Educational leadership and culture in China: Dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership traditions?

Abstract

This article explores the extent to which Chinese school leaders espouse dichotomous or integrated Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management preferences. Data are drawn from questionnaires completed by school leaders and from semi-structured interviews with individual school leaders from different parts of China. The exploratory study shows that Chinese school leaders perceive a coexistence of Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management values, rather than the domination of one over the other. The findings suggest that it is important to understand the impact of national cultures on leadership and management. Differences between Chinese and Western culture and leadership and management are open to the challenge of stereotyping, and should not be over-stressed, as school leaders are working in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, and are exposed to and socialized into cultures of a multileveled polity ranging from the school to the local, national, and even global levels.

Keywords: Leadership and management, Education, Culture, Multileveled cultural world, China

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the fields of leadership and management in the business and educational sectors have been criticized for being dominated by Anglo-American intellectual and cultural frameworks, and for under-exploring the influence of various cultures on leadership (Dimmock and Walker, 2000b). In response, many studies on leadership and management in non-Western societies (Fidler, 2000b; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1998; Hofstede, 1980, 1984b, 2008) have emerged that emphasize the importance of national cultures in shaping and explaining leadership in different societies, and the distinctions between leadership traditions in Western (specifically Anglo-American) and non-Western societies. Many Chinese management studies, for example, emphasize the dichotomy between Anglo-American and Chinese leadership and management styles and practices and, in particular, question the relevance of using Anglo-American perspectives to explain practices of leadership and management in Chinese societies and organizations, including schools (Alon, 2003; Cheng, 1995; Dimmock and Walker, 2000a; Ge, 2007). These models dichotomizing Western and non-Western (including Chinese) cultures, leadership, and management are open to the challenge of stereotyping, however, and warrant re-examination in an age of an increasingly globalized world.

With reference to China, this study explores the preferences of Chinese school leaders (principals, school party secretaries, and deputy principals) for Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management. Data are drawn from about 350 questionnaires completed by school leaders and 20 individual interviews with school leaders working in different parts of China. The study shows that, to varying extents, school leaders' perceptions of leadership and management are affected by both Chinese and Anglo-American values and practices. The implications of this study suggest that leadership and management are cultural constructs and practices in a multileveled cultural world.

The article first reviews the literature on culture as it relates to leadership and management and examines the dichotomy between Chinese and Anglo-American approaches. Next, it highlights the background of the study and describes its design and implementation. Third, the article presents the major findings of Chinese school leaders' preferences for school leadership and management. The article then suggests possible explanations for their preferences and concludes with a discussion of leadership and management as cultural constructs and practices in a multileveled cultural world.

2. Societal culture and educational leadership and management

Each culture refracts into and is reflected by its constituents' practices of leadership and management. Culture is a common term with many possible definitions.[1] This article draws from those of Fan and Rokeach. Fan (2000) views culture as a collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, customs, and attitudes that distinguish members of a group from other groups. Rokeach (1973) defines culture as a force that shapes people's beliefs and attitudes and guides their behaviours. These two definitions are complementary in understanding the normative

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[1] For example, whilst Hofstede (1984a) regards culture as the "collective programming of people's mind" and holds that its core element are values, Schein (1984) considers culture to be the pattern of basic assumptions held among group members to cope with problems arising from external adaptation and internal integration, and transferable to new members so as to shape their perceptions, thinking and feelings in relation to these problems.

and prescriptive nature and functions of culture in human activities. Despite a lack of consensus on the definition of culture, there is general agreement on its relationships to and influences on leadership and management in the business and education sectors.

2.1. Bringing culture back in

Starting in the 1980s, some scholars (such as Cheng, 1995; Fidler, 2000a, b; Hofstede, 1984a; Schein, 1996) criticized the field of leadership and management for under-researching, or even 'missing' the impact of culture. The field has also been criticized by other scholars (e.g., Dimmock and Walker, 2000b; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1998) for being dominated by Anglo-American intellectual and cultural frameworks; over-emphasizing Anglo-American perspectives to explain phenomena and practices of leadership and management in other cultures; and lacking cultural sensitivity about the borrowing of ideas and experiences from other countries.

These criticisms later engendered more research and theorization on the importance of culture in understanding management and leadership styles. As a pioneer of empirical research on comparative leadership in international business and the impact of national cultures on organizations, Hofstede (1984a) argues that management is 'culturally specific', involves coordinating people's efforts towards common goals, and therefore is about relationships between people. Relationships, however, are affected by values that represent broad preferences for certain states of affairs over others, and certain management skills may be appropriate in one national culture but not in another (Hofstede, 2007).

Paralleling the development of cultural-specific views of leadership and management are attempts to find universal views of leadership and management. The latter is represented by an empirical study of managers in 62 societies conducted by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE). On the one hand, the GLOBE found that some leadership attributes reflecting charismatic or transformational leadership are 'universally endorsed' as contributing to outstanding leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Dorfman et al., 2004). These attributes include leaders' foresight, communicativeness, trustworthiness, willingness to encourage staff, and ability to build up staff's confidence. On the other hand, the GLOBE reveals that some attributes are seen as culturally contingent and that their importance and influences can vary within and across cultures; examples include enthusiasm, risk taking, ambition, humility, sincerity, sensitivity, and communication skills.

In the field of comparative educational leadership, researchers view culture as a major factor shaping educational leaders' perceptions and practices, a significant broad context in which leadership and management are exercised, and an important facilitating condition for and/or a constraint on school leadership and management (Cheng and Wong, 1996; Cheng, 2000; Ribbins and Zhang, 2006; Terpstra and David, 1996; Walker and Dimmock, 1999). In particular, school leaders, as Marshall (1988) argues, have been socialized into their culture, as should be revealed by their values, assumptions, and behaviour patterns. Moreover, the different expectations of the immediate community, government, and nation, Fidler (2000a) contends, can influence those of school leaders and other stakeholders within the school, and can result in differences in school leadership and management among various societies. Therefore, when analyzing schools, it is important to link school leadership and management closely to their external and policy environment and to understand culture as a significant

mediating factor affecting educational leadership and management (Dimmock and Walker, 2000b).

2.2. Dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American culture and leadership and management

A consequence of promoting culture-focused studies is the emergence of works emphasizing distinctions between Anglo-American and non-Anglo-American leadership and management. Chinese leadership and management studies, for example, focus on dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American culture and leadership and management. Some Chinese value surveys, such as those conducted by the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) and Bond (1988), use different cultural categories and variables to examine the impact of Chinese culture on Chinese people's behaviours, habits and practices. However, because Chinese culture and values are very diverse, there is no commonly agreed definition of Chinese culture and operationalized cultural variables (Fan, 2000); similar difficulties confront definitions of Anglo-American cultures and cultural variables. Despite a lack of consensus, this article—similar to those of prominent Chinese scholars, such as Qian (2004) and Liang (2006)—considers Confucianism as representing the core of traditional Chinese culture.[2] It also adopts Fan's (2000) broad definition of Chinese culture as 'a set of core values that underlies social interaction among the ordinary Chinese people and remains relatively stable over a long period of time'; contemporary Chinese culture comprises traditional Chinese elements, communist ideology, and Anglo-American values.

In many Chinese leadership and management studies, Chinese and Anglo-American societal cultures are often stereotyped as theoretical constructs representing two different cultural and intellectual paradigms for understanding relations to nature, the self, group, or society and approaches to time, space, and relations (Davies et al., 1995; Ge, 1997; Peng and Tian, 2007). Liang (2006) argues that Chinese and Anglo-American cultures are incompatible in four major aspects. First, Anglo-American thinking and theories focus on the scientific, analytical, and logical, whereas their Chinese counterparts focus on technique rather than on theory. Second, Anglo-American people emphasize self, materialism, and the conquest of nature, whereas Chinese people tend toward collectivism and are more accepting of the status quo. Third, socially, Anglo-American people stress democracy, while Chinese people do not. Fourth, Anglo-American attitudes towards work are rationalistic and focus on the individual; Chinese work attitudes are more empathetic and emphasize collective interests. Luo and Ge (1998) even contend that whereas Anglo-American people stress definitions and precision, Chinese people focus on 'core rather than non-core matters', and accept a degree of 'flexibility on non-core matters' that allows for the coexistence of the real and the ideal.

A similarly stereotyped dichotomy is constructed around Chinese and Anglo-American leadership traditions. Hofstede (1980, 1984a) argues that management in Chinese

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[2] Although some scholars, such as Lowe (2003) and Qi and Wu (2007), have used individual Chinese philosophies such as Taoism to explain phenomena and practices in Chinese societies, Russell (1922) and Zhu and Xu (2005) hold that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are the three main pillars of traditional Chinese thought and represent how Chinese culture shapes individual thoughts and behaviours, as well as Chinese norms and practices.

organizations and institutions is more collectivist than its Anglo-American counterpart and is characterized by a large 'power distance' and strong 'uncertainty avoidance'. Fan (2000) agrees, but adds that Chinese culture emphasizes the unity of the masculine and the feminine rather than the ascendancy of one over the other. Anglo-American and Chinese leadership and management traditions, as Qi, Wu, and He (2007) argue, differ in their explanations of the individual's relationship to nature, society, people and self: Anglo-American leadership and management focuses on the pursuit of interests, stresses clear division of labour, emphasizes institutionalization, and considers individuals a part of the system; Chinese leadership and management stresses harmony between individuals and the organization, relationship building, and self-reflection for improvement and perfection.

In more detailed and concrete terms, Lowe (2003) constructs four major dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management traditions. First, Anglo-American leadership and management is marked as an individualistic-competitive orientation, stressing self-control, negotiated contracts, efficiency, professionalism, competition, and personal interest/reward; whereas its Chinese counterpart is characterized by a collectivist-cooperative orientation, focusing on relationships, networks, and the pursuit of group interests. Second, Anglo-American leadership and management is democratic, allocating power through achievement, encouraging participation and a team orientation; whereas its Chinese counterpart is autocratic and paternalist, stressing the need to follow one's patron's rules. Third, Anglo-American leadership and management is marked by rationality, objectively analysing information before acting, employing due diligence, dividing issues into measurable variables, and arguing empirically; whereas its Chinese counterpart features an intuitive orientation, with a focus on using inductive reasoning to determine best practices, addressing problems in their entirety, and cultivating unfolding change. Fourth, Chinese leadership and management stress a long-term orientation that is considerate of family wealth and succession; whereas its Anglo-American counterpart emphasizes a short-term orientation, focusing on entry and exit strategies. To supplement Lowe, Hong and Engeström (2004) argue that Chinese paternalist culture emphasizes order and obedience, top-down information flow, strict adherence to rules, respect for authority, and loyalty to one's superiors.

Lowe (2003) further contends that the concepts and practices of leadership and management in China and in Anglo-American countries are rooted in different intellectual and cultural paradigms. Anglo-American leadership and management are built on functionalism and scientific rationalism marked by 'bivalent either-or antinomies' and 'black-and-white linear reductionism', whereas Chinese leadership and management is developed from a nonlinear and multivalent worldview, which 'sees contradiction and paradox as normal, experiential, and valuably coherent common sense' (2003).

China's national culture, as K. M. Cheng (1995) and Bush and Qiang (2000) argue, has played an important role in shaping the Chinese educational system and its reform. In particular, Bush and Qiang's (2000) qualitative study shows that educational leadership in China is affected by a 'hybrid' Chinese culture, comprising: traditional Chinese cultural values (e.g. collectivism, harmony and respect for authority); socialist ideology (which reinforces traditional Chinese [notably Confucian] culture and politicizes the role of school leaders); enterprise culture (which introduces market values into education); and patriarchal culture (which determines the roles of males and females in the school). Ribbins and Zhang (2006) use similar cultural factors to explain the shaping of the lives and leadership paths of 40 secondary-school principals in a rural area of China.

The literatures of leadership and management in general and Chinese leadership and management in particular help explain culture and educational leadership in China. As shown later, however, they cannot specifically explain strong preferences among Chinese school leaders for both Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management, and the variation of their preferences with different extents of local development. Unlike many Chinese leadership and management works, this study demonstrates that the dichotomy between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management is less distinctive in contemporary China and does not adequately explain contemporary Chinese leadership and management. This study supplements the qualitative studies of Bush and Qiang (2000) and Ribbins and Zhang (2006) by providing quantitative evidence about Chinese school leaders' strong preferences for Chinese leadership and management and demonstrating their similarly strong preferences for Anglo-American leadership and management.

3. The study

3.1. Background

China has a population of about 1.3 billion people and has been ruled by the Communist Party of China (CPC) since 1949. In the late 1970s, China began establishing diplomatic ties with Western countries, such as Britain and the United States. In the 1980s, China began gradually re-introducing market principles into its socialist economy and allowing some areas (and some people) to get rich first (Law, 2006). The country can be divided into three major regions: eastern (and coastal), middle, and western, the former being the most economically developed and culturally advanced.

China has the largest school sector in the world. In 2009-10, it had some 366,300 primary and secondary schools, enrolling about 200 million students (Ministry of Education, 2010). Education is financed mainly by local, rather than central government. This financial arrangement has contributed to regional disparities in schools, physically as well as educationally. Since the 1980s, China's economic reform has increased inter-regional and particularly urban-rural disparities in economic development and in public investment in school education (Project Team of a Case Study on Key Educational Policy in Transitional China, 2005; Yu, 2004).

3.2. Purpose and research methods

This exploratory study examines Chinese school leaders' preferences for Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management, and how their preferences vary with local factors. This study adopts a broad definition of school leaders, one that includes principals, school party secretaries and deputy principals, all of whom are often collectively referred to as school leaders (*xuexiao lingdao*) in official documents. Moreover, as school leadership and politics in Chinese schools are structurally integrated, school leaders are expected (by the ruling CPC) to perform both administrative and political functions (Chen, 2009). In many Chinese schools, one of the vice principals generally serves as school party secretary, while the principal is the school's vice party secretary; it is not uncommon, however, for the principal to be the school party secretary (Law, 2009). The CPC Central Committee and State Council insist on CPC-led leadership, requiring school-based CPC branches (led by school party secretaries) to act as the 'political core' of school leadership and management (1993,

Article 40); similar structural integration can be found at the national and local governance levels throughout China.

Unlike Ribbins and Zhang (2006), who conducted qualitative research to understand the leadership careers of 40 secondary-school principals in China, this study (which was conducted between February and June 2008) used a mixed methodology consisting mainly of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The former explored the views of a larger sample of school leaders, while the latter involved a sub-sample of school leaders for in-depth probing and clarification (Cohen et al., 2007; Wiersma and Jurs, 2004). Similar to Ribbins and Zhang (2006), the scale of this study was small, because it is difficult to recruit Chinese school principals to participate in academic research in China.

The questionnaire had two parts. The first part collected personal and school information. The second part investigated respondents' preferences for Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management in their regular practices, and the majority of its 27 question items were adapted from Lowe's (2003) aforementioned four dichotomies to understand Chinese school leadership and management (Table 1). Questions concerning the autocratic and paternalist feature of Chinese school leadership and management in Lowe's second dichotomy were supplemented by Hong and Engeström's (2004) study, which, as discussed earlier, provides more concrete items to explore paternalist culture in Chinese organizations. Although both studies focus on Chinese leadership and management in non-education settings, they provide theoretical constructs about the distinction between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management traditions, which this study aimed to deconstruct. However, unlike Table 1, in which question items are clearly arranged by tradition and dichotomy, the questions in this study were pre-coded and mixed in the second part of the questionnaire with a view to "avoiding stereotype answering" (Forza, 2009).

I consulted a local expert on culture and school leadership and management in China about the suitability of questionnaire items particularly, those which were adapted from Lowe (2003) and Hong and Engeström (2004). I accepted her advice to supplement their items by adding one new element — high moral standards — as an important criterion for recognizing good school leaders in China because Chinese leaders are expected to provide moral leadership (Le, 2003). China's state appoints school leaders based, in part, on their demonstrated moral conduct (e.g., fairness, probity, putting collective interests before personal interests, etc.) and expects them to make the moral education of students and staff their first priority (State Education Commission, 1991).

After piloting the survey, I slightly modified the wording of some questionnaire items on school information (such as options in school's geographical location) to suit the Chinese school context. In the second part of the questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Questions in this part were found to have high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.905). To encourage greater honesty and ensure reliability, the questionnaire, as Cohen et al. (2007) suggest, was anonymous. It took less than 30 minutes to complete. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). T-tests and ANOVA were employed to find significant differences in means between groups.

The sample included school leaders serving in eastern, middle, and western regions of China, in both urban and rural areas. Three hundred-sixty questionnaires were distributed and collected through both personal connections and also during and after school leaders' training

courses, workshops, and seminars in 18 cities and districts of nine different parts of China (including Anhui, Gansu, Henan, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shanxi, Shanghai, Xinjiang, and Zhejiang). Of the 360 questionnaires, 347 (96.4%) were useable. Of all respondents, 54.7% were male and 46.3% were female; 37% were principals, 10.4% were school party secretaries, 35.5% were vice principals, 13% were both principals and party secretaries, and 1% were both party secretaries and vice principals. Geographically, 69.2% worked in China's eastern region, 28.5% in its middle region, and 2.3% in the western region. About 75% of respondents worked in urban areas versus 25% in rural areas.

After preliminary analyses of the survey results, semi-structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis, mainly to explore (a) school leaders' major concerns about leadership and management, (b) mechanisms through which their leadership could be realized, (c) their most important values in leadership, (d) how they described their leadership style, and (e) in what aspects Chinese and Anglo-American cultures and traditions had affected their leadership and management. In addition to their being questionnaire respondents, two major criteria were used to select which school leaders would be interviewed: their regional distribution and the school leadership post they occupied.

Because of informants' accessibility, and the time and funding available for fieldwork, this study interviewed a total of 20 school leaders: 10 from Shanxi and Hunan in central China, 9 serving in Shanghai and Jiangsu in the east, and 1 from Xinjiang in the west; 18 interviewees were from secondary schools and 2 were from primary schools; 18 were principals and 2 were deputy principals; 1 school leader was both principal and school party secretary, 1 school leader was both school party secretary and deputy principal, and 4 principals were also school vice party secretaries. The interviewees were between 36 and 56 years of age (average age 44.3) and had between 2 and 19 years of leadership experience (average 7.5).

Nine interviews were conducted in interviewees' school offices, and 11 took place in venues used for training courses, workshops, or seminars. Each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, with an average duration of about 70 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Putonghua (the national oral language of China) and were audio-taped with permission. The data were transcribed to provide complete interview records and to facilitate data analysis.

As a small project, the study has some limitations, including its small research scale and the limited number of school leaders involved (i.e., 360 questionnaires and a convenience sample of 20 interviewees) relative to the enormity of China's school sector, the wide geographic distribution of its schools, and its diverse cultures. This study, however, is not intended to yield findings that are generalizable to other school leaders in respondents' schools or to other schools in China. Moreover, because of time and resource constraints and the vast geographical distribution of schools in China, the study only explored Chinese school leaders' self-reported preferences and practices in their daily leadership and management, and did not observe their actual practices or solicit views from their administrators and teachers.

4. Major survey findings

This section presents the findings of the questionnaire portion of the survey. (Findings of the interview portion will be presented in the discussion section.) The questionnaire data reveal that the surveyed Chinese school leaders harbour similar preferences for Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management orientations. A comparison of means for all

question items (T-test and ANOVA) shows that these preferences are statistically significantly different in eight (out of 27) leadership and management items by levels of local development and four items by region (Table 1).

4.1. Coexistence of school leaders' preferences for Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management values

Chinese school leaders' perceptions of school leadership reflected many characteristics and values of both Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management described by Lowe (2003), whose mechanistic stereotyping of these two traditions is open to challenge. On the one hand, they very highly valued the Anglo-American style of leadership and management (Table 1). On the individualistic-competitive dimension, they strongly preferred to demand staff efficiency (mean [M] = 4.72, with 4 and 5 representing agree and strongly agree, respectively) and professionalism (M = 4.70) and they were very eager to promote competition among teachers (M = 4.55). With regards to democratic leadership and management, they highly rated both the promotion of team spirit (M = 4.84) and participation in school administration (M = 4.50). Regarding rationalistic approaches to problem solving, they strongly agreed on the importance of winning arguments with proofs or facts (M = 4.67), objectively analyzing information before acting (M = 4.66), employing due diligence (M = 4.55), and dividing issues into measurable variables (M = 4.08). On the arrangement of short-term manpower, they indicated the importance of clearly defining entry and exit strategies (M = 4.09).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

On the other hand, the surveyed school leaders treasured the values and features of traditional Chinese leadership and management, expecting school leaders to have high moral standards (M = 4.84). On the collectivist-cooperative dimension, they strongly emphasized the promotion of staff cooperation (M = 4.79) and the group/school's interests (M = 4.49). They also preferred not to emphasize personal interests and rewards (M = 3.51, with 3 and 4 representing no preference for disagree or agree and agree, respectively). They strongly preferred to resolve problems using intuitive methods or in ways that work for the school (M = 4.74), maintain harmony and consensus (M = 4.59), treat problems in their entirety (M = 4.69), and cultivate unfolding change (M = 4.34). Regarding autocratic leadership and management, respondents strongly preferred that their teachers strictly follow school rules (M = 4.50), and tended to more agree than disagree on the importance of establishing order and obedience among teachers (M = 3.97), and of requiring teachers to show respect (M = 3.25) and loyalty (M = 3.24) to their superiors. Finally, they were concerned about succession preparations for senior school posts (M = 4.05).

4.2. Influences of local development on school leaders' leadership preferences

Further data analysis suggested that it is difficult to use a single Chinese model, if any, to explain leadership and management across China, because the strength of surveyed Chinese school leaders' leadership and management preferences varied with the level of local or regional development. In general, rural school leaders gave higher ratings to three out of four autocratic aspects of Chinese leadership and management (Table 1); however, their mean differences were not statistically significant. Other than for these three items, urban school leaders consistently gave higher ratings to all dimensions of both Chinese and Anglo-

American leadership and management, by differences ranging from 0.08 to 0.54; about 30% of these items were statistically significant.

Compared to their rural counterparts, urban school leaders indicated a stronger preference for Anglo-American-style leadership and management in promoting staff professionalism (M = 4.77; higher in mean by 0.27 at $p < 0.01$), settling disputes by school rules and regulations (M = 4.27; higher in mean by 0.54, $p < 0.001$), promoting team spirit (M = 4.89; higher in mean by 0.19 at $p < 0.05$), and objectively analyzing information before acting (M = 4.72; higher in mean by 0.22 at $p < 0.01$). Similarly, in the area of Chinese leadership and management, urban school leaders promoted cooperation among teachers (M = 4.84; higher in mean by 0.17 at $p < 0.05$), using intuitive methods to deal with problems in the most effective manner (M = 4.79; higher in mean by 0.17 at $p < 0.05$), maintaining harmony and consensus (M = 4.67; higher in mean by 0.29 at $p < 0.01$), and preparing for succession by having a long-term orientation (M = 4.12; higher in mean by 0.28 at $p < 0.05$). Stronger preferences for Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management were displayed by school leaders working in better-developed parts of the eastern region than those working in middle and western regions; however, the number of items whose mean difference was statistically significant was smaller.

5. Possible explanations and discussion

This section considers some <u>possible</u> explanations for Chinese school leaders' strong preferences for both Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management traditions, and the variation of these preferences according to the extent of local development. These explanations include: Chinese school leaders' international exposure to an increasingly globalized world; continuing influences of national culture; and local differences in school conditions and leadership concerns. To challenge the stereotyping models of Chinese and Anglo-American traditions, I argue that school leaders' perceptions and practices can be continually shaped and reshaped through intertwined interactions with, and responses to, their own changing cultural contexts. As such, educational leadership and management need to be understood and interpreted within the context of a dynamic, multileveled cultural world that ranges from the national level both up to the global and down to the local levels.

5.1. Intensification of exposure beyond national borders in a global age

School leaders are increasingly exposed to ideas, theories, and events beyond their national borders, which can shape their perceptions and practices of leadership and administration. Despite their strong Chinese cultural heritage, the surveyed Chinese school leaders showed a strong preferences for elements of the four major orientations of Anglo-American leadership and management defined by Lowe (2003): individualistic-competitive, rationalistic, democratic, and short-term. This finding contradicts Lowe's stereotypical dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management traditions. It further suggests that the concepts of educational leadership and management in China are not constrained by national borders, but are subject to influences from the rest of the world, particularly Western countries. This can be seen as resulting from China's establishment, since the late 1970s, of diplomatic ties with such Western capitalistic countries as Britain and the United States. In an interview, one principal (P2) acknowledged that 'the world has become a global village', and that China is inevitably more connected to and thereby more affected by the world than before. All interviewed school leaders from urban and rural areas

agreed that, to different extents, Anglo-American culture and leadership and management had influenced their perception and practice of leadership.

The channels for these school leaders' exposure to the 'Western world', according to interviews with principals, can be direct (e.g. through short-term overseas studies, exchange, and visits) and indirect (e.g. internet, reading translated Western works or Chinese works that introduce Western concepts and theories, exposure at training seminars and workshops to academics who have training in Western countries and/or have been exposed to Western cultures through various means). As an older principal (P6) admitted in an interview, the indirect means were the most welcome, because of the 'huge amount of money involved in and less opportunity available for' direct exposure. Both types, however, are important influences on school leaders' concepts of (for example) efficiency, competition, and professionalism, all of which are emphasized in educational leadership and management in Western countries.

Many interviewed school leaders were cautious about applying Anglo-American theories and models in the Chinese context, however. A principal working in Xinjiang in the less-developed western region (P1), warned that principals should be 'cautious' and 'selective' when learning from the West, and 'should not transplant Western models without rigorous attention to the Chinese context'. Two principals (P14 and P19) in well-developed Shanghai (in the eastern region) offered a similar caution about educational borrowing, one of them even warning against 'blind learning and borrowing from the West'.

5.2. Continuing influences of national cultures

Despite having more chances for international exposure, school leaders remain subject to the ongoing influence of their own national culture, as the respondents' strong preferences for values and practices in Chinese leadership and management revealed (Table 1). Similar to their counterparts in the business sector (Hofstede, 1984a), school leaders deal with people (including policymakers, government officials, teachers, students and parents) and human relationships that are embedded with values and preferences representing their society; and the ways in which people, relationships, and things are handled can be socio-culturally specific. In this study, surveyed Chinese school leaders indicated their strong preferences for elements of Lowe's (2003) four major domains of Chinese leadership and management. This suggests that, despite having been exposed to Western countries and concepts, school leaders' views of leadership and management were still rooted in and reflective of their national culture. One interviewee (P1) stated that the 'principles and spirit of Confucianism' helped him deal with 'management problems', such as allocating duties to teachers. Another principal (P3) expressed that she preferred using the 'Chinese doctrines of means and harmony' to 'develop and maintain different types of working relationships' between her and her teachers and among teachers.

Moreover, socio-cultural values, preferences, and principles of leadership and management in a country can be institutionalized through policymaking and by establishing a power structure at the educational system and/or school level(s). For example, the traditional Chinese cultural values of obedience and respecting one's superiors in CPC-led China are reinforced by the integration of politics and education in the educational administration hierarchy at both the education system and school levels (Law, 2009). The relationship between the government and school leaders is mainly vertical. Principals are recruited, appointed, and appraised by governments at the county level and above (State Council, 2001).

The CPC-led state also gives principals an important political role in leading and managing schools and requires them 'to persistently implement the directives, policies and regulations of the CPC and the State' (Communist Party of China Central Committee and State Council, 1993, Article 16); nearly half of all the principals surveyed (such as P2 and P4) stressed the importance of this duty. Being made a principal is not a sinecure; continuous professional development is a basic condition for reappointment. Principals must attend government-organized or -recognized training workshops and seminars (including sessions on political learning, education policy and regulations), take intensive professional training courses, and pursue advanced training certifications if they are to remain principals (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Within the school, the functional relationship between school leaders and staff in China is mainly vertical. Despite the external control exerted by the education bureaucracy, Chinese school principals still have much power over internal school policy and the management and deployment of human and financial resources. Because there is no clear division of power between the principal, party secretary and staff congress, power in daily school administration is often concentrated in the principal's hands (Feng, 2002). Under the principal are three major inter-related authority chains: the department of teaching affairs, which oversees different subject groups; the department of political and moral education, which oversees grade-based administrative units; and the department of research. There is a clear division of labour between these units, all of which operate with detailed job descriptions and standard working procedures (Tian and Cheng, 2007); the heads of each of these units are appointed and appraised by the school's principal. Based on a review of school documents and websites, similar vertical administrative hierarchies exist in the schools of nearly all interviewed secondary-school principals (such as P1, P7, and P19). These vertical relationships and mechanisms can promote an autocratic and paternalist culture in school leadership and management.

5.3. Influences of local development on school conditions and leadership concerns

How school leaders perceive and practise leadership can vary according to local circumstances, which in turn can affect school conditions and leadership concerns. In this study, both urban and rural Chinese school leaders gave similarly high ratings to both Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management models. In part, this is because both were subject to similar Chinese cultural influences and exposures to Western countries.

Behind this broad common pattern, however, are sub-patterns showing regional and especially urban-rural differences in school leaders' views on school leadership and management. Notwithstanding Chinese leadership and management's autocratic dimensions, urban school leaders generally indicated a stronger preference for promoting both Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management than their rural counterparts, with mean differences ranging from 0.02 to 0.54 (Table 1). This can be interpreted as resulting from local conditions influencing school leadership. Compared to urban areas, rural China is less economically developed, rural governments have less revenue, and fewer financial and human resources are available to schools. As a result, school conditions and teachers' salaries and allowances are generally better in urban areas than in rural areas. Making their positions even less attractive is the fact that, despite being poorly compensated, principals of rural schools bear the huge burden of managing schools with very limited financial resources (Sun and Sun, 2006).

These disparities in local economic development and educational investment can lead to further differences in school leaders' views and behaviours preferences in two key areas: major school concerns and international exposure. First, the extent to which local governments financially support schools can affect principals' school leadership and staff management concerns. The interview findings suggest that rural principals were under more pressure to find additional financial resources for improving school conditions and paying teachers' salaries in full and on time, and were more concerned about how to attract teacher education institute graduates and prevent good teachers from moving to urban schools. Urban principals were more concerned with students' academic performance on public examinations, and in enhancing teachers' teaching quality and professional development, including research capability. This partly explains why urban school leaders gave higher ratings to promoting staff efficiency, professionalism, and competition for performance than did their rural counterparts.

Second, school leaders' international exposure varies with the extent of local financial support for their professional development. In this study, Chinese school leaders working in the eastern region had more exposure to, and were more influenced by Western countries than were their rural counterparts. As mentioned earlier, Chinese school leaders used direct and/or indirect means to access the world beyond China. Three interviewed principals in the middle and western regions (P2, P4, and P5) admitted that, because of relatively backward local development levels, they had had far fewer direct and indirect exposures to Western people and ideas than had their urban counterparts in, for example, Shanghai and Beijing (which are a national economic centre and the capital of China, respectively). One respondent (P2) expressed that, in her province, principals and people in general had 'less contact with Western things'; another principal (P5) indicated that rural principals had 'very few direct contacts with Western cultures' and that their 'contacts with the West were mainly through TV and the internet'. He complained that school leaders in rural areas had 'fewer opportunities for professional development' or for learning about new ideas and theories of leadership, Western or Chinese; many rural governments lacked sufficient resources to finance education, let alone seminars for principals' professional development.

Compared with their rural counterparts, urban school leaders have more financial support and more opportunities to interact with Western people and ideas. Geographically, urban principals, as indicated by a Shanghai principal (P15), have more opportunities to undertake part-time master's or doctoral studies or to attend seminars at universities, which are generally established in larger cities and which have more contacts with academics from around the world. Moreover, they enjoy more financial support from their local governments and schools. One principal working in China's eastern region (P13), for example, noted that their district education bureau and schools had cosponsored a trip he and other principals had taken to visit schools in Canada.

5.4. A proposed theoretical framework: Leadership and Management as cultural constructs and practices in a multileveled cultural world

This study's findings suggest that educational leadership and management are rooted and exercised in a multileveled cultural context ranging from the personal and school levels, to the local, national, and international levels. It is not merely a cultural phenomenon promoting the values and customs of a given group (Gerstner and Day, 1994), but also a cultural construct and practice that involves interactions between school leaders and other actors at various levels of a multileveled polity (including teachers, students, parents, governments of

various levels, and other education stakeholders). Each actor can select values, traditions, and practices from any of the numerous levels and dimensions in this multileveled cultural world. As such, the relationships and interactions among these actors are dynamic rather than static, and can involve accommodation and/or clash of cultures at or between levels.

School leaders can be active selectors of values, norms, and customs for leadership. To varying degrees, they can identify with and be committed to leadership values, customs, and expectations from any level or dimension of the multileveled cultural world. In this study, surveyed Chinese school leaders favoured both Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management orientations. They valued some practices of the latter because they might have already deemed them useful in Chinese practice. This can be partly explained by what Wong (2001, 2007) called Chinese leaders' pragmatic approach: using whatever helpful means are available to settle or solve problems or issues. Moreover, although there were considerable similarities in responses, school leaders espoused differing views. This was reflected by the standard deviations on the questionnaire items (ranging from 0.50 to 1.40 in Table 1).

School leaders are not isolated: They are socialized into and often need to adapt to their immediate and wider contexts. Therefore, their leadership traditions and practices do not necessarily entirely reflect their own preferences. At the school level, internal conditions, expectations, relationships, and school dynamics affect school leaders' planning, implementation, and daily operation and school improvement decisions (Fidler, 2000b). In this study, surveyed Chinese school leaders' major concerns regarding school operation were partly determined by school conditions, which in turn depended on the financial support levels provided by local government. Cultures outside of the school can also shape leadership perceptions and practices. Study data have shown that surveyed Chinese school leaders' perceptions reflected the coexistence of Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management orientations, rather than the domination of one over the other. This coexistence contradicts extant studies advocating stereotypical dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management and has two important theoretical implications for understanding and explaining leadership and management.

The first implication is that school leaders serve in an increasingly globalized workplace, society, and world. Since the late twentieth century, the twin forces of globalization and technology have accelerated and intensified the cross-border flow of not only capital, goods and services, but also of people, ideas, information, and images; increased, too, is the interconnectivity and interdependence of peoples in different parts of the world and in various areas of human endeavours, including politics, economy, culture, society and education (Featherstone and Lash, 1995; Masemann, 2002; Robertson, 1992; Rupérez, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999; Waters, 1995). Western and non-Western schools alike are urged to prepare students for the challenges of globalization by equipping them with a global outlook, transnational skills (e.g., proficiency in international languages, and information and communication technology), and basic competences (such as critical thinking and team work) (UNESCO, 1996). In many countries, the state uses education and/or curriculum reform to turn global expectations into demands on teachers and principals (Law, 2003).

School leaders in non-Western countries such as China are increasingly exposed to Anglo-American practices and intellectual and cultural paradigms in educational leadership and management as well as in other fields (Dimmock and Walker, 2000b). Wang (2007) reveals that, after receiving training in Western leadership and management programme at an Australian university, several Chinese educational leaders (including school principals)

shifted their concept of leadership from a task/directive oriented model to a motivation/collaborative oriented one. In this study, many interviewed Chinese school principals who did not have similar opportunities for direct overseas contact still had encountered Anglo-American ideas and theories through indirect means (such as the internet and reading).

The second theoretical implication is that schools serve and are financed by their nations and local communities rather than the world, and that the expectations for and responses of schools (including school leaders) are therefore more influenced by the former than the latter. Despite the convergent effects of globalization on educational values, programs, and practices across national boundaries (Hallinger and Leithwood, 1998), this study does not support the argument that globalization has a homogenizing effect on educational leadership; rather, it supports the position of Dimmock and Walker (2000a) and Fidler (2000a), who stress the importance of the national culture in understanding and explaining educational leadership and management in a given society. The values, relationships, and processes in school operation and leadership can be shaped by national and local actors (including government), economic developments, and socio-political and cultural contexts. As shown in this study, major Chinese leadership traditions and values were embedded in Chinese school leaders' preferences for leadership and management. For example, Chinese school leaders stressed the need for school leaders to display high moral standards, a feature of Chinese leadership traditions.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored the extent to which Chinese school leaders espouse dichotomous or integrated Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management preferences. It has demonstrated the respondents' strong preferences for values and practices of the so-called Chinese and Anglo-American leadership and management traditions, which are often simplistically dichotomized in Chinese management studies, and that local levels of development affect school workplace conditions and leadership concerns. These can be interpreted as resulting from dynamic interactions between school leaders and other actors in a multileveled cultural world; increased exposure of Chinese school leaders to Anglo-American leadership traditions; the ongoing influences of China's national cultures, which have been institutionalized at the system and school levels; and the impact of regional and urban-rural disparities on school conditions and leadership concerns. The findings do not support simplistic, stereotypical dichotomies of cultures or leadership and management models between societies, and thus I have proposed a framework for understanding educational leadership and management as ongoing cultural constructs and practices of school leaders who live and work in a multileveled cultural world.

This framework is more useful for explaining how school leaders in contemporary China perceive leadership and management than the domination of Anglo-American paradigms, the cultural-specific or universal views of leadership, or the traditional dichotomy between Chinese and Anglo-American cultures and leadership and management characteristics. In a world that is still divided by distinctive geopolitical borders and is full of diverse cultures, over-emphasizing the convergent effect of globalization on values, theories, and practices in school leadership and management or the influences of national culture on school leadership and management might become a barrier to cross-cultural interactions and fertilization of

intellectual and cultural frameworks between societies. The over-stressing of stereotyped dichotomies between Anglo-American and non-Anglo-American cultures and leadership and management models might also have this same negative effect. In an inter-connected but changing world, cultures of different societies interact. These traditional cultural dichotomies can become increasingly blurred or even mixed, while new patterns of cultural similarities and differences arise from dynamic, ongoing cross-cultural interactions between peoples with different chemistries in different societies in accordance with their new needs and conditions. The complexity of leadership and management as dynamic cultural constructs and practices is better understood and interpreted in a multileveled than mono- or bi-levelled (school and societal) cultural world.

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