

The Core Values of Principals in School Management under Chinese Education Reform

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Abstract

The values of principals in school management play a pivotal role in shaping school leadership, teacher behaviours, and student performance. However, research studies focusing on principals' values are relatively abundant in Western countries, yet still limited in the Chinese context. To fill this gap, this paper adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate the fundamental values of Chinese principals in leading and managing primary schools within the current education reform landscape. The findings reveal that the principals in the study emphasised nine core values: equity, fairness, openness, respect, empowerment, encouragement, recognition, trust, and democracy. These values were found to contribute to a positive school climate that promoted the growth of teachers, students, and the school. The results have significant implications for policy makers and principals in China, suggesting the necessity to foster ethical and relational skills among principals and to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of teacher leaders and teachers in school development.

Keywords: principals, values, school management, education reform

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1. Introduction

With the deepening development of Chinese education reform, schools have become an increasingly complex context, necessitating a transformation in their internal management modes (Shen & Chen, 2022). Schools are value-driven organizations, where principals as leaders have the right and obligation to oversee all aspects, including teachers, students, curriculum, teaching processes, and the environment. Therefore, only when principals establish their own appropriate values can they lead the school to adapt to the development and requirements of education, guide the transformation and renewal of the school's values, and promote the development of students and teachers (Aslanargun, 2012).

As key policies in the current curriculum reform in China, the *Professional Standards for Principals of Compulsory Education Schools* in 2013 and the *Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Team Building in the New Era* in 2018 have both stipulated that principals should focus on democratic management, respect teachers' democratic rights to participate in school management, and care about teachers' physical and mental health. It can be seen that Chinese education policies require principals to adopt democratic and decentralised values in school management practices.

The principals' values play a pivotal role in determining their own behavioural choices and the quality of school leadership (Notman, 2014; Bottery et al., 2013). This is based on an increasing awareness that leadership is a moral endeavour and principals are morally and ethically responsible actors. Indeed, much of the literature on principal leadership emphasises that principals can be viewed as moral actors responsible for the processes of decision-making in their schools (i.e., Starratt, 2009). When encounter substantial and complex role dilemmas and issues, the principals' values are able to shape their professional identity and help them realise how to use their skills and strategies in different contexts (Crow & Møller, 2017; Hallinger, 2013). Once principals practice values such as integrity, fairness, democracy, empathy in school management, it not only drives them to work diligently but also enables them to gain respect and trust within the school community, leading to their success as leaders (Gurr, 2015). This is especially true in the face of sudden crises. For instance, principals developing their own empathy and fostering teacher collaboration are effective strategies to address the negative impacts of COVID-19 on educational leadership, serving as strong safeguards for the regular teaching process (Constantia et al., 2023).

The principals' values also serve as a powerful role model for the teacher community (Liu, 2023) and significantly affect students' performance (Copeland, 2014). For example, previous research indicated that the principals' openness to change could influence teachers' organisational citizenship behaviour, while the principals' self-transcendence values are related to teachers' in-role performance (Abd El Majid & Cohen, 2015). Furthermore, the positive values exhibited by the principals in their leadership practices also have a crucial impact on shaping students' personal values (Berson & Oreg, 2016). Additionally, they help students develop prosocial behaviour, create a positive disciplinary atmosphere in the school, and ultimately improve students' learning (Branson, Baig, & Begum, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that one prominent ingredient in Confucianism closely related to Chinese education is known as encouraging individuals to build virtues and then developing morally binding groups. According to Confucianism, there are five virtues (Wu Chang) including benevolence (Ren), righteousness (Yi), ritual (Li), wisdom (Zhi), and integrity (Xin) (Mu, 2016). The principles of the first three virtues tied directly to each other are proposed in *The Analects of Confucius*. Benevolence (Ren) as the core of Confucianism focuses on “to love all humanity” (Lai, 2017, p. 24), which is regarded as the foundation of being a human being from the moral perspective. To be specific, benevolence has the sense of “empathy or kindness between human beings” (Mou, 2008, p. 121). Thus, harmonious and healthy social relationships are able to be established among principals and their subordinates. For Confucius, the virtue of benevolence (Ren) should be particularly adopted by rulers who should govern their subjects by benevolence instead of force.

In the reviewed literature, values have been emphasised as an essential element in leadership (Hutton, 2018). In particular, Hopkins (2003) emphasises that defining the values and purposes of the school is one main domain in instructional leadership practices. According to Hopkins (2003), the key concerns of values which infuse effective leadership refer to learning from a broader and deeper view and empowering teachers. This view assumes that values have profound implications for the moral purpose of leadership and also in fostering an environment within the school as a learning community for teachers and students. In addition, when the role of professional principals is grounded in shared values and knowledge, they become more adept at addressing extra demands beyond the scope of schooling’s mission and are better prepared to manage conflicting requirements (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Årlestig, 2023).

Many scholars have recognised the significance of principals’ values in school management and have conducted a series of studies on this topic. Different scholars employ different ways to categorise the dimensions of principals’ values. Berson and Oreg (2016) utilised the Portrait Values Questionnaire to investigate four types of principals’ values, including conservation, self-transcendence, openness, and self-enhancement. Larsen and Hunter (2014) summarised three core values of principals: prioritising student needs, handling affairs flexibly, and valuing relationships. They also suggested that middle school principals should continuously weigh their decisions based on their values and beliefs when making authorisation-related decisions. According to interviews with principals, Aslanargun (2012) found that principals share some common values, involving justice, confidence, school rules, and diligence. Gurr (2008) contends that the values held by principals should be characterised by equity, social justice, empowerment, encouraging participation, commitment to the school, people orientation, fairness, and respecting others.

Previous studies have also found that some values receive particular attention from principals. Kafa and Pashiardis (2019) identified several personal identity values that primary school principals value most in their practice, such as equality, honesty, authority, and innovation. Hansen and Lárusdóttir (2018) surveyed the values of compulsory education school principals and found that almost all principals emphasised moral values such as care, equality, democracy, autonomy, tolerance, and justice. Some other values of principals, such as recognition, trust, and democracy, are also highlighted by principals (e.g., Novak, 2009). Thus leadership which reflects these values focuses on promoting teachers and school development, supporting school members to participate in activities, and being led by fairness and equity. In this leadership role, through their actions, principals transmit their views and values and subtly influence the behaviours of teachers and students (Gurr, 2008).

Extant literature indicated that compared to the relatively abundant research in Western countries, the related studies on Chinese principals’ values are still scarce. There is a lack of research that systematically categorises the values of Chinese primary and secondary school principals, and there is also limited exploration into the impact of different types of principal values on teacher leaders, teachers, and students. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative research approach to understand the core values of Chinese principals in primary schools and explore how principals promote schools’ overall progress through their practical actions guided by these values.

2. Research method

The study employed a qualitative research method to explore the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of principals regarding their values in leading and managing schools. The descriptive and exploratory nature as an important feature of qualitative research is highlighted in this study (Yin, 2017). Two cities, City W and City Z, located in Shandong province of China, were selected as the research sites for this study. Five principals were selected from five public schools of City W and five were drawn from five public schools of City Z. All ten principal participants were from urban primary schools, with designations from P01 to P10. According to stratified purposeful sampling (Cohen et al., 2017), participants should possess a number of characteristics. As a means of comparison, principals were matched according to gender and years of service in similar positions. There were a greater number of female principals (i.e., six) than male principals (i.e., four) in the sample. This reflects the current situation in China where an increasing number of females occupy the position of principal in urban primary schools. Years of service ranged from 1.5 to 18.5 years. This represents principals at different stages in

their development. Finally, these principals were drawn from ten schools, ranging from 860 students to 1800 students in size, which provides a diversity of different school sizes by Chinese standards.

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to investigate the principals' values in school management. The interview questions were formulated based on insights from the literature to ensure content validity. For example, one of the questions was "How do you perceive your values in leading and managing schools?" The interviews followed predetermined interview protocols, while allowing interviewers to ask follow-up questions based on the significant information provided by the interviewees. Each interview lasted between 60 to 135 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, and audio recordings were made and transcribed to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the data.

By utilising thematic analysis, the interview data in this research was carefully analysed to reveal significant insights (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). The data was coded following Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) model, leading to the identification of key themes that illuminate the values embraced by principals. Themes were derived from the interviews through an iterative process that involved reading and rereading the material to determine critical issues contained in it. Specifically, each segment of the transcript was assigned a code using the researcher's or interviewees' words to describe it. Similar codes were then grouped together to form major ideas, which were labeled as themes in the database.

3. Findings

All of the interviewed principals emphasised the significance of principals' values in leading and managing schools. They believed that this 'valuing' aspect of their leadership contributed to fostering excellence in the school. The principals in the study highlighted nine core values, including equity, fairness, openness, respect, empowerment, encouragement, recognition, trust, and democracy. Each of the values is now discussed.

3.1 Equity, fairness, and openness

Half of the principals (five of ten) in the interviews argued that they promoted strongly the adoption of the principles of equity, fairness and openness in every aspect of school management. Equity highlights that all school staff are treated equally and no one has an unfair advantage. Fairness means that principals treat school staff in a way that is right or reasonable, and not allow personal opinions to influence their judgment. Openness refers to principals' quality of being honest, willing to talk about things, and not hiding information or feelings. This approach to embedding equity, fairness, and openness in their work with staff was viewed as a vital way to improve the enthusiasm of teachers and the effective implementation of school directives. These three values have been identified in existing literature. Many researchers from Western countries have underscored the importance of fairness and equity as a goal not only for education but also for relationships with staff in schools (Buluc & Gunes, 2014; Gurr, 2008). Moreover, Gurr et al. (2006) identified equity as a key value of school principals that is demonstrated through being open and flexible.

An example that was provided by principals to demonstrate equity and openness in practice was via the annual teacher appraisal system. Here five of the ten principals referred to how they adopted a number of processes underpinned by equity and openness. According to one principal, teachers were encouraged to "*get deeper understanding about themselves, enhance self-reflection, pinpoint their own development problems, and then identify effective solutions*" (P09). The principals in the study also indicated they encouraged teachers to develop their own personalised teaching styles and think carefully about their career development.

3.2 Respect

All interviewed principals agreed that respect was one of the most important values that principals held towards teachers and students. This is in line with the findings in some Western studies where respect for all people in schools is a central value of principals (Kheir-Faddul, Bibu, & Nastase, 2019; Novak, 2009). In the current study, this belief was reflected by comments made by principals regarding the way they respected teachers' work and opinions. Principals also respected students' interests whilst expressing a broader desire to support teachers and students in achieving excellent performance. For example, principals asserted that such respect was based on an equal relationship between teachers, students and principals, rather than conceptualising the position of the principal as an authority figure superior to teachers and students. Yet, they also recognised that they were the formal leaders in the school which required them to use their legitimate authority to oversee and manage the school's operations at times.

In addition, principals suggested that when teachers were well respected in the school, their self-confidence would grow and this would contribute towards high levels of teacher enthusiasm, motivation, and innovative work. In a case study by Day et al. (2001), a number of 'personal values' of principals were demonstrated as underpinning principals' practices. One of these values referred to the modelling and promotion of respect for individuals. The following paragraph provides a good illustration of one of the Chinese principal's views about respect:

As both teachers and students with whom I am confronted have complex thoughts, any word and deed of mine may exert effects on their mind. Therefore, it is necessary to first respect each school member on an equal level, such as listening to and accepting their comments and suggestions. Otherwise, it will become easy for me to stand too high and lose the truth of the matter. (P02)

3.3 Empowerment

All of the interviewed principals stated that they had delegated their power and responsibilities to other teachers, especially teacher leaders. Empowering teachers has been identified as an important value and practice by principals in Western schools (King, 2011; Harris, 2012). In the current study, principals indicated that they were aware of the increasingly complex schooling environment in which teachers now work. In this environment, a principal could not be an omniscient and omnipotent leader and manage all the responsibilities of administering and leading a school. Principals accepted that they needed to rely on others, especially their teacher leaders, to assist them in making the school run effectively. They indicated that they provided teacher leaders with many opportunities to develop their autonomy with full trust and support. The findings from the interview data revealed that teachers' motivation, efficiency, and creativity were stimulated by this approach that enabled them to make a greater contribution to their school's development. One principal described her approach to empowering staff:

I always encourage teacher leaders and teachers to carry out more tasks with courage. They can learn from working to improve their leading and managing abilities and working quality. At the same time, I also make efforts to think and observe teachers' work in order to provide them ongoing advice and guidance. The teachers and I could achieve the enhancement together during this process. (P05)

The ten principals also proposed three strategies they used to empower their staff. First, principals claimed that it was essential to clearly identify the roles and responsibilities taken by principals and teacher leaders. Principals emphasised the importance of having an in-depth understanding of teacher leaders' work in order to effectively arrange the work of the school in each phase. According to one principal, *"as a school principal, I need to stand high and look far so that I can have a clear mind in most aspects of school management and make a proper arrangement of distributing responsibilities to teacher leaders"* (P10).

Second, principals stated that they not only delegated power to teacher leaders in the school hierarchy, but also indicated clearly the levels of accountability that came with accepting increased levels of leadership responsibility and the consequences of unintended outcomes. For this reason, teacher leaders could experience principals' trust and support whether they finally achieved success or failure. Conversely, principals could also gain support and loyalty from their subordinates. Principals indicated that this approach to empowerment contributed to a school's sustainable development. One principal said, *"as long as teacher leaders make great efforts to do things with careful consideration, it does not matter when unexpected problems emerge. I will take the blame for them"* (P07).

Finally, all principals pointed out that it was necessary to supervise teachers' work when authority and power had been distributed in the school. Principals were alert to problems that may emerge in leading and managing, should unsupervised teachers abuse their authority. Principals indicated that they were kept informed of teachers' work by means of regular inspection, discussion, and meetings. More specifically, as one principal mentioned, *"I offered the recognition of teachers' achievements, pointed out the shortcomings in their work, and coordinated the arrangement of school work to ensure teacher leaders were using their power properly"* (P03).

3.4 Encouragement

Most principals (eight of ten) noted that they provided encouragement to the leadership team and the teacher group in the school. Encouraging staff as a core value of principals was also identified by Saleem et al. (2020) and Gurr (2008) in Western schools. The significance of this was noted by one principal in the sample who stressed that *"the principal's encouragement and support to teachers is the most important component in teachers' development"* (P01). A principal's encouragement was also seen as significant for prompting the inner working passion and energy of teacher leaders. The eight principals were mindful that if teachers were not interested in their work or lacked commitment and passion, they would find it difficult to deal with increased levels of responsibility regardless of their acceptance of training or discussion activities in the school.

From the interviews, it was evident that principals adopted two main approaches to encourage teachers. One approach focused on verbal encouragement, for instance, principals showed their acknowledgment and praise through comments such as *"well done"* (P03) or *"you did a good job"* (P08) to encourage teachers in their daily work. Principals realised that their encouragement and praise, even through brief comments, could prompt teachers' motivation and commitment to practice. The second approach involved was offering various rewards to teachers, such as issuing them with certificates or awards in different areas, including *"outstanding teachers, outstanding form teacher, subject experts, excellent teachers in teaching, and moral model"* (P10). Principals believed that selecting and publicly acknowledging some teachers with excellent performance each semester,

enabled them to be more diligent and thoughtful in their work. Principals indicated that this approach to encouragement was an effective way to reward excellent teachers and encouraged less able or underperforming teachers to be aware of professional standards.

3.5 Recognition

More than half of the principals (six of ten) indicated that their recognition of teachers had a significant effect on the implementation of teachers' work. These principals reflected that although the background and abilities of teachers were diverse, principals should recognise their teachers' achievements, regardless of their level of significance. It has also been demonstrated by Ogina (2021) that in order to create an environment for learning and growth, principals should acknowledge teachers' desire for achievement and recognition. As Kouzes and Posner (2010) pointed out, the leader needs to recognise the contributions of others by sharing appreciation. This was the case in this study as one principal explained that *"as each teacher has a particular way of pursuing success, teachers expect their principal to recognise their efforts and devotion"* (P02).

Thus, principals remarked that their recognition of teachers' work gave teachers confidence and made them feel their efforts were valued. Such recognition also contributed to teachers who approached their work with commitment and enthusiasm. These principals suggested that when teachers experienced recognition they were more likely to work actively and creatively. They drew a contrast with teachers who might require constant monitoring and supervision. Moreover, the six principals claimed that by recognising different teachers' work efforts, principals were able to draw from teachers' strengths, thereby contributing to the overall development of the school.

3.6 Trust

All principals asserted that they trusted teacher leaders and other teachers to carry out their work. One principal said that *"if the principal always keeps an eye on teachers' shortcomings, it will dampen their working enthusiasm and initiative"* (P06). Thus, principals underlined the necessity to establish a relationship of trust between themselves and teachers through open and honest communication. Likewise, principals in Western schools not only trust staff, but also require trust from them (Browning, 2014; Cansoy, Polatcan, & Parlar, 2020). In the study, principals stressed that mutual trust was of particular importance in the operation of the leadership team. In this context, the principal and teacher leaders could work closely to contribute to the development of the whole school.

Principals believed that as long as they listened to teachers' opinions and provided genuine and sincere guidance, teachers would experience a sense of trust and reassurance at work. They indicated it was important that they would demonstrate their trust towards and support of teachers, even if a teacher acted improperly or incorrectly. Principals also indicated that by building trusting relationships with teachers, they would be enabled to do their best to meet school requirements. The following comment comes from a principal who referred to the importance of trust:

As a principal, I fully trust my teachers in our school. So teachers can do their work with a sense of responsibility. Although most working tasks are very common, teachers can still feel the glory and sacredness of the work and they are achieving success during the process. (P06)

3.7 Democracy

Most principals (eight of ten) stressed that they endeavoured to provide a democratic environment for teachers and students by adopting a tolerant and relaxed leadership style within the school. Democratic concepts, as evident in the trend towards decentralisation of school management that has emerged globally (Kwan & Li, 2015), have become a relatively new feature of principals' values in China. As an example, these principals claimed that they identified the increasingly important role of teacher leaders in teaching and managing to carry out the current curriculum reforms. Accordingly, those principals who indicated they adopted a democratic style of leadership in their schools reported that they actively listened to teachers' points of view and were not perturbed if teachers disagreed with their views. The following statement illustrates this idea:

In order to prepare for Education Bureau's supervision last year, teacher leaders talked about how to display school achievements and provided a plan. However, as I had another plan to carry out, we could not reach an agreement. After my adequate consideration, I found that their suggestions were indeed good and I finally accepted their ideas. (P01)

Principals highlighted their responsibility to fulfil the requirements of school staff through specific strategies such as staff representative meetings¹. In the current study, this scheduled formal meeting with staff representatives was viewed as an effective strategy through which principals could respond democratically to

¹ A staff representative meeting is usually organised by a principal to discuss school affairs with those staff who serve as representatives of the entire school staff.

staff concerns. Principals indicated that they utilised different strategies at these annual meetings to communicate with staff. For example, some principals indicated they collected staff feedback in the form of anonymous teacher comments and suggestions about school affairs, while other principals said they encouraged teachers to participate in face-to-face conversations with them. Principals referred to the categorisation of the feedback raised at such meetings such as those issues that revolved around problems in school management. For example, staff raised concerns about “*the principal should provide teachers with more support for family-school communication, and the principal should offer teachers more external training opportunities*” (P07). Some principals also indicated that they attempted to address those problems raised by staff, by proposing and implementing strategies which were then itemised as specific tasks and allocated to those teacher leaders who were in charge of different areas, such as teaching or moral education.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, principals claimed that the effective exercise of principal leadership was driven by their values concerned with equity, fairness, openness, respect, empowerment, encouragement, recognition, trust, and democracy. According to the principals’ indications, these values were found to contribute to a positive school climate that fostered the development of teachers, students, and the school. Principals underscored the necessity of constructing these values for school improvement. One important finding that emerged from the interviews is the uniqueness of the value of “democracy”, which the principals mentioned as a relatively new aspect within the Chinese context. The movement to shared decision-making between principals and teachers under school-based management is a recent phenomenon in China. Principals in the study acknowledged this and highlighted that their role had changed considerably with the advent of teacher leaders and teachers taking a more active role in school-based decision-making.

Researchers have identified the great importance of values in understanding school leadership (Warwas, 2015; Harris & Johnston, 2010; Sverdlik, Oreg, & Berson, 2022). This may be caused by the increased awareness that principals should assume their obligations in moral and ethical ways in their practice (Garza et al., 2014; Hicks & Wallin, 2013; Aslanargun, 2012). In addition to confirming the values identified by Gurr (2008), such as equity, fairness, respect, empowerment, and encouragement, this study revealed another four values and these included openness, recognition, trust, and democracy. These findings highlight the complexity and richness of values that play a crucial role in shaping effective school leadership and fostering positive school climates.

However, principals admitted that the formation of values was a gradual and continuous process with ongoing improvements. During this process, they stressed the prerequisite was to first adopt a principle that focused on carrying forward good school traditions and then creating a new school culture. Most principals recognised the significance of values in the current education context and endeavoured to develop them within their schools. By prioritising the cultivation of values, these principals demonstrated their dedication to shaping effective school leadership and contributing to the improvement of the entire school community.

It is worth noting that globalisation and the advent of the knowledge economy have exercised a great impact on the transformation of school education in China. The concepts of democracy and the decentralisation of power that have emerged within the context of globalisation (Olssen, 2020) provide principals and teacher leaders with new opportunities to undertake increased responsibilities in leading and managing their schools. This shift in direction has influenced the way principals interact with teacher leaders and teachers, moving away from traditional autocratic approaches and incorporating democratic elements into their practice. However, this push for democratisation exists within a larger overarching frame of surveillance from education bureaus and political authorities.

The Chinese cultural context exclusively relates to the traditional and enduring values and norms of Chinese society. In contemporary society, Chinese education is still bounded to the traditional culture of China, with Confucianism as the dominant cultural force for centuries continues to exert an impact on the values of school principals (Zhang, 2004). Related to the key place of learning, the message conveyed was that principals held personal values such as respect, care, and openness towards staff and actively put these values into practice by developing harmonious and effective relationships within the school community. Cultivating virtues and morally binding relationships with others aligns with the core beliefs of Confucius (Wang et al., 2020).

To some extent, the formation of the positive values of principals can be drawn from some educational thoughts of Confucius. For example, Confucius highlighted the necessity for a modest attitude towards learning, so that principals, teacher leaders, and teachers would learn from each other and appreciate each other’s merits (*Bu Chi Xia Wen*). According to Confucius, principals are expected to treat colleagues and students with humaneness (*Ren*). Hence, principals’ values such as care, respect, and concern for other teachers and students can be attributed to Confucius’ notion of *humaneness (Ren)*. School culture in the contemporary Chinese society has further expanded the meaning of humaneness (*Ren*) to love, which includes love for students, teachers, and the school. As a result, principals’ values align with Confucian principles and reflect a commitment to fostering a positive and nurturing school culture based on mutual respect and care.

The principals in this study offered rich accounts of their values as they led their schools. Their detailed descriptions provided important insights into a crucial aspect of school leadership within China. Thus, an essential implication of this study for policy makers is that leadership is not a technical or simplistic process; it needs to be understood as a moral and human endeavour that relies on goodwill and positive relationships between principals, teacher leaders, and other members of the school community. Therefore, policies and initiatives aimed at improving school leadership should prioritise the development of ethical and relational skills in principals. This includes providing training and support that emphasises the importance of empathy, effective communication, and collaborative decision-making. Another important implication of the study for principals is the recognition that teacher leaders and teachers are invaluable members of a school community, as their support to school principals is vital for effective school functioning and good school performance. Principals should promote a democratic school environment by adopting a tolerant and relaxed leadership style. This entails being receptive to different perspectives, making unbiased judgments, and avoiding a hierarchical approach. By fostering an inclusive and collaborative culture, principals can promote shared decision-making, encourage active participation, and nurture a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the school's success.

There are two main limitations to consider in this research. On the one hand, the study's sample size is limited to ten principals from two cities in Shandong province of China, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings to other regions or contexts. Future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample to ensure a more comprehensive representation of the values and experiences of principals in various geographical locations and school settings. On the other hand, the research relies solely on interviews as the primary data source. While interviews are a valuable research method, they have limitations in terms of potential biases, subjective interpretations, and limited scope of information. In future research, incorporating additional data collection methods, such as observations or surveys, could yield different sets of insights.

Given the substantial disparities between regions and between schools in China, it is recommended that future studies be conducted to explore the core values of principals in rural areas and less developed regions. Research that focuses on these less developed regions would create a broader understanding regarding principals' values in different school contexts and lead to more effective resolutions for greater equity and quality. Moreover, it is evident that there are many factors that impact on the development of principals' values in education system. It is recommended that future studies explore a wider range of factors that help to shape core values as it is enacted by principals under Chinese education reform.

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