideologies. More so than Qin, Fei especially highlighted her ethical obligation to serve the community and country. It was observed that Fei emphasised contractual accountability to the system (Ehrich, 2000) since she followed the directives of the Chinese Communist Party and she implemented the mandated policies of the central government of the CCP (Ministry of Education of PRC, 1991).

**Enactments as an educator**

According to Starratt (2005) the third level of ethical leadership refers to the role of the school principal as educator who has a good command of curriculum and instruction and takes responsibility for the teaching and learning activities in their schools. The findings of this study showed that both Qin and Fei valued their roles in instructing teaching and learning in their schools. For them, student learning was their main priority. Qin’s strong care for students and her commitment to teaching and learning lead her to emphasis authentic learning for students. She instructed teaching and learning activities directly. Fei, also paid much attention to the quality of teaching and learning in her school. She was clearly conscious of the importance of high quality teaching and learning. Some empirical studies (Shakeshaft, 1987; Tough-Doogan, 2003) have also found that female primary school principals place considerable emphasis on the teaching and learning programme in the school. Teaching and learning is considered more fully later in the discussion.

**Enactments as an administrator/manager**

The fourth level refers to the responsibility of educational leaders to make equal and good organisational arrangements so that all the students can have an equal chance to obtain a good education (Starratt, 2005). At this level, educational leaders should make good use of their access to a variety of educational resources to arrange better education for all the students. It was evident that the leadership practices of Qin and
Fei demonstrated this level of ethical consideration.

Qin cared for every student, ensured that suitable teaching and learning methods were used for different students and made use of her network to invite educational experts or researchers to help teachers improve their teaching competencies. Furthermore, Qin provided a role model for staff on how to care for students. She told staff to inform parents that there would be no special privileges bestowed on some children since education is for all. She directly supervised and managed the teaching and learning activities within the school. Similarly, Fei played an active role in promoting teaching and learning. Nevertheless, her way to manage the teaching activities was by working with and through her management team and by establishing a clear process and system. Here, she guided and worked with her senior school teacher leaders to promote the teaching and learning activities of YPS and, in turn, they organised specific teaching and learning activities within their respective departments. All of them reported to Fei and adopted her suggestions. Moreover, the friendly and supportive initiatives between YPS and some primary schools in communities that were lack of schooling resource demonstrated Fei’s ethical considerations in this regard. While Qin had direct contact working with teachers, Fei exercised her role by working with and through her management team. The dimension of teaching and learning is discussed later in the chapter.

*Enactments as educational leader*

This level of leadership is said to be transformational in nature since leaders see the potential of people and trust teachers to transform teaching and learning into an authentic learning community (Starratt, 2005). The findings from the case studies indicated that while both Qin and Fei used different approaches, both built a learning community in their schools. In TPS, Qin called for teachers to proactively co-construct learning experiences with students by encouraging their active participation in the learning process. Like Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2005) argument about transformational leadership that transformational leaders redesign the school
structure to create the beneficial condition for learning community, Qin transformed TPS, which was a regular bureaucratic school organisational structure, into a two-line school organisational structure. She aimed to create a more flexible and collegial climate for teachers of TPS. While Fei also encouraged teachers and students to proactively construct learning experiences, she preferred teachers and students to work within a relatively stable system without challenging the existing teaching and learning order. In YPS, although each department was encouraged to work collaboratively, school tasks were mainly managed by a hierarchical school organisational structure. It seems that guaranteeing the security and safety of children and maintaining current school achievement was important for Fei.

In terms of ethical practice, Qin and Fei demonstrated practices that are aligned to Starratt’s (2005) five levels. As with the findings from empirical research in Western countries about female school principals (e.g., Kropiewnicki, 2000; Tough-Doogan, 2003; Varley, 2005), both Qin and Fei exhibited an ethic of care to teachers and others. Both Qin and Fei were aware of their ethical obligations as citizen-public servants to serve the community and the society. Furthermore, both demonstrated their ethical consideration in terms of teaching and learning.

**Teaching and learning**

There is little doubt that both Qin and Fei viewed teaching and learning as core components of their work. Although researchers argue that leadership of teaching and learning is not exerted solely by school principals (Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2005; Lambert, 2005), there is a strong body of evidence that indicates the role school principals play in instructing teaching and learning improves school performance and student outcomes (e.g., Bartlett, 2008; Eldredge, 2008; Gurr, 2008; Leithwood et al., 1999; Southworth, 2005). There has been much written on the features of instructional leadership (e.g., Edmonds, 1979; Elmore, 2000; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987 cited in Eldredge, 2008; Trodden, 2006). However, in order to interpret the work of Qin and Fei in regard to their instructional leadership, the work of Hopkins (2003) is now
discussed. Hopkins (2003) synthesises three broad domains of instructional leadership: values and purposes of the school; managing teaching and curriculum; and establishing a school as a professional learning community. Each of these is considered in turn.

**Values and purpose of the school**

Among the discussion about instructional leadership in the literature, setting goals has been reiterated as one of the important instructional behaviours of instructional leaders (e.g., Eldredge, 2008; Hopkins, 2003; Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Trodden, 2006). Hoy and Hoy (2003) indicate that school principals must communicate a clear vision which focuses on teaching and learning. Hopkins (2003) argues that instructional leadership is purposeful and driven by a value of consistent pursuit of excellent teaching and learning for all members of the school. Eldredge (2008) claims that the vision focusing on teaching and learning promotes school effectiveness. Consistent with these statements, the present study demonstrated that the instructional leadership practices of Qin and Fei were driven by strong values about what a good school should be.

While Qin and Fei were instructional leaders, they used different approaches to teaching and learning in the school. Qin’s efforts emanated from her strong commitment to teaching and learning grounded in her expert knowledge of teaching. Her approach was akin to a number of studies conducted in western countries (Angulo, 1995; Fennel, 1999) that have shown women as leaders who see themselves as teachers primarily and who love being with children. In contrast, Fei exerted her role as instructional leader by formally building the school vision and articulating it into specific school initiatives. For Fei, her school strove to foster all-round students to serve the development of the nation. In YPS, student excellent performance, teacher outstanding performance, and the excellence of school were strongly emphasised in the school strategic plan. Both principals conveyed shared values about the importance of quality teaching and learning to all staff.
Managing teaching and curriculum

Both Qin and Fei were managers of the teaching programme and managers of curriculum in their schools. These instructional management tasks encompass specific supervisory practices such as conducting instructional school conferences, promoting staff professional development, and encouraging critical reflection (Blase & Blase, 2004; Hopkins, 2003), monitoring and assessing teaching and learning outcomes, and facilitating teaching and learning (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). The case studies revealed that both principals kept an eye on classrooms; motivated and facilitated teaching and learning; and promoted teachers’ professional development.

Keep eyes on the classroom

Some research suggests that it is important for school leaders to spend time in the classroom and track teaching and learning (e.g., Blase & Blase, 2004; Southworth, 2005). Both Qin and Fei maintained consistent and close classroom supervision in their day-to-day leadership practices. As an educational expert and leading figure in her school, Qin directly coached teachers to improve their teaching skills and classroom management capacities. For her, classroom observation was more than collecting judgmental information about teachers’ teaching; rather it was a reciprocal dialogue process between her and teachers which provided an opportunity for staff to gain educative and developmental learning experiences. Conducting effective instructional conferencing is said to be an important activity for teachers’ learning (Blase & Blase, 2004). Qin also actively engaged in organizing a variety of staff meetings to discuss teaching, learning and curriculum development. In the meetings, she encouraged teachers to share their self-reflection of teaching and learning and offered constructive suggestions to teachers to improve their teaching capabilities. Through her direct supervision of teaching and learning, Qin conveyed her understanding of effective teaching and learning. These sorts of strategies are said to constitute learning-centered leadership (Southworth, 2005).
Compared with Qin, Fei did not spend as much time as Qin in supervising classroom teaching and learning, but she maintained regular classroom observation. Unlike Qin’s who directly coached teaching and learning activities, Fei achieved her instructional leadership by working closely with senior teacher leaders in her management team who then performed the role of monitoring teachers. As some researchers point out, school principals can exert their leadership in teaching and learning by working with and through others and thus, they exercise an indirect influence on students’ learning (e.g., Gurr, 2008; Southworth, 2005; Lambert, 2005).

Motivate and facilitate teaching and learning

Apart from classroom observations, Qin and Fei exerted their instructional leadership by motivating teachers and facilitating teaching and learning, both practices that Hoy and Hoy (2003) claim are crucial improve student achievement. However they approached this in particular ways. Qin preferred to motivate teachers mostly through non-monetary motivation, such as the opportunity for professional advancement or professional development. She strove to motivate teachers by appealing to their inner passion for the teaching profession. She endeavoured to create a friendly, happy, relaxed and harmonious school climate so that teachers would feel motivated about teaching. This type of environment was akin to the one created by elementary school principals in Varley’s (2005) study. Qin did not implement a strict evaluation system to rank teachers’ teaching performance; rather she imbued in teachers what she saw as effective teaching and learning activities in her day-to-day interaction with teachers. Qin used also her broad network with academics and researchers in China to offer intellectual support for teachers.

Different from Qin’s way of motivating, Fei used a number of other strategies. In YPS, teachers’ teaching performance was linked to both their professional development opportunities and their monetary rewards. They were offered considerable material rewards. For instance, in YPS, the tasks of each department and individual were specifically stated and teaching and learning quality was
monitored by multiple school monitoring systems and supported by an apprentice-like mentoring system. As Southworth (2005) points out, “good management matters as much as good leadership” (p.83), so too with Fei’s efforts. Fei used an effective managerial system to organise, coordinate and support teaching and learning in the school. Similar to Qin’s utilisation of networks to promote teaching and learning, Fei also integrated her professional resources with teaching and learning in YPS.

Promote teacher’s professional development

Sheppard (1996) points out that promoting teachers’ professional development is the most influential instructional leadership behaviour of leaders. Both Qin and Fei channelled their efforts into improve teaching and learning by offering and encouraging teachers’ professional development. In both schools, teachers were extensively involved in conducting action research to improve their teaching outcomes as well as their professional capabilities. In Qin’s school, all teachers were involved in an international teaching and learning programme. Like her practices in supervising teachers’ classroom teaching, Qin engaged in the research programme with teachers and directly worked with them and other researchers in the programme. As Southworth (2005) indicates that school principals need to create opportunities for teachers to speak with colleagues about teaching and learning, Qin suggested that involving teachers of TPS in the international research programme offered a good opportunity for teachers to learn from peers and to promote their professional dialogue.

Instead of involvement in one research programme, teachers in Fei’s school were involved in a variety of research inquiries at the national level, district level and school level. Similar to her efforts in supervision of classroom teaching and learning, Fei steered these research initiatives through a systematic research programme management system specifically implemented by levels of related teacher leaders. Furthermore, Fei achieved her leadership in promoting teachers’ professional development through the integration of school goals with individual professional
development goals.

Building learning community

Some researchers argue that instructional leadership is not solely the instructional practices of the school principal, and therefore, instructional leadership should transcend instruction in the classroom (e.g., Hopkins, 2003; Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Trodden, 2006). Their arguments suggest that school principals should foster the instructional leadership of others and build a learning community. The present findings indicated that both Qin and Fei’s instructional practices helped to build a learning community in their schools. In Qin’s school, apart from encouraging all staff members to read, they were encouraged to improve their learning through their daily communication with others. This idea is akin to the notion of professional dialogue mentioned by Southworth (2005). For Qin, learning was something embedded in daily life. Therefore learning happened everywhere in the school community. In Fei’s schools, learning was embodied in a series of reading initiatives of all members of YPS. Hoy and Hoy (2003) indicate that school principals should be intellectual leaders who keep abreast of the latest development in teaching and learning. Qin and Fei were intellectual leaders as they maintained consistent learning through reading and engaged in a variety of professional activities outside of school. To some extent, their consistent learning also contributed to the development of the learning community in their schools. They modelled the importance of learning to staff in their schools.

In summary, similar to Hopkins’s (2003) argument about instructional leadership, Qin’s and Fei’s leadership of teaching and learning activities in their schools can be categorised also into three parts. First, their instructional leadership practices were driven by their school vision which underscored improving teaching and learning. Second, they invested a great deal of time and energy in managing teaching and the curriculum. They monitored classroom teaching and learning closely and took active measures to both motivate and facilitate teaching activities in their schools. Third,
they strove to promote teachers’ professional development through involving teachers in research programmes. In keeping with the ideas of some Western scholars (e.g., Hopkins, 2003; Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Trodden, 2006), Qin’s and Fei’s instructional leadership practices were not confined to the classroom; rather they strove to build a learning community and encouraged learning to take place all the time and everywhere. Their own practice modeled the importance of formal and informal learning.

**Power utilisation**

Researchers in the school leadership field identify the importance of power in understanding school leadership (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Busher, 2006; Fennell, 1999; Yukl, 1994). The findings of this study echo this view. Although both Qin and Fei did not frequently mention the word *power* or be shown to wield their power in overt ways, it was evident that power utilisation constituted a key component of their leadership practices.

The findings of this study revealed that both Qin and Fei did not demonstrate behaviours that fell within the authoritarian leadership (Blase & Anderson, 1995) or a “power over” (Fennell, 1999, p.25) approach. Both Qin and Fei stated that they were unwilling to use their positional power, like dictators, over others. While they acknowledged the legitimate basis of their power as school principals, they were reluctant to call upon this type of power-based strategy. Instead of using their authority, they were more likely to use influence (Southworth, 1995). In commenting on school principals in Mainland China, Z. Zhang and Wu (2005) claim that principals should avoid using their authority to control others. Qin and Fei used a number of other sources of power such as individual personality, reputation and knowledge. Of note is that they exhibited a different preference in terms of specific power utilisation. In light of Blase and Anderson’s (1995) four leadership approaches, Qin’s power utilisation was similar to a closed transformative approach: Adversarial leadership, while Fei’s use of power resembled an Open transactional
approach: Facilitative leadership. Both of these will be considered in more detail.

**Qin: Closed transformative approach: Adversarial leadership**

Driven by her personal vision of what constitutes a good school, Qin strove to transform a traditional hierarchical school climate into an authentic learning community for students and teachers so that both students and teachers could experience the joy of learning. According to Blase and Anderson (1995), in a closed transformative approach leaders undertake active change to promote their vision. Critical to this approach is a moral agenda (Blase & Anderson, 1995). This applied to Qin as she held a very strong moral commitment to her vision and she promoted and pursued her vision and goals mainly via a power over approach (Blase & Anderson, 1995). However different from the pure form of power over as in authoritarian leadership, she influenced and motivated staff to follow her moral agenda that involved student welfare and betterment. In some respects, adversarial leadership is akin to a benevolently dictatorial style (Jie.Lin & Wu, 1999).

In Qin’s school, there was little doubt that she had a direct and strong influence on nearly every aspect of the running of the school. As one of the educational experts in teaching and learning in her field, Qin played a role as a leading figure in supervising the teaching and learning in TPS. She directly supervised teaching and learning and extended her educational philosophy through her day-to-day dialogue with staff. She was able to exert her strong influence on teachers based on her extensive knowledge of teaching and learning. It was evident that her status as an educational expert was a crucial source of her power. French and Raven (1959) refer to it as expert power (cited in Lintner, 2008).

In addition to her strong moral commitment and knowledge base that saw her as a revered educational expert, Qin’s influence on teachers was gradually built over time and consolidated through her modesty, honest personality and her strong commitment to build a good school. These attributes are said to constitute referent
power since they relate to personal commitment and personality (French & Raven, 1995, cited in Lintner, 2008).

One of Qin’s key goals was to build an authentic learning community. To achieve this goal, she perceived that she had to have a direct say in controlling and overseeing almost all of the daily work at TPS. As Blase and Anderson (1995) state, adversarial leaders are usually paternalistic and charismatic. It could be said that Qin used both a paternalistic and charismatic style. She was revered by teachers who described her as a “kind mother” and “strict father”.

**Fei: Open transactional approach: Facilitative leadership**

Blase and Anderson (1995) argue that an open transactional approach which results in facilitative leadership depicts leaders who maintain the status quo of the school’s organisation, as well as conducting initiatives that need improvement. Fei’s overarching goal of leadership in YPS was to maintain stability of YPS and its existing achievement. Yet, at the same time, she also appeared to advocate change to pursue further excellence of YPS. For her, the position as school principal implied strong accountability to the parents, to the community and even to the broader society of China. To achieve her goal of leadership as a school principal of YPS, she mainly employed a facilitative style as she exerted her influence through building a shared school vision, building a school management system and delegating some leadership activities to her teacher leaders. Her way of using power was similar to a power through approach which is characterized by working through others to reach desired goals (Fennell, 1999).

As Blase and Anderson (1995) indicate, leaders who utilise a facilitative leadership approach may also use a power over approach when it is warranted. This seemed to apply to Fei as she kept a tight control over most of the management activities in YPS even though she did not directly participate in the implementation of specific tasks. She used her legitimate position power to build school systems to manage the
work of all staff. Her relationship with staff was formal in the sense that it was akin to a “contractual relationship” since articulated rules and clearly expressed guidelines were used to guide staff members’ behaviours (Blase & Anderson, 1995, p.16). Fei exerted her power to help her achieve influence among staff. She assigned senior school leaders to work with her as allies. By working with and through them and offering her support to them, she conveyed her influence to teachers and other staff.

Similar to Qin, Fei made full use of her knowledge power to exert her influence among teachers. Yet, her knowledge power resided not so much in the field of teaching and learning (like Qin) but was more evident in her work as an effective administrator. She developed her knowledge of educational administration through more than ten years’ teaching experience and by her post-graduate studies both in Chinese and overseas universities.

It was apparent that both Fei and Qin did not exercise leadership referred to by Blase and Anderson (1995) as “open transformative style: Democratic/ Empowering leadership” (p.21). In this approach, leaders share power and empower others to contribute democratically to the school’s management. This approach can also be described as “power with” (Fennell, 1999, p. 27). The findings from the current study do not support the findings of some research on female leaders that has shown they operate within a power with mode, sharing power, sharing decision making, and encouraging collaboration at all levels (Carr, 1995; Fennell, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Henderson, 1997; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001)

Yet the findings of the current study provide strong support for the arguments of researchers in the field of female leadership that suggest that female leaders are not all the same; they differ due to their different cultural background, race and class position (Blackmore, 1999; Collard, 2007, 2001; Helgesen, 1990; Pacis, 2005; Peters, 2003; Reynolds, 2002). That Qin and Fei used more power through and
power over (i.e. adversarial leadership) rather than power with needs to be understood within the broader cultural context of China, which is a high power distance country. More of these ideas will be discussed later in the chapter.

In summary, Qin and Fei endeavoured to use their power as school principals wisely and carefully. They did not show any signs of using an authoritarian approach or power over approach; rather they drew upon their expert power and their referent power to influence others. However Qin and Fei were different in terms of their preference for how they used power. Following the categorisation of Blase and Anderson (1995), Qin’s approach was akin to a Closed transformative approach: Adversarial leadership, while Fei’s use of power resembled an Open transactional approach: Facilitative leadership. Driven by her vision to create an authentic learning community for students and teachers, Qin strove to transform her school and directly controlled its management. In contrast, Fei’s overarching goal of leadership was to maintain the school’s stability and its existing high achievement. Therefore, she mainly employed a facilitative style by creating a stable and strong school management system whereby she delegated leadership to her teacher leaders.

**Dealing with risks and challenges**

The final practice that is considered here is dealing with risks and challenges. Currently in the worldwide literature about school leadership, there is a consensus regarding the increasing complexity of the school context and the challenges that school principals face (e.g., Day, 2000; DiPaola, 2003; Duignan & Collins, 2003; Xiufang. Wang, 2003; Wong & Cheng, 1995). China is no different as a number of commentators (see Jing. Lin, 1999; Xiufang. Wang, 2003) have underscored this point particularly since the commencement of educational reform in 1985. Others have highlighted a number of challenges and risks for school principals due to decentralization and school-based reforms (Yufang. Li, 2005; Yixian. Li, 2006). In China, as elsewhere, parents have exerted pressure on schools to ensure that their children receive good marks (Y. Peng, 2004).
The current study found that Qin and Fei faced a variety of challenges in their day-to-day activities even though their schools were recognised by their peers and superiors as being “effective”. Of interest was that both principals were reluctant to talk about any specific challenge or risk they faced in the principalship. This may be explained by the point that they did not wish to admit either of their schools faced any difficulties. Qin did not want others to think that her school had a bad reputation or was disorderly in any way. Her denial to talk about the risks was an attempt to protect her school, similar to a “benevolent parent” protecting his/her child. Fei’s reluctance could also be construed as her wanting to protect the excellent reputation of her school, excellent not only in China but also internationally.

Their reluctance to expose their risks and challenges did not mean they shirked away from dealing with challenges or risks as they faced them. Data from other sources such as document analysis, interviews with teachers and senior teacher leaders, and interviews with their superintendents revealed that they were open to change and were proactive in solving conflicts. Their openness and willingness to solve conflicts echoed the findings of Klecker and Loadman (1996) regarding the women principals in their study. Rather than focus on any particular difficulty, both Qin and Fei displayed a positive and forward-looking attitude and philosophy to dealing with challenges. Both believed in themselves, were “emotionally mature” (Duignan & Collins, 2003) and gave the impression that they could handle any problems that could potentially arise. It seemed they did not want to be viewed as de-energised by past difficulties.

Yet, both principals did speak in general terms about the way they handled risks in the past. Qin’s approach was to treat any problems in a peaceful way without imposing too much pressure on her. She pursued tasks that were manageable for her within her proximal zone. Her aim was to build a harmonious working environment characterised by good relationships with staff and thus minimise the potential for
difficulties. This was similar to the female principals in Zen’s (2004) study who underscored the importance of harmonious relationships with staff. Fei set many professional goals for herself and challenged herself to keep learning to help her to improve in her work. Her strong self-faith helped her to re-energise. Both Fei and Qin undertook a variety of strategies in their lives to help them stay healthy both physically and psychologically.

Feminist research over the last couple of decades has revealed that women in leadership positions face many challenges and barriers due to their gender (Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2002; Coleman et al., 1998; Hilliard, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1999; Trujillo-Ball, 2003). Of note in the present study was that both Qin and Fei indicated that they did not confront any difficulties due to their gender. Nor did they state that they experienced any barriers in relation to their career progression unlike women leaders in other studies (Pounder, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989; Wyatt, 1992).

Both of them suggested that being a female leader has advantages and they referred to the characteristics that some women have such as caring for others and creating nurturing environments. However, Qin pointed out that there was a negative side to femininity and it included vulnerability, weakness and emotional behaviour. For her, female leaders should avoid showing these negative attributes.

Of importance was that Qin and Fei acknowledged that they had a double responsibility as women principals: firstly, they were principals and, secondly, they were mothers / wives who were responsible for their families. For instance, Qin indicated she felt guilty because she was not able to give more time to her family. Fei acknowledged she had to work harder because of her family responsibilities. However, they did not view these two kinds of responsibility as contradictory. Like the findings of other research that discovered women need to balance their family and professional responsibilities (Coleman, 2002; Reynolds, 2002; Turner, 2004; Zen, 2004; Zhong, 2004), both Qin and Fei noted that balance was something they strove towards. The support of their families helped them to achieve this balance.
In summary, both of Qin and Fei faced a number of challenges in their principalship. Instead of dwelling upon them, their preference was to be pro-active and work towards resolving them. While both principals displayed a positive and forward-looking attitude to dealing with challenges, they drew upon different types of strategies to deal with them. Unlike the findings of some feminist research, Qin and Fei claimed they had not faced specific barriers or challenges due to on their gender. They did concede, however, that as women principals they had to endure a double responsibility: work and family.

Summary

In response to the first research question asked in this study, five core leadership practices engaged by Qin and Fei (vision building, ethical considerations, teaching and learning, power utilisation, and dealing with risks and challenges) were identified and discussed. The daily practices of Qin and Fei’s leadership styles were found to be consistent with some prior research investigating female school principals. In the following part, their leadership practices are further explored by addressing research question 2 which focuses on the factors which impact upon these leadership practices.

7.4. Question 2: interplay of multiple factors and leadership practices

In this section, an examination of critical influential factors that impacted on the leadership of Qin’s and Fei’s is conducted. These influential factors encompass two broad parts: the contextual factors and the individual principals’ factors. In light of the conceptual framework, the contextual factors discussed include the Chinese cultural context, current societal context of Mainland China, and the organisational context of each school. As with the prior section, the five core leadership practices (vision building, ethical considerations, teaching and learning, power utilisation, and
dealing with risks and challenges) guide the discussion.

For clarity, the Chinese cultural context and societal context are discussed separately, although they are closely associated. In this study, the Chinese cultural context exclusively refers to the traditional and enduring values and norms of Chinese society; the societal context of Mainland China largely relates to the societal situation of the PRC since the economic reform in 1978; the organisational context involves the internal school organisational situation and the external community, which closely surrounds the school. The reason for considering these factors is that (a) traditional Chinese values and norms still have a strong influence over contemporary Chinese society, (b) the two female school principals started their career in the economic era of the PRC, and (c) the external community of each school was closely related to each school’s internal organisational context and had an increasing impact on the inner organisational contexts of schools. The individual principal factors relate to the personal values and leadership character which each principal gradually formulated in her previous career experiences. The discussion in this section addresses Research Question Two.

**Chinese cultural context**

In Chinese history, traditional Chinese culture had exerted a dominant influence over Chinese society. Although it was almost destroyed under Mao’s regime, its influence has been gradually rebuilt in Mainland China since 1980s. The enduring values and norms in traditional Chinese culture are embedded in Chinese society and exert an influence implicitly. Dimmock and Walker (2005) indicate that education is a dynamic process which is bounded in a certain society and culture. It is influenced by the cultural tradition and values of the society. The legacy of traditional Chinese culture is still evident in the education systems in the PRC (Wong, 2006). The current findings revealed that the leadership practices of Qin and Fei were influenced by traditional Chinese culture in the following ways.
First, the study found that teaching and learning were greatly emphasised by Qin and Fei in their daily principalship. Their emphasis on teaching and learning reflected the broad cultural tradition of China where education is valued in the whole society. According to Confucius, whose doctrine dominated Chinese culture for centuries, education is an important way to cultivate virtues of people and build morally binding social relations (Wong, 2001). In traditional Chinese society under Confucianism, social members were tied to a hierarchical configuration through which five cardinal role relations between an emperor and his subject (or boss-subordinate), father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and friend-friend were established. This hierarchical configuration was characterized by a dominant-subservient relationship which underscores authority, obedience, and loyalty (Jia.Wang, 2008). To transfer this social order and consolidate the rule of the emperor, education was highlighted at the state level. In addition, at an individual person level, education also played a crucial role in achieving social mobility in the hierarchy (Cheng, 2001).

It is because of the significance of education for the state and the individual person, education has constantly been highlighted in Chinese society. Within this cultural context, it is therefore not surprising that educators in this system have to strive to improve teaching and learning. As the key leader of schools, Qin and Fei inevitably paid a lot of attention to teaching and learning. However it is worth mentioning that their strong emphasis on teaching and learning was also due to the influence of other more direct influential factors, such as the organisational context and the current societal contexts of the PRC which more closely circumscribed the leadership practices of school leader. These factors are discussed in the next sections.

Second, due to an emphasis on virtue building and a morally binding social order in traditional Chinese culture, Chinese education has a preference for moral education and political purpose (Redding, 1990; Wong, 2006). This preference of Chinese
education seemed to influence the ethical considerations of Qin and Fei. In Section 7.3 it was revealed that Qin and Fei both had a strong ethical awareness in their leadership and practised ethical behaviour in their day-to-day principalship. Such orientation toward ethical awareness could be attributed to Confucius’ contention that people should keep on building their virtues. It may be that the moral standard set for people in Chinese society, which both Qin and Fei exhibited, impacted on the principals’ ethic of care to others. According to Confucianism, people should be friendly to each other.

Furthermore, because education in Chinese society is associated with the purpose of transferring a morally binding social order among people and establishing a morally binding united society, educators within this system are expected to fulfil their ethical obligation in this respect. Not surprisingly, Qin and Fei assumed their ethical obligation to promote ethical behaviours in staff and children. This manifestation was especially evident in Fei’s leadership practices where, she launched a student moral programme to foster the polite behaviours and proper manners of children.

Third, Chinese traditional culture has also exerted some influence over the leadership of Qin and Fei in terms of power utilisation, and vision building. Some researchers of Chinese culture have demonstrated that Chinese society under Confucianism exhibited an emphasis of respect for authority in a hierarchical social configuration (e.g., Cheng, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). In light of Dimmock and Walker’s (2005) categories, Chinese society falls into the category of “power-concentrated” which means power is possessed by a small number of people who hold resources. Dimmock and Walker indicate “high power-concentrated societies tend to accept the unequal distribution of power” (p.30). Thu, influenced by this power orientation, both Qin and Fei tended to maintain control over the staff in their schools though they did not wield their authority over others like a dictator.
Qin’s preference was to take a transformational-power over style of power utilisation where she tightly controlled all the management and leadership in her school like a benevolent patriarch. In Fei’s school, although she delegated some of her leadership in terms of the teaching and learning to other staff members, this did not mean that her power was distributed in her school organisation. In fact, Fei still had strong control over the leadership practices in the school. It may be for this cultural influence that both Qin and Fei did not exercise a power with or democratic approach with organisational members.

This finding regarding Qin’s and Fei’s approach to power utilisation resonated with the research of Wong (2007) who conducted case studies on two successful school leaders in Shanghai. His study found that the two school principals used a “top-down” style to manage their schools although some consultative processes were used to invite teachers’ participation in decision making. He concluded that this style of management is consistent with Chinese culture.

In addition, regarding the vision building dimension, it seems that Qin and Fei’s emphasis on using a common direction to guide their school and their focus on creating a harmonious organisational climate was influenced by one of the characteristics of Chinese society under traditional Chinese culture, i.e. collectivism or group-oriented unified social configuration. This refers to the importance of the collective rather than individuals (Cheng, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

Moreover, in light of Dimmock and Walker’s (2005) category of culture, Chinese society can be viewed as one that emphasises holistic relationships. In this society, interpersonal relationships are widely used to constrain people’s behaviour rather than formal and structured rules which are applied to everyone equally. In Qin’s leadership, this cultural influence was prominent. For instance, she said she led her school by creating harmonious relationships with staff rather than adopting a fixed strategic plan. Tracing back to Chinese traditional culture, it seems Qin’s preference
in this respect was influenced by the natural thinking of Taoism which emphasises things are done properly by following natural forces rather than by imposing too much non-natural rules. At this point, Fei’s preference to use a formal and structured strategic plan was not consistent with this orientation of Chinese traditional culture. This difference between Qin and Fei’s leadership practices demonstrated that cultural factors do not have the same influence on people's behaviour in the same way.

**Societal context of the PRC**

Since the establishment of the PRC, communism has dominated the society in mainland China. In the first three decades of the history of the PRC, Chinese society was characterized by the strong political control of the CCP over all aspects of the society. Guided by Maoism, the CCP strove to establish “an ideologically based egalitarian social order” in China (Guthrie, 2008, p. 77). Since the market-oriented economic reform in 1978, Chinese society and culture have changed drastically. In recent years, with the further integration of international competition, great change has taken place in current society in the PRC. Unlike the uniform control of the state-party over Chinese society under Mao’s regime, the current society of the PRC in this economic reform era has been characterized by less state control, more freedom of individuals, more openness to the outside world and the increasing influence of market factors. The changing societal context has had far-reaching influence over the lives of people within it. Influenced by the current changing society in the PRC, education has also been reformed to echo the changes of the economy and other fields. Educational reforms have meant new challenges and many changes for school principals.

There is little doubt that both Qin and Fei were influenced by the larger social and economic transformations that are moving China towards becoming a knowledge-based global competitive economy. A host of educational reforms since the 1980s
have pointed to the explicit ways in which school leaders are required to develop a generation of children who can contribute to the nation’s development and enhance the sustainable progress of China’s economy. Educational reforms such as new school governance arrangements and developing new modern curricula that go beyond traditional teaching and learning approaches are among these reforms that have had important implications for the work of school principals. In terms of governance, school principals have been afforded new decision making responsibilities in relation to budgeting, hiring and firing staff, and granted autonomy to establish a management system within their schools to work with staff, and the autonomy to set goals and visions that are in keeping with the flavor of national goals for their respective schools. The case studies of Qin and Fei revealed the different ways in which both leaders interpreted the educational reform initiatives and how they sought to actively operate their own system of managing their schools.

An important influence of the educational reform was well-demonstrated by the strong emphasis Qin and Fei placed upon creating “education quality” in their respective schools. The aspect of educational reform that both Qin and Fei focused on was enhancing teaching and learning activities in the school by supporting and developing their teachers’ capabilities. The tradition of valuing education in Chinese culture has constantly influenced Chinese society except during the period of the Cultural Revolution. In current Chinese society, this tradition has been underscored because of the increasing recognition of the value of education for national economic development, social progress and the international competition of the PRC (Ministry of Education of Education of the PRC, 1998). For individuals, the role of education has been also acknowledged.

Apart from the traditional role of education to enable upward mobility for Chinese people, in the current society of the PRC, education is seen as an important means to add to the competitive capacity of individual people in the market-oriented
economic reform era. In the market-oriented economic reform era, instead of the strong control of the state-party over the whole society, free market principles have been adopted in many aspects of the society of the PRC. Under these circumstances, individual people who used to be tied to the hierarchical and reliable social system in which the state-party took much accountability for the lives of its social members now have to take more responsibility for their own welfare (Guthrie, 2008). Therefore, to compete with others in the job market, people have to equip themselves with sufficient capacity.

This increasing competition in current Chinese society has contributed to a strong emphasis on education by individuals. Furthermore, this emphasis on education by individual people has been exacerbated by the implementation of One Child Policy in the PRC. To prepare the only child in the Chinese family for a competitive future, parents impose high expectations on the education of their children. This has impacted on the teaching and learning activities of schools. That is, educators in schools are accountable for the learning performance of their students. In particular, principals are required to provide educational programs which meet the expectations that parents have for their children’s learning outcomes.

It may be because of these external demands that Qin and Fei prioritized teaching and learning activities and seriously fulfilled their ethical responsibility to the community and the parents. Moreover, it may be for their understanding of the increasing challenging jobs of teachers in current Chinese society that they exhibited their ethic of care to the teachers in their day-to-day principalship.

In addition, the societal influence over the leadership practices of Qin and Fei can also been seen from the visions which they proposed for their schools. In their school vision, both mentioned that their school should offer excellent education to their students and prepare them for international competition in the 21st century. This international orientation in their school vision echoes the international
integration of the society of the PRC. Starratt (1996) indicates that school principals are expected to know the contexts in which they work and what such contexts mean for school leadership. It seems that Qin and Fei’s school visions with an international orientation reflected their understanding of the wider external contexts.

Moreover, the way of using power by Qin and Fei demonstrated the influence of the societal context of the PRC on them. The society of the PRC is governed through a single-party system which the CCP controls the governing of the state (Guthrie, 2008). Under Mao’s regime, society was tightly controlled by the representatives of the state, the CCP, through a hierarchical and reliable social system, which consisted of family, work units or commune, and the state-party. Currently, although this tight control of the CCP has been reduced since the economic reform in 1978 and the previous reliable hierarchical social system has been changed due to a myriad of decentralised reform initiatives, the CCP, as the single ruling party, still holds most control over the society. Moreover, since the long tradition of the hierarchical social system in the Chinese society, current society in the PRC is still governed by a hierarchical system.

This kind of governing system influences all of the institutions and people within them. In the school field, the administration of the schools manifests this kind of governing system. A survey about the power distribution in schools which was conducted by Bo (2005) revealed that in the current Chinese school context, political power still exerts an important influence on school members’ behaviours, and this type of power has a strong impact on other types of power such as economic power, administrative power, economic power, academic power, and symbolic power (Bo, 2005). Similar to the finding of Bo (2005), the finding of this study demonstrated that Qin and Fei acknowledged the influence of political power in the society of the PRC and both carefully followed the policies of the CCP. Indeed following the political leadership of the CCP is fundamental for school principals in the PRC (Ministry of Education of PRC, 1991). In addition, the hierarchical social system of
the PRC is also exhibited in school management.

Another finding of Bo’s study (2005) indicated that a bureaucratic style of administration still dominates the management of schools in which strict hierarchical structures are frequently used to organise teachers and other staff members and where participation of staff and students is limited. In Qin and Fei’s school, although they emphasised the participation of teachers and other staff, they utilised a bureaucratic style of management through which they held strong control of what happened in their schools. In Qin’s school, although she especially designed a flat organisational structure to encourage more participation of teachers and other staff, the hierarchical school organisational structure was also used to manage the routine work in her school. In Fei’s school, a carefully conducted hierarchical school organisation was used to manage the work in her school. Given the size of the school and the fact that the school was located on three distinctive sites, Fei’s rationale for organizing the school in this way is understandable. Through the system, she worked through other teacher leaders and transferred her leadership through the hierarchical school administrative system. In sum, the way of power utilisation of Qin and Fei demonstrated the implicit influence of the whole hierarchical social system of the PRC.

**Organisational context**

To echo the economic reforms since 1978 and offer sufficient intelligent support for economic and social development, the education system in Mainland China has also experienced a series of reforms at all levels. These reforms provide the educational policy environment for schools and thus they affect the practices of schools and its external community environment. For instance, *Reform of China’s Educational System* (1985) promulgated the decentralization of education systems and devolution of administrative power and financial responsibility to the regional and local government. This elicits the system reforms at school level such as the
implementation of the Principal- or President- Responsibility System at primary and secondary level, the ongoing curriculum reform initiatives in primary and secondary schools, and school-based management in primary and secondary schools.

These reforms directly affect the school organisational contexts in which the leadership practices of school principals are exerted. One of the prominent manifestations is that the community in which the school is located is exerting increasing influence over school practices currently since the responsibility of developing education has been devolved into the locality and the schools are encouraged to obtain various support from the community to supplement the insufficient national education funds.

Currently the educational reform initiatives, the teachers, other staff and the students in schools, and the parents and other people in the community together constitute the organisational context around the leadership practices of school principals. The present findings revealed that the leadership practices of Qin and Fei were directly influenced by the organisational contexts of their schools.

Firstly their leadership practices in terms of teaching and learning demonstrated the direct influence of the educational reform initiatives, school community, and the situation of school. Since the late 1990s, educational reform in Mainland China has gradually transferred its attention to the improvement of the quality of education rather than simply pursue the growth of quantity of educational outcomes such as the rate of universalisation of nine-year compulsory education (Chu, 2008). The launch of “Quality education project” in one of the salient educational reform policies, Action Plan to Vitalize Education in the 21st Century (1998), is an example of this new orientation. This project promulgates that from 2000 a new modern curriculum framework should be built to transform the shortcomings of traditional teaching and learning styles (Ministry of Education of PRC, 1998). Since the issue of the document, a lot of attention has been given to curriculum development and
how to improve teaching and learning activities in schools. The emphasis of teaching and learning has been underscored because of the enactment of the other two important educational policies including *Decision on Deepening Educational reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* in 1999 and *Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* in 2001 (State Council of PRC, 1999, 2001). Due to these polices, schools in Mainland China are currently involved in research on how to improve teaching and learning in schools. As school leaders, school principals are required to play an active role in managing and leading teaching and learning activities in their schools (Yufang, Li, 2005).

The strong attention to teaching and learning activities in Qin’s and Fei’s school also reflected the influence of this new educational reform orientation. In addition, their leadership practices in terms of teaching and learning were also influenced by the factors in the community. These community factors included the factors from parents of students and from the academics which have direct or indirect influence over the schools. As established in earlier chapters, both Qin’s and Fei’s schools were located in a district in which the parents of students were well educated and imposed high expectations on students’ learning outcomes. As for the specific community in which each school was located, the community of Fei’s school was famous for the constellation of parents who held higher degrees. It may be due to the background of parents of students that both principals focused on the teaching and learning quality in the schools. Thus as school principals, both Qin and Fei were required to meet the demands of these parents. Although an emphasis on teaching and learning is part of Chinese traditional culture and an urgent social demand of current society of Mainland China, the high educational backgrounds of the parents of children who attended the two schools seemed to exert increasing pressure on improving teaching and learning in the schools. Therefore, under these circumstances, it was not surprising that Qin and Fei prioritized teaching and learning.
Apart from the influence of parents, it is worth noting that academics or researchers from the scholarly community also influenced the leadership practices of Qin and Fei. An example was when Qin and Fei encouraged their teachers’ involvement in the research programme as a means to promote teachers’ professional development and to help them solve problems in their teaching practice. The emphasis on teachers’ involvement of research and improvement are claims which are advocated in the academic community in the PRC (e.g., Qiu, 2005; Xu, 2005).

Another example of this influence of the scholarly community over their leadership practices can be seen from the current principals’ training programmes in the PRC. Since the 1990s, principal training has been identified as an important way to improve the professional capability of school principals in the PRC. These training programmes provide school principals with knowledge and skills in educational leadership such as knowledge of psychology of leadership, curriculum development and curriculum reform, how to communicate with teachers, how to motivate teachers (Wu & Ehrich, 2009). Moreover they provide an opportunity for principals to attend seminars with other school principals and short visits to schools in the PRC or in other countries or regions outside the PRC. These training programmes for school principals at different stages of their career prepare and enhance school principals’ knowledge that keeps them informed and up-to-date. Since both Qin and Fei had experienced these training programmes, it is not surprising that their specific leadership practices were influenced by the scholarly community. For instance, the way Fei built the school vision and developed strong senior management teams demonstrated her systematic knowledgebase in educational leadership. Furthermore, both Qin and Fei spent a lot of time networking with researchers, academics, and professors in the scholarly community.

In addition to Qin and Fei’s leadership practices in terms of teaching and learning were influenced by the organisational context of each school, the ways they used power were also influenced by the organisational context. Under the current Chinese
educational reform, the nature of school principalship has been changed since the devolution of educational administration and financial responsibility (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985). Unlike previous times when school principals were viewed as officials in the bureaucratic government system of Mainland China, currently school principals are considered to be professionals, like teachers, doctors, and lawyers. An implication of this changing perspective is that school principals should not wield their power like autocrats; rather as professionals who have exclusive knowledge and skills (W. Huang, 2005), it is preferable for them to use their expert power.

The findings of this study revealed that both Qin and Fei acted as professionals who exerted their influence as experts in their field. Moreover, influenced by the different internal organisational contexts, Qin and Fei took different approaches to exert their power. For Qin, since TPS was a newly built regular school and teachers of TPS were not as experienced as those in key primary schools, she held a tight rein over the work to make sure the school had an excellent performance. As a leading figure in her field, she used her personal vision to guide the development of TPS. Different from Qin’s power over approach, Fei used a power through approach to manage her school. This was influenced by the organisational context of YPS. As a key primary school with long standing excellent teaching tradition, teachers within it normally had expertise in their own subject. Thus in this organisational context, it was better to work with these expert teachers rather than dictate what they should do or not. Fei’s employment of a facilitative style was consistent with the organisational context of YPS.

**Individual experiences**

In addition to the contextual factors which influenced the leadership practices of Qin and Fei, both their personal and professional values which they formulated in their previous career experiences also had an impact on their leadership practices. The
influence of their personal and professional values on the five dimensions of their leadership practices are discussed as follows.

Firstly, each principal drew upon their value position to influence and build their vision for the school. For Qin, her vision about school was related to a harmonious and friendly school climate and building an authentic learning community for students and teachers. This vision seemed to be influenced by her caring family upbringing and her professional experience in the primary schools where she started her teaching career. In that first primary school, she experienced the friendly and collaborative relationship with her peer teachers and the supportive leadership style of the principal in that school. This experience in her early professional career laid the base for her preference for a harmonious, collaborative and supportive school climate when she was in the principalship. In addition, her sequential career experiences of participating in a national research programme about curriculum development and teaching and learning contributed to her deep understanding about teaching and learning. It was these research experiences that changed her traditional thinking about teaching and learning and contributed to her thinking about how to build an authentic learning community for students.

Fie exhibited similar patterns. Her early years and education experience laid the bases for her preference over a more disciplined working style since she was born in a family in which discipline and moral order were emphasised. In addition, her professional experiences at YPS, a school famous for its long standing strict teaching tradition and excellent student academic performance, contributed to her emphasis on designing and implementing a systematically strategic plan to achieve excellent teaching and learning in addition to building the school’s international reputation.

Secondly, their previous experience also contributed to their ethical considerations and actions. Qin’s strong ethical considerations about building an authentic learning
community for students and teachings was due to her deep understanding about
teaching and learning constructed through her expertise as a teacher and experiences
in research. It was evident that her ethical awareness went beyond merely serving
the public through offering a safe and secure schooling environment for students;
she exercised an ethic of care. While for Fei, her long time work experience in YPS,
framed her ethical considerations. Influenced by the strong school tradition of
valuing education and meeting obligations to both the parents of children and the
wider society, Fei’s ethical considerations appeared to be strongly contractual
(Ehrich, 2000). Yet, it is important to mention that an ethic of care was a strong ethic
evident in their leadership practices and this ethic is often associated with their
gender. Both acknowledged that as females, their gender contributed to their caring
for others.

Thirdly, their leadership practices in terms of teaching and learning were influenced
by their personal and professional values. Both Qin and Fei were born in the period
of the Cultural Revolution in the PRC during which knowledge, and teaching and
learning were devalued (Sautman, 1991; Swetz, 1973). The Cultural Revolution
caused the loss of a proper education for many students during that period (Jing. Lin,
1999). Although both Qin and Fei received some education during that period, it was
limited for them. It may be due to this experience that both valued teaching and
learning and made good use of opportunities that came their way to update their
knowledge bases. Moreover, their priority for teaching and learning may have
resulted from their previous career experiences. Qin had a strong passion for
teaching and learning and this led to her interest in directly supervising teaching and
learning where she spent a lot of her work time participating in teaching and
learning activities inside and outside her school. In contrast, for Fei, her leadership
practices in regard to teaching and learning seemed to be more driven by her
obligation as an educator. As a school principal in a traditional famous key primary
school, she knew well the important role of teaching and learning for the school
performance and reputation.
Fourthly, the ways of their power utilisation were associated with their previous experiences. In Qin’s school she used her power like a benevolent patriarch. This may be due to her previous teaching and research experience that helped her achieve a reputation in this field. Her expertise in teaching and learning enabled her to gain influence among teachers. In addition, it may also be due to her teaching experience that she knew only too well the hard work of teachers. Thus, she endeavoured to show her care and kindness towards them. Her previous experience prepared her to manage her school through a strong moral commitment to bettering the learning for children. For Fei, her way of using power demonstrated her values about school. Since her previous career experience contributed to her views that school should initially offer safe and secure education to meet the needs of the parents and fulfil its social obligation, she tended to prefer stability.

Finally, the personal attributes and values which were formed in the career experiences of Qin and Fei had a strong influence over the way that they dealt with their risks and challenges in their day-to-day principalship. As Duignan and Gurr (2008) have indicated, one of the crucial attributes of successful principals’ is a “can do” attitude. This was apparent in the work of Qin and Fei who exhibited a positive attitude in the face of challenges in their principalship. It is possible they adopted their positive attitude based on previous career experiences. Gronn (1999) indicates that on the way to leadership incumbency, individual leaders usually have to suffer various challenges and self-conflicts so as to build their self-belief. Both Qin and Fei identified some challenges which they faced and which they overcome and those challenging times in their work no doubt contributed to their psychological maturity.

The aforementioned discussion has revealed that Qin and Fei formulated their personal and professional values based on their early life experience and career experience. These values did influence their leadership practices. Yet, Qin and Fei were not passively shaped by the broader contexts and forces impacting upon their
lives; rather they proactively interacted with their contexts to shape and create the types of schools they envisioned. Although both worked within constraints and were required to conform to a variety of accountability requirements, they put their mark upon the culture of their respective schools. This finding confirms the work of Gronn (1999), Sugrue (2005b) who says that leadership results from interplay between biographical factors, the context, and individual agency.

**Summary**

This section further discussed the leadership practices of the two exemplary female school principals through understanding the crucial influential factors over their leadership practices. This discussion demonstrated that the contextual factors such as Chinese culture, the social situation in Mainland China and the specific organisational context of each school shaped the leadership career and leadership practices of the two exemplary female school principals. For instance, their strong commitment to teaching and learning manifested the cultural influence of traditional Chinese culture and societal influence of current society in Mainland China. Namely, the long tradition of valuing teaching and learning in traditional Chinese culture and the increasing recognition of education in current society of Mainland China shaped the personal value and professional value of the two female school principals and then contributed to their commitment to teaching and learning in their leadership practices. This finding is consistent with J. Zhang (2004) and Wong (2007) who found that Chinese societal culture influenced the leadership of school principals in their study.

In addition, this discussion revealed that the two exemplary female school principals’ personal and professional values, as well as their personal attributes, influenced their leadership practices. For instance, Qin’s vision of creating a happy learning place for students and teachers was shaped by her values on the importance of having a family-like harmonious school environment to facilitate learning; Fei’s vision to
cultivate good manners and morality of students in her schools was shaped by her strong sense of moral obligation. Moreover, the findings in this study also demonstrated that the personal attributes of the two female school principals, such as their passion in their work and their perseverance in the face of difficult situations also contributed to their leadership practices. This was particularly so in the maintenance of a positive attitude when dealing with risks and challenges in their principalship. This finding confirmed the argument of Sugrue (2005b) that it is the sustaining passion of individual school principals that contributes to their leadership.

It is worth mentioning that the influences from contextual and individual personal factors on the two principals’ leadership practices were largely inseparable. It was found that these two factors interacted in a dynamic way to facilitate the construction of the leadership practices of the two female school principals. In a nutshell, these contextual factors shaped the leadership practices of the two principals. However, this shaping of leadership style and practices was not merely a passive response to situations and occurrences. By contrast, the two principals played an active role in making good use of the contextual factors in order to create opportunities for the development of their schools.

Consistent with Wong’s (2007) findings of two successful secondary school principals in Shanghai, who had an excellent knowledge of the schooling system of Mainland China and made good use of contextual factors to assist in their work, so it was with the two exemplary female school principals in this study. Indeed, their active responses to contexts resonate with the argument of western researchers on school leadership regarding the balance of various contextual factors (e.g., Busher, 2006; Day, 2000; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Day & Leithwood, 2007).

Conclusively, the interaction of contextual and individual factors revealed in this study supported Day’s (2000) model of values-led contingency leadership. That is to say, the leadership of individual principals is constructed via a dynamic interactive
process in which personal values interplay with contextual factors contributing to the formation of leadership practice.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION
8.1 Overview

This chapter summarises the study presented in this thesis. It revisits the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework which was used to guide it and the research methodology. Following this is a discussion of the key findings and the implications for theory, policy, methodology and for the practice of school principals in Mainland China. The limitations of this study are also presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

8.2 Purpose of the study

Educational reforms in primary and secondary schools worldwide have changed the schooling context in which school principals work. In recent years the research on school effectiveness has demonstrated the importance of the leadership of school principals in bringing about improvements in student outcomes (Day & Leithwood, 2007). In Mainland China, since the educational reforms were initiated in 1985, the role of school principals has been emphasised in both the policy literature and the small but growing body of research in the field. To date, there has been very little research conducted on female school principals yet statistics revealed that in one large urban city in Mainland China, female leaders constituted more than 50% of the number of principals in that area (Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, 2005). Other regional statistics demonstrate a similar orientation (e.g., Coleman et.al, 1998). Given that females are working as principals in some urban regions throughout Mainland China, a study that explored closely their leadership practices under current educational reforms proved itself to be of interest.

The aim of the study, then, was to present the daily leadership practices of two female school principals. To achieve this, two exemplary female principals in an urban district in one region in Mainland China participated in the study. Specifically two research questions were asked: (a) what are their leadership practices in their day-to-day principalship? (b) what factors have influenced their leadership practices?
8.3 Conceptual framework and methodology

To guide the exploration of the leadership practices of the two exemplary female school principals and the influential factors impacting on their leadership practices, a conceptual framework was developed from the broad ranging literature in the field. The framework drew heavily upon the model of leadership as a career from Gronn (1999). According to Gronn, there are four sequential stages (formation, accession, incumbency and divestiture) leaders experience in their career. Gronn’s model is useful since he acknowledges that leadership does not exist within a vacuum; it is understood and shaped by the wider social, cultural and historical contexts. In order to investigate the specific leadership practices of the two exemplary female school principals, five broad dimensions of school leadership, synthesised from research and literature about school leadership, were incorporated into the conceptual framework. Based on the conceptual framework, the study investigated the specific leadership practices of each female school principal in light of the five dimensions of leadership and the influential factors by tracing back the career experiences of each female school principal and understanding the contexts in which her leadership practices were exerted.

In order to present a rich understanding of the leadership practices of the two female school principals, a qualitative exploratory case study methodology was employed in this study. This type of case study was chosen because, according to Yin (2003), this approach is suitable when little prior research has been conducted in this field. Furthermore, this type of case study is deemed relevant to answer research questions that focus on “what” questions. These characteristics of exploratory case study determined the use of this research methodology. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the leadership practices of the two female school principals, semi-structured interviews with the two female school principals, with teachers in their schools and their superintendent were conducted. Moreover fieldwork was undertaken and document analysis was utilised to augment the interview data.
8.4 Key findings of this study

The key findings of this study include responses to the two research questions. They are briefly summarized as follows:

**What are the leadership practices of the two female school principals?**

1. The current findings found that both Qin and Fei exhibited five key leadership practices (vision building, ethical considerations, teaching and learning, power utilisation, and dealing with risks and challenges). Driven by their personal vision, both strove to use a common vision to guide their schools. Both practised their ethical considerations in their daily work, exhibiting an ethic of care, of obligation and an ethic of learning. They both prioritized their role in leading teaching and learning and paid a great deal of attention to monitoring teaching quality. Teaching and learning were prominent in their leadership practices. In addition, both preferred to use their knowledge power and their referent power to influence others rather than to wield their authority over others. However unlike the argument in some western literature that indicates women school leaders prefer to empower others and share power with others (Carr, 1995; Fennell, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Henderson, 1997; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001), this study found both Qin and Fei held onto their power although they delegated some leadership to their other school leaders and teachers. The study also found Qin and Fei preferred to take a proactive attitude to face challenges and risks in their principalship rather than to restate or complain about the challenges and difficulties they faced. As for their gender, they did not conceive it as barrier to their career advancement; instead they suggested that being a female leader had advantages because some attributes of women such as caring for others are beneficial to leadership. At the same time, they also acknowledged the double responsibility women face in their dual roles...
as mothers and as principals. They indicated it was important to balance the
two aspects of responsibility.

2. Apart from these commonalities, Qin’s and Fei’s leadership practices
differed in a number of specific ways. Qin preferred to use an informal and
ad hoc approach to translate the school’s vision to teachers and to guide them
to create a harmonious school climate, while Fei designed a strategic plan to
guide the work in the school. Her preference was to implement a formal and
systematic approach to lead and manage her school. With regard to the
ethical considerations, Qin worked hard to transform the school from being a
bureaucratic structure to one that was an authentic learning community for
students. In contrast, Fei aimed to develop a learning community by
implementing incremental steps that would not pose any threat to the
existing stable system. Regarding teaching and learning, while both
principals were strong advocates, their approach was different. Qin preferred
to directly supervise teaching and learning and extend her thinking about
teaching and learning in day-to-day interactions with teachers, whereas Fei
exerted her role in teaching and learning by working with and through her
management team and monitoring their work. As for power utilisation, Qin’s
power utilisation was similar to a “closed transformative approach:
Adversarial leadership”, while Fei’s use of power resembled an “open
transactional approach: Facilitative leadership” (Blase & Anderson, 1995,
p.18). Revered by teachers who described her as a “kind mother” and “strict
father”, Qin strove to transform her school and directly controlled its
management. Fei mainly employed a facilitative style and exerted her
influence by using a more formal approach to building a shared school vision,
building a school management system and delegating leadership to her
teacher leaders. Both approached dealing with risks and challenges
differently. While Qin’s approach was to treat problems in a peaceful and
unflustered way, Fei dealt with difficulties by continuing to learn.
What factors have impact on their leadership practices?

1. Like the findings of other researchers (e.g., Cheng, 2001; Wong, 2001, 2006; J. Zhang, 2004) which indicate that traditional Chinese culture and its enduring values have influenced the Chinese education system and the leadership of school principals, this study found that the leadership practices of Qin and Fei reflected an indirect influence of traditional Chinese culture and its enduring values. For instance, their strong emphasis on teaching and learning reflected the important position of traditional Chinese culture which values education for its role in establishing a morally binding society and in promoting individual mobility (Cheng, 2001; Wong, 2001).

2. In addition to the influence of traditional Chinese culture, the social situation under the PRC had an important influence on the leadership practices of Qin and Fei. For instance, their emphasis on improving teaching and learning reflected the increasing recognition of education in terms of national competition and individual competition in the contemporary society of Mainland China. Moreover their power utilisation (i.e. both principals had legitimate power and were the main power brokers within respective schools) also provided evidence of the influence of the wider social context on them. The finding of this study echoed the research finding by Bo (2005) which revealed that in the current Chinese school context, political power still exerts an important influence on school members’ behaviours (Bo, 2005).

3. Apart from the indirect influence of traditional Chinese culture, and the influence of the social context of contemporary society in Mainland China, the school organisational contexts in which Qin and Fei worked exerted a direct influence on their leadership practices. This study found
that the ongoing educational reforms in primary and secondary and the increasing voice of the community and the scholarly community influenced the organisational context and then influenced their leadership practices. Their emphasis on teaching and learning and the preference of using their knowledge as a type of power reflected the influences of these organisational contextual factors.

4. There were individual biographical factors that shaped Qin’s and Fei’s leadership values and character and in turn affected their leadership practices. These factors led to their differentiated approaches in the five aspects of leadership practice. For instance, Qin’s strong commitment to teaching and learning and building a harmonious school climate can be traced back to her experiences in teaching, learning and research, and the supportive school climate of the primary school where she started her teaching career. Whereas Fei’s strict family upbringing in accordance with traditional Chinese culture, her systematic learning experiences in educational administration, and the strict teaching traditions she observed in the schools she worked contributed to her strong sense of duty to the community and country and her preference for a formal and rational approach to lead and manage others.

5. The study also found that the principals’ leadership practices were the result of the interplay between the broader contextual factors and their personal individual factors. This finding resonated with the contentions of Day (2000) who maintains that leadership is value laden and contingent upon the context. Both principals understood well the educational reform imperatives emerging from the broader societal and organisational contexts and both exhibited competence and skill in leading their schools. Driven by their personal values about how schools should look, they managed their schools successfully. Moreover, Qin’s
and Fei’s personal values and beliefs illustrated that they were “passionate” leaders (Sugrue 2005b) and it was that passion that helped to sustain them in their daily work.

8.5 Implications for theory of educational leadership

The study integrated five core leadership dimensions with Gronn’s (1999) leadership as career theory and built the conceptual framework for the study. The contribution of this study was that it adapted an existing theory by incorporating five core leadership dimensions and used these to explore the biographical, career and leadership experiences of two exemplary principals in Mainland China. Within Gronn’s theory is an acknowledgement of the wider social and cultural contexts in which leadership is constructed and understood. In recent times understanding educational leadership from a cultural perspective has attracted growing attention of theorists and researchers internationally (Cheng, 1995; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Furthermore, there has been increasing attention given to understanding educational leadership and management in a Chinese context (e.g., Bush, Coleman, & Si, 1998; Coleman et al., 1998; Wong, 1998, 2001; J. Zhang, 2004). The findings of this study contributed further understanding about the cultural factors that shape and impact upon the leadership practices of school principals in the context of Mainland China.

Apart from this cultural perspective to educational leadership, some researchers and theorists in the field suggest understanding educational leadership by focusing attention on an individual leader’s value and beliefs (e.g., Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993; Gronn & Ribbins, 1996; Hodgkinson, 1991; Sugrue, 2005a). In the current study, the leadership practices of the two exemplary female school principals were investigated by understanding their personal and professional values which they formulated in their biographical experiences. The findings in this study revealed that the personal values of Qin and Fei played an important role in shaping their
leadership practices. This finding thus may contribute to understanding leadership practices by focusing upon the personal values of leaders.

Furthermore, in terms of the exploration of gender and educational leadership, researchers and theorists indicate there is a need to develop a more sophisticated awareness about educational leadership which recognises the influence of gender, race, culture and class (e.g., Blackmore, 1999; Collard, 2007; Reynolds, 2002). In light of this argument, the current study endeavoured to capture the leadership practices of Qin and Fei by integrating factors of gender, culture and individual family background. The findings in this study revealed that gender is not the only construct that influences leadership. They confirmed that researcher should consider multiple factors such as gender, race, class and culture (e.g., Blackmore, 1999; Collard, 2007; Reynolds, 2002) in order to gain a richer understanding of educational leadership. Since there is little understanding about female school principals in Mainland China in the current international academic community, the findings in this study that explored in-depth cases of two principals in Mainland China make a contribution to better understanding gender and educational leadership.

8.6 Implications for policy

Current educational policy literature about school principals identifies what school principals should do and how they should lead. The contribution of this study was that it provided in-depth case studies revealing the leadership practices of two exemplary school principals. The findings of this study revealed that leadership is a more complex activity than policy would indicate; it is a complex, dynamic and human experience. In this study, the two principals made sense of the educational reform initiatives identified in various policies and implemented them in their own way. In addition, this study provided evidence about how the work of school principals is changing and complex. It also underscored the point that the work of female school principals seems more challenging due to the dual responsibility they carry being both females (and main caregivers in their family) and principals. Thus,
an implication for policy makers is the need for greater gender awareness when constructing policies. For instance, more concrete and specific initiatives should be developed to better support women principals who still tend to be the main caregivers in their families.

A series of policies from Mainland China (e.g., *Decision on Deepening Educational reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* (1999); *Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* (2001)) indicate that principals are instructional leaders and should be those key officers in schools responsible for directing the teaching and learning activities. The findings of this study indicated that both Qin and Fei were instructional leaders. Yet, the policy literature also indicates that principals are required to perform both managerial duties as well. A further implication of this study for policy makers is to recognise the increasing workload of school principals and that the expectation to be a manager and the main instructional leader in the school may not be realistic.

The finding of this study showed that Fei achieved her leadership of a large sized school by delegating her leadership to teacher leaders. An implication of the current study for policy makers then is to consider the notion that teachers can exercise leadership in a particular ways and can work in alignment with principals to achieve good school performances. This implication, however, needs to be sensitively viewed in the light of contemporary Chinese culture and the dominant “top down” view of leadership.

**8.7 Implications for practice**

This research makes an important contribution to scholarship about the leadership practices of successful female school principals in Mainland China. Firstly, it provided insights into their career trajectories, career choices, and the types of opportunities that emerged for them in their careers. It revealed the important role of mentors in supporting and promoting their development and opening doors for them
in relation to career change and mobility. The career experiences of the two female principals in this study are likely to be of interest to aspirant school principal candidates (both male and female) in terms of identifying the factors that may contribute towards career mobility; and in identifying a number of activities in which they might like to engage in an effort to design their own career journeys.

Secondly, the study revealed a rich and detailed case study of the two principals’ enactment of leadership. Although they had slightly different approaches to leadership, both were morally responsive leaders (Ehrich, 2000) who showed much commitment to their staff and students by their strong professional and moral ethics. An ethic of care was apparent in their dealings with teachers in the way they interacted with them, rewarded them, and supported their learning and development. In relation to children, both principals were themselves excellent teachers who were vigilant in building and supporting their teachers’ capacities and skills in order that the children would benefit. An important implication of this study, then, was its demonstration of how central ethics and ethical considerations are in the work and decisions of leaders.

Thirdly, the ethical considerations of both principals in terms of teaching and learning demonstrated the significant role of education in contemporary society of Mainland China in enhancing the competition of the country internationally and reinforcing Chinese nationalism (Kurlantzick, 2007). Therefore an implication of this study is that it demonstrates that school principals in the current society of Mainland China should realize their ethical obligations since the work they do makes an important contribution to the nation.

Finally, both principals in their daily work exercised power and influence in slightly different ways in their schools. By and large, their leadership style tended to be directive and top-down. Yet, in much of the western research and literature, top-down leadership approaches are rarely advocated; distributed or delegated forms of
leadership are those promoted. The implication of this finding reinforces the point that successful leadership is situational and contextual (Day & Leithwood, 2007). Most importantly, an implication of this study is that leadership practices such as power utilisation of school principals needs to be interpreted within the wider organisational, social, and cultural context. The findings regarding the leadership practices of the two exemplary leaders indicate that it is important for school principals to have a clear understanding about themselves as leaders, their strengths and the different contexts that are shaping their leadership practices.

8.8 Implications for methodology

An exploratory case study was used in this study to investigate the leadership practices and influential factors impacting upon those leadership practices of two female principals. This type of methodology was utilised since a more traditional methodology such as questionnaires would not have been appropriate to investigate the contextual factors in defining individual leaders’ behaviour (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996). In the current study, the leadership practices were explored through understanding the contextual factors and tracing back biographical experiences.

One important implication of the methodological approach that was used in this study relates to the challenges the researcher faced when using an exploratory case study. During fieldwork, in each school, the researcher found it was difficult to interview the two female school principals about their biographical experiences. Both were reluctant to discuss their early life or formative experiences. Early in the planning of this thesis, the researcher had intended to conduct life history case studies which rely on co-constructed conversations about participants’ biographical experiences and formative experiences. However, this did not eventuate because the school principals in this study were unwilling to share too much personal information with the researcher. A plausible explanation for their reluctance to disclose personal details may be cultural and due to the legacy of the Cultural Revolution (Spence, 1990). As a result of these challenges, the researcher used
another type of case study exploratory case study which was not reliant on co-
constructed in-depth conversations of a personal nature.

Not only were principals reluctant to provide personal information regarding their upbringing, but both of them were not prepared to allow the researcher to shadow them and only on one occasion was the researcher permitted to observe some public school activities which were related to teaching and learning. Again, a plausible explanation for this reticence was cultural.

Teachers were also not accustomed to seeing a researcher spend eight weeks in each school. This is not to say that researchers from universities do not conduct research in Mainland China, because they do. However the type of research they tend to use is quantitative. If and when such research is qualitative, it is rarely expected that a researcher will spend such a concentrated period of time in the field. The current study which was qualitative in nature and which required participants (the principals and teachers) to be interviewed and to share their opinions, thoughts and perceptions, was essentially foreign to them. Furthermore the curiosity of some teachers in each school about the researcher’s observations also indicated that they were not used to this type of research activity in their school. Their unfamiliarity with this process may help to explain why participants were reluctant to have their interviews tape-recorded. These challenges raise the issue of the necessity for researchers to consider the culture and previous research approaches used in the research site when designing research.

Although the researcher encountered a number of challenges during the fieldwork of this study, the nature and quality of the findings reinforced the point that qualitative research methodology has much merit to understand the professional lives of school leaders in Mainland China.
### 8.9 Limitations of this study

All research studies have limitations and this study was no exception. There were five limitations in this study that need to be acknowledged. Four of these related to the methodology and one was related to the theoretical perspective used. Firstly, this study was an exploratory case study that investigated the leadership practices of two exemplary female school principals in Mainland China. For this reason, the findings cannot be generalised. Thus, the implications the study raises for policy makers and practitioners need to be considered cautiously because of the research methodology used and the small sample of participants involved (i.e. 12 teachers, 1 superintendent and 2 principals). A second methodological limitation of the study related to the point that both principals were deemed exemplaray and both worked in urban schools that were perceived as highly effective by members of the wider community. Thus, the findings were revealing about two exemplary principals in urban areas; not all principals. It is likely that a study that explored principals working in rural areas with fewer resources may have yielded very different findings.

A third methodological limitation related to the possibility of researcher bias. The researcher endeavoured to minimise this bias by keeping a journal and recording key ideas, thoughts, and presuppositions. A fourth methodological limitation related to language. All data collected for this study (i.e. interviews, documents, fieldnotes) were in Chinese. This meant that the researcher was required to translate all of these materials into English. While the researcher endeavoured to check each and every translation, it is possible that during this process some errors may have been made and misinterpretations provided. The final limitation relates to theory. In this study, the theoretical framework used adapted an existing theory and incorporated five core leadership dimensions that were identified from the literature. While this perspective helped the researcher make sense of what was happening within the two sites, it also conditioned what the researcher saw. It is likely that other theories may have yielded other ways of making sense of the two principals’ leadership practices.
8.10 Recommendation for further study

In conclusion, the findings of this study identified and discussed the leadership practices of two exemplary female school principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China. It contributed further understandings of the professional lives of female school principals under current educational reform in Mainland China. At the same time this study provides some recommendations for further study in this field.

1. While this study focused on the leadership practices of two exemplary female school principals, it is recommended that future case studies be carried out that explore the leadership practices of exemplary male principals to determine if male principals enact leadership in different ways from female principals.

2. There is great disparity between regions and schools in Mainland China. It is recommended that future studies be conducted that explore the leadership practices of female school principals in rural and less developed areas with fewer schooling resources. Studies about female school principals in regular schools or less well-performing schools are also needed in order to gain a broader understanding regarding the principalship in different school contexts.

3. While this study focused on the leadership of school principals, it became apparent during the fieldwork of this study that teacher leaders exhibited leadership in both schools and played a liaising role between the principal and other teachers. It is recommended, therefore, that future studies explore the leadership of both female and male teacher leaders such as directors, deputy principals, and other senior leaders as a means of understanding how different types of leadership are played out in Mainland China.
4. As teacher leadership is a relatively new idea in China, it is recommended that research studies be conducted that explore the relationship between teacher leadership and principal leadership. This area of research seems particularly important given that devolution of decision making has become a feature of current educational reform in Mainland China.

5. Based on existing western literature, this study built a theoretical framework to understand the leadership practices of two female school principals operating in Mainland China. It is recommended that future studies be carried out that consider the use of this theoretical framework in other cultural contexts to enrich understanding of educational leadership from a cultural perspective.

6. As there is a dearth of statistical information regarding the representation of women school principals across most regions and localities in Mainland China, further research that accesses these types of statistics would be informative for policy makers in developing their succession plans.

7. Given the expectation that educational reform will be an ongoing concern for Mainland China (and for other countries in the world), it is recommended that further studies be conducted that explore the impact of particular types of reform, such as curriculum reform and changing governance arrangements, on the work and practices of school principals.

8. To date, there has been a small body of comparative research on the principalship worldwide. A recent exception is the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSP), alluded to in Chapter 3, that has provided comparative data about principal preparation across several countries including Mainland China. It is recommended that future comparative studies be conducted to explore the leadership practices of the principal, in
order to explore fully the commonalities inherent in successful school principalship worldwide as well as the differences.

9. The findings of this study revealed that there is increasing influence of principal’s professional development in Mainland China. However how to improve the effectiveness of principals’ professional development programmes so as to offer better intellectual support to enhance school principals’ practices needs to be further investigated. Moreover, currently there are few programmes which are customized to female school principals. Given the different life experiences of females and males, more studies about how to provide professional development support to female principals are also needed.
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Zen, Y. (2004). *Nüxiaoazhang de lingdao fangshi tanjiu: dui guangzhoushi mou putong zhongxue nüxiaoazhang de ge’an yanjiu [Female principal leadership
A case study on a female secondary school principal in Guangdong]. Unpublished master thesis, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, PRC.


Jan. 19, 2007

Dear District Bureau of Education,

I am a Doctor of Philosophy student in the Faculty of Education of Queensland University of Technology in Australia. Currently I am conducting a study regarding the leadership practices of female principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China. In order to implement my investigation, two primary schools will be selected as field school sites. An anticipated outcome of the study will assist a better understanding of the daily leadership practices of female principals in urban primary schools.

I will be very appreciative of your permission to access these two schools.

Yours Sincerely,

Wanjuan Zhong
Appendix B: Consent form

Leadership construction: An exploratory case study of two exemplary female principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China

Wanjuan Zhong

Doctor of Philosophy Student

Queensland University of Technology

Email: w2.zhong@student.qut.edu.au

Principal Supervisor: Dr Lisa Catherine Ehrich;

Associate supervisors: Dr Patricia Anne Fox; Dr Jan Millwater

Telephone: 83138 3059

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

• have read and understood the information sheet about this project;
• have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;
• understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team;
• understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
• understand that you can contact the research team if you have any questions about the project, or the Research Ethics Officer on 3864 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project;
• agree to participate in the project; and
• agree to audio recording of the interview.

Name:                                                                           Signature:

Date:
Appendix C: Information sheet

Description
The important role of school principals in primary and secondary schools has been emphasised in Mainland China due to the continuous educational reform initiatives since the 1980s. There has been increasing pressure on school principals as a result of the changing nature of their roles and growing accountability expected of them. Although a range of issues regarding principals in primary and secondary has been extensively discussed in Chinese academic circles, most writing in the field seems to lack the concern of the daily practice of principals. Moreover, there is little research on female principals in Mainland China.

By selecting two female principals in urban primary schools in one of the cities in Mainland China, the study plans to conduct an exploratory case study to explore the leadership construction of them in their life cycle. Semi-structured interviews with each individual female principal, with the teachers in each school, and with her superintendent; and other research techniques such as observation, document analysis will also be employed to obtain multiple insights about the leadership practices of each female principal. By exploring how the two female principals make sense of their leadership practices in their daily lives and in the specific organisational, social and cultural contexts, the study plans to present two in-depth cases about the professional lives of female principals in urban primary schools in Mainland China. The researcher will spend eight weeks in each selected school.

Expected benefits
It is proposed the study will provide a useful reference for further understanding principals’ practice and bridge the knowledge gap regarding the study of female educational leaders in Mainland China.
Risks

There are no risks associated with your participation in this project.

Confidentiality

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses. And you have the ownership of the tapes and the transcripts.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with district education bureau.

Questions / further information

Please contact Ms Wanjuan Zhong via email w2.zhong@student.qut.edu.au, if you require further information about the project, or to have any questions answered.

Concerns / complaints

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 83138 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project.
Appendix D: Summary of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Work place &amp; position</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Interview duration</th>
<th>Interview place</th>
<th>Interview theme</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>TPS; teacher</td>
<td>17/05/2007</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>Tea house outside TPS</td>
<td>Perception about principal’s leadership</td>
<td>07051715/TPS/Tinter01</td>
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<td>Hua</td>
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<td>07060311/TPS/Tinter02</td>
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<td>TPS; teacher</td>
<td>22/06/2007</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>TPS’s campus</td>
<td>Perception about principal’s leadership</td>
<td>07062211/TPS/Tinter03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang</td>
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<td>07051113/TPS/Tinter04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>22/06/2007</td>
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<td>School cafeteria</td>
<td>Early life experience</td>
<td>07062212/TPS/Pinter03</td>
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<td>YPS’s campus</td>
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<td>07092116/YPS/Tinter05</td>
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<td>Duration</td>
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<td>Oct, 11th</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
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<td>YPS; principal</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>superintendent</td>
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<td>Telephone interview</td>
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Appendix E: Semi-structured interview schedule

Interview questions with school principal

Theme: Career experiences of school principal

Interview questions:

1. Can you give a brief description about your professional career? When were you assigned to current principalship position? Before that what did you do?
2. Why did you choose to take up the principalship? Please describe your feeling when you were first assigned to the position of principal? Did you want to take your current position? Why
3. Did you confront some psychological conflicts then?
4. Do you think you have gained equal chance in your professional development? Why?
5. What is your opinion of the current system of principal recruitment?
6. How were you assigned to your current position? Please describe the situation at that moment? What credentials did you need then?
7. Please describe some significant events during your career experiences.
8. Can you nominate any significant others (e.g., colleagues, etc.) who were important for you during your career development?
9. What challenges have you confronted during your career development? What were your colleagues’ opinions about your accession to current position? How about the teachers and staff?
10. Do you think you can easily deal with your principalship now? How do you think of your current situation in the principalship position?
11. Currently, what challenges and opportunities have you confronted?
12. Do you have some plans for your future professional development?

**Interview questions with school principal**

**Theme:** Leadership practices

**Interview questions:**

1. How do you perceive your position as an educator and a principal in primary school?
2. What is your understanding of the nature of school organisation?
3. How do you perceive yourself as school principal and female school principal?
4. What is principalship like for you?
5. How do you perceive your power as a school principal and your authority?
6. How do you utilise your power?
7. Do you often communicate with the teachers and staff? How do you interact with them?
8. How do the teachers and staff perceive your leadership? Please give an example.
9. How do you perceive the basic educational reform? What is the impact of current educational reform on primary schools and the principalship?
10. What challenges have you confronted in your daily principalship?
11. How do you deal with the challenges?
12. What is important in your daily principalship and what constitutes the core work of school principals?
13. How do you perceive teachers’ professional development?
14. How do you perceive a learning community?
Interview questions with school principal

Theme: Early life experiences

Interview questions:

1. Can you generally describe your biographical experiences? Can you tell me something about your family background?
2. Do you still remember some significant events that happened during your family life when you lived with your parents?
3. When you were child, were your parents strict with you? What were their expectations of you?
4. Did you feel you were educated differently due to your gender? Can you give some examples?
5. Please describe some significant events between you and your teachers, your schoolmates, your friends in your childhood and when you were a student.
6. What kind of games did you play in your childhood?
7. Did you feel that you were treated differently due to your gender during your schooling?
8. What subjects did you like and which ones were you good at?
9. Do you think the societal and cultural context in which you grew up in and are now living has had an impact on your personality and your daily leadership practices?
Interview questions with teachers

Theme: Perception of leadership of female school principal

Interview questions:

1. Can you generally describe your career experiences?
2. Do you have any opportunity to communicate with your school principal?
3. Do you have any opportunity to participate in school management?
4. Are you happy working in the school, why?
5. How do you view the development of your school at present?
6. Please describe some events about your school principals’ leadership practices.
7. How do you perceive the leadership of your school principal?
Interview questions with superintendent

Theme: Perception of leadership of female school principal

Interview questions:

1. Can you generally describe the educational development of your district and the situation of the primary school?
2. What is your impression of the principal?
3. How do you perceive her leadership?
4. How do you perceive female school leadership?
Appendix F: Fieldnotes form

Time:         Venue:

Event:

No:

Theme:

Observation notes

Comments/Reflection:
## Appendix G: Example of the coding system

### Coding system in the first school (TPS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 07051715/TPS/Tinter01 | 07051715 refers to the time/ date (17 May, 2007 at 3:00 p.m (15)).  
TPS refers to the name of the first school;  
Tinter 01 refers to interview with Teacher 1 in first school. |
| 07060711/TPS/Pinter01 | 07060711 refers to the time/ date (7 June, 2007 at 11a.m (11)).  
TPS refers to the name of the first school;  
Pinter01 refers to the first interview with the school principal. |
| FN070515TPS   | FN refers to field note; 070515 refers to the time / date (May 15, 2007);  
TPS refers to the name of the first school. |
| D2TPS         | D2 refers to the second collected document;  
TPS refers to the name of the first school. |
Coding system in the second school (YPS)

07060309/YPS/Tinter02
07060309 refers to the time/ date (3 Jun, 2007 at 9:00 a.m (09)).
YPS refers to the name of the second school;
Tinter 02 refers to interview with Teacher 2 in second school.

07102514/YPS/Pinter03
07102514 refers to the time/ date (25 Jun, 2007 at 2 p.m (14)).
YPS refers to the name of the second school;
Pinter03 refers to the third interview with the school principal in second school.

FN071024YPS
FN refers to field note; 071024 refers to the time / date (Oct 24, 2007);
YPS refers to the name of the second school.

D1YPS
D1 refers to the first collected document;

Code of the interview with the superintendent

07102620/BJ/Sinter01
07102620 refers to the time/ date (26, Oct, 2007 at 8:00 p.m (20)).
BJ refers to the place of this interview;
Sinter 01 refers to the first interview with the superintendent.
Appendix H: Organisational structure and system of TPS

The organisational structure of TPS includes two lines which are supervised by the principal. One line concerns routine school management and within this line there are four parallel departments designed to manage the routine of TPS.

The first department is teaching and learning. It concerns all activities which related to teaching and learning in TPS. In this department, there are three senior leaders: Hui, Ya, and Wang. Hui is responsible for supervising the teaching and learning activities of all subjects to promote the quality of teaching and learning. Ya is responsible for coordinating the general affairs about teaching and learning, such as notifying weekly schooling activities, preparation for school examination. In addition, all the general administrative affairs belong to Ya. Wang is the assistant of the principal and assists in the work of Hui and Ya when they need it. The second department is moral and patriotic education. A senior leader, Xu is in charge of all the work relating to moral education and patriotic education of students. Most of student activities except for teaching and learning activities are arranged by Xu’s department. The third department is logistics. This department offers support to all schooling activities. It looks after school finances, teachers’ salary and personnel files, school facilities, school security, school clinic and school cafeteria. One senior leader, Bin is in charge of the department. Two financial staff members, one staff who manages all the personnel files and some other casual employees work in the department with the senior leader, Bin. The fourth department involves all the research activities in TPS. A senior leader, Pin is in charge of supervising the research activities and offering support to teachers’ teaching and learning.

Under the second level is the third level which consists of leaders of each grade and subject leaders of four subject groups. In TPS, there are six grades from Grade One to Grade Six. The four subject groups are Chinese, Mathematics, English and a
comprehensive subject group which includes other subjects except Chinese, Mathematics and English. These grade leaders and subject leaders play a role as liaison person between the senior leaders of each unit and the other teachers. Each grade leader looks after the schooling activities in each grade; each subject leader specifically organises the teaching and learning activities in that subject such as the weekly meeting of teachers in each subject. Chinese and Mathematics are the main subjects in primary schools and thus TPS has more teachers in these two subject areas. Two senior leaders are the subject leaders of these two subjects. Hui looks after Chinese and Wang looks after Mathematics. Under this level is the fourth level of the organisational structure. It consists of all other teachers who deliver classes to students every day.

The second line comprises four integrated teams which are linked with the departments in the first line. They are Research Team, Grade Team, Subject Team, and Interaction Team. The four-level management line maintains the routine management of TPS, while the four integrated teams were set up to promote communication between teachers. The integrate teams were lined with the activities in units in the routine management. For example, Research team is based on the department of research that conducts specific research projects of TPS, Grade team includes all the grades and conducts activities to promote the communication among grades. Subject team is linked with the department of teaching and learning and conducts teaching and learning activities for each subject. Interaction team organises some entertainment activities to offer opportunities for teachers to socialize with each other after work.
Level 1: Principal (Qin)

Level 2: Routine

Integrated team

Level 3: Grade&Subject leaders

Level 4: Teachers
Appendix I: Specific organisational structure of YPS

Principal (Fei)

Tianying campus
- T&L
- L
- M

Subjects & Grades

Teachers & Ancillary

YPS original campus
- T&L
- L
- M

Subjects & Grades

Teachers & Ancillary

Tianyu campus
- T&L
- L
- M

Subjects & Grades

Teachers & Ancillary
Description for the specific organisational structure of YPS

At YPS, Fei, the principal is at the top of the hierarchical structure. She is in charge of all the work across the three campuses. On each campus, a director was assigned to supervise the daily management of the campus such as teaching and learning. In Tianying campus, the deputy principal, Wang, acted as director of the campus; in Tianyu campus, a senior leader, Lin, looked after the management of that campus as director; in the original campus of YPS, Mei, acted as the director who was responsible for the daily management of the campus. Since the original campus was the headquarters of the school, Fei spent most of her time working there. She assisted Mei to look after the work of the campus.

T& L: Department of teaching and learning. In each campus, there is a senior leader who is in charge of the work in the department. The senior leader of the department of teaching and learning in the original campus of YPS also coordinates all the teaching and learning activities of YPS.

L: Department of logistics. The work in the department offers ancillary support to teaching and learning of the school. The work of finance, school safety and sanitary management, and school cafeteria is managed by staff in the department. In Tianyu campus and Tianying campus, there is one senior leader to look after the work in the campus respectively. In the original campus of YPS, there are two senior leaders to look after the work in the campus since there are more students enrolled at this campus. Although the department of logistics of each campus has the responsibility to manage the funds on each campus, Fei, as principal, oversees the work of this department.

M: Department of moral education. The work in this department offers education to students in aspects of patriotism, nationalism, socialism and communism and civics. In mainland China at the primary school level, socialism and communism education
embodies activities of the Young Pioneer organisation. Usually from Grade One, all pupils are required to join in the Young Pioneer organisation. A senior leader is in charge of the activities of Young Pioneer organisation. In recent years, since there has been an emphasis on moral education, and fostering good citizens by the CCP central government. For this reason, schools across the country are required to pay attention to the work of this department. In Tianyu campus and Tianying campus, one senior leader on each campus is assigned to look after the work. In the original campus of YPS, Mei and another teacher looked after this work.

Subject and grade leaders: In YPS, there are four subject areas. They are Chinese, Mathematics, English, and other subjects such as arts, music, science, and P.E. Chinese, Mathematics and English are the main subjects of students, and one subject leader is assigned to lead the specific teaching and learning activities in that subject. For the rest of the subjects, one subject leader is assigned to look after all the teaching and learning activities of these subjects. Like other primary schools in mainland China, there are six grades in each campus of YPS; a grade leader is assigned to coordinate the teaching and learning activities of each grade on each campus. Each campus of YPS had the same management in terms subject and grade. These subject leaders and grade leaders work closely with senior leaders of each department and act as important liaisons between teachers and senior leaders.
Appendix J: Physical environment of three campuses of YPS

The physical environment of the original campus

The original campus of YPS is a small sized campus in a congested urban community. Apart from four school buildings (one four-floor building, one three-floor building with a four-floor annexe, and a two-floor music building) with nearly forty cellar classrooms and nearly ten staff rest rooms and administrative offices, there is only a small school playground for students to play games. On the small campus with the large student population, the layout of classrooms and staff offices was carefully considered to make good use of each corner of the campus. The classrooms for the students from Grade One to Grade Three are positioned in the lower floors of the buildings (from 1st floor to 3rd floor). The P.E staff rest room is positioned in the first floor so that P.E teachers could conveniently deliver classes on the playground. To avoid the noise of music instruments during music classes, a two-floor building was especially placed a little further from classroom ward in a corner of the school playground. In the three-floor school building with a four-floor annex, some classrooms, administrative offices and some function rooms such as the multi-media conference room, the science rooms, the computer rooms, and library were converged. These function rooms are linked to a classroom ward in the three-floor building, but a pair of glazed doors separated the two areas.

During field work on the campus, the researcher observed that when some important school events were being held in the function room area, a staff member guarded the door to avoid students intruding accidentally and making noises (FN071013YPS). The administrative area and the classroom areas are separated by a pair of glazed doors. It seems students were not allowed to pass through the administrative area to function room area. The researcher did not see any students passing through the
administrative areas. They used another entrance to the function rooms. In YPS, students were required to walk quietly in and around the school buildings. On the original campus, the researcher often saw that senior leaders and teachers reminded students to walk quietly in school buildings (FN070928YPS).

A wall outside the school gate of the small campus has been decorated with a row of glazed bulletin boards to exhibit the students’ and teachers’ achievements in YPS. Inside the school, most corners of the school yard are adorned with basins of flowers or green plants. The walls of all the corridors inside the buildings are covered with Chinese ancient poems. The corridor in the administrative area is decorated with basins of flowers. In the entrance to the administrative areas and function rooms, the calligraphy written by a senior leader of the city has been hung on the wall to inspire the students of YPS. In the classroom area, or the outside wall of each classroom, was a small book shelf with books to encourage students to read books after class. The overall physical environment of the small campus is one that is tidy, attractive and practical.

The physical environment of Tianying campus

The school buildings of Tianying campus are stylish and located in the modern school playground of the campus. Inside the campus, there are a five-floor modern school building with bright and spacious classrooms, a superb entrance foyer and an ancient Chinese garden. The foyer to the classroom is decorated with the national flower of one country with which YPS has developed a sistership friendship. In the classroom area, two huge wall paintings which exhibit the harmony of human beings with nature is located in the hall of the school building. As with the decoration of the original campus of YPS, the outside walls of each classroom on this campus are also decorated with some display boards that illustrate aspects of Chinese culture and other cultures. The stairs in the building are decorated with some small boards that present information about different countries in the world. These knowledge boards are designed to create a learning environment to help students to learn and extend
The physical environment of Tianyu campus

The school buildings in Tianyu campus are the oldest and are approximately 50 years old. YPS had not spent too much money on renovation. The style of the campus was practical and student friendly. For instance, the height of the beds for students was adjusted to meet the body height of students in different grades. To encourage students to do physical exercises after class, some sports facilities are available at the front of the gate of the dormitory building. In contrast to the other two campuses, the old school buildings on this campus consist of two striking parts. One is the eight big golden Chinese characters encased on the wall near the entrance of the school campus. These Chinese characters state that students are expected to learn how to cooperate with each other, but at the same time, how to live independently. The other striking part is a set of golden award boards hung on the wall near the eight Chinese characters. These prize boards showed YPS’s school achievement in its long standing history. The purpose of these boards is to inspire staff and students on this campus (FN081023YPS).