

## **The Prospect of Chinese Schools - from the perspective of dialectics**

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China has gained lots of educational achievements since 1978 when the Reform and Opening-up policy was first implemented. China's education is undergoing dramatic changes in the ages of globalization and digitization. This report is based on the empirical investigation of Chinese students, teachers, parents, and principals for more than two years. This study employs mixed methods to depict an authentic panorama of Chinese schools collecting data through questionnaire survey, interview and observation. The study finds that Chinese schools are filled with vitality and conflicts, namely, the adherence and alienation of educational aims; the joys and sorrows of students' growth; the deep anxiety and high expectation of parents; the persistence and emancipation of teachers; the dilemma and breakthrough of principals. Besides, Chinese school organizations are experiencing evolvement and transformation. What's more, China is looking forward to more extensive and intensive educational international partnership in the globalization era.

Keywords: Chinese schools, educational reform, dialectics, conflicts, prospects

Over nearly the past four decades, Chinese schools<sup>1</sup> have witnessed tremendous reform and yielded profound achievements despite being the world's most populous country since the reform and opening-up in the late 1970s. China met the goal of 9 years compulsory education popularization in 2000. The fiscal expenditure of education has been over 4% of total GDP since 2012. Along with these remarkable educational accomplishments, basic education curriculum reform, teachers' quality enhancing, balanced education development, national college entrance examination (commonly known as Gaokao in Chinese) and educational legal system structuring have been conducted in full swing in China. Nevertheless, Chinese schools have been criticized as strict, stressful, mechanical, depressive, docile and even stifling in for

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese schools here mainly refer to primary and secondary schools in China, specifically including six years of primary school education, three years of lower secondary and three years of upper secondary education.

a long time. Surprisingly, students in Shanghai twice topped the ranking for reading, math, and science Program in International Student Assessment (PISA) both in 2010 and 2013, which arose a great shock of west counterparts. It could be claimed that Chinese schools are full of controversies from a perspective of dialectics. They are not only lauded for high test achievements but also criticized for harming students' development into well-rounded individuals. What's more, a wealth of knowledge and insights about Chinese schools has been out of reach to the world, and Chinese schools seem to wear a mysterious veil in the world. It is imperative to decode Chinese schools and show their real look to the international community.

School education is typically seen as a primary vehicle for building students and even a nation's comprehensive ability. It is thus increasingly viewed as a nation's strategic focus, education is the indispensable approach to success from the perspective of the students; education is the top priority for their children from the perspective of Chinese parents. Confronted an ever-changing world, Chinese schools encounter the challenges of globalization, digitization, the revolution of new science and technology as long as the rapid social reforms. Furthermore, president Xi Jinping introduced the important guiding thought and governing concept "Chinese Dream" in the political agenda in 2013 (Gu, Ma & Teng, 2016). Correspondingly, "Chinese Education Dream" which aims to turn China into a strong human resource nation through enhancing education quality becomes an essential component of the whole picture of "Chinese Dream".

To date, there is an impressive body of literature on Chinese schools (Irving, 1991; Zhang, 1997; Hu, 2010; Hayhoe, 2006; Gu, 2013, 2016; Chou, 2016). This article offers a richly detailed panorama of Chinese schools from the perspective of dialectics. This article aims to answer the following questions: How students, parents, teachers and principals' typical day looks like? What factors are shaping Chinese schools and how? What paradoxical phenomena exist in Chinese schools and why? What is the Chinese schools' prospect in the constantly changing world?

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

Dialectics theory is used in this study to help interpret and analyze the complex and paradoxical Chinese school and education issues. Dialectics often refers to the dilemma situations containing elements of contradiction, conflict, paradox and inconsistency in the ways they are both perceived and resolved. The dialectical theory with logical and causal analysis, emphasizes relationships within a whole on the one hand and stresses that development is often multi-linear and discontinuous on the other hand (Ball, 1979), it can be traced from Socrates through Hegel to pragmatism and contemporary general systems theory. There are various iterations of dialectics theories, the prevailing Marxist dialectic theory claims that dialectics is reality, united logic and empirical observation. The idea of development through conflict, the notions of contradiction, opposition, negation, dilemma and paradox are the essential issues should be dealt with in dialectics theory (Rytina & Loomis, 1970). The dialectical theory has emerged as one of the most influential approaches to understanding the relational and contradictory nature of social affairs. Historically, dialectics theory is used to analyze the relationship between knowledge and power (Rescher, 1977; Rescher, 2007).

This study employs dialectics theory to outline the intricately entwined Chinese school reforms and education reality. Under the pressure of global competition, the Chinese government is eager to increase national competitiveness through school reform and education success. Meanwhile, school education itself possesses educational, cultural, political, economic functions. They are the forces to dominate school reform but often contradict each other in

practice. The individual schools sometimes could not combine the conflicting ideas and compromise to the reality.

China pursues human-based educational idea. It is people who are the principal actors in Chinese schools. This research tries to reveal real life of four key groups of people. Specifically, they are students, parents, teachers and principals. Through a detailed, profound analysis and explanation of those four distinct groups' typical day, this study attempts to explore reality full of contradictions in Chinese schools. This study includes schools' organization reform as well.

## **Methodology**

This research adopted mixed methods and conducted a systematic and empirical investigation of the issues and prospects in Chinese schools over two years. Mixed methods use both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. They are often marginally mixed in that the types of questions asked and inferences made are either quantitative or qualitative in nature (Truscott et al., 2010). Moreover, they are considered uniquely suited to examine complex educational issues. Mixed methods in this study specifically consist of questionnaire, field observation, in-depth interview and document analysis.

## ***Design***

The aim of this study is to figure out Chinese schools' real conflicts and prospects. To this end, a complementary mixed method design is used in that clarification and elaboration of the results from one method is sought through the results of the other method (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003). Here, a mixed method design is efficient for making sense of survey results in the words of students, parents, teachers, principals themselves, cross-validating findings from both quantitative and qualitative data sources. In this way, we try to excavate the ideas and practices of Chinese schools, and meanwhile shed light on the prospects.

Inspired by John Goodlad's masterpiece *A Place Called School*, with a view of unfolding the inner conflicts and mechanism of Chinese schools, this study targets the pivotal Chinese school stakeholders, who are students, parents, teachers and principals as the protagonists. In order to know what kind of study is expected by international readers, we held discussions with international faculty in education in Beijing Normal University to collect some considerations through the lens of sojourners. Previous researchers have agreed that Chinese schools are full of fierce competitions, spoon-fed instruction, and smothering of creativity. Therefore, it is almost a stereotype of Chinese schools that students live under pressure and in tension, and teachers are extremely stern and strict (Xu, 2015; Pan et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2016). But given the drastically school education reforms, Chinese schools have changed a lot. It is time to break those stereotypes and have a comprehensive understanding of Chinese schools. Based on those ideas, mixed methods combined with the questionnaire, in-depth interview, on-site observation, document analysis are all used in this study. Most importantly, revealing the significant or latent paradox and conflicts from a perspective of dialectics remains the primary research goal.

## **Design of questionnaires**

The research team develops questionnaires for parents, teachers and principals separately. Structured and closed questionnaires are designed for the sake of large samples. Firstly, the questionnaire for teachers references the structure and parts of the questions of *Teaching and Learning International Survey* teacher questionnaire in TALIS 2013 and the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* in 2011. Based on the pilot study data and the features of Chinese teachers' profession, this study develops the *Portraits of Chinese Schools*:

*Teachers Questionnaire*. The questionnaire includes seven main categories composed of 37 individual questions. The questions range from basic information, education philosophy, teaching experience, professional development, communication and feedback, teachers' research to homeroom teachers' daily work. The *Portraits of Chinese Schools: Parents Questionnaire* consists of 22 questions, covering the following six aspects, the parents' primary information, expectations for children, choice of schools, shadow education, home-school cooperation, and parents' involvement in education specifically. There are 30 questions in *Portraits of Chinese Schools: Principals Questionnaire*, covering a broad range of issues as follows: selection and appointment of principals, education philosophy, school improvement, work time and pressure, school resources and honor.

### Design of Interview

Interviews enable the participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and express how they regard situations from their point of view. The interview is not solely concerned with collecting data about life, and it is a part of life itself (Cohen & Morrison, 2000). The collected data by interviewing is the most indispensable component to describe what Chinese schools look like and explain why Chinese schools look like this. As the guidance of interview, the interview protocol will exert a profound influence on the data. Interview protocol has a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses (Norman et al. 2000). As for this study, the interview protocols are developed by the research team composed of faculty members, Ph.D. students and master students majoring in comparative education and education management. Key questions relate to, 1) students' daily life, perceptions of collective identity and experience of *Gaokao*; 2) homeroom teachers' routine, teachers' self-images and self-identity; teachers' perception and experience of research; 3) parents' typical day, parents' education philosophy; parents' experience of school choosing; 4) principals' roles and daily work; principals' selection; excellent principals' innovation leadership. Furthermore, this research makes necessary modifications to the interview protocols after a pilot test in 5 students and 3 teachers. This study employs the in-depth, semi-structured interview. Besides, individual, focus-group, face-to-face and online verbal interchange forms are all used. Similarly, the study develops four sets of interview protocols for teachers, students, parents, and principals in corresponding to the questionnaires.

### ***Participants***

Participants are the members of Chinese schools' community. For the questionnaire survey, this study collects 4266 valid questionnaires from 896 teachers, 2930 parents and 440 principals from different parts of China. The participants distribute in 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four centrally administered municipalities. To be specific, the sampling varies a lot regarding their personal identity, demographic and social roles, and deliberately selected to represent different categories.

Among all the 896 teacher participants, there are 94.8% regular teachers, 3.1% temporary teachers and 2.1% substitute teachers. 76.3% of the teacher participants teach Chinese, mathematics or English, the three major subjects of the curriculum. Besides, the proportion of teacher participants who teaches in primary schools, lower secondary schools, and upper secondary schools are 79.7%, 13.5% and 6.8% respectively. As for the parent's participants, those with a regular university education account for the highest percentage, 26.9% for fathers and 26.6% of mothers among all the 2930 participants; regarding occupation, 24.7% fathers and 19.8% mothers are private business owners. Furthermore, among all the 440 principals, 65% are aged between 40 to 50 years old. 41.1% have served in their current position for less

than 5 years, 81.1% are bachelor degree holders, 57.3% come from non-urban areas and 96.1% are from public schools.

As far as the in-depth interview, taking into consideration of the samples' representativeness and typicality, this study selects 14 principals, 38 teachers, 28 students and 27 parents as interviewees respectively, they come from urban and rural areas, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools, public and private schools. It is worthy to mention that to know students' *Gaokao* experience, three freshmen from two universities are selected in this study.

### ***Data Collection***

#### Phase One: Questionnaire

This research collects questionnaire data from September 2015 to March 2016. Internet has increased the possibilities for myriad ways that one can collect data through online venues in conducting both quantitative and qualitative methods through various information communication technologies in the age of Internet (Merriam, 2015). Given to the full range of the participants, this study takes the advantage of electronic questionnaires and resort to Wechat, the most popular social media in China currently. To get the more valid data by accessing to the targeted participants, this research launches an information exchange platform via the official Wechat account of *China Education Daily* where respondents could fill in questionnaires online by cellphone. *China Education Daily* possesses more than 1 million regular subscribers who care Chinese education a lot, most of them are the teachers or who works in schools, which helps make sure the data' authenticity, authority and validity.

#### Phase two: Interview

The interview is necessary in this study for observing participants' behavior, feeling or how they interpret the world around them (Merriam, 2015). Based on the research questions and interview protocols, this study conducts the semi-structured in-depth interview for a total number of 105 representatives consisting of 28 students, 36 teachers, 27 parents and 14 principals, the interview data are collected during March 2015 to February 2016, the total number of script Chinese characters is nearly 262 000. Besides, this study develops two focus group interviews consisting of 5-7 participants in lower secondary and upper secondary schools in Beijing, encouraging them to provide details. Students' discussion is guided based on the protocol, and free talk is allowed in the discussion. Meanwhile, for five primary and secondary school teachers in Henan, Shandong and Anhui provinces who prefer to talk via telephone, the online interview was conducted, which is voice-to-voice and real-time interview via telephone. All the interviews are recorded after obtaining the written or oral consent of the interviewees to keep accurate and complete records of the discussion, and each interview lasts approximately 30 minutes to 60 minutes, including the time to explain the purpose of the interview. All interviews are conducted in confidentiality and the names of interviewees are withheld according to the agreement mutually reached.

#### Phase three: On-site Observation

Observation is a primary means by which people develop their knowledge of the world they live in, and some authentic data are more easily accessible (Taylor, 2015). In some settings, the physical environment, devices, facilities, activities and participants' performance in their daily routine are exposed to the researchers. Through on-site observation the dilemma and conflicts in Chinese schools could be accessed and understood by outsiders. To increase the

understanding of the participants and their views of the certain research questions, this study also conducts on-site non-participant observation during September 2015 to February 2016 in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Zhejiang, Jilin and other six provinces, by which researchers go to the schools, classrooms, students' homes, principals' offices, and participate in school meetings, teacher meetings and teachers' seminars carefully. During the on-site observation, researchers take notes about what is occurring on research sites. Based on the field notes, different types of school activities and the participants' performance are recorded.

### ***Data Analysis***

As for the quantitative data, we analyze the questionnaire data by employing SPSS 18.0 to demonstrate a broader picture of Chinese schools, stakeholders' perception of their roles in schools and opinions to certain kinds of schools' issues. The software employs a combination of statistics-based and linguistics-based methods and determines how frequently terms occur in the data and establishes a semantic network that creates a probabilistic analysis of the co-occurrence of terms (Jim & Amanda, 2010). First of all, from descriptive statistics, we observe the teachers' characteristics, their attitude towards school education; parents' characteristics, parents' education philosophy, the perception of school-choosing and school education; principals' characteristics, how they manage a school and their perspectives on school reform. Secondly, we observe the relationship between teacher's professional development and teaching efficiency, principals' time management and school reform, and correlation analysis is used in this study.

What's more, the analysis of qualitative data (interviews, on-site observations, documents) aims to explore the participants' perceptions of Chinese education from their perspectives and real-life experience. The interviews are transcribed verbatim in Chinese, and content analysis is used to examine the interview data. N-Vivo 8 is adopted here to facilitate the two level's coding of the interviewees' responses, clarifications and thoughts that relate to the research questions in this study, which are open and thematic coding.

Open coding is used during the data analysis phase to identify the similar and reoccurring themes. As the total number of 261 800 transcripts are analyzed, the researchers take advantage of thematic coding to construct different subcategories. Sort the data is recursive or iterative, it involves continually raising questions in the field (Le Compte, 2010). Thematic coding is the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data, and the emerging issues become the categories for analysis (Jennifer & Eimear, 2006). Those subcategories are later merged to form the final main categories included in this research: educational aim, students' schooling experience, parents' attitude towards school, teachers' persistence, principals' dilemma and schools' organizations involvement in Chinese schools.

We rely on the techniques of thematic analysis and cross-case (Mile & Huberman, 1994). Comparison is made, especially, to know the disparities and similarities of the participants' views on the particular issues. As the participants' responses often do not address the research questions directly, we, therefore try to identify clues by examining all aspects of their understanding of Chinese schools and analyze the data logically and deliberately.

### ***Trustworthiness and Accuracy of Data***

Triangulation is a latent construct and is used to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the findings. Triangulation is a method for looking at data in different ways or from different points of view (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Multilevel mixed-method research data provides more possibilities to guarantee the trustworthiness and accuracy of data in this study by triangulation.

The study team is composed of more than 20 professional researchers, especially three professors who are experts in Chinese education. Peer debriefing, member check, and journaling are all the effective measures to make sure the trustworthiness and accuracy of data (Amankwaa, 2016). Besides, the research team accomplishes triangulation through sequential data analysis. After reading through the data and initial analysis, we compare findings between quantitative and qualitative data. We validate emerging themes, make corrections, comparisons and identify areas for further study according to the previous analysis (Jim & Amanda, 2010).

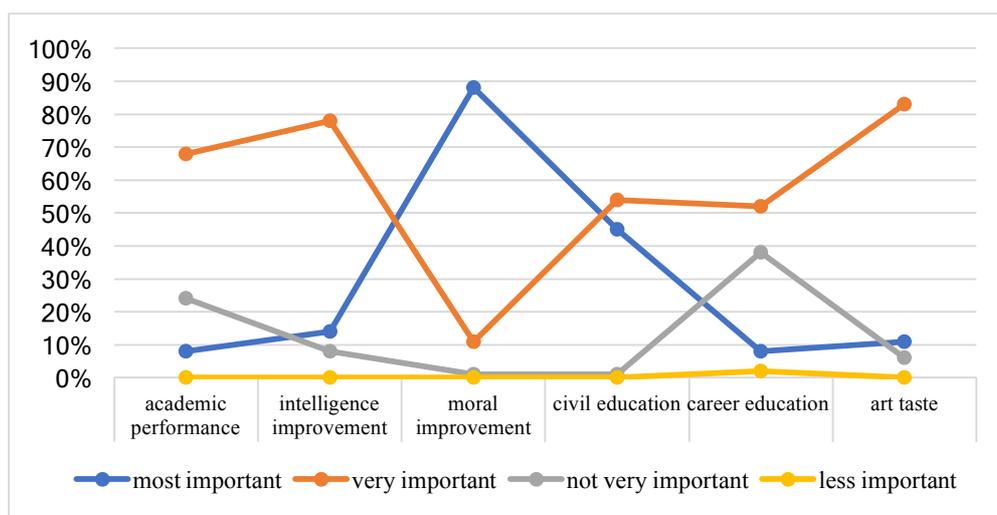
## Findings and Discussion

After further in-depth research, the analytic process described in the previous sections yielded five interpretable findings related to the issues in Chinese schools. In general, one of the Chinese schools' characteristics is full of conflicts. In line with these findings, the conflicts prove to be a powerful tool for unearthing the participants' struggle with Chinese education.

### *Educational Aims' Adherence and Alienation*

Educational aims can give direction to the educational process, and provide a criterion for evaluating the educational process. Similar to ancient western countries, traditional Chinese education focuses on moral education, pursuing of personality's harmony of truth, kindness and beauty. This is the chief educational aim for two thousand years. The insertion of western education principles exerts a profound influence on Chinese education. Chinese educational goals' approach to the dualism enforced by external and internal forces has taken two major directions since the reform and opening-up in 1978. They are adherence to and alienation from the traditional educational aims at same time. Many of Chinese principals would pull the orientation more towards both students' moral education and intelligence improvement, but surprisingly, as much as 88% principals insist that moral development is the primary education aim, whereas, only 8% principals indicate that academic performance is of the most importance. Apparently, those principals' view on the importance of career education is rather balanced (Figure1).

Figure 1. The Importance of Different Education Aims from the Perspective of Principals



### Socialization vs. Individualization

Historically, the educational aim links closely with politics and social development. When

education is a privilege of the social elite, the particular educational goal is to cultivate governors, as what Confucius said: *officialdom is the natural outlet for good scholars*. However, educational goals, like both the concept and process of education, are historical, ephemeral and changing, which are also contextual, political, normative, dynamic and contested (Marples, 2012). Education should meet the needs of students' individual learning in the contemporary society. Facilitating students' well-rounded development gains the upper hand of the evolvement of Chinese school educational aim. The juxtaposition of socialization and individualization has become the most significant conflict in Chinese schools.

Along with the great social reform since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, China formulated socialist education aim. Chinese educational aims are as a fusion of principles from its educational legacy with Marxist-Leninist principles (Zou, 1985). Emile Durkheim ever pointed out that education lies in the socialization of youth, he focused on character as a socially constituted, socially enacted, socially monitored and regulated essence (Prus, 2011). Promoting students' socialization is one of the most important educational aims in Chinese schools. Chinese schools make students socialized gradually by the cultivation of collective identity, for instances, holding the flag-raising ceremony every week; setting collective border by the identification symbols such as school motto/school badge/school song/school uniform; defending collective right to speak; distinguishing groups by members' self-encouragement and team building. (Ma & Rao, 2016)

However, it is imperative to ask if it is more important for the student to learn how to live in a group than to obtain knowledge? There is a paradox here. The modern society requires school education to be more individualized in one hand and students to learn to live together with others in another. In line with the idea of individualization, Chinese schools are undergoing great reform and lots of measures are taken, such as making every student grow freely; expanding students' daily living and study ability; tailoring learning and making it individualized; setting various kinds of student clubs according to students' individual interests; diversification of the curriculum; holding home-school interaction activities; carrying out teachers' home visiting; providing psychological helps to students; focusing on students' individual characteristics in teaching etc.

### All-round Development vs. Core Competencies

It is as an axiomatic that education serves the needs for the all-round development of students and makes a contribution to enhancing students' ability. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, China has proposed to make student develop in intellectual, moral, physical, aesthetic education. China issued *Compulsory Education Law* in 2000 and pointed out that education should combine with labor. This idea has become national education policy. As a result, all-round development adds labor education as the fifth dimension. The policies amply show that China attaches great importance to all-round development of students, which intends to educate students to have ideals, morality, knowledge and physical strength (Zou, 1985).

Manifestly, the philosophy of all-round development is a necessary foundation and guild-line which leads students to grow up with healthy mind and body. The development of society and the approaching of globalization era pose a much higher standard to Chinese students. Therefore, the idea of core competencies for school education is brought out in response to the new times and the global competition for talents in China. The U.S and international organizations, such as European Union(EU) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) initiated the education core competencies framework responding to changing social and economic dynamics, which is called the "21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills" (US), "21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies" (OECD), and "Key Competencies" (EU) in the late of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Core competencies in the literature on education is a range of concepts to support personal development, employability, and socialization (Holmes & Hooper, 2000). Influenced by “21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills” in the global community, China constructed an overall framework based on intensive research to keep pace with educational high-performing countries. The Chinese government puts core competencies as the essential part of curriculum reform, which accentuates on the competence of cooperation, interaction, creativity and critical thinking. Core competencies favor student-centered teaching method, for instance, problem-based learning and project-based learning that allows students to collaborate, work on authentic problems and engage with the international community (Andrew & Daniel, 2010). China set up a well-structured core competence framework in 2016 (Fig.2), and predictably, core competencies framework will guide Chinese schools’ curriculum reform in the future. It is also important to mention that in this framework, students’ all-round development is the school education’s final goal, and independent development, social engagement and cultural foundation are the vehicles to promote students develop into integrated persons.

Table 1. Chinese Education Core Competence Framework

Chinese Education Core Competence Framework		
Integrated Person	Independent Development	Learn to study
		Healthy life
	Social Engagement	Duty & Responsibility
		Practice & Innovation
	Cultural Foundation	Humanistic Connotations
		Scientific Spirit

Source: Core Competences Research Team (2016). Core Competences for Chinese Students’ Development. *Journal of the Chinese Society of Education*, 16(10):1-3.

### Inheritance vs. Innovation

China has a long education history and accumulates rich culture heritages, and Chinese people attach great importance to educational work. Chinese schools play a decisive role in inheriting culture, cultivating innovative spirit and meanwhile generating knowledge. Inheritance and innovation seem to contradict to each other literally, and there is a dilemma between inheriting and cultivating innovative spirit in Chinese schools.

Undeniable, students, teachers and parents are culture inheritors. As the importance of traditional culture heritage is recognized again in post-industrial society, Chinese schools seek to integrate Confucian and ethical culture into the formal curriculum. More so, there even appears traditional culture fever in many schools, for instance, students need to recite the *Confucius’ Analects*, *Ti Tzu Kui* (disciple gauge) and exercise calligraphy in some primary schools. But some people claim that Chinese traditional culture heritage surpasses innovative deeds to some extent, and for instance, there is an old Chinese saying which goes *wood show in the forest wind will destroy*. Some people criticize Chinese traditional culture as teaching students to be obedient, stifling their imagination. This criticism fits the argument that Chinese traditional educational system lacks the potential to innovative capability. Chinese culture is commonly understood not to favor creative behavior for a long time (Zhang, 2014).

Moreover, there is also a high calling for cultivating students’ innovative thought, and the

advent of scientific and technical revolution has proposed a new challenge to schools to develop creative talents. Chinese schools confront with the dilemma between traditional Confucian ethics and new educational ideas and concepts. A question, *why Chinese educational system cannot cultivate outstanding talents?* was raised by Qian Xuesen, one of the most well-known scientists in China. The question has aroused widespread and heated discussion about how to cultivate students' critical thinking and innovative thought on a national scale at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now Chinese schools pay more attention to foster creativity and critical thinking and embark on substantial curriculum reform to build free class atmosphere.

### Mass Education vs. Elite Education

Mass education refers to the education which serves the majority people broadly (Gu, 1990). Chinese primary and secondary school has spread rapidly in the late of 20<sup>th</sup> century and achieved the goal of popularization of compulsory schooling. Mass education is a striking feature of Chinese education modernization. China's primary schools' net enrollment rate reached to 99.88%, lower secondary school, upper secondary school's gross enrollment rates are 104% and 87% in 2015 respectively (Ministry of Education, 2015). Those figures gave a clear picture of the facts of Chinese mass education. Rather, education massification has led to the development of the argument that 'more means worse,' (Lomas, 2002). On most occasions, mass education is the synonym of a poor-quality provision to defend social justice.

With the mass education spread in China universally, the education quality of mass education has always been perceived to be inferior to elite education. There is increasingly high demand for elite education. On this basis, Chinese schools expand education supply, and improve education quality consistently on one hand, and meanwhile provide elite education to meet parents' and students' demands and national needs of talent personnel on the other. More precisely, mass education and elite education should be one body with two wings, Chinese government's policy has been focusing on education equity and balanced development of local education. This policy has not only laid emphasis on expanding education supply but also has improved education quality consistently in recent years. The efforts ensure all the students, rather than just a privileged few to have the opportunity to access to high-quality school education.

### Exam-oriented Education vs. Quality-oriented Education

The educational system in China has been test-based since the establishment of the civil service examination for over a millennium despite periodic disruptions (Yi, 2014), and the importance of testing is so deeply embedded in Chinese tradition that educational tests have become part of the Chinese cultural mindset (Zhou 2005). Exam-oriented education had been the leading educational form before the late of the 1990s. Chinese school education has a stereotypical image that it focuses solely on rote for examination. But the exam-oriented education has been criticized for killing students' personality, and has many social functions such as selecting qualified students for educational system fairly, accelerating social mobility.

The exam-oriented education has dominated the school landscape of China for a long time. However, the exams themselves have severe consequences for students' advancement in their education. Exam-oriented education composed of rigorous and standard tests encourages rote rather than students' learning experience and high-order thinking skills. Thus, students cannot develop in an all-round way under overwhelming pressure of fierce competition. In order to build a country rich in human resources, and to keep pace with the western nations' education, China formulated the quality-oriented education aim in the 1990s, providing chances for every

students' all-around development, and making students take initiatives in their growth (Ministry of Education, 1999). The concept of quality-oriented education stems from the idea of putting the student as the subject of education and promoting every student's development by education. Based on the philosophy of quality-oriented education, the Chinese government has embarked on various education reforms and issued many documents. Among the official documents on education reform, there was a seminal one titled Outline of the Curriculum Reform for Basic Education (Ministry of Education 2001). Since then New Curriculum Reform (NCR) has been implemented throughout the country, which has made Chinese schools reform has adhered to the philosophy of quality-oriented examination and the exam-oriented education has started to lose ground. The activity-based class, extra-curriculum activities have boomed in Chinese schools as well. More important is that the focuses of assessment have been changed from stressing on elitist selection to enhancing student learning. Chinese educational reform signifies that basic education is striving mightily to break out of the hindering fetters of exam-oriented education and is taking another significant step toward quality education (Bao, 1997).

*“The real education is a healthy education caring students' growth.”*  
— a lower secondary school principal in Zhejiang

### ***Students' Joys and Sorrows in Growth***

Chinese students spend most of their time on schooling. They learn knowledge, make friends and make themselves socialized via school attendance. A school is a place where a child grows up gradually, and school life is not only a kind of kaleidoscope full of games, curiosities, and interests, but also a sort of purgatory to some extent filled with tests, competition and rules. The fierce competition of Chinese schools and the high expectation from Chinese parents leave Chinese students in a paradoxical position. Chinese students experience joys and sorrows in their schools.

### **Unbearable Pressure**

As mentioned above, China is a country which traditionally that relies on exam-based assessment to determine educational achievement and future social status. School life is composed of all sorts of exams, which put students into anxiety. Especially the high-stake National College Entrance Examination exerts tremendous pressure on students, and even impairs students' psychological health. Living in a prevailing exam-centered culture, Chinese students are primarily assessed based on test scores. School is under the name of “examination hell” for putting tremendous pressure on students.

In order to have a good performance in exams, students must be well-prepared. Schools are evaluated mainly by students' test scores, and also teachers' rewards and accountability are related to their students' performance closely. For secondary school students, there are eight class periods or more than 8 hours each day in school and other tutorial/specialty classes after school. Students' workload is formidable no matter in the weekdays, weekend or the holidays. Piles of homework have encroached students almost all their spare time, and it is particularly the case for upper secondary students. Students have to shoulder the tremendous pressure of high standard achievement test, and school choice etc. In addition, on the territory of the peer relationship, the distorted competition ruins student friendship. For most of the Chinese students, bad behaviors and poor academic performance will be interrogated by their parents, who usually shoulder the hope of the whole family. This turns to be a heavy moral burden for the kids.

*“With a test every three days, an examination every five days, I have no time to think about the meaning of the tests, the only wish is to improve my academic performance gradually and pass the college entrance examination smoothly.”  
— an upper secondary school student*

### Agony of Outside School Temptation

Chinese education’s success attributes to more time spent on studying instead of extra-curriculum activities. Guaranteeing intensive classroom learning is crucial for students to have a good performance in exams. Chinese students are confined to schools and books to study wholeheartedly. For most students, there is a scant scale of leisure time. They usually are segregated from social life and immerse themselves in the study all around the days. In order to keep students focused on studying, Chinese schools have stringent regulations to confine the usage of computer, TV, cell phone, and other electronic amusement facilities only for learning in schools, so they become a temptation to students. But playing game is the very nature of Children. Electronic games are the best choice for the Child who has no playmates, but most children cannot access to the digital productions for the purpose of entertainment under parents’ harsh supervision. According to lots of reports, there are still many teenagers who cannot resist the temptation to addict themselves to electronic games and neglect their studies. It does not only do harm to children’s mental and physical health but also lead the children to astray.

### Glamour from Cooperation and Competition

Cooperation mingled with competition in class and extra-class activities is a remarkable phenomenon in Chinese schools. As group collaboration is beneficial to cultivate team spirit, and to bring out students’ learning potential and to cooperate with others is an essential skill student need to learn to survive in the future society, group collaborative learning has been reinforced in Chinese classrooms after the implementation of New Curriculum Reform. Most Chinese students are the only-child in their family, the absence of siblings makes them lonely on most occasions. In schools, they can make friends with their peers and cooperate with them gladly. Cooperation can help students overcome shyness and fear, and make students braver. Meanwhile, Chinese teenagers compete with their peers in many aspects, such as their learning achievements, school ranking, hobbies and interests, etc., among which academic competition holds the highest stake. Students compete for limited educational facilities and better educational opportunities. Competitions can be incentives for them to make progress continuously. On most occasions, cooperation and competition are mixed organically in Chinese schools. Moderate pressure and interesting cooperative activities are twin forces to help students step forward.

*“The reason for me to campaign for a class leader is to improve my competence, and to become more competitive in future job-hunting.” — a lower secondary school student in Beijing*

### Joy of Colorful Activities

The Chinese government issued the *Outline for National Mid-Term and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Planning (2010-2020)* in 2010, this planning highlighted the importance of alleviating students’ academic burden by decreasing the amount of homework and increasing extra-curriculum activities. Chinese schools therefore organize a lot of interesting activities, such as sport festival and art festival, etc. Parents believe that extra-curriculum activities will have a good impact on personal life and competitiveness in the future.

The proliferation of student extra-curriculum activities reveals the fact that Chinese schools have made great efforts to steer education from examination to pay much attention to students' life and learning process. Students improve their leadership in the process of organizing, planning and coordinating extra-curriculum activities. The colorful activities themselves are cheerful, but it is an agony when they become the tool of competition, the students will experience strong feelings of confusion, helplessness, disappointment, loneliness instead of curiosity, interests, pleasure and enjoyment.

### Happiness of Dream Coming True

As indicated above, Gaokao is of epic importance in China's basic education saga. The high-stake Gaokao links with the individual student's fate to some extent. After the unprecedented higher education expansion since 1999, the college admission rates have improved a lot. But to gain access to elite universities via Gaokao is still a dream for most Chinese students. The scores in Gaokao are the most critical factor for college admission and Gaokao is regarded as the unique pass to success. Admitting by prestigious universities can bring reputation and fame to schools and parents. If students have a good performance in Gaokao and have an opportunity to study in the elite universities, it likes a dream coming true after 12 years hard work. Viewing a longer life trajectory, Gaokao has not only helped students gain knowledge and skills, but also improved resilience, and laid a solid foundation for their growth. Couldn't be Gaokao a powerful tool to help students realize their dream?

On the contrary, there are some sorrows in Gaokao. As the Chinese conventional wisdom indicates, *"if you wish to be the best person, you must suffer the bitterest of the bitter,"* Chinese students are told and taught to endure hardship in the study for a long run benefit. They constrain themselves, focus themselves in the study without distractions to meet the expectation of their parents. The success of Gaokao is viewed as the last triumph of the long and torturous Gaokao journey. Unfortunately, the failure of Gaokao exerts dreadful strike for students. Some students become psychologically twisted after failing the exam. It is noticed that a considerable number of students get lost when they start their college life for lacking independent living capabilities.

### ***Parents' Deep Anxiety and Expectation***

Many Chinese families have a single child in China. Parents dedicate all of their efforts to their child. Whereas, parents demand a lot of their only child at the same time, especially a high grade in tests, which is the path to the successful future of their Child. Chinese parents treat child harshly in the name of love, they take care child discreetly in life, do almost everything except study for Child. China's new generation is growing up in conflicts between parents' rational and irrational choices, and between parents' contradictory and painful decisions and actions (Zhu, 1999).

### Anxiety Caused by Too High Expectations

To understand Chinese parents' nursing philosophy, it is necessary to comprehend Chinese traditional culture. Chinese traditional education philosophy has an expectation for a perfect life and happiness. *"Everyone wants their son to become a dragon and their daughter to become a phoenix"*<sup>2</sup> is Chinese parent educational doctrine, and every parent wants their only child to succeed (Kajanus, 2015). The expectation of Chinese parents is not only much higher than students' self-expectation but also is disjointed from the reality of the society and their

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<sup>2</sup> This phrase means parents have great ambitions to their children.

child's ability. To a certain extent, the parent expectation is irrational and Utopian.

A survey of Chinese parents finds that 60.9% parents, whose education background is secondary school and below, expect their children to get a bachelor degree or a master degree, the higher, the better. From the perspective of Chinese parents, education is more like a life-saving straw for their children, because education is looked upon as the guarantee for the children's bright future. Whether rich or not, one will be somebody as long as he or she studies hard. The competition for college admission already begins at the primary school stage; more specifically, it is a competition of grades. Parents have a strict requirement and high standard to the child, and they expect children to be obedient and studious.

### Arrogant Criticism of School Education

It is noteworthy that child is the special treasure for most of the Chinese parents, and they want their child perfect and excellent in every single aspect, specifically in academic performance. With all reforms, Chinese schools are expected to take many roles, such as delivering equal education opportunities, keeping high-quality education and facilitating students' socialization. Chinese schools are often criticized for not meeting Chinese parents' unrealistic and ambitious expectations. There are 8% of the parents do not agree that the school teachers are dedicated and qualified. Chinese parents put a lot of pressure on schools to prepare their children to be so-called successful persons. Many parents send their children to schools, but do not have a proper trust on the school teachers.

To be sure, most Chinese parents recognize the positive role of schooling on their children's growth, and believe schooling will benefit their children's development and career readiness. It is ironic that Chinese parents do not trust anyone in child's education but themselves, even the teachers in schools. Our survey finds 8% of the parents strongly disagree that the school does well in educating their children. Parents often challenge school education, and always claim their utterly dominant right to their children's study. They often criticize teachers and schools for the sake of education quality. Chinese schools are burdened excessively by the high-demand of parents. Fortunately, many measures have been taken to involve parents in schools. The parent-school cooperation activities provide a platform for parents to express themselves and contribute their efforts to improve school education. But, unfortunately, some Chinese parents concern only their personal agenda and view others as competitors, and the only concern is to make their children better other than others' children. Therefore, their attitude toward school-parent cooperation is not positive.

### Self-loss Life

Obviously, Confucian philosophy has had a long and profound influence on Chinese parents' philosophy of education and nurture. Chinese culture focuses on children to a remarkable degree and suggests that this is the other, less noticed, side of filial piety (Hayhoe, 2006). Chinese parents regard the notion of "giving up everything for children" as a "virtue," and children's future becomes the whole value and significance of their life.

Children's education is the top priority of Chinese parents. Education issues also give rise to the concerns from all walks of the society. Children's academic performance, especially their grades have become the yardstick to measure parents' success or failure, and parents' concern for and involvement in their children's education and future reach unparalleled levels. Parents tear between the idealistic and utilitarian views of their children's education. Chinese parents usually put their only child at the center of the whole family's life. They attend to their child exhaustively, arranging a broad range of child's life, from the trivial things such as all the

details of accommodation to the major decision concerning child's future, for instance, choosing hobbies and filing school application forms for their child. Most parents devote all their energy, time and money to raise a child, providing the best to child. All the 2930 parent respondents in our survey help their children to check the homework every day. In China, parents descend to children's "servants," and are dedicated to serve their children, and sometimes even spoil their children.

### Utmost Support

Children's education is not only parents' unshakable responsibility, but also the achievement of their lives according to traditional Chinese culture. Parents have a strong sense of responsibility. Parents pay everything (time, energy, money) for their children. Parents teach children by words and deeds, forming family's culture: rules, morals, value, reading, etc. Parents or even grandparents do all the housework, and they treat their children like little emperors. Children are the center of the family, whose academic performance is closely concerned by the whole family. Chinese parents' devotion is directly correlated to their expectation of their children. Parents frantically urge their children to study, so that their children can gain the edge at the starting point. Children are trained to be studying machines from a very early stage.

Child rearing becomes increasingly costly in both time and finance. Thereafter, Chinese parents work themselves to the bone for their Children' education. So as to make their children excel in academic performance and versatile in life, it is common for parents to send their children to expensive shadow education institutions to learn math, English, Arts, Music, and any other subjects. The expense of a child's shadow education can range from 1000 Yuan to more than 5000 Yuan per month. Our survey reveals that approximately 75% of the parents spend 1000-2000 Yuan in shadow education for a child every month, 16%, 5% and 4% of the parents, , spend 2000-3000, 3000-4000, and over 4000 Yuan respectively. Diverse practices of private tutoring are employed to make the child look like a full-developed person and become more competitive in school and even in future job market. The utmost support is detrimental to children's independent growth, and they rely much on their parents, and grow up as the learning machine and "giant infants" (referring to an adult without living abilities).

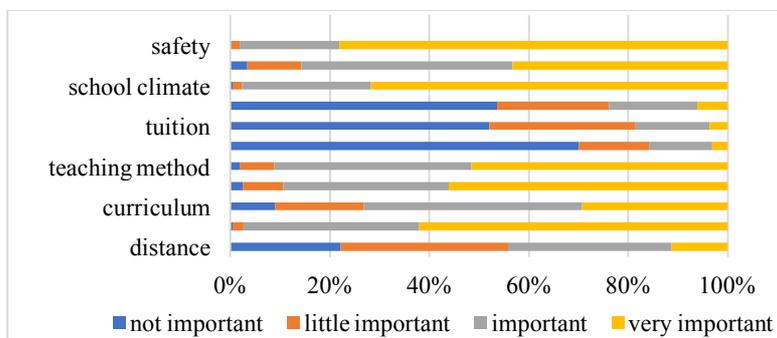
### School Choice under Neighborhood School Policy

Chinese government's policy has been focusing on education equity and balanced development of regional education. The Chinese government has issued a series of policies to prohibit public school choosing. However, there are always high demands for elite education. The "key schools" are highly respected and pursued by students and intensely supported by the government. Key schools are elite schools in China which admits only about 4 % of the secondary population (mostly from urban areas) but enjoy resources up to double the level of non-key schools (Lewin and Hui 1989). Previous studies indicate that social capital correlates students' school performance. Education becomes a key to the acquisition of work-related social capital, and in turn the social capital becomes a key to the acquisition of elite education. There is no exception of school-choice, wealthy middle-class parents send their children to leading state schools, it is reported that around 70 % of the students' population in key schools are composed of children from high-income households or whose parents are cadres and intellectuals (Comer, 2015).

Key schools are excessively prized and hotly pursued by parents, as they attract high-quality teachers. School-choice is also a privilege of the well-to-do families, it involves many

approaches, such as by money, relationships, or by children’s academic performance. A popular approach is purchasing of an apartment in the catchment zone of a leading elementary school at an inflated price. (Wu & Waley, 2016).

Figure 2. Factors Considered in School Choice (%)



### Teachers' Persistence and Emancipation

China possesses the largest number of teachers to support the most extensive education system in the world. China has more than 9 million full-time teachers in compulsory education phase (Ministry of Education, 2015), they take the roles of delivering lectures, managing the class, looking after students, implementing every single educational reform in practice. The vast body of teachers are the key actors in educational practice. Building a high-quality teaching corps to improve the education quality is the overarching goal of school reform.

#### Persistence of Teacher's Ethics

Teachers was regarded as “holy men” and teaching was deemed to be a “religious profession” for an extended period in China. Particularly because schooling was the privilege of officials and rich in the ancient times, only a learned and integrated man could serve as a teacher. According to *The Analects of Confucius*, teachers are described as “gentle but demanding, strict but not aggressive, modest but serene.” In the context of rich cultural inheritance, teachers are the models for posterity with virtue and intellect. Teachers’ image as scholars with extensive knowledge and elegant appearance is rooted deeply in Chinese people’s mind even in the modern times. Teachers’ ethics is the central facet to determine whether the teacher is qualified or not from a lens of Chinese traditional culture. Government contemporary policies about teacher focuses on ethics as well, the latest teacher rank promotion policy, for example, pays much attention to teacher's virtue.

#### Improvement of Teaching Skills

Pedagogy is not only a skill but also an art. The transformation from ‘exam-oriented education’ to ‘quality-oriented education’ imposes an enormous demand for improvement of teachers’ teaching skills. In previous years, school education was organized around examinations, especially the Gaokao, and teaching usually was didactic and unidirectional. However, the curriculum reform calls for students’ effective learning in the classroom as opposed to listening to lectures and memorizing factual information (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013). The new curriculum removed complex, tough, examination-oriented and outdated material and emphasized students’ life experiences, skills, and individual interests and needs. Besides, various education policy initiatives urged learner-centered pedagogy. Teaching should concern about values and equip students with learning abilities. Teaching methods to engage students in learning must

be employed.

It is a long journey for teachers to improve their teaching skills. Chinese teachers have opportunities to engage multiple professional development activities. The continuous and school-based professional development including pedagogy research play an important role in improving teachers' teaching skills. To be a teacher is now a hot career choice in job markets. Strict teacher recruitment criteria in Chinese schools gives a guarantee of teachers' quality. New teachers should take part in initial teacher training to polish their practical skills. The orientation training is just the beginning of teaching skill improvement agenda, teacher's rank appraisal promotion and pay raise are endorsed teaching skills and professional development simultaneously. In spite of those concerns, teaching research focuses on specific teaching problems play a dominate role in improving teacher's teaching ability. The essential activities are teaching discussion, seminars, collective lesson preparation, teaching contest, each teacher will spend more than two hours in any of those school-based professional development activities per week. Furthermore, teaching research which puts the problem solving as the purpose commonly associates with improvement of teaching skills. Schools are exceedingly supportive to teaching research so as to enhance the overall teaching quality and uplift school's reputation.

### Sacrifice of Teachers

Teachers are often compared to candle, silkworm or ladder in Chinese traditional culture, which are interpreted as teachers' sacrifice to wholeheartedly work for students' growth. Teachers are the main force of education and teaching, who play multiple roles in schooling. This is especially true for homeroom teacher, who supervises everything that happens in her or his class besides regular teaching. Homeroom teacher is a special system arrangement in Chinese schools, where a homeroom teacher is assigned to each class from grade 1 through grade 12. The significant duties of a homeroom teacher are as follows: urging students to learn, promoting students' healthy development, organizing colorful activities, class culture building, coordinating home-school relations and class management etc. Generally, a teacher has begun his/her tired but happy working day at 7:30 o'clock a.m. which can lasts till 10:00 p.m., and more than 86% teachers work more than 8 hours on weekdays, they devote almost all of their time and energy in school work.

### Life's Emancipation

Chinese teachers live in a dilemma as they bear the heavy moral burden of emancipating students, but do not have time or energy to fully take other roles, such as children, parents and spouses. Teachers are looking forward to liberating from the heavy moral burden, and live an integrated life as a full person.

This research also explores teacher's images to demonstrate Chinese teachers' social roles and the most important virtues. The following table of teachers' images in Chinese society presents the contrasts of teachers' images from the perspective of teachers themselves and traditional culture vividly. It reveals a marked discrepancy between the traditional images and teachers' self-images. The former corresponds quite closely to the sanctification of teaching profession which is expected by the society, and the latter reflects teachers' own thoughts on teaching profession. It has been gradually agreed in China that teaching profession is transcending from a holy career to an ordinary career.

Table 2. Teachers' Images in Chinese Society

	<b>teacher's ethics</b>	<b>principle of teaching</b>	<b>teaching as a profession</b>
<b>traditional images</b>	learned men with virtue and intellect	to teach with dignity and authority	sacred profession to sacrifice
<b>teachers' self-images</b>	harmonious group consisting of different individuals	compass for students' growth	a common profession

### ***Principals' Dilemma and Breakthrough***

Chinese schools are in the setting of rapid reform, students, parents, and teachers are all in tension, and principals have no exception. Most of the Chinese principals are teachers in their early career stage, and they are selected or appointed as principals for their exceptional teaching and leadership skills. Principals are moral role models and the soul in Chinese schools. They have a huge influence on school management and education reform. Principals immerse themselves in school affairs from the moment he arrives at school until the moment he leaves. When the principal participants are asked "are you satisfied with your job as a principal?" in our survey, 29% and 43% of them give a positive answer of "totally agree" and "partly agree" respectively.

### Infinite Responsibilities

The principal is the representative of a school, and they have the authorities to manage school's daily operation, personnel, and finance affairs. To a certain extent, the principal is the crucial factor to determine a particular school's development and the students' academic performance. Most principals have the experience of the classroom teacher, assistant principal and administrator (Wolcott, 1973). Besides the role of school leader, the principals play multiple roles, for instances, educator, public figure, social worker, excellent teacher and so on. Apart from those, there are multiple affairs principals should do, such as planning the school's development, managing, teaching, and dealing with public relations. In order to promote Chinese principals' professionalization, China Ministry of Education issued the document "*Professional Standards of Principals at the Compulsory Education Stage*" (which covers primary and junior secondary schools) in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2013). The following six areas are covered in "the professional standards": planning school development, fostering school culture, leading the curriculum and instruction, facilitating teacher development, improving management system and adjusting the inner and external environment (Ministry of Education, 2013).

### Ability to Get Things Done

The principal's leadership unarguably is a key factor to the success of the education policy implementation. The work environment that principals face has also become increasingly complex. The education aims to cultivate all-rounded students bring a great challenge to the principals. Chinese principals now enjoy more autonomy with the educational reform coming down to school practice. The autonomy plus ability make an outstanding principal. Principals have to possess a set of professional knowledge, competencies and proper behavior to fulfill

their responsibilities. First of all, they must be experts in teaching and administration. To facilitate teacher's professional development is principals' obligated responsibilities. According our survey, more than 40% of the total feedbacks about teaching that teachers received come from their principals. Principals set directions for the school development, and take the role of model for their teachers and students. High abilities in curriculum development, teaching supervision, handling daily issues, conducting self-development, working on plans, communication with students, teachers, parents, maintaining public relations are all required to build a good school. Research carried out previously shows the similar results, and it is found that principals are the key actors in setting the school's direction, personnel development, shaping core ideas and concepts (Hu, 2010). Our survey indicates that most Chinese principals are competent for their job, and an overwhelming proportion of respondents (92%) agree that they are satisfied with what they have done as a principal, and by comparison, only 8% of the principals are not satisfied with their job.

### Dedication and Commitment

To be sure, there are vast individual differences in principal's personalities, but the common personality they all possess is the dedication and commitment to education. Principals spend their time, energy and even money on running schools. According to this study, over 95% respondent principals agree that they are very busy and tired every day, nearly 87% of them work more than eight hours on the weekdays, and the majority need to work overtime at night and on the weekends and in vacations. Principals have a concern for the development and well-being of the teachers and students. They have an emotional investment in cultivating people, including teachers, staffs and students. For most of the Chinese principals, "all for students, all for school" is their motto. They commit themselves to build a flexible, harmonious environment filled with humanistic spirit. They have a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction as long as they can contribute to school development. They have to raise fund to improve school infrastructure as now China is in the market economy times. Nevertheless, as many schools encounter a grave scarcity of fund, lots of principals subsidize their schools by donating their mingy money. Dedication and commitment are viewed as virtues for principals. According to our survey, nearly 70% of the principals would like to be principal if they had another chance to choose their career.

### Self-challenging

It is pretty hard to be appointed as a principal for the opportunities are scarce. Only outstanding teachers can be selected in the current Chinese principal selection mechanism. Compared to the regular teachers, the principal should have the spirit of innovation and self-challenging. Outstanding teaching is a prerequisite for this position. They outperform their peers by possessing excellent teaching ability and excellent administration ability. When the principals are appointed, they have to keep challenging themselves, as they live in a time of changes. They have to learn to raise fund in the time of market economy, keep up with new ideas in education, and study government new policies in this time of educational reforms. Besides, they have to keep communicating with teachers, students and parents as participation is one of main characters in our time. Therefore, principals must cope with emerging challenges in a changing environment.

### Hazardous Profession

In our survey, 82% of the principals hold the opinion that the advantages outweigh the

disadvantages for the profession of principal. But in reality, it is viewed as a risky profession. It is an all-too-common phenomenon that principals easily suffer from mental and physical diseases. Principals work intensely, with the high workload, little leisure time, the terrible pressure of the examinations and competitions, and have little time to care about their health. Principals are likely to breach moral or legitimate rules when they take actions to promote school development in China (Gu, Ma & Teng, 2016). There is a distinction between principals' role in real life and ideal one. As the legal person responsible for all aspects of their schools, principals have to follow high moral and law standards to discipline themselves all the time. Under such intense pressure, when asked "do you regret to be a principal?" 55% of the principals said yes. On that basis, it is a rational choice to proceed toward establishing a mechanism combining with autonomy and accountability for principals. Only by doing this can the principals take an active role in school improvement.

### ***Evolution and Transformation of School Organization***

A school is defined as an organization formed by a group of people working together to achieve specific purposes (Brunold, 2013). Chinese school organization has evolved and transformed immensely in modern times, and substantive development has been taking place in Chinese school organization, both in theory and in practice.

#### Modernization of Facilities and Equipment

With the prosperous growth of the Chinese economy, public education investment has increased in recent years. It is possible for application of advanced teaching equipment in schools. The infrastructure improvement is the first and decisive step towards education modernization. Accordingly, school-wide free wifi, multimedia facilities for teaching, special teaching room of music, physical education and arts, school TV, learning robots, virtual reality skills are used widely in schools. We asked the principals "how many computers available in teaching in your school?" the survey indicates 29% of the schools possess more than 50 computers except laptop and iPod in their schools for the purpose of teaching and learning. We visited there are 39976 volumes of books in the library on average, and more than 70% of the schools have no less than 5000 volumes of books in the schools. Besides, the average number of specialized classrooms is 13 for as many as 42 different types of functions in the schools we visited.

The essential paradox of the modernization of facilities and equipment is that school could fall in trap of "information technology myth," schools could depend too much on information technology to deal with all education problems. Even more revealingly, to obtain expensive equipment becomes a goal itself. It is at this point that the pursuit of new technology could cause neglect of individual differences in learning and resource wastage.

#### Innovation of School Building and Space

Unlike the uniform and monotonous building and space design in early times, conforming to the principles of utility and modernity, Chinese school building and space design illustrates a coalescence of the historical, cultural, functional and aesthetic concepts. Not surprisingly, very innovative school building design reflects individualized school culture. The change of educational ideas is one major reasons for the change of school buildings and landscapes. After the new curriculum reform, the learning process changes from rote learning and mechanistic training to active participation, inquiry-based learning, hands-on experience, problem-solving, communication and collaboration. The diversion of pedagogy asks for a functional change of

teaching and learning space. A case in point is a noticeable primary school, Zhongguancun No. 3 Primary School in Beijing. This school locates in the heart of Chinese Silicon Valley filled with creative and entrepreneurship spirit. The school is the spearhead and flagship of educational innovation. Influencing by the leading edge educational idea to provoke and evoke student's curiosity, it reallocates school spaces to form schools-within-schools and open classrooms. The open classroom makes teaching, learning, activities, games integrated, and different classes are connected.

### Incorporating of Schools

Though there is a sharp imbalance between supply and the demand of excellent education resource in China. China has implemented a series of policies to balance the development of basic education since 2010. The pilot programs of incorporating schools haven put in practice to facilitate balanced development of basic education in developed areas such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Zhejiang. Given the positive effect of the pilot programs, the incorporating of schools has been gradual promoted to other areas in China. It is expected that the excellent education resources are enlarged and school governance system is innovated when the schools are incorporated. The purpose of incorporating schools is to reach a balanced, excellent basic education system which people can have equal access to, and meanwhile to reform school governance system. There are mainly three approaches to incorporate schools, which are: the good school setting up branch school; good school taking over or merging disadvantaged school and secondary school combining with primary school and kindergarten.

But the school incorporating has suffered some backlashes. Some incorporated schools became excessively large and their principals are not prepared or proper trained to run these multi-campus schools. The so-called "milk dilution" effect has taken place in some good schools when they incorporate weak schools. In this movement of school incorporating, some ordinary schools are labeled weak or poor schools so that they lose motivation to make progress.

### Multiple School Functions

As early as the 1980s, Xiaoping Deng proclaimed the strategic educational guideline, "education should be geared towards modernization, the world, and the future." In this context, education should be an engine for building China into a modern nation (Hartnett, 1998). Worldwide, there is a calling for high-quality and equity education to meet the need of rapid social development and raise the quality of the workforce. The goal of educational reform is for all schools to develop curriculum, pedagogy and assessment modes that benefit students not just academically but also morally, culturally, physically and emotionally (Tan, 2016). Teaching and learning are essential functions of school organizations. As for the society, the school provides education service and promote upward social class mobility. Cultivating talent, helping the realization of family dreams, reserving and renewing the culture occupy a particularly salient position in school functions. Eschewing staid notions, the education system has no higher purpose than to help people to have creative engagement with the world and to form free self (Goodlad, 1984). The schools should balance both the ideal and practical functions in their operation.

### Concentrated Geographical Distribution

The paradox of Chinese schools concentrated geographic distribution lies in the dilemma of balancing education equity and quality. The concentrated geographic distribution means the decreasing number of rural schools and increasing the number of urban school simultaneously.

With the change of the population composition and urbanization, there have been less children in rural area. So as to integrate the precious education resources and improve education quality, the Chinese government issued a policy of dismantling teaching points and combining schools in rural areas in the late of 1990s. This policy has been debated and questioned. In retrospect, combining rural schools added the difficulty to go to school for village children. Another aim of rural school consolidation was to use advanced teaching resources in central schools, which usually locate in towns, so as to improve the quality of education for rural students. It is argued that the school consolidation policy reduced educational expenditures, accelerated urbanization, and improved the teaching quality of certain subjects (Mei, Jinag, Xiang & Song, 2015). With this policy implemented, many urban ‘mega-schools’ appeared, and schools concentrated in urban areas are required to play a major role in improving education quality. By contrast, some mega-schools brought new problems such as heavy financial debt, dis-economy of scale and schools' imbalanced development.

## **Conclusion**

The Chinese government provides sufficient education investment on one hand and reinforces the supervision to the schools on the other hand. Chinese education administration system has been gradually decentralized to a tripartite one consisting of central government, provincial agencies, and schools. Educational modernization is their core concern. Chinese schools enjoy more autonomy have explored new governance strategies now. The interplay between Chinese traditional culture and modernization is the core element to explain why Chinese schools are filled with conflicts.

With the transformation of Chinese society and population policies, the total enrollment of school-aged students is decreasing. Schools pay more attention to protect students’ learning interest. Consequently, there is an improvement of students’ degree of satisfaction. The examination has been regarded as the “educational baton” in China for an extended period, but the situation is changing. In order to meet students’ diverse learning needs, Chinese schools now offer more selection of learning subjects, have updated curriculum contents and have been making assessment more diversified. Teaching has been transformed to a rather professional profession. High entry requirement is the basic guarantee to the high-quality education. Continuous professional development activities are provided to teachers through their every stage of career development. To improve teaching quality, teachers’ evaluation is implemented strictly. It is notable that comprehensive teaching method reform with advanced technology is a new power to shape the modern school education. The infusion teaching has been gradually changed to learn by inquiry with the guidance of teachers.

In China’s charge towards becoming a prosperous nation, China has made significant achievements in education and presents energetic and colorful prospects. Still, Chinese schools are full of conflicts that we need look at with dialectics. Education reform is in progress. China is looking forward to more intensive global communication and cooperation in education.

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