

Principal Leadership in a Chinese Public-Private Partnership (PPP) School: A Case Study

by

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A thesis submitted to

The Education University of Hong Kong

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)

April 2020

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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

This study was performed to explore how a nationally renowned Chinese principal managed a new reformed school based on a unique public-private partnership (PPP). The investigation was focused on how the principal interacted with key stakeholders and managed the ongoing development of this new school. School M is a unique example of PPP in education, in that it has the status and receives the associated benefits of a public school, but is managed by an entrusted philanthropic educational foundation. The school is co-sponsored and operated as a joint partnership between the local education authority and a prestigious private company. The data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 20 informants (four school leaders, six teachers, two private managers, four governmental officials and four parents), representing the main stakeholders of the school. Data were also collected through participant observation, reflective field notes and archival research at the school. Qualitative and interpretive case analysis was used as the research framework. The data were analyzed using analytical codes and thematic clustering. The results of the study highlighted the complexity of the PPP in School M. During the six-years of the principalship, the partnership brought both leadership opportunities and challenges. These were sorted into five categories: institutional innovation, goal planning, resource allocation, principal appointment and flat management structure. A discussion is provided on the different roles of the stakeholders, namely the government, the private company, vice-principals, middle leaders, teachers, and parents. The results also revealed the broad range of leadership strategies used by the principal to respond to multiple accountabilities. In the conclusions section, recommendations are made for further studies on leadership in a broader socio-cultural context, and the implications are discussed for theory, practice and policy.

Acknowledgments

Rome was not built in one day. Neither was a project conducted over several years like the current research.

I am indebted, first and foremost, to my brilliant supervisors, who have been instrumental in me bringing this study to fruition. Chair Professor Allan David WALKER provided intellectual direction and critical insights as my Principal Supervisor over these years. A marvelous support as always, he has offered constructive feedback and made my time in EDUHK transformational and unforgettable. My most gratitude is reserved for Associate Professor QIAN Haiyan, whose tailored guidance, deep concern and empathetic understanding whenever needed often moved me into tears. Of almost the same age, she is more like one of my dearest elder sisters, professional, peaceful and mature, inspiring me all the way towards the goal.

Particular and heartfelt thanks to Associate Professor LU Jiafang, whose unremitting confidence in my abilities shed light upon the road throughout the metamorphosis of this work.

Special thanks to Prof. LI Jiacheng and Prof. NING Bentao for their insightful comments and invaluable resource.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Mr. JI Chengzhong, Dr. CHENG Hongbing, Mr. TIAN Hongming, Dr. MIAO Ningli, Mr. YANG Haizheng and Mr. DOU Ruigang for their knowledge of the educational leadership and their expertise in school reform, which contributed to sharpening my ways of thinking and offered me sage advice about the interpretations relating to the uniqueness of Chinese culture.

Thanks to all the informants participated in the research for their indispensable support and invaluable faith in me regarding the significance of the study. Their inspiring ideas have been wise counsel to generating an authentic narrative. I have attempted to translate every

interviewee's words as faithful and accurate as possible, and I hope that any misunderstandings or misinterpretations on my part will be kindly forgiven.

Thanks to the faculty of School M in Shenzhen that allows me to take a closer look at its common practice of leadership as well as the managing operation. Throughout the fieldwork they embraced me with warmth and shared with me their life perceptionse with genuineness.

I thank my colleagues, Director LI Hongmei and Principal DING Changyi and, as their kindness and caring attitudes have been inspiring and encouraging in the process of my thesis writing.

I thank my dearest friends, HUANG Ting, YU Yongdan, LIN Xiaoyan, XU Qizhi and CHENG Rong, whose optimistic life attitudes, esp. in times of trouble or dismay, have always cheered me up and shone my path to proceed.

I am forever thankful to my parents, my husband and my son for their unconditional love as a source of enormous support and encouragement.

I bow to all who have made this study feasible and meaningful.

As the memories have been engraved on my heart and left a deep impression in my mind, I look forward to the future where in some distant lifetime we will relive the quality time.

Table of Contents

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	II
ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IV
ABBREVIATIONS	IX
LIST OF TABLES	X
LIST OF FIGURES	XI
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Statement of the Problem	1
1.2. Rationale for the Study	6
1.2.1. Principal leadership in China	6
1.2.2. Evolution of PPPs and their development in China	8
1.3. Research Objectives	15
1.4. Research Questions.....	15
1.5. Significance of the Study	16
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	19
2.1. Evolution of ePPPs	19
2.1.1. The rise of Neoliberalism	20
2.1.2. PPPs in brief	24
2.1.3. ePPPs	27
2.1.4. ePPPs in China	30
2.2. Administrative Challenges in Public Schools Adopting PPP Forms	39
2.3. Educational Leadership	41
2.3.1. An overview of educational leadership	42
2.3.2. Leadership for change	47
2.3.3. Principal leadership in PPP schools.....	50
2.3.4. Principal leadership in the Chinese context.....	53
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....	59
3.1. Scope of the Study	59
3.2. Choice of Qualitative Methodology.....	60
3.3. Case Study Design	62
3.4. Researcher as Participant	64
3.5. Data Collection.....	65

3.6.	Data Analysis.....	70
3.7.	Limitations and Ethical Issues.....	76
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS		79
4.1.	Functioning of the PPP in School M.....	79
4.1.1.	Identifying contextual parameters	79
4.1.2.	Creation of School M by chance: Looking for a third way	83
4.1.3.	Fulfilling the mission: The role of the school principal	85
4.1.4.	A different management structure at School M under the PPP model	87
4.1.5.	Three stages of development of School M under the principalship of Mr. P	90
4.2.	Opportunities and Challenges for School Leadership Posed by the Partnership	100
4.2.1.	Institutional innovation	103
4.2.2.	Goal planning.....	105
4.2.3.	Resource allocation	107
4.2.4.	Principal appointment	111
4.2.5.	Flat management structure	113
4.3.	Leadership Strategies for Coping with Multiple Accountabilities in School.....	117
4.3.1.	Leadership strategies of the principal to cope with the local government	117
4.3.1.1.	Role of the government: From an invisible supporter to a visible supervisor	117
4.3.1.2.	Leadership strategies of the principal in relation to the government.....	124
4.3.2.	Leadership strategies of the principal to cope with the private enterprise.....	129
4.3.2.1.	Role of the enterprise: From a strong supporter of the school to an ally of the government	129
4.3.2.2.	Leadership strategies of the principal in relation to the company.....	133
4.3.3.	Leadership strategies of the principal to interact with the vice-principals.....	136
4.3.3.1.	Role of the vice-principals: Hard-working team members of the principal turning the school's vision into educational practices.....	136
4.3.3.2.	Leadership strategies of the principal in relation to the vice-principals	139
4.3.4.	Leadership strategies of the principal to interact with the teachers	144
4.3.4.1.	Role of the teachers: Fighters for efficient teaching on the battlefield of education	144
4.3.4.2.	Leadership strategies of the principal with the teachers	147
4.3.5.	Leadership strategies of the principal to cope with the parents	155
4.3.5.1.	Role of the school parents: Pragmatic decision-makers striving for the future of their children	155
4.3.5.2.	Leadership strategies of the principal with the parents.....	157
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION		167
5.1.	Summary of the Study.....	167
5.2.	Revisiting the Context	171
5.3.	Limitations of the Study	178

5.4.	Significance of the Study	179
5.5.	Recommendations for the Development of Leadership and its Practice	181
REFERENCES.....		184
Appendix A		206
Sample Questions in English and Chinese for Semi-structured One-to-one Interviews		206
Appendix B		212
Interview Schedule		212
Appendix C		213
Information Letter and Consent Forms in English and Chinese.....		213

Abbreviations

BL: Education Bureau Leaders

CCCCPC: Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

CPC: Communist Party of China

DEB: District Education Bureau

EM: Managers of the Private Enterprise

GO: District Governmental Officials

LEAs: Local Education Authorities

MOE: Ministry of Education (PRC)

MOF: Ministry of Finance (PRC)

NPC: National People's Congress (PRC)

NDRC: National Development and Reform Commission (PRC)

PA: School Parents

PPP: Public-Private Partnership

PRC: People's Republic of China

SC: State Council (PRC)

SEC: State Education Commission (PRC)

SP: School Principals and Vice-Principals

TM: School Teachers and Middle Leaders

List of Tables

Table 1.1. Official Documents Promoting the Development of PPPs in China.....	11
Table 2.1. Public-Private Partnerships Defined	25
Table 2.2. Types of PPPs at the Basic Education Level *	27
Table 2.3. National Policy Incentives	31
Table 2.4. Eight Types of Schooling for Basic Education in China.....	37
Table 2.5. Six Main Schools of Leadership Theory	43
Table 2.6. Policy Documents for School Principals in Compulsory Education.....	54
Table 3.1. Link between Research Questions and Interview Questions	66
Table 3.2. Interview Participants.....	67
Table 3.3. Concepts Identified in the Reduction Process	72
Table 3.4. Sample Script of Analysis in Three Stages	74
Table 4.1. Contextual Settings of the Reform of School-running System	80
Table 4.2. Intent of the Reform Initiatives in the Creation of School M	84
Table 4.3. Timeline of the First Honeymoon Stage	92
Table 4.4. Timeline of the Second Stage of Negotiation and Compromise	94
Table 4.5. Timeline of the Third Stage of Resignation	98
Table 4.6. Distinctive Features of School M.....	100
Table 4.7. Changing Roles of the Government Perceived by Public Officials	118
Table 4.8. Tactics by the Principal to Build his own Knowledge-Discourse System	127
Table 4.9. Collaboration of both Parties in the Development of School M	130
Table 4.10. Differences in the Vice-Principals (VPs)' Fulcrum Seeking	138
Table 4.11. Word Chunks to Describe Working Status in Interview Transcripts	144
Table 4.12. A Summary of Leadership Strategies of the Principal	165

List of Figures

Figure 2. 1. Number of Charter Schools and Student Enrollment by Year *	30
Figure 3. 1. Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model *	71
Figure 3. 2. Overall Analysis Process	72
Figure 3. 3. Initial Coding Process.....	73
Figure 4. 1. Governance Structure of School M using the PPP Model	88
Figure 4. 2. Organizational Structure of the Council	89
Figure 4. 3. Organizational Structure of the School Board.....	89
Figure 4. 4. System Inertia and Self-Consistency: A Conceptual Comparison between Public Education and PPP School M.....	104
Figure 4. 5. Flat Hierarchy of School M.....	113
Figure 4. 6. Principal Leadership: Idealism VS Pragmatism	127
Figure 4. 7. Value-Oriented Characteristics of the Teachers.....	150
Figure 4. 8. Functions of the Principal's Communication Strategy with Parents	159
Figure 4. 9. How Principal Leadership is Constructed and Influenced at School M	162

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have become a new form of school organization around the world (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio & Guàrdeta, 2009; McQuaid, 2000; ASPBAE, 2013).

Many countries have adopted this structure to increase the quality of the services provided by the public sectors and to enhance the efficiency of government management (Patrinos, et. al, 2009; Wang, 2013). China is no exception: since the introduction of its first PPP project in 1988 (Thieriot & Dominguez, 2015), many projects have been developed, mainly in the public welfare sector (e.g. energy, water and transportation).

In education, the PPP model has only recently been put on the reform agenda at different levels. That is, there has been limited application of PPPs in the field of basic education, compared with the growing number of examples of PPP approaches being used in Chinese universities.

Thus, when a new PPP school announced in 2013 the recruitment of a capable principal who would have an annual salary of RMB 1 million, the school attracted a lot of attention. This school is located in the central district of Shenzhen, and was accredited and operated under the collaborative control of the District Education Bureau (DEB) and a well-known private company (Company X).

Shenzhen is a booming city bordering Hong Kong, and is an economic center of southern China. Since the establishment of its Special Economic Zone status following the national Open Door Policy in 1978, Shenzhen has grown from a small fishing village to a cosmopolitan city. During this period of rapid development, Shenzhen gained wide recognition for the innovation and dynamic synergy of its economic growth.

The high salary offered to recruit the new principal at School M created a public sensation,

and sent a clear message about how important the role of a school principal was considered. Clearly, the DEB and the private company both believed that the quality of principalship was essential to the success of this newly established and innovative PPP-based school. As a research fellow at the DEB, I have been indirectly involved in the process of this experiment from the start, as the focus of my work on education reform and innovation has inevitably led me to participate in the development of PPP schools. Over time, I noticed that the progress reports in local social media all had a positive attitude toward the pilot case. However, disputes between various parties (the government, the private company and the School Board) arose from time to time. On several occasions I overheard complaints about a “messy” situation in school management. One of these complaints from a teacher aroused my curiosity about the situation in the school: *“They (the school) mean to do well, but so far they have not kept their promise.”*

I developed an ever-growing interest in exploring the complexities of the various influences that shape school leadership, concurrent with beginning my doctoral studies. The PPP model has inevitably given school leadership a new meaning and high expectations, and has also created new possibilities and uncertain challenges for the principal. Unlike other public schools that are under the direct administration of the DEB, School M is operated under the leadership of the principal, who is accountable to the School Board, which is comprised of nine members chosen to represent the government and the private entity. For instance, a senior executive from the private company was appointed Chairman of the School Board, and the head of the DEB was another representative. Thus, the principal of this school has more autonomy than his counterparts in traditional public schools.

As a result, many questions about the experiment remained to be answered: What is going on in this school? How do disputes (or problems), if any, arise? Are they unique to the PPP school? How does the school principal develop strategic solutions? Are there any unresolved

problems? What inferences can be drawn in terms of what constitutes effective leadership in this type of education? What lessons can be learned from this particular PPP school to improve the leadership in traditional public schools?

This list of questions was not exhaustive, but was sufficiently aligned with my prior interests to trigger me into action. A preliminary literature review led me to realize that the PPP approach remains under explored in the field of basic education, and has rarely been used in non-Western learning situations.

There is a strong belief in many studies that PPPs will create synergies between various sectors to improve school effectiveness and efficiency. However, empirical evidence for this theoretical claim is lacking. Therefore, an in-depth study of PPP schools is timely and urgent. Accordingly, this study of School M, which was performed six years after the school was founded, was focused on identifying the characteristics of a true compulsory PPP school in the Chinese context. Specifically, the aim was to perform an illustrative analysis of the uniqueness of a representative Chinese PPP school, where the principal's leadership skills intertwine with social norms, expectations and competing interests to facilitate the development of the school.

The uniqueness of School M is reflected in three aspects.

Firstly, the establishment of School M took place within a broader reform context in modern China, when the notion of governance was becoming increasingly dominant in the overall political scenario.

In late 2013, *the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform* proposed, for the first time, the idea of “promoting the modernization of the state governance system and governance capacity”(the Central People's Government of the PRC, 2013). It positioned “governance” as a driving force to promote the development of contemporary Chinese society in terms of politics,

economy, culture and ecology, among other areas.

In education, school management is traditionally based on the bureaucratic or hierarchical structure, in which individual members are required to form a group and coordinate to achieve common developmental goals. In contrast, school governance is based on democratic participation and joint consultation, thereby reducing the level of management, decentralizing resources and encouraging bottom-up innovation and development.

In accordance with the reform of school governance, a large number of business entrepreneurs have started to invest in education, in the forms of educational philanthropy or non-profit investment. A good example is that of schools catering to the needs of immigrant workers, charging a small amount of tuition fee and educating their children. Although there is a share of private investment in the overall operation of these schools, they retain their public status.

Second School M is unique because its PPP is mainly intended for institutional innovation. Local education authorities (LEAs) made this experiment a top priority, placing it first on their strategic agenda for educational innovation. This took place before the Chinese government designated Shenzhen as a key pilot zone for socialism, in the August 2019 publication of *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Supporting Shenzhen in Building a Pioneering Demonstration Zone for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*. Given Shenzhen's strategic positioning as a "good example of people's livelihood and happiness" (the Central People's Government of the PRC, 2019), the analysis and implications of the leadership practice of School M are useful and relevant to the development of a knowledge base on education reform and leadership in China.

Third, the uniqueness of School M lies in the fact that it differs from its counterparts in the Western context, in which PPP initiatives are primarily an alternative means to increase funding for school construction and the improvement of educational services (Patrinos,

Barrera-Osorio & Guàrdeta, 2009; Latham, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, School M is operated under the united effort of the public, the DEB, and the private sector, Company X, one of the most prestigious firms in China. One of the co-founders of Company X, Mr. Y, is also Chairman of the School Board, described School M as “ground-breaking” at an international conference:

“This experimental project was ground-breaking because it is the first public entrusted school - meaning that it receives public school status and benefits, yet is managed by an entrusted education philanthropy foundation —— M Foundation.”

“To date, School M is recognized as an experimental school with an innovative model. It has become one of the best local schools in a few years...”

“From my experience with School M, I realize that a small institutional change can make a big difference. ...I have learnt that each education institution has its own journey to explore the best way for them to benefit the education sector.”

(Dr. Y, Opening Speech as Guest Speaker at the International Baccalaureate Global Conference, 2018)

Therefore, School M deserves in-depth exploration for the following reasons. First, education in China has been in the spotlight for the past decade, in part due to the success of Shanghai students in the 2009 and 2012 PISA tests. Second, questions remain regarding the suitability and adaptability of transplanting a PPP model, originally from the UK and the US, to the non-Western social context of a Chinese school. Third, an in-depth analysis of this particular school, entering a new stage of development, in addition to the ongoing reform can provide empirical evidence on whether PPP schools can be an alternative organizational form in China. Finally, given the work functions of my position as a mid-level manager at the DEB with responsibilities in education reform and innovation, this study can help shedding light on the development of School M as an experimental project, to ultimately, improve current practice and policy making.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

1.2.1. Principal leadership in China

Educational leadership and school management emerged as a rigorous subject area in the academic world only half a century ago (Campbell & Faber, 1961), but this area has grown considerably, as shown by the steady increase in the number of studies on principal leadership (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). However while research on principal leadership in the Western context has accumulated a large knowledge base, the study of principalship in China is still in its infancy.

The professional role of a principal was first officially discussed in *the Decision on the Reform of the Education System*, a document published by the Chinese central government in 1985 (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1985). The “Principal Responsibility System” was developed and all schools were expected to gradually set up and implement such a system. Subsequently, *the Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China* of 1986 provided a brief definition of the Principal Responsibility System, stating that this system refers to the responsibilities of the principal for the operation of a school, along with the supervision ensured by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the democratic management of the Community with regard to the teaching faculty of the school (The National People's Congress of the People’s Republic of China, 1986). In other words, a school principal is responsible for meeting the needs of the supervisor administrative departments and the school community, including teaching and management, staff, and all students and parents.

Along with the creation and perfection of the Principal Responsibility System, multiple policy imperatives for education reforms have been issued in China over the last three decades, to restructure education, and pursue quality education, quality assurance and school management. As more responsibilities have been assigned to the school principals, there is an

urgent need to develop their leadership capacity.

The literature in China has offered different perspectives on principal leadership (*xiaozhang lingdaoli*). One view focuses on the capacity and competence of a principal, in terms of interaction with different stakeholders for the development of the school (e.g. Zhang, 2010; Zou & Wang, 2004). Another view pertains to the influence of a principal, referring to the effect of a principal on his or her subordinates to achieve common goals (e.g. Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2006; Ma, 2007). The third view considers principalship as a joint force, including the overall competence of the school leader and his or her influence on others, to achieve the school's visions (Qiu, 2008).

However, there is no consensus on the definition of principal leadership in China. Therefore, what can be inferred from the above views are the following:

- 1) Principal leadership refers to the skill set, or the integrated competence of the principal.
- 2) Principal leadership is centered on the objectives of the school goals.
- 3) The ultimate goal of principal leadership is to meet the development needs of various stakeholders, such as students, teachers, or parents.
- 4) Principal leadership can be embodied in the principal's personal traits and charisma and in the dynamic interaction between the principal and others (Wang, 2016).

Principal leadership research in China has been dominated by studies conducted in public schools, in which the appointment of a school leader is decided by the local educational authorities (LEAs) as the local Education Bureau. In recent years, the main results of principalship have been linked with the context in which school leaders have to cope with the challenges of national curriculum reform. As a result, instructional leadership has captured the characteristics of a typical Chinese school principal, with an emphasis on building good relationships (*guanxi*) with administrative departments. In this context, little is known about

the new trend to grant more autonomy to the principal and to adopt the PPP model as an innovative form of education.

To analyze the issue of principal leadership in China, the review of the literature on Chinese principal leadership conducted by Walker and his colleagues (Walker et al., 2012; Walker and Qian, 2015) is worth mentioning. Their work revealed a disappointing picture of an underdeveloped field, comprising a limited knowledge base of Chinese principalship, composed of non-empirical and empirical research.

Two main patterns were identified for non-empirical studies, *prescriptions*, telling principals what to do to succeed, and *commentaries*, “focusing on key concerns and problems confronting principals” (Walker, Hu & Qian, 2012: 375). Both patterns were found to be unconvincing due to their lack of theoretical framework, logical argumentation and rigorous methodology. Similarly, empirical studies must be further enriched given their two limitations. The first limitation is the lack of consideration of the complexity of Chinese society when using Western leadership models. The second limitation is the absence of an authentic theory based on convincing data or an applicable theoretical framework (Walker, et.al, 2012).

The insufficient quality of research in the field of principal leadership in Chinese society has been confirmed by subsequent studies (e.g. Walker & Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger & Chen, 2015; Walker & Hallinger, 2007; Walker, 2012). More indigenous research is needed to explore the mechanism of school leadership used in the Chinese context.

1.2.2. Evolution of PPPs and their development in China

The phenomenon of PPPs has now become global. This new trend in education reform can be traced back to the mid-1980s, when public schools in the United States were accused of failing to meet the expectation of providing quality education for all (Chubb, 2004). The need for change in public education was based on the premises that public schools were lagging behind due to institutional collapse (Hoxby, 2003).

To resolve this problem and gain new vigor, an alternative option was to use parental choice and a franchise. This led to a new form of partnership, with the private sectors entering the public domain as a partner to instill a sense of competition and innovation in the education system. This reform inevitably injected new content into the leadership and management of public schools.

In terms of organizational transformation, Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) seminal book can be seen as a landmark. At a time when the American government was known for its rigid bureaucracy, endless scandals, and high deficits, a new concept of public management was proposed, focused on results and promoting competition inside and outside the government. Osborne and Gaebler proposed that the business customer service model be applied to the government, such that citizens would be seen as customers. Based on empirical case analyses, Osborne and Gaebler strongly advocated more entrepreneurial governance in the public sector, whereby the public, private and nonprofit sectors would be used to transform all public systems in the industrial era, including education.

Almost concurrently, the first publicly-funded-but-privately-managed charter schools were created in the US (CER, 2009), marking the beginning of an era of more accountability and autonomy in school management. Above all, the charter school model promotes entrepreneurship and accountability at the level of community ownership (Hoxby, 2003; Wang, 2013).

Similarly in the UK, a new school of public management appeared in the late 1980s, favoring business efficiency and innovative thinking over the poor performance of the public sectors. Of significance was the implementation of the Education Reform Act 1988 by the Thatcher government. It advocated restructuring systems to enhance competitiveness in two ways. First, it emphasized the national control of education in terms of standards, tradition, authority, and hierarchy, justifying the need for a unified national curriculum and

standardized exams. Second, the involvement of market forces was formally recognized, not only to end the monopoly of the state in education, but also to inaugurate a new form of competition, including school autonomy and school management, diversified choices and the privatization of education (Pierson, 1998). The result has been a general trend toward decentralization over the last two decades.

The Private Finance Initiative (PFI), a form of PPPs, was announced in the fall of 1992, to increase the involvement of the private sector in the provision of public services. According to the PFI, the public sector retained a significant role, either as a catalyst for a project or as the main purchaser of services, while the private sector contributed its expertise by providing capital assets or good services (Broadbent & Laughlin, 1999).

This reform trend from the US and the UK quickly spread to various developing nations. In the late 1990s, several non-state schools were established to remedy the inadequate education provided by national schools (e.g. Patrinos, et. al, 2009; McQuaid, 2000; ASPBAE, 2013). As reported by UNESCO, educational provision by the private sector is growing most rapidly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia (Patrinos, et. al, 2009). These involved non-governmental organizations cooperating with government departments through the adoption of PPPs, seeking promising ways to tackle the problems of equity and quality in education (Latham, 2009a; 2009b).

Although China has a history of a highly centralized education system, there is a trend in education reform toward decentralization favored by the government and the public (Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2014). First, micro level curriculum reforms have taken place in China since the early 1990s. Second, from a macro perspective, it has been widely recognized that insufficient investment in education has become the bottleneck for its future development at different levels (e.g. Wang, 1996; Yang & Yang, 2013). Strategic planning for increasing education inputs has been proposed, including efforts to increase government spending on

education, diversify the education investment system, open up multi-channel non-governmental investment in education, restructure the education system, and use educational resources more effectively and efficiently (Wang, 1996).

In 2014, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) published six official documents (see Table 1) to encourage private capital to be invested in the public social sectors (Thieriot & Dominguez, 2015).

Table 1.1. Official Documents Promoting the Development of PPPs in China

(Adapted from Table 1 of Thieriot & Dominguez, 2015:5)

Date	Issuing Body and Policy
May 18, 2014	National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), <i>Notice to encourage private capital to invest in first infrastructure projects</i>
Sep. 21, 2014	State Council, <i>Opinions of the State Council on strengthening the management of local government debt</i>
Sep. 23, 2014	Ministry of Finance (MOF), <i>Notice on questions relating to expanding the use of PPPs</i>
Nov. 16, 2014	State Council, <i>Guiding opinions on the innovative investment mechanism and encouraging social investment in key sectors</i>
Nov. 29, 2014	MOF, <i>Guide on operation of public-private partnership projects (interim)</i>
Dec. 2, 2014	NDRC, <i>Guidelines on development of public-private partnership projects</i>

According to Thieriot & Dominguez (2015), the first PPP project was the Shajiao B power plant in Shenzhen, adopting a build-operate-transfer model and starting operations in 1988. A Special Economic Zone bordering Hong Kong, Shenzhen has gained worldwide recognition for its innovation and vibrant synergy. Since the implementation of the *Reform and opening up* policy in China in the late 1970s, many talented young people and entrepreneurs have come to this city, in search of new opportunities and development. In three decades, Shenzhen has grown from an underdeveloped fishing village to a thriving metropolitan port.

Shenzhen's robust economy, its different cultures, and its abundant pool of capital and professionals have earned it a reputation as a city of innovation.

As the general environment of Shenzhen promotes innovation, it is not surprising to witness the development of School M, from a new idea to a large learning organization using the PPP model.

This research is focused on school leadership and management to examine the professional life of a principal who ran a PPP school (School M) in Shenzhen, China. To better understand the research problems, it is first important to discuss the background of this school.

School M was established during the term of the previous district head, whose vision led to the overall development of all industries in the district. Company X is one of the biggest taxpayers in the district, and one of the world's top 500 largest companies. Over the past decade, Company X has funded several philanthropic projects in the southwest region of China to improve the quality of education in remote villages.

One conversation between the former district head and the senior manager of Company X sparked the thoughts of cooperation to establish an innovative school. When deciding on the type of innovation the new school should achieve, they heard complaints from school principals in the district that they were spending too much time attending various meetings, which did not benefit their jobs. Based on a rough estimate, a school principal must attend more than 300 meetings per year, one meeting almost every day. This leads to the following question: Who else is available and competent to monitor the school if the principal devotes most of his or her time and energy to different meetings? More often than not, this places a heavy burden on the principal, who barely has time to focus on teaching and instruction. To remedy this dilemma, the former district head and the top executive representative of Company X agreed to build a school distinct from other existing ones. The principal of the new school would have more autonomy than those in a traditional setting to the extent that he

or she would be exempt from the redundant administrative workload, thereby focusing on providing high-quality education.

A cooperation agreement to manage the school was later concluded. In the fall of 2013, School M began enrolling its first students. As agreed, both the district government, as the public sector, and Company X, as the private entity, invested an equal amount (RMB 50 million) as start-up capital in School M. In its second year, School M, like other public schools in China, received annual per capita funding from the government to continue its development.

Under this joint effort, School M represented an innovative type of educational experiment, using the PPP approach: publicly owned but independently run by the School Board. The School Board, made up of nine representatives from the government, the DEB, Company X and parents of pupils, represented the decision-making body of School M, while the management team led by the principal acted as an executive agency. Later, it became a comprehensive school with a 12-year system, comprising primary and secondary education. Shortly after its creation, the former district head advised the former DEB director to exercise loose control over the management of the PPP school. In their own words, the potential of PPP at School M lies in the promises that *“full autonomy is to be given to the hiring principal in the school management”*.

Ideally, this autonomy should be exercised following a three-step process. First, the district government (via the DEB) delegates power or autonomy to the School Charity Foundation, which further entrusts its right to run the school to the School Board, in terms of staff, finance, and facility management. Second, the School Board empowers the hired principal to make all decisions concerning the development of the school. Third, the principal exercises adequate power in decision-making to improve the school and maintain its achievements.

During the first two years, the different stakeholders seemed to have a certain bond, enjoying

satisfactory communication. The principal had full autonomy to deploy people and money, and design the curriculum. However, things started to change after two years, when the new leaders of the district and the DEB took over. In a pilot interview with the principal, he mentioned that the newly appointed director of the DEB had a “bossy” attitude, and tried to meddle or “*have a final say*” in certain school affairs that in the past were decided collectively by the School board and the principal.

As previously mentioned, friction often occurs in reality, usually around the issue of decision-making. The three parties, namely the government and the DEB, the School Charity Foundation supported by the private company, and the principal entrusted by the School Board, tended to continually interact within the blurred boundaries of power.

These blurred boundaries led to a problematic situation in which the principal and the senior manager of the private company had to maintain the autonomy prescribed in the contract. In times of uncertainty, “*unnecessary*” and “*frequent*” communications took place, making it even more difficult to make informed decisions. This shows that without consensus, leadership practice is neither effective nor efficient.

Using this contextual complexity, this research was performed to investigate the operation of School M to reveal how school leadership manifests and is executed through the interaction of different stakeholders. It focused in particular on the situational reality of the PPP in which the school activities studied took place, and the meaning of these activities.

It should be noted that a comparison between the management of a traditional school and the management of a school using the PPP approach was beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this research constituted an examination of how the principal responded to different situations arising in the partnership to facilitate the ongoing operation of the school.

1.3. Research Objectives

This research was an analysis of the “black box” of leadership practice, and the dynamic and interactive management process that takes place among staff and activities during a given period was identified. An in-depth analysis of the leadership strategies and practices of a PPP school is presented, placing the role of leaders against the contemporary reality of Chinese society.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to explore how the principal of a PPP school managed the challenges and seized the opportunities necessary to support the continuous development of this school while meeting the varied expectations of stakeholders.

This involved investigating how a unique PPP school operates in the Chinese context by identifying the opportunities and tensions encountered by the principal, and the main strategies used to manage them during the formative years of the partnership.

There were three sub-objectives. The first sub-objective was to explore the complexity of principal leadership in a new PPP school. The second sub-objective was to identify the opportunities and challenges arising from this partnership. The third sub-objective was to reveal the leadership strategies adopted by the principal to solve emerging problems by managing the multiple accountabilities arising from the different demands of the public, the private sector, and society in general.

1.4. Research Questions

The main research question was the following:

How did the principal of School M formed through a PPP in China lead and manage the multiple accountabilities of the various stakeholders?

This broad question was further explored based on three sub-questions:

- 1) How does the PPP work in School M?

- 2) What were the opportunities and challenges of school leadership since the creation of the partnership in School M?
- 3) What were the leadership strategies, which were conceptualized by various stakeholders, adopted by the principal to deal with the opportunities and challenges arising from a context characterized by multiple accountabilities?

Based on the distinctive contextual setting of Shenzhen as the most innovative and dynamic city in mainland China, this study on principal leadership contributes to the pool of non-Western indigenous research.

1.5. Significance of the Study

There is a dearth of literature on principal leadership in the context of PPP schools in the Asia-Pacific region, and internationally. This scarcity of empirical research has posed challenges for educational practitioners and policymakers. In terms of PPP implementation of in education, little is known about its strengths and weaknesses in different societal and cultural contexts.

This study was conducted to address this research gap, and reveal a dynamic picture of the intertwined forces behind a united district-wide impetus for education reform in the Asia-Pacific region.

The study is important for three reasons.

The first reason is related to the PPP research in education. This study was conducted in a society widely known as a “Confucian heritage culture” (Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2014:222), typified by diligence and a great respect for education. These societal norms are very different from those of Western cultures (Walker, 2011, 2012). Thus, it remains unclear whether the PPP model in education, borrowed from Western tradition and transplanted into a very different context, can yield results similar to those achieved with PPP-based education in

the West. That is, as the Chinese society is more centralized and hierarchical, this may pose contextual challenges to the application of the PPP model. The findings of this study add to those many empirical studies undertaken in different contexts, provide evidence for future research comparing the pros and cons of PPPs, and thus will influence contemporary education reform policies.

Second, in terms of educational leadership, an empirical study of principalship conducted in the Chinese socio-cultural context contributes to the international literature on educational administration. The experiment of School M, as above-mentioned, has been described as “ground-breaking” as it was “*the first public entrusted school*” in China and “*has become one of the best local schools in a few years*” (Dr. Y, Opening Speech as Guest Speaker at the International Baccalaureate Global Conference, 2018). When exploring regional and partnership opportunities and challenges for school leaders, it is important to assess the relevance of leadership theories within the knowledge base of the Asia-Pacific region. The third reason is related to the improvement of current practices and policies. It is essential to inform educational practitioners about the ongoing process of running a school and managing a bilateral PPP. The findings of this study highlight on the complexity and perplexity of educational reform in the face of the global trend of centralization, decentralization, and recentralization. In addition, the findings show how School M re-positioned the government in the field of educational administration, with information on how to build an environment conducive to the execution of leadership in a PPP school. This in-depth case analysis is also useful for identifying the opportunities and challenges of education authorities when changing the mode of education and for providing policy-making bodies with more evidence-based research for future improvement.

Thus, an empirical study of a real PPP school is timely and urgent. This study is an extension of previous research on the challenges and dynamics of transplanting a PPP model into public

schools in a non-Western setting, and shows how the changing direction of education reform constantly influences the execution of school leadership. The findings contribute to the development of a truly global knowledge base in educational leadership, revealing regionally research strategies in the field of school leadership (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This study was conducted to investigate how principal leadership facilitates the continued development of a PPP school. This chapter comprises a review of the evolution of PPPs in education (ePPPs), the changes brought about by this type of partnership in public schools, and theories of school leadership with a focus on leadership for change. Various threads of inquiry covering these three areas set the tone for this study, and are woven together to reveal the complexity and challenges of school principalship in a Chinese school using the PPP approach. The research gaps are summarized at the end of the literature review.

The chapter has three main sections. The first section traces the evolution of ePPPs alongside the rise of neoliberalism around the world. PPP development is discussed at the international and national levels. The second section explores the administrative challenges of PPPs for the management of public schools. In response to the dynamic transformation and challenges, the third section addresses a specific issue of leadership for change that is necessary for appropriate management of PPP schools in the Chinese context, in addition to providing a general picture of educational leadership.

2.1. Evolution of ePPPs

This section addresses three questions:

- 1) Under what circumstances did PPPs emerge?
- 2) What defines a PPP?
- 3) What do we know about ePPPs in the global context and in the Chinese context?

To address these questions, this section is divided into four sub-sections. The first sub-section is a review of the global trend of neoliberalism, setting the tone for the rise of privatization and PPPs. The second sub-section is a presentation and comparison of various definitions and typologies of PPP. In the third subsection, the challenges of the ePPPs model in public

education are identified. The last sub-section comprises an examination of ePPPs in the Chinese context, as the PPP model remains a new and little-researched organizational form in China.

2.1.1. The rise of Neoliberalism

The emergence of neoliberalism has been documented by many scholars, from the early 1930s, to the work of Hayek, the Chicago school of the 1970s, and the political scenario of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations and beyond (e.g. Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Ball, Dworkin, & Vryonides, 2010).

In the first half of the 20th century, and in particular after the two world wars, the cradle-to-grave social welfare system prevailed in Western developed countries. As a type of public service, education was universally provided by the government, which was responsible for public school spending, from tuition fees to lunch fees, school commutes, and school uniforms (Mueller Dennis, 2003; He, 2012).

At the heart of the welfare state ideology is the belief that school is an instrument of social justice and that the government is responsible for the education of all children, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status (Ahonen, 2002; Baltodano, 2012). For example, in an attempt to guarantee equal opportunities in education and to widen the scope of education for all, the British government established public secondary schools across the country and increased the years of compulsory education through legislation from 6 to -7 years to 9 to -12 years (Dent, 1955).

This social, political and economic situations characteristic of the Keynes doctrine were soon transformed by the large-scale economic recession around the world in the early 1970s. As a result, state control over the economy was no longer effective in ensuring overall prosperity. This has led to the emergence of a political and economic ideology called neo liberalism, which opposes excessive state intervention while emphasizing trade liberalization.

Three characteristics of neoliberalism are identified in the literature. First, neoliberalism advocates market self-regulation, as opposed to excessive government intervention in economic activities. Second, it emphasizes private ownership and asserts the superiority of private firms. Third, it believes in the competitiveness and effectiveness of the market mechanism, rather than state monopoly (Harvey, 2005; Ball, et.al, 2010; Savas, 2000; Morales, et.al, 2014). In short, marketization, privatization, and liberalization are the hallmarks of neoliberalism in the economic arena.

These neoliberal trends have since the late 1970s changed the way in which the state fulfills its responsibility toward its citizens. In terms of state management, neoliberal reforms are “commonly viewed as having involved two major waves: first, the privatization of activities previously carried out in the public sector and the decreasing regulatory role of the state, and second, the deployment of the ‘new public management’ within the government apparatus” (Morales, Gendron, & Gu énin-Paracini, 2014: 424). These two major waves, privatization and new public management, are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Privatization

Savas (1982) defined privatization as “the act of reducing the role of government or increasing the role of the private institutions of society in satisfying people’s needs; it means relying more on the private sector and less on government” (821).

To understand the context of privatization, it is worth mentioning the interrelation of five types of societal forces, i.e., realistic, economic, ideological, and commercial considerations, and the influence of populism (Ahonen, 2002; Ball, 1998; Baltodano, 2012; Mu, De Jong & Koppenjan, 2011; Savas, 2000). The following section provides a brief overview of the dynamic interaction of these factors.

The first societal force involved in the privatization trend involves realistic factors, due to the pressure of rising government costs and reduced tax revenues at all administrative levels of

government. Increased privatization and more cost-effective public services are two key strategies implemented to ease the pressure on the public purse (John D., 1989; Savas, 2000). Second, contrary to the government's growing financial constraints, more upper and middle class families have become wealthy. This economic abundance and prosperity has led them to believe that investing in competing public and private organizations, rather than paying taxes, will enable them to better manage their children's education and their own health care, and to obtain better financial returns (Brown & Lauder, 1996; Savas, 2000). In a sense, economic factors have reduced the public's dependence on government goods and services, with wealthy classes being willing to pay more money for goods that meet their demands. Third, from an ideological point of view, freedom, justice, and efficiency are different and sometimes even conflicting goals, and a society can rely on the government as a tool to help achieve these goals and maintain its balance. However, the continued expansion of the scale of the government has led to excessive power and can be seen as a threat to democracy. Therefore, less government intervention is seen as an ideal goal, as illustrated by the doctrine of Thomas Jefferson, stating that "government is best which governs least" (Rhodes, 1996; Savas, 2000).

Fourth, support for privatization comes from commercial interests. Some business leaders have criticized the government for its exclusion from competition, causing confusion in management, waste of resources, and lazy governance (Savas, 2000). According to them, a larger share of government spending should be transferred from paying government employees to private companies, to enable the private sector to optimally use state-owned facilities and assets. Other private entities have targeted the business opportunities offered by government investment projects and their potential for economic growth (Economist, 1998a, b).

Populism is the fifth driving force of privatization. Populists are against oversized

governments and giant business groups. They have argued that the government and the private sector have become too institutionalized, too bureaucratic, too specialized, and too concerned about protecting their own interests. They believe that to build a better society, the public should have the right to choose public services, to reduce their dependence on bureaucracy, to rely more on family, neighborhood, church, and ethnic groups, and to create a sense of belonging to the community (Savas, 1990, 2000a, b).

As a result, an interaction of different forces has led a global wave of privatization-based administrative reform, as part of the process to establish a liberal or market model in society.

New public management

Consistent with the neoliberal ethos, market-based theories of public choice and new public management have received more attention and advocacy among governmental officials and the public (Rinne, Järvinen, Tikkanen, & Aro, 2016; Savas, 2000).

First, the school of public choice focuses on the relationship between society and government. It is believed that the best way to solve the problem of a growing number of inefficient government departments is to break the government's monopoly and establish competition between public and private institutions.

Along with the marketization trend, a range of social goods have become commodities. To modernize public services, the landscape of education has been reshaped and restructured to meet the economic and political needs of social reform (Ball, 2012).

In the US, the Standards-based Accountability Movement has emerged (Burbules & Torres, 2000), advocating the use of high-stakes, standardized testing as a key indicator of academic success. Public school funds have also been redistributed, in the name of "school choices," by education authorities at the state level (Dworkin, 2008). In addition, additional funds have been allocated to deprived families, pre-school education, and bilingual instruction for marginalized students (Baltodano, 2012).

Similarly, the theory of new public management argues that the introduction of the market mechanism in the public domain is beneficial for improving its governance capability. It also advocates the introduction of management methods and a competitive mechanism widely used by private firms in the public sector. Focusing on the output of public services, it also adheres to a more flexible and effective flow of implementation in staff recruitment, job tenure, wages, and other aspects of administration (Ball, 1998; Savas, 2000).

Therefore, the role and status of the government have been reshaped by a new model of guidance. The book *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) further illustrated this revolution. In this national bestseller, Osborne and Gaebler discussed 10 scenarios in which market forces were introduced into monopolistic government enterprises across the country to manage strong fiscal pressures; these measures resulted in catalytic, competitive, enterprising, anticipatory, decentralized, community-owned, mission-driven, results-oriented, customer-driven, and market-oriented governments. All of these governance models show how better an “entrepreneurial government” can be when it pragmatically enforces the idea of new public management.

When juxtaposed, these two waves delimit the context of the rise in commodification, commercialization, and privatization as a key for socio-economic development (Ball, et. al, 2010). The overall development of PPP initiatives is discussed in the following section.

2.1.2. PPPs in brief

In the 1990s, many global organizations, aid agencies, and research associations became increasingly interested in PPPs, and international academic journals were created to document this development (e.g. *the International Journal of Applied PPPs* and *the International Journal of PPPs*) (Verger & Moschetti, 2017).

The definition of PPP varies in different areas of research and state policies (McQuaid, 2000;

World Bank, 2011; ASPBAE, 2013). Depending on the context, a PPP can be defined more specifically to include contractual arrangements, or more generally to include various partnerships between the public and private sectors (Latham, 2009a,b). Below is a list of six operational definitions derived from the literature, chosen on the principle that they represent the most recognized interpretations.

Table 2.1. Public-Private Partnerships Defined

“a contract that a government makes with a private service provider to acquire a specified service of a defined quantity and quality at an agreed price for a specific period.” (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio & Guàrdeta, 2009:31)

World Bank

“a risk-sharing relationship based upon an agreed aspiration between the public and private (including voluntary) sectors to bring about a desired public policy outcome. More often than not this takes the form of a long-term and flexible relationship, usually underpinned by contract, for the delivery of a publicly funded service.” (LaRocque, 2008:8)

Commission on UK PPPs

“arrangements whereby the private sector provides infrastructure assets and services that traditionally have been provided by government, such as hospitals, schools, prisons, roads, bridges, tunnels, railways, and water and sanitation plants.” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008:8)

OECD

“a partnership between the public sector and the private sector for the purpose of delivering a project or a service traditionally provided by the public sector.” (The European Commission, 2003:16)

The European Commission

“a contractual agreement between a public agency (federal, state or local) and a private sector entity. Through this agreement, the skills and assets of each sector (public and private) are shared in delivering a service or facility for the use of the general public. In addition to the sharing of resources, each party shares in the risks and rewards potential in the delivery of the service and/or facility.” (Meyer, 2012:2)

The National Council for PPPs, USA

“a cooperative venture between the public and private sectors, built on the expertise of each partner, that best meets clearly defined public needs through the

appropriate allocation of resources, risks and rewards.” (LaRocque, 2008:8)

Canadian Council for PPPs

From these definitions, it is fair to conclude that a PPP refers to a relationship between the public and private sectors. Further, this arrangement is created to use mutual resources, share risks, and gain common benefits.

Debates on the pros and cons of PPPs have permeated the international arena of public affairs. Scholars have identified a number of advantages and opportunities in PPPs. First, it is possible to adopt multiple forms of PPP projects to meet the diverse needs of the public. Second, a PPP ensures the optimal allocation of existing resources to improve the quality of the services provided. Third, a PPP facilitates the transfer of the ethos of effectiveness and efficiency of private firms to the operation of the public sector. Finally, innovation can be generated during a partnership, in the process of communication and interaction (LaRocque, 2008; Meyer, 2012; OECD, 2008; Patrinos, et. al, 2009).

However, PPP opponents generally take an ideological stance, arguing that the objectives of the government conflict with the profit-focus of the private sector, and that when the public good becomes secondary to the pursuit of profit, the execution of PPP projects actually borders on pure privatization (Freeman, 2003; Meyer, 2012; Rosenau, 1999).

There are other concerns. First, a PPP is a confusing policy approach, so its meaning, rationale, model options, and effect allow for various interpretations (Verger & Moschetti, 2017). Second, implementing and managing an effective scheme can diminish the value of a PPP (The European Commission, 2003). Third, one of the main objectives of cost savings may be impossible to achieve without deliberate calculation (Meyer, 2012). Fourth, PPP initiatives appear to increase rather than reduce stipulated regulations (Verger & Moschetti, 2017; NCPPP, 2002).

Thus, policy imperatives may be influenced by political will and interest. PPPs also vary in

their terms of purposes, the needs of their multiple stakeholders, their constituent elements, and the legislative and regulatory structures designed at the national and local levels (ASPBAE, 2013; Meyer, 2012). ePPPs are discussed in the next section.

2.1.3. ePPPs

Compared with other public services, education is a late adopter of the PPP model. There are different types of ePPPs, having different extents of private sector involvement in the provision of educational services; these vary from a situation in which education is entirely provided and controlled by the government to a fully privatized school system (Patrinos, et.al, 2009; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006). Full privatization occurs when there is a complete transfer of ownership, funding, and management of education to the private sector (Patrinos, et.al, 2009; ASPBAE, 2013; World Bank, 2011; Latham, 2009b).

However, other scholars have classified the different types of ePPPs into seven categories, as shown in the following table 2. 2. (LaRocque, 2008; ASPBAE, 2013)

Table 2.2. Types of PPPs at the Basic Education Level *

Category	What it means	How it looks like (selected examples)
1. Private Sector Philanthropy	assistance provided by private sectors or individuals (e.g. school equipment and facilities, scholarships, teacher fees, etc.)	Philanthropic Foundations (USA, Philippines); Academies Program (UK); Philanthropic Venture Funds (USA)
2. Private Management of Public Schools	contract arrangement with private organizations to manage certain or all aspects of public school	Contract Schools & Charter Schools (USA); Concession Schools (Colombia); Independent Schools (Qatar)
3. Government Purchase of Education Services	publicly-funded education services delivered by private schools or private entities	Universal Secondary Education Program (Uganda); Educational Service Contracting (Philippines); Alternative Education (New Zealand)
4. Voucher and Voucher-like	financial grants to allow deprived students to enroll in	Targeted Individual Entitlement (New Zealand); School Funding System

Programs	accredited private schools	(Netherlands)
5. Adopt-a-School Programs	private sector partners provide cash and in-kind resources to complement government funding of public schools	Sindh Education Foundation (Pakistan); Adopt-a-School Program (Philippines)
6. Capacity Building Initiatives	training of public school teachers and curriculum enhancement programs delivered by the private sector	Cluster Based Training of Teachers (Pakistan); Quality Assurance Resource Centre (Pakistan)
7. School Infrastructure Partnerships	long-term contracts with the private sector for designing, financing, constructing and operating public school infrastructure	PFI (UK); School Private Finance Projects (Australia); PPP for New Schools (Egypt)

* Source: LaRocque, 2008:9

Amid their broad scope, five universal elements are identified as the main features of ePPPs, as follows (Latham, 2009b; World Bank, 2011; ASPBAE, 2013):

- 1) ePPPs are formal arrangements;
- 2) ePPPs involve a long-term relationship between collaborative partners;
- 3) ePPPs are focused on outcomes;
- 4) ePPPs have a consensus on risk sharing that is distributed among all partners; and
- 5) ePPPs' private sector partners can be from the for-profit and not-for profit sectors.

The role and impact of PPPs in education (Patrinos et al., 2009) is an influential work produced by the World Bank in the field of education. It presented ample evidence from the international literature and the ongoing evaluation of outcomes, in addition to a comprehensive synthesis of 92 PPP programs and policies across 47 countries. Overall, ePPPs can generally serve one or more of the following four main objectives of education especially in developing and low-income countries: improving access, enhancing quality, reducing costs, and overcoming inequalities (LaRocque, 2008; Patrinos et al., 2009).

Globally, the increase in ePPPs is due to the failure of government departments to provide

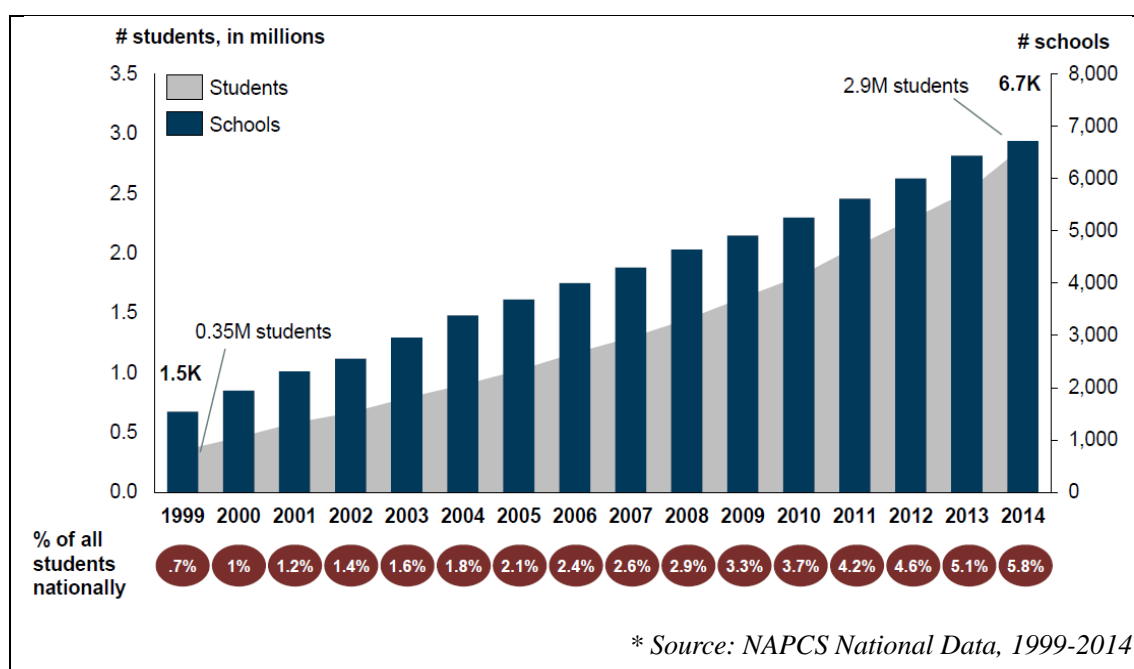
adequate and satisfactory public education, stimulating the sharp increase in the number of non-state schools (CER, 2009; Chubb, 2004; Hoxby, 2003). Charter schools in the US are good examples of private management in public schools adopting the PPP model. These involve private firms, with a mindset focused on quality and efficiency, being involved in public schools. These firms were expected to save these schools from the vicious cycle of inefficiency, and embark on a virtuous development of the quality of education (Callet, 2010; CER, 2009).

In 1991, the first charter school law was enacted in Minnesota, followed by other states. The following year saw the opening of the first charter school, City Secondary School. Based on data from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS, 2016), at the end of 2015-2016, there were more than 6,800 charter schools in the US serving about 2.9 million primary and secondary school students. There were 27 states with at least 50 operating charter public schools and nearly 20 states with 100 or more charter schools. Over the last 15 years, the number of public charter schools has grown steadily (see Figure 1), although the number of charter schools closing has also increased (NAPCS, 2016).

It is commonly agreed that charter schools tend to show more signs of continuous improvement than traditional public schools in terms of enabling students from deprived and vulnerable groups to access quality education (NAPCS, 2013, 2016; Yang, 2014). In addition, research has shown these schools' ability to eliminate the rigid bureaucracy of public schools and to provide more autonomy to school administrators and teaching staff and free choice to parents and the community (Callet, 2010; CER, 2009; LaRocque, 2008; NAPCS, 2013). Charter school legislation has enabled education reformers to recognize the advantage of charter schools in overcoming the drawbacks of public education. This success can be attributed to the strong belief that a new partnership can inject new content into teaching activities in the local community, by emphasizing community ownership in terms of

entrepreneurship and accountability (NAPCS, 2013; Yang, 2014).

Figure 2.1. Number of Charter Schools and Student Enrollment by Year *



Regardless of the overall progress of charter schools in many states in the US, evidence of the performance of ePPPs remains contradictory in terms of the quality of public services and social goods provided, compared with traditional state provision, “and, ultimately, context-specific.” (Verger & Moschetti, 2017: 5). The effects of ePPPs depend on a dynamic interaction of environmental and relational variables, consisting of macro and micro factors with context-specific influences. The case of ePPPs in China is briefly discussed in the next section.

2.1.4. ePPPs in China

Unlike the UK and the US, where ePPPs have developed over two decades, the evolution of ePPPs in China is still in its infancy.

The term “PPPs” appeared in China’s policy discourse in 2014, although as early as 1982, the government encouraged various types of societal forces¹ to establish educational institutions.

¹ Social forces refer to the basic units that can participate in and promote social development, including natural persons, legal persons (social organizations, party and government institutions, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, enterprises, etc.).

Since then, some policy incentives have been implemented at the national level to promote ePPPs (Gao & Wu, 2010). The following table provides an overview of these attempts.

Table 2.3. National Policy Incentives

(Revised upon Table 1 of Gao & Wu, 2010:50)

Policy Issued (Year)	Specific Provisions (by Article) / Main Theme
the Constitution of the PRC (1982)	Article 19 The State encourages the collective economic organizations, state enterprises and undertakings and other <i>societal forces (shehui lilian)</i> to set up educational institutions of various types in accordance with the law.
the Decision of the CCCPC on Educational System Reform (1985)	Article 2 “encourage and guide state-run enterprises, social organizations and individuals to run schools”
Provisional Regulations on the Establishment of Schools by Societal Forces (1987)	Article 2 <i>Societal forces</i> , hereinafter in the Provisions, refer to, with juristic personality, the state enterprises and institutions, the democratic parties, people’s organizations, collective economic organizations, social organizations, academic groups, and independent school-running individuals approved by the state. Article 3 “Governments and education authority at all levels shall encourage and support <i>societal forces</i> to run educational undertakings of various kinds”
the Outline for Educational Reform and Development in China (1993)	16. Reform the school-running system. Change the universal pattern of governmental school-running; gradually establish a system wherein the government acts as the main body, supplemented with forces from all <i>social sectors (shehui bumen)</i> , in school-running.
Education Act of the PRC (1995); Education Act of the PRC (First Amendment) (2009)	Article 25 The State encourages enterprises, institutions, social groups, other social organizations and individual citizens to organize schools and other educational institutions in accordance with the law. No organization or individual may hold schools or other educational institutions for the purpose of profit.

	<p>Article 46</p> <p>The State encourages enterprises, institutions, social groups and other public organizations to collaborate in various forms with domestic institutions of higher learning and secondary vocational schools in teaching, scientific research, technological development and application.</p> <p>Enterprises, institutions, social groups and other social organizations and individuals may support school construction and participate in school management via appropriate forms.</p>
Interim Provisions for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (1995)	<p>Article 2</p> <p>Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools mentioned in these provisions refers to educational undertakings enrolling Chinese citizens as the main objectives and run by educational institutions (hereinafter referred to as cooperative educational institutions) established in cooperation by foreign bodies corporate, individuals and relevant international organizations and Chinese educational institutions and other social organizations with the status of legal persons.</p> <p>Article 3</p> <p>Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools is an important form of Chinese education in its international exchanges and cooperation, and serves as a complement to Chinese education.</p>
the National 9th Five-year Plan for Education and the 2010 Development Scheme (1996)	<p>Article 6 (Reform of school-running system)</p> <p>During the ninth five-year-plan period: strengthen the lawmaking work for <i>societal forces</i> to run schools, and actively develop all kinds of non-governmental (<i>minban</i>) schools with an emphasis on secondary education and below, especially all levels of technical education and vocational training (TVET).</p> <p>The existing public schools, when the circumstances permit, can also be appropriately transformed into “public-run and people-support (<i>gongban minzhu</i>)” or “people-run public-support (<i>minban gongzhu</i>)” schools.</p>
Regulations on School-Running by Societal Forces (1997)	<p>Article 4</p> <p>With regard to educational provision by <i>societal forces</i>, the State carries out a policy of actively encouraging, largely supporting, appropriately guiding and strengthening management.</p>

Action Scheme for Invigorating Education towards the 21st Century (1998)	39. It is envisaged that in the next three to five years, a framework of educational provision will basically take shape under which most schools are run by the state, supplemented by schools run by other <i>social sectors</i> , giving rise to the co-existence of public and non-public/private schools.
Law on the Promotion of Non-public Schools of the PRC (2002)	Article 45 People's governments at or above the county level may take such measures as financial aid and the lease or transfer of idle State-owned assets, in support of non-public schools.
Notice of the MOE on Relevant Issues Concerning Strengthening the Administration of School-running for Basic Education (2002)	2. Low-performing schools, primary and secondary schools that are affiliated to state-owned enterprises, and newly-built governmental schools, under the premises of ensuring both students of compulsory education attending schools in the neighborhood and that there is no loss of state-owned assets, can carry out the reform experiment in accordance with the mechanism of the non-public/private schools and implement the publicly-owned privately-operated model.
Regulations of the PRC on the Implementation of the Law on the Promotion of Non-public/Private Education (2004)	Regulations regarding private education were made on joint schooling, cooperative schooling, common investment and support and reward.
the National Outline of the 11th Five-Year Plan for Education Development (2007)	Contents covered include sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, non-public education development, establishing diversified investment mechanisms for higher education, and encouraging enterprises, individuals and social groups to donate or invest in education.
the Outline of the National Medium-and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010)	Chapter 14 Reform of School-Running System 42. Deepen the reform of school-running system for public schools, encourage industries, enterprises and other <i>societal forces</i> to participate in the running of public schools. All localities, in accordance with the specific situation, can carry out public-school-oriented experiments of joint-running, entrusted management and other forms, with an aim to explore various forms of schooling and raise the level of running public schools.

	<p>Improve the provision of public services for non-compulsory education, improve preferential policies, encourage fair competition, and guide social funds to enter education in a variety of ways.</p> <p>43. Strongly support private education: governments at all levels should encourage investment and donated funds to run schools, and promote <i>societal forces</i> to set up education in an independent or co-held manner, or in other diversified forms.</p>
Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform (2013)	<p>42. “Deepening the comprehensive reforms in the area of education. We will improve the systems of government subsidies, government services purchase, student loans, scholarships and incentive for donation to education, and encourage social funds to be channeled into education.”²</p>
Education Act of the PRC (Second Amendment) (2015)	<p>Article 26</p> <p>The State encourages enterprises, institutions, social groups, other social organizations and individual citizens to organize schools and other educational institutions in accordance with the law.</p> <p>Schools and other educational institutions that are completely or partially funded by government finance or donated assets, shall not be established as profit-making organizations.</p> <p>Article 47</p> <p>Identical with Article 46 of the Education Act of the PRC (1995) and the Education Act of the PRC (First Amendment) (2009).</p>
Opinions of the SC on Encouraging Societal Forces to Initiate Education and Promote the Healthy Development of Private Education (2016)	<p>9. Explore multi-subject cooperation in running schools. Promote <i>the government and social capital cooperation (PPP) model</i>, encourage social capitals to participate in the construction of educational infrastructure and operation management, and provide professional services.</p>
the Law on the Promotion of Non-public/Private	<p>Article 46</p> <p>People’s governments at or above the county level may take such measures as service purchasing, student loans, scholarships and</p>

² Excerpted from *Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform* (2013). Retrieved from China.org.cn (2014-01-17) at http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2014-01/17/content_31226494_12.htm?cv=1.

Education (2017)	grants, and the lease or transfer of idle State-owned assets in support of private schools. Non-profit private schools can also take government subsidies, incentive funds, donation incentives and other supportive measures.
Work plan for the implementation of <i>Opinions of the SC on Encouraging Societal Forces to Initiate Education and Promote the Healthy Development of Private Education</i> by the central authorities concerned (2017)	14. We should promote the government and social capital cooperation (PPP) model, encourage social capital to participate in the construction of educational infrastructure and operation management, and provide professional services. Actively encourage public schools and non-public /private schools to purchase management services, teaching resources and scientific research findings.

As shown in the table, these provisions on educational cooperation often use the word *societal forces* (*shehui liliang*), sometimes used interchangeably with *social sectors* (*shehui bumen*). Instead of being a wholly Western form of PPP, the PPP model in the Chinese context refers to the government and social capital cooperation model, i.e.

*a middle-to-long-term cooperative relationship established in the field of infrastructure and public services. The general pattern is that the social capital takes on **most of** the design, construction, operation and maintenance of infrastructure, and receives reasonable return on investment through "user pays" and the necessary "government fees". Government departments are responsible for the **supervision of prices and quality** of infrastructure and public services in order to maximize the public interest (MOF, 2014).*

Caution should be exercised when considering PPPs in the context of China. Indeed, the second “P” (Private) in the current PPP model in China refers to social capital with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as the main body, leading to a significant difference between

the domestic model and the international approach. As SOEs account for a large share of infrastructure construction and utility companies, and many of them have PPP-type agreements with local governments, there is a reason to consider agreements contracted with SOEs as PPPs in the Chinese context.

However, some critics have pointed out the logical barriers and even the grammatical inaccuracy of the concept. First, according to them, by abandoning the traditional understanding of PPPs and describing PPPs as “government and social capital cooperation,” the government is faced with an ethical dilemma of cooperating with money (capital). Second, requiring capital to undertake “most of” the work not only goes beyond the real capacity of social capital, but also creates more ambiguity and uncertainty about what “most of” the work refers to. Third, the fact that the responsibility of government departments is limited to “the supervision of prices and quality” inevitably reduces the limits at which each level of the government should enjoy reasonable rights and assume responsibility, throughout the PPP life cycle (Zhou, 2017; Pan, 2017).

As a result, there is no binding definition of PPPs, and none can be found. However, while PPPs have many context-specific characteristics, a broader perspective was adopted for the purpose of this study: thus, PPPs are defined as the formation of cooperative relationships between the public sector (i.e., the government, LEAs, and specific schools) and private business entities, as for-profit and not-for-profit education service providers.

It is worth noting that first, any policy instrument involves a certain political will and interest, and divorced from the actual context to explore its nature may be biased. Second, partnerships created for public welfare are different from those designed for commercial benefits in terms of how their constituent elements are distributed. Thus, the core decision of ePPPs is whether or not to provide more and better educational services.

Currently, there are different types of schools in the field of basic education. Schools can be

divided into eight categories, in terms of property rights, financial support, and operational management, and range from pure public schools to pure private entities. Table 2.4 provides an overview of these school types.

Table 2.4. Eight Types of Schooling for Basic Education in China

Type of Schooling	Body of Property Rights (who owns)	Financial Support (who sponsors)	Operation Management (who operates)
Public / Government Schools (<i>gongli xuexiao</i>)	Government	Government	Government
Public-built people-operate (<i>gongjian minying</i>)	Government	Government	Non-government
Government-run people-support (<i>gongban minzhu</i>)	Government	Government, Non-government & Parental choice fee	Non-government
Government & Non-government jointly sponsored (<i>gongmin gongjian</i>)	Government	Government & Non-government	Non-government
State-owned people-run (e.g. entrusted management; franchise) (<i>guoyou minban</i>)	Government	Government	Non-government
People-run school (<i>minban</i>)	Non-government	Non-government	Non-government
People-run Government-sponsored Schools (<i>minban gongzhu</i>)	Non-government	Non-government & Government subsidies	Non-government
Private School (e.g. international school) (<i>sili xuexiao</i>)	Non-government	Non-government	Non-government

The four types of schools highlighted in the shaded section of the table can be classified as PPP schools, as the government and other non-governmental forces are involved together in the education process, either through funding or cooperation.

The overall development of PPP initiatives in China was outlined in the previous chapter. A specific example occurred in 1988, when the Shajiao B power plant was established in Shenzhen. This plant was operated according to the build-operate-transfer model, and was therefore considered the first PPP project (Thieriot & Dominguez, 2015). In 2014, a series of national directives were published and included in the policy agenda to encourage private engagement in social services traditionally operated by public entities (See Table 1 in Chapter

1). This reform established the development of PPP initiatives, marking the start of a PPP era in 2015 (Tang & Ni, 2013).

According to the 4th quarterly report of the National PPP Comprehensive Information Platform Project Library published by the China Public-Private Partnerships Center ((Yuan, 2017; Chen, 2016), at the end of August 2016 there were 515 educational projects, representing 4.99% of all national PPP projects. Compulsory education comprised the largest proportion of these, accounting for 28.16% of all ePPPs. Most ePPPs (88.74%) involved a private entity sponsoring school facilities, such as school construction and infrastructure, while private participation in educational software enhancement, such as educational content, teaching services, and management and teacher training, was strikingly lacking (Yuan, 2017; Chen, 2016).

Although the development of ePPPs has become an emerging trend, most of the PPP literature in the field of basic education has focused on policy advice and theoretical advocacy (Chen, 2017; Wang & Yuan, 2013; Zhang & Wu, 2013; Tang & Ni, 2013; Yuan & Shan, 2009). What prevails in the literature is a shared conception that a solid basis for the development of ePPPs has been formulated, based on three aspects of the current reality of China. First, China's funding for education cannot raise the quality of basic education to the next level. Second, a competition mechanism can be used to improve the efficiency of public management and strengthen the driving force of quality. Third, introducing the PPP model in basic education can help create a favorable environment in which school autonomy can be reinforced to improve education (Tang & Ni, 2013; Ni, 2013).

Some researchers have offered some suggestions for developing ePPPs. For example, a change of mentality has been deemed necessary, as ePPPs are often wrongly conceptualized as education privatization. To remedy this, it is necessary to reach a consensus that the introduction of the PPP model will not affect the public welfare nature of basic education. On

the contrary, its objective is to offer better alternatives for public services in education. In addition, the impetus for establishing a partnership should be based on providing more diverse educational choices, instead of generating profitable returns or economic benefits. This variety of school choices will in turn transform the ecology of public education, creating more individualized school visions. In addition, the need to create scientific assessment rubrics for project evaluation and supervision, to carefully select private partners, and to flexibly choose the most suitable PPP model has been highlighted (Chen, 2017; Wang & Yuan, 2013; Zhang & Wu, 2013).

The scarcity of ePPP initiatives can be interpreted from a pragmatic perspective. In Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Shanghai, students have achieved an enviable level of learning in international assessments, including PISA, due to the high quality of public education for all (Fennell, 2007). Thus, in such areas, where public education mainly meets parents' needs for excellence, PPP schools have not appeared to be required. This is different from the case of the UK and the US: consider how charter schools emerged to save public education from disaster in the US. Critics of new public management have suggested that in the field of basic education, institutions should maintain a purely public character and promote the value of public products (referred to as educational quality) based on honesty, professionalism, and commitment to the public interest (Fennell, 2007).

In summary, research on PPP-related issues in the field of basic education has proliferated in the academic world over the years, while the knowledge base in this field remains thin and inadequate.

2.2. Administrative Challenges in Public Schools Adopting PPP Forms

Along with privatization as a policy agenda in developed and developing countries, constant changes have taken place in society since the late 1980s, marking the start of an information

age sometimes called the post-industrial society (Hage & Powers, 1992). On the one hand, the emergence of PPP initiatives reflects a global trend toward autonomy and decentralization (Mu, et.al, 2011). On the other hand, the explosion of knowledge and globalization in the post-industrial era has increased the complexity of work roles and education (Crow, Hausman & Scribner, 2002).

Historically, public schools have been seen as self-managed organizations of learning, operating on the basis of a hierarchical and rigid bureaucracy. In the process of transforming learners into highly skilled and responsible citizens, public schools must follow fixed regulations and restrictions set by higher authorities (Crow, et. al, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1994). The literature has shown paradigmatic changes in the nature of work embedded in the emergence of the post-industrial society (Jr, Solomon & Tarabishy, 2005; Crow, et. al, 2002). Unlike rationality, which was the characteristic of work in the last century, the post-industrial society is characterized by the complexity of work roles (Hage & Powers, 1992). This emphasis on complexity requires tailored responses to customers, a mindset focused on human capital and information search, increased interaction, and a benchmark of assessment adapted to entrepreneurial innovation for all (Hage & Powers, 1992). Therefore, instead of “decisiveness and firmness,” “flexibility and sensitivity” have become universal principles for individuals and organizations to cope with the complexity of the environment more effectively and efficiently (Crow, et. al, 2002:195).

In addition, the partnership involved in the PPP model requires public schools to relinquish part of their governance and operation of education to external agents (Yonah, Dahan & Markovich, 2008; Yemini & Sagie, 2015). Inevitably, the predominant role of the government in decision-making has shifted to a type of distributed ownership, in which risks are shared among all parties via a partnership (Latham, 2009b; Thieriot & Dominguez, 2015). As a result, the metaphor of school has shifted from a type of autonomous social mechanism to a

continually interacting community of professionals or stakeholders, who achieve consensus regarding school development (Sergiovanni, 1994).

These changes have significantly reshaped school management, catalyzing decentralization, the development of school autonomy, and creating high-stakes accountability to multiple stakeholders (e.g., LEAs, the private sector, parents, NGOs) (Leithwood, Jantzi, & McElheron-Hopkins, 2006). A large part of the education system is delegated to “those representing organizations whose chief interests lie in something other than the advancement of education for the good of society and an active democratic citizenry” (Yemini & Sagie, 2015:546).

As a result, it is not surprising that there is a common dilemma voiced in the current PPP literature regarding the dynamics of power relations between all parties involved. Chen and Hubbard (2012), for instance, argued that in the social, political, and economic environment of China, the partnership between the public and private sectors has distorted risk allocation in favor of the stronger party (i.e., the local government). In the Western context, similar failures have been illustrated, to show that an effective allocation of tasks cannot be taken for granted in the establishment of a PPP contract (Hodge & Greve, 2007; Latham, 2009a; Latham, 2009b; Thieriot & Dominguez, 2015). This dilemma creates uncertainty for private entities, which in turn can end partnerships without gain.

In short, PPP school principals are expected to have not only pedagogical expertise, but also business-oriented management and leadership skills, and risk-taking and change management attributes.

2.3. Educational Leadership

This section is divided into four subsections. The first section is an overview of educational leadership, a rigorous academic field from the Western knowledge base. The second section

comprises a discussion of the results of a survey of the changing nature of school leadership. The third section is focused on principal leadership in the context of PPP schools. Finally, the fourth section on principal leadership in the Chinese context comprises a focused perspective of culture-specific leadership in Confucian society in China.

2.3.1. An overview of educational leadership

In what follows, an attempt is made to give a brief overview of the development of leadership theories since the early 20th century, and to focus on leadership approaches and effective strategies in the field of education. Regardless of the types of emerging leadership models and strategies, there is lack of empirical studies of leading PPP schools in the non-Western context.

Throughout history, people have tried to identify what makes a good leader. For example, in the East, in 500 BC Confucius listed the virtues of effective leaders, emphasizing the four aspects of *ren* (love), *li* (proper conduct), *xiao* (piety), and *zhongyong* (the doctrine of the mean).

In the contemporary field of general management and leadership, Katz (1955) proposed three basic skills that can be developed for effective administration, i.e., technical, human, and conceptual skills. Technical skills refer to a set of professional techniques for dealing with specific tasks. As these are mainly related to processes, physical objects, or both, human skills mainly concern people and are reflected in the process of an administrator interacting with others and building trust within his or her team. Finally, conceptual skills refer to the ability of an executive to comprehend the complex functioning of an organization, to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and to take action to advance “the over-all welfare of the total organization” (Katz, 1955: 36).

In addition, Barnard (1968) suggested two primary functions of a leader, i.e., managerial and emotional functions. Managerial functions involve guiding, directing, and constraining

choices and actions, while emotional functions involve defining a vision, building trust, and committing to a larger moral goal.

Over the past 80 years, scholars have identified six main schools of leadership theories (Bass, 1990; Turner & Müller, 2005), as shown in the table below.

Table 2.5. Six Main Schools of Leadership Theory

Types of schools	Timeline	Main assumptions
School of Trait	Before 1940s	Leaders are born, not made. Effective leaders share common traits in terms of ability, personality, physical appearance and the like.
School of Behavioral or Style	1940s-1960s	Effective leaders can be made. They adopt certain styles or behaviors, such as relationship-or-output-concerned, enacting authority, collective decision-making and more.
School of Contingency	1960s & 1970s	What makes an effective leader would depend on the situation. Three major variables (leader-member relations, task structure and position power) determine whether certain leadership style favors the situation.
Visionary or Charismatic School	1980s & 1990s	Successful business leaders leading their organizations through change can be displaying transactional or transformational leadership. Transactional leaders emphasize contingent rewards, whereas transformational leaders exhibits charisma in goal-setting, inspiration-giving, pride engendering, challenging followers and trusting subordinates.
School of Emotional Intelligence	Since the late 1990s	The success of a leader is more dependent upon his/her emotional intelligence than his/her intellectual capability. Two domains of emotional intelligence were identified, including personal competence and social competence.
School of Competency		Leaders can be made by acquiring different combinations of competencies, which, in turn, produce different leadership styles catering to the needs of different contexts.

What has been discussed so far can be summarized in the following statements. From initial

attention to the unique quality and capabilities of leaders, research on leadership has gradually shifted, and now emphasizes how leadership qualities or skills can be integrated into the work situation and best match a given context.

As leadership is a concept too controversial and ambiguous to define, it is commonly accepted that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy to lead successfully. Effective leadership is often embodied through the process of making sense of a context and empowering subordinates to act accordingly. Educational leadership needs to be re-examined to understand how leadership is applied in school, as a learning organization.

In the field of education, there is an abundance of research highlighting the critical factors of principal leadership for the success of a school (Bell, Bolam & Cubillo, 2003; Portin & Shen, 1999). Although educational leadership and management appeared as a rigorous subject in the international academic world only half a century ago (Campbell & Faber, 1961), this field has grown considerably with a steady increase in the number of studies on effective principalship (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013).

Several theoretical models have been developed to address the problems of school leadership in traditional educational settings. Providing a complete list of emerging models is beyond the scope of this study, but based on their relevance to the problems of interest, four models were selected and are discussed in chronological order below.

First, the effective school movement in the early 1980s in the US gave rise to the theory of instructional leadership. Research on this theory has highlighted the guiding and decisive role of a principal in shaping curricula and instruction to improve student learning, especially in poor urban communities (Hallinger, 2003). However, the instructional leadership model has been widely criticized for being too focused (and placing undue demands) on the role of the principal as the only source of expertise and authority.

During the 1990s, school restructuring reform started with the emergence of alternative

“adjectival leadership” models (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010:10). For instance, scholars have identified 21 leadership approaches that have been studied theoretically and empirically (Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005). Distributed leadership, transformational leadership, and contingent leadership are some examples.

Unlike instructional leadership, which places the principal at the center, distributed leadership emphasizes that many people are capable of leading an organization. It argues that the way people interact with others, either to execute or to facilitate and support leadership, is the key to success. What matters most in the concept of distributed leadership is the idea that leadership is not a static phenomenon, but is an ever-changing situation in which different people undertake different tasks (Spillane, 2006). In other words, it is the interaction of different people, rather than individual direction, that governs the execution of leadership. Change-oriented education policies permeate the global environment. With a focus on restructuring and transforming contemporary schools, transformational leadership is undoubtedly one of the most influential leadership models in education (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leaders are able to meet the requirements of 21st century education, as they can inspire others to “commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers’ leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring and provision of both challenge and support” (Bass & Riggio, 2006:4). Depending on the context, transformational leaders can be directive or participative, democratic or authoritarian (Bass & Riggio, 2006:4).

Contingent leadership shares common attributes with transformational leadership, in that it focuses on the suitability of leaders’ working style with their setting. This two-dimensional model involves an effective interaction of tasks and relationships. First, leaders can adapt their leadership behavior to the situations in which they find themselves. Second, this concept

is affected by different social systems, cultures, and social management modes (Fiedler, 1964).

Studies of traditional schools have painted a general picture of leaders' characteristics, styles and, more recently, contextual interaction. Depending on the complexity of the situation, a task-oriented leadership style, for instance, is more effective than a delegating style when followers are inexperienced with limited skills (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004), while in other circumstances, charismatic leaders can be as successful as transformative leaders (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

In addition to theories of educational leadership, scholars have explored effective leadership strategies to understand the success of leadership behaviors.

Kouzes and Posner (2004) argued that leadership, as “a collection of practices and behaviours regardless of the profession” (2004:5), is a skill that anyone can learn. Their two decades of research on effective leadership have generated a five-dimensional model for effective leadership practices, namely encouraging the heart, modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, and enabling others to act.

In addition, Robinson (2007) identified five sets of leadership practices that are effective for student achievement, namely, 1) establishing goals and expectations; 2) strategic resourcing; 3) planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; 4) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and 5) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Similarly, Leithwood (2011) proposed four main categories of leadership practices shared by successful leaders in various contexts. These broad categories are as follows:

1) “Setting directions” is aimed to motivate all staff. This includes establishing a shared vision, communicating group goals to all members, creating high expectations for performance, and clarifying directions.

2) “People development” is focused on building professional capital. This includes providing personalized support to individuals, stimulating minds, and developing work-related ethics and values.

3) “Redesigning the organization” means creating a conducive environment for people to show their full potential. This includes supporting cooperation, establishing a culture of mutual collaboration, working with families and communities to foster productive relationships, and leading school life in society at large.

4) “Managing the instructional program” is focused on teaching and learning practices. This includes designing the program, providing instructional support, supervising school activities, filtering distractions to help staff focus on teaching and learning, and reallocating resources for optimal use (Leithwood, 2011).

In conclusion, various concepts of leadership compete for attention, and the way in which leaders implement these practices vary across different contexts. Consistent with sweeping education reforms, substantial changes have occurred in the roles of school principals and head teachers. However, unlike most leadership studies focusing on traditional schools, little research has been done on how principals lead and deal with the more complex PPP setting. In the next subsection, the changing nature of educational leadership documented in the literature is explored.

2.3.2. Leadership for change

Leadership in schools has changed over time (National College for School Leadership, 2007). The literature has documented an increasing scale of change for schooling, e.g., standardized teaching, decentralized education management, increased demands to improve the quality of public education, more accountability to different stakeholders, increased pressure on public spending, and more shortages of resources and funds (UNESCO, 2015; Hauge, Norenes, & Vedøy, 2014; Eyal & Kark, 2004).

School improvement is limited by a system of complex factors. In recent years, the dominant discourse of competition and marketization under the new liberalism has increased the pressure of accountability, not only for institutions, but also for the ongoing accountability mechanism within the education system. Most countries delegate certain responsibilities of power and assessment to schools, while requiring that schools adopt a universal standardized framework formulated by the state, leading to a paradox of decentralization and centralization (Hess, 2005): i.e., schools have more autonomy, but are also subject to increased scrutiny. This paradox increases the pressure of principals as school managers, who have to face the issue of overwhelming accountability inside and outside the school (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016).

However, principal leadership plays a decisive role in educational change and school improvement. The empirical link between school leadership and improved learning outcomes has been widely recognized (Fullan, 2007). For example, a study of more than 1,800 schools serving 15-year-old students in eight countries (Hauge, et. al, 2014) revealed a positive correlation between leadership and school improvement, i.e. better-quality management was strongly associated with better educational outcomes.

This raises the following question: what has school leadership got to do with educational change?

Two dimensions are presented below to delineate the concept of leading educational change. The first dimension is the dimension of practice, referring to what leaders should do to bring about meaningful change. In a broad sense, leadership for change involves a chain of actions, including careful observation of the new setting, listening and learning from others, finding facts and problem-solving solutions, diagnosing the problem, meeting people's needs, and collaborating on a credible plan for change (Fullan, 2008). While leading the school through major changes, effective school principals should be able to create a vision for academic

success and an atmosphere conducive to appropriate education, cultivate the leadership of others, improve teaching, and manage people, data, and processes (Syed, 2014).

The second dimension is the dimension of processes. Leadership for change is often centered on the dynamic interaction between leaders and teachers in achieving the core objectives of the school (Fullan, 2007; Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2015; Leo & Wickenberg, 2013). As mentioned earlier (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016), a reciprocal relationship involving the distribution of authority through decentralized networks, the establishment of mutual trust, and a positive influence on school culture must be implemented to make adaptive changes to the complexity and tensions of the environment in which leadership takes effect. To delve into this process of change, scholars have documented a skillful design of relocating staff and cultural and technological resources to bring about advanced leadership. These deliberate teamwork efforts are vectors for change, highlighting the need to develop collaborative and participative concepts of school leadership (Hauge, et. al, 2014).

During this process, school principals should be aware of the current norms of the school as a learning organization, and how these can be changed to produce better results. Professional norms are guidelines or directions for the action of school staff, and these norms can be set when leaders and staff have expectations of each other, of the policy agenda, and of students and parents (Leo & Wickenberg, 2013). Good communication should also be encouraged within the school, to set and disseminate norms.

In addition, an overlooked area of leadership succession was found to have an effect on school transformation in a qualitative case analysis (Barker, 2006). The results showed that a successful transition from one leader to another is the key to sustainable school improvement. The need to address key issues, such as the arrival, inauguration, and departure of principals during leadership succession, was also stressed.

In short, school development involves a variety of interacting factors, especially in the

contemporary era marked by constant change. While educational decisions have been challenged by the increasing dynamics and complexity of society and the economy, leadership in PPP schools remains underexplored. As the PPP phenomenon has become global and many countries have adopted this approach to modernize education, it is necessary to further examine the specific experience of principals in PPP schools. Thus, the limits and challenges of principal leadership in the context of PPP schools are discussed in the following section.

2.3.3. Principal leadership in PPP schools

In traditional public schools, principals are primarily accountable to the government. However, in PPP schools, the issue of accountability is more complex and requires attention. To describe the different types of accountability, Moos (2005) adopted an integrated model to highlight the increasingly complex environment in which principals work. There are five types of accountability in his model:

1) Managerial accountability: The school must live up to standards, standardised procedures, norms and criteria outlined by superior administrations and ministries.

2) Market oriented accountability: The school must deliver the products/services that consumers expect on the basis of standardised declarations.

3) Public accountability: The local community/parents assess if the school performs according to public promises because schools are important cultural and social institutions in the local community.

4) Professional accountability: The school must live up to professional standards as defined by the teaching profession.

5) Ethical accountability: The school must live up to ethical/moral norms as it is an educational, human institution (Moos, 2005: 323-24; quoted in Qian, 2009: 51).

In addition, most types of accountability are integrated into any education system “most of

the time,” with different interaction patterns for balance (Qian, 2009: 51). How to prioritize one type of accountability is, to a certain extent, determined by several culture-specific factors. This creates tensions in the work lives of school principals.

In the case of PPP schools, a recurring idea is that the diversity of partnerships blurs the line between the public and private entities, creating new problems for effective governance (UNESCO, 2015; Nayyar, 2015; Patrinos et. al, 2009; McQuaid, 2000). Most of these challenges revolve around the issue of who ultimately controls or leads and manages the school: the principal, the school district, or the private sector partner (DiMartino, 2013).

Another question is to what extent the partnership can really contribute to school development, as each of the main participants (as different stakeholders) has different goals, namely, the Department of Education, State Treasuries, private corporations, and school leaders (Poole, 2010).

Thus, principal leadership is important for the sustainability of a partnership, as a school leader should be able to develop shared responsibilities and common values between the various stakeholders.

Among the limited number of studies, those focused on school leadership in the context of PPPs for compulsory education have generated mixed results.

In the UK, Woods and Woods (2004, 2005) conducted a three-year case study of a PPP, in which the core services of an LEA were outsourced. The perceptions of private senior managers and secondary head teachers both revealed signs of modernized leadership, suggesting that the management of public education has dealt with the injection of private sector values in a positive way. Furthermore, to reconfigure the elements of modernized leadership and traditional public ethics, the authors proposed an adaptive public service (APS) model to resemble on-site leadership.

Davies and Hentschke (2006) found that the success of ePPPs is context specific. It depends

on the interaction between different factors, including the preconditions for partnership, the resulting changes, and the partnership mechanism. Therefore, entering into a new partnership requires a proactive leadership style.

Similarly, Mertkan (2011) reported a general willingness on the part of head teachers to welcome voluntary management support from the private sector, but only when this support is tailored to the specific but complex needs of a particular school.

However, in the US, the private management of public schools, as the main type of ePPP, is mainly shown in studies on the charter school experiment (Patrinos et. al, 2009). Compared with traditional public schools, charter schools do not provide management innovation (Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). Leadership is more important for charter schools serving students from low-income families than those from middle-class families, and there are many ways to improve the current leadership of charter schools (National Governors' Association, 2008).

Moreover, Callet's (2010) dissertation, which comprised an in-depth case analysis, confirmed that leadership is important for the success of a partnership. Although ePPPs have several advantages and disadvantages, innovation in education does not necessarily lead to improved student achievement. A shared commitment and common values are crucial for a sustainable PPP relationship.

Weal and Coll's (2007) case study examined the nature of client-provider technology education partnerships in New Zealand between full primary schools (Years 1 to 8) and external technology education providers for Year 7 and Year 8 students. They concluded that it remains questionable whether these partnerships were the most effective way to provide technology instruction to Year 7 and Year 8 students in full primary schools. This may be because educational partnerships are hampered by a lack of shared leadership and accountabilities.

Compared with studies in developed countries, the results of studies in developing countries are more conflicting and pessimistic. For instance, Rajbhandari (2011) reported that a partnership in Nepal has made no significant improvements to the school. Likewise, in the United Arab Emirates, Thorne (2011) found that a mismatch of responsibilities between different parties placed a heavy burden on the school principal and staff. Overall, three key observations can be drawn from the review of the literature on school leadership in the context of ePPPs:

- 1) Despite the potential of ePPPs to create synergy between different sectors to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of a given school (McQuaid, 2000; Patrinos, et.al, 2009), empirical studies on this are lacking.
- 2) A universal theme is that leadership is important and context is king;
- 3) Previous research has focused on the Western context (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013:308).

These observations highlight the need for empirical studies in non-Western contexts. Thus, the issue of principal leadership in China is explored in the following subsection. Again, the scarcity of literature underlines the need for more empirical research to understand school principalship in general, and principalship in PPP schools in particular.

2.3.4. Principal leadership in the Chinese context

Currently, there are more than 310,000 primary and secondary schools in China (Hu, 2013). As there is at least one principal and one vice principal in each school, there are at least 620,000 primary and secondary school principals in China, making it the nation with the highest number of schools and principals (Liu, Xu, Grant, Strong, & Fang, 2017). Consequently, China urgently needs a large number of qualified school leaders. As with Western education systems, the recent education reform in China reflected a

universal call to reframe the roles and responsibilities of principals. Since the early 1990s, a series of government policies have been published to regulate the standards and qualifications of principals, as shown in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6. Policy Documents for School Principalship in Compulsory Education

Documents (Issuing Body, Year)	Specific Content
Incumbency Quality and Position Requirement of Elementary and Secondary Schools Principals Nationwide (for trial implementation) (SEC, 1991) (<i>Quanguo Zhongxiaoxue Xiaozhang Renzhi Tiaojian he Gangwei Yaoqiu</i> <Shi Xing>)	Put forward three categories of total 17 items required for the criteria of principal leadership: basic political attainment, job-related knowledge requirements, and job-related competence requirements.
Strengthening Quality of Elementary and Secondary Schools Principals Nation-wide (for trial implementation) (SEC, 1992) (<i>Guanyu Jiaqiang Quanguo Zhongxiaoxue Xiaozhang Duiwu Jianshe de Yijian</i> <Shi Xing>)	Proposed four dimensions of effective principalship: morality (<i>de</i>), competence (<i>neng</i>), diligence (<i>qin</i>), and achievement (<i>ji</i>).
Implementation Suggestion on the Guideline of Education Reform and Development of China (SC, 1994) (<i>Guowuyuan Guanyu Zhongguo Jiaoyu Gaige he Fazhan Gangyao de Shishi Yijian</i>)	“In order to enhance principal leadership, it is necessary to formulate standards for the positions of primary and secondary school principals. Implement the ‘training program for millions of principals,’ and strive for the implementation of the requirement for primary and secondary school principals to hold on-the-job training certificate around 1997” (SC, 1994)
Provisions on Implementing the Requirement for Primary and Secondary School Principals of Holding On-the-job-training Certificate (SEC, 1997) (<i>Shixing Quanguo Zhongxiaoxue</i>	Newly appointed primary and secondary principals should be certified with adequate on-the-job training.

<i>Xiaozhang Shanggang Zhidu de Guiding)</i>	
Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality Education in an All-round Way (CCCPC & SC, 1999) <i>(Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan Guanyu Shenhua Jiaoyu Gaige Quanmian Tuijin Suzhi Jiaoyu de Jueding)</i>	“We shall consolidate and improve the system of on-the-job training and certificate appointment for primary and secondary school principals. Try to implement the principal career-ladder system. Gradually improve the system of principal selection and appointment, and encourage excellent principals to teach in low-performing schools.” (CCCPC & SC, 1999)
Decision of the State Council on the Reform and Development of Basic education (SC, 2001) <i>(Guowuyuan Guanyu Jichu Jiaoyu Gaige he Fazhan de Jueding)</i>	“We shall implement the system of appointment of primary and secondary school principals, define the qualifications of principals, and gradually establish the mechanism of open recruitment and competition for principals. Implement the fixed-term tenure system for principals and encourage continued re-election. Actively implement the principal career-ladder system” (SC, 2001).
National Guidelines for Medium-and-Long-Term Educational Reform and Development 2010-2020 (MOE, 2010) <i>(Guojia Zhongchangqi Jiaoyu Gaige he Fazhan Guihua Gangyao <2010-2020>)</i>	Set a 10-year development plan for education: target equity and excellence; propose the concept of “Educators Managing Schools”.
Guidelines for Professional Standards for Compulsory Education School Principals (MOE, 2013) <i>(Yiwu Jiaoyu Xuexiao Xiaozhang Zhuanye Biaozhun)</i>	Explain the six professional responsibilities of principals: set a school development plan; create a nurturing school culture; engage in curriculum and instructional leadership; facilitate the professional development of teachers; optimize internal organizational management; adapt to external contexts.

What can be inferred from Table 2.6 is that school principals in compulsory education in

China are expected to perform to high quality standards. Their responsibilities range from the internal management of the school to adaptability to the societal environment. These policy documents define a standardized professionalization of school leadership and reflect the direction of China's education reform toward school effectiveness and principal accountabilities. In a sense, this echoes the international trend of neoliberalism and new public management (Ball & Youdell, 2007; Qian, 2009; Wei, 2017).

China is a country with clear national administrative and control structures (Brien, 2017). The education system in China has long been described as highly centralized, the State Education Commission being a symbol of official authority in the development of education policy (Turner & Acker, 2017).

Today, several aspects of the Chinese education model demonstrate its hybridity. These include the shift toward decentralization, the autonomy of educational institutions, constructivist pedagogy, formative and alternative assessment, active participation and student-centered learning, and the emphasis on lifelong learning, innovation, experimentation, and knowledge by doing (Beckett & Zhao, 2016; Tan & Reyes, 2016).

Although many education reforms have taken place in recent decades, scholars have described this process as a process of “centralization, decentralization and recentralization” (Hawkins, 2000:442). Policies for the PPP approach have been put on the official agenda and advertised nationwide, but the implementation process at different administrative levels is always fluid (Turner, 2017; Brien, 2017). Local governments have acted as “the real entrepreneurs and change agents” (Hawkins, 2000:445) to foster innovative reforms in education. Thus, it is not surprising to see a gap between policy intent and policy effect. When the trend toward decentralization and marketization swept across China, the interpretation and implementation of the policy at the school level was influenced by “the particularities of the context, and [by the fact] that the status of the school plays a particularly

important role in this process” (Qian & Walker, 2011:187).

As Hawkins (2000) noted, the government is reluctant to use the term “privatization,” but in reality, “while privatization is growing, it is not leading the growth and change that is occurring” (445). To further explain it,

traditional values that honor hierarchy, seniority and status continue to shape perspectives toward power and staff involvement. Therefore, despite continuing efforts to “decentralize authority,” “involve teachers in decision making,” “empower teachers” and create cadres of “middle-level leaders” in these societies, educational change and school improvement remain largely top-down enterprises (Hallinger & Walker, 2017:139).

The literature on the role of culture in educational practices shows that culture is a powerful determinant of the characteristics of a particular school (Alexander, 2000; Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989): the culture in which a school is located in a city, and which is shared by all stakeholders, distinguishes one school from another. However, culture is not attached to a particular school; instead, it is part of the education process, with cultural values and ideas underpinning all observed practices of school leaders (Alexander, 2000; Tobin et.al, 1989).

As the influences of Confucian culture and values permeate Chinese society, the adoption of the PPP model at the national level involves sophisticated ideas that are often implicit and open to various interpretations (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Thus, the way school leaders understand a given policy and implement it through leadership practices depends on their previous beliefs and understandings and the “constructs, schema, values and emotional reactions they bring to the policy content” (Louis & Robinson, 2012:631). All of these influences help shape their decision-making process to run and manage a school.

Overall, few empirical studies have been conducted on ePPPs or the contextual interaction between school leadership and current ePPPs. The few existing studies have been

non-empirical, serving each of the four dimensions:

- 1) Conceptual work on the need for ePPPs (why);
- 2) Theoretical studies introducing ePPPs in compulsory and non-compulsory education (how);
- 3) Policy analysis of ePPPs (what); and
- 4) Contrast and comparison of ePPP projects (PPP projects in brief) (Zhang & Wu, 2013).

Therefore, using the Chinese context provides an explanatory perspective to understand and envision how problems are solved and decisions are made by the principal as a manifestation of his or her leadership.

In this chapter, it has been shown that few empirical studies have been conducted on ePPPs or the contextual interaction between school leadership and current ePPPs; this typifies the evolution of ePPPs and the unknown scope of the different types of principal leadership. Given the absence of such data, more in-depth research and empirical studies are needed to enrich the literature.

Qualitative methodology would be useful to explore the complexity of how school leadership is implemented in a certain political, social, and cultural context. As such, a rationalized choice of research designs are outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Methodology

In this chapter, a detailed description of the study methodology is provided. The first objective is to further define the scope of this study and to clarify the research problem. The second objective is to discuss the theoretical framework used in the study and the potential paradigm adopted. The third objective is to justify the choice of the methodological approach and the corresponding data collection and analysis techniques.

This chapter is divided into six main sections. In the first section the scope of the study is clarified, and in the second section the choice of qualitative methodology is justified. To narrow the qualitative boundaries, the rationale for adopting a case study design is given in the third section. The data collection and data analysis are described in the fourth and fifth sections, respectively, while the last section comprises a discussion of the limitations and ethical issues of this study.

3.1. Scope of the Study

The study comprised an investigation of the operation of a PPP school in mainland China, to reveal how school leadership manifests and functions through the interaction between different stakeholders. Specifically, it was determined how the principal managed the opportunities and challenges created by the PPP as the governing body of School M in Shenzhen, China.

As stated in Chapter 1, Shenzhen has long been regarded as the vanguard of economic reform in China, and thus a pilot project in Shenzhen is generally considered a useful model for other regions. The establishment of School M, adopting the new PPP approach, has been recognized as an innovative education reform by LEAs at the district and municipal levels, signaling its uniqueness and need to be studied. By exploring school leadership and the PPP in School M, the knowledge base of leadership in PPP schools can be enriched, from an

Eastern perspective.

This study was focused on two main issues: the nature of partnership in PPP schools in China and principal leadership. First, from its establishment in 2013 between the DEB representing the public sector and a famous company as the private entity, the bilateral partnership evolved and developed during the duration of the study. This relationship, partly due to policy momentum, inevitably brought new meanings to school leadership and the ecology of local education. The study led to an empirical understanding of this new type of partnership in the largely centralized education system in China, revealing how principal leadership is executed in this new form of school organization.

Second, questions about the nature of school leadership practices were answered by examining the practical concerns related to the management of this new form of school organization. Various perceptions from different stakeholders were explored to investigate how the context influences individual knowledge, and the approach to lead this particular school.

Based on the objectives and context of this study, the researcher situated her approach in the field of qualitative research. As some scholars have stated, the differences in the combination of different factors “have led to distinctive approaches to qualitative research” (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014:2). These factors may include, but are not limited to, ontology (beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it) and epistemology (the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired), the goals and purposes of the research, and the general environment in which the research is conducted (Ormston, et. al, 2014:2). The following section further explains the choice of qualitative methodology.

3.2. Choice of Qualitative Methodology

It is difficult to clearly define qualitative research (Barbour, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

At a general level, it is often described as “a naturalistic, interpretative approach, concerned with exploring phenomena ‘from the interior’ and taking the perspectives and accounts of research participants as a starting point” (Ormston, et. al, 2014:3).

The choice of a qualitative design for this study was based on the following three aspects.

First, compared with quantitative studies, qualitative research tends to be more suited to three types of questions:

- 1) the importance of the occurrence of an event or phenomenon for a particular population;
- 2) the influence of natural and social situations on such events or phenomena; and
- 3) problems or practical concerns arising from the development or consequence of such events or phenomena (Yin, 2003).

This study comprised an investigation of the operation of a PPP school in mainland China to reveal how school leadership manifests and functions through the interaction between different stakeholders. The research problem of this study had two dimensions. One dimension concerned the nature of the partnership, exploring its value and importance for leadership in School M. The other dimension concerned the pattern of the leadership practices of the principal, seen as the consequences of the dynamic interaction between different stakeholders. Both aspects fell within the domain of qualitative research.

Second, qualitative research was deemed useful for exploring the complexity of how school leadership is implemented in a certain political, social, and cultural context. One of the main strengths of qualitative research is its ability to reveal the dynamic process of development of a certain event or phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Flick, 2009). This study was focused on the current cultural and political context in which the school activities studied took place, and the significance of these activities. What was observed was a set of contemporary events, as the researcher had no control over the subjects and objects of

research (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative research is not a simple description of current events or social phenomena.

Instead, it focuses on “thick description” (Barbour, 2013: 92), approaching the topic of research from multiple dimensions with reasoning and analysis. It involves multiple channels, information, experiences, and knowledge that are otherwise difficult to access with other research approaches, such as quantitative methods (Qian, 2010).

Third, qualitative research goes beyond the level of description. It aims to improve the status quo (Qian, 2010). Indeed, I, as the researcher, personally established a good relationship with the principal of School M, and had known the secretary-general of the Education Foundation (EF) delegated by the private company before the development of this study. Besides, my position as a research fellow at the DEB was useful to interpret and understand the concrete meaning of the impetus of administrative policy and bureaucratic orders and commands in Chinese society. Constantly I went out into the field and collaborated with various stakeholders, empowering the “voices” of the participants at different levels in the context of the research. Acting as a liaison between the public and private sectors, I was able to facilitate communication, in the event of ambiguity and misinterpretation.

3.3. Case Study Design

A case study design was chosen as it is better than other designs when focusing on the “how” and “why” aspects of a phenomenon (Yin, 2003:9). Indeed, one of the main advantages of case studies is that “they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects, and that in-depth understanding is required to do justice to the case” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013:492). It produces an illustrative analysis of the uniqueness of a PPP school, in which the principal’s leadership skills intertwine with social norms, expectations, and competing interests to facilitate the

development of the school. In addition, ePPPs are evolving. They are rooted in this contemporary age, and thus a case study is most appropriate to draw a dynamic picture of interdependent variables (Yin, 2003).

Therefore, a case study design was used as the optimal design to provide an in-depth understanding of principal leadership in the chosen scenario of a Chinese school. School M, adopting a PPP, was treated as a single case in the real-life, contemporary context of Futian District in Shenzhen, China. The principal led and managed this school during the study period, thus the information gathered was first-hand, not lost in time. The focus was on the case itself, as School M differs from traditional public schools and presents a unique situation. In particular, the study was focused on determining how the principal interacted with others to reach a consensus between different stakeholders.

The merit of a single-case analysis lies in the fact that the preliminary theory, derived from one man and one study and based on original data, can explain a specific social phenomenon in a particular situation. In the future, it may develop into a formal theory to become a system of conceptual and logical structures that can be used to illustrate, demonstrate, and predict the laws of related social phenomena (Zhang, 2010).

Given its uniqueness and innovation, this case study was believed to be able to initiate research prior to a larger project, or to provide exemplary illustrations for subsequent qualitative and quantitative research.

Case studies require more than one tool to collect data and multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). As there are many factors involved in a single case, being able to better understand a combination of factors is the key to inferring meaning from complex realities (Cohen, et.al, 2013).

That is to say, a case study design was adopted in this study as a type of qualitative design. Semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders were conducted to reveal their

perceptions of the partnership and the principal's leadership style. In addition, the researcher was immersed in the PPP organizational culture, often through participant observation, to describe and interpret the leadership behaviors and practices of the school principal. Reflective field notes were generated, as a complementary source to record the daily life of the school principal.

3.4. Researcher as Participant

A meaningful interpretation of a social phenomenon or situation can be generated through a dynamic interaction between the researcher and the participants (Patton, 2015). In this regard, I became a participant of this study, and had many opportunities to know the research context and to build conversations with the phenomena in their context.

The role as researcher-participant enabled me to develop an insider's perspective. As a research fellow and a middle manager at the DEB between August 2011 and January 2019, I experienced and witnessed first-hand the development of School M as an innovative project, different phases of school leadership, key events, and multilateral dialogues. During the study period, I was close to the situation and was able to observe phenomena that would have otherwise remained hidden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, I was aware of the close interaction between the other participants and myself, and of the emerging interpretation of the meaning (Patton, 2015). I was thus able to acquire an accumulated understanding of the research context (Yin, 2009).

Being an insider who shared the culture of power related to leadership was also important for conducting semi-structured interviews. This experience was useful and significant, as I was in a rare position to generate interpretive interpretations of the data collected and to understand the dynamics, feasibility, and constraints of leadership at School M (Punch, 2009).

However, my role as researcher-participant had some limitations, which are addressed in the

ethical considerations section in this chapter. To provide a holistic picture of leadership dynamics, I used various methods to collect qualitative data.

3.5. Data Collection

To present an in-depth description of the case, I collected qualitative data in various forms, including interviews, observations, field notes, and documents. These different methods made it possible to collect data on the complexity of the case, including its history, a chain of chronological events, and “a day-to-day report” of the principal’s activities (Creswell, 2013:113). In terms of detailed description, I focused on key issues related to the nature of partnership and school leadership.

Interviews

The main data collection tools were semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the statements of the informants, and thus to identify the central themes of their lives (Kvale, 1996). Some of the observations focused on the participants who provided insights during their interviews (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All of the interviews were semi-structured, which is well suited for probing an informant’s opinions on an issue. Semi-structured questions are also useful for exploring the attitudes, values, and beliefs (Kvale, 1996) of key informants. I used a series of questions, but with flexibility in the order and wording.

Each one-on-one interview followed a regular procedure: I greeted the informant, explained the purpose of the study, and sought the informant’s consent to record the interview before setting up the digital recorder. Then, the interview started with my thanking the informant for his or her participation, and then proceeding with a list of guiding questions, all explained verbally to the participant. During each interview, key questions and follow-up questions were asked to collect the views of each participant as they unfolded. Each interview lasted

approximately an hour and a half. At the end of each interview, the informant was thanked again for his or her interest, I briefly explained the processes that would be applied to the data, that the interview would be transcribed verbatim, and that the verbatim transcript would be sent to the participant for verification. If a prompt (such as a hints or clue) was used to further examine a question, a limited number of notes were taken during the interviews. This was done to avoid disrupting rapport and to properly hear the participant's voice without disruption, which could lead to misinterpretations.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with different objectives. In the first round, all of the informants were interviewed and the data collected formed the main body of the data set. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection. When the initial codes were identified in the preliminary analysis, the second round of interviews was conducted, focusing on these thematic codes with follow-up questions and probes. These follow-up interviews were conducted with only three informants: the principal, one public official, and one business manager.

As a template, Table 3.1 shows the link between interview questions and research questions:

Table 3.1. Link between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Main themes	Research questions	Bridging elements	Interview questions
Nature of the PPP at School M	Q1.Operational model of the PPP at School M	What was agreed in the contract?	<i>e.g. What are the goals of the partnership? How are the goals measured?</i>
	Q2.Opportunities and challenges for school leadership due to the partnership	Question of responsibilities/risk sharing among stakeholders	<i>e.g. What does the principal/the DEB or the government / Company X keep control over?</i>

Principal leadership strategies	Q3. Principal leadership strategies for dealing with multiple accountabilities in School M	Who is the principal accountable to? What strategies did the principal use to solve the problems?	<i>e.g. What roles do the different stakeholders play when interacting with the principal? What strategies were taken by the principal when interacting with different stakeholders?</i>
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Here were some of the key questions asked during the interviews:

- 1) *Could you describe what led to the decision to establish this partnership in the school?*
- 2) *What were the steps in forming the partnership? Take me through the process.*
- 3) *What were your initial expectations relative to the partnership and how, if at all, have those expectations changed?*
- 4) *What are the reasons that the Principal became resolute to work in the PPP school instead of a traditional public school?*
- 5) *What are the goals of the partnership and how are they measured? (Probe for actual quantitative measures)*
- 6) *I'm interested in how the partnership operates. What are your roles and responsibilities relative to the partnership?*

Different types of informants were asked of different sets of interview questions. See Appendix A for the four types of questions asked to the informants as governmental officials and private managers, (vice) principals, teachers and parents.

Participants

The number of participants for interview is shown as follows:

Table 3.2. Interview Participants

From	Stance	Interviewees (representing multiple stakeholders)	Number
Within School	Public	1) School Principal (SP)	1
		2) Vice-Principals (SP)	3
		3) Teachers & Middle Leaders of School (TM)	5
Beyond School	Public	4) District Governmental Officials (GO)	2
		5) Leaders from the DEB (BL)	3
	Private	6) Senior Managers from the private company (EM)	2
	Societal	7) Parents (PA)	4
Total			20

As School M involves multiple stakeholders, 20 interviewees were chosen to constitute a sample of interviews inside and outside the school. Governmental officials and DEB leaders, business managers, and parents were included, as they representing public, private, and societal forces, respectively, and because of their direct involvement in the creation and development of School M.

Outside the school, two government officials, including the former deputy head of the district, promoted and participated in this PPP reform initiative during their term of office. Therefore, they were seen as quality informants. In addition, three DEB leaders, namely two directors in consecutive sessions, the former and the current director, and a deputy director, participated in the interviews. Having been involved in this experiment from the start, they were seen as unique insiders and their views from the public sector needed to be explored.

In terms of private forces, two senior managers in consecutive sessions were approached as important representatives of the private company working in collaboration with the government to manage the school. Their views were fully explored through interviews. Furthermore, four parents were approached, to hear their voices and develop an overview of school leadership strategies.

Inside the school, the principal, three vice principals, and five teachers and middle leaders represented the insider's perspective, for an immediate perception of the management process.

Specifically, the principal was the main leader of the school, whose leadership practices were the focus of this study. The three vice principals were respectively in charge of the primary, junior middle, and senior high section of School M, for a full school from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Two teachers and three middle leaders formed the subgroup of teachers and middle leaders. Among them, one teacher and one middle leader had got along well with the principal over the years, and joined the teaching staff early, but left for personal reasons halfway through the study. The other three had worked at School M from the start and had witnessed the overall development of the school. Considering their different work experiences, their personal relationships with the principal, and their different career choices, the researcher had no reason to doubt the variety of voices being heard and the different views on the research problem.

All of these informants offered rich and appropriate information, thus constituting the purposive sample of this study. All interviewees were informed in advance of the nature and objectives of this research. Their rights to refuse to join or withdraw from the study at any time were preserved from the start. All of these informants participated in the interviews and no one asked to leave.

Participant observations, field notes and documents

To improve the credibility of the data, participant observation, field notes, and documents were adopted as complementary sources of data (Yin, 2003).

Participant observation was mainly focused on the principal's daily routine, as these events or situations provided authentic opportunities to observe how specific tasks were routinely accomplished under the critical leadership of the principal (Kvale, 1996).

Field notes were used to record what the researcher saw, heard, and felt during and beyond the immediate context of the interviews. These notes also made it possible to recall and reflect on the events observed, as reflections on the dynamics of an occurrence can provide

prompts or ideas that can be used for further analysis (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Documents, including online and offline resources, written documents, mass media reports, and formal and informal school brochures, were collected to support or question the participants' responses.

This combination of data helped validate the results. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the research question, the responses of the interviewees were further compared to identify common patterns and explore inconsistencies.

3.6. Data Analysis

Firstly, reliability in data analysis is to make sure that all transcriptions done on my part do not include any obvious mistakes. Reliability of a qualitative study, according to Gibbs (2007), involves transcription checking and avoiding inconsistent or inaccurate definitions in coding. In terms of transcription checking, data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the initial data collection. Each interview was first transcribed commercially using *ifly*, a software application. Then, the initial transcripts were read and double-checked by the researcher while listening to the recordings. Once completed, the second version of the transcripts was sent and verified by the interviewees. Once approved, the transcripts were saved as complete and ready for analysis. The original recordings and a set of transcripts were stored separately, with the backup in digital files on different electronic devices in a secure location for later use.

To avoid definitional drift in coding, I kept code memos in 20 word-processing files respectively for the 20 interviewees. Once thematic codes were identified, they were applied to each of the different transcriptions to compare and cross-check whether they best captured identical or similar clusters of meanings. Constant checking, therefore, helped me use

consistent codes throughout the whole process of data analysis. In addition, a retrospective examination of the recordings was helpful to fulfill my research objectives, e.g., analyzing the leadership responsibilities of the principal and understanding the power relationships underlying all leadership activities.

Secondly, to ensure validity, primary data from the interviews and complementary data from participant observation, field notes, and documents were converged, to capture the meaning and significance of the overall case study and strengthen the results. Each data source can be considered as part of a whole, with each part contributing to a better understanding of the entire phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

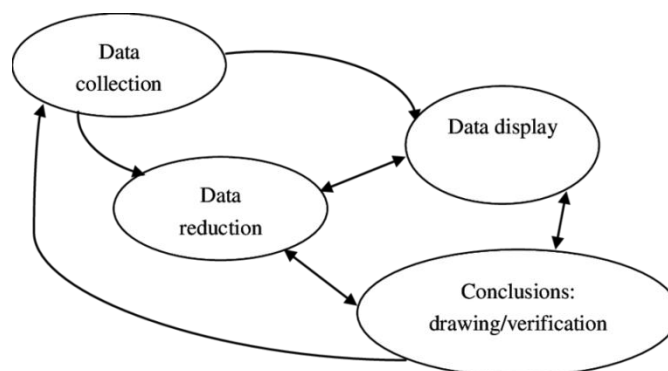
In addition, member checking was used to consolidate the trustworthiness of the study. That is, the researcher discussed and shared her interpretation of the data with the informants, who were able to clarify and provide additional perspectives on the questions under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

A naturalistic approach was adopted to allow the emerging themes of the data to form major categories. Data analysis was conducted using specific tactics to generate meanings (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The flow of analytical tactics included, but was not limited to, noting patterns or themes, identifying plausibility, clustering, making metaphors, and making contrasts or comparisons.

Three stages were involved in the data analysis process, according to Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model *

** Source: Miles & Huberman (1994)*



The first stage was data reduction. Data from multiple sources were reduced through condensation, e.g., summarized, coded, and broken down into themes or categories. The second stage was data display. At this stage, the condensed data were displayed in diagrammatic or visual forms, to show their implications. The third stage was conclusion drawing and verification, in which the displayed data were interpreted to derive meaning, identify patterns, and explore themes or regularities (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

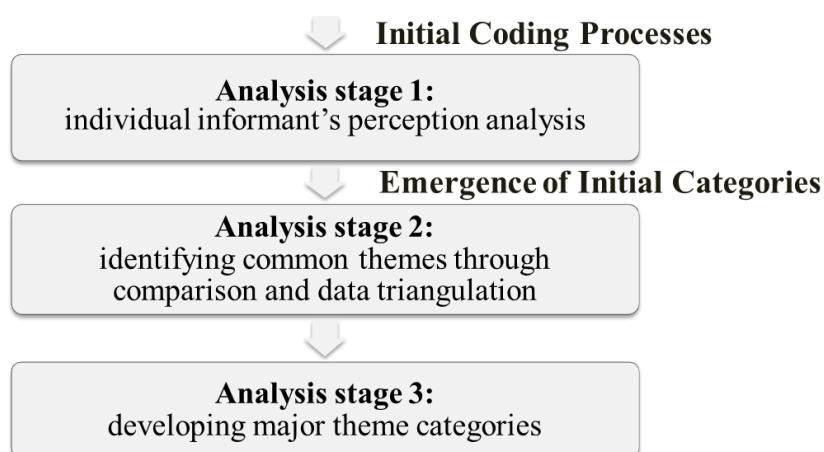
Table 3.3. Concepts Identified in the Reduction Process

Data Source	Concepts
Participant-researcher observation & Field notes	<i>empowering teachers, prompt feedback, addressing concerns, modeling effect, coach and mentor, boundary setting, perceived vs. preferred autonomy</i>
Documents and artifacts	<i>reform impetus, space of autonomy, top design and grass-root experiment, advocacy of state policy</i>
Principal's Wechat subscription ³	<i>delegating power, perceiving needs, transformation of governance institution</i>

There were three steps in the analysis of the interview transcripts, allowing for the gradual detection of the initial concepts, common themes through comparison, and major themes. The conceptual flowchart is shown in Figure 3.2:

Figure 3.2. Overall Analysis Process

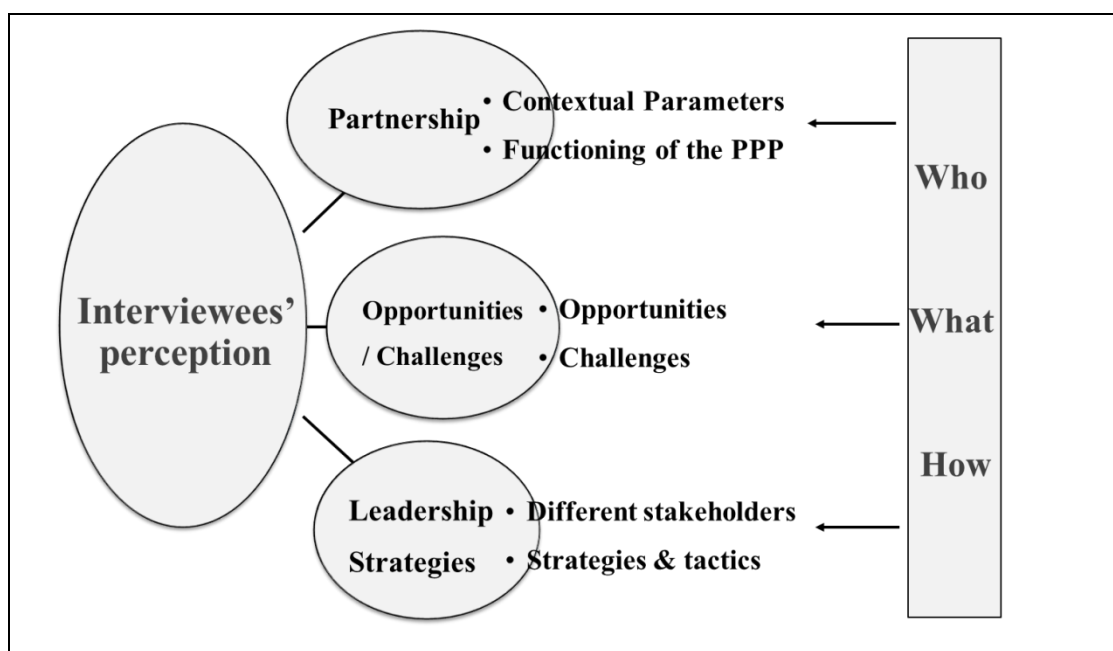
³ It is worth noting that the principal's WeChat subscription emerged as an important source of data. As the founding principal of School M, he posted 158 articles from Mar. 14, 2016 to Jan. 17, 2020, adding up to a total of approximate 237,000 words.



Analysis stage 1: Analyzing the perceptions of individual informants

During initial coding, a schema was developed iteratively to draw an explicit analysis of the informants' perceptions. Two levels of questions, related to the functioning of the PPP, the opportunities and challenges for school leadership posed by the partnership, and leadership strategies of the principal in dealing with various stakeholders, were focused on the “what”, “who/whom” and “how” categories. The schema adopted is presented in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3. Initial Coding Process



Analysis stage 2: Identifying common themes through interview comparison and data triangulation

As the aim of this study was to explore how the principal of School M managed challenges and seized opportunities to support the continuous development of the school, the collective perceptions of the various stakeholders were a major focus. This justified the need to compare the different interpretations of the interviews. The informants' responses were then compared to identify common patterns and explore inconsistencies. This gave rise to convergent and divergent patterns.

As the initial categories emerged through comparison, the researcher continued to identify common themes through data triangulation. Participant observation, field notes, and documents were used to confirm the results through the convergence of different perspectives.

Analysis stage 3: Developing major themes

A list of key thematic ideas, derived from previous research on related topics and generated from the analytical codes extracted from different texts, comprising transcripts, observation notes, memos, and school documents, was identified as a framework analysis protocol (Gibbs, 2007).

Table 3.4. Sample Script of Analysis in Three Stages

<i>Sample Script</i>	<i>Analysis in Three Stages</i>
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<p><i>“To usher in the best enterprise force is the key to the partnership. But what can be defined as the best? Firstly, it should have an international perspective. Secondly it should bear a sense of social responsibility, as well as a sense of innovation with competence. Also we considered the standardized procedure Company Xry has followed in its operation for years. Another point is that it does not run schools for the purpose of profit.”</i> (GO. No.2)</p>	<p>Stage 1. Initial Concepts <i>Private enterprise of the best: 1) international horizon; 2) social responsibility; 3) innovative mind and competence; 4) fair play, modern enterprenurial mechanism; 5) non-profitable (GO. No.2)</i></p> <p>Stage 2. Common Themes through Comparison and Data Triangulation <i>Do things in accordance with the norms; work by rules, steady management style and follow clear procedure; social reputation valued (GO. No.1)</i></p> <p>Stage 3. Major Theme Category <i>Strengths of the Private in the Partnership / Opportunities brought along with the Partnership</i></p>
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Table 3.4 presents a sample of the three-stage analysis of interview transcripts.

In addition, the researcher looked for the patterns of the principal’s mental activities, embodied by his ideas, values, and beliefs expressed through language or daily activities, such as how he behaved when solving problems and making decisions, as represented by his interaction with others, and as observed by the researcher. In other words, the principal’s leadership strategies were described and interpreted by observing his behaviors, mental activities, thoughts and methods, and actions and skills. This thematic analysis was rich in the context of this case, enabling achievement of the research objectives.

A range of macro and micro issues related to the school were explored, namely the establishment of the PPP, power relations, school culture, the dominant and hidden curriculum, and the decision-making process of leaders. The perceptions of insiders and outsiders of the principal’s leadership behavior were interpreted, to understand the subtlety and complexity of the principal’s decision-making process.

Much time and effort was spent to describe the complexity of leading a PPP school in a non-Western context. Certain culture-specific themes were explored when searching for the

patterns of the principal's leadership practices.

In conclusion, the overall objective was to describe an intrinsic case study, i.e. “the focus is on the case itself because the case presents an unusual or unique situation” (Creswell, 2013:113). The researcher chose the case for the study: the PPP school and its operation under the leadership of the principal. This “case” was a bounded system, bounded by time (12 months of data collection) and place (located on two campus sites). In the district, School M is different from other public schools, as the school leader is accountable to various stakeholders.

This case analysis was performed to obtain information on the nature of the PPPs adopted in an educational setting, and on school leadership. Set in the broader context of Chinese society, the researcher's insight should be further examined in future research.

3.7. Limitations and Ethical Issues

The main aim of this study was to reveal the complexity of managing a PPP school in contemporary China. It was found that there is a dynamic and interactive management process between various staff and activities. This can benefit policymakers and leaders of similar schools in China.

However, this study was focused on a single case, limiting its possibility of generalization. Specifically, it applied only to specific objects in a particular time and space, and may not be directly analogous or generalizable to other objects.

Nevertheless, it may be possible to increase the objects of research in similar contexts, e.g., leadership practices in another PPP school, and conduct quantitative research to confirm the scope of the original research findings. As researchers have argued, a single case study can serve as an exploratory tool, its goal being to expand and generate the theory rather than prove it (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995).

An ethical issue in this study was my role as the researcher. Some of the participants interviewed, including the school principal and senior managers from the private company, were acquaintances of mine, and I was working as a research fellow and a middle manager at the DEB at the time of the study. Thus, while discussing the problems encountered during the partnership and its disadvantages, these participants may have thought twice before expressing their real concerns, based on the concept of saving face in Chinese culture to avoid mutual intrusiveness. This was also the case when the teachers were interviewed, to discuss their perceptions of the principal's leadership strategies.

Regarding the question of saving face, I attempted to create safe and non-threatening relationships with school staff, rephrased the questions to avoid intrusiveness, took precautions to preserve the participants' rights to refuse to join or to withdraw at any time during the study, and solicited comments from the informants on their verbatim transcripts. In addition, data triangulation was used as a quality assurance strategy to enhance validity. I used multiple data sources, such as participant observation, field notes, and school documents, to support or question the participants' responses, to actively seek different perspectives, to solicit interpretations, and to obtain alternative meanings (Stake, 1995).

As the PPP school under investigation is unique in the district, there is a potential risk of disclosing the information of the participants. In terms of security, the data were stored on a password-protected computer, while the original and anonymized hard copies of the interview transcripts were stored in a locked office for three years from the interview date. Permission was obtained in advance from the participants to record the interviews. All recordings and transcripts will be destroyed within five years of the interview date. Given the sensitive nature of this particular study at a time of political and economic reform of the supply side and the educational initiative of innovation in education, I spared no effort to disguise the identity of the participants, and the name and location of the school and the

private company. Confidentiality was guaranteed and pseudonyms were used.

Chapter 4 Findings

This chapter comprises an in-depth description of the research results, to answer the three main research questions. The first objective of this chapter is to describe the functioning of the PPP in School M and the school's principalship. The second objective is to provide an account of the opportunities and challenges offered by the dynamic partnership to school leadership. The third objective is to illustrate the strategies used by the principal to deal with multiple accountabilities inside and outside the school.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, the functioning of the PPP in School M is explained. The second section comprises a discussion of the opportunities and challenges to school leadership posed by this partnership. To respond to these promises and obstacles, the leadership strategies used by the school principal to cope with multiple accountabilities inside and outside the school are examined in the third section.

4.1. Functioning of the PPP in School M

4.1.1. Identifying contextual parameters

To understand the emergence of the PPP in School M, it is necessary to retrace the evolution of the policy that gradually enabled and promoted the involvement of the private sector in public education. School M would not have existed without certain policy imperatives, the increased expectations of parents for alternative education, and the initiatives led by public and private sector leaders. These contextual parameters mainly focused on these three aspects.

Policy imperatives

In 1985, the *Decision on the Reform of the Education System* was implemented, marking the first step in a long journey of school reform in China. Since then, a series of national policy incentives have been promulgated to encourage ePPPs.

Meanwhile, Shenzhen has gained worldwide recognition for its constant innovation and dynamic production. According to the Comparison of PCT International Patent Disclosures in International Innovation Cities in 2017, Shenzhen was ranked second after Tokyo in terms of innovation, followed by Silicon Valley, New York, and Israel (Shenzhen Patent Agency of CNIPA, 2018).

In this context, School M was created to meet the imperatives of education reform. Table 4.1 presents the policy environment leading to the creation of School M as a PPP school.

Table 4.1. Contextual Settings of the Reform of School-running System

1980	Shenzhen approved as the first Special Economic Zone Since the implementation of the reform and opening up policy in 1978, Shenzhen has grown from a fishing village to a booming city and economic center in China.
1988	First PPP project in Shenzhen, China A build-operate-transfer project launched in a power plant in Shenzhen.
1985~2009	Impetus for national policy incentives A series of national policies (12 documents) have been adopted to reform the school management system, with a late focus on ePPPs.
2010	Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010) The concept of <i>separating the management, operation and evaluation of education</i> (Guan ban ping fen li) was initially proposed as a strategy for education reform and development. The role of the government at all levels was defined to continue the reform of the public school system. Various societal forces were encouraged to participate in the reform.
2013	Creation of School M in Shenzhen School M is a newly established experimental school, and is operated under the joint effort of the DEB and a renowned private company.

Societal expectations

The creation of School M was more **fortuitous** in the circumstances of the time. First, it was

related to the favorable policy environment. Second, its creation was related to the pressure to find solutions to real social problems:

The reform was launched because all of society has long criticized our basic education, i.e. not satisfied with our children's comprehensive quality. [That is bound] with parents' anxiety because of students' academic pressure and that whether students really feel happy, including their physical conditions, sleep time and so on. (BL No.2)

In a nut shell, the societal expectations or unmet social needs can be boiled down into a word, i.e. the contradiction and a mismatch between parents' desire for authentic quality education and the prevalence of exam-oriented education in reality. Since the late 20th century, the dominance of China's examination-oriented teaching mode has been widely criticized. Like a persistent alarm bell, the infamous "Nobel Prize complex"⁴ as described by Xuesen Qian, the father of Chinese rocketry, has sparked large-scale debates and discussions throughout society. This phenomenon was also mentioned by another interviewee:

In China, especially in developed cities, we thought that our education was not quality education, but exam-oriented education. ... From the educational circles and beyond to the society, the voice of criticism was quite harsh, esp. in Shenzhen, including parents, there were more negative voices about our education mode. (GO No.2)

A growing number of wealthy families, especially in economically developed areas, including Shenzhen, started to "vote with their feet," choosing to send their children to study abroad at a younger age. As mentioned in the interviews, going abroad at an early age is "*not conducive to the overall cultivation and sustainable development of students' quality.*"

As the first Special Economic Zone, Shenzhen had more incentive to implement the PPP reform. Mr. Z, the top leader of a district government, expected the district to lead education

⁴ Noble prize complex is a commonly-held idea to explain the unsuccessful attempts of Chinese elite universities and leading research institutes to cultivate world-class creativity and innovation among their scientists. It unveils an increasingly aggravating consequence that no noble prize winners among all in Chemistry, Medicine, or Physics have been homegrown scientists from the mainland.

reform and to make breakthroughs in the current education system:

The reform motions mainly come from our Party secretary [Mr. Z]... He believed that the change in system and mechanism would produce a powerful driving force to change the current situation of education. ... How can we break through the system and mechanism? ... It is very difficult to resort to [strengths] within the system to break through this management mode. So we wonder if we can set up a charitable foundation with the help of a third party and run a school together as organizers. So that's the way the earliest motivation is originated. (BL No.1)

Considering the “possibility of combining forces outside the system with societal forces”, Mr. Z then proactively approached private Company X, the best in the district, to explore alternatives and possibilities for innovative education models. As an interviewee concluded:

It should be said that we all consider that education should be reformed, that education should be innovated, and that we should build first-class international education. Such is a situation where these starting points bring us together. (GO No.2)

Formation of an initial partnership

Indeed, the initiative of creating a school using the PPP model and the reform of the school management system was first born in the mind of Mr. Z. Company X, a Fortune Global 500 Companies and a prestigious corporation, was located in the district and had not moved its headquarters to another district during Mr. Z's term in office. In an attempt to implement this education reform project, Mr. Z visited Company X several times in early 2012, and convinced one of its CEOs and co-founders, Mr. Y, of the importance of mutual cooperation. Responding to the call from the public and the parents, government and business leaders then organized a few meetings before reaching a consensus. Several cycles of communication and negotiation produced results, with the government and the private company agreeing to allocate 50 million yuan each for the creation and development of School M. In March 2013,

the local government and the EF affiliated with the private company signed the *Framework Agreement on Cooperative Schools* (FACS), which provided a solid basis for guiding the partnership between the public and private sectors.

In the formation of the initial partnership, the foresight of the government leader and the founder of Company X should be noted. As the two main sponsors of this PPP, their foresight was based on their own life experiences. In terms of careers, both have witnessed the material wealth and economic prosperity brought about by the reform of the Chinese economic system since the reform and opening up policy, and that people's standard of living has been greatly improved, as mentioned here:

Mr. Z believed that the reform of our economic system has played a very good role in the prosperity of the market and the great enrichment of material resources. (BL No.1)

While identifying the dividends of the current system reform, both leaders were convinced of the power of the reform for the public system and mechanism, hoping that a new vitality and synergy would be injected into education through the reform of the education system.

4.1.2. Creation of School M by chance: Looking for a third way

When discussing what a reformed and innovative school like School M should look like, both leaders agreed that neither a purely public nor a purely private model would be able to solve realistic educational problems. On the one hand, public education is infamous for the lack of power and autonomy of school principals, preventing them from fully using their leadership, as pointed out in the following quotation:

You need to find me the best institutional mechanism at this stage, so that the principal can truly manage the school independently in accordance with the law, and let the school operate for the sustainable, happy, and lifelong development of children, education, and teaching. That is to say, the principal should no longer focus on administrative tasks, like an official being accountable only to higher leaders, only to the Bureau of Education. He

should be responsible to the students; this is the basic guidance. (BL No.1)

Thus, a basic orientation to define the blueprints for School M was to give the school principal more power and autonomy, because

an ideal state cannot be found [in education]. Based on the concrete operating process of the school, the management power, the power of the staff, and the financial power of the school [principal] cannot reach an ideal state. (BL No.3)

On the other hand, private education is flawed due to unstable funding and blamed for its profit-seeking tendency:

For a purely private mode, it is often difficult to guarantee funding. (GO No.2)

Private schools (in China) are controlled by capital. ... Capital-controlling means excessive profit-seeking. (BL No.3)

Called the first and second ways in China, the public and private models of education have been criticized for being “administration-driven” and “ineffective,” or “capital-controlled” and “profit seeking.” Therefore, the leaders wanted to find another way to overcome the weaknesses of both models:

We felt that we should take the third road, neither purely public nor purely private. We wanted a third way. It should still have a public nature ... and access to funding. Like other public schools, funds should be paid to this school. However, societal forces are introduced and the school has operating autonomy. (GO No.2)

As shown in Table 4.2, “the third way” in the reform of the Chinese school-management system captured the intention to create School M through data analysis.

Table 4.2. Intent of the Reform Initiatives in the Creation of School M

Public Education	Private Education	Creation of School M
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low autonomy for school principals, energy spent mainly on administrative tasks; - No solution for teacher burnout; - The duck-feeding teaching model prevails, little differentiated teaching, and a universal shortage of promotion of independent personality; - Low efficiency in the success of school operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Profit-seeking model; - School funding based on previous interests, not always guaranteed; - A positive link between school quality and high tuition fees; - The use of advanced and efficient teaching methods varies from school to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-profit, more autonomy for school principals; - Join business and government forces for a promising school mode; - A pilot case for the separation of the management, operation, and evaluation of education; - Use high salaries and contracts to ensure high efficiency and a low level of teacher burnout.
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In summary, the creation of School M was facilitated by the right timing and effective leadership, and born by chance. At the start of mutual communication, the government leader skillfully inspired a sense of mission in the co-founder of Company X, noting that “*a hundred-year-old company is not easy to keep alive, while a hundred-year-old school is bound to shine forever.*” It turned out that this type of exchange largely contributed to the creation of a vision for both parties. The local government subsequently set up a temporary supervisory system for the reformed school, and appointed staff to monitor the critical issues of the private company-led cooperation. Given the funding provided and the educational mission shared by the government and Company X, it is no exaggeration to say that School M was “born with a silver spoon in its mouth.”

4.1.3. Fulfilling the mission: The role of the school principal

As stated in the *FACS*, the overall objectives of the PPP for school management were to create School M as

a new high-end and non-profit G1-12 school, which adheres to the laws of education, fully respects the development of the students’ personality, and cultivates talents with an international vision in accordance with new concepts.

The school has a clear mission and goal and an advanced school management mechanism. Under the leadership of the board of directors, the school follows a modern education system characterized by independent management in accordance with legal provisions, democratic management, expert governance, and broad participation of parents and society, [and will] thus [rapidly become] ... a leading school nationally and internationally.

The school focuses on training future talented citizens with Chinese values, international vision, modern citizenship, and creativity, who will participate in international competition and cooperation.

Based on foreign examples of non-profit schools operated by public welfare foundations, and combining the “direct subsidy scheme” (DSS) of Hong Kong schools and charter schools in the US, School M was the first public-entrusted school in mainland China. It was expected to fulfill the mission of fostering the development of young learners with an innovative spirit and an independent personality, and of liberating children from the pressure of examinations.

To complete its mission, the school principal would play a major role. In the traditional public education mode, school principals are appointed by the Education Bureau and accountable to their superiors. Over time, public interference generally leads to principals lacking autonomy to manage their school. In contrast, the recruitment of the principal in this reformed school followed a different path, based on the merit of having more autonomy.

First, when it was created, School M was entrusted to a charitable foundation. The foundation then established a board of directors to exercise its management functions, including the recruitment of a talented principal.

The chosen principal is accountable to the School Board and is therefore exempt from reporting to the LEA and performing top-down administrative tasks or higher level instruction. Compared with his or her counterparts in traditional public schools, the principal

of this reformed school has more autonomy in school management, in three main aspects: financial allocation, teacher recruitment, and curriculum design.

This autonomy created a relatively relaxed environment for the initial development of School M, and the effective leadership of the well-known principal produced results based on the fertile soil of school reform. The overall management structure of School M under the PPP model is discussed in the following section.

4.1.4. A different management structure at School M under the PPP model

As an experimental school co-sponsored by the local government and the charitable foundation of a private corporation, School M was entrusted to the EF, an independent non-public foundation with a total of 100 million yuan in donations. In other words, the EF has complete autonomy in the management of the school, and is responsible for making full use of the donations for teaching and learning.

The EF encouraged the creation of a division to oversee the management of the school, with a council for financial issues and a school board for management and supervision. The Council is made up of eight representatives from both the government and Company X. In principle, one managing director and one supervisor are respectively recommended by each party, on behalf of the private and public sectors. To implement the decisions and advance the reform agreed upon by the eight representatives, a secretariat is responsible for the routine operations of the foundation under the leadership of the Council. In contrast, the School Board is made up of nine directors, including education professionals, social sages (e.g. prestigious professionals, prominent citizens, etc.), parents' and students' representatives, and public officials, and senior managers from the private company. The School Board has specific responsibilities for the management of the school and ensures its overall management and operation.

An important function of the School Board was to publicly recruit and independently select a

talented candidate to become the school principal, based on the human resource management model of Company X. This explains why the Principal Selection Committee (PSC) was the first subsection of the School Board. Several rounds of interviews organized by the PSC led to the appointment of Mr. P as principal of School M. He has a Ph.D. in education, and had held various positions in education, e.g., high-school teacher, principal, dean of the district institute for education development, and deputy head of the DEB. He is also an author of nearly 20 books and hundreds of articles in education journals, and has built a national reputation in the field of basic education and is recognized for his in-depth professional expertise. Mr. P has also received a national award for his dedication to teaching and is an expert entitled to a special allowance from the State Council.

In accordance with the FACS regulations, the school principal is de-administrated, appointed by, and accountable to the School Board. In a very short time after his arrival in early October 2013, and immediately after the creation of the school, Mr. P established a school management. Leading the management team, Mr. P was responsible for developing mid-term and long-term school management plans and implementing day-to-day management, including, but not limited to, formulating detailed school rules and regulations, establishing and implementing the annual expenditure budget, deciding on the composition of the teaching and administrative staff, and making the necessary adjustments to fulfill the mission of the school.

Figure 4.1. Governance Structure of School M using the PPP Model

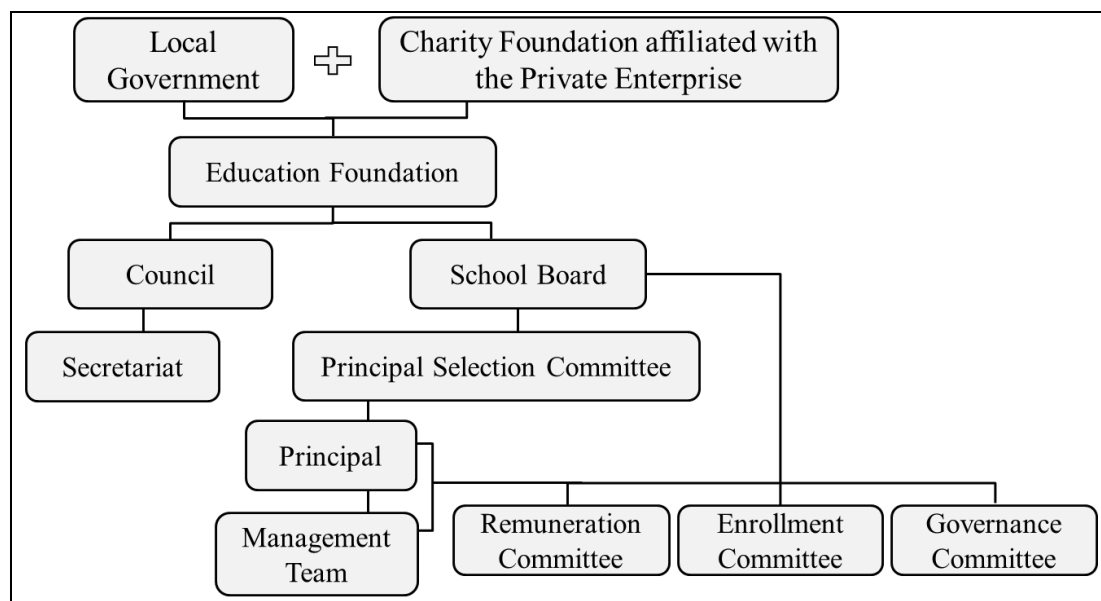


Figure 4.1 presents the overall governance structure of School M under the PPP model. As shown in the figure, two characteristics of the PPP of School M should be noted. First, several governance bodies participate in the school management process. Second, channels of cooperation and negotiation are built within the school, to ensure that the Principal Responsibility System functions as intended under the direction of the School Board. The composition of the council and the school board is also illustrated in Figures 4.2 and 4.3. No representative is expected to occupy two positions on the council and the school board. In addition, representatives from the public sector, the private sector, and the school are all empowered to participate in the management of the school.

Figure 4.2. Organizational Structure of the Council

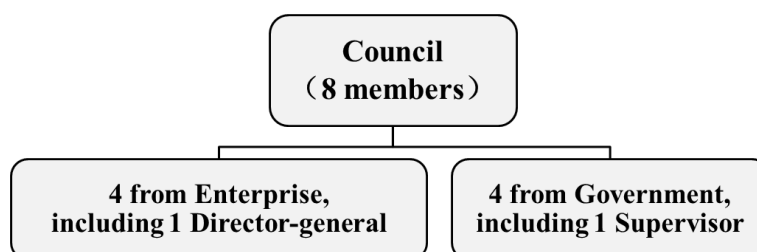
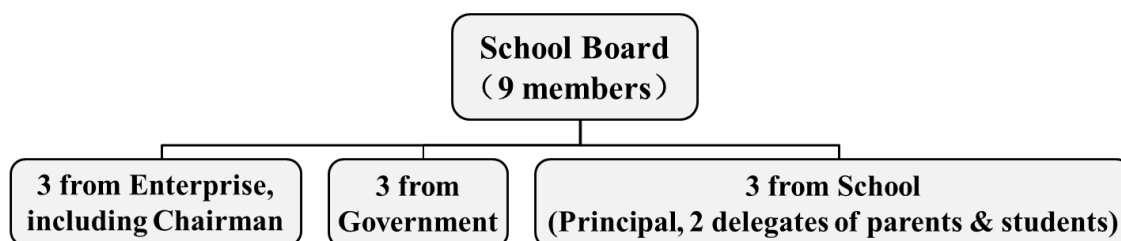


Figure 4.3. Organizational Structure of the School Board



To better represent the management of the school, the main development phases of School M. are discussed in the following section:

4.1.5. Three stages of development of School M under the principalship of Mr. P

In late 2012, Mr. Z, head of the local government, took the initiative to contact a well-known company to discuss education reform issues. After several cycles of communication and negotiation, a consensus was reached in December 2012 to establish a reformed school using the PPP approach. On March 6, 2013, the local government and the company (represented by its charity foundation) signed the FACS, deciding to choose a newly created school to implement the reform, while recruiting a school principal internationally through multiple advertising channels. Since then, the opening of School M was planned.

From the moment a well-known principal, Mr. P, decided to leave his previous position and to accept the leadership challenge of School M, the school started a period of rapid growth. In addition to recruiting a principal, School M went through three main stages. During the initial “honeymoon” stage, the government, the DEB, and Company X fully supported the school principal. This was followed by the second stage of negotiation and compromise, during which the change of government and bureau leaders created uncertainty and ambiguity in the reform context and reduced the principal’s autonomy in the management of the school. The third stage was that of resignation, marked by the principal’s resignation and the appointment of a new principal to manage School M.

Honeymoon stage

The honeymoon stage began shortly after both parties signed the FACS and started operating

the school in accordance with the agreements. The school opened in September 2013 and enrolled 260 G1 (primary) and G7 (secondary) students in eight classes. At the same time, Mr. P had completed all of his departure procedures and assumed the leadership role of School M. From its creation, autonomy was granted to the School Board and the principal:

*[Mr. P, the school principal] came to Shenzhen because he was moved by the sincerity of the enterprise. The Secretary (Mr. Z, head of the local government) gave him **full authority** at that time, and other public officials also granted him **autonomy in the management of the school**, as they trusted him. They often commented using his quote: “if I chose to come [to Shenzhen], it was because I was aspired by an ideal school”. ... So when he came, he gave up many things and broke down the resistance. **What he wanted was full autonomy.** (EM No.1)*

Note that “full autonomy” was something that Mr. P, a well-known principal, had wished for. Later, the same interviewee added:

In fact, public schools are severely deprived of autonomy and very restricted. Basically, the only thing principals do is listen to the DEB. Upon his arrival as principal, the Secretary reminded the director of the DEB that he should treat this school as if it did not exist (ni jiu dang zhesuo xuexiao bucunzai). (EM No.1)

This explains why the district governor, Mr. Z, rarely reminded the director of the DEB and other public representatives of the need to interfere with the management of the school. Furthermore, “leaving the school alone” was indeed reaffirmed by the leaders of the DEB, as follows:

It is a good thing to leave the school alone. For an aspiring principal, you can show him your greatest care and support by never poking your nose into [the management of the school]. (BL No.1)

The data clearly showed the concept of “honeymoon,” representing a period of harmonious

cooperation during which the public and private parties stood side by side, performed their own duties, and supported each other.

Table 4.3 provides a timeline of key events during this honeymoon stage for principal leadership. During this stage, School M further improved the organizational structure of the School Board, including the four committees for teacher remuneration, student enrollment, principal recruitment, and school governance. In addition, the rules and regulations were amended and supplemented in the FACS.

Table 4.3. Timeline of the First Honeymoon Stage

Honeymoon Stage	1.0 Phase of School Management
	September 2013 Opening of the school, with an enrollment of 260 G1 and G7 students (primary and secondary) in eight classes.
	October 2013 The School Board was created.
	December 2013 The School Board created the Remuneration Committee, to establish a salary system framework in line with the development of the school and at the forefront of market competitiveness.
	January 2014 The Secretary, Mr. Z, was promoted from District Governor to serve as Deputy Mayor.
	March 2014 The School Board created the Enrollment Committee, dealing with enrollment issues of district and non-district students.
	27 May 2014 The local government and Company X signed the <i>FACS Supplementary Rules and Regulations</i> .
	June 2014 The School Board created the Principal Selection Committee and adopted the <i>School Board Constitution (revised edition)</i> and <i>Regulations of School M</i> .
	October 2014

	Leader succession. A new public official took the position of head of the DEB.
	June 2015 The School Board created the Governance Committee, to standardize the school system and improve the quality of school management.

In early 2014, Mr. Z received an official promotion, resigning from his role as District Governor to serve as Deputy Mayor. Later that year, a similar succession of leaders occurred in several government agencies, including the director of the DEB. These events marked the end of the two-year honeymoon stage. As an old Chinese saying goes, there is nothing like having a man on the spot to smooth the way:

If it is still within the official term of the Secretary, the external environment of this school will be good Due to the change in personnel, there was a kind of non-continuity of the policy, which inevitably led to twists and turns in the middle of the reform. (SP No.4)

While the change in government personnel created uncertainty about intangible support due to the “non-continuity of the policy,” some tangible offerings or resources also stopped, as explained by another interviewee in the following quote:

Speaking of the current atmosphere of the reform, many breakthroughs could not be achieved. Since the departure of the Secretary, no substantial breakthrough in resources has been made for this school. (EM No.2)

In terms of principalship, School M then entered its second phase, calling for more negotiation and sometimes compromise.

Negotiation and Compromise Stage

Prior to the extension to two campuses in September 2015, School M entered a second stage of negotiation and compromise for principal leadership. Constant communication took place between the government, Company X, and the school.

As shown in Table 4.4, this stage lasted approximately three years. This stage was characterized by more consultations, more compromises, mutual resolution, and preparation for any unforeseen event. Above all was the issue of a school merger.

Table 4.4. Timeline of the Second Stage of Negotiation and Compromise

Negotiation and Compromise Stage	September 2015 Another public school merged with School M, creating a second campus.
	November 2015 The local government and Company X signed the <i>FACS Supplementary Agreement</i> for the management of the second campus.
	September 2016 A third campus was located and School M started enrolling G10 (high school) students there. This marked the completion of the 12-year integration of the school management mode.
	2.0 Phase of School Management
	April 2017 The School Board held the first meeting of the year, marking the entry of School M into a new phase of school management.
	October 2017 Two rounds of audits were conducted by the National Tax Bureau and the Discipline Committee of the Education Bureau in the district, to oversee the financial issues of School M.
	April 2018 The local Audit Bureau conducted a three-month audit on the implementation of the school budget and the management of project funds in 2017.
	July 2018 The academic performance of G4 students in the two campuses of School M was ranked 4th and 2 nd , respectively, among more than 80 schools in the regional final term exams.

When School M opened in September 2013, it offered nine years of compulsory education. Based on its initial goal of a 12-year comprehensive school, School M started to request a second campus for its high school section with the municipal education bureau, which

oversees general affairs for the operation of high schools. Members of the municipal education bureau then came and conducted on-site research. Given the difficulty of managing students of different ages from G1 to G12, the municipal education bureau denied the possibility of building a second division for a high school on the original campus. School M then applied to the DEB in early 2015 to have a second campus. Shortly after, the new director of the DEB, Mr. S, took office. He granted the request of School M in the form of another existing primary school. This was seen as an “*impossible*” solution:

it was impossible, because it was a primary school with its own students, and when it comes to managing students of different ages, it is always a difficult situation. (SP No.3)

Although the issue was not settled, and the final decision was still pending, the parents of the second primary school heard about it and quickly submitted a joint appeal asking the DEB to let School M take over their primary school. As one interviewee stated, “*they launched a quick motion. Their appeal gave us some frustration*” (SP No.3).

In addition, the appeal submitted by these parents was quite abrupt and unexpected⁵. They chose parents’ delegates to bargain and negotiate with the DEB. They even used social media to justify their appeal. This crisis in public opinion led the DEB to an embarrassing situation, so that the bureau had no other choice but to accept their request, although the school merger was not approved by the School Board or the principal himself.

First, this school merger led to a compromise between the government (represented by the DEB), the School Board (whose chairman has a final say in major school issues, representing the standpoint of Company X), and society (represented by the parents of the second school).

On this topic, another interviewee commented,

⁵ The reasons why most parents took part in the joint appeal could be a complex issue, considering the social economic development of Shenzhen. Some parents may fight for better teaching quality for their children as School M has quickly established its social reputation within a short period of time since its opening in late 2013. Whereas other parents, also the neighborhood residents, may be realizing that their houses would be upvalued if the existing school is merged into a better one, School M, since it is for sure that the housing price of a neighborhood in China relates largely to the quality of its public school nearby. Indeed the housing price, after the school merging, was reported to have truly raised 20,000 *yuan* per square meter.

The School had not yet prepared for a second campus at the time. It takes time to cultivate one's school culture and transmit it for duplication, not to mention the fact that the second school was an old school, whose way of doing things was typical of traditional public schools and different from that of School M. (EM No.2)

As the school merger showed, school leadership is situated between three types of forces, public, private, and societal forces, each representing a different stakeholder influencing principal leadership.

After the merger problem with the second campus, School M looked for a third campus for its high school division. A year later, the third campus was located and School M began enrolling G10 (high school) students there. This marked the completion of the 12-year integration of the school management mode of School M, and the start of the 2.0 phase of school management. The following quote clearly differentiates these two phases:

Now we say that the school has entered its 2.0 version ... The 1.0 phase was a process starting from scratch, from 0 to 1. After a process of four or five years, something should be added to the base of the school, and the School Board affiliated to the EF may wish to add something with more vitality... (SP No.2)

While suggesting that “things are always developing,” another interviewee attached advanced “computing technology” to “something to add” to the School M:

For a long time, our computing technology had no optimal way to promote education reform and had no significant effect on the reform of the school management model. Now [in its 2.0 version], the government is working with us and hopes to make a breakthrough in this regard. (EM No.2)

In the second stage, the succession of leaders at the levels of the government, the DEB, and Company X created problems requiring continuous negotiation and communication. As one interviewee speculated:

After we [managers of Company X] left, maybe he [Mr. P] felt pressure from the DEB and the government departments. [But] the backend did not give him enough support. You know, like [for me], I went to the DEB at least twice a week [with full support]. (EM No.1)

Therefore, the idea of “*treating this school as if it did not exist*” had radically changed. From the end of 2017 to mid-2018, three public bodies in the district, namely the National Tax Bureau, the Discipline Committee of the Education Bureau, and the Audit Bureau, conducted several rounds of auditing on the implementation of the financial budget of School M. They eventually reached the same conclusion, proposing that School M should implement rectification measures to ensure that its standards matched those of traditional public schools. Above all, they questioned why the teachers of School M were paid about 20% more than their peers in traditional public schools. Their question caused frustration to school leaders. According to an interviewee

[it] made our staff reform impossible. Autonomy in the recruitment of teachers is one of the main reforms of this school. Our teachers are recruited without tenure-track positions. Therefore [as a substitution for a stable position], we need to pay 20% more to encourage them to teach here. (SP No.4)

Accordingly, the conclusion drawn by the three public bodies was viewed as “*a mistake*”, for *Finally, the conclusion [they reached] shows that they all stick to the government standards for general public schools while ignoring the FACS. (SP No.4)*

In short, as one interviewee argued,

The reform took a long time and had a wide scope, and it only got temporary support from a few people rather than real support from the [public education] system, so it got stuck when circumstances changed over time. (EM No.1)

Resignation Stage

In early 2018, the principal offered his resignation letter to the School Board due to his age. This marked the start of the third stage of the principal's resignation. A new principal was recruited and appointed later in September. Since its creation five years ago, School M has become a large school with three campus sites, welcoming 3,026 students and 233 teachers in 87 classes, compared with its original scale of approximately 260 students in eight classes. The first problem encountered by the new principal was how to respond formally to the concerns raised in the audit report issued by the local Audit Bureau. After consulting with some leaders of the DEB, the new principal submitted a formal report in early 2019, agreeing to make the necessary amendments and adjustments. Table 4.5 presents some key events that took place during the third stage of development of School M in relation to principal leadership.

Table 4.5. Timeline of the Third Stage of Resignation

Stage of Resignation	September 2018 Principal succession for School M. School M extended to a third campus site, with a total of 3,026 students and 233 teachers in 87 classes.
	January 2019 In response to the concerns raised in the audit report issued by the local Audit Bureau, School M made a series of adjustments related to school management, including strict implementation of the local unified budget and final account management system and of unified government procurement rules and regulations, and the unified use of the government procurement platform.

In describing the succession of the principal of School M, several interviewees shared their perceptions, as shown below:

He was a very modest man and a man with no selfish desires <with tears in the eyes>.

(SP No.2)

[The Principal] also told me that he wanted to rest because his heart was not working

well. (TM No.1)

Although some interviewees attributed the principal's resignation to his health, the following two quotations show there was concerns about the pressure, burnout, and obstacles he encountered:

The principal is the guide. He walks toward his ideal school. But he is also human. He can be tired. He can get stuck by all kinds of obstacles, so he will slow down, this is how it is. (SP No.3)

It should be said that [the principal] himself said that he was not in good health. Yes, he resigned. Later, I wondered whether it was because of too much work Maybe he did not receive enough support, and the pressure was great, coupled with his physical condition, he may have started to develop a desire to leave. (EM No.1)

So far, the three development stages of School M have unfolded in parallel with principal leadership:

All reforms are back to their starting points. So what is the most important thing about it? It is that the reform is always repeated. As usual, the reform cannot be sustained and is always denied by latecomers. This is the only conclusion we can draw. (SP No.4)

Reflecting on his experience as principal of School M, Mr. P frankly stated:

In fact, looking back on my five-year career in managing a school in Shenzhen, I think the first three years were the most enjoyable for me. [During] the first three years, [there] was a heavy workload, [but I was] happy.

It should be noted that all interviews were conducted between early September and late December 2018, when the new principal took office after the resignation of Mr. P. This time period was deemed valuable for the data collection used here for three main reasons. First, although he handed over his office to his successor, Mr. P was still the principal of School M, as he became a chief principal and stayed to deal with certain macro issues of school

management. As usual, his abstract reasoning was excellent and he had written a number of books and articles. It is very likely that he will continue to write and use his metacognition process to analyze his achievements at School M. Second, it was the beginning of a period during which Mr. P, the focus of this study, had started to slow down his work pace in school management, and consequently had more free time to think about what he had faced and accomplished when running this school. Third, as he was gradually withdrawing, it is less likely that other interviewees as stakeholders would brag about his leadership, except to discuss his actual achievements. Nor would they downplay his achievements in the hope that he would be replaced by someone else if they were not satisfied with Mr. P's performance as school principal. In both cases, it validated the interviews conducted.

In summary, this section comprised a detailed description of the characteristics of the PPP at School M. Thanks to this partnership, the school leadership scenarios were closer to an ongoing process of negotiation, communication, and even compromise between various stakeholders, namely public, private, and societal forces. Thus, although the creation of this school was considered a happy coincidence, the introduction of a partnership brought both opportunities and challenges for school principalship. This is the main theme discussed in the next section.

4.2. Opportunities and Challenges for School Leadership Posed by the Partnership

According to the FACS and its *Supplementary Rules and Regulations*, there are various differences between School M and traditional public schools in terms of management, finance, staff, and student enrollment.

Table 4.6. Distinctive Features of School M

Differences	Local Public Schools	School M
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(1) School Management Funds	The government invests money to guarantee the day-to-day operation of compulsory schools and high schools, including providing per capita funds each term.	The government and Company X each invested 50 million yuan as start-up funds, and continue to allocate special funds for education reform simultaneously, proportionally, and quickly to the EF. The government regularly allocates significant per capita funds (20% higher than for traditional public schools). Direct donations are also accepted.
(2) Operating Mode	Run, managed, and evaluated by the government.	Company X created an independent EF as the main body of school management. The EF created the School Board, which is specifically responsible for the management of the school.
(3) Form of Education	Primary, middle, and high schools, or nine-year comprehensive school (G1-G9)	Exploring a 12-year comprehensive education form (G1-G12).
(4) Principal Appointment	Entrusted by the government, the principal with a tenure-track position (<i>bianzhi</i>) is appointed by the local education bureau.	The principal is de-administrated, i.e., without a tenure-track position (<i>bianzhi</i>), appointed by, and accountable to the School Board.
(5) Staff Recruitment	The local education bureau is responsible for recruiting teachers and assigning them to a specific school. Teachers have tenure-track positions (<i>bianzhi</i>) and cannot be dismissed.	Teachers are recruited independently after signing a contract with a clear statement of responsibilities and rights. Teachers do not have tenure-track positions (<i>bianzhi</i>) and will be dismissed if found to be unqualified.
(6) Remuneration System	Follows the unified salary standards for public school teachers.	Independently designs a merit pay scheme and a welfare system to guarantee good wages rewarding excellent performance. The average salary of teachers is 20-30% higher than

		that of traditional public schools.
(7) Management	No expatriate management staff.	Company X selects talented managers to assist the school.
(8) Expenses	Follows the unified standards for budgeting and spending of traditional public schools.	Independently decides on the school's budget and expenditure within the scope of law and policy.
(9) Financial Audit	Conducted regularly by the local audit bureau.	Conducted annually by external accounting firms.
(10) School Management Term	The government runs the schools sustainably, and holds the rights of property, use, and management.	School property rights belong to the government. Company X holds its rights of use and management for 30 years of cooperation.
(11) Student Enrollment	Follows the nearby enrollment policy (<i>jiujin ruxue</i>), i.e., enroll students from the neighborhood.	Uses both nearby and independent enrollment, the latter comprising a small number of students.
(12) Class Size	A large class size (up to 50 students per class) is common, as a peak in the birth rate puts additional pressure on already overcrowded public schools.	Implements small-class teaching (no more than 35 students per class).
(13) Bridging of Junior and High Schools	Follows the laws and regulations of municipal education authorities; middle school students must pass the entrance exam to continue their studies in high school.	Explores an innovative mechanism in which students complete G7-G12 education without taking high-stakes entrance examinations at the end of G9.
(14) International Classes	International classes are not allowed in traditional public high schools, according to the relevant laws and regulations.	Explores the creation of international classes in its high-school section, and trials the joint management of the school with quality institutions abroad.

These characteristics have distinguished School M from traditional public schools. As

expected, the partnership has been innovative and reforming, creating both opportunities and challenges for school leadership. Echoing the saying that every coin has two sides, this situation has increased the complexity of education reform in contemporary Chinese society. The five main categories that emerged from the data analysis are discussed below:

4.2.1. Institutional innovation

Faced with public doubts and dissatisfaction with education and the rising trend of young children studying abroad, government leaders, in collaboration with Company X, sought “a third way”, and created School M to experiment with institutional innovation.

In design, it was intended to use the advantages of public and private education, referred to as the first and second ways, and to overcome their shortcomings.

First, public education has long been criticized for its fixation on examination performance, its relatively low efficiency, and the lack of autonomy of the school principal in the management of the school. Second, private education is flawed, as school funds are not guaranteed in the long term, leading to its profit-seeking reputation, and there is a positive link between school quality and high tuition fees.

Therefore, the institutional innovation of School M lies in the fact that it combined the welfare trait of public education and the autonomous feature of private education, and eliminated the tedious administrative tasks of public school leaders and the seeking-profit tendency of private education.

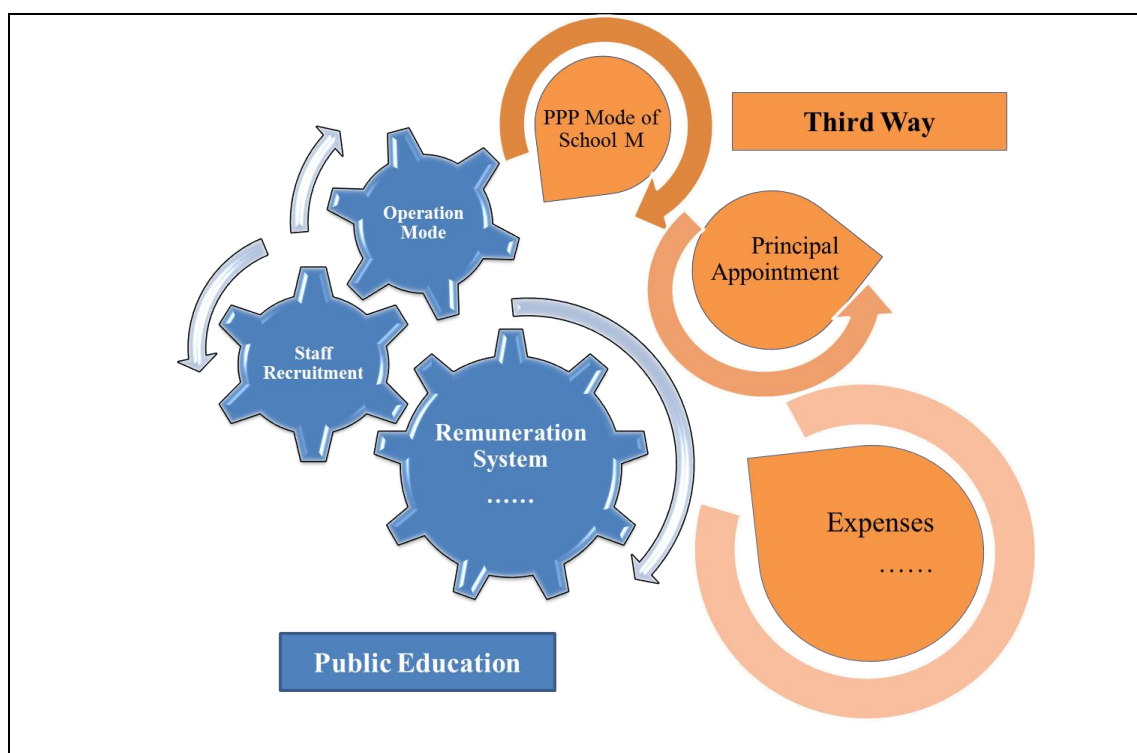
However, in practice, the institutional innovation of School M also faced challenges.

First, the long history of public education has developed its own system of self-consistency and self-adaptation, and public schools can be operated and maintained only by following its unique inertia-based approach. In contrast, using “a third way,” School M does not do things in the same way as traditional public schools in many respects, such as its staff recruitment, remuneration system, financial audit, among others. Therefore, when it came to

implementation, it was necessary for the departments concerned to design a different framework to guide and facilitate the development of the school, as shown in Figure 4.4. Before the creation of this new institutional structure, the efficiency of the functioning of School M depended on the understanding of all parties involved in the reform. Whenever disparities arose, School M had to send staff to communicate with specific government departments to reach consensus and ensure its smooth operation.

Figure 4.4. System Inertia and Self-Consistency:

A Conceptual Comparison between Public Education and PPP School M



Second, when the succession of (especially key) leaders occurred in the government, the continuity of the school reform became uncertain and slowed, requiring more cooperative synergy on multiple sides. In other words, it became a leader-dependent reform, with leadership replacement meaning that the momentum necessary for the continuous development of School M was weakened. Consequently, this created a challenge, as it took longer than expected to experiment with and rapidly develop the third way approach while

testing its appropriateness.

4.2.2. Goal planning

The FACS laid the theoretical foundations of school management. Before School M opened, the public and private leaders reflected on some key issues, one of which was to develop School M as a 12-year comprehensive school.

In theory, a 12-year comprehensive education mode can free teachers and students from unnecessary anxiety and pressure to prepare for the high-school entrance examination. It is believed that it is only by postponing the redundant evaluation of education and teaching that a school can have more autonomy in the systematic development of its curriculum. Similarly, when students are exempt from the pressure of high-stakes test performance at the end of G9, they will have more time and space to develop into all-round individuals.

Another merit is that this system will be able to keep all students on the right track at school for a learning period of 12 years, creating an apprentice-like relationship for the benefit of the lifelong development of students. One interviewee, who was one of the first designers of School M, made this remark when describing an ideal teacher-student relationship:

My ideal school is a bit like the relationship between Confucius and his disciples, that is, teachers are actually engineers of the human soul. What is the core of this sentence? It's the human soul. This is very demanding for teachers. She is not for the dissemination of knowledge. Instead she is a guiding role, and is accompanied by the growth of children to find themselves, and find their own (destinies). Such is the process (for learning). Therefore, teachers will eventually become spiritual mentors. The part of knowledge imparting can be handed over to technology. Technology solves the inheritance of knowledge and education returns to the guidance of the soul. This is what I have believed in the ultimate goal of education. Teachers are not concerned with the level of knowledge, but with the growth of life. (EM No.2)

This quote echoes an old Chinese proverb: it takes 10 years to grow trees, but 100 years to raise people. Education is a long-term plan rather than a series of examinations.

However, although appearing efficient and sustainable at first glance, this proposed arrangement later turned out to be a “castle in the air”: the planned 12-year learning path did not comply with national policy, and thus in 2016 the municipal education administration rejected School M’s request to adopt this 12-year system.

Due to financial constraints in China, compulsory education covers Grade 1 to Grade 9 at the regional (district) level. At the end of Grade 9, the municipal education administrative departments must carry out a high-stakes high-school entrance examination (*zhongkao*) for students in compulsory education. Depending on their test results, students will choose to study in high school, enter a vocational school, or drop out if they are denied access to higher education. This eliminatory regime limits the quota of students entering a higher level of education.

As one interviewee commented, this request was challenged by people from the Municipal Bureau of Education:

When we went to do that, the Municipal Bureau of Education said, “Your agreement is problematic. It says that [School M has] a 12-year comprehensive system. Shenzhen schools have not had such a system for a long time. Don’t you know? You are breaking the law.” He said it directly. It is illegal. He also added, “Your district went out to do this with a private company, and then [you] took it over and asked me to approve it. How could I let you go [this way]? ... It won’t be approved.” (SP No.3)

Clearly, the 12-year comprehensive system proposed by School M somehow challenged the functions and power of LEAs. Although it was designed to guide and advanced the goals set by the early pioneers of School M in the district, it was seen as a problem by outside authorities in their higher education administrative agencies.

To go further, as the innovative points of School M did not set rule-based limits, whether related to vertical ownership in education administration (municipal, provincial, national) or to horizontal government reform departments (financial bureau, tenure compilation agencies, personnel departments), this posed unresolved challenges to the sustained development of school leadership.

4.2.3. Resource allocation

Another major opportunity and challenge brought about by the PPP was resource allocation. The abundant resources of School M can be mainly classified into three aspects: a large amount of money for school management, small class sizes, and competitive teacher remuneration.

First, the local government and Company X jointly invested a huge amount of funds to promote the operation of the school. To some extent, this led to a spotlight effect on school reform. According to publicly available information (incomplete statistics), 18 months after the school was founded, School M was discussed 96 times by the main national media. Of these, 10 were in-depth investigations and more than 30 were reports on its curriculum reform. By the end of 2015, the “School M model” triggered a number of demonstrative effects in society. Public schools and various school management groups across the country showed their interest in actively referring to, learning from, and replicating the School M model. In less than three years, School M had become a high-quality school, widely recognized and admired by the local population.

Nevertheless, it also sparked controversial debates. As seen by local traditional public schools, the efficiency of the management of School M was attributed to the unique marriage of administrative momentum and integration of commercial resources. This high level of funding made it incredibly difficult to replicate and promote the School M model in the district. Second, its small class teaching mode has raised concerns about how to balance

educational equity with effective school management.

In 2017, the population density of the School M district was more than three times the average level of Shenzhen, ranking it first in the city. In December 2017, the proportion of large classes with more than 45 students in public primary schools in the district was around 78.3%. The sustained growth of the population has put enormous pressure on the supply of public education products.

In contrast, School M and its harmonious situation advocates and implements a small-class teaching mode. From the beginning, the FACS suggested “exploring the reform of the teaching management system, such as small class teaching (30 to 35 students per class), stratified teaching, a walk-in class-earning scheme, a credit system, a tutoring program, and the like to achieve the all-round and personalized development of each student.” Since its creation, School M has maintained a small-class teaching mode with no more than 35 students. As one interviewee pointed out:

School M still has a small advantage in terms of resources. For example, why do parents want to learn in small classes? As everyone knows, small class teaching is an advanced educational concept or an important symbol of modern advanced education. Yet, for now, it cannot be done elsewhere in Shenzhen. (BL No.2)

When further explored, this contrast revealed a balance between overall educational equity and effective school management at School M. In response, one interviewee, a bureau leader, suggested that

the School Board's desire to acquire a social reputation for good academic performance must be unified with its social responsibility [to welcome as many students as other public schools].” (BL No.1)

He also added,

During the process, as long as it involved negotiation on school enrollment, the DEB and

Company X were somewhat antagonistic and neither side accepted the other's views. (BL No.1)

The bureau has repeatedly expressed concern about this issue, asking School M to enroll more students to provide more placement for children in basic education. However, the School Board complies with the rules and regulations previously formulated in the FACS and refused to make any changes. The rivalry between both parties has led to an impasse for principal leadership.

Third, its distinctive and competitive remuneration scheme has created opportunities and challenges.

As formulated in the FACS, M School has an independent performance-based remuneration system. Setting its own salary standards, School M played an incentive role and set up a distribution mechanism with a good salary for optimal performance. Based on the principle of “merit pay for more and better work,” the remuneration scheme of School M issued by the Remuneration Committee of the School Board stipulates that a teacher's salary is made up of a base salary, a referenced government subsidy, a teaching-hour subsidy, a job allowance, a reward for teaching achievement, a reward for teaching duration, an assessment award, and a company annuity. Teachers are appointed on a contractual basis, and receive a salary that is 20-30% higher than that of teachers in traditional public schools.

School M has also changed the traditional way of recruiting teachers in traditional public schools, by formulating a five-level evaluation system and by widening the sources of recruitment in universities at home and abroad, without being limited to graduates of normal universities. In addition, the school mobilizes social resources by recruiting part-time teachers from social backgrounds and inviting parents to create elective courses to share professional and technical experiences. To a certain extent, School M has reached a diverse composition of teaching staff.

In January 2019, School M had 233 teachers, with an average age of 31 years old. Among them, 134 (60%) teachers have a Master's degree or above. In contrast, in traditional public schools in the district, 66% of teachers are over 35 years old. Many schools have staff with an average age of over 45 years old, with only 8.5% of all teachers having a Master's degree or above⁶.

Thus, School M is characterized by its young and highly educated faculty, closely related to the reform of staff and remuneration systems implemented with the establishment of the PPP. Before the school opened, the first designers incorporated the salary incentive mechanism into the framework of cooperative school management to attract and hire quality teachers, by offering a higher salary than other public schools, establishing an unhindered entry and exit system for talent, and maintaining teaching staff mobility.

Despite its current non-tenure-track positions, in the early stage of its creation, the government negotiated with Company X and approved 10 tenure-track positions to attract keen applicants with teaching excellence. In 2015, due to the opening of its high school section, 10 new positions were added to the pool to ensure the absorption of some basic teachers and key subject leaders. In addition, other teachers were appointed on the basis of the appointment system and recruited independently to guarantee the autonomy of school employment.

Keeping a small number of tenure-track positions was defined as a “public standard” mindset by one government interviewee, indicating that teachers are strongly attached to tenure-track positions in public schools:

Because Chinese people have a mindset not only for official standards, but also for public standards. [The latter is like that], I prefer to get less money in a public school with a tenure-track position than to teach in a private school [without a tenure-track

⁶ Excerpted from *Work Report on Sustainable Development of School M*, November 13, 2018.

position but a higher salary]. [The reason is that] it gives me a sense of security and I feel comfortable with a stable future. (GO No.2)

In fact, until the end of 2018, 12 teachers in School M received double privilege treatment, with a tenure-track position and a higher salary than their peers in traditional public schools. This practice was reported in the audit report of the district Audit Bureau at the end of 2018 as inappropriate, with its being claimed that the budgetary management of School M was not strict and that the salary distribution of teachers was not standardized. After further negotiations and consultations, School M agreed to proceed to a unified rectification, establishing a salary distribution for tenure-track teachers in accordance with the unified standards for public school staff in the region.

However, this creates a new challenge, as it means that there are two salary schemes at School M: one complying with traditional public schools, in terms of wages and tenure-track positions, and one with offering higher wages without tenure. This “one school, two systems” mode of remuneration management will inevitably lead to obstacles or difficulties for school management, and remains to be tested in the future.

In short, having more resources is considered a privilege. At a time when educational equity is promoted nationally, having privileges is not positive or favorable to school leadership:

This reform is ... additive. It is not a simple reassembly of the original elements.

Innovation is more about the recombination of original elements. School M has a new element. This new element is that the government and Company X each gave 50 million yuan, that is, 100 million yuan. Then, they gave another 100 million yuan, [for a total of] 200 million yuan. Can this [funding] be used well in another school? Other schools do not have this funding. Is it replicable and copyable?(BL No.3)

4.2.4. Principal appointment

According to the FACS, the principal is appointed by the School Board and is accountable to

the board of directors each year. Members of the School Board oversee the school management process led by the principal. This work scheme has a strong influence on principalship. In such circumstances, the pioneer principal either fights to run the school and create good results, or decides to quit and prepare for retirement. The resignation of the first principal somehow proved this. In fact, some interviewees addressed this issue:

There is a good point [about the appointment of the principal], especially when the school has a strong principal. The principal's willpower can be carried out to the end of the nerve [of the school]. His educational thoughts can be fully incorporated into the school management process and his ideas can be realized. I think it reduces what can hold you back. (PA No.2)

It is more about empowering the principal, which amounts to a system of power and responsibility.... The main idea is empowerment.... Yes, if you cannot do it well, you will be affected. Either change the principal, or his salary is affected, or his position is affected, it is basically a corporate culture. (EM No.1)

However, these two-way constraints for the appointment of the principal are not without flaws. Take for example the issue of principal succession. Luck, whether good or bad, will be encountered and involved in each cycle of leadership rotation. In the case of good luck, a new principal may, upon arrival, try to integrate his ideas into the school management process to quickly gain a reputation and the trust of all involved parties. In doing so, the legacy of the previous principal cannot be respected and preserved, damaging the ideological legacy of principalship. As another parent interviewee commented:

What worries me is that I heard that there could be some signs that the new principal is ready to change things. Many principals cannot do things for legacy, which is very troublesome. (PA No.2)

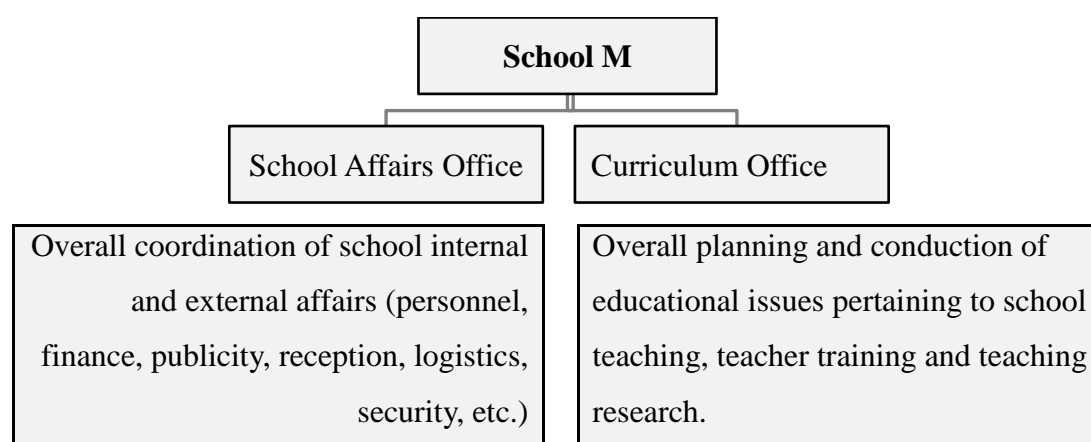
Conversely, in case of bad luck, as this interviewee suggested, there is the issue of “the high

cost of trial and error” in a school like School M, highlighting the leadership of the principal. Therefore, the principal-appointment system appears to be a double-edged sword.

4.2.5. Flat management structure

A distinctive feature of the management of School M is its flat hierarchy structure, as shown in Figure 4.5, consisting of two departments, the School Affairs Office and the Curriculum Office.

Figure 4.5. Flat Hierarchy of School M



Public media reports and the school brochures and leaflets have shown the advantages of the flat management structure currently in use at School M, highlighting its efficiency and flexibility (e.g. The Structural Change of M School, 2016).

Traditionally, hierarchical management structure is pyramid-shaped, with orders transmitted from top leaders to middle managers to lower agents. In contrast, a flat management structure strives to transfer authoritative decisions directly to the acting executives, by removing the middle management level. Therefore, it creates a more efficient information-flow and speeds up the decision-making process.

First, a flat hierarchy imposes rigorous demands on managers. Middle managers have decision-making power and autonomy. They must be omnipotent managers, with not only outstanding professional and coordination skills, but also be good coaches and attentive

listeners. In an interview, a mid-level teacher leader from School M emphasized that constant practice and on-the-job learning were required to master communication and coordination skills for management:

[Everyone is in] a state of exhaustion. ... Here the operation is more efficient, and the emphasis is on good execution, time nodes, many work processes, and constantly optimizing the process, [as required by] the flat management of the school. ... Meetings are held whenever necessary. Sometimes there can be meetings at noon, which is very rare in other public schools. (TM No.1)

This state of exhaustion is due to the fact that the school went through a period of rapid development. This undoubtedly led to the creation of a rapid-response mechanism and facilitated rapid feedback and efficient problem-solving:

Every morning, the grade leader patrols classes like a doctor visiting the ward. Then he gives quick feedback for an early review. This is impossible in many schools. (TM No.1)

Note that before working at School M, this interviewee was a middle manager in a traditional public school in the same district. After having worked at School M for three years, the same respondent decided to resign, and her resignation was already approved at the time of the interview. In response to the rigorous demands of the flat hierarchy, she admitted that her state of exhaustion could not last longer and that she needed a more natural and slower pace of life:

[At my new school], teachers are randomly distributed in terms of age groups, including senior, middle-aged, and young staff. The age structure is more natural. The team [at School M] is a team of warriors preparing to die, the kind of fellows rushing forward all the time. [But in this school], when my colleagues greet me, tell me to take care, and ask me not to work too much, I always feel warm. (TM No.1)

Second, a flat hierarchy strengthens distributed leadership and decentralized management.

This decentralization can give middle leaders independent decision-making and management autonomy, and encourage them to assume more responsibility for achieving different objectives.

However, when leadership is distributed and responsibilities are dispersed, this can lead to no one taking real responsibility. A parent interviewed described an open school activity as “*disorganized and disorderly*” in the early days of the School:

they organized a parent-child sports meeting. When they did it for the first time, it failed because of the haste. It was badly organized ... the whole situation was a mess and many activities could not start. (PA No.1)

She also added:

There were some middle managers, but they lacked organizational skills. They were too inexperienced. Plus, I think maybe the principal's focus was not here, his focus was on classroom teaching.

To remedy this, more attention was paid to the organization of various subsequent activities in terms of the detailed program design and the operating guide, and providing clear follow-ups.

Another interviewee, after being promoted from a middle manager to vice principal, commented on the high demands for middle managers to find solutions in activity planning:

A good solution is to clearly indicate how to execute a plan. I think that the simplest and best thing is that after reading a plan, one has no doubt and does not have to come back to you a second time. A person should learn everything by reading at a glance. (SP No.1)

Third, with the expansion and development of School M into multiple campuses for G1 to G12 education, the flat management structure does not work as efficiently as it did during the early years of the school. School leadership has faced more challenges. To maintain the simplicity of the flat hierarchy at School M, there will necessarily be an increase in the

management range, However, the larger the scope of the flat management structure, the more decentralized the power. This change will increase the burden of coordination for leaders with distributed power, making it more difficult to create an adhesive and centered connection within the school.

For instance, here is the response of a vice principal interviewed:

It is understandable that a flat management structure was used for the first two years, but later the principal himself was pained [by this flat management structure]. Because at first there were only two functional departments, and they gradually couldn't cope with the situation. Various departments have been added onto the flat hierarchical structure, and then more functional divisions were added.... Now the middle-level leaders are burning out. ... [Regarding] the rapid development of the school, from 300 to 3,000 people in five years [and the fact that we now have] 10 times the number of students, you can see that the development of the school and a flat management structure are completely incompatible. (SP No.3)

In short, a flat management structure is not a panacea, because of its limitations and weaknesses. First, it leads to higher replacement costs, as people in key positions need to have more skills and more responsibilities, and when they need to be replaced, it is difficult to find suitable candidates. The reduction in the number of management posts means fewer promotion channels and opportunities and a longer promotion cycle, which inevitably affects work enthusiasm. In addition, due to the reduction in management levels, the promotion space for grassroots teachers is considerably reduced, leading to a ceiling effect on career development for those aspiring to a career path in education administration.

In other words, the rapid development of School M has placed stricter demands on the form of management. The conclusion that effective management is not merely a matter of formality, but depends on the specific needs of the situation remains to be tested. It may be possible to

adopt a flat hierarchy, or flat management, to inject vitality and synergy in the operation of educational groups such as School M.

In this section, five issues related to the PPP of School M, namely, its institutional innovation, goal planning, resource allocation, principal appointment and flat management structure have been examined. While these are all characteristics of School M as a reformed school with a PPP, they have created opportunities and challenges for school leadership. School M also requires more complex and meticulous coordination, communication, and sometimes compromise for effective leadership. The following section discusses the different leadership strategies used by Mr. P, as the principal, to deal with the multiple accountabilities faced by the school.

4.3. Leadership Strategies for Coping with Multiple Accountabilities in School

In traditional public schools, the government is the sponsor and founder. The school principal reports to and discusses with education administrative authorities, such as LEAs, and must consult them on important school decisions. In contrast, in the case of School M, multiple stakeholders interact with one another and constitute a complex network of important actors to whom the principal is accountable. The five main stakeholders are the local government, the private company, vice principals, school teachers, and parents. The school is at the center of external accountabilities to the local government and the private company, and internal accountabilities to staff (vice principals and teachers) and parents.

4.3.1. Leadership strategies of the principal to cope with the local government

4.3.1.1. Role of the government: From an invisible supporter to a visible supervisor

Two interviews with local government officials and three with the leaders of the DEB formed the data set for an overview of the role of the government. Data analysis revealed a transition in the role of the government from an invisible supporter to a visible supervisor.

Table 4.7 provides an overview of the changing role of the government, as perceived by the interviewees (Table 4.7a-7e).

Table 4.7. Changing Roles of the Government Perceived by Public Officials

a. Perspective of GO No.1

Invisible Supporter	Visible Supervisor	Interviewees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I remember that the Secretary had a word at that time. He said, you just <u>leave the school</u> to them, do not (bother to) care. Just <u>let it go, let it go and fly freely</u>.</i> - <i><u>Whatever I can do for support</u>, I'm fighting for it both publicly and privately. So for me..... I have been <u>supporting</u> and <u>paying attention</u> to this school, in all aspects.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>(Looking back) it seems that there are <u>deviations in some aspects</u>. System implementation needs to be enhanced, e.g. some financial practices are marked as <u>not normative</u> by the audit. That is to say, the school should <u>strengthen its awareness</u> of implementing and abiding by rules and regulations, <u>make it a conscious action</u>, and <u>not go beyond that limit</u>. Besides, it needs <u>timely supervision</u>.</i> 	GO No.1
<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation</p> <p>In the beginning, the government was expected to delegate power to School M, as revealed by the expressions “<i>leave the school to them</i>,” “<i>let it go</i>,” or “<i>fly freely</i>.” Later, this was seen as a deviation from the norms (e.g., shown by “<i>deviations in some aspects</i>” and “<i>not normative</i>”), requiring “<i>timely supervision</i>.”</p>		

b. Perspective of GO No.2

Invisible Supporter	Visible Supervisor	Interviewees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>It is the duty of the government to provide funds. The other is to work with the enterprise Charity Foundation to exercise the responsibility of school organizer, making important decisions for its development. <u>One is to fund, the other is to manage</u>.</i> - <i>Its role is more <u>to provide service</u>,</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>At the beginning of school-running, we tried <u>not to give the school too many constraints or too much pressure</u>. We just set the direction. As to how it goes on to submit a final answer sheet to us, we (agreed to) <u>consider it in due time</u> later on.</i> - <i>When it was settled at that time, (we agreed that) <u>in three years</u> the</i> 	GO No.2

<p><u>more service and less intervention.</u></p> <p>- Once the School Board was established, I began to shift to <u>support them behind their backs.</u> Yes, I was to find my own position. I was going to <u>step back and let them run their own schools.</u></p>	<p>school-operation efficiency was not to be assessed or monitored. We would <u>let it go, without supervision or evaluation.</u></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation</p> <p>The role of the government was more about providing services, with “less intervention.” It was a consensus or agreement among public officials that, within three years, the school would be granted autonomy “without supervision or evaluation,” which, according to the connotation, relates to “too many constraints or too much pressure.”</p>		

c. Perspective of BL No.1

Invisible Supporter	Visible Supervisor	Interviewees
<p>- <u>Let it be</u> is a good thing. For an aspiring principal, you’ve <u>given him the greatest support if you let his school be.</u></p> <p>- The main responsibilities of the government are <u>to support and coordinate.</u> <u>That's all.</u> It's hard to reconcile (all sides) without support. It's hard to support if all the forces are not coordinated. The key is that the government supports and coordinates.</p>	<p>- Now I think <u>the two aspects</u> ----- the School Board's will to run a school and its social responsibility ----- <u>must be unified.</u> <u>The Education Bureau and the enterprise are somewhat antagonistic</u> and each side does not accept the other's standpoint.</p> <p>- Now there is a problem. As I just mentioned, <u>what the school should be like.</u> <u>What should our government and the enterprise do?</u> In terms of <u>such norm,</u> these problems are emerged.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BL No.1</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation</p> <p>This informant, indicating his awareness of the principal's situation by saying that “it is difficult [for a school leader] to reconcile all sides without support,” acknowledged that the principal receives “the best support” if the government “lets his school be.” Along with the changing role of the government, he admitted that “the DEB and Company X were somewhat antagonistic” and that “problems ... emerged” concerning the level of responsibility assumed and shared between the</p>		

school, “our government, and the company.”

d. Perspective of BL No.2

Invisible Supporter	Visible Supervisor	Interviewees
- <i>In fact (the role of) our government is to give money. <u>Let the principal run the school. Let him do whatever he wishes as long as there are not any mistakes in following big political policies.</u> Such is the most ideal state.</i>	- <i>The implementation of the educational policy of our country cannot go wrong. The general direction cannot go wrong. We will then strengthen our supervision.</i>	BL No.2
<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation</p> <p>Based on his view of the “most ideal state” of school autonomy, the role of the government is “to give money” while the principal is the decision-maker and can “do whatever he wants” as long as the bottom line of “following major political policies” is not violated. Later, the government added political weathervanes that “cannot go wrong,” including “the implementation of the education policy of our country” and “the general direction.” This explains why “our supervision” had to be “strengthened.”</p>		

e. Perspective of BL No.3

Invisible Supporter	Visible Supervisor	Interviewees
- <i>The reform is, to some extent, a violation of the law. Yes. It is somehow against the law, <u>a breakthrough of the original system.</u></i>	- <i>When <u>key leaders</u> of the district administrative departments have changed, <u>their judgments</u> on the reform will have also <u>changed</u>. One risk is the <u>policy</u>.</i>	BL No.3
<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation</p> <p>“The reform is” somewhat “a violation of the law”. It is then up to the risk-taking ability of an official to carry forward an education reform. It is clear that things continue to change and that “one risk” of “the policy” remains. The change of “key leaders” inevitably leads to different “judgments on the reform” of the new leaders.</p>		

At the initial stage of the reform, all parties agreed to grant autonomy to the school principal, to recruit staff and to design the curriculum. The key leader of the government, the Secretary, played a major role in putting the reform into practice. This “top leader effect” made it

possible to allocate abundant resources from the public government and the private company and to synergize wisdom to form a way for the creation of School M, as a model for future public schools.

Keeping in mind the Secretary's constant reminder for *"more services"* and *"less intervention,"* others followed his instructions and provided support, rather than administrative interference, for the development of the school. As one governmental interviewee commented, *"to support them behind their backs"* vividly captured their positions at the beginning of this PPP project. Given his prestigious status and reputation in the field of basic education, Mr. P was the most suitable principal to assume the mission and meet the expectations of the pioneer leaders. At the time, the public official appeared to have good reasons to state that *"as the government, we wanted a good school but not the power to run the school. Such was the assumption then."* (GO No.2)

Shortly after, the Secretary left the district to assume a higher leadership role in the city. Upon leaving, he approached some officials and the principal and told them: *"if you have any problems, you can come to me directly. I will do my best to support you."* Later, there was a similar succession of leaders in other government departments related to the reform. One informant explained the following,

when the key leaders of district administrative departments change, their judgments on the reform will also change. (BL No.3)

Over time, public officials started to reflect on their decisions and views, compared with their views in the past. Echoing the idea that *"there is a problem"* regarding the standards of the three parties, the government, Company X, and the school (see interviewee BL No.1), other informants also mentioned the issue of government supervision, such as *"timely supervision"* (see interviewee GO No.1), *"the two aspects must be unified"* (see interviewee BL No.1), and the need to *"strengthen our supervision"* (see interviewee BL No.2) in case of the *"policy risk"*

(see interviewee BL No.3). As GO No. 1 pointed out, “*with the development of this era and the progress of the society, the School will surely have to make some adjustments. It is inevitable. It cannot be static.*” (GO No.1)

In a sense, the changing role of the government can be attributed to the progressive socio-political changes taking place in China. In terms of encouraging social capital to enter the field of education, the change in the policy context of Chinese education was characterized by three trends.

One trend was to further increase recognition of the importance of equity. Since the creation of the People’s Republic of China, educational equity has always been one of the fundamental values of socialist education (Shi, 2015). To reinforce educational equity, the CPC Central Committee (2013) suggested “further expanding the equity of education” as an important policy in current and future education reforms in China and developing a strategic plan to improve educational equity. In addition, it emphasized that the main direction to deepen the reform of the school management system was to integrate social capital in the field of education, and increase the total amount of high quality resources. Unlike previous incremental reforms in education, the guiding principle was a combination of storage reform and precise incremental reform, further promoting the equity of incremental reform projects in education. Moreover, the Government Work Report 2018 proposed “the development of fair and quality education”.

The second trend was to shift from non-government investment in education to standardized school management practices. An examination of the education policy documents issued by the government in recent decades revealed an emphasis on the legitimacy of social capital entering the field of education, and that previously restrictive means have been converted into incentives, with governments at all levels being required to play the role of active guides (2015, Shi; 2016, Zhu; 2016, Zhu & Zhang; 2017, Zhou). In 2017, the State Council

published *Several Opinions on Encouraging Social Forces to Establish Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Private Education*. It proposed methods for implementing differentiated management for for-profit and not-for-profit sponsors in school management. This policy also called for “substantial opening” and “differentiated support” for investment in education, to broaden the channels and allow different types of social capital to enter education. Subsequently, *the Report of the 19th National Congress* pointed out that the main conflict in China has become a conflict between people’s growing need for a better life and an unbalanced and inadequate social development. In short, the main theme in promoting educational equity was to “support and standardize the establishment of education by social forces.”

The third trend was the emphasis on the leading role of the Party (CPC) in non-governmental education. According to the *Several Opinions on Encouraging Social Forces to Establish Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Private Education* (2017), it aimed to promote the sound and healthy development of non-governmental education with the fundamental task of “educating people with morality (*lǐde shùren*)”. It recommended strengthening the Party’s leadership in government and non-government schools, demanding the creation of Party sections in non-government schools, recognizing its core role, and improving the participatory mechanism of Party organizations in decision-making.

All interviewees mentioned these trends in one way or another. For example, one interviewee mentioned the effect of the equity policy: “*That is to say, we built School M and gave it privileges. This actually caused an injustice.*” He also discussed the different class sizes of School M and other schools:

Currently, the number of students is increasing sharply and there are too many students in other schools. The pressure is enormous, as [this problem affects] the equity of education and the public welfare of basic education. (GO No.1)

Another interview emphasized the importance of doing thing in a normative and standard way:

(One reason in choosing Company X as our partner is that we believe) this enterprise conducts normative and standard practices of decision-making for important issues of school management. (GO No.2)

One interviewee also mentioned the pressure to adopt uniform practices in school management:

We have sorted out the comments from this audit. The first problem concerns the responsibility of the budget management department. Now we have completed the coordination. The School has agreed to strictly follow our management system. (BL No.1)

It was also necessary to emphasize the role of the Party in School M:

The Party's leadership must not be ambiguous. It must have priority and the school must meet with and gain support from its staff representatives. These systems are all internal forms of democratic management. (GO No.1)

Note that this was also the period when the government vigorously promoted the separation of the management, operation, and evaluation of education, advocated the practice of letting educators run schools, emphasized simplified governance and decentralized power, and required schools to be managed in accordance with the law. Along with the aforementioned changes in the macro socio-political discourse, it may not be surprising to see a change in the role played by the government in the PPP of School M.

In response to the changing role of the government, the principal adjusted and adapted his leadership strategies when interacting with the government.

4.3.1.2. Leadership strategies of the principal in relation to the government

Overall speaking, the principal used three main leadership strategies

Strategy 1: Leading as an agent of change

The role of the principal can be seen as that of an agent of change, leading School M as a learning organization along the path he has chosen. At the initial stage, he was willing to resign from his previous position. Upon his arrival in a new city, he established School M and, in a short time, gained recognition from local authorities, parents, and the community. He had the capacity to create and shape change, adopting a chain of innovation to help the school take the lead in operational efficiency and overall improvement.

He had a strong impetus to advance the reform, as evidenced by his ideas on the current situation of Chinese education and the future of education. Quoting the words of different government interviewees, he had a strong “*understanding of the social reality*,” “*formed his own understanding of education*,” set up effective school management by building a team of competent teaching staff, and devoted himself to a “*continuous change process for the better*.” In doing so, he became an “*idealist scholar-type*” principal, “*independent and unorthodox*,” wishing to realize his aspiration and his educational ideal at the forefront of the reform. In addition, he radically transformed school culture. Take for example how he defined the culture of School M:

Although the school has only been running for six years, it has formed its cultural characteristics distinct from other schools. We are particularly keen on reforms. Yes, various reforms. Because we were born in the reform process and our practice is for reforms. This is the original impetus of the school.

Strategy 2: Having a high moral purpose

The title of his recent book, *Coming for an Ideal School* (2015), captures the essence of a principal’s pursuit of value of in plain words. To pursue a third way in the field of basic education in China was a mission never undertaken by professionals and predecessors. This represented the strong value orientation underlying the principal’s brave and ambitious actions to sacrifice his career benefits and move to a new environment at an age close to

retirement. His resolve and determination won unanimous praise from all of the interviewees. In terms of serving for the benefit of the public, his pursuit of value coincided perfectly with the original driving force of the reform initiated by the government. With the full support of the Secretary, the principal had no difficulty coordinating with the government. In the early years, he enjoyed the prestigious status of an education expert and was empowered to make the final decisions for the development of the school.

However, when leadership turnover occurred in the government, the principal then faced more uncertainty and restrictions than ever before. His autonomy was reduced and he was forced to spend more time negotiating with public officials on crucial issues. When communication did not work, compromise became the only way.

The following quotes highlight the principals' personality and leadership style in his pursuit of value, according to one observer:

He presents himself as a scholar principal. Yes, in his context, a scholar principal is a self-positioning of which he is proud. Speaking of scholar, he may be a little bookish, not very practical or realistic. But I think he [makes] his own value judgment. (BL No.3)

In terms of being an educator, a principal, a scholar, and an internal administrator of a school, Mr. P is a very good expert, [aside from] his external coordination skills. (BL No.1)

In addition, his perseverance in the pursuit of value gave him little flexibility to coordinate with public officials, as shown below:

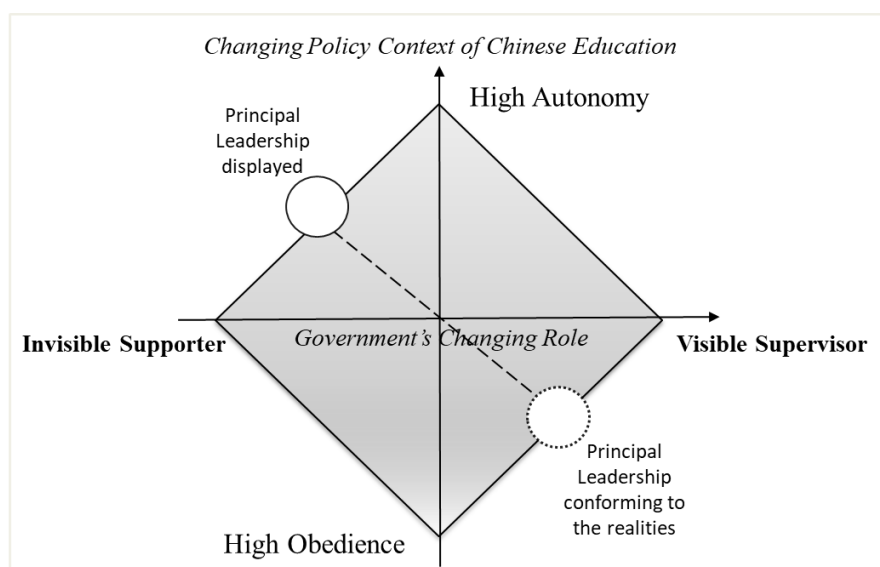
The ability to coordinate with external actors [beyond the school] is not his strong point, nor does he want to coordinate. (BL No.3)

He is clear on what to love and what to hate. So, whatever he has to tolerate, there is a limit beyond which he cannot bear it. I knew it. It is clear that if you change, he'll quit. (BL No.1)

Strategy 3: Using professional authority to challenge administrative authorities

The change in the policy context of Chinese education put forward new requirements for principal leadership, with the preferred type of leadership behavior shifting from flexible autonomy to normative obedience, as shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6. Principal Leadership: Idealism VS Pragmatism



When the local authorities increased their control over the school, the principal was expected to be obedient rather than emphasizing his autonomy. However, this stance did not align with his values and beliefs. Using his words, he protested the “*meaningless entanglement*” and “*lack of thinking*” (e.g., audit accountability) initiated by some government departments. Indeed, he built a knowledge-discourse system in line with his own values. This system was based on his deep understanding of education laws and his knowledge of independent thinking. By virtue of his professional status as an insightful educator, he used this discourse to compete with the administrative power of government departments.

Table 4.8 provided an overview of how the principal responded to the requirements of the government and built his own knowledge-discourse system. Either by ignoring, criticizing, rejecting, or cooperating selectively, he strongly defended what he believed to be right.

Table 4.8. Tactics by the Principal to Build his own Knowledge-Discourse System

Tactics	Quotes of the Principal
Clarifying	<i>"At that time I had told the bureau director, first we do not have enough people, and second there is a lack of experience for me, logistical management was not that I could handle well."</i>
Setting boundary	<i>"The enterprise is your business. But education is my business. You have the final say in business whereas it's up to me in education."</i>
Ignoring	<i>"In dealing with educational inspections from above, we surely say that we are using those editions required by the Ministry. But in fact, we may use these two textbooks together. A variety of teaching materials is also necessary."</i>
Cooperating selectively	<i>"Guided by our school-running philosophy, we will walk as far as we can and jump as high as we can. It's mainly about how much space is given (by the government) and how much I can do."</i>
Offering alternatives	<i>"This is not a problem, but a phenomenon. So can we take a longer time to observe, or can we listen to more opinions of those from all walks of life?"</i>
Challenging	<i>"I said, you audited me, you were wrong, the auditor was wrong. You should audit the district government. Who told them to do that (the reform)? You don't even have any logic."</i>
Criticizing	<i>"What mostly featured educational governance is its pluralistic subject. It is not that, like in the past, the superior issuing commands and subordinates just executing them. It's not that simple."</i>
Rejecting	<i>"If you are correct, I'll listen to you, and do as you say. But I'm sorry. I don't take part in things if they affect children. We do things in our own style. You can't control us by administrative order. I can refuse it."</i>
Be tough	<i>"You are trying to tell the principal how to do his job. When it was clear the principal was right, you said he was wrong, and don't even let him talk. Isn't that bullshit? Don't fuss me around on education. Fire me, or I can say anything in education."</i>

By building this discourse system, he became an authoritative and credible person, perceived as having the right conclusions on school education. The function of knowledge is to protect people's lives and promote their understanding of the outside world (Wang & Luo, 2019: 16). Using his knowledge to strengthen his professional status was a tool continually used by the principal to counter the administrative power of the government. His indisputable status in

the field of education was also manifest as cultural capital, enabling him to protect and strengthen his dominant position and gain authority.

4.3.2. Leadership strategies of the principal to cope with the private enterprise

4.3.2.1. Role of the enterprise: From a strong supporter of the school to an ally of the government

Two senior managers from Company X, involved in the practical operation of School M from its early days, participated in the interviews. Their comments revealed the changing role of Company X, from being a strong supporter of the school to an ally of the government.

Take for example the following quote:

In the partnership, the government and Company X have the same status. Any private or public school is ... used to listening to the government, from top to bottom, [but in School M] I can converse with the government. I can negotiate with the government ... It is the first time that those who manage and those who are managed are on an equal footing.
(EM No.1)

Acknowledging his role as a negotiator “on an equal footing” to “converse with the government,” the first informant from Company X mentioned the importance of the PPP involved in the operation of School M. That is, with the support of Company X, School M was able to confront the government forcefully for “the first time”.

Similarly, the other interviewee confirmed the role of the private company as a strong supporter:

Our main approach is to help the school solve some problems arising from the reform and cooperate with the government, because the school cannot deal with the government ... I can lobby for them and I can convince them. (EM No.2)

The initial support of Company X was strong, as illustrated by four aspects. First was the effort put by the company with the government at the beginning of the design process to draft

a blueprint for the operation of School M.

One interviewee explained that at the pre-opening stage of School M, he “*spent one year negotiating with the government*” to settle all items of the reform and was able to ultimately “*come up with a brand new FACS*”.

Second was the resource mobilization of the company when cooperating with the government. Indeed, the private company used its social status and public credibility and its super-large financial consortium to push forward the creation of School M. Both the government and Company X were able to mobilize their best resources for the development of School M (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Collaboration of both Parties in the Development of School M

Resources Mobilization			
Channel	Government	Enterprise	Function
(1) Agreement	collective brainstorming of <i>Framework Agreement on Cooperative Schooling (FACS)</i>		blueprint for innovation
(2) Money	50 million yuan	50 million yuan	start-up fee of schooling
	50 million yuan	50 million yuan	additional funding
	appropriate funds per student	/	sustained school operation
(3) Infrastructure	allocate a campus site	/	environment & facilities
(4) Culture-shaping	/	human resources	management mode

Third was the effort made by the people of Company X for the operation of School M. The uniqueness of School M determined that “*it could not follow any predetermined scheme.*” “*Many things needed to be rectified*” as the new school took shape. Recognizing “*a lack of routine communicative channels,*” some private managers, represented by the two informants, worked as key spokesmen to converse with the public officials. They invested “*an invisible and enormous amount of energy*” to promote “*frequent communication and coordination,*” admitting that “*there was an enormous power involved.*”

A typical example of this “*enormous power involved*” could be the question of whether to screen students. On the one hand, the private company, together with the principal, was eager to establish the school’s social reputation in a short time. Aiming for excellence, they considered it a good starting point if a small number of students could be admitted by meeting the screening requirements of the school. On the other hand, this practice was later deemed unnecessary by the DEB, because of its potential threat to educational equity and equity of access.

Finally, the private company made de-bureaucratizing efforts to align School M with modern forms of entrepreneurial organizations. On the one hand, both informants believed that there were many long-term problems in the public education system, within which inefficient management and insufficient impetus for innovation have often been criticized. From the moment Company X accepted the government’s invitation to become a co-founder of School M, Company X assumed the responsibility of identifying the problems of public education and proposing changes. This was confirmed by another public official in the following quote:

After Company X joined, frankly, it was a kind of check and balance. Due to the presence of Mr. Y, one of the CEOs and co-founders, there was less finger pointing on the part of the government. (BL No.1)

On the other hand, as “*teachers usually follow traditional ways of thinking and do not know the entrepreneurial ways of doing things,*” the company volunteered its human resources to help the school with business-like management and financial modes. It continued to make efforts to “*ensure that [School M] truly enjoyed greater autonomy with regard to staff, finance, and curriculum.*” In fact, the company tried to up the ante, mainly through socializing with different levels of public officials and in-person communication, to implement optimal innovations and policies.

However, strong supporter as it was, things started to change when there was a turnover of

managers in the fifth year. According to the first interviewee, he could not understand the reasons for this turnover in the company, admitting that “*certain sensitive issues*” may lead to staff turnover decisions.

According to the principal, after this change of staff the situation changed and more perplexities, and even resistance, confronted his leadership:

[Before the turnover] these people did a lot for the school to coordinate with the government. We got along really well and they were good partners to cooperate with. But the newcomers ... didn't work well with the government. They could not offer the help we wanted. We faced a lot of invisible leaders, more finger pointing, more verbiage.

His complaint was confirmed by the remark of the first company interviewee:

Later, I wondered whether the principal had too much work. When we left the project, was he under too much pressure from the government? Yes, it is possible that he did not get enough support from the company. So, in this case, not enough support with increased pressure, and taking into account his health, may explain his decision to resign. (EM No.1)

Contemplating the resistance perceived by the principal as “*finger pointing*” or “*verbiage*” from Company X represented by the newcomers, the same informant commented:

The emergence of resistance was largely a change in the overall environment. Added to this was the turnover in key government positions. (EM No.1)

For the convenience of elaboration, this issue is discussed in the next chapter.

In short, reflecting on the contributions of Company X to the operation of the school, an interviewee recognized that

First was our effort [on behalf of the school] to communicate and coordinate with public officials at different levels. Second was our management. Third was the money [we donated]. Fourth was [our] human resources. (EM No.1)

These efforts were “*enormous*”, in that the type of communication they helped with was actually “*great support for the school.*” With the absence of their forceful communication after the turnover, the following situation naturally followed:

the reform encountered various difficulties. Throughout the process, both parties gradually changed their recognition and compliance with the contracts. They would negotiate in case of new problems. But if there were different opinions on the applicability of the current points, the final decision was bound to be the result of a compromise. (EM No.1)

4.3.2.2. Leadership strategies of the principal in relation to the company

To interact with the private company, the principal used the following strategies:

Strategy 1: Sharing the same value with the company of “making a difference” in improving education

As previously stated, the creation of School M aimed to identify a third way for basic education in China. Quoting one interviewee, “*the core of this project was to establish a model of letting educators operate schools (jiaoyujia banxue)*”.

By agreeing to participate in this “groundbreaking” reform project, the principal responded positively to the high expectations of both parties. Almost 60 years old, and close to retirement, he chose to give up his cadre status (*ganbu bianzhi*) and make a new start in a remote city.

His moral pursuit was worthy of the high expectations and high positioning of this reform project initiated by key leaders in the government and Company X. Motivated by and subject to a broader social and moral objective governing his decision-making process, the principal seized this opportunity to “*make a difference*”. As one interviewee explained:

Different people have different values ... If there is hope in China, it is precisely because of this group of people. They will start from their own perspective on life, thinking about

what can be done to improve education. (EM No.2)

Thus, by aligning his personal values with the mission of the company, the principal won the trust of Company X. Sharing the same goal facilitates the unification of different forces. Side by side, they were able to form a powerful alliance of synergy to push forward this experiment.

Strategy 2: Showing strong charisma

The charisma, or personal charm, and the influence of the principal was a strategy unanimously mentioned by almost all informants interviewed. One interviewee recalled how Mr. P was chosen as the principal. Several rounds of interviews were conducted with various principals from mainland China, Hong Kong, and abroad. Some domestic headteachers were also seen. However, he stated that “*as soon as he finished speaking, it became clear that Mr. P was the right person.*” (EM No.1)

His charisma had a magical effect that could influence and persuade others in no time, like an opinion leader. The powerful words, the confident gestures and postures, and his eloquent speech added to his charisma. This seemed to reinforce the idea that people with charismatic leadership have innate characteristics. Largely determined by his charisma, the people of Company X were confident and strongly believed in the delegation of power to the principal, counting on him to make breakthroughs in this form of education. Without hesitation, the principal indeed used his authentic ideas and deep thinking, gaining the support of the people of Company X.

Strategy 3: Adopting a persuasive and coercive communicative approach

Empowered to lead and manage the school as he saw fit, the principal was happy to communicate, whenever asked, with business people about his great educational blueprint. Frequent interaction helped him share his thoughts with these delegates, until he was accepted as a professional with the final say in education.

The principal also spared no effort in writing, reflecting on and keeping a record of his leadership practices throughout the process. From time to time, social media people came to him asking for updates about the school. His statements to society through the media are a good example of his skillful communication.

This efficient and frequent communication helped build mutual trust between the principal and the private company. When problems or disputes had to be resolved, he knew that the people of Company X were allies he could count on. As a main communication channel for critical issues, School Board meetings were held twice a year to oversee important matters related to school governance, teaching innovation, and budget audit, among others. During these meetings, the principal usually delivered a formal report, addressing the periodic targets achieved for the development of the school. When a new decision was made, the EF went ahead to allocate the necessary funds for further support.

United to achieve the same goal, their cooperation proved to be very efficient and effective. Recalling his five years of work at School M, the principal was largely happy during the first three years, admitting that he was understood by the people of Company X. This was also a period during which School M experienced rapid development.

However, when the company delegates changed, in his fourth year at the school, the principal started to feel a little dismayed, saying that his feeling of being understood and supported was gone.

First, the government shifted from being an invisible supporter to being a visible supervisor. Second, the newly appointed managers representing the private company showed a more passive style of cooperation with the principal. In such circumstances, the powerful alliance between Company X and the principal no longer existed. He had disputes with the company managers on some professional issues of education. Having experienced poor communication, he started to feel frustrated with pushing forward the reform. All of these factors led to his

decision to resign from his position as principal.

4.3.3. Leadership strategies of the principal to interact with the vice-principals

4.3.3.1. Role of the vice-principals: Hard-working team members of the principal turning the school's vision into educational practices

The three vice-principals all participated in the interviews. The data collected revealed their role as team members and vision implementers, managing according to the school's vision and translating the principal's ideas into daily practice.

The following quotations provide an overview of their interpretations of what they intended to manage or accomplish:

I mainly seek to promote and realize [the school's vision]. Based on [the principal's] thoughts, I want to perfect and enrich [the school's vision.]. Because I am the main implementer, this is my self-positioning, distinct from that of the principal. (SP No.1)

I think we are actually following this idea (the principal's school vision). Very closely. Then (we implement it and) make it specific into the details of every plan, as all agreed upon. (We are) also efficient. (SP No.2)

Because this road has never been taken. No one told us how to get there. This is also the case for the principal. He puts his own vision here, and he keeps groping for it. From a few points he gradually consolidates the foundation (for the school): people, money, and curriculum. (SP No.3)

To turn the school's vision into educational practices, they spared no effort to understand the vision, find support, and undertake the mission.

First, they had to understand the principal's vision of education. This involved two layers of meaning. One was to listen attentively, observe carefully, and think deeply to properly digest the instructions and thoughts given or shared by the principal. The other was to transform their interpretation into working practice to test if it was feasible, applicable, or effective.

Understanding first, then doing, consolidates real learning. This two-step understanding of the vision from the vice principals through learning and doing helped not only enrich the original school's vision articulated by the principal, but also continuously perfected the conceptual packages for the overall construction of the school legacy.

Take for example these remarks made by the vice-principals:

The school's vision was written by the principal himself. When I first looked at it, [I felt] that I had never heard of it. Really never. I was immediately drawn to him and felt that it was a very hopeful school. (SP No.1)

We are doing thing to realize the Principal's top design thinking. It's like, this semester has not yet finished, though, I may think about what to do for my next semester. I may follow the principal to think about the five-year school plan. So my team needs to reach a consensus with me, and we are working towards a common vision. (SP No.2)

The first interviewee acknowledged the originality and innovativeness of the school's vision proposed by the principal. Fresh and attractive, he felt a strong desire to further explore "the big ideas" of education. Similarly, the second informant discussed his strong belief in the vision of the principal, "working toward a common vision" constituting the leadership objective of "[his] team."

In short, as commented by another interviewee:

[In] the so-called ideal school, in my opinion, the vast majority of us depend on the principal's vision for [what] the ideal school [looks like], and we slowly build it and shape it. (SP No.3)

Second, they worked hard and looked for a "pivot point" to execute this leadership, as mentioned by one interviewee:

Sometimes I wonder how [the principal's] ideas are reflected in the curriculum; how to put them in theory and in practice. When you think about what he says, you need to find a

pivot point. (SP No.1)

Thus, his expression “pivot point” echoes a quote by Archimedes (mathematician and inventor of ancient Greece): Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world. In other words, the vice-principals wanted to find a fulcrum (i.e., pivot point), so as to fully utilize their strength in school management and leadership.

Table 4.10 shows the different types of support sought by the three vice-principals:

Table 4.10. Differences in the Vice-Principals (VPs)’ Fulcrum Seeking

Pivot Points Sought by the VPs		
Curriculum integration and teacher training	School-based curriculum development	Finding resources abroad
<i>Also I cannot do relationship building (pao guanxi). I cannot get any sponsors. So I mainly focus on aspects within school, such as curriculum, teacher training, or teaching research.</i> <p style="text-align: right;">—— SP No.1</p>	<i>For school-based textbook compiling, I may consider its impact on the whole life of our children. I will gather teachers from distinctive disciplines and listen to their opinions.</i> <p style="text-align: right;">—— SP No.2</p>	<i>He (the principal) wanted me to help locate some foreign resources. I then contacted Woodbridge Academy, the largest US private education group. In a month their chairman paid a visit to our school.</i> <p style="text-align: right;">—— SP No.3</p>

As shown in Table 4.10, two vice-principals linked their points of support with school-based aspects, such as curriculum development and teacher training for academic purposes, while the other vice-principal used his characteristics of “*people smart*,” “*resource building*,” and “*foreign exchanges*.”

In addition, for the vice-principals, finding a pivot point meant making a trade-off, and focusing their efforts on aspects related to their personality, interests, and abilities. In this case, less is more. It is better to spend time to find an appropriate pivot point than use a bunch of management knots close at hand.

Third, all vice-principals aspired to comprehensively develop the school, observing and

learning from the principal's leadership practices. They took pride in working hard and persevering, positioning themselves as role models for mid-level leaders and teachers. Together with the principal, they participated in the overall planning of school education and teaching.

One interviewee acknowledged he was diligent and did not care about getting his professional title approved through scrutiny at school. He communicated daily with middle leaders. Kind but strict, he assumed many responsibilities for the growth and development of teachers, students, and mid-level leaders. Trying to create a positive atmosphere conducive to work on campus, he also admitted that working five years at School M surely contributed more to the development of teachers than 10 years in a traditional public school. Overall, all vice-principals proved to be reliable team members who strongly supported the principal.

4.3.3.2. Leadership strategies of the principal in relation to the vice-principals

From the perspective of the vice-principals, the principal's leadership strategies included the following:

Strategy 1: Setting a broad and noble vision

In accordance with the FACS, School M was established with the deep and lasting mission to explore a third way for Chinese basic education. This distinguished School M from traditional public schools. In its early stage, the principal drafted an eight-year school development plan, in which he incorporated all of his ideas for the creation of the school. One vice-principal commented on the plan as follows:

At first glance, I was immediately drawn [to it], I had never heard of such ideas; never. I thought this was a very hopeful school. (SP No.1)

The originality and novelty of the school's vision can be reflected in the words “*never heard of*” and “*very hopeful*.” This plan was created by the principal based on his previous experience with school management. When interpreting the school's vision, the same

informant added,

[The vision was] to develop individuals with an international horizon and global literacy. That is to say, students should be able to circulate freely between different cultures, ... to adapt flexibly to different ways of thinking and doing, ... and to converse freely with diverse mentalities.(SP No.1)

The second interviewee shared a similar view:

The principal's vision was deeply rooted in the hearts of both teachers and parents. They believed that this school could be different from others, in terms of curriculum reform, or the vision of its leader and its management of the school. (SP No.2)

The reason this school's vision was "*deeply rooted in the hearts of both teachers and parents*" was that the principal successfully ignited in many people the dream of building "*an ideal school.*" Both teachers and parents came together for this common dream: "*In my opinion, our point of view on the school was largely based on the principal's vision of an ideal school, and gradually shaped by our realities.*" (SP No.3)

Overall, the principal incorporated his ambition into his school's vision, made it memorable, and integrated it into the daily practices of his management team. The school's vision "*can be found on the official website. The text is very passionate. Many people have read it and remembered it.*" (SP No.1)

Strategy 2: Strengthening curriculum leadership among the vice-principals

The principal showed his curriculum leadership in several ways to shape the vice-principals' ways of being and doing in their school management practice.

First, he raised their awareness of building and enriching the three-level curriculum framework. The principal "*introduced the concept of a three-level curriculum with reference to the foundation courses, school-based courses, and courses for specific needs. Then we had to further explore it and enrich it.*" (SP No.1)

Second, the principal used his professional expertise to lead curriculum change. The school redefined its core subjects, widened the teaching content, and restructured the curriculum to meet the needs of young learners. For example, *“by reconstructing Chinese texts into a broad category of teaching content, we developed the subject of Chinese.” (SP No.1)*

Textbook compiling helped extend teaching materials. However, this reconstruction was not only conducted through textbook compiling, but also through lesson planning and teaching, as the informant mentioned when discussing the concept of *“rebuilding classroom teaching”*:

classroom reconstruction, i.e., to combine different elements that make up the classroom teaching model ... to build a smart classroom with cultural significance. (SP No.1)

The third strategy was to integrate a sense of curriculum into the planning of all school activities:

We integrate all activities into the school curriculum, give it connotations, give it cultural significance, and finally come up with a pile of cultural productions. (SP No.1)

Thus, after various trials and practices,

All teachers have been encouraged to do action research, to teach, to carry out research projects, to compile texts to implement the curriculum reform. (SP No.1)

As commented, the principal was *“a curriculum expert,”* under whose professional guidance the vice-principals *“were able to enrich the school curriculum framework by compiling [school-based] textbooks, rebuilding classroom teaching, and reorganizing subjects.” (SP No.2)*

Strategy 3: Empowering with scaffolding support

The principal oversaw many school activities and delegated his power to the vice-principals, according to their abilities. This involved distributing his power to his team members, letting them become decision makers, and preparing them to be accountable for their decisions.

One vice-principal stated that the principal listened to her all the time and offered advice

when necessary, but that she was in charge of textbook compiling (“let go”) for the school curriculum.

Again “let go” was mentioned by a second vice principal:

Just let go and do it; as [the principal] always let me do things, I have no qualms. In fact, I do little management of my teachers. Too much intervention and management kills them. I focus on the procedures and the outcomes. (SP No.1)

Another interviewee described his main job area as “socializing with people from the[education] bureau.” This was something the principal disliked doing:

After joining, [because the principal] did not like socializing with people from the [education] bureau, I [often] ran [to the government and the bureau] at the time, [dealing with] all kinds of things. (SP No.3)

However, when the vice-principals had difficulty completing a task, the principal was willing to support them and offer them appropriate corrections:

In the process of pursuing dreams and goals, we constantly corrected our deviations. Correct them, yes. (SP No.2)

They were often impressed by the principal’s extensive knowledge and insights:

[The Principal] certainly had great holistic ideas. This was really impressive. His ideas, his thinking, his mindset ... I think it was really extraordinary, because we could not come up with that. (SP No.1)

The vice-principals had many opportunities for their professional learning and growth:

For many things, he focused on what he was good at and willing to do. For what he was not willing to do or not good at, he trusted you and let you do it. (SP No.3)

What can be inferred from these statements is a consensus among the vice-principals on how the principal delegated and empowered them to contribute to the management of the school.

In doing so, they developed the same sense of doing things right.

Strategy 4: Increasing expectations

The principal increased the expectations of the vice-principals. Based on his daily practice, he made it a requirement for them to “*think hard, think deep, and think clearly about everything*” at school in the broad curriculum category. In his own words, this meant “*pursuing perfection*” and “*living up to the high expectations*” of School M and those of the local educational circle. It also meant a dual focus on “*procedures and outcomes*” and “*doing things in a down to earth way*” while “*aiming high,*” from G1 to G12.

The third vice-principal also explained how he repeatedly reminded his fellow teachers that becoming a teacher at School M meant choosing to be different. The school is not a typical public school and does not offer tenure-track positions, but higher wages can be expected for people who deserve it.

Increasing expectations was also embodied in the way the principal intended to develop the holistic mindset of the vice principals and tried to fully use their potential. Specifically, at School M, it is a prerequisite for all vice-principals to accumulate teaching and learning experience and experience in general school affairs. This experience is considered beneficial, as each vice-principal can gain a broader understanding of how to manage from different perspectives. In this way, vice-principals can focus on the general development of the school, rather than just their area of work.

With a holistic strategic mindset, the principal was able to present a general picture to the vice-principals of the future of School M and its current stage of development. The school’s vision, as proposed by the principal, was then accepted by all vice-principals, and became a guiding compass that they used while working with their teams toward this objective.

Reflecting on their behavior, one vice-principal mentioned “*collective brainstorming sessions between teachers to work out development plans for each semester.*” The school uses collaborative decision-making on all major issues.

Another vice-principal discussed the higher standards for middle leaders in planning school activities:

I said that the simplest and best [criterion] is that after reading your plan, there is no doubt and no need to come to you a second time. Everything is clear at a glance. (SP No.1)

Increasing expectations gave the vice-principals a common mindset focused on excellence. School M became the top school in the district within five years of its creation. Above all, it was the first school to recruit new teachers from Hong Kong universities, to send its students on exchange to Arab countries, and to develop a G1-12 curriculum structure for the whole school.

In conclusion, the strategies used by the principal, as perceived by his vice-principal team members, showed his visionary leadership (*setting a broad and noble vision*), instructional leadership (*curriculum leadership*), distributed leadership (*empowering with scaffolding support*), and strategic leadership (*increasing expectations*).

4.3.4. Leadership strategies of the principal to interact with the teachers

4.3.4.1. Role of the teachers: Fighters for efficient teaching on the battlefield of education

In this category, the interviews were conducted with five teachers, including three mid-level leaders. They frequently used words such as “*fighting*”, “*burning*”, “*hurry*”, “*exhausted*”, and “*dashing*” to describe their work status at School M, which was no accident. Table 4.11 highlights these words in the transcript of each interviewee. As the principal was ambitious in achieving his vision at School M (especially in a short span of five years, as it turned out), as the school increased its scale three times, and with its growing social reputation, these words are understandable when one imagines the efforts that must have been made in the early years.

Table 4. 11. Word Chunks to Describe Working Status in Interview Transcripts

Interviewees	Word Chunks in the Transcript	Interpretations
Teacher 1 / Mid-level Leader 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>more time desired;</i> <i>workload-based merit pay scheme;</i> <i>repeated emphasis on execution;</i> <i>time nodes;</i> <i>too busy to think about their identity;</i> <i>burning state for all teachers;</i> <i>whole-hearted giving;</i> <i>long for rest;</i> <i>dare-to-die corps (gansidui);</i> <i>dashing state;</i> <i>conflicting roles between work and family</i> 	<p>This interviewee described his desire for “<i>more time</i>” and “<i>long for rest</i>”. The “<i>workload-based merit pay scheme</i>” means more payment for more work. At school, there is “<i>repeated emphasis on execution</i>” and “<i>time node</i>”. He felt that teachers are “<i>too busy to think about their identity</i>” as they are all in a “<i>burning state</i>” or a “<i>dashing state</i>”, like soldiers in “<i>dare-to-die corps</i>”. The term “<i>whole-hearted giving</i>” means their roles between work and family tend to be “<i>conflicting</i>”.</p>
Teacher 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>lots of project work in the name of reform;</i> <i>pioneering;</i> <i>22 classes for a teacher in M, relatively heavy workload compared with 12 classes for a teacher in the public school;</i> 	<p>This interviewee mentioned that teachers were expected to undertake “<i>lots of project work in the name of reform</i>” at School M. What they have accomplished was “<i>pioneering</i>”. Compared with 12 classes for a teacher in a public school, a teacher in M usually has 22 classes.</p>
Teacher 3 / Mid-level Leader 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>overtime working;</i> <i>salary based on the amount of classes taken;</i> <i>driven by higher payment;</i> <i>payment based on class size, class type, teaching subject, teacher’s qualification, etc;</i> <i>making money matters;</i> <i>everyone exerted his best for school development</i> 	<p>This interviewee believed that teachers’ “<i>overtime working</i>” was “<i>driven by higher payment</i>”, as one’s salary in School M is “<i>based on the amount of classes taken</i>”, “<i>class size, class type, teaching subject, teacher’s qualification, etc.</i>” For young teachers, <i>making money matters</i>. At School M everyone has “<i>exerted his best for school development</i>”.</p>
Teacher 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>deadline pushed;</i> <i>too much pressure;</i> <i>too many unplanned activities;</i> <i>too much workload;</i> 	<p>In expressing his concerns, this interviewee mentioned “<i>too much pressure</i>”, “<i>too many unplanned activities</i>”, “<i>too much</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>not enough time to care each student;</i> • <i>too many classes per week; uncertainty</i> 	<i>workload”, “too many classes per week”, being pushed by “deadline”, having “not enough time to care each student”, and “uncertainty”.</i>
Teacher 5 / Mid-level Leader 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>buried in a heavy load of work;</i> • <i>walk fast;</i> • <i>not allow much time for hesitation or adaptation;</i> • <i>fight upon arrival;</i> • <i>no time to learn slowly;</i> • <i>start right away;</i> • <i>everyone in a state of combat;</i> • <i>run around the school;</i> • <i>in a haste state of daily working;</i> • <i>no time for drinking;</i> • <i>either competent or obsolete;</i> • <i>having no rest all day long;</i> • <i>no time for teachers to observe lessons and learn from each other</i> 	<p>This interviewee described his feelings of “<i>fighting upon arrival</i>” at School M. He had to “<i>walk fast</i>” and “<i>start right away</i>”, for it did “<i>not allow much time for hesitation or adaptation</i>” and he had “<i>no time to learn slowly</i>”. Like everyone else who is “<i>in a state of combat</i>” every day, he found himself often “<i>running around the school</i>” “<i>in a haste state of daily working</i>”. Sometimes there was even “<i>no time for drinking</i>”. Teachers may be <i>either competent or obsolete</i>. If obsolete, they were fired by the school or chose to quit. <i>Having no rest all day long</i>, teachers could hardly find time “<i>to observe lessons and learn from each other</i>”.</p>

Excellence does not come easily. Under this high pressure and heavy workload, some teachers planned to quit, some did, but the majority chose to stay – while remaining a bit uncertain about the future, as shown below:

One issue is the small class size. If there are more teachers, (it may be better) and sometimes (when time) is too tight, young people may have tough but good chances to develop themselves. But for teachers of different ages, if they want to stay longer at school, they may not be able to bear it. (TM No.1)

In the case of 22 classes, and with such a large number of so-called teaching reform projects, in fact, teachers can't bear it. (TM No.2)

If people do not think it is worth it, they will quit, because the teachers recruited are

typically [Master's graduates, and] relatively strong in their own competitiveness. If they have a hard time working here, they can go. (TM No.3)

Although I only teach two classes, I really have my hands full right now with work. In the public school system we are used to this kind of ... The business-like management [of School M], this kind of work is overloaded, it is a lot of work. If young people can't adapt to it, I mean I am much older, I cannot, either. (TM No.4)

So, each year, the biggest effect on our school is that our teachers pass exams to obtain a tenure-track position in the public school system. Now it is the recruitment season again. Novice teachers who graduated less than three years ago can apply for the exam.

Teachers that we chose are really excellent. Then if they wish to get tenured positions, they'll have to take the exam anyway. It is the biggest impact on us. (TM No.5)

The teachers work like a dashing corps of fighters, ready to fight for efficient teaching on the battlefield of education. Some may choose to quit midway while those who finally stay continue to “fight” for better performance. Note that the school has a different operating mechanism, in which teachers are hired on the basis of employment contracts, as shown below:

[Among the teachers who left], some were dismissed by the school, mainly due to their work attitude or their bad temper. With the school mechanism, it is easier to terminate employment contracts. Some left for personal reasons, mainly aiming for tenure-track positions in traditional public schools. (TM No.1)

4.3.4.2. Leadership strategies of the principal with the teachers

The results of the data analysis showed five leadership strategies adopted by the principal when he approached the teachers. The keywords were charisma, vision, talent selection and development, modeling and empowerment, and efficiency oriented.

Strategy 1: Charisma

Charisma was the first leadership strategy mentioned by the teachers and middle leaders. The high professional status of Mr. P, the principal, successfully attracted many teachers, novice or senior, to join School M to participate in this innovative education reform. His profile, marked by the authorship of dozens of books, his reputation as a principal, and his frequent activities as a guest speaker at educational conference and seminars, added to his public reputation. All wanted to learn from this well-known expert. The interviewees admitted that the principal had charismatic traits that inspired his followers to be around him. In addition, they stated that they were first drawn to the principal's national fame when joining School M. Combining all of these factors, they had high expectations for School M. The teachers agreed with the principal on the ideal direction to pursue an “*open and free education model*.”

Take for example the following comment:

I felt that the principal was incredible. My father was also an educator, but I had never seen such a strong personal profile. I had never seen a principal [like Mr. P], giving up many things and coming to create an ideal school, i.e., he had resigned from any public office [upon arrival]. (TM No.3)

His charisma was also embodied in the numerous school visits to School M from teachers and educators from across the country, as the school attracted many educators to deliver lectures or share their expertise with the teachers. Without charisma, a principal cannot build such a powerful network of scholarly relationships for the development of a school.

The way the principal worked in the eyes of these teachers also added to his charisma.

Described as a principal with typical “*quick and hurried*” footsteps on campus, he impressed people with his high efficiency and deep thinking. Almost 60 years old, his charisma could be attributed to his habit of spending his time thinking, reflecting, and writing, whenever possible. Although rigorous in thought and writing, he was an easy-going person with a kind personality. Middle leaders described his leadership approach as “*moving*,” “*touching*,” or

“emotionally appealing.” No one denied his charismatic and inspirational traits.

Strategy 2: Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation was the second strategy discussed. This referred to a process in which the principal transmitted his ideals, ambitions, and visionary goals through clear and strong articulation on several occasions, such as weekly teacher meetings, school open days, campus gatherings, and public media reports. In addition, the principal has delivered a series of “outspoken” and sometimes “provocative speeches” at educational conferences or seminars over the years.

Recalling their reactions to brainstorming and intellectual stimulation during the early days, these interviewees explained:

I am very touched by that PPT [showing the school vision]. At that time there was nothing in the school, you know. (TM No.3)

I was very curious. In fact, I really wanted to know about the third way for basic education. How can we get rid of some of the obstacles that have hindered the development of public schools and make better use of their advantages? (TM No.1)

Discussing the strong curiosity aroused by the way the principal presented his educational ideas to the teachers, the latter interviewee continued:

When the principal presented his educational ideas to the teachers of the school, and when the Bureau leaders introduced him, I had a lot of questions, mainly how it worked, how to boost vitality [for public education]. (TM No.1)

Other comments also stressed the value of the process of intellectual stimulation. For instance, the principal took every opportunity to transform and transmit his educational values to the teaching team, define the direction, and made the necessary adjustments along the way to achieve his vision. The teachers were well aware that their school had a “very clear motto”; focused on the “authentic development” of students; its noble vision “written in the school

song” sung by all teachers and students at Monday’s flag raising ceremony; each time the “*concise but strong*” tune and lyrics were played, people felt their “*heart beat*” as if their sense of commitment was reinforced by the ritual. Furthermore, intellectual stimulation occurred in the “*daily work*” of middle leaders, and their consensus to “*build the vision*” was consolidated, to create an environment conducive to the achievement of the reform mission.

Strategy 3: Instilling a sense of commitment and pride

The third strategy was to instill in teachers a sense of commitment and pride. The principal believed that selecting good teachers first and then training them was more effective than developing good teachers without any prior screening process. Shortly after the opening of School M, he urged one of the vice-principals to recruit new graduates from Hong Kong universities on campus. This was an innovative attempt, as none of the local public schools had ever made similar efforts to hire teachers. These new elite teachers, after years of rigorous academic training and after graduating from top universities in Hong Kong, proved to be valuable human capital for the development of the school. The high quality of the teaching faculty, especially young graduates recruited from Hong Kong and abroad, was a common topic discussed by all interviewees.

In addition, the principal developed a five-star screening scheme for the teacher recruitment process. Whether in interviews or on public occasions, he repeatedly shared his views on talent selection and development. His methods have also been attested to by research from Harvard.

In the process of instilling a sense of commitment and pride, the data collected from the three middle leaders interviewed revealed three value-oriented characteristics, namely, value sharing, value shaping, and value fulfilling (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7. Value-Oriented Characteristics of the Teachers

<p>Instill a sense of commitment and pride</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Value sharing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) sharing similar values in education b) favoring those willing to engage in teaching ➤ Value shaping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Heterogeneous composition to encourage innovation b) Highlighted value of teachers ➤ Value fulfilling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Awards vs. elimination b) Different needs met to retain teachers
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Value sharing indicated that the principal tended to look for and recruit candidates who shared similar educational values. In fact, he favored those who were committed to teaching as a profession and who were willing to give rather than take.

Value shaping indicated that the principal followed the guideline of a heterogeneous composition for the teaching team to foster innovation. He welcomed graduates from normal and non-normal universities, novice or senior, at home or abroad. He recruited professionals with different expertise, such as in curriculum reform, international exchanges, academic performance enhancement, or with research skills. Whenever possible, he shared his thoughts among teachers that the hope for Chinese education was on the shoulders of teachers. He also repeatedly suggested that the value of a teacher was best shown through everyday teaching.

Value fulfilling referred to the corresponding actions taken by the principal to develop individual teachers. He put in place an incentive system and an elimination mechanism, whereby, based on contractual management, teachers are either competent or obsolete. During the early years of school development, the teaching staff were able to retain their vitality and synergy, with only a 10% resignation rate. In addition, he tried to offer better alternatives for those who wanted to resign but had great potential, either by giving them a Principal's Award stipend or merit pay, a promotion, or building a trustworthy and affective relationship. If necessary, he coordinated and mobilized resources across the three campuses to facilitate value fulfilling.

Strategy 4: Modeling and empowerment

The principal used various modeling and empowerment methods to foster the career development of teachers.

First, the role model effect of the principal was demonstrated in his resignation from any public service and by accepting the invitation to be the pioneer principal of a reformed school. Based on his vision of “*an ideal school*,” his great ambitions and noble aspirations gave him the impetus to work hard and operate efficiently. His diligence became direct incentives for middle leaders and teachers. He created a teachers’ gathering on Friday, during which nationally renowned professionals were invited to deliver lectures on teaching and learning from time to time. Via his personal network, “*those big potatoes*” managed to create “*shocking sensations*” among the teachers, as they could see how a common teacher can grow from nobody to somebody. Seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears the anecdotes and trustworthy advice of several well-known teacher educators, they felt their horizons widen and plunged into “*the pride of the teaching profession*.” What followed was a sense of fulfillment and achievement instilled in their hearts.

There was also food for thought at the meeting of middle leaders. Over time, they saw how the principal “*simplified complex disputes through sharp thinking*,” how he identified “*possible future trends*” from the “*static development of an event*,” and how he examined “*exceptional and contrary examples*” to gain a comprehensive understanding of an issue. They learned that “*dedicated work is not enough*” if one aspires to become a great teacher. They looked to the principal to see how he developed his thinking, through reflective writing and extensive reading. They also realized that it was his “*independence and self-discipline*” that led to his current status and achievement. In all his being and doing, the principal set himself as a role model with “*the glory of human nature and the pinnacle of a career in education*.”

Second, the principal's empowerment offered middle leaders many opportunities to teach and research, to make sense of every activity organized in the school, and to explore its educational significance. They took initiatives to understand and assimilate the school's vision and the principal's thoughts from meetings, his books, and formal or informal talk. They intended to show their understanding in the day-to-day management of school affairs, with respect to staff, classroom teaching, communication with teachers, or curriculum development. Together with the leadership team, middle leaders were there to help teachers clearly understand effective teaching, ensuring that each teacher did his or her best for the development of the school.

In their eyes, the principal was "*bold to cross the line*" when designing the school curriculum and "*capable of taking responsibility*." With autonomy in curriculum integration, teachers were in a position to learn from hands-on trials and action research. In a short semester, the school created a list of approximately 70 extracurricular courses primarily designed by these pioneer teachers. Based on the school curriculum clusters, latecomer teachers quickly followed suit, exploring their own advantages in teaching and making adjustments along the way.

The principal as a leading authority was a professional model for others to follow, in teaching and research, school curriculum development, or constant reflective writing and deep thinking. Witnesses to the principal's professional status, the teachers were able to plan their own growth scheme, i.e., with a love for teaching, extensive reading, and reflective writing. As previously mentioned, the principal used his social network to invite prestigious scholars in the field of basic education to offer his teachers the best intellectual inspiration. He not only showed the teachers the best teaching practices, but also empowered them to conduct their own research on classroom teaching and management, on stratified curriculum development, and on other innovative ways to approach the noble vision of "*free education*."

He created a positive overall environment, allowing teachers to take risks and feel safe to explore their personal teaching strategies. As a result, the teachers' skills and confidence grew rapidly.

Strategy 5: Gradually establishing a stereotypical job protocol

The principal gradually established a stereotypical job protocol focused on efficiency. As one interviewee explained, the daily work of middle leaders involved “*repeated emphasis on execution and time nodes*,” “[*being*] *focused on problem solving*,” and “*operating more efficiently*.” School M has created a reporting channel from teachers to grade heads, then to middle leaders and vice-principals. Middle leaders act as a liaison between teachers and vice-principals, as middle leaders have to conduct “*double-level communication, jumping to the lower and second-lower level to constantly seek consensus*.” At the same time, they have to build a constant “*information-exchange channel*,” trying to connect “*the principal's circle*” to “*the teachers' circle*” and “*the parents' circle*” to link these circles at school. Once a problem is identified, they organize “*on-site meetings*,” “*attend to relationships*,” use “*work flowcharts for feedback*,” “*analyze solutions*,” and provide “*follow-up help for teachers in need*.” Marked by a “*high frequency of daily communication*” and “*a high degree of taking responsibility*,” middle leaders quickly became the backbone of the school.

Similarly, the principal set “*must-do tasks for each teacher*,” especially during the early years of the school when the size of the faculty was small and the personalized instruction given by the principal to individual teachers was easily managed. Whenever possible, the principal entered their classroom to observe their lessons and shared his comments and thoughts immediately after. This problem-based feedback helped teachers overcome their shortcomings. At other times, prompt training and action-taking impetus were provided to help novice teachers become advanced teachers.

In a short time, the teachers of School M started to shine on different occasions, either in

local subject-teaching contests or in all-around competitions organized by higher education administrative bodies. Many teaching prizes and credentials have been won by young and capable teachers of School M. They flourished and prospered in their career development with *“a sense of achievement.”*

4.3.5. Leadership strategies of the principal to cope with the parents

4.3.5.1. Role of the school parents: Pragmatic decision-makers striving for the future of their children

Four parents of two primary and two secondary children were involved in this research and participated in the interviews. The data revealed their role as pragmatic decision makers striving for a better future for their children in contemporary Chinese society.

Indeed, being deeply concerned and genuinely involved in the ups and downs of basic education like most families in Shenzhen, these parents were able to comment with deep sadness on the drawbacks of inadequate public education. Fearing the outdated practices of examination-oriented learning in some schools, they never wanted their children to be educated in a way that was *“crammed with book knowledge of little practical use.”* When social media reported that School M wanted to find a promising third way for students, it drew their attention, eager to try an alternative option in education. On many occasions, the principal shared his school management ideas with parents and society. His statement of *“respecting children’s personality”* and cultivating future-oriented talents with *“broad horizons, a positive mindset, cooperative skills, and healthy well-being”* touched their hearts, in accordance with their dreams of quality education.

Regarding the education of their children in School M, they were very satisfied. In particular, their overall evaluation of the education offered by School M can be summarized in four strengths.

First, the parents were impressed by the design of the school management system even before

its opening. The parents observed that the local government had prepared this project well and fully developed this innovative approach. Learning about each facet of this project was like making a jigsaw puzzle: the more they learned from each piece of news or report, the more it built their trust and faith. Second, its small class size was important, as this meant that better quality of teaching could be expected and ensured, which was superior to many traditional public schools. Third, a great advantage of the school curriculum reform was the rich opportunities it offered to each student to choose from a variety of high-quality extracurricular activities. It was free, unique, and irreplaceable. Fourth, the school offered a handsome salary, to attract excellent graduates from colleges and universities at home and abroad. It also had its own selection and assessment mechanism to retain dedicated teachers to teach at school. Those who stayed proved to be true child-lovers and good at teaching and research.

However, as their children grew older and approached the age of high-stakes entrance exams, for instance, at the end of G6 and G9, these parents also shared their anxiety and uncertainty about whether their choice of School M was good. Since its creation, School M has not yet received a full third-party evaluation. This indicated a lack of clear and comparable reference for parents. When calculating the costs and benefits, they felt worried and helpless about the most important goal – quality education or examination-oriented learning – as their children grew older.

Voting with his feet, one parent had already transferred his child to a traditional public school at the end of G5, believing that this school could provide more comfortable lunch breaks and a clearer plan for the entrance channel. In addition, another parent shared his wish for the school to offer more examination-oriented learning for teenagers, perceiving that

“successfully passing the high- school entrance exam is the first thing to do for 9th graders.”

In other words, acting as pragmatic decision-makers between educational ideals and reality,

these parents were trying to find the best education for their children. They were torn between adequacy and availability, between cultivating authentic learning and getting more teachers' attention, between being a small fish in a big pond (mediocre performance in School M) and being a big fish in a small pond (top performance in another public school), between being taught "*by a group of young and capable teachers, but [who are] maybe a little exhausted*" and by "*a group of teachers of mixed ages with more experience and patience.*" Answering their focused concern was not easy. This uneasiness is likely to accompany these parents until their children graduate from college.

4.3.5.2. Leadership strategies of the principal with the parents

Strategy 1: Fame and Charisma

Overall, fame and charisma referred to how the principal's ways of being and doing attracted the parents at first sight. Even without a clear picture of an ideal school and of the reform or innovations implemented, these parents wanted to send their children to School M, based on the belief that "*a good principal can create a good school*":

My child started there in 2015. As I thought later, I chose the school mainly because of the principal. Yes, because of his [fame and charisma] to a large extent. Yes, a good principal can create a good school. (PA No.2)

The same informant further expanded his thinking:

He is a famous headmaster in China. He has a large network of contacts beyond the reach of ordinary people. The level of headmaster is different, so is the height [of his competence]. (PA No.2)

Discussing the principal's expertise, another interviewee presented the highlights of the principal's profile as one advantage:

He has run many schools and served as [deputy] director of the education bureau. He is quite experienced. (PA No.3)

Even for parents who chose to transfer their children to another school halfway, the principal's fame and charisma were recognized:

At that time, we recognized his fame and we really liked his ideas [of school management]. So we sent our child to this school. But as my child grew older and entered a higher grade, I wanted him to be more competitive for a better junior high school and be part of a more elite group. That's why I transferred him. (PA No.1)

Therefore, in the field of education where “parents vote with their feet,” the principal's charisma, professional background, expertise, and credibility proved to be a striking strategy for gaining the trust of the parents.

Strategy 2: Cultural bond

The principal used symbols to form a cultural bond and produce unified recognition on the part of the parents. He developed an eight-word school motto (*Mingde Zhengxin Ziyou Renge*), and explained it to the parents on different occasions. This school motto has a connotation of developing an upright morality and rectified minds, and a free personality.

Unified recognition could not be obtained from all parents on the first attempt. At first, some parents felt that they had “*never heard of it.*” Then they started to accept the school motto and approach it from their own perspective, and it was not difficult for them to understand it literally. Later, when they reviewed the school's activities or came across media reports on the school, they felt that the “*school motto did the talking while the principal did the walking*”, in terms of what was going on at school. Over time, the parents have formed a deep affinity with the motto, and this this cultural bond has helped to create a close link between parents' associations of different grades and classes. They are all united closely with the school, to see what can be done for the good of all children.

Enlightened by the school motto, one interviewee remarked the following

First was his charisma. His cultural leadership was a second key. Upright morality,

rectified minds, and free personality have been instilled in the school motto. We can feel its power. It creates a cultural bond that unifies our understanding. (PA No.2)

This cultural bond has helped shape the behavior of students. The following informant admitted that there is something special about the students of School M:

Do children really have a [cultural] mark of this school? Well, you can spot it at first glance when you see them. (PA No.3)

Another informant mentioned the difference of School M in terms of activities:

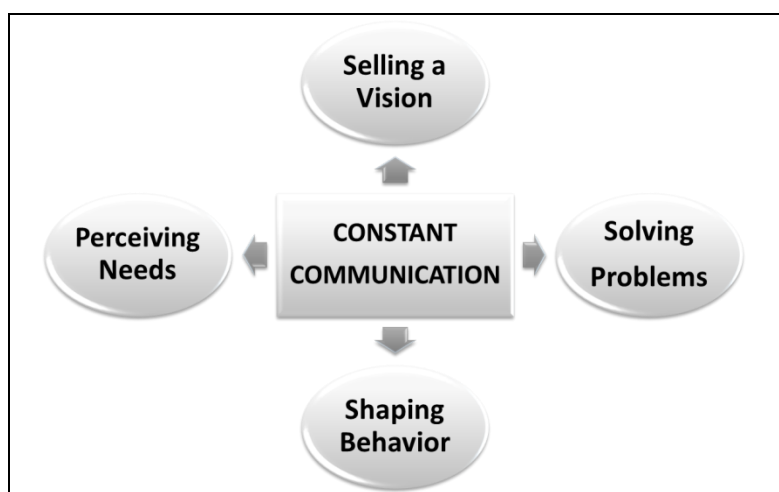
We went to the school to observe [everything]. The principal gave a lecture, then we saw some curricular activities. I think it is a little different from traditional schools. (PA No.4)

When defining the concept of culture, Leslie White (1959) stated that culture is produced by the use of symbols. This includes thoughts, attitudes, values, and meanings, and their materialization in material and behavioral forms (White, 1959). Thus, the cultural-binding strategy used by the principal established a school culture among parents and students that was unique.

Strategy 3: Communication, communication, communication

Constant communication was the main strategy used by the principal to influence, convince, and gain support from the parents. Through various channels of constant communication, four types of functions characteristic of school-family interaction emerged: selling a vision, perceiving needs, shaping behavior, and solving problems. Figure 4.8 presents a functional structure of the principal's leadership strategy of constant communication.

Figure 4.8. Functions of the Principal's Communication Strategy with Parents



Under the leadership of the principal, School M established various channels to encourage the parents to communicate with him, such as school open days, parent-teacher meetings, a parents' committee, a parent volunteer team, and the principal's WeChat (Chinese twitter). The parents heard the principal's "*inspirational speech*" from various sources, which successfully sold the school's vision. For instance, one informant admitted that

[the choice of this school was] mainly based on the school's vision he conveyed. The school ... truly respects personality development. (PA No.1)

The school's vision embodies a child-centered education philosophy, and that the goal of education is the mental, physical, and overall well-being of young people and children. From the parents' perspective, the school's vision is concise and merges the concepts of traditional Chinese culture and modern society. Frequent exchanges and communication helped the parents reflect on the school management ideas of the principal, and internalize them as part of their own beliefs in good education. When a vision is successfully shared, parents become strong school allies.

Second, communication helped the principal to understand the parents' educational needs. In the early days of the school, the principal defined "*education for a free personality*" or "*free education*" as a goal to achieve. The school curriculum was designed based on this goal, offering students many opportunities to explore their potential and interests, from Grade 1

onwards. With the addition of two new campuses and the inclusion of grades covering primary and secondary education, parents from different backgrounds expressed their concerns and wish for their children to be well-prepared for high-stakes entrance examinations. Responding to their concerns about improving their children's examination performance while empowering them to become versatile, the principal was able to make the necessary adjustments to curriculum design and implementation. As he stated, *"of course we care about exams. Free education is an ideal goal in the current situation. Frankly, it is impossible to fully achieve this goal because of the limits of social reality."*

Third, communication and negotiation proved to be powerful tools for the principal to shape parents' behavior. Various channels allowed the parents to participate in all facets of school operation. Their voices were carefully heard and their suggestions were fully respected.

However, the principal also limited parental involvement, based on the idea that *"once parents have the power to participate in school affairs, they sometimes abuse it"* and tend to give directions to teachers on what to do and how to do it. This usually leads to a dilemma where the amateur tries to guide the professional. Therefore, the most important thing was that *"parents are encouraged to fully participate in the management of the school only when they do not behave inappropriately."* In case of abuse, the principal recognized the need to *"negotiate and continue to negotiate"* with the parents until a mutual agreement was reached.

Finally, when the concerns of the parents were related to problems or deficiencies in the functioning of the school, the principal tried to solve them as soon as possible. In other words, by focusing upon problem solving, the principal's communicative strategy consolidated parents' perception of school efficiency on *"how long it takes to solve a problem."* Such process involves constant communication, as pointed out by one informant:

We try to involve parents in the actual management of our school, through publicity and communicating with parents. So some of them walk into the school and start to

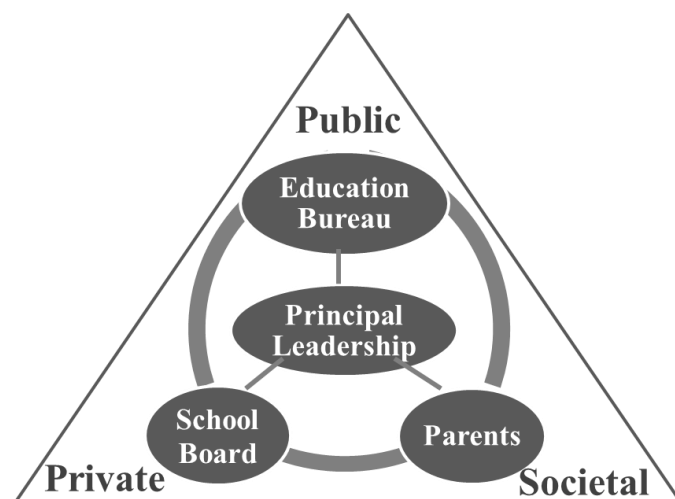
understand us. But their understanding cannot be achieved overnight. Neither is the way of solving a problem. Say, the principal gives a lecture, and some parent may accept his ideas, but only cognitively. When it comes to actual behaviors and specific school management measures, the parent may not necessarily accept them. So it is bound to be a constant communicative process for debugging and adaptation. (SP No.4)

Adding to its efficiency, the school published timely reports to publicize its events and development to society. Moreover, the principal came to the school gate and greeted the students every day, regardless of the weather. This practice of engaging in small things helped build his reputation as a person with great perseverance. The principal had a reputation for adopting a “*down-to-earth approach*” and gaining the trust of “*grassroots*” parents. With his professional status and his widely recognized charisma, his communication strategy contributed to the functioning of the school and won the broad support of parents. This echoes his statement that “*what needs to be done deserves to be done well*”.

Summary

Figure 4.9 illustrates the position of school leadership between the three types of external forces (public, private, and societal forces), each representing a different stakeholder influencing principal leadership.

Figure 4.9. How Principal Leadership is Constructed and Influenced at School M



Amid the interwoven complexity of principal leadership and the principal's interaction with multiple stakeholders, the results revealed discrepancies in understanding, disagreements in communication, and differences in resolved actions. These differences are representative of the huge difference between the ideal objective of School M to find a third way for basic education, and its real management in a modern city in contemporary China.

Although the principal dreamed of full autonomy and was indeed promised more autonomy by taking the direction of School M as an educational initiative, most interviewees pointed to a downward trend in autonomy alongside the development of the school. The variation in the expectations of the three parties in terms of principal leadership is therefore not surprising. As a result, the principal had to adjust his leadership style and some of his behaviors in an attempt to meet various expectations. This leadership strategy can be contextual and task specific.

The government, including the DEB, played a significant role, changing from an invisible supporter to a visible supervisor over the course of this study. This change was attributed to two factors: a transformation of China's macro socio-political context and leadership succession in key positions (e.g., the Secretary of the district, the head of the DEB) overseeing this PPP reform conducted at School M. Sharing the noble value of finding a third

way for public schools with the government, the principal made great efforts to push forward the reform for an ideal education. In response to his reduced autonomy in school management caused by increased accountability to government departments, the principal used his professional status to challenge the administrative “intervention” of the government.

Second, the private company first acted as a strong supporter of the school to negotiate with the government via the school board as the decision maker. This role would never have been possible for the private company without the support of its super-large financial consortium. Senior managers from Company X negotiated with the government, emphasizing key issues, such as the design of this innovative mode of education, and making the final decisions or compromises with the principal. Take for example its consistency in defending a small class-teaching mode, despite the increasing pressure of the growing number of school-aged children placed on the DEB. Regarding Company X as an ally, the principal aligned his personal values with the vision of the company and showed his charisma and interactive communication skills when socializing with people from Company X to create a synergistic effect in school management.

Parents represented a third stakeholder with societal expectations for this pioneering school, and assumed the role of pragmatic decision-makers striving for their children’s future. Their views reflected a hesitant attitude, involving counting the costs and benefits of education reform. When it was time for their children to take high-stakes tests, such as the entrance examination for entry to privileged junior or senior high schools, they carefully weighed each decision hoping for the best outcome.

Responding to parents’ needs, the principal started to include test-taking skills and drills in the school management process. To survive successfully in China’s current education reality, a good school (not an ideal school) must improve students’ test performance and develop their independent personality. As the principal pointed out, “*there is no contradiction between*

these two purposes.” As a result, he used visionary symbols to establish a cultural bond and took initiatives to communicate regularly with parents. As a sophisticated principal with a strong charisma and skillful communication, he fulfilled his goals of sharing his vision for the school, perceiving parents’ needs, influencing their behavior, and resolving their critical concerns to facilitate the development of the school.

The three parties discussed above were the external forces influencing the actual functioning of School M. As illustrated, the principal exercised his leadership not from above, but from the center.

However, within the school, the principal adopted different strategies to lead a team of vice-principals. He developed a broad and noble vision to help them understand how good the school could be. He showed his expertise in curriculum reconstruction. By giving them full support, the principal also increased what was expected of them, requiring them to have a holistic mindset and a focus on excellence. Middle leaders and teachers were deeply impressed by the principal’s charisma and vision. They witnessed his development of an effective job protocol. In addition, they saw the principal not only “*talk the talk*” but also “*walk the walk*.” When Middle leaders and teachers were encouraged to take on more responsibility, they focused on efficiency and admitted to feeling a sense of commitment and pride in their daily work.

Table 4.12 provides a summary of the principal’s leadership strategies.

Table 4.12. A Summary of Leadership Strategies of the Principal

Leadership Strategies of the Principal	
Government <i>from an invisible supporter to a visible supervisor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Leading as an agent of change ➤ Having a high moral purpose ➤ Using professional authority to challenge administrative authorities
Company <i>from a strong supporter of</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sharing the same value with the company of “making a

<i>the school to an ally of the government</i>	<p>difference” in improving education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Showing strong charisma ➤ Adopting a persuasive and coercive communicative approach
Vice-Principals <i>hard-working team members of the principal turning the school’s vision into educational practices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Setting a broad and noble vision ➤ Strengthening curriculum leadership among the vice-principals ➤ Empowering with scaffolding support ➤ Increasing expectations
Teachers and Middle Leaders <i>fighters for efficient teaching on the battlefield of education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Charisma ➤ Intellectual stimulation ➤ Instilling a sense of commitment and pride ➤ Modeling and empowering ➤ Gradually establishing a stereotypical job protocol
Parents <i>pragmatic decision-makers striving for the future of their children</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fame and charisma ➤ Cultural bond ➤ Communication, communication, communication

In this study, a distributed perspective was used to help identify the dimensions of the leadership practices and articulate their interaction. In addition, by making the “black box” of school leadership practices more transparent, by using the opinions of key informants, the findings reveal how the school leaders thought, acted, and coordinated with the government and Company X to facilitate education. Having gathered information on how the principal used his leadership with the various stakeholders, these leadership strategies are located in the broader social-cultural context in the following section, and their implications for theory, policy, and practice are discussed.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1. Summary of the Study

This qualitative study was performed to investigate the actual development and management of a newly established school as an educational initiative in mainland China. In particular, a close examination was made of the joint effort in a partnership between the local government and private company to affect school management, and vice versa. As a discursive practice, leadership is ineffective without the effect of its context. Of particular interest was the complex context of the school and principal leadership via interaction with different stakeholders.

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- 1) To explore the functioning of a PPP school in the Chinese context;
- 2) To clarify the roles of the different stakeholders with whom the school interacted, and to determine their effect on school management; and
- 3) To generate theoretical and practical recommendations for future research and management practices related to the operation of a PPP school.

The main research question was the following:

How did the principal of a Chinese school formed through a PPP lead and manage the multiple accountabilities of the various stakeholders?

Two main themes were identified to answer this research question, i.e., the nature of the PPP at School M and the leadership strategies used by the principal as a school agent.

In addition, the three sub-questions operationalizing the main research question and specializing it for data collection and analysis, were examined, as follows:

- 1) How does the PPP work in School M?
- 2) What were the opportunities and challenges of school leadership during the creation of the partnership structured in School M?

3) What were the leadership strategies, conceptualized by various stakeholders, adopted by the principal to deal with the opportunities and challenges arising from a context characterized by multiple accountabilities?

Interpretive theory and a case study were the study methodology. There was a particular focused on the “how” and “why” aspects of the dynamics of school leadership as a phenomenon, and certain explanations of the factors contributing to the partnership situation characterized by “negotiation, compromise, and sometimes conflict” before the principal’s decision to resign. The data sources included the formal and supplementary agreements between the local government and the renowned company, school review reports submitted to the LEAs, archival documents, and other publicly available documents highlighting the school’s milestones and major events influencing decision-making for its future development. The school newsletter and the school website were included in the analysis as useful artifacts to cross-check the validity of the data and generate relevant interpretations.

Semi-structured interviews with 20 informants representing the five main types of stakeholders inside and outside the school were conducted, to reveal their different perceptions of the partnership and the principal’s leadership practices and strategies.

Analytical codes extracted from the texts, namely interview transcripts, observation notes, memos, and school documents, were used to clarify or interpret the possible and relevant aspects of the study. As a research fellow and a mid-level manager at the DEB at the time of the study, I used myself as a tool to question, reflect on, and validate the data.

The results of this study revealed a complex and intertwined relational network of stakeholders to whom the principal of School M was accountable. Adopting a PPP, School M was both unique and complex, both challenging and marginalized. Principal leadership was effective in that the school developed rapidly and quickly gained recognition from society.

Within the school, a more nuanced understanding of the use of distributed leadership

practices through the flat management structure was provided. The vice-principals were trained with a focus on curriculum construction and restructuring, while middle leaders were trained to help manage the school and teachers were empowered to develop their teaching skills and grow professionally. This is consistent with previous research analyzing situations in which leadership is distributed among various people and multiple tasks (Elmore, 1999; Crowther, Hann, McMaster & Ferguson, 2000).

Behind the rapid development of the school, there were challenges and obstacles, visible or invisible, for leadership development and school management. Under this principalship, School M went through three main stages of development, identified as the initial honeymoon stage, the negotiation and compromise stage, and the principal's resignation stage. The degree of autonomy granted to the principal was a key element differentiating one phase from another. The gap between perceived autonomy and preferred autonomy reported by the principal were consistent with previous results, suggesting that increased school autonomy helps reinforce the principal's sense of ownership (Bogler & Somech, 2005). In addition, autonomy can be used as a leadership strategy to enable school accountability and improve school efficiency (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003).

The study confirmed that the establishment of a partnership between the public and private sectors requires the investment of human, monetary, and logistic resources, and yet its effect remains a context-specific issue (Patrinos et. al, 2009). The results showed that the partnership created both opportunities and challenges for school leadership, mainly in five categories. Adding to the pressure and intricacies of the realities of leadership, these categories were institutional innovation, goal planning, resource allocation, principal appointment, and flat management structure. Indeed, most challenges revolved around the question of who ultimately led the school: the principal, the DEB representing the local government, or the School Board, where the private sector had a final say (DiMartino, 2013).

In short, as a two-sided coin, a PPP can create new problems for effective governance (UNESCO, 2015; Nayyar, 2015; Patrinos et. al, 2009; McQuaid, 2000). In addition, principal leadership plays a crucial role for the success of partnerships (Callet, 2010). Moreover, as PPPs have advantages and disadvantages and their success in education is context-specific (Davies & Hentschke, 2006), what matters is how leadership is implemented to create an environment conducive to the reconfiguration of elements of traditional public ethos and private sector values (Woods & Woods, 2004; 2005).

However, this study was focused on principal leadership, highlighting the complexity and the real feelings of a prestigious headmaster facing multiple stakeholders to seek an optimal development path his PPP school in Shenzhen, a city of innovation in China. A shared commitment and shared values between multiple accountabilities are essential (Callet, 2010).

Regarding the network of accountabilities with the principal at the center, the government, the private company, vice-principals, teachers, and parents were the various stakeholders. First, the government initially acted as an invisible but strong supporter, but gradually shifted to the role of visible supervisor with the change in the socio-political context. As a result, the principal used three main leadership strategies, i.e., leading as an agent of change, insisting on the constant pursuit of values, and developing a knowledge discourse system to challenge administrative authorities.

Second, the role of the private company also changed, from being a strong supporter of the school to becoming an ally of the government due to the turnover of business managers.

Appreciating that the coordination efforts of the pioneering businessmen were a link between the school and the government, the principal shared the same vision with the company of “making a difference” in improving education, showed his charisma, and skillfully used his persuasive and coercive communication skills as powerful strategies.

Third, the vice-principals proved to be hard-working team members of the principal, turning

the school's vision into educational practices. To lead and unite the administrative team, the principal used various leadership strategies, including setting a broad and noble vision, developing curriculum leadership based on reconstruction, empowering them with scaffolding support, and increasing expectations.

Fourth, the teachers and middle-leaders of School M were seen as young fighters for efficient teaching on the battlefield of education. The most recognized strategies used by the principal included, but were not limited to, his charisma, intellectual stimulation, modeling and empowerment, and the development of a stereotypical job protocol.

Finally, the school parents were pragmatic decision makers between educational ideals and the reality of education. They were drawn to the principal's fame and charisma and defended his strategies of cultural connection and constant communication

5.2. Revisiting the Context

Few studies have been performed to examine the importance of the education context in the leadership. This study was focused on the disparities in social and cultural resources defining the conditions of School M.

Past research has traced some evidence of nine major trends of changes taken place in different areas and levels of education across the Asia-Pacific area (Cheng, 2009; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Similarly, the current case analysis reflected some changes in China both at the macro level including restructuring educational systems as a district-wide reform initiative and diversifying school education, and at the meso level referring to more parental involvement in the school management. At the site level, the study appeared as a showcase of ensuring educational accountability and implementing decentralization (Cheng, 2009; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

This study was performed in the field of basic education in China, adopting a centralized

mode in education in terms of coordination, evaluation, and supervision. In recent decades, the policy initiative of the principal responsibility system has granted principals greater autonomy, mainly in terms of staff management, financial arrangement, student enrollment, and other school affairs (Ngok, 2007; Zhu, Devos & Tondeur, 2014). Although devolution has been in effect to some extent, the study findings were consistent with previous results, revealing that principals felt constrained by the limits of the management mechanism of the government or the private company, or both (Feng, 2002; Du, 2011; Qin & Wang, 2013). While the domestic literature is lamenting the general lack of the principal's instructional leadership, the principal focused in this research can provide a better model to follow suit. Instructional leadership of the principal is salient and viable in that vice principals, together with teachers and middle leaders, have confessed rapid growth in themselves with an edge of curriculum capacity. A series of management activities, including communicating school visions, modeling and coaching, developing staff with professional training, setting high demands and standards for teaching, coordinating curriculum construction and creating an environment conducive for teaching and learning, has been perceived by different informants, adding up to constitute a life-like portrait of an effective instructional leader (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; De Bevoise, 1984).

State vs. Market

The interviews conducted with the representatives of the government, the private company, the teaching faculty, and the vice-principals revealed an interactive coupling force in the PPP between the state (represented by the DEB and other government departments) and the market (represented by Company X). One advantage reflected in this PPP case is that both parties, the public and the private, have enjoyed equal status in rulemaking, fair playing and cooperation in the partnership. It has changed the situation in which the government has been a dominant role in decision-making. Over time, these public and private forces have grown

and declined, cooperated and opposed, challenged and compromised. However, while the need for government reconstruction is highlighted and its authority is expected to diminish, the government continues to enjoy supreme power with a considerable degree of legitimate basis, to the extent that companies sometimes have to compromise with the government. Citing the study as an example, one may argue that PPP does not necessarily lead to the privatization of education (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio, & Guàrdeta, 2009), at least not so in the short run. On the contrary, the government's control is gradually tightened along with the changing of the Chinese societal background as shown in this case.

Leadership turnover in government departments created uncertainty as to the continuity of the reform of the management system of School M. To some extent, this may be due to some of the characteristics of the bureaucratic structure of the government, i.e., impersonal and rule-based, seeking stability, unwilling to do things differently, officials in key positions caring more about their own career promotion, and the government sometimes being the market rival for interests and political gains (Weber, 1978; Zhou, 2008; Zhou & Zhao, 2009).

In addition, from an organizational perspective, there was some inconsistency and disconnection between the decision-making intention of the initial key leaders and the specific implementation process. This may be due to the long administrative chains of a government initiative (Wilson, 1989). Specifically, there were more intermediate institutions and staff involved in the actual implementation of this innovative project, while the specific executors injected their own understanding into it, adopting different strategies or tactics and even personal interests in the implementation process. Indeed, the members of an organization are by no means the abstract "organizational persons" (Zhou, 2013) who will mechanically execute the orders of their superiors. Instead, they are social people with their own thoughts, feelings, and interests, and they will inevitably bring their own cognition, thoughts, and interests to the execution process (Zhou, 2013). As such, leadership in

officialdom is closer to contingent leadership, based on the relevance of a political situation or occasion. Different officials involved in a reform will interpret and define the rules according to their own intentions.

Vulnerability of leadership

School leadership faces many challenges and obstacles in the new era. For example, some major trends are influencing school leadership in many Western countries. Among them, teaching and learning are the focus of school leadership, followed by other important issues, such as creating an atmosphere conducive to pedagogical reform, establishing new forms of school-community relationships, promoting the development of the professional learning community of teachers, and establishing permeable boundaries to increase accountability (Christie & Lingard, 2001). The changing landscape of school-management reform and the ongoing movement for effective schools have taken place not only in Western countries, but also in the Asia-Pacific region, such as China (Cheng, 2002; Fullan, 2005).

While many studies have shown the importance of leadership for school success and learner development, the vulnerability of leadership remains underexplored. In the current cultural context of high-stakes accountability reform, principals have experienced a series of key events that have invisibly and unmeasurably generated some negative emotions, leading to the vulnerability of their leadership.

Among all the strategies, the principal adopted a persuasive and coercive communicative approach interacting with the company, targeting at building mutual coalition with the private entity. When there is disparity in understanding between the government officials and the school leaders, the principal preferred to either have someone with higher authority (e.g. the District Secretary) or seek informal assistance from the third party of coalition partners (like business managers) resolve disagreement. Further, constant communication is employed to win parents' support and intellectual stimulation, with school staff. Such findings were

consistent with Chinese values regarding power distance and respect for authority (Yukl, Fu & McDonald, 2003). They have, in particular, reinforced prior literature of effective influence tactics used with peers, subordinates and the superior (Yukl & Tracey, 1992; Fu & Yukl, 2000).

Give the unexpected resignation of the principal from School M, and considering his reputation as a prestigious principal in the field of basic education in China over the last decade, one can hardly deny the vulnerability and fragility of school leadership.

First, the merger with another school on the original campus of School M was a critical event that ruined the relationship of trust between the principal and the DEB. Second, leadership turnover in key government positions created subversive risks for the implementation of the principal's school-wide initiative. Different leadership strategies were used to remedy the problem, by negotiating the disparity between perceived autonomy and preferred autonomy, but with few promising results. Third, there were issues of conflicting commitment and conflicting responsibilities between the school principal and the new managers as representatives of the private company. Over time, the initial three-month supervision carried out at School M proved to be a signal revealing the peripheral position of the School Board and the conflicting interests between the principal and the DEB.

All of these examples demonstrate the professional vulnerability of principal leadership. In the midst of interaction inside and outside of schools, power differences occur all the time. When government officials wanted to demonstrate their capabilities, the incident turned out to be an event of trust erosion between the principal and the government. This unexplored issue confirmed previous results that behaviors reflecting the ability and integrity of leaders are more important in incidents of trust erosion (Lapidot, Kark, & Shamir, 2007).

Reform: Perplexity and uncertainty

The results of this study consolidated, to some extent, the powerful arguments made by some

renowned scholars, e.g. Ravitch (2001) and Darling-Hammond (2015), that strategic financial investment in a school can make a significant difference in boosting the academic achievement of students, and that money does make a difference when it comes to educational quality. In revealing how an education reform is initiated and put into practice in contemporary Chinese society, the results underscored the importance of context. Specifically, in a socio-cultural context, education reform is a source of perplexity and uncertainty. Moreover, leadership must respond to the characteristics of reform and see it as a constantly evolving process, full of ups and downs.

There are no silver bullets when it comes to improving education (Ravitch , 2001). Reform can be regarded only as a meaningful attempt to offer more options, alternatives and possibilities. Reform is inevitably a source of perplexity and uncertainty. The reflections on education reform drawn from the innovative project of School M can be summarized from the following three perspectives.

Macro perspective

First, education reform must counter changes in the social and political environment. If the external environment supports the reform and the overall atmosphere is fault tolerant, the reform can be conducive to the creation of a more relaxed external condition. Nevertheless, when the political context changes, e.g., the extent of fault tolerance decreases as stability becomes the centerpiece of a discourse system, the external space for reform can be reduced. As a result, it stifles certain plans and ideas from being put into practice.

The change in the social, political, and cultural environment created uncertainty and perplexity for School M. Over time, the strong public and private forces pushing forward the reform started to decline, while leadership turnover added more divergence, more communication, and more compromise in the partnership. As a result, the reform entered a bottleneck period, during which success was not possible without group synergy.

In addition, the pace of education reform must increase, as the common slow pace of reform means it is difficult to gain understanding and support from everyone involved at different times. In the process of a reform, it is observed that the behavior on the part of the government behavior towards the private sector is always contradictory. Sometimes it helps the private sector to restore confidence and help, and sometimes it undermines its confidence and hinders its development (Kornai, 2007). Over time and with changes in key positions, the momentum generated by multiple stakeholders is likely to diminish.

Third, the conservatism of education reform and the openness of reform have always eroded each other. The education sector has a high degree of conservatism, which is determined by its characteristics of transmitting its will and protecting its legitimacy as a ruling sector class. At the same time, education is also a tool to learn the mainstream ideology of the country. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has elevated the national curriculum to an unprecedented level and published a series of policies to emphasize its irreplaceable nature. Reflecting on the curriculum reform of School M, the use of school-based teaching materials has decreased.

Meso Perspective

Key government leaders often have their own career development. To take their careers to a higher level in each limited term, they inevitably pursue more or less the best political achievements in the interest of promotion. This performance orientation will have a certain effect on the current reform. As this education reform was not a new product of their tenure, the subsequent leaders did not have as strong an incentive to boost the development of School M as did the school's founders.

Frequent changes in the key figures involved in the reform and changes in the key leaders of various related departments led to uncertainty about the reform. After the new officials took office, the multiple stakeholders in the reform had not yet established a deep level of mutual

trust. The reform process was then reduced to a constant struggle of communication and compromise.

In addition, education reform is not a monologue in the education sector; it involves cooperation and dialogue between different government departments. With the frequent involvement of multiple departments, the change of leadership at all levels, and each person's cognition and attitude toward the reform, new understandings and attitudes will intertwine to add to the current reform process and development direction.

Micro perspective

The reform model is hard to define, as it is difficult to generalize the innovation of School M in simple language, not to mention its neither-public-nor-private identity.

In addition, the partnership between the government and the private company to create School M was intended to explore a third way for China's basic education. Based on this grand and unified moral goal, different stakeholders brought different values. For example, the government wanted to explore a school management mode that could be copied, used as a reference, and popularized in a standardized way. With respect to this idea, the reproducible mode, the physical conditions of the school, and the quality and equity of education were equally important. In contrast, Company X wanted to develop an elite school offering elite education, in the interest of society and to continuously create a positive brand image for the company. In the same vein, the School Board and the principal shared a focus on quality, but equity was less important. To achieve this high-quality goal of school management, School M fought for more resources, more policy privileges, small classes, and preferential admissions.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study was focused on a single case and was conducted in a single school.

While some of the characteristics of School M may be similar to those of other schools, in

particular other PPP schools, it cannot be assumed that its distinctive characteristics will be shared among other types of schools. In addition, the data were collected in Chinese, but coded and interpreted in an English frame of mind. While I am proficient in English and is familiar with English culture, I am not fully bilingual or bicultural. Thus, my position as an investigator limited the breadth and depth of the interpretation of the data, given the context of English as a second language.

Considering the multiple stakeholders of School M, thousands of students constitute another critical type of interviewees. The absence of students' voices recorded in the study is pitiful. It might be suggested, however, that the interview questions for parents were designed to somehow reflect their understanding of their children. For example, one question was "How do you evaluate the teaching quality of your kid's class?" (Q6 in *Appendix A-4*) Another two questions touched upon something that should be done in terms of "student development" (Q13) and addressed something showing that the school has provided "tailor-made development path for every kid" (Q14).

From a methodological perspective, the use of purposive sampling at School M and in its network with the government and the private company reduced the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, the results of this study may be applicable to situations in which school leaders find themselves in a relational network of multiple stakeholders, and in which their leadership is focused on a united synergistic effort involving the participation of more than one societal force. The results can also apply to similar PPP school contexts, providing food for thought on how to proceed and maximize productive and cooperative school leadership.

5.4. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contributions to knowledge in the field of educational leadership and management, which have been mainly produced from Western contexts, and

in particular to the construction of a non-Western knowledge base regarding the implementation of ePPPs. As most of China's educational PPPs are projects of new school construction (Chen, 2016), this study is unique in that it provides a snapshot of the practical operation of leading a restructuring school with public status and private engagement in the contemporary setting of Chinese society. In addition, the results revealed a dynamic and ever-changing status of school development under effective principal leadership, initiated in a united district-wide impetus for education reform in the Asia-Pacific region.

Another contribution of this study is related to its value in informing educational practitioners about the ongoing process of leading a school and managing a bilateral partnership between the public and private sectors. It will also be useful for providing policymakers with more evidence-based accounts for future improvement and amendment. The government should use the results of empirical research such as this study to reposition itself in the field of educational administration, and it is essential that principals strive for mutual agreement produced through constant communication and occasional compromise. The diplomatic skills of a principal are necessary to ease tensions between different parties and lead to a win-win prospect.

The findings of this study confirmed Moos's (2005) integrated model of five types of accountability, and highlighted the declining but crucial aspect of managerial accountability in the reality of China. Accordingly, education reform requiring decentralization will not be fully realized in the cultural context of Chinese society. Methods of balancing the conflicting forces of managerial accountability and other types of accountability will determine the far-reaching effect of principal leadership.

From an organizational perspective, the findings of this study offer a vivid picture of how interdependent strengths influence each other, resulting in fulfillment of a common mission in the education bureaucracy organization. This organization is characterized by public welfare

and entrepreneurial efficiency, and contains different types of power. It can also provide a snapshot to explore and clarify advanced leadership in different situations or occurrences. The identification of an optimal way forward from the perspective of organizational development will be determined in future research.

5.5. Recommendations for the Development of Leadership and its Practice

The results of this study reveal a series of recommendations for leadership practices in PPP schools.

In terms of PPPs, the following is recommended:

- The objective, prerequisites, legitimate basis, and pros and cons of a PPP should be presented to multiple stakeholders for open discussion before being put into practice;
- Formal leaders must understand the expectations, intentions, and action strategies of their partners and constantly communicate with them, in particular on key issues related to power and responsibility and the decision-making process, to establish a public-private relationship as a unified alliance.
- Considering that institutional change has the characteristics of path dependence, the forthcoming reform of school model, if adopting a PPP, must be clarified and defined explicitly to promote the overall development of the school;
- In terms of promoting the separation of management, operation and assessment in education system, the construction of a partnership turns out to be a realistic approach to break through the traditional model of government-arranged schooling, thus meeting people's need for diversified education. Its standardized operation deserves an in-depth examination.

Regarding school leadership in the high-stakes socio-cultural context of China, the following is recommended:

- The effect of education reform driven by the global forces of neoliberalism, marketization, and decentralization must be understood by policy makers before examining the fundamental value of pushing an initiative.
- A systematic review and examination of effective influence tactics pertaining principal leadership conducted in the Confucius culture of the Chinese context is valuable to be referred to as part of professional training to inform the preparatory procedure of school leadership succession.
- By relating the leadership behavior of the prestigious principal with his time allocation of different leadership behavior, future research can develop a set of advocacy attributes of school leaders as a blueprint sample for the training of the aspiring principal.
- At the systems level, education bureaucrats and business representatives must be aware of the constraints and challenges of school leadership in PPPs, or in collaboration between multiple stakeholders.
- At the school level, an innovative initiative requires that the entire school community (principals, middle leaders, teachers, students, and parents) share a common culture and belief, and unite to form a synergy to promote its implementation in practice.
- At the individual level, the cultural values specific to the different stakeholders must be shared with others and open for discussion, as they can have a significant effect on the implementation of school leadership.

By considering the school context as a reform initiative, a list of questions is generated, offering directions for future research:

- What incentives can financial investments play in raising the overall academic achievement of a school?
- What is the priority of the leadership strategies used by the principal to interact with public bureaucrats and societal forces?

- What is the significance of a bilateral partnership on decision-making during the school development process?
- What leadership preparation is required to assume formal leadership roles in schools with various accountabilities?
- What is the influence of previous leadership and management experiences on a principal's capacity to achieve his leadership ambition and commitments in a PPP school?
- What is the effect of school leadership to the status quo of teachers' emotional labor in the setting of educational reform, as well as the indicator of school context variables in teacher job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession?

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Appendix A

Sample Questions in English and Chinese for Semi-structured One-to-one Interviews

A: Interviewer

Duration: _____ Date: _____

A-1. For Governmental Officials & Private Managers

- Q1 Could you describe what led to the decision to establish this partnership in the school?
A 請問是什麼導致了學校這種公私合作辦學關係的建立？
- Q2 What were the steps in forming the partnership? Take me through the process.
A 建立這種關係的話，有哪些步驟？
- Q3 What were your initial expectations relative to the partnership and how, if at all, have those expectations changed?
A 對於這種夥伴關係，您最初的期望是什麼？之後，您的這種期望有沒有改變？
- Q4 What are the reasons that the Principal became resolute to work in the PPP school instead of a traditional public school?
A 那當初招聘校長時，您是用什麼樣的說法說服校長辭去上海的職務，來深接受這份挑戰？
- Q5 What are the goals of the partnership and how are they measured? (Probe for actual quantitative measures)
A 這種合作辦學的目標是什麼？然後，是怎麼去衡量它的這個目標？（具體手段）
- Q6 I'm interested in how the partnership operates. What are your roles and responsibilities relative to the partnership?
A 這種合作夥伴關係是如何運作的？您在其中的角色和責任是什麼樣的？
- Q7 Could you describe the roles and responsibilities of X-company / the local education authority (LEA) or the government?
A 你能否介紹一下 X 公司/區教育局/區政府在其中的角色和職責？
- Q8 What does the LEA or government retain control over and what does X-Company control?
A 區教育局/區政府以及 X 公司分別管控什麼方面的事物？
- Q9 What are the terms and limitations of the contract?
A 合作協定裡的條款是怎麼說的？現在看來，協議是否存在一些局限？什麼局限？
- Q10 How are students enrolled in the school?
A 學校是如何招生的呢？
- Q11 How are teachers hired and identified themselves in the school?
A 教師是怎麼招聘的呢？
- Q12 Could you describe the financial relationship between the school and the company? How is the school funded?

- A 學校和公司之間，它的這種財政關係是怎麼樣的？學校辦學是怎麼樣獲取資助的？
- Q13 I'm interested in your perception with regards to the strength and weakness of this relationship. What does your district give to X-company and what do you receive in return?
我想知道，在您看來這種公私合作關係的優勢和劣勢在哪裡？X 公司能夠給學校提供什麼樣的、區教育局無法提供的服務？
- A 在這種合作辦學當中，區政府給 X 公司帶來了一個什麼樣的利益交換？為什麼 X 公司願意去這樣做？
- Q14 How do you measure the principal's performance to the level of leadership accountability?
A 就學校所面對的多方持份者而言，您如何評價校長的領導力成效？
- Q15 I'm curious about whether you think the partnership is working, from your own perspective as well as from the perspective of your school community.
- Q19 From your perspective, what are the principal advantages and disadvantages of the partnership?
A 那您是否認為這種公私合作關係有效呢？比如說從您自己的角度，以及學校的角度？
- Q16 How has the partnership evolved from its original inception?
A 那這種合作關係，從最初建立到現在，您有沒有覺得它經過一種演化了？就是演化的過程怎麼樣？還是說，當初基本上怎麼樣，現在還是怎麼樣？
- Q17 What problems have arisen so far? How are they solved or going to be solved? By whom and using what strategies?
A 那目前來說，這種合作關係有哪些問題呢？
- Q18 What are some challenges you continue to face?
A 那您覺得這種問題怎麼解決呢？還是說已經解決了？還是說正在解決？
- Q20 Is there anything else you'd like to add or comment on?
A 還有沒有什麼您要添加或者補充的？

A-2. For (Vice) Principals

- Q1 What are the reasons for your decision to work in the PPP school instead of a traditional public school?
A 當初是什麼樣的想法，讓校長決定在這所公私合作辦學的學校擔任校長，而不是在其它一所普通的公立學校？
- Q2 What are the goals of the partnership and how are they measured?
A 這種合作辦學的目標是什麼？怎麼去衡量它的這個目標？
- Q3 What were your initial expectations relative to the partnership and how, if at all, have those expectations changed?
A 對於這種合作夥伴關係，您最初的期望是什麼？之後，您的這種期望有沒有改變？
- Q4 I'm interested in how the partnership operates. What are your roles and responsibilities relative to the partnership?
A 這種合作夥伴關係是如何運作的？您在其中的角色和責任是什麼樣的？
- Q5 What is the school vision? How do the principal communicate it to the society? How does the principal strengthen the understanding of school goals in teachers and parents?

- A M 學校的辦學目標是什麼？校長怎樣加強教師和家長對於學校辦學目標的理解？怎樣向社會傳達學校的辦學目標？
- Q6 How are students enrolled in the school?
A 學校是如何招生的呢？
- Q7 How are teachers hired and identified themselves in the school?
A 教師是怎麼招聘的？
- Q8 What does the principal retain control over?
A 校長管控學校什麼方面的事物？
- Q9 In what ways do you know about the current status of school-running? In what ways do you perceive and understand the needs of teachers, students and parents?
A 您通過什麼方式瞭解學校辦學的現狀？通過什麼方式瞭解師生和家長的需求？
- Q10 What kind of growth and training platform does the school provide to teachers? What is the system of reward and punishment for working efficiency? How to evaluate teachers?
A 學校給教師提供了什麼樣的成長和進修平臺？有怎樣的獎懲工作制度？如何評價教師？
- Q11 How does the school guide students' growth and development through curriculum? How to evaluate students?
A 學校如何通過課程引領學生成長發展？如何評價學生？
- Q12 Could you describe the financial relationship between the school and the company? How is the school funded?
A 學校和 X 公司之間，它的這種財政關係是怎麼樣的？學校辦學是怎麼樣獲取資助的？
- Q13 What culture has been formed in the school at present? Do you consciously build up these cultures? In what ways do you contribute to the establishment of these cultures?
A 您認為學校目前形成了哪些文化？您是否有意識地在建構這些文化？您是通過什麼方式方法促成這些文化的形成？
- Q14 Did you try to push every teacher and make them contribute their talents to the school development? How did you do it? Has it worked or not?
A 您有沒有試圖發揮每一個教師的聰明才智為組織作貢獻，您是怎麼做的？有效嗎？
- Q15 I'm curious about whether you think the partnership is working, from your own perspective as well as from the perspective of your school community.
Q19 From your perspective, what are the principal advantages and disadvantages of the partnership?
A 那您是否認為這種公私合作關係有效呢？比如說從您自己的角度，以及學校的角度？
- Q16 I'm interested in your perception with regards to the strength and weakness of this relationship. What does your district give to X-company and what do you receive in return?
A 我想知道，在您看來這種公私合作關係的優勢和劣勢在哪裡？
- Q17 What problems have arisen so far? How are they solved or going to be solved? By whom and using what strategies?
A 目前來說，這種合作關係帶來了哪些問題？這些問題怎麼解決？還是說已經解決了？還是說正在解決？

Q18 In the process of leading the school to excellence, what kind of assistance has been given to any groups or individuals at school? How do they help you achieve effective leadership?
A 在您領導學校走向卓越發展的過程中，學校哪些群體或個體給予了怎樣的協助？他們是如何協助您實現學校的有效領導的？

Q20 Is there anything else you'd like to add or comment on?
A 還有沒有什麼您要添加或者補充的？

A-3. For Teachers

Q1 What is the difference between this school and other public schools? What has attracted you to work here?

A 據您所知，這所學校與其它學校有什麼不同？是什麼吸引您來到這裡工作？

Q2 What advantages do you think the school has in terms of its school-running pattern?

A 您覺得相對普通公立學校來說，這所學校的辦學形式存在哪些方面的優勢？

Q3 What do you think is the deficiency of the school-running form of this school?

A 您認為，相對普通公立學校來說，這所學校的辦學形式存在哪些方面的不足？

Q4 Do you know the school goal (vision)? How do you get to know it? How do you perceive it?

A 您瞭解學校的辦學目標（理念）嗎？是通過什麼形式瞭解的？你是否認同？

Q5 How was the school curriculum system built and developed? Who was involved in the process? In your opinion, does it effectively reflect the school vision?

A 學校的課程體系是怎麼打造的？誰參與打造的？在你看來，是否有效體現了辦學目標？

Q6 How does the school provide professional training to the teaching staff? Are there any effective training mechanisms or measures?

A 學校如何培訓、打造教師團隊？是否有常效的培訓機制或措施？

Q7 What does a typical day look like for a teacher like you at school? Give me an overview.

A 你在學校的每天工作是怎樣的一個流程？可以給我簡單敘述下嗎？

Q8 How is the salary level of teachers? Is it more or less compared to that for teachers in ordinary public schools?

A 教師的薪資水準如何？對比普通公立學校，是更多還是更少？

Q9 How does the school recruit students? How do schools publicize itself in the annual enrollment season?

A 學校是怎樣招生的？學校在每年招生季節是如何宣傳推介學校的？

Q10 How does the school carry out school-family interaction? Does the mutual connection form a normal mechanism?

A 學校如何開展家校聯繫？聯繫是否形成了常態機制？

Q11 How are teachers hired and identified themselves in the school?

A 教師是怎麼招聘的呢？您們對於自己學校的角色身份是怎麼定位的？

Q12 Will you consider job hopping if other public schools have offered you a tenured track?

A 如果其他公立學校給您提供編制，您會考慮跳槽嗎？

Q13 What are the problems in school-running? What do you think should be done to solve these problems, e.g. in terms of curriculum design, teaching and training, teacher development, student development?

A 據您所知，學校辦學中存在哪些問題？您覺得應該怎樣解決這些問題？比如說課程設置、教材培訓、教師發展、學生發展等各個方面。

Q14 Does the school provide tailor-made development path for every teacher? Explain briefly.

A 學校是否為每位教師提供了適合他自身發展的專業成長道路？請簡單說明下。

Q15 Is there anything else you'd like to add or comment on?

A 還有沒有什麼您要添加或者補充的？

A-4. For Parents

Q1 What is the difference between this school and other public schools? What has attracted you to send your kid here for study?

A 據您所知，這所學校與其它學校有什麼不同？是什麼吸引您將孩子送到這裡讀書？

Q2 What advantages do you think the school has in terms of its school-running pattern?

A 您覺得對比普通公立學校來說，這所學校的辦學形式存在哪些方面的優勢？

Q3 What do you think is the deficiency of the school-running form of this school?

A 您認為，相對普通公立學校來說，這所學校的辦學形式存在哪些方面的不足？

Q4 Do you know the school goal (vision)? How do you get to know it? How do you perceive it?

A 您瞭解學校的辦學目標（理念）嗎？是通過什麼形式瞭解的？你是否認同？

Q5 How was the school curriculum system built and developed? Who was involved in the process? In your opinion, does it effectively reflect the school vision?

A 學校的課程體系是怎麼打造的？誰參與打造的？在您看來，是否有效體現了辦學目標？

Q6 How does the school provide professional training to the teaching staff? How do you think of the overall teaching quality? How do you evaluate the teaching quality of your kid's class?

A 學校如何培訓、打造教師團隊？你認為教師隊伍的整體素質如何？你認為孩子就讀班級的任課教師素質如何？

Q7 Have you volunteered to help at school? What does a typical task look like for a volunteer parent like you at school? Give me an overview.

A 你參與過學校的日常事務嗎？可以給我簡單敘述下嗎？

Q8 How is the salary level of teachers? Is it more or less compared to that for teachers in ordinary public schools?

A 你瞭解明德教師的薪資水準嗎？對比普通公立學校，是更多還是更少？

Q9 How does the school recruit students? How do schools publicize itself in the annual enrollment season?

A 學校是怎樣招生的？學校在每年招生季節是如何宣傳推介學校的？

Q10 How does the school carry out school-family interaction? Does the mutual connection form a normal mechanism?

A 學校如何開展家校聯繫？聯繫是否形成了常態機制？

Q11 How are teachers hired and identified themselves in the school?

A 您孩子班級的教師幾年下來有變動嗎？對於離職的老師，您是否瞭解他們離職的原因？對於自己學校的角色身份是怎麼定位的？

Q12 Have you ever thought of or consider transferring your kid to another public school in the district? For what reason? Are you going to make it happen?

A 你想過給孩子轉學嗎？因為什麼緣故？現在還會考慮轉學嗎？

Q13 What are the problems in school-running? What do you think should be done to solve these problems, e.g. in terms of curriculum design, teaching and training, teacher development, student development?

A 據您所知，學校辦學中存在哪些問題？您覺得應該怎樣解決這些問題？比如說課程設置、教材培訓、教師發展、學生發展等各個方面。

Q14 Does the school provide tailor-made development path for every kid? Explain briefly.

A 學校是否為每位學生提供了適合他個性發展的成長課程？請簡單說明下。

Q15 Is there anything else you'd like to add or comment on?

A 還有沒有什麼您要添加或者補充的？

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

BL: Education Bureau Leaders

EM: Enterprise Managers

GO: District Governmental Officials

PA: Parents

SP: School Principals & Vice Principals

TM: School Teachers & Middle Leaders

Date	ID	Location	Medium
2018/09/11	SP No.4	School M	In person
2018/10/12	PA No.1	Local Education Bureau	In person
2018/10/15	PA No.2	Interviewee's Office	In person
2018/10/16	TM No.1	Local Education Bureau	In person
2018/10/17	PA No.3	Interviewee's Office	In person
2018/10/17	PA No.3	Interviewee's Office	In person
2018/10/18	GO No.1	Local Government	In person
2018/10/19	TM No.2	Local Education Bureau	In person
2018/10/20	SP No.1	School M	In person
2018/10/23	TM No.3	School M	In person
2018/10/24	TM No.4	Local Education Bureau	In person
2018/10/26	SP No.2	School M	In person
2018/10/26	SP No.3	School M	In person
2018/11/02	BL No.1	Quiet Cafeteria	In person
2018/11/06	TM No.5	Local Education Bureau	In person
2018/12/22	GO No.2	Quiet Cafeteria	In person
2018/12/26	SP No.4	School M	In person
2018/12/26	Meeting GO-BL	Local Government	Focus group
2018/12/28	EM No.1	Quiet Cafeteria	In person
2019/01/04	BL No.2	Local Education Bureau	In person
2019/01/06	EM No.2	Quiet Cafeteria	In person
2019/01/08	BL No.3	Quiet Cafeteria	In person

Appendix C

Information Letter and Consent Forms in English and Chinese

THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Department of Education Policy and Leadership

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (FOR SCHOOL)

Principal Leadership in a Chinese Public-Private Partnership (PPP) school: A Case Study

My school hereby consents to participate in the captioned research supervised by Prof. Alan David WALKER and conducted by Ms. Xiaohong XU, who is a doctoral student of Department of Education Policy and Leadership in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the personal details of the school staff will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. Staff participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

Name of Principal/Delegate*:

Post:

Name of School:

Date:

(* please delete as appropriate)

INFORMATION SHEET

Principal Leadership in a Chinese Public-Private Partnership (PPP) school: A Case Study

Your school is invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. Alan David WALKER and conducted by Ms. XU Xiaohong, who is a doctoral student of the Department of Education Policy and Leadership in The Education University of Hong Kong.

The aim of the study is to explore how the school leadership handles challenges and seizes opportunities to sustain the ongoing development of the school while meeting the expectations of multiple stakeholders.

Altogether 20 interviewees (including 4 school leaders, 6 teachers, 2 private managers, 4 governmental officials and 4 parents) will be selected for the study. The interviewees will be asked to answer a few open-ended questions in relation to their perceptions of the school operation and the principal's leading strategies. They will attend one or two interview sections, each being audio-recorded and lasting for about one and a half hours.

Participant observations will also be used to collect data, mainly focusing upon the principal's daily routines. Each observation session, according to their distinctive purposes, lasts for no more than an hour.

Disclosing the information of the research participants may constitute a potential risk. The researcher will spare no efforts to disguise the identity of the participants, the name and location of the school and the private sector. Confidentiality will be provided and pseudonyms will be used.

Please understand that staff participation in the project is voluntary. They have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. Any participant who wishes to decline to join or withdraw from participation may inform the researcher verbally or send a text message to the researcher via cell phone indicating your decisions. Their inclination to decline to join or withdraw from participation will be fully respected. Plus, their comments and consensus will be sought upon their verbatim transcripts. All information related to your staff will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher. Pseudonyms such as 'X school' will be used as your school if the researcher plans to generate papers and publish them in conference or academic journals. Any information sheets containing identifiers (e.g., names and positions), original and anonymized hard copies of the interview documents as well as recorded interview data will be destroyed until 5 years past publication.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Ms. Xiaohong XU at

telephone number 86-XXXX XXXX XXX or their supervisor Prof. Allan David WALKER at telephone number 852-XXXX XXXX.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

XU Xiaohong

Principal Investigator

香港教育大學
教育領導與管理學系

參與研究同意書(學校)

《一所公私合作學校的校長領導力研究》

本校同意參加由汪雅量 (Allan WALKER) 教授負責監督,徐曉紅 (Xiaohong XU)女士執行的研究項目。他們分別是香港教育大學教育政策與領導系的教授和學生。

本校理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表。然而校方有權保護本校參與教員的隱私,其個人資料將不能洩漏。

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簽署:

校長/ 學校代表*姓名: _____ (教授/博士/先生/女士/小姐*)

職位: _____

學校名稱: _____

日期: _____

(*請刪去不適用者)

有關資料

《一所公私合作學校的校長領導力研究》

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本研究采用质性研究范式,將在貴校选取 20 名受訪者(包括 4 名學校領導、6 名教師、2 名私營管理人員、4 名政府官員和 4 名家長)參與研究。受訪者將應邀回答一些開放式的問題。所有問題都關乎他們自身對學校運作的看法和對校長領導力及領導策略的視角。他們將參加一個或兩個受訪環節,每個環節會被錄音(不录像),預計持續一個半小時。

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本研究並不為閣下提供個人利益,但所搜集的數據和後續分析將為學校發展提供有價值的資訊。閣下的參與純屬自願性質。所有參加者皆享有充分的權利在研究開始前或後決定退出這項研究,更不會因此引致任何不良後果。任何希望拒絕參加或退出研究的參與者可以直接口頭告知研究者或者向其發送手機短信,表明其決定。訪談轉錄後,也會徵求他們對轉錄稿的意見,尋求共識。研究者將充分尊重他們拒絕參加或退出研究的意願。凡有關貴校領導教師的資料將會保密,一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。

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如閣下想獲得更多有關這項研究的資料,請與徐曉紅女士聯絡,電話 86-XXXX

XXXX XXX 或聯絡她的導師**汪雅量教授**,電話 852-XXXX XXXX。

如閣下對這項研究的操守有任何意見,可隨時與香港教育大學人類實驗對象操守委員會聯絡(電郵:hrec@eduhk.hk;地址:香港教育大學研究與發展事務處)。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

徐曉紅

首席研究員

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (FOR PARTICIPANTS)

Principal Leadership in a Chinese Public-Private Partnership (PPP) school: A Case Study

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by Prof. Allan David WALKER and conducted by Ms. Xiaohong XU.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

INFORMATION SHEET

Principal Leadership in a Chinese Public-Private Partnership (PPP) school: A Case Study

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. Allan David WALKER and conducted by Ms. XU Xiaohong, who is a doctoral student of the Department of Education Policy and Leadership in The Education University of Hong Kong.

The aim of the study is to explore how the school leadership handles challenges and seizes opportunities to sustain the ongoing development of the school while meeting the expectations of multiple stakeholders.

Altogether 20 interviewees (including 4 school leaders, 6 teachers, 2 private managers, 4 governmental officials and 4 parents) will be selected for the study. As one of the interviewees, you will be asked to answer a few open-ended questions in relation with their perceptions of the school operation and the principal's leading strategies. You will attend one or two interview sections, each being audio-recorded and lasting for about one and a half hours.

Participant observations will also be used to collect data, mainly focusing upon the principal's daily routines. Each observation session, according to their distinctive purposes, lasts for no more than an hour.

Disclosing the information of the research participants may constitute a potential risk. The researcher will spare no efforts to disguise the identity of the participants, the name and location of the school and the private sector. Confidentiality will be provided and pseudonyms will be used.

Your participation in the project is voluntary. **THE PRINCIPAL DOES NOT KNOW WHO HAS BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE.** You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. Any participant who wishes to decline to join or withdraw from participation may inform the researcher verbally or send a text message to the researcher via cell phone indicating your decisions. Your inclination to decline to join or withdraw from participation will be fully respected. Plus, your comments and consensus will be sought upon your verbatim transcript.

All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher. Records, names and any other identifying information collected from you of the in-depth interviews will be linked to your identity only through a unique identifier and the information used to link records with identifying information will be kept in a securely locked file drawer only accessible to researcher herself. References to names or other identifying information will be eliminated from the written transcript of the interview in preparation for data analysis. Pseudonyms such as 'Mr/Ms X' will be used as your name if the researcher plans to generate papers and publish them in conference or academic journals. Besides, any information sheets containing identifiers (e.g., your name and position), original and anonymized hard copies of the interview documents as well as recorded interview data will be destroyed until 5 years past publication.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Ms. Xiaohong XU at telephone number 86-XXXX XXXX XXX or their supervisor Prof. Allan David WALKER at telephone number 852- XXXX XXXX.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

XU Xiaohong

Principal Investigator

香港教育大學
教育領導與管理學系

參與研究同意書

《一所公私合作學校的校長領導力研究》

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參加者姓名:

參加者簽名:

日期:

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