Understanding Chinese Educational Leaders’ Conceptions of Learning and Leadership in an International Education Context

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Abstract

This thesis presents an interpretative study of an Australian offshore education program in educational leadership conducted at Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province in China from 2002 to 2003. It is a study of the influence of international education on the conceptions of the participants in a particular context, where Chinese culture and Western cultures came into contact. The study is significant because it investigated a relatively new aspect of international education, offshore education, this time from the perspective of the participants. It explored the conceptions of learning and leadership brought by a group of Chinese educational leaders to the course and investigated the perceived influence of the course upon their conceptions and self-reported leadership practice. It employed a culturally sensitive approach which recognizes that a complex interaction between Chinese and Western cultures is occurring in the participants of this study.

This interpretative study was inspired by the phenomenographic approach. Phenomenography is an approach to research that has been used to help understand the key aspects of the variations in the experiences of groups of people (Marton & Booth, 1997). The study examined the experiences and understandings about learning and leadership of Chinese leaders in an offshore program, a Master of Educational Leadership. The program was delivered in a flexible mode in three intensive teaching brackets of six subjects. The study employed a semi-structured and in-depth interview technique. Twenty participants were interviewed twice over a 12-month period. The study sought a better understanding of their conceptions by making a comparison between their perceptions prior to and after undertaking the course. Participants were from schools, universities and educational departments. Potential differences across the three sectors were also considered in the analysis.

The findings showed that most participants developed more complex understandings of learning and leadership throughout the course. Comparison of conceptions prior to and after the course indicated an expanded range of conceptions. There was reportedly a movement towards more complex and diversified perspectives. Prior to the course, participants reported comparatively traditional conceptions of learning and leadership in quite a limited range. Learning experience and exposure to Western educational ideas and practices seems to have led participants to reflect on their inherited assumptions and
to expand their conceptions. They generally increased their awareness of key aspects of variations in learning and leadership. This study identified a general shift from content/utilitarian-oriented learning conceptions to meaning/developmental-oriented conceptions after undertaking the course. There was also a shift from task/directive-orientated conceptions about leadership to motivation/collaborative-oriented leadership conceptions. Many participants reported that they expanded their leadership practice after the course. The findings also revealed some differences regarding conceptual and practice changes across the three sectors.

The study contributes to understanding of learning and leadership in an international education context. The learning and leadership conceptions and self-reported practices are context and culture dependent. The study illustrates the tensions between different cultural forces in the process of teaching and learning. The methodology which explores the subjective understandings of participants renders more complex understandings of intercultural processes than cross-cultural comparisons which have been predominant in the educational leadership field in the past. The results highlight the need for appreciation of local contexts in designing international programs. The discussion questions the universal applicability and transferability of Western ideas, and also highlights the importance of critical reflection and adaptation on the part of educational practitioners from non-Western cultures. It highlights the potential for growth of change in both providers and recipients of international education as a result of very different cultures and traditions coming into contact. Intercultural dialogue and integration of educational ideas and practices are likely to come about when East meets West in an open and reflective dialogue.
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Chapter 1 Introduction and Overview

1.1 Introduction


This thesis presents an interpretative study of an Australian offshore education program in educational leadership conducted at Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province in China between 2002 and 2003. It is a study of the influence of international education on the conceptions of the participants in a particular context, where Chinese culture and Western cultures came into contact. The study is significant because it investigated a relatively new aspect of international education, offshore education, from the perspective of the participants.

International education is a significant and current topic of research for educational researchers across the world. Increasing globalisation\(^1\) has drawn developing nations into closer ties with educational providers from Western countries. As a result, internationalisation of higher education over the past two decades has brought about considerable change to Australian universities. Growing numbers of international students have enrolled in Australian universities and similarly, the number of students studying offshore has also increased considerably (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). There seems little doubt that the internationalisation of education is here to stay, and has increasingly become a part of the everyday work of Australian academics (Tsoidis, 2001). The emphasis of research into international education has been most commonly placed on big picture issues like student movement across national boundaries and the economic implications involved (e.g. IDP Education Australia, 2002a, 2002b). Much material has been published on the ramifications of the increased numbers of onshore

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\(^1\) While the terms “globalisation” and “internationalisation” are closely related (indeed, they could be seen as synonymous), some may recognise subtle distinctions between them. “Globalisation” generally refers to the spread of ideas, policies and practices across national boundaries, while “internationalisation” relates to the adoption of outward-looking perspectives in stark contrast to ethnocentrism (Walker & Dimmock, 2000b, p. 227). Further explanation about international education and offshore education is provided in Chapter 2.
international students studying at Australian universities (Ballard, 1987; Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Barker, 1990; Samuelowicz, 1987; Tsolidis, 2001).

However, there are relatively few published research studies on offshore teaching and learning, particularly from the perspective of students (Bennington & Xu, 2001; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). This study examined one Australian offshore leadership development program conducted in China between 2002 and 2003. It explored Chinese educational leaders’ (i.e. school principals, university administrators and system officials) conceptions of leadership and learning. It investigated the perceived influence of the course upon their conceptions and self-reported leadership practice over one year period. It also examined how they perceived contemporary Western leadership ideas and Western approaches to teaching and learning.

The site of the offshore program is in China, and therefore an introduction about the Chinese educational context is important for setting the context of the study. Education enjoys a priority role in the national development agenda in contemporary China. It is regarded as the basis for knowledge-acquisition, popularisation and application, as well as a cradle for nurturing people with innovative spirits. It is now generally believed by the Chinese educational authorities and scholars that the most precious resource in the economy in the new century is not the latest technology; it is people (Ministry of Education, 1998, 2001c).

The emergence of international, knowledge-based economies and rapid development of technologies pose particular challenges for educational futures and leadership in China. China’s opening to the outside world over the past two decades has been accompanied by exposure to Western theories and practices. This has accelerated even further with China’s entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001. Chinese educational authorities and scholars argue that isolationist and authoritarian traditions do not mesh well with the networked nature of the global world (Ministry of Education, 1998, 2001c). Globalisation and technological advances are bringing increased competition, but also create opportunities for very different learning experiences for students and educators. In the face of these environmental changes, Chinese educational leaders are challenged to improve their leadership and management abilities, engage in life-long learning, bring about change in the education system, and gain an international perspective (Feng, 2002a; Gu & Meng, 2001; Ministry of Education, 1998; Zhong, Jin,
The educational institutions need competent, entrepreneurial and innovative leaders to take on new and expanded roles, maximize learning outcomes of students, and achieve effectiveness and efficiency in education (The National Center for Educational Development Research, 2000, 2001, 2002; Zhao & Guo, 2002; Zhong et al., 2000; Zhu, 2002).

The past two decades have also seen great advances and reforms in Chinese education. Today educational administrators in China are expected to change their traditional ideas about learning and teaching and improve their leadership competencies in order to promote “Essentially Quality Oriented Education” (Suzhi jiaoyu) and adapt to the changes brought by educational reforms, decentralisation, and marketisation. This has led to continuous efforts in promoting the professional development of teachers and educational leaders since the 1990s (Ministry of Education, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & the State Council of China, 1999). Efforts have also been made to facilitate human development and promote an international perspective through establishing partnership programs with foreign educational providers in the past decade (Ministry of Education, 2003b). The policy perspective is that the ultimate goal of educational leadership development is improvement of learning, teaching and leadership practice. If educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership are developed to higher levels, their leadership practice may accordingly be improved. This study therefore sought to understand Chinese leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership in the context of a leadership development program.

The specific impetus for investigating Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions in this study came from two issues. The first issue concerned the relative absence of empirical studies about offshore teaching and learning situations, particularly from the students’ perspective. An in-depth investigation about how Chinese participants perceive the learning process and content of the course will inform offshore education research. Chinese leaders hold conceptions which are greatly shaped by learning and leadership traditions as well as social, economical and cultural contexts in China. Learning traditions in China mainly emphasise didactic teaching in the context of positivist knowledge transmission. Many Chinese students tend to hold absolute rather than relativistic beliefs about knowledge. They tend to regard knowledge as static, objective
and universal truths which can be readily transmitted from teachers to learners (Zhu, 2002). In contrast, contemporary Western approaches generally emphasise participatory learning in the context of a constructivist adult learning framework. Constructivists place an emphasis on an indefinite, subjective and pluralist notions of knowledge. They regard learning as active construction of meaning through multiple interpretations of phenomena (Foley, 2000b). These differences therefore lead to questions about how Chinese participants in an offshore program experience Western modes of learning and teaching. Few studies have systematically examined participants’ concepts and experience of Western modes of learning and teaching in the context of an offshore program.

Moreover, leadership traditions in China mainly focus on hierarchy, directive leadership approaches, and the moral development of individual leaders (Child, 1994; Wong, 2001b). More participative, strategic and visionary forms of leadership are needed in the changing context (Feng, 2002a; Huang & Cheng, 2001). Contemporary Western leadership theories generally emphasise shared vision and distributed leadership (Gronn, 1999; Lakomski, 1999, 2001). We therefore need to investigate how Chinese leaders in an offshore program perceive Western leadership. To date, and to the knowledge of the researcher, this study is the first empirical study which has systematically examined an offshore leadership development course in terms of the content and learning process from the perspectives of participants.

The second issue came from a growing awareness of the internationalisation and globalisation of educational policies, without sufficient attention given to cultural differences and diversity (Diao, 2000; Gu & Meng, 2001; Liu, 2002b; Shi, 1999; Wong, 2001b; Zhang, 1999; Zhong et al., 2000; Zhou, 1999). The current scene in education administration in East Asia, including China, is full of “cultural borrowing” (Cheng, 1998; Dimmock & Walker, 1999; Walker & Dimmock, 2000a) and the vital importance of avoiding “cultural imperialism” is increasingly emphasised (Bush & Qiang, 2000). It is acknowledged that leadership is a value-laden concept (Sergiovanni, 2001), which is influenced by social, political, cultural and technological contexts. The importation of substantive ideas from one cultural context to another can be beneficial but is fraught with risk. As such, it should be undertaken with sensitivity and care (Ribbins & Gronn, 2000). Therefore, it is unwise to assume that theories and practices of leadership
espoused in Anglo-American cultures are universally applicable to Chinese culture. It is important to explore intercultural interaction and understand how national and indigenous cultures influence and modify the uptake of ideas and practices imported from Anglo-American countries.

Research into international programs suggests that we should address issues like cross-cultural pedagogy, cultural sensitivity and awareness, cultural dissonance and intercultural understanding (Tsoidis, 2001). It is established that developing countries like China have pre-existing administrative cultures and traditions which are different from the core assumptions of European and American societies (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). This couples with an understanding that the participants in training courses may hold different assumptions about learning, pedagogy, leadership and the purpose of education from those who teach them. There might be a danger that academics from Western nations who conduct courses in leadership training or act as change agents in developing nations may operate from unquestioned assumptions that paradigms and practices from the Western cultures are automatically appropriate to contexts which have different cultural traditions. Such practices have been viewed as contemporary forms of cultural imperialism (Collard & Wang, 2002).

In an increasingly globalised world, where the exchange of information among educational administrators is more widespread, understanding intercultural exchange is becoming increasingly necessary. In fact, the automatic application of Western educational administration theories, policies and practices into non-Western countries without alignment with the contextual factors is problematic. It is therefore advisable to adopt a culturally sensitive and culturally conscious perspective, and to be cautious about cultural imperialism or policy cloning (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Bush, Qiang, & Fang, 1998; Crossley & Broadfoot, 1992; Dimmock & Walker, 1998b; Hughes, 1990). It is unrealistic to adopt a universalistic set of principles for educational leadership as appropriate for all cultures. There is a need for more locally sensitive approaches to the process and practice of educational leadership in non-Western settings. This study, in seeking to understand the students’ perspectives, will add to the research on the influence of such pedagogical interventions.

This study addressed these two issues by exploring the conceptions and personal experiences of a cohort of Chinese educational leaders who participated in the Master of
Educational Leadership, a partnership program conducted by the University of Canberra (UC), Australia and Hangzhou Normal University (HZNU) in China from 2002 to 2003. The study focused on the conceptions of educational leaders in Zhejiang Province, China, by undertaking an interpretative in-depth study of the offshore program. It explored their prior assumptions about learning and leadership before undertaking the course. It also investigated the influence of the course on their understandings and changes in their conceptions and leadership practice over a period of 12 months. It explored continuities within their conceptions of past Chinese traditions and potential resistance to Western influence. Comparison of conceptions prior to and after the course indicated an expanded range of conceptions. There was reportedly a positive movement towards more complex and diversified perspectives, and many participants reported improved leadership practice after the course. This movement was viewed as positive not because the participants accepted what is called “advanced Western ideas”. Their learning experiences and exposure to different perspectives have reportedly broadened their views, increased their awareness of intercultural dynamics, and equipped them with a wider range of strategies in leadership practice, and thus enhanced their abilities to deal with challenges in an increasingly complex and networked world. The findings also revealed some differences regarding conceptual and practice changes across the three sectors. School principals reported larger changes in conceptions and practice than university administrators and system officials.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

In the twentieth century, leadership has become a topic for sustained formal analysis by scholars and researchers. Many theories of leadership have been developed in the last fifty years, and scholars have conducted an impressive array of leadership research. The fields of general, business and educational leadership have moved from scientific management theories, trait theories, behavioural theories, situational and contingency theories to charismatic theories, transformational theories, cultural leadership theories, and theories of leadership for learning organisations (e. g. Argyris & Schon, 1996; Bass, 1990, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Conger, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Fiedler, 1967; Gronn, 1996; Gronn, 1998, 1999; Hersey & Blanchard, 1979, 1982; Lakomski,
However, most of this research has been conducted within specific cultures, especially in Anglo-American countries. Leadership in non-Western educational settings has largely been ignored, with the result that little is known about the influence of culture and traditions on the beliefs and actions of educational leaders across national boundaries. The field of educational leadership and management has therefore developed along ethnocentric lines, dominated by Western perspectives. As a consequence, many of these Anglo-American approaches are imported into other settings with questionable appropriateness and often limited success (Dimmock & Walker, 2000a). Indeed, the relationship between societal cultures and educational leadership is a complex matter. In spite of the complexity, many scholars have argued the need to establish cross-cultural dimensions within the general field of educational administration and to discern how societal culture influences leadership in diverse contexts (e.g. Cheng, 1995; Cheong, 2000b; Dimmock, 2000; Dimmock & Walker, 1998a, 1998b; Stott & Low, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2000a; Wong, 2001b).

More recently, cross-cultural lenses have begun to penetrate the leadership discourse. These frequently take the form of mapping differences between cultures to enhance cross-cultural understanding (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). However, the comparative approach is limited by its tendency to conceptualise culture as a “static reality”, something approaching the universal precepts of positivists, rather than a dynamic and multi-faceted phenomenon (Collard & Wang, 2002). Some scholars have warned of the dangers of describing particular groups in terms of contrasting beliefs and values as a form of “generalisation” which should be treated with a degree of “skepticism” (Putnis & Petelin, 1996, p. 74). In an era of constant and discontinuous change such generalisations have limited utility. The traditional cultures of developing nations are themselves in a state of disruption as global forces penetrate their boundaries. The strange mix of socialist collectivism and market forces in contemporary China clearly illustrates this. Contemporary cultures embody conflicts to a greater extent than the snapshots provided by cross-cultural analysis. The reality is more fluid and multi-layered. It is more like a multimedia production where images shift and transmute as
different cultural forces, dominant traditions, pre-existing sub-cultures and international forces collide (Collard & Wang, in press).

The concept of intercultural understanding offers a way forward. It frames cultural interaction in dialectical terms as a conversation or interview rather than a frozen snapshot. It also recognizes the power of human agency by privileging reflective dialogue over submissive cloning. It understands that interactions between individuals from different cultures entails inherited frameworks infused with differing perceptions and values. However, dialogue offers possibilities for building emergent understandings and new frameworks rather than submission to imported wisdom. It permits adaptation, fluidity, nuanced change and even resistance. When this occurs both the change agent and the recipient become partners in intercultural construction. What emerges from such interactions is too subtle for cross-cultural cartography\(^2\) (Collard & Wang, in press). Therefore, the research is not a cross-cultural study in the traditional sense, which implies a comparative approach. It employs a more culturally attuned and sensitive approach which recognizes that a complex interaction between Chinese and Western cultures is occurring in the participants of this study. Chinese and Western educational ideas are not viewed as polar opposites. They are at various points of a continuum, sometimes overlapping or sharing similarities. Such a concept lays the foundation for intercultural dialogue and integration underpinning this study.

Literature shows that although there are some studies about general leadership theories and business management in the past decades in China, little in-depth empirical research has been conducted about educational management and leadership, particularly in the international education context (Feng, 2002b). Educational leadership as a research subject and academic discipline, as claimed by some Chinese scholars, has not been fully formalized or systematized in the research field in China (Feng, 2002b; Zhang, 1998). It is often classified under the umbrella name of education studies or general management studies. Moreover, few studies employ in-depth investigation to

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\(^2\) Cross-cultural approaches generate generalised statements about differences between cultures. The classic exemplar in the field is Hofstede’s cultural frameworks (1980, 1991, 1994). Such frameworks are valuable but limited to macro and somewhat static views of culture.
examine leadership beliefs and understandings from a perspective of intercultural
dialogue and understanding. A better understanding of Chinese leaders’ perspectives of
learning and leadership after exposure to Western educational ideas will facilitate their
professional development in a globalised world and add value to their leadership
practice. Furthermore, investigating the interaction of Chinese leadership and learning
culture with contemporary Western culture has the potential to expand the leadership
discourse itself. Since leadership perceptions and practices are greatly affected by the
national culture and the values held by the leaders, this particular study attempts to fill
the void and answer the following question: When East meets West, will Chinese
educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership change?

1.3 Focus of the Study and Research Questions

The focus of this study is to explore conceptions of learning and leadership by
investigating a small and targeted sample of educational leaders in Zhejiang Province,
China. The purpose of this research has been two-fold. The primary purpose is to
understand Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. The
second purpose is to explore their conceptions before and after undertaking a Western
leadership development course, and then to investigate the change in their conceptions
and self-reported leadership practice. The study therefore examines the influence of a
Western leadership development program upon Chinese leaders’ understandings of
leadership and learning. It also addresses the issue of possible conceptual and practice
change when Chinese leaders are exposed to contemporary Western educational and
leadership ideas.

The current understanding of offshore students’ learning situations is often general,
fragmented, and sometimes confusing (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). This study will
redress the need for more systematic and coherent information in that it will provide an
in-depth contribution to answering two main research questions:

- How do Chinese educational leaders conceive learning and leadership in an
  international education context?
- What is the influence of a Western leadership development course on Chinese
  educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership and their self-
  reported leadership practice?
The study will further examine four specific subsidiary questions:

1. What were Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?
2. What were their conceptions of leadership before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?
3. What changes (if any) have occurred in their conceptions of learning and leadership after undertaking the course, and what accounted for such changes from their perspective?
4. To what extent did they perceive that their conceptual changes in learning and leadership affected their self-reported leadership practice?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is the first in-depth analysis of the Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership, and the influence of a Western leadership development course on their conceptions and self-reported leadership practice. The study is significant in that it has attempted to fill the void of in-depth and empirical research upon Chinese educators’ conceptions in an international education context. The research has the potential to generate qualitative insights into the influence of Chinese traditional culture on leadership and learning perceptions, and into the influence of exposure to Western educational and leadership ideas on conceptions and practice.

The study is informed by a framework of intercultural dialogue and understanding. It has the potential to contribute to a developing knowledge base about cultural dynamism and fluidity. The study highlights the influence of Chinese contexts upon educational leaders’ conceptions and the possibility of integration of Western and Chinese leadership and learning ideas in a global context. It also highlights the need for appreciation of local contexts in designing international education programs. An in-depth investigation about how participants perceived the learning process and content of the course has the potential to inform offshore education research. The findings of the study should be valuable for conducting offshore partnership programs in China or other developing countries in the future.
The participants had opportunities to be aware of and reflect deeply on their leadership and learning conceptions. They entered into a process of reflective learning about educational leadership through undertaking the course. Meanwhile a reflection on the relation between conceptions of learning and leadership would be helpful to deepen our understanding about the leaders as key learners in changing international contexts. This had the potential to add great value to their professional development and leadership practice.

Recommendations can also be suggested to the policy makers and Chinese educational authorities about professional development of Chinese leaders in terms of developing conceptions of leadership and learning, enhancing an international perspective and enhancing intercultural awareness in a global context. This also has the potential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of educational organisations, and the learning outcomes in contemporary Chinese education.

The study illustrates the tensions between different cultural forces in the process of teaching and learning. The methodology which explores the subjective understandings of participants renders more complex understandings of intercultural processes than cross-cultural comparisons which have predominated in the educational leadership field in the past. This study questions the universal applicability and transferability of Western ideas, and also highlights the importance of critical reflection and adaptation on the part of educational practitioners from non-Western cultures. It highlights the potential for growth and change in both providers and recipients of international education as a result of very different cultures and traditions coming into contact.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis consists of ten chapters in three sections. The first section (Chapters 1 to 5) identifies the rationale for the research and describes its theoretical and methodological frameworks. As well as this introductory chapter, the section presents a literature review, the epistemological framework, the research approach including research design, the data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. The second section (Chapters 6 to 9) addresses four research sub-questions and describes the findings and discussion of the study. It also describes their interrelationship and relevance to previous research. The final section (Chapter 10) provides a summary of the findings
and discussion. The chapter draws conclusions and implications from the study together with recommendations for further research in the area. Each of the chapters is briefly described here to provide an overall context for the reader.

Section 1 Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks for the Study

Chapter 1 Introduction and Overview

This chapter lays the foundation for the thesis. It justifies the rationale for the study and introduces the focus of the study and research questions. This chapter also presents the significance of the research. The outline of the thesis is then briefly described. On these foundations, the thesis proceeds with a detailed description of the research.

Chapter 2 Context

This chapter places the research study site in an historical, economic, cultural and educational context. The chapter begins with a description of the changes affecting international education in Australia, and the growth of offshore education. The discourse surrounding China’s educational policy is outlined as well as China’s cultural background and the politico-economic rationale for quality education and leadership development. The chapter also provides background information about the specific Australian offshore program in which the study is situated and a personal context of the researcher for the study.

Chapter 3 Literature Review on Conceptions of Learning

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study based on previous literature on conceptions of learning. It begins with a review of the literature surrounding Chinese culture and its influence on learning and teaching traditions. Some commonly held opinions and recent interpretations of Chinese learning and teaching are also reviewed. This is followed by a review of research employing the phenomenographic approach into students’ conceptions of learning in the West and in cross-cultural contexts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of conceptions of learning from a conceptual change perspective. The main focus of the literature reviewed in this chapter is research that has explored the learning traditions and conceptions of learning, particularly in the Chinese context.
Chapter 4 Literature Review on Conceptions of Leadership

The main purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on conceptions of leadership. It begins with a review of the literature surrounding the Chinese culture and its influence on leadership traditions, using Hofstede’s cultural framework, historical and social influence model, and Bush and Qiang’s four-aspect cultural analysis. The existence of other leadership traditions and practices in China is acknowledged. The historical development of educational management and issues in contemporary educational management and leadership are discussed. Research into concepts of leadership in the West and cross-cultural contexts is also reviewed. Multiple definitions and theories of leadership in the West are examined, showing the complexity of the field. It is argued that the leadership discourse is mainly Western-centric, and scant attention has been paid to non-Western contexts. A theoretical framework, which draws the various strands of literature together, is then presented as the basis of the study. Finally five issues derived from previous research are noted. These have been addressed in designing the present study.

Chapter 5 Methodological Framework

The epistemological and methodological foundation for the research is presented in Chapter 5. It outlines the research framework and approach used to conduct the study, which is a qualitative, interpretative study strongly inspired by the phenomenographic approach, to explore personal conceptions of learning and leadership. This chapter describes research design, data collection methods and procedure, and data analysis techniques. It addresses dependability, credibility and generalisability issues. It also deals with delimitations and limitations of the study. It concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.

Section 2 Findings and Discussion of the Study

Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion about Conceptions of Learning

This chapter presents data collected at the beginning and end of the course in relation to the participants’ understanding of learning. The chapter addresses the first subsidiary research question: “What were Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?” The critical aspects of participants’ conceptions of learning are outlined in a set of seven categories
of descriptions, with the first four identified as prior conceptions and the last three as perspectives developed over the course. It describes conceptions of learning that participants brought to the course and then deals with their expanded conceptions after the course. Following the descriptions, the logical relations between the categories are analysed in greater depth.

**Chapter 7 Findings and Discussion about Conceptions of leadership**

This chapter presents data collected at the beginning and end of the course in relation to the participants’ understanding of leadership. The chapter addresses the second subsidiary research question: “What were Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of leadership before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?” The critical aspects of participants’ conceptions of leadership are outlined in a set of six categories of descriptions, with the first five identified as prior conceptions and the sixth as a perspective developed over the course. The chapter first describes conceptions of leadership that participants brought to the course and then addresses their expanded conceptions after the course. Following the descriptions, the logical relations between the categories are analysed in greater depth.

**Chapter 8 Implications of Findings about Conceptual Change**

This chapter addresses the third subsidiary research question “What changes (if any) have occurred in Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership after undertaking the course, and what accounted for such changes from their perspective?” An analytical framework for learning conceptions is first presented. Change from a content-focused and utilitarian orientation to a meaning-focused and developmental orientation is described in terms of participants becoming increasingly and focally aware of the critical aspects of understanding learning. Based on the analytical framework, five themes about learning are then examined to give a more comprehensive picture of conceptual change path undergone by participants. An analytical framework for leadership conceptions is also presented. Change from a task-focused and directive orientation to a motivation-focused and collaborative orientation is then described in terms of participants becoming increasingly and focally aware of the critical aspects of understanding leadership. Based on the analytical framework, five themes about leadership are examined. A discussion of the conceptual change process and self-reported interpretations of conceptual change is presented in the final section.
Chapter 9 Self-reported Change in Leadership Practice

This chapter addresses the fourth subsidiary research question in the study “To what extent did Chinese educational leaders perceive that their conceptual changes in learning and leadership affected their self-reported leadership practice?” The chapter begins with a presentation of the self-reported profiles of leadership practice change of all participants. Ten vignettes selected from school, system and university sectors are then discussed to further examine their leadership practice changes. Self-reported reasons for little change in practice are examined. The limitations of self-reporting of leadership practice and the implications of the results are also addressed. The importance of this chapter lies in its illustrations of examples cited by respondents to support the argument that conceptual changes in learning and leadership did lead to changes in actual leadership practice in this study. Changing conceptions did not simply mean the end of learning in this study. Most participants did make efforts to relate the learning to their leadership practice. However, many lamented structural and environmental constraints and their dilemma in addressing the discrepancy of their “theory espoused” and “theory in use” (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Section 3 Conclusion

Chapter 10 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter revisits and reflects on the previous chapters to summarise and integrate the major findings and implications of the overall study. It begins by examining how the research questions have been addressed by the research outcomes described in Chapters 6 to 9. These are then related to the literature described in Chapters 3 and 4, highlighting this study’s contribution to the further understanding both of Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership and their conceptual and leadership practice development in an international education context. The discussion of the research findings probes the conceptual, theoretical and practical significance of the study and the implications for leadership development. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and directions for future research. It concludes with a summary of the study.
Chapter 2 Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter places the research study site in an historical, economic, cultural and educational context. The chapter begins with a description of the changes affecting international education in Australia, and the growth of offshore education. The discourse surrounding China’s educational policy is outlined as well as China’s cultural background and the politico-economic rationale for quality education and leadership development. The chapter also provides background information about the specific Australian offshore program in which the study is situated and the researcher’s personal context for the study.

2.2 The Australian International Education Context

Increasing globalisation and an international market economy have drawn developing nations into closer ties with educational providers from advanced Western countries in the past two decades. At an international level, this is frequently accomplished through agencies such as United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), The World Bank, The Asian Development Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Such agencies have had a strong shaping influence on the education and training policies of developing nations, and this is frequently underwritten by aid programs (Daniel, 2002). Their programs are framed in terms of “capacity building”, and the goal of which is to address a shortage of “appropriately skilled people” in such nations. This has been described as the search for “a proper balance between the creation of human capital and the creation of social capital” (Daniel, 2002, p. 5). Joint endeavors by UNESCO and The World Bank to promote “Education for All”, by advocating “free compulsory education of good quality” for all students by 2015 is an example of a major humanitarian initiative which is having significant impact upon education in developing nations at present (The World Bank, 2002). China is an active participant in this project and provides regular annual reports (China Report to UNESCO, 2002).

A less publicized aspect of this enmeshing of Western and developing nations is the growth of training and award-bearing courses between nations. In the past, the
dominant form of such interaction involved students from developing nations travelling to advanced Western nations for formal studies and then returning to their home states. However, the past decade has seen an escalation in visits to Western nations, participation in short courses offered by Western education providers, and the delivery of programs at sites in the developing nations themselves. This enables more economical delivery of training to larger cohorts of students and practicing professionals (Collard & Wang, 2002). Australian universities and TAFE colleges are major providers in this process. More than 70% of all offshore programs conducted by Australian universities are in Asia, especially in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong (Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee, 2001). The emergence of online delivery is beginning to expand this provision even further and has enormous potential for future developments.

Three distinct waves of globalisation can be identified in the international education industry (Mazzarol, Soutar, & Seng, 2003). The first involved students traveling to a host nation to study at a chosen institution. This was the usual model throughout much of the last century and remains common today. The second involved institutions moving forward into the export channel—usually through an alliance or coalition—and establishing a presence in international markets through “twinning” programs (Smart, 1988). This process of “forward integration” became common in Asia throughout the 1990s, with many privately owned colleges providing an outlet for students to study a foreign degree in their home country (Prystay, 1996). New approaches have emerged recently. These involve the creation of branch campuses in foreign markets and the development of online delivery of courses through information and communication technologies (Mazzarol, 1998).

2.2.1 International Education

In Australia, larger numbers of schools are admitting international students and universities are not only increasingly concerned to enrol international students, but also to open offshore campuses or offer offshore courses. There seems little doubt now that the internationalisation of education is here to stay, and increasingly it is part of the everyday work of Australian academics (Tsolidis, 2001). One of the most obvious ways in which internationalisation has impacted on higher education is in the flow of students across national boundaries (Richardson & McKenna, 2003; Scott, 1994).
Education exports have been one of the brighter spots on the Australian trade map in recent years. By all accounts, education exports have boomed in the past 10 years, growing from almost nothing to become Australian’s eighth largest export industries (Ramsay, 2002). Starting off from negligible levels in the early 1990s, Australia’s education sector has grown into a massive industry that was worth $4.2 billion in 2002, the third largest service export, with 160,000 international students particularly (Business Asia, 2002, 2003). According to latest research by IDP Education Australia, the total demand for international higher education in Australia will be more than 996,000 students by 2025. India and China will be the major clients and fast movers, with the two forecast to account for more than 50 percent of total global international students. Overseas students now make up eighteen per cent of total enrolments in Australian universities, contrasting with the United States where only three per cent of university students come from outside the US. On some campuses, fees from international students provide more than half the student revenue (Johnston, 2003).

Because Australian universities provide for more and more diverse cultural, linguistic and pedagogical traditions, an imperative to rethink and rework curricula and pedagogies has been created, particularly in relation to international education. This is invasive, disruptive, and also enormously stimulating. Globalisation and cultural diversity also opens up the potential for research and scholarship in many fields (Marginson, 2000). The internationalisation of higher education is becoming the trend. Education and education professionals are now looking to meet the demands of operating in a global arena. Altabach and Lewis (1996, p.36) comment that “as the world has become increasingly interdependent and national academic boundaries have been blurred, science and scholarship are becoming increasingly international”.

Whilst research is conducted into Australian international education, the emphasis has been most commonly placed on the big-picture stories related to student movement and the economic implications involved (IDP Education Australia, 2002a), strategic management of international education at institutional level (Poole, 2001), or issues in planning for international campus development (McBurnie & Pollock, 2000). There is a profound need for us to consider the chalk-face or more appropriately web-face of international education—the learning and teaching situations which lie at its heart (Tsolidis, 2001). In some ways this parallels developments in cross-cultural research.
The focus is limited to macro level analysis rather than the exploration of the subjective experience of students.

2.2.2 Offshore/Transnational Education

The international export of educational offerings provides major opportunities for universities to expand their activities and to raise their profiles. Programs in which learners are located in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is based are referred to as “offshore” education in Australia and “transnational” education in much of the rest of the world (UNESCO and Council of Europe, 2000). The Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) refers to the growing trade in transnational education services (GATE, 1999). GATE defines transnational education as “any teaching or learning activity in which the students are in a different country (the host country) to that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home country). This situation requires that national boundaries be crossed by information about the education, and by staff and/or educational materials” (GATE, 1997).

Offshore education provides students with the opportunity to earn foreign degrees without the need to leave their home bases, and expands human resource development opportunities for governments and employers (McBurnie & Pollock, 2000). While the international mobility of students is a well-established and growing feature of higher education, the international mobility of institutions and courses on a large scale is a more novel phenomenon (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Offshore education is becoming a key feature of globalisation of higher education, as a growing number of internationally mobile programs operate as tradeable services. These are made possible by recent information and communication technologies and use innovative forms of delivery including international partnerships to respond to far-flung peaks in student demand for Western degrees fuelled by rapid integration into the global economy (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; McBurnie, 2001; Scott, 2000; van Damme, 2000).

During the past decade, the scale of offshore provision of education has grown dramatically, particularly in Asia, where British, Australian and American institutions

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3 This thesis will use offshore education and offshore programs throughout because the context of this study is in Australia.
have been at the forefront of educational innovation, delivering programs through local partner organisations, such as private colleges, universities and professional associations. The UK is the largest provider of transnational education, with over 120,000 offshore students enrolled in UK universities (Bennell & Pearce, 1998). Around 53,000 offshore students are enrolled in Australian universities, which represents more than one third of the international students in Australian universities. Fees paid to Australian universities constituted around one quarter of the $4.2 billion revenue in 2002, and offshore programs constitute a growing proportion of this revenue (IDP Education Australia, 2002b).

While there is a growing body of literature dealing with offshore/transnational higher education, little has been written about teaching and learning in these programs. This is rather surprising, since the continued growth of offshore programs has meant that the ability to teach effectively in such programs is becoming essential to academic work in many universities (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Most of the research and policy literature published until now has focused on either government regulation of trade in education services (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001), quality assurance processes for transnational provision (van Damme, 2000; Ziguras, 2001), international experience and academic careers (Richardson & McKenna, 2002, 2003), or management of transnational programs at the institutional level (Davis, Olsen, & Bohm, 2000). Some academics who taught overseas have provided useful anecdotal accounts of particular programs (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Clark & Clark, 2000). However, these isolated accounts of offshore education have lacked rigour and made generalised conclusion about offshore teaching and learning experiences (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003).

A few studies have been undertaken to examine the perspectives of Chinese students about their learning experiences in the international education context. Berrell, Wrathal, and Wright (2001) through working with three groups (50 executives per group) of Chinese executives in on-shore programs, proposed a model for Chinese management education, adapting the case study method to transfer management knowledge. McClure (2003) has explored the experiences of Chinese international postgraduates studying in Singapore. She investigated how they perceived their new learning environment and the coping strategies they employed to manage, understand and construct meaning out of their learning situation. Zhang (2002) has examined the academic adjustment
experiences of undergraduate Chinese international business students at Victoria University. The results of this study have suggested that cultural and educational backgrounds play a significant role in students’ adjustment. Bennington and Xu (2001) conducted a study focusing on the relative benefits of an offshore MBA study twinning model using questionnaire survey to elicit opinions of 174 Chinese students. The majority of respondents recommended MBA study via a twinning program involving both offshore and onshore study.

Literature therefore shows little systematic and in-depth research has been undertaken from the perspective of Chinese students who study in offshore programs, although a few studies have investigated Chinese international students’ learning experiences. This study sought to contribute to understanding the specificities of offshore teaching and learning environments by examining how Chinese students perceive and experience Western learning and leadership in an offshore program. It should be noted that the issues raised in the study are more complex than an analysis of teaching approaches and course content. The key issue is intercultural interaction involved, not just quality or style of education provision.

2.3 The Chinese Educational Context

2.3.1 Cultural and Political Background

China is one of the most important countries in the world in terms of its huge population, long history, rich cultural heritage, and increasing political and economical influence. The term Greater China has come into increasingly common use as an umbrella descriptor of Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau (see, e.g. Shambaugh, 1995; Taylor, 1996). However, the focus of the study is on Mainland China. Therefore, the term China in this study refers specifically to Mainland China or the People’s Republic of China. In order to investigate learning and educational leadership in China, we first need to examine the historical, political, economic, and cultural traditions and understand their influence upon educational systems.

Mainland China is the world’s most populous nation with 1.3 billion people. It is also a vast country with an area of 9,600,000 square kilometers. China has achieved rapid economic progress in the past two decades. Murray (2003) argues that when the
economic history of the latter part of the twentieth century is written, China will be recognized as one of the world’s greatest success stories. Despite the Asian financial crisis and global economic slowdown, China’s economic performance has been exceptional. According to the Asian Development Bank, from 1996 to 2002 GDP grew by 8.1% per annum; per capita GDP increased by 44% from US$ 671 to US$ 964; labour productivity increased by 6.9% per year; and the economy became increasingly globally competitive. However, China is a lower middle developing country, not a wealthy country, because its GDP per capita ranked 141 in the world in 2000 (Murray, 2003). Economic development is also uneven across China, with a gap between relatively developed eastern coastal regions and less developed Western areas. This has brought uneven educational development in different regions across the nation (Du, 2000).

China has a long history of five thousand years and many dynasties. In Mainland China, the last imperial dynasty came to an end in 1911 with the revolution by Sun Yat Sen and Nationalist Party. In turn, this Nationalist regime was replaced by the People’s Republic of China under the leadership of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. For the first decade, developments were strongly influenced by the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong died in 1976, and subsequent years brought a softening of the communist approach. Deng Xiaoping, who became the national leader in 1978, was responsible for China’s open-door policy, which gradually increased interaction between China and other countries. In 1992, Deng introduced the notion of a “socialist market economy”. China remains a socialist state, but has been increasingly shaped by market forces (Bray & Gui, 2001). This really means a mix of socialist and capitalist ideologies. Educational reform is seen as crucial for economic growth (Marginson, 1997). Promoting economic development and social progress through science, technology and education has become the national policy and strategy for development since the 1990s (Ministry of Education, 1998, 2001c).

2.3.2 Contemporary Educational Context

However, to educate and train nearly one quarter of the world’s population is a challenging task. Respect for education and knowledge has been a cornerstone of Chinese civilization for the last 5,000 years. China has had one of the best established and most extensive educational structures in the world (Clarke, 1999). It has been
traditionally composed of four components: basic education, vocational/technical education, higher education and adult education. The pattern of education in most parts of China follows a consistent sequence. Three years of pre-school or kindergarten education from the age of 3 are for many, but not all children. This is followed by six years of compulsory primary education. At the age of 12, youngsters normally transfer to junior secondary schools for three years of compulsory secondary education. At the age of 15, the young people proceed to three years of senior secondary schooling. After passing the National College Entrance Examinations, the senior secondary school graduates progress to institutions of higher education.

China has set up an educational system with the government as the major provider. Education is mainly run by governments at different levels. The Ministry of Education and provincial governments direct institutions of higher education (some specialized institutions are under other ministries). Regional and provincial governments are responsible for secondary and primary education, and local authorities control primary schools. Local communities and informal sectors are also encouraged to invest in education. Over the past decade, the number of private schools and universities has increased steadily (Yang, 2002).

Great emphasis has been placed on investment in primary and secondary education to ensure that school-age children can receive 9 years of compulsory education (primary and junior secondary education). According to a statistical bulletin released by the Ministry of Education in China (2003c), there were 456,900 primary schools in China, and the net enrolment ratio reached 98.58% throughout the country in 2002. There were 65,600 general junior high schools throughout China with the net enrolment ratio of 90.0%, and 58.3% of young people progressed to three years of senior secondary education. There were 32,800 schools at the senior secondary education level including general senior high schools, specialized secondary schools, and vocational schools in 2002. The net enrolment ratio reached 42.8% for senior secondary schools throughout the country in 2002. Higher education has been developing steadily, especially in the last few years. In 2002, there were 2,003 institutions of higher education in China, with

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4 Primary enrolment ratio: The number of pupils enrolled in the primary level of education who are of official school age for that level, as a percentage of the population of official school age for the primary level (Globalis, 2004).
1,396 general higher education institutions and 607 adult higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2003c)

With the expansion of higher education in recent years, the net enrolment ratio reached 9% in 1998, an increase of about 8% over the last 20 years. The net enrolment ratio continued to rise steadily, reaching 13.2% in 2001 and 15% in 2002 respectively (Globalis, 2004). Continuing education or adult education provided through radio and television universities, adult universities, and training schools, has been booming and attempting to cater for the needs of different learning groups. In 2002 there were 389,500 adult technical training schools in China, and 4,273,900 adults obtained various kinds of certificates or diplomas through adult education (Ministry of Education, 2003c)

Chinese education has made a great contribution to enhancing scientific and cultural levels of the whole nation. However, as the most populous nation in the world, China faces a Herculean task in “modernizing” its education and training system to equip it for participating in the international economy. In 1999 the CPC Central Committee noted that:

The ideas, structure and management system of education, the pattern of skills training, and the content and methods of teaching prevailing in our country are relatively backward, adversely affect the all-round development of our young children and youth and cannot meet the needs of raising the quality of the whole nation (see China Report to UNESCO, 2002).

As things stand now, the reform and development of education in China are faced with a number of challenges and difficulties. The average educational attainment of Chinese citizens is still rather limited compared with Western nations, and the proportion of students engaged at the upper secondary and tertiary levels is rather small in comparison with nations like the U.S.A. or Australia. The proportion of people with an upper secondary education among the employed is less than 14%, and the proportion of people with higher education qualifications is only about 4% (Ministry of Education, 2001c).

Although in recent years public expenditure on education has kept increasing, its weight in terms of GDP percentage has remained at a level prevailing in underdeveloped nations. China has 1% of the world’s educational budget but supports 15% of the
world’s population who need education (Yang, 2002, p. 136). In fact, the total investment in education in China accounted for only 2.5% to 2.7% of GDP in the past decade, while the corresponding figures for many developed countries were above 5%. For example, the figures for UK and Brazil in 1998 were 5.4% and 5.2% respectively; India and South Korea invested more than 3% of GDP in education in 1998 (Investment in Chinese Education, 2001). The conflict between a lack of educational resources and the increasing demand for education in China is serious and will not be solved in the short term. Insufficient educational financing is still the major factor constraining educational development in China.

As indicated in The Tenth Five-Year Plan for Educational Development (2001) and China Report to UNESCO (2002), some of the unresolved challenges facing Chinese education include:

- failure to meet the target of increasing the proportion of GDP allocated to education to 4% by 2000;
- unequal educational provision across regions, especially those in the west of the nation, where local resources cannot finance 9 years of compulsory education;
- lack of flexibility and inadequate openness of the existing education system, which hampers the formation of “interchanges” between various ways of education and training in the facilitation of a complete and effective lifelong learning system;
- inability of the existing systems of curricula and textbooks to adapt to the needs of Essentially Qualities Oriented Education (EQO) education, i.e. High Quality Education;
- unsatisfactory academic qualifications of schoolteachers and their overall quality;
- low physical resource capacity in schools especially at lower secondary levels;
- gaps in the remuneration of teachers between affluent and poor regions with subsequent issues related to recruitment and retention;
- limited places for higher education with subsequent excessive reliance upon rigid and outmoded examination systems to determine entry.
The policy response to these difficulties has been a call for radical changes in the
career of education, talent or skilled manpower, and educational quality. These
would require a mechanism for articulating general and vocational education,
facilitating the transition from school to work, strengthening the development of weak
schools so as to narrow the gaps between schools; reforming college and upper
secondary school entrance examinations and the system of assessment; raising the
quality of teachers, reforming curricula, and optimizing the whole process of education
(China Report to UNESCO, 2002).

The Tenth Five-Year Plan for Educational Development (Ministry of Education, 2001c)
also reiterates that efforts should be made to “rectify educational ideas, transform
outdated educational concepts, and renew educational models in an endeavour to foster
innovative spirit and ability among students, to foster their spirit of entrepreneurship
and practical ability, and to promote an all-round development of students—morally,
intellectually, physically, and aesthetically”. It also stresses the imperative to
“constantly strengthen the development of teaching staff and strive to enhance the
standards of teachers and managerial personnel”. The joint leadership development
program between University of Canberra and Hangzhou Normal University, which is
the focus of the study, has been developed within this policy context.

2.3.3 Educational Reforms and Policy Approaches

Facing these challenges, education reform has been started and accelerated across the
board, from schools to higher education institutions, in the past two decades in China.
Since the mid-1980s a wide range of government policies has shown that China has
been moving in the direction of “decentralisation” and “marketisation”. Like many
nations with advanced economies, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) acknowledged
that over-centralization and stringent rules would stifle the initiative and enthusiasm of
local educational institutions. It called for “resolute steps to streamline administration,
devolve powers to units at lower levels to extend the schools’ decision-making power in
the administration of school affairs”(Levin, Xu, Little, & Zheng, 1994, p. 233) and
reduce the rigid controls over schools at all levels (Chan & Mok, 2001; Hawkins, 2000;
Mok, 2001).
In 1993, the CCP reiterated its support for the decentralisation and diversification of educational services. The central government changed its policy from direct control to managing schools through legislation, funding, planning, advice on policies and other necessary means (State Education Commission, 1993). This policy also clearly stated that it was necessary for China to shift the focus from being narrowly concerned with economic development and marketisation to human resource development.

By 1995, the Education Law sought to further develop local communities’ and informal sectors’ support for education. Decentralisation of management and finance was further stressed. Undoubtedly, the ideas and practices of “socialist market” economy or “market socialism” have had decisive impacts on educational development in China (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Chan & Mok, 2001). Concepts like “efficiency”, “effectiveness” and “competition” have become far more popular in the management and governance of the educational sector, while the demand and supply of the labour market have begun to play a more significant role than the manpower planning approach in education which characterized previous decades in China (Zhou & Cheng, 1997).

The adoption of a “market-oriented” approach in education has the following features: the encouragement of a diversity of educational providers, calls for multiple channels of educational funding, increased numbers of self-supporting students, the reorientation of curricula to meet market needs, and the introduction of competition in the educational sector to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of educational services (Agelasto & Adamson, 1998; Mok, 2000).

How to meet the challenges of the knowledge economy and promote innovative education also became the focus of educational reform. In May 1995, at the National Conference of Science and Technology, “making China prosperous through science and education” was first put forward as a national strategy for development. Promoting economic development and social progress through science, technology and education has become the focus of national policies and strategies for development since then (Zhao & Guo, 2002).

In May 1998, Chinese President Jiang Zemin called on the whole society to pay great attention to the primary role of knowledge, innovation and the tapping of intellectual resources in the promotion of economic development and social progress. Since then,
the notions of “the knowledge economy” and “innovation” have become the topics of discussion and have caught the attention of the whole society. As part of the national innovation system, the Action Scheme for Invigorating Education towards the Twenty-first Century formulated 12 main tasks as the means to implement the national strategy (1998). The gist of this scheme was that education should wholly support national economic development and the progress of science and technology by providing a wide range of human resources and knowledge innovations (Zhao & Guo, 2002).

In August 1998, the promulgation of the Higher Education Law stipulated that the development of higher education must cater for emerging social needs and reconfirmed the general principles behind the policy of decentralisation. The Action Scheme for Invigorating Education towards the 21 Century (1998) and the Tenth Five-Year Plan for Chinese Education Development (2001) reiterated the efforts towards decentralisation and marketisation and towards achieving quality and innovative education.

A review of Chinese educational policy in the past two decades indicates that it is still driven by economic imperatives. The rhetoric has changed to one of human resource development and capacity building under the influence from the West, but the purpose of education has not changed much. In China, it is generally agreed that the most precious resource in knowledge economy in the twenty-first century is human capital. Competent and innovative educational leaders equipped with advanced educational concepts are called for in order to improve student learning outcomes and achieve high quality education.

The Eighth Curricula Reform in primary and second education is the most recent initiative in China aiming to “change the traditional educational values, beliefs and ways of developing talents” (Zhu, 2002, p. 131). The Eighth Curricula Reform started in 38 national experimental areas in 2001, and the new curricula will be implemented in primary and secondary schools all over China by 2005. Similar initiatives have started in higher education institutions as well in recent years. The curricula reform demands that Chinese educators, particularly educational leaders, change their traditional views and assumptions about knowledge, learning, the purpose of education and leadership. Contemporary China needs leaders who are change agents and leading learners. The initiative between UC and HZNU in promoting professional development of Chinese educational leaders is set in this changing context.
2.3.4 Internationalisation of Education

In China, partnership programs with foreign education providers have been increasing rapidly since the 1990s, especially in the relatively developed Municipalities and eastern coastal areas. Those partnership programs play an important role in facilitating human resource development and capacity building through making use of foreign educational resources in the globalised world (The National Center for Educational Development Research, 2002).

In the context of internationalisation, institutions of higher education in China are looking to benefit from “new skills and different approaches brought by international scholars, better international research networks, or enhanced communication skills” (Welch, 1997). Postiglione and Mingle (1999) have reported that relatively few Shanghai academics have advanced degrees, especially doctorates, and even though 95% (of their sample of 276 academics from three universities in Shanghai) agree that international connections are important, only 11% studied or travelled overseas in the three years prior to their study. There has also been general concern about the quality of Chinese higher education due to insufficient funding and poor infrastructure (Bennington & Xu, 2001; Postiglione & Mingle, 1999). To some extent, Chinese academics and scholarship are still relatively isolated from current developments in Western nations.

According to a report released by Ministry of Education of P. R. China (2003b), by the end of 2002, there were 712 joint programs or agencies in China. The current number is five times the figure for 1995. These joint programs or agencies were mainly located in economically and culturally developed municipalities or eastern coastal provinces, such as Shanghai (111), Beijing (108), Shandong (78), Jiangsu (61), Liaoning (34), and Zhejiang (33). The foreign education providers were mainly from economically and technologically advanced nations or regions, such as the U.S.A (154), Australia (146), Canada (74), Japan (58), Hong Kong (56), Singapore (46), and the U.K. (40).

By the end of 2002, there were 97 partnership programs with Chinese universities which offered the degrees by foreign educational providers or universities from Hong Kong, and these degrees are recognized by Chinese education authorities (Ministry of Education, 2003a). As shown in Table 2.1, in 1995 there were only two such joint programs in China, but in 2002 the Degree Awarding Administrative Office of the State
Council approved 37 partnership programs. Among 97 partnership programs, 28 (28.9%) of them award degrees related to Master of Business Administration (MBA), Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) or Master of Public Administration (MPA). Other degrees related to education include Master of TESOL or Master of English Language, or Master of Education Management.

Table 2.1 A List of Partnership Programs Offering Degrees Recognized by China by 2003

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of programs approved in one year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>38.1</td>
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Among those 97 partnership programs, the University of Canberra (UC) in Australia had four programs, offering more recognized programs than other foreign educational providers involved. The Master of Educational Leadership program initiated by the University of Canberra and Hangzhou Normal University is the first joint graduate program in China targeted at the professional development of educational leaders. It was approved by the Degree Awarding Administrative Office of the State Council of P. R. China for three cohorts from 2001 to 2006.

2.4 The Specific Context of the Study

2.4.1 Educational Leadership Development Courses in Australia

The course involved in this study is a Western educational leadership development course. An investigation of similar courses across a range of universities in Australia was undertaken, with the intention of gauging the typicality of the course under study. Courses were selected by institutional type because it was expected that there might be predictable differences according to research emphasis, funding basis, and history of the institutions. University types developed by Marginson included (see Marginson, 1997, 1999; Marginson & Considine, 2000):

1. Sandstone and Redbrick (Group of 8) universities, established prior to 1949 as well as research intensive universities built after the end of the second world war;
2. Gumtree universities, built in the 1960s and 1970s, consequent to the Martin report but before Dawkins created the unified national system (UNS);
3. New universities, comprising old Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Higher Education and created after the UNS, i.e. post Dawkins;
4. Unitech universities, which grew from the large institutions of technology, some of which have been in operation for over a century.

For example, a research intensive Sandstone university, Melbourne University, offers a Master of Educational Management. The course is an MBA-style course which aims to provide a blend of practical knowledge, conceptual frameworks, and state-of-the-art research. A central feature of the program is its problem-based approach to learning, which involves Harvard-style advanced case studies of significant problems and issues experienced at senior levels in the work setting. The course emphasises a global perspective. Students can choose either coursework or coursework combined with a research project (Melbourne University, 2004). A Redbrick university, University of New South Wales offers a Master of Education Administration. Another Redbrick university, Monash University, offers a Master of School Leadership, which is designed to meet the needs of teachers from all sectors who aspire to school principal appointments. Course promotional materials suggest that students will expand their worldview through organisational and environmental perspectives as they develop managerial and technical proficiencies (Monash University, 2004).

A Gumtree university, Macquarie University, offers a Master of Educational Leadership (Higher Education). The program aims to provide participants with an introduction to the broad areas of leadership and organisational theory. It seeks to assist participants to develop their understanding of current and likely future approaches to the governance, structure, and organisation of higher education, of the nature of, and relationships between, academic and administrative leadership and management, the skills of effective academic and administrative leadership and management, and the challenges facing, or likely to face, the leaders and managers of higher education institutions today and in the future (Macquarie University, 2004). Other Gumtree universities also offer similar courses. For instance, La Trobe University offers a Master of Educational Leadership and Management. The course caters for people who are interested in pursuing a role in leadership, management and evaluation of educational institutions.
and systems including schools, universities, TAFE, health and nursing education, and other industries providing professional education (La Trobe University, 2004). The University of Newcastle offers a Master of Leadership and Management in Education in both coursework and research strands. Flinders University offers a Master of Educational Management in both strands as well.

The University of Canberra (UC), which belongs to the type of teaching-focused New universities, offers a Master of Educational Leadership. Other New Universities also offer similar courses. For example, Australian Catholic University (ACU) also offers a Master of Educational Leadership. Central Queensland University (CQU) offers a Master of School Management. This program is designed for school principals, deputy principals, teachers and educators wishing to take up an educational management position and education administrators and executives who wish to extend their practical knowledge and skills in school management. The Master of School Management is a professional degree specializing in quality practice in school management and offers the opportunity to focus practically and critically on daily management experiences in the schooling sector. It aims to meet the professional development needs of school administrators, recognizing the major changes affecting their work in education (Central Queensland University, 2004).

A Unitech university, RMIT University, offers a Master of Educational Leadership and Management. The promotional literature states that studies are geared to meet the needs of practitioners who wish to develop their leadership and management expertise in the rapidly changing services industry. The essential philosophical basis for this course is that as professionals we are continually engaged in: learning about learning, learning about service, learning about culture, and learning about communication. The program is structured on a number of key themes: leading and managing self, leading and managing others, leading and managing operations, and leading and managing systems (RMIT University, 2004). Another Unitech university, Curtin University, offers a Master of Leadership and Management, which is designed for those seeking an understanding of organisations in the current environment and wishing to develop practical skills assisting in leading and managing people more effectively (Curtin University, 2004).
It can be seen that similar postgraduate courses in educational leadership and management are provided across four types of universities in Australia. Nine of twelve universities offer Masters degrees in this field by coursework. A few Sandstone or Gumtree universities, like Melbourne University, the University of Newcastle, and Flinders University offer degrees in both coursework and research strands. Most Masters courses deal with educational leadership and management across a range of educational institutions with a few focusing on school leadership (Monash University, CQU, and ACU) or leadership in higher education sectors (Macquarie University). The courses reviewed generally aim at extending participants’ understanding of leadership, management and organisational theories, and developing their leadership and management expertise in the current changing environment. In these ways, the UC course is a typical Western educational leadership development program.

2.4.2 Description of the Offshore Course under Study

In 2001, the University of Canberra entered into a partnership with Hangzhou Normal University in the relatively affluent and developed Zhejiang Province in Eastern China. The agreement involved UC undertaking responsibility for six subjects from a Masters of Educational Leadership program and the local university taking responsibility for an additional four subjects requested by Chinese authorities. The participants who met the entry criteria and finished the coursework were awarded a Master degree from UC, which was also recognized by Degree Awarding Office of the State Council in China.

The six subjects offered by the University of Canberra were as follows:

- **Leadership in Learning Organisations**: This subject explores leadership and management roles within a variety of learning organisations. Students are encouraged to develop understandings of core concepts such as leadership, learning cultures and organisational development. Global issues concerning government, educational institutions and the community are identified and students are encouraged to explore their implications for leadership and management. Micro-level issues, in particular organisations, are also explored and students are expected to analyse and develop interventions in work sites with which they are familiar. Particular attempts are made to respond to the emerging leadership needs of educational institutions in China.
• *Educational Futures*: This subject explores the concept of educational futures in Chinese and international contexts. It seeks to develop critical perspectives about educational provision until the present day at primary, secondary, post secondary and higher educational settings. It utilizes the concept of lifelong learning as an emerging integrative paradigm for the twenty-first century. It seeks to identify the challenges which confront policy makers and practitioners in a world characterized by rapid globalisation, technological innovation, changing workforce needs and growing inequality.

• *Professional Development in Educational Organisations*: After studying this subject, students will be able to identify the major concepts underlying professional education theory and the distinctive nature of educational processes in organisations; analyse the relationship between professional development and organisational effectiveness; examine both the theory and practice of professional development; examine the broader structural issues of teacher career structures, promotional processes, accountability and professionalism; and review contemporary professional development issues for Chinese teachers.

• *Training, Development and Knowledge Transfer*: After studying this subject, students will be able to analyse the nature of the learning organisation; identify the implications of adult learning requirements for professional development educators; analyse the process of knowledge acquisition and transfer; identify implementation strategies that link people development to organisational culture; and apply an understanding of knowledge transfer to a professional setting or training and development program.

• *Educational Policy and Planning*: This subject explores the key influences and concepts underlying contemporary educational policy in domains such as schooling, vocational training, higher education and educational research. It pays particular attention to the economic and social assumptions which inform policy making from a range of levels. Specific attention is paid to various levels of policy making within Chinese education. There is also coverage of the role of international policy agencies in policy history in developing nations. Students are expected to develop critical analytical frameworks to examine policy matters through the concepts of power, participation, conflict
and accountability. An important aspect of the subject is the opportunity to plan a policy implementation process in a worksite.

- **Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation**: After studying this subject, students will be able to explain the concepts of organisational effectiveness; identify the role of evaluation in a broad range of public and private settings; identify the characteristics of effective evaluation methodologies and their roles in building learning capacity and cultures in organisations; analyse case studies in terms of the characteristics of effective evaluation; explore interactions between organisational cultures and evaluation fields; and design an evaluation for a particular organisation (University of Canberra, 2002).

The four subjects offered by Hangzhou Normal University included: Educational Philosophy, Educational Economics, Education Management, and Information Technology. According to the admission brochure released by Hangzhou Normal University, the purposes of the joint program were to:

- make full use of international educational resources;
- enhance the professional development of senior administrators at various levels of educational institutions and authorities;
- meet the demands of education internationalisation;
- satisfy the increasing demand for high quality and open-minded educational leaders and administrators in the twenty-first century (Hangzhou Normal University, 2003).

After studying the graduate course the students were expected to:

- have extensive and systematic discipline knowledge about educational administration, education leadership, and modern information and communication technologies;
- demonstrate instructional and managerial skills and leadership ability;
- possess enhanced abilities related to resource management, instructional design, education evaluation, education economics and school management;
- have the ability to apply theories into practice and resolve the related theoretical or practical issues;
have flexibility, decision-making, analysing and organizing abilities;
• demonstrate a relatively good command of English;
• possess enhanced ability to communicate with researchers in the international arenas (Hangzhou Normal University, 2003).

The UC Handbook stipulated the competencies it expected of graduates from the course as the ability to:

• provide educational leadership;
• manage educational resources;
• design organisational processes to maximize student learning;
• evaluate and develop teaching staff;
• liaise with government and related educational communities and organisations;
• plan, monitor and review educational policies and programs;
• implement change in educational organisations (University of Canberra, 2003).

The course is a two-year masters program. The participants in the first cohort started studying a short-term part time English Training Course in October 2001 as required by Hangzhou Normal University. The six core subjects were delivered by UC academics in Hangzhou in three intensive teaching blocks in a face-to-face context over 12 months (namely March-April 2002, October-November 2002, and April 2003). Two subjects were delivered by UC staff in one intensive teaching block which usually lasted two weeks. Students who satisfactorily completed the coursework were awarded a Masters degree from UC in December 2003.

The course was delivered in a flexible delivery mode, including face-to-face delivery (25 classroom contact hours for one subject), self-study, call-back day interaction, and distance learning. There were three stages of teaching and learning in every semester.

1. Previewing stage. Upon getting the subject outlines, study guides and reading bricks, students were required to preview the course materials and be familiar with the contents. Chinese co-teachers provided tutoring sessions in
preparation for the intensive delivery stage in order to familiarise students with the key concepts in English.

2. Intensive delivery stage. Australian academics conducted teaching in class and provided guidance to students.

3. Self-study and assignment stage. Students received support and feedback from Chinese co-teachers as they completed their assignments. They had online communication with the Australian academics as appropriate. They also exchanged views with co-teachers and other students on call-back days and were required to incorporate constructive feedback into their assignments.

The participants were part-time students with full-time work commitments. They were school principals and deputies, officials from local and provincial education departments, and administrators from higher education institutions. They were high caliber educational leaders in Zhejiang Province but most possessed limited proficiency in English. Therefore, a co-teaching and bilingual flexible model of delivery was adopted. Australian academics undertook responsibility for the development and intensive delivery of the course and for moderating assessment. Chinese academics were utilized as translators of course materials, co-teachers in the classes, providers of support for students to complete assignments after the intensive phase, and markers of assignments. Lectures were delivered in English and translated by bilingual team members. Course materials were primarily of Western origin, but some materials were drawn from Chinese sources or relevant cross-cultural studies. Study Guides, Subject Outlines and Summaries of selected readings were provided in Mandarin to facilitate student understanding.

2.4.3 Academic Profiles and Teaching Approaches

A profile of the course deliverers was provided in addition to an introduction of the subject contents. Five Australian academics from the University of Canberra were involved in the development of the course materials and delivery of the six subjects in China. Four academics are experienced teachers at senior levels and have held leadership roles. The following is a brief introduction of their academic background.

Academic A holds a Diploma of Teaching, B.A., M. Ed, and PhD in Psychology, and is Associate Professor of Education. She has taught undergraduate and postgraduate
courses onshore and offshore for many years in university sector, such as adult education, professional development, and organisational development. Her major area of research is leadership development, strategic planning, postgraduate research supervision, and institutional and academic autonomy. She has published two books, one in education, and she is currently writing a third book. She is currently in a leadership role as Deputy Head of Division and was previously convenor of an academic leadership program at a research intensive university. She also initiated and co-convened the Academic Leadership Program at UC.

Academic B holds a B.A. Hons, M.A., M.Ed. and PhD in Education, and is Senior Lecturer of Education. He has over twenty years experience in educational leadership. He was principal of a large secondary school and later joined the senior management of one of the largest school systems in Australia. He is the Convenor of an educational leadership program at UC. His research interests include educational leadership, community leadership, intercultural leadership, lifelong learning, gender issues in education and futures planning.

Academic C holds a B.A., Dip. Ed, B. SpeEd, M. Ed, and PhD in education, and is Associate Professor of Human Resource Development. He has held a number of positions in the University such as director of HRD Centre, Head of the Educational Leadership and Professional Development Program. He has many publications including three books (also translated and published in China). He has won several awards such as the American Society for Training and Development award (ASTD) for leadership in research. He was a finalist for the 2003 and 2004 Australian Human Resource Awards (Lexis Nexis) in the category of “KPMG Award for Outstanding Contribution to HR”. Currently he convenes the Master of Human Resource Development and the Professional Development Education courses at UC and is conducting research into executive decision-making comparing problem solving and ways of thinking across Chinese and Australian cultures.

Academic D holds a B.A. (Honours) and M. Ed. (Honours) and is Associate Professor of Community Development. She is Director of a community development research institute. Prior to that, she was a Deputy Director of the Division and Head of School. She is a program leader of postgraduate courses in Community and Health
Development and teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses in both onshore and offshore programs. Her research and teaching focuses on socio-economic change in communities, social capital development, capacity building, community leadership and strategies for regional community development. She has also researched, written and taught in the area of race-relations and multiculturalism.

Academic E, the researcher, is Lecturer of Education. She was a lecturer at a university in China for ten years. She obtained her Masters degree in Educational Leadership from UC and then started her PhD research in the field of educational leadership in 2001. She has taught Master of Educational Leadership, Master of Professional English subjects, Chinese Language and Culture, and Advanced Chinese. Her research interests include leadership in cross-cultural settings, transnational education, learning conceptions, professional development of educators, and comparative studies. A personal context for the study is provided in detail in the next section.

The overall design of the course reflected a strong commitment to characteristics known to facilitate adult learning (Brookfield, 1986; Foley, 2000b; Knowles, 1978, 1980; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). These include:

- a high degree of choice, self-direction and participation;
- opportunities to relate the core concepts of the subject to workplace realities;
- utilization of group learning processes consistent with theories of learning cultures;
- criterion-based and honest feedback from teaching staff and fellow students;
- opportunity for field-based exploration of and application of learning (adapted from the Subject Outlines).

The Australian academics generally employed a common teaching approach focusing on utilization of adult learning principles and learners’ prior experience. This participatory teaching approach was used across the range of subjects. Academic C’s views about teaching and learning were mostly typical and widely shared by the other academics. For example, academic C explained that his conception of teaching, learning and research includes an essential social dimension. Activities that lead to insights are essentially group based and rely on consolidation and exploration of ideas among people with knowledge, experience and an interest in those issues. In his teaching he
has endeavoured to demonstrate a commitment to basic principles of adult learning as espoused by Malcolm Knowles, known as the father of adult learning, who states that adult learners have a self-concept of being self-directed, they are responsible for their own lives and their learning especially in the classroom where they should not be reduced to dependency by the teacher. Second, adults have a great volume of experience which they should be encouraged to reflect upon in their learning and become a rich resource to themselves and others in the learning process. Third, adults are ready to learn when they experience a need to know or to do something in order to perform more effectively in a particular area of their life or work, and as a teacher his role is to stimulate readiness within students so they can optimise their applied learning. Fourth, adults tend to enter learning situations with a life-centred and problem-focused approach. This means that as a teacher and facilitator his role is to develop in the adult student the need to know what will be learned. Fifth, the more potent motivators for adults to learn are intrinsic ones, and as a facilitator and teacher his emphasis in program delivery is to highlight these types of outcomes (adapted from personal communication).

Academic C also emphasised that all learners build upon knowledge and wisdom accumulated over time. The process of discovery itself is essentially a social one through modelling, imitation, empathy, vicarious reinforcement and creating cultures and new perspectives through juxtaposing ideas in new ways. To him, teaching means facilitating a process of discovery that needs sustained, concentrated effort and a rigorous and robust methodology, otherwise the knowledge created will lack substance and credibility. A central issue that teachers need to face is how to assist students to achieve quality in our ever-changing environment. In essence, the teacher fosters and augments learning to enable students to achieve a product of the highest quality that advances knowledge and understanding contributing to enhancing society. From the students’ perspective, a teacher is someone who assists them to achieve a personal, professional outcome, and through the course of actions to acquire expertise in the discipline and in the learning and research processes (adapted from personal communication).

The teaching approach in the course was deliberately dialogue-based and linked to constructivist theories of learning (e.g. Chan, 2001; Huang, 2002). It combined mini-
lectures with group and report back sessions where the aim was explicitly to encourage students to construct their own critical understandings based upon their knowledge of Chinese cultural values and traditions, Chinese education and leadership practices and input from the Australian academics. This was encouraged through the use of learning journals where students were asked to record their critical reflections about learning events from each day of the course. The assignments required students to analyse local situations and workplaces, and then apply their acquired knowledge through personal reflection and planning change interventions.

2.5 A Personal Context for the Study

On a personal and practical level, this study also emerged from the researcher’s curiosity about how Chinese leaders studied a Western leadership development course, how they perceive their learning experience in a cross-cultural educational context, and how the researcher could help more of them to become aware of their conceptions and emerging understandings of learning and leadership.

Being an academic in a university in Beijing for ten years and already having exposure to Western culture before studying overseas, the researcher felt confident that it would not be too difficult for her to fit into the new environment. However, when the researcher came to Australia to pursue her postgraduate and doctoral study, she found she needed to make efforts to adapt to the new academic socialisation in addition to overcoming hurdles faced by international students, such as the complexity of a new culture, a different academic culture, and the subtlety of a second language. With her own rewarding and enlightening learning experience in a Western culture, the researcher is particularly interested in understanding learning experience of Chinese leaders who “study a Western course without stepping out of national boundary”. Will they find it hard to fit into an international education environment and how will they relate their learning into their professional lives?

As an interpreter and co-teacher for the course delivery in China, the researcher was involved in development and translation of the course materials, liaison with the partnership university, and actual delivery of six subjects in three intensive teaching blocks in China. The researcher has shared participants’ learning experiences over the course through interacting with them in lectures, having engaging discussions with
them in group work and informal exchanges after class, and visiting their workplaces, in addition to interviewing twenty participants. In working with class groups and individuals through the eighteen months the researcher noticed that some people seemed to experience insights and develop alternative perspectives, others struggled to own new ideas and a few seemed to reject them.

The researcher witnessed participants’ developmental process of fitting into and reflecting on a new learning environment. Many participants have developed from initial surprise and frustration in reacting to different teaching approaches, different values and ideology from Western culture to an increasing intercultural sensitivity and awareness of their assumptions about learning, teaching, and leadership. The researcher was impressed by their critique of and reflection on Chinese learning/leadership traditions and contemporary practices. The researcher also deepened her understanding about learning, teaching and leadership in the contemporary, changing context of Chinese education. The researcher admired the passion, insight, and openness of Chinese educational leaders who have embraced the challenges of globalisation and radical educational reforms sweeping the nation.

Exposure to alternative perspectives and learning experience made participants re-examine their assumptions and contemporary Chinese education and leadership practice from a fresh perspective. As well as learners and observers in the class, they were also educational leaders holding important positions at various institutions. The researcher is interested in how these leaders became more aware of their perspectives, developed their ways of understanding critical aspects of learning and leadership, and more importantly, improved their leadership practice after studying a Western leadership course. In this way, the researcher has developed her own understanding about Chinese education and leadership, and developed professionally as an academic in the professional development of educators.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides background information for the research context of the study. The chapter begins with a description of the changes affecting international education in Australia and growth of offshore education. The discourse surrounding China’s educational policy is outlined as well as its cultural background and the politico-
economic rationale for quality education and leadership development in contemporary China. Contextual information about the specific Australian offshore program and a discussion of a personal context for the study concludes this chapter.
Chapter 3 Literature Review on Conceptions of Learning

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study based on previous literature on conceptions of learning. It begins with a review of the literature surrounding Chinese culture and its influence on learning and teaching traditions. Some commonly held opinions and recent interpretations of Chinese learning and teaching are also reviewed. This is followed by a review of research employing the phenomenographic approach into students’ conceptions of learning in the West and in cross-cultural contexts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of conceptions of learning from a conceptual change perspective. The main focus of the literature reviewed in this chapter is research that has explored the learning traditions and conceptions of learning, particularly in the Chinese context.

3.2 Chinese Culture and Learning Traditions

We are what we are because of culturally based learning (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990).

In any social system, culture serves as a perceptual framework that guides the interpretation of interactions and the construction of meanings (Cortazzi, 1990). In educational institutions, this can include perceptions regarding rights, rules, roles and unspoken assumptions about how to learn and what is worth learning (Ballard, 1987; Barker, 1997; Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Hofstede, 1980, 1986). Hence, an investigation of the Chinese culture and learning traditions provides an appropriate backdrop to understanding Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning.

3.2.1 Conceptions of Learning in Confucian Tradition

Chinese education and learning traditions have been influenced by Chinese culture in general and Confucianism in particular for centuries. Within many schools of thought in Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism has been the most important influence. The great teacher-philosopher, Confucius’ (551 BC) notion of education as changing people for the better remains at the heart of the purpose of education even in the early years of the third millennium (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Cleverley, 1991; Wong, 2001b). The
development and characteristics of the system of Chinese education have been greatly influenced by Confucianism and this traditional culture (Wang & Mao, 1996). Cleverley (1991) argues that traditionally the Chinese have placed a high value on education. While modern schooling has been accompanied by far reaching attitudinal change, “the Chinese people have not lightly discarded the patterns of thinking and action from their rich historical past whose values have permeated the new Marxist precepts” (Cleverley, 1991, p. xii).

Some scholars believe that all education in mainland China is based on Confucian principles even though the teachers and students are often unaware of the source (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). These principles include the high value placed on education by society; beliefs that learning involves reflection and application; that hard work can compensate for lack of ability; that the teacher is a model both of knowledge and morality; and that learning is a moral duty and studying hard is a responsibility to the family (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Watkins, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 2001b). Lee (1996) argues that contemporary explanations of the cultural contexts of Chinese learners highlight a number of Confucian conceptions which continue to have currency. He describes the following critical aspects of conceptions of learning in the Confucian tradition.

**The significance of education**

The significance of education features highly in the Confucian tradition. Education is perceived as important not only for personal improvement but also for societal development. *The Great Learning* constitutes one of the *Four Books*, and the opening sentence of Confucius’s *Analects* (I.1) refers to the significance and joy of learning: “Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?” (*Analects*, 1990) Education is not only important for personal development, according to Confucius, society requires learned people to be officials: “The officer, having discharged all his duties, should devote his leisure to learning. The student, having completed his learning, should apply himself to be officer” (*Analects*, XIX. 13), a similar notion to Plato’s philosopher king, who asserts that the country should be ruled by wise and learned people (Lee, 1996, pp. 26-27). This conception has influenced the traditions of bureaucracy and officialdom, and it has carried implications for concepts of learning and leadership in contemporary China.
**Educability for all and perfectibility for all**

The high status of education in the Confucian tradition rests upon the presumption that everyone is educable. Confucius himself set an example by never refusing to teach whosoever came with a nominal ceremonial tutorial fee (*Analects*, VII. 7). One of his most famous sayings refers to education without class distinction (Zhu, 1992). Confucius was aware of social inequality, “By nature men are nearly alike, but through experience they grow wide apart” (*Analects*, XVII. 2). However, his practice was to use education to overcome socially generated differences. The concept that everyone is educable, everyone can become a sage, and everyone is perfectible forms the basic optimism and dynamism towards education in the Confucian tradition. And this explains why education is viewed to be wholly significant in such a tradition (Lee, 1996, pp. 28-30).

**Learning, effort, will power, and human perfectibility**

The concept of the attainability of human perfectibility is expressed in terms of sagehood in the Confucian tradition, and is closely related to education. To the Confucianist, education and learning are always associated with effort. Self-determination or will-power is the driving force of efforts. “If another man succeeds by one effort, he will use a thousand efforts. If another man succeeds by ten efforts, he will use a thousand. Let a man proceed in this way, and, though dull, he will surely become intelligent; though weak, he will surely become strong” (*The Mean*, XX. 20-21). It is clear that human perfectibility, learning, rationality, effort, and will power are discussed in the Confucian tradition in close relationship. They are so closely interrelated that they are sometimes inseparable. This Confucian tradition illuminates how Chinese learners view education, and explains why effort is seen to be so important in the process of human perfectibility (Lee, 1996, p. 32).

**Intrinsic motivation of learning: learning for self-realization**

The notion of “learning for the sake of one’s self” best signifies the individualistic orientation in education in Confucian tradition. Learning is considered to be an end in itself rather than a means to an end (Tu, 1985). It originates from Confucius’ dictum in the *Analects* (XIV. 25), which was expanded to criticize the attitude of learning for the sake of pleasing others or showing off to others. This notion was seized upon by the
Neo-Confucianists in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) who attacked bureaucratic scholarship and the vogue of learning for sitting civil examinations. Tu (1985, pp. 55-57) interprets “learning for the sake of the self” to mean self-cultivation. The purpose of learning is therefore to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous, and authentic being. The process of learning is therefore an inner-directed process. This ideal of learning is similar to Maslow’s (1968) concept of the peak experience of learning, ultimately oriented towards self-actualization (Lee, 1996, p. 34).

The deep approach to learning: promoting reflection and enquiry

Confucian traditions of learning and teaching also emphasise deep as opposed to superficial knowledge. As education in the Confucian tradition is considered important for its intrinsic value, it is by nature inclined towards the deep approach rather than the surface approach to learning. There is strong stress on the significance of reflective thinking in the process of learning in the Confucian tradition. Apart from suggesting that seeking knowledge (learning) and thinking are two sides of the coin, Confucius’ conception of learning was indeed a process of “studying extensively, enquiring carefully, pondering thoroughly, sifting clearly, and practicing earnestly…” (The Mean, XX.19). The emphasis on reflective thinking in learning requires a spirit of enquiry and open-mindedness. It is worth mentioning here that memorization is seen as a significant part of learning in the Confucian tradition, but should by no means be equated with rote learning. Memorization precedes understanding, and is for deeper understanding. It has never been regarded as an end in itself. Memorizing, understanding, reflecting and questioning are the basic components of learning. They are interrelated and integrated, and should be repeated for future and deeper learning (Lee, 1996, pp. 35-36).

Achievement motivation in learning

Confucian tradition not only places emphasis on the intrinsic significance of education but also on the dimension of external manifestation and utility of education. The fact that a person should seek perfection (pursue sagehood) and a government office has thereby become an ideal of the Confucian tradition, which is typified in the notion of “sage within and king without” (Neisheng waiwang) (Chang, 1976, p. 293). It is said in
The Great Learning that a person should “cultivate himself, then regulate the family, then govern the state, and finally lead the world into peace” (The Great Learning, IV). This can be interpreted in two ways: if a person wants to govern the state, he should first cultivate himself; on the other hand, if there is a person who has cultivated himself sufficiently well, he should seek to influence the outside world. Hence for Confucius, a scholar should ultimately seek the opportunity to obtain a government office, in order to extend his good influence. Paradoxically, the aspiration for extrinsic rewards coexists with the ideal of external manifestation of a person’s internal establishment in the Confucian tradition (Lee, 1996, pp. 37-38). The concepts of learning are part of a political order, which also suggests a utilitarian end of learning and a quest for officialdom and self-cultivation.

The influence of the basic tenets of Confucian conceptions of learning has been pervasive over the centuries and can still be felt in contemporary Chinese education (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Wong, 2001b). It is a complex tradition which embraces various goals for learning, but it has been reduced to a simple stereotype by some Western observers. The following accounts describe some commonly held opinions about learning and teaching in China.

### 3.2.2 Some Commonly Held Opinions about Chinese Learning

**Rote learning and examination culture**

The Confucian tradition has influenced Chinese education for more than 2000 years. Some researchers argue that the emphasis was on rote-learning for centuries and the whole process of learning was geared to the memorization of ideas of antiquity, by way of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* (Guo, 1996; Wang & Mao, 1996). This made up the content of education which had to be mastered for the Civil Service Examination. This national-run public examination for selecting government officers, called *Ke Ju*, started in China more than 1000 years ago. If candidates could recite the texts correctly during the Examination, they would obtain an official position in a government.

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5 A person here refers to a man or a woman. However, he is used afterwards, indicating a strong patriarchal culture in ancient China.

Nine decades have passed since the Civil Service Examination was abolished in 1905, but the method of memorization is still prevalent among Chinese learners. It is still thought that people should memorize as much knowledge as possible and that one cannot produce or create until one has accumulated enough basic knowledge (Guo, 1996). Many commentators on contemporary Chinese education suggest that learning for exams still relies heavily on memorization. Such exams, they argue, promote surface learning—the ability merely to repeat information without a real understanding of meaning or of how the new information relates to previous knowledge (Kennedy, 2002). A strong focus on examinations has been recognized as a weakness of the basic education in China (Gao & Watkins, 2001a, 2002). The exam culture acts as a barrier to creative expression, critical thinking and problem-solving in education and subsequently in work. Chinese students are frequently characterized as hard-working and diligent but lacking in creativity and originality: for example, “even though Chinese students do better than Western students in mathematics and sciences, they are not known for their creativity and original thinking” (Salili, 1996, p. 100).

The Civil Service Examination (Ke Ju) was viewed as an effective method of selecting “excellent” intellectuals. Every candidate had the opportunity to reach the top status in society and consequently become rich if they could succeed in the Ke Ju. Schooling was considered a way of educating government officials, the so called Xue Er You Ze Shi (Gao & Watkins, 2001a, 2002). This phenomenon is reflected in the following idioms: “although studying anonymously for ten years, once you are successful, you will become well-known in the world” and “there are golden houses in books and there are beautiful girls in books” (see also Lee 1996).

From the thirteenth century onwards, success in Civil Service Examinations could lead to great wealth and high status (Lee, 1996, p. 37). Even today, in contemporary China, academic success still remains the route to a good job and high social status. Schooling in China is often considered an important and effective way of raising one’s social and

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6 This is a quotation of Zi Xia, one of the followers of Confucius. It means that when a scholar is able to cope beyond studies, he should take office in the government.
economic status. Success in public examinations, for instance, the National University Entrance Examination, means that one can expect a better career with security and high income after graduation from university. Parents are therefore very concerned about their children’s performance in examinations. Most reward their children for higher marks in examinations or punish them for poor performance. Student records in public examinations are treated as the most important indicator of the quality of schools by the community (Gao & Watkins, 2001a, 2002; Simon, 2000).

Learning is therefore considered as utilitarian, and knowledge as useful information or objective truth to be mastered by students. Students know their academic success, and eventual economic and social status, hinge upon achievement, which is linked to examinations. This linkage from authorized knowledge, to testing, to achievement, and eventually to privilege, is apparent from elementary school through university in China (Pratt, Kelly, & Wong, 1999). Kvale (1996b) points out the cyclical nature of this relationship and problematises the nature of the examination process in China.

A discipline’s knowledge is not merely transmitted in teaching and evaluated at examinations; the examination itself contributes to the construction of what counts as valid knowledge. The very process of examining provides an operational definition for the students what knowledge is worthy of acquisition and mastery (Kvale, 1996b, p. 124).

**Authoritarian teacher and obedient student**

There are generally two conceptions of teaching and learning (Cortazzi, 1990). One perception views them as hierarchical, positioning the teacher as all knowing and his/her knowledge as being transmitted directly to learners. Another perception views the relationship between the teacher and students as more egalitarian. This latter perception views learners as creatively building up knowledge and concepts through activity, participation and independent thinking (McClure, 2003). The first perception has been often associated with Asian or high-context cultures, like Chinese culture, that stress “continuity, stability, and group identity”, (Cortazzi, 1990, p. 58). The second is linked to Western or low-context cultures that emphasise individual development, innovation and an egalitarian ambiance. Cortazzi (1990) stresses that both perceptions “are present in most of cultures but receive very different emphasis, with the result that varied expectations come about, affecting presuppositions about learning and teaching”.

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Cortazzi and Jin (1997) argue that Chinese academic culture tends to put an emphasis on the first perception.

The academic culture of the Chinese emphasises relationships. The collective consciousness of the group is important. Hierarchical relations obtain strongly between those who are older, senior or in authority, and those who are younger, junior or subordinate. It follows that a learner’s duty is to understand and master what those in authority say, as transmission, before any independence of mind or creativity in a field can be expected (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, pp. 78-79).

Indeed this academic culture can be traced back to the Chinese traditions of respecting authority and rank. According to the Confucian code of social conduct, Wu Lun (five cardinal relationships), children are taught to have respect for age and rank—for parents, elders and ancestors (Bond, 1996). Teachers were traditionally listed among the five categories of those most respected by Chinese society: the God of Heaven, the God of the Earth, the emperor, parents and teachers (Lee, 1996; Zhou, 1988). Proper respect is to be given to teachers, whose wisdom and knowledge is taken for granted and not questioned (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Kennedy, 2002). Students are expected to “respect the teacher’s authority without preconditions” (Wang & Mao, 1996, p. 148).

Besides their extensive knowledge and intelligence, teachers were and are regarded by their students as their “parents”, people who would look after them with care and love. There is a saying in Chinese about the relationship between students and teacher: “If someone taught you as a teacher for one day, you should respect him as your father for the rest of your life” (Wan, 2001). In turn, students are expected to obey their teachers just as they do their parents. A traditional feudal parent-child relationship is therefore reflected in the teacher-student relationship (Guo, 1996). Chinese learners have been brought up to respect wisdom, knowledge and expertise of parents and teachers. They have been socialized to respect those who provide the knowledge and to avoid challenging those in authority (Chan, 1999).

It is frequently contended that socio-cultural attitudes such as emphasis on authority and face promote conformity and reinforce passive, compliant roles in class (Kennedy, 2002). The concept of face (mian zi)—having status in front of others—is important. It is argued that it is Chinese tradition that people are afraid of making mistakes, for losing
face. This traditional doctrine, which advised people to take a neutral stance, is still observable in China today. Pratt (1992a, p. 303) notes that Chinese proverbs, such as “the bird that stands out will be shot first” and “the taller tree will catch the wind first”, warn people not to take risks but “to play it safe”. It is considered selfish and shameful to cause someone to “lose face” (Bond, 1996). Students are not encouraged to speak out, to question or to criticize, and are unwilling to commit themselves for fear of being wrong and thus losing face (Tsui, 1996). Being modest and self-effacing, not “blowing your own trumpet” is praiseworthy, while wasting other students’ class time by expressing independent judgments is egotistical and selfish. Traditional teachers may regard students as impolite if they ask questions and interrupt the class. They may think that students want to challenge them and such challenges are disrespectful and may cause them to lose face (Chang & Holt, 1994; Hwang, 1987).

Teachers are expected to act as role models, and relate students’ intellectual development to their moral and personal development (Gao & Watkins, 2002). A good teacher should not only perform well in teaching and learning, but also perform well in other aspects of life, the so-called Wei Ren Shi Biao (a set phrase in Chinese which means teaching as well as cultivating good persons). Chinese students expect teachers to have deep knowledge, be able to answer questions, and be good moral models (Cortazzi & Jin, 2001). This might be another powerful legacy of Chinese educators. Han Yu, one of the most widely recognized scholars and educators in the Tang Dynasty, summarised three different roles of a teacher in his book Shi Shuo (On Teachers):

> What is a teacher? A teacher is the one who shows you the way of being human, teaches you knowledge and enlightens you when you are confused (Liu, 1973, p. 754).

**Transmissive teaching and passive learning**

The learning traditions in China have been a process of transmission of information and skills from teacher to learner (Guo, 1996). Pratt (1992a), a Canadian who has examined teaching and learning in China, explains that one of the concepts of Chinese teaching is the delivery of content. Pratt (1992a, p. 313) states that, in China, the teacher’s responsibility is to deliver content; the learner’s responsibility is to absorb it—teachers give and learners receive. In other words, teachers take responsibility and the learner
remains a passive recipient. Students, the learners, are considered as empty containers or sponges of authoritative knowledge (Gu & Meng, 2001; Guo, 1996). Ginsberg (1992, p. 6) commented that a teacher in China is an authority figure, “a respected elder transmitting to a subordinate junior”. Teaching is largely didactic and text-bound, with little time allowed for discussion:

For many Chinese students and teachers books are thought of as an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. Knowledge is “in” the book and can be taken out and put inside students’ heads … [whereas] for many foreigners, books are open to interpretation and dispute (Maley, 1983, p. 101).

Some scholars speculate that the over-reliance on the teacher and the set textbook may retard the development of ideas in students. They believe that students’ creativity is hindered from childhood, and although students can get high scores in their exams, they may not be very competent at solving practical problems. The saying “High scores but low abilities” is used to describe this common phenomenon in Chinese education. Many commentators have lamented that critical thinking and originality of students are woefully ignored (e.g. Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Gu & Meng, 2001; Kennedy, 2002; Salili, 1996; Su & Su, 1994; Zhong et al., 2000; Zhu, 2002).

Such teaching and learning traditions lead teachers to be very formal and serious—the unquestionable authorities in the classroom (Su & Su, 1994; Zhong et al., 2000; Zhu, 1999; Zhu, 2002). They encourage students to accept and conform to the established principles and procedures. Chinese students also expect classes to be formal. They expect the teacher to control the class, and “cram knowledge”. If the teacher does not, the students will judge them to know little, or not to have adequately prepared the lessons in advance. The teacher will be suspected of avoiding responsibility and will not be regarded as a good teacher. Those teachers who have tried to change teacher-centred instruction may have sometimes been labelled as “lazy teachers” because they let their students explore and solve problems before presenting the correct answer to them (Su & Su, 1994; Zhu, 2002).

Both Chinese students and teachers pay particular attention to establishing a systematic structure of knowledge and illustrating fully the relationship among key concepts and
theories (Pratt et al., 1999). Many teachers prefer deductive rather than inductive reasoning as the major method of teaching. Teachers first present theories or concepts step by step, and then proceed in an orderly way with specific examples to explain the concepts. It is very important for teachers to be “correct” and “detailed” in teaching basic theories and concepts. Whether the lectures are lively and interesting is of secondary importance (Su & Su, 1994). It is widely believed that mastering foundational knowledge and basic skills is the prelude to ability development and creativity (Gardner, 1989; Pratt et al., 1999).

Some researchers speculate that the emphasis on systematic knowledge transmission and interrelationship among theories may be related to the cognitive style of Chinese learners. Oxford and Anderson (1995) describe Chinese learners as adopting a **concrete-sequential** cognitive style as opposed to an **intuitive-random** one. Chinese learners are more **reflective** than **impulsive**, that is, they prefer a slow, accurate, systematic approach and are less comfortable with guessing or predicting. They feel the need for rapid and constant correction and have a low level of tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

Many Chinese theorists maintain that conceptions about learning and teaching in China are influenced by the pervasive influence of behaviourism or a positivistic view of learning. They advocate an interpretative or constructivist view of learning and knowledge in contemporary Chinese education (Chen & Zhang, 1998; Ding, 2001; Gao, 2003; Gardner, 1989; He, 1998; Mao, 1998, 2003; Oxford & Anderson, 1995). Whereas the behaviourist approach was seen to be useful for building up sub-skills and basic knowledge, increased attention has now been given to constructivist\(^7\) and social-constructivist approaches emphasizing learning and teaching for understanding (Chan, 2001). Positivists regard knowledge as an entity independent of learners, something “out there”. The interpretive and constructionist approaches see knowledge as both subjective and socially constructed (Crotty, 1998; Foley, 2000a). Due to the influence of positivist assumptions about learning and knowledge, the phenomena of didactic

\(^7\) Constructivism is also used, often interchangeably with constructionism. Crotty (1998) considers a useful distinction that can be made between the two. Further explanation of constructionism is provided in Chapter 5.
teaching and passive learning are not uncommon in Chinese schools and universities (Zhu, 2002).

Knowledge is generally regarded as sacred and authoritative, which is not only absolute but also objective truth. Therefore, knowledge becomes an objective entity existing like underground natural resources to humans. As to knowledge, the only thing people can do is to discover its existence. As to students, their main tasks are to acquire and store knowledge discovered by precedents (Zhu, 2002, p. 7).

3.2.3 Some Recent Reinterpretations

The preceding account runs the risk of generalizing stereotypes which are too superficial. Some of the descriptions may hold certain truth. However, the reality is actually more complex than the portrait drawn above. This portrait is hereby introduced as a “general consensus” amongst commentators, which should be subsequently modified and reinterpreted.

As suggested in the preceding section, Chinese learners are generally considered as passive receivers of established knowledge and seldom challenge the validity of knowledge and authority of teachers. It is widely believed that knowledge transmission and achieving orientation are emphasised in Chinese education. According to some Western scholars, large size classes with teacher-centred approach may lead to poor learning outcome and academic performance. However, the superior performance of Chinese students in the international tests of mathematics and science has prompted some researchers to investigate the paradox of Chinese learners and Chinese teachers (Biggs, 1996b; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Watkins, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001a, 2001b). Recent years have also seen some reinterpretations and new understandings of Chinese learning and teaching.

Confucian confusions

Recently, Kennedy (2002) indicated some existing “Confucian confusions”. Although the “Confucian values” of collectivism and conformity are often stressed in the research literature on “the Chinese learner”, it should be noted that Confucius also emphasised individuality in learning, “learning for the sake of the self”. Education is only meaningful if it leads to the perfection of the self; “the purpose of learning is therefore
to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous, and an authentic being”. Confucius also “promoted reflection and inquiry” in the learning process (see Lee, 1996, pp. 25-41). Cheng (2000, p. 441) concurs, pointing out that the Chinese term “knowledge” is made up of two characters: “One is ‘xue’ (to learn) and the other is ‘wen’ (to ask). This means that the action of enquiring and questioning is central to the quest for knowledge.” Biggs (1991) shares a similar view, and comments that the Confucian tradition, in fact, emphasises a deep approach to learning.

Confucius himself saw learning as deep: “seeing knowledge without thinking is labour lost; thinking without seeking knowledge is perilous [Analects II. 15]”, his methods were individual and Socratic, not expository; his aim was to shape social and familial values in order to conserve a particular political structure. These do not appear particularly conducive to surface learning. However, Confucius did inspire several themes and variations (Biggs, 1991, p. 30).

Memorising and understanding

A particular aspect of the “paradox of the Chinese learner” is the relationship between memorising and understanding. Chinese students are perceived as passive rote learners, yet show high levels of understanding (Watkins & Biggs, 2001b). Contrary to the commonly held opinion that Confucianism emphasises rote-learning, memorization is considered as a significant part of learning in the Confucian tradition. But memorization should not be equated with rote learning (Lee, 1996). In other words, memorization has never been seen as an end in itself but as a prelude to deeper understanding. In situations such as preparing for an examination or a performance, “memorizing lines or already understood facts may be required to ensure success and is considered to be a deep approach” (Ho, Salili, Biggs, & Hau, 1999, p. 48). Research shows that many of the teachers and better students do not see memorizing and understanding as separate but rather as interlocking processes, and high quality learning outcomes usually require both processes (Biggs, 1996b; Kember, 1996; Marton, Dall'alba, & Tse, 1996; Marton, Watkins, & Tang, 1997; Watkins, 1996b). This theme was taken up by Dahlin and Watkins (2000). Their study on Chinese learners has sought to draw a clearer distinction between the rote learning process (mechanical learning without meaning) and repetition for “deep memorizing” of content. Whereas Western students saw
understanding as usually a process of sudden insight, Chinese students typically thought of understanding as a long process that required considerable mental effort.

**A family relationship between student and teacher**

The relationship between student and teacher also seems to take on a somewhat different character in collectivist Chinese cultures. This is an area where Western observers often see only part of the picture. The teacher-student relationships may be not as cold or authoritarian as they at first appear (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). The typical method of teaching is not simply transmission of superior knowledge but utilizes considerable interaction in a mutually accepting social context (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). In class, a teacher’s manner might appear to be formal and distant, but out of class, they are expected to be more informal. The relationship between students and teachers is not limited to the classroom and the academic work of that arena. There is a feeling that teachers and students should think of each other as members of an extended family. Responsibility, authority, and morality (heart) are all part of the relationships (Pratt et al., 1999).

**A mixture of authoritarianism and student-centredness**

The picture of passive, non-participative Chinese learners and a teacher-dominated, authoritarian classroom is common (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Pierson, 1996; Scollon & Scollon, 1994). However, as Cortazzi and Jin (1996:191) suggest, it may be that “students are not passive but reflective…Chinese students value thoughtful questions which they ask after sound reflection…less thoughtful questions may be laughed at by other students”. After a few visits to China, Gardner (1989) realised that his first impressions of Chinese teaching as mimetic, highly directive and imitative were simplistic. Teaching is in fact accomplished “by holding the hand”, not simply by directing. He explained different beliefs about the appropriate order of various learning-related activities. Westerners believe in exploring first, then in the development of skill; the Chinese believe in skill development first, which typically involves repetitive learning (as opposed to rote learning), after which there is something to be creative with. Gardner is not the only Westerner to make this point:

A common Western stereotype is that the Asian teacher is an authoritarian purveyor of information, one who expects students to listen and memorize
correct answers and procedures rather than to construct knowledge themselves. This does not describe the dozens of elementary school teachers that we observed (Stigler & Stevenson, 1991).

The teachers that Stigler and Stevenson (1991) observed, in China, Taiwan, and Japan, saw their task as posing provocative questions, allowing reflection time, and varying techniques to suit individual students: Confucius’ “elicitation” mode is in full swing. Researchers use the term “constructivist” to describe the most common teaching approach they saw, an ideal espoused by progressive Western educators and in practice realised only by the expert few (Driver & Oldham, 1986; Tobin & Fraser, 1988: cited in Biggs, 1996b). This is not to say that Chinese teachers are non-authoritarian but there is an apparently curious mixture of authoritarianism and student-centredness in the Chinese classroom. Again, the reality is more complex than the stereotype.

It seems that Chinese teaching and learning are more subtle and complex than they appear to be in some (Western) representations of them. Relevant studies provide evidence that conceptions of teaching, learning, and knowing are deeply rooted in specific cultural antecedents and social structures (Gao & Watkins, 2001a, 2002; Kember, Kwan, & Ledesma, 2001; Marton, 1981; Pratt et al., 1999). Consequently, there arises the need to further investigate conceptions of learning from the experience of the actors in a specific cultural context. The next section reviews research on conceptions of learning from phenomenographic, cross-cultural, and conceptual change perspectives.

3.3 Research on Conceptions of Learning

3.3.1 Phenomenographic Perspective

In recent years, considerable research interest in education has been given to investigating students’ conceptions of learning. Some studies conducted in the West investigate conceptions of learning (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, Dall'alba, & Beaty, 1993; Prosser, Trigwell, & Taylor, 1994), the relationship between student conceptions of learning and other key aspects regarding students’ use of self-regulated learning strategies (Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996), the classroom environment, and approaches to learning (Dart et al., 2000), contrasting forms of memorization (Meyer, 2000), student academic achievement (McLean, 2001), tertiary students’ perceptions of
responsibility for their learning (Devlin, 2002), and university assistants’ perceptions of knowledge and instruction (Buelens, Clement, & Clarebout, 2002).

There is also considerable research investigating the conceptions of learning held by Asian students (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Fung, Carr, & Chan, 2001; Marton et al., 1996; Marton et al., 1997; Meyer & Boulton-Lewis, 1999; Meyer & Kiley, 1998; Sachs & Chan, 2003; Tang, 2001; Yuk & Gerber, 2001) or indigenous Australian university students (Boulton-Lewis, Wilss, & Lewis, 2003). Most of these studies have employed a qualitative phenomenographic approach, although some of them are quantitative studies (e.g. Buelens et al., 2002; Dart et al., 2000; Meyer, 2000; Meyer & Boulton-Lewis, 1999; Meyer & Kiley, 1998; Sachs & Chan, 2003).

**Epistemological beliefs**

The initial impetus for research into students’ conceptions of learning came from the work of William Perry, who examined the epistemological beliefs of college undergraduates (see Perry, 1968, 1970, 1981). According to Perry, when students first enter university courses they believe that knowledge is simple, certain, and handed down by authority. Through exposure to different ways of thinking and doing things, most students come to believe that knowledge is complex, obtained through a process of reasoning, and may involve ambiguities and conflicting truths. Perry argues that learning problems can be related to students’ beliefs about the nature of knowledge itself. If learners consider knowledge to be static they perceive learning as a process of accumulating information.

Researchers have pursued Perry’s (1968, 1970) work from at least two different perspectives: the epistemological and the phenomenographic perspectives. Some studies have investigated students’ epistemological beliefs and orientations on the assumptions that they are part of an underlying process of metacognition (Bennack, 1982; Ryan, 1984; Schommer, 1990, 1993b; Schommer, Crouse, & Rhodes, 1992; Stonewater, Stonewater, & Hadley, 1986; Wilkinson & Schwartz, 1990). Such research builds on Perry’s original notion that students progress from an *absolutist* view, in which knowledge is perceived as dualistic (right or wrong, good or bad) and handed down by authority, to a *relativist* one that recognizes the flexibility of knowledge and the possibility that it can be questioned or derived through reasoning. Schommer (1990)
has reconceptualised this absolutist-relativist distinction and maintained that unsophisticated learners believe knowledge is discrete, unambiguous, and certain (see Purdie et al., 1996).

Research on conceptions of learning shows that the epistemological perspective and the phenomenographic perspective are distinct but not incompatible. There seems to be a close relationship between conceptions of learning and conceptions of knowledge. Some scholars argue that there are dualistic and non-dualistic beliefs about knowledge. Dualistic knowledge refers to a belief that knowledge is a fixed entity and that it exists as discrete units, separated from other pieces of information and the learner. When learners believe knowledge is assigned to a single element then they do not see the need to reflect on and search connections that integrate elements within the given information and with existing prior knowledge (Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Pillay, Brownlee, & McCrindle, 1998; Schommer, 1993a). In considering the nature of knowledge, Hammer (1994) and Marton and Booth (1997) argue that learners who believe that knowledge is dualistic do not emphasise the need to integrate new information with prior knowledge to construct meaningful understanding. Such epistemological beliefs encourage conceptions of learning that support learning approaches that are surface-oriented and utilitarian.

Hofer and Pintrich (1997) also maintain that a relationship exists between epistemological beliefs about knowledge and conceptions of learning. Based on the original work of Perry (1968, 1970), Hofer and Pintrich (1997) roughly dichotomize the multitude of epistemological models into absolute and relativistic beliefs about knowledge. The absolute conception is characterized by a conviction of the existence of “right” and “wrong” answers. Scientists are deemed gradually to gather more “right” answers. Eventually this process will lead to better and more complete knowledge. Subjects holding a relativistic conception, on the other hand, define scientific activity as discussing alternative positions. Every opinion has its own value and every position opens new aspects. Whether an answer is “right” or “wrong” depends upon the subjective interpretation of evidence. Students who describe knowledge as “absolute” assume that “reproduction” is the best way to learn. Students holding a relativistic knowledge conception stick to a meaning-oriented learning conception. Buelens, Clement, and Clarebout’s (2002) investigation into university assistants’ conceptions of
knowledge, learning and instruction has supported the claim that a relationship exists between epistemological beliefs of knowledge and conceptions of learning.

**Phenomenographic approach**

Many studies in recent years have examined conceptions of learning from a phenomenographic perspective. Phenomenographic inquiry investigates the qualitatively different ways that people experience phenomena in their world, and delineates those ways of experiencing, or the variations in a finite set of categories of description (Marton, 1988, 1994). Attention is directed not so much at “objective reality”, but more at the various interpretations people have of it—what has been referred to as a *second order perspective* (Marton, 1981). A conception is dependent upon both human activity and the world that is external to an individual and, as Svensson (1997) states, it encompasses the “meaning and understandings of phenomena” (p. 163). In the case of learning, conceptions develop as a result of a student’s engagement in learning contexts. This is reiterated by Morgan and Beaty (1997) when they describe a conception as a focus of awareness that constitutes part of a student’s experience of learning (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2003). The aim of the phenomenographic approach was to understand how students perceived the content and process (the “what” and “how”) of learning. The underlying rationale was the phenomenological notion that people act according to their interpretation of a situation rather than to “objective reality”, which is emphasised in the positivist traditions (Watkins, 1996a).

Most of the research in this area originated from the work of Marton and Säljö (1976) who used extensive interviews to examine the processes and strategies of learning of Swedish university students, as well as what they understood and remembered from the learning tasks. Underlying students’ approaches to learning is their conceptions of what “learning” means. In a later study of a similar type, Säljö (1979) identified five different conceptions of learning held by students, and in more recent research, Marton, Dall’alba and Beaty (1993) identified six conceptions. The first five conceptions are similar to those identified by Säljö (1979). These six conceptions are presented in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1 Categories of Learning Identified by Marton, Dall’alba and Beaty (1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Category</th>
<th>The Meaning of Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Learning as increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>Quantitative collection, consumption, and storage of ready-made knowledge or information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Learning as memorizing and reproduction</td>
<td>Acquisition of learning through rote memorization resulting in a reproduction, without transformation, of what has been learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Learning as applying</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge or procedures which are to be used when the need arises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Learning as understanding</td>
<td>The learner tries to abstract meaning in the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Learning as seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>There is a change in the learners’ way of thinking or conceptions about something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Learning as changing as a person</td>
<td>Learning is viewed as a new way of seeing phenomena and the world, with the learner having a different self-perception.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Marton, Dall’alba and Beaty (1993).

Investigations of student learning from a phenomenographic perspective have divided these conceptions of learning into two distinct groups based on their conceptual similarity: surface and deep (Marton & Säljö, 1976; Säljö, 1979). Of these six conceptions, the first three are normally associated with surface approaches to learning and the last three with deep approaches. Parallel to the surface/deep distinction examined in approaches to learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976; Säljö, 1979), the first three conceptions are seen as lacking in constitutive meaning, while the last three conceptions are seen as being concerned with constitutive meaning. According to Marton, Dall’alba and Beaty (1993), these conceptions form a hierarchy, with the first three focusing on quantitative dimensions of learning while the latter three are characteristically qualitative. The conception “understanding” is the demarcation point as it relates to gaining meaning. The first three conceptions concern taking in information as though it was “something ready-made” and devoid of meaning (Marton et al., 1993).

The key difference between the two categories is the focus of meaning in learning. The first three of these conceptions have been described as constituting reproductive or surface conceptions of learning, and they usually result in low-level learning outcomes. The latter three are seen to represent a deep or constructivist view and are commonly associated with learning outcomes that indicate greater complexity of cognitive processing (Martin & Ramsden, 1987; Van Rossum & Schenk, 1984). In his review Ramsden (1992) identified a reproduction-oriented and meaning-oriented conception within Säljö’s (1979) categorisation and the subsequent alternatives proposed by other
researchers. According to Ramsden (1992) “reproduction-oriented learning” focuses on memorizing by repeating isolated facts. The information is not changed by the learner. A “Meaning-oriented” conception is considered to consist solely of constructive activities allowing the learner to integrate new information within his/her own conceptual framework.

Marton, Dall’alba and Beaty (1993) shared similar views and proposed that the reproductive-constructivist distinction was largely related to the role of meaning in learning. The notion of meaning is absent from the first group of conceptions. Information, in the form of facts for knowledge of procedures, is accumulated and stored so that it may be subsequently retrieved and used. Applying means retrieving what had been learned (accumulated and stored) and using it. There is no attempt at interpretation of information; it is simply there to be used. In an earlier study, Säljö (1979) noted that these conceptions represented a “taken-for-granted” view of learning. The second group of conceptions, however, is primarily about the constitution of meaning. In these conceptions, there is a notion of change or of gaining a better understanding of phenomena by abstracting meaning for what is presented. Whereas in the first set of conceptions there is no attempt at evaluation of information (it is simply accepted and used), in the second set of conceptions there is often critical reappraisal of the facts as they have been presented. Knowledge is viewed from one’s own perspective rather than perceived as an unchangeable, externally given collection of facts and procedures (see Purdie et al., 1996).

The substantial research in this area carried out by Biggs using his Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) has confirmed the usefulness of deep and surface approaches (Biggs, 1991, 1992). The test has also added an “achieving” approach in which students aim at obtaining good academic results and developing learning strategies that would allow them to make the best use of their efforts (Watkins, 1996a). The achieving or strategic approach is driven by an intention to succeed and relies on study habits and an awareness of the assessment demands which sometimes is referred to as a-means-to-an-end approach (Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Ramsden, 1988).

Phenomenographic inquiries into conceptions of learning are initiated by a need to understand how individuals experience learning in their world. Such research on student learning has given increased attention to how learning is experienced, understood, or
conceptualised by learners. This orientation inspired this study to investigate Chinese leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership in an international education context.

3.3.2 Cross-cultural Perspectives

Several studies over the past years have identified remarkably similar conceptions of learning which, perhaps unintentionally, have implied universality in how people experience it (Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000). However, like most other human thought structures, many authors claim that conceptions of learning should be seen in terms of their social and cultural contexts (Marton & Booth, 1997). Conceptions and beliefs may influence an individual’s perception and judgment about tasks in a specific learning context and help learners to determine what needs to be done to acquire certain types of knowledge.

Säljö (1979, p. 106) noted, “learning does not exist as a general phenomenon. To learn is to act within man-made institutions and to adapt to the particular definitions of learning that are valid in the educational environment in which one finds oneself.” Furthermore, he states that different environments will define learning according to “different socially and culturally established conventions with respect to what counts as learning” (p.104). These observations together with Marton and Booth’s (1997) acknowledgement of the complexity in understanding the variance in learners’ conceptions of learning suggests a need for further research (Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000).

In relation to the cross-cultural research on conceptions of learning, a significant number of studies have been concerned with students in a specific educational context in their home country. Few studies to date have examined students’ conceptions of learning in an international context and any possible conceptual change. As a consequence, as noted by Tynjala (1997), there is a need to widen the sample types and the experience of participants in future studies on conceptions of learning, particularly as we explore the complexities of variation in conceptions of learning (Marton & Booth, 1997; Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000). This study addresses this gap by investigating Chinese educators who studied in an offshore/transnational education context.
Some researchers argue that conceptions of learning are assumed to be context-dependent (e.g. Gao & Watkins, 2002; Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). This implies that, while some aspects of learning conceptions may be consistent across contexts, others will vary with differences in contexts, such as differences in the stage of school, sector, discipline, evaluation system, and social and cultural background. Hence, it would be useful to investigate learning conceptions held by students from different cultural and educational contexts. While most such studies have been conducted in Western cultural contexts or in Hong Kong, it would be valuable to explore the learning conceptions of educational leaders in mainland China where the educational system and the social and cultural contexts are quite different from the West.

**Cross-cultural research on conceptions of learning**

Many researchers suggest that conceptions of learning and teaching are likely to vary across cultures (Biggs, 1996b; Marton et al., 1997; Pratt, 1992a; Pratt et al., 1999; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). In the past two decades, other researchers—such as Van Rossum and Schenk (1984), Giorgi (1986), Martin and Ramsden (1987), and Aguirre and Haggerty (1995)—have carried out further studies on conceptions of learning using the phenomenographic approach. With the exception of Aguirre and Haggerty (1995), who claimed to have tapped areas of learning not discovered in other work, these studies have broadly aligned with the categories identified by Marton, Dall’alba and Beaty (1993).

Such research has been concerned with student learning in the West but, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in studying Asian learners, such as Nepalese or Japanese students (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Purdie et al., 1996). This can also be seen in the numerous studies using students from Hong Kong and, in some cases, other parts of China—such as Biggs (1987; 1991; 1992; 1996a; 1996b), Kember and Gow (1991), Marton, Dall’alba and Tse (1996), Marton, Watkins and Tang (1997), Dahlin and Watkins (2000), Tang (2001), and Fung, Carr and Chan (2001). In all of these studies, the researchers identified differences in Asian students’ ways of interpreting the meaning of learning, which reflected differences within Asian cultures and philosophies of teaching and learning (Fung et al., 2001). Another speculation derived from these studies is that the variations in categorisation may be due to cohort differences rather than cross-cultural differences.
Purdie, Hattie, and Douglas (1996) examined differences between Australian and Japanese secondary school students’ conceptions of learning and their use of self-regulated strategies. Findings indicated that conceptions similar to those identified by Marton, Dall'alba and Beaty (1993) could be observed among Australian and Japanese students. Australian students seemed to have a narrow, school-based view of learning, focusing more on school knowledge. The Japanese students viewed learning from a much broader perspective, emphasizing a lifelong, experiential learning process leading to personal fulfillment. However, in spite of these differences in learning conceptualizations, the strategies used by Australian students were similar to those used by Japanese students. Although minor in terms of their occurrence, three previously unmentioned categories were identified in this study: learning as a duty, learning as a process not bound by time or context, and learning as developing social competence. The variations in categorisation suggest the complexity of conceptions of learning which may be affected by different social and cultural contexts.

Dahlin and Regmi (1997) conducted a phenomenographic study of conceptions of academic learning among 30 Nepalese university students, about two-thirds of whom were students at a teacher training institute in Nepal. The results are described within a two-dimensional outcome space, derived from previous studies of learning experience conducted in various cultural settings, and providing a general framework for different conceptions of learning. Learning can vary in depth, at one extreme merely memorizing words, at the other gaining understanding of phenomena around us. This is called the depth-dimension of learning. Learning is also a process with different phases (i.e. acquiring, knowing, and applying phases), more or less clearly separated. The study indicates, among other things, that Nepali students look upon memorizing and understanding as interlinked in a way not usually found among Western students. Dahlin and Regmi (1997) raised the question as to what extent conceptions of learning are culturally dependent.

From our results so far, it seems that culture does not determine the content of the learning experience in any absolute sense. But it does seem to influence which aspects of the experience are accentuated, and which are left in the background. The conceptions described above are not all identical with those found in the West. However, they are not completely different either, and we have identified some common features. “Rote learning
Another important area of cross-cultural research regarding students’ conceptions of learning has centred on understanding the conceptions held by students from Confucian-heritage cultures (CHC) (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). There has been a growing body of literature on learning and teaching in CHC from the students’ perspective (Kember et al., 2001; Kember & Wong, 2000; Kwan & Ng, 1999; Pratt et al., 1999). Of particular interest has been the so-called “Chinese Learner” paradox (Watkins & Biggs, 1996), as discussed in the previous section. It is now well known that Chinese students, compared with their Western counterparts, have continually shown high achievement in mathematics and science in international studies of educational achievement (Biggs, 1996b; Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1996). Questions have been raised as to how Chinese students, often perceived by Western educators as passive learners, could perform so well on these international achievement tests, despite the crowded and unfavourable learning environment. Biggs (1996b) claims that socio-cultural factors and socioeconomic structures may explain the performance differences. Another speculation is that Chinese students may simply be more intelligent on these dimensions than Western students. Yet there are few Nobel Chinese winners in these fields although many Chinese do well outside China, which seems to be a perplexing phenomenon (see Cao, 2004).

**Studies on Chinese learners’ conceptions of learning**

Recent years have seen a growing number of phenomenographic studies on Chinese learners’ conceptions of learning. Marton, Dall’alba, and Tse (1996) investigated conceptions of learning held by 20 teacher-educators from Mainland China who travelled to Hong Kong to participate in a course for English language teachers. The results shed light on the paradox of the Chinese learner. Two principal results that contribute to the solution of this paradox were: Chinese are similar to Europeans in that there is variation in their ways of understanding the phenomena investigated in this study; and Chinese differ from Europeans in their ways of understanding these phenomena. Referring to Chinese students’ conceptions of learning, Marton, Dall’alba, and Tse (1996) argued that the “memorization-understanding” relations observed among Chinese learners address this paradox. Their conclusion was that, whereas
memorization in Western countries is associated with rote learning and a lack of understanding, memorization in Asian countries is seen as an integral component of understanding. These researchers argued that Chinese learners do not see memorization as rote learning: rather, they would use understanding to help them memorize the materials. Due to the emphasis in traditional Chinese education on recitation, students would also memorize the materials to help themselves understand. In other words, memorization can be used to deepen and develop understanding. In this study, Marton, et al. (1996, p. 82) emphasised “exercising caution when making assumptions about students’ learning methods from other cultures”.

In another recent study, Fung, Carr, and Chan (2001) explored the conceptions of learning held by a group of in-service primary school teachers studying for a Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree at the Open University of Hong Kong. The data, which were collected by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, were categorised into the six conceptions of learning identified by Marton, Dall’Alba and Beaty (1993). The most significant finding was the absence of any reference to memorization in the subjects’ initial responses to the question: “What do you actually mean by learning?” This finding was similar to that reported by Dahlin and Regmi (1997) whose research also involved Asian learners (Nepalese). This result relates to the different conceptions of the meaning of memorization held in Chinese societies compared to the West, and thus highlights the dangers of cross-cultural generalisations about students’ conceptions of learning. In particular, the study confirmed other Hong Kong researchers’ emphasis on the different meaning of memorization within Chinese culture, which helps in part to explain the “paradox” of the Chinese learner. Findings from other recent studies also tend to support the claim that Chinese students, in contrast to Western students, view memorization as an integral component of understanding (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Marton et al., 1997; Pratt et al., 1999).

Tang’s (2001) study investigated the influence of teacher education on conceptions of teaching and learning held by Hong Kong primary and secondary teachers who undertook in-service degree courses. He employed survey questionnaire and phenomenographic interview methods to examine their conceptions and conceptual change. The conceptions of learning identified in his research closely resemble those in Marton, Dall’Alba and Beaty (1993). The findings seem to indicate a significant
correlation between conceptions of learning and conceptions of teaching. Tang speculates that the correlation probably results from the strong influence of institutional contexts, and the experience of learning and teaching. He claims that the study has pointed to the possibility that the conception of learning is a limiting factor on the conception of teaching and that the experience of learning is the main pathway through which conceptions of learning and teaching may be changed.

As indicated above, considerable interest has been given to Chinese students’ conceptions of learning. Researchers in this field primarily employed the phenomenographic approach and used interview to identify Hong Kong Chinese students’ conceptions of learning. In the following Figure 3.1, three recent studies conducted among Hong Kong Chinese learners are compared with the study undertaken in the UK by Marton, Dall’Alba and Beaty (1993). The contexts and samples of the studies and the conceptions identified are summarised with similar conceptions shown as horizontal rows in Figure 3.1.

As can be seen from Figure 3.1, the conceptions of learning identified in studies of Fung et al. (2001) and Tang (2001) closely resemble those in Marton et al. (1993). It should be noted that there are differences between conceptions identified by Marton et al. (1997) and those by Fung et al (2001) and Tang (2001), although the subjects in these studies share the same cultural background. Memorization reported by Hong Kong secondary students in Marton et al (1997) was seldom mentioned by the teachers in Tang (2001) and Fung et al. (2001). Moreover, the category D of Marton et al. (1997) can hardly embrace the idea of seeing something in a different way or changing perspectives in other studies. The idea of relating and explaining phenomena (Tang, 2001) is more likely to be categorised mainly as the conception of learning as understanding (Marton et al., 1993).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Hong Kong: Chinese</td>
<td>Hong Kong: Chinese</td>
<td>Hong Kong: Chinese</td>
<td>United Kingdom: English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
<td>Open University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>In-service primary school teachers</td>
<td>Primary/secondary school Teachers</td>
<td>Secondary school students</td>
<td>In-service school teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions</td>
<td>Increase in Knowledge (A)</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge (A)</td>
<td>Committing to memory -words (A)</td>
<td>Increasing one’s knowledge (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing exam or completing assignments (B)</td>
<td>Applying (C)</td>
<td>Understanding meaning (C)</td>
<td>Applying (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application (C)</td>
<td>Understanding (D)</td>
<td>Understanding phenomenon (D)</td>
<td>Understanding (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing as a person (F)</td>
<td>Changing perspectives or attitudes (E)</td>
<td>Seeing something in a different way (E)</td>
<td>Changing as a person (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committing to memory -words (A)</td>
<td>Memorizing and reproducing (B)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.1 A Comparison of Key Studies on Chinese Learners’ Conceptions of Learning**

Source: adapted and developed from Tang (2001, p. 235).

It is expected that different institutional contexts and sample differences may explain the variance. Marton et al.’s (1997) participants were secondary school students whereas the subjects in the research conducted by Fung et al. (2001) and Tang (2001) were Hong Kong Chinese school teachers taking part-time degree courses. For them, the totality of the conception of learning was in developing the personal and knowledge system to deal effectively with the demands of life and professional practice, rather than synthesizing knowledge or making sense of phenomena in a classroom setting as perceived by secondary school students. In the light of this, the absence of the two
highest categories among the secondary school students was not unexpected (see Tang, 2001, p. 236). However, Tang’s (2001) explanation that memorization is comparatively a less significant part in the totality of the teachers’ conception than in that of the high school students does not seem to apply to teachers in Fung et al.’s (2001) study.

As shown by the review of relevant studies on conceptions of learning, different national or institutional cultures and different sample types may have some influence on conceptions of learning. Tang (2001) suggests in his study that there seems to be no indication of a very strong impact of Chinese culture on the conceptions of learning and teaching among the Hong Kong school teachers. Some studies have been conducted to examine conceptions of learning held by Hong Kong Chinese learners, but very few studies have investigated conceptions of learning held by secondary school students or in-service teachers in mainland China (e.g. Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Marton et al., 1996).

It is argued that Hong Kong shares its Confucian heritage culture with mainland China, but the strong influence of British colonisation makes its social, historical, and school cultures relatively different from those in Mainland China. It is therefore expected that conceptions of learning held by Hong Kong Chinese learners may be different from those held by Mainland Chinese learners. Findings from previous studies conducted in the West or Hong Kong may not necessarily apply to the social cultural context in Mainland China. Further empirical research is needed to examine the conceptions of Mainland Chinese learners, to explore their conceptions in an international education context and further our understanding about the extent of influence of culture and different learning environments on conceptions of learning. To date, there has not been any systematic study of the learning conceptions of Chinese educational leaders such as school principals, system officials and university administrators from an intercultural perspective.

3.3.3 Conceptual Change Perspective

The only person who is educated is the person who has learned how to learn: the person who has learnt how to adapt and change, the person who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security (Rogers, 1969 ).
Hettich (1997), in comparing the various cognitive-structural theories of development, believes that irrespective of age, maturity and background, “students are on a journey towards complexity, and all dimensions of their being are involved” (p.56). Of particular importance on this journey is the need for students to be exposed to epistemological theories to assist them in understanding their personal growth. Students themselves believe that the earlier this occurs, the greater will be the impact on their development (Biggs, 1979; Hettich, 1997; Marton & Ramsden, 1988). Gow and Kember (1993) reviewed the research on student learning and teachers’ conceptions, and asserted that altering conceptions is a challenging task. They suggested a three-stage program to facilitate such change:

- diagnosis of conceptual frameworks;
- provision of a period of disequilibrium and conceptual conflict, and
- reconstruction and reformation as necessary.

Ho (2001) proposed a four-stage conceptual change approach to university staff development, which is similar to Gow and Kember’s (1993) model. He argues that for a conceptual change to be successful, it is desirable to include the following four elements which are in logical order of occurrence:

- the confrontation process;
- the self-awareness process;
- the availability of better alternative conceptions;
- the commitment building and refreezing process.

Ho (2001) indicates that the following four change theories seem to provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for his model. Firstly, according to Argyris and Schon (1974) the process of increasing professional effectiveness involves the building and rebuilding of one’s theories-of-action which are the rationale that someone holds for one’s action. Transitions between theories-of-action are usually initiated by dilemma associated with existing theories-of-action. When such dilemmas surface, the confrontation experienced by the professional will create tension to resolve the dilemmas, thus leading to changes in the espoused theory or theory-in-use. However, people’s existing theories-in-use tend to be self-maintaining and may blind them from perceiving dilemmas or may even result in them adopting a defensive attitude.
Therefore, in the process of theory transition, the professional needs to become aware of one’s theories-of-action, to admit the sources of dilemmas and to value the confrontation.

The second change theory underpinning Ho’s (2001) framework is Lewin’s (1947) three-stage model of unfreezing, moving and freezing. Lewin (1947) argues that a successful change will need to go through a three-stage process. The first stage is unfreezing of the present level, a process of clearing up the preexisting prejudices which would involve “emotional stir-up” to “break open the shell” (p.229). The second stage is the moving stage when new beliefs, attitudes, values and habits are built. The third stage is freezing again at the new level.

Third, the theories developed by Posner and his associates (1982) informed Ho’s (2001) framework. The central ideas of Posner et al’s (1982) theory rest with the learner being confronted with a conceptual conflict. Dissatisfaction with the dysfunction of existing conceptions is the first and fundamental requirement to initiate a conceptual change. Fourth, Ho’s (2001) framework also drew upon Shaw and his associates’ (1990) theories. Shaw et al. (1990) considered that for change to actually occur, a person has to be perturbed by an unsatisfying current situation and thus becomes aware of the need to change. It is also necessary for the person to build up a commitment to change, a vision of what the changes will bring about, and a projection into the vision.

As argued by researchers and policy makers, many Chinese educators hold traditional beliefs which are insufficient for promoting quality teaching and learning (China Report to UNESCO, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2001c; Zhu, 2002). Accordingly, it is believed that improving quality education and leadership practices in Chinese educational institutions requires developing educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. Literature shows that there is a lack of empirical in-depth study on Chinese leaders’ conceptual development in a cross-cultural educational context. Ho’s (2001) conceptual change model for professional development of university teachers provides another useful model for this study to investigate the development of Chinese educators’ conceptions of learning and leadership.
3.4 Chapter Summary

The main aim of this chapter has been to review the literature exploring Chinese learning traditions and research on conceptions of learning. Evidence from the literature on Chinese learners and their conceptions of learning was also outlined. Important concepts and assumptions to be addressed in this study have been indicated from an understanding of the literature reviewed here. While the volume of research into students’ conceptions of learning employing the phenomenographic approach has increased in recent years, there is a surprising lack of literature in relation to the specific nature of Chinese students’ learning experiences and their conceptions of learning in the international education context. There has also been less attention to conceptual change from the perspective of these students. Issues of learning conceptions and their relationships with culture, educational context, and nationality have only begun to be explored.

This study was informed by these gaps in the literature and sought to address the issues identified. Thus one of the aims of the study was to examine the essential learning experiences of Chinese participants with the focus on their conceptions of learning in a specific Australian offshore leadership development course. The study also sought to focus on their conceptual change, given the influence of alternative perspectives and new learning experience in the course. The study was aware of the importance of accounting for the institutional culture, as well as the social-economic, cultural milieu of their environment. The study recognized that to incorporate these concerns, a qualitative, phenomenographic approach was necessary in order to adequately probe Chinese learners’ understanding of learning and leadership. This study examines the issue from two dimensions: content (knowledge, theories and practice of learning and leadership) and process (the experience of learning) in an international education program.
Chapter 4 Literature Review on Conceptions of Leadership

4.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to review the range of literature on conceptions of leadership. It begins with a review of the literature surrounding Chinese culture and its influence on leadership traditions, using Hofstede’s cultural framework, historical and social influence model, and Bush and Qiang’s four-aspect cultural analysis. The existence of other leadership traditions and practices in China is acknowledged. The historical development of educational management and issues in contemporary educational management and leadership are discussed. Research into concepts of leadership in the West and cross-cultural contexts is also reviewed. Multiple definitions and theories of leadership in the West are examined, showing the complexity of the field. It is argued that the leadership discourse is mainly Western-centric and scant attention has been paid to non-Western contexts, particularly in leadership development programs. A theoretical framework, which draws the various strands of literature together, is then presented as the basis of the study. Finally five issues derived from previous research are noted. These have been addressed in designing the present study.

4.2 Chinese Culture and Educational Leadership

The concept of culture has become increasingly important in the discourse of educational leadership and management. Many writers have argued for a comparative cross-cultural perspective where the influence of societal culture upon educational administration is researched and compared across societies and cultures (Cheng, 1995; Cheong, 2000b; Gronn, 2001; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2000; Walker, 2003; Wong, 2001b). However, the current scene in education administration in East Asia, including China, is often full of “cultural borrowing” (Walker & Dimmock, 2000a) and the vital importance of avoiding “cultural imperialism” is increasingly emphasised (Leithwood & Duke, 1998). Researchers suggest that a culturally and contextually sensitive approach to the study of educational leadership is needed (Begley, 2000; Chapman, 2000; Cheong, 2000a; Dimmock & Walker, 2000b; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000b; Ribbins & Gronn, 2000; Stott & Low, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2002).
As argued by Hughes (1990, p. 137), “the uncritical transportation of theories and methodologies across the world, without regard to the qualities and circumstances of different communities, can no longer be regarded as acceptable”. Other writers (Bush et al., 1998, p. 137) have expressed similar views that “all theories and interpretations of practice must be “grounded” in the specific context.” Dimmock and Walker (1998a) demonstrate the links between national and organisational culture. They emphasise the complexity of the concept of culture and the variety of manifestations which can be expected when assessing its significance in any national context. Walker (2003) argues that indigenous perspectives may broaden the knowledge base of the field to the benefit of scholars and practitioners alike. Wider exposure to non-Western knowledge and practices can add richness to our understanding base thorough exposing alternative ways of thinking and working. As Hallinger and Kantamara (2000a) state: “We can only understand the nature of leadership by exposing the hidden assumptions of the cultural context. This will open new windows through which to view educational leadership” (p. 202). It is evident that a critical understanding of Chinese leadership traditions is important before adapting any theory or practice from abroad.

### 4.2.1 Chinese Culture and Leadership Traditions

The following section investigates the influence of Chinese culture upon leadership tradition by means of examining Hofstede’s five-dimension cultural framework (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 1994), Chinese historic and social influences, and Bush and Qiang’s (2000) four-aspect Chinese culture model. These models examine the relationship between Chinese culture and leadership from different angles and result in similar interpretations. This section provides a background for understanding Chinese leadership and emphasises some key cultural values in relation to leadership.

**Hofstede’s cultural framework**

The model of Geert Hofstede (1980, 1991, 1994) is generally acknowledged as the most influential in the field of international and comparative business management over the last two decades. Although Hofstede’s framework has been criticized on a number of grounds (Osland & Bird, 2000; Putnis & Petelin, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1993), his ideas have been applied and tested repeatedly over the last fifteen years, and stand, according to Redding (1994, p. 324), as a “unifying and dominant” influence in the field.
As recognized above, there is a marked absence of research which specifically targets the influence of societal culture on the conception and practice of educational leadership. Indeed, it is hard to locate any studies that systematically compare educational leadership using the construct of societal culture as the main mode of analysis (Dimmock, 2000, p. 265). This study attempts to address this need by drawing on Hofstede’s framework to examine the relationship between Chinese culture and leadership traditions. However, Hofstede’s framework has a limitation in that it tends to generalise across cultures rather than focus on organisational variables and situational analysis. Commentators from the communication field have warned of the dangers of describing groups in essentialist terms of contrasting beliefs and values as a form of “generalisation” which should be treated with “scepticism” (Putnis & Petelin, 1996, p. 74). Osland and Bird (2000) argue that while this sophisticated stereotyping is helpful to a certain degree, it does not convey the complexity found within cultures. Culture is embedded in the context and cannot be understood fully without taking context into consideration. In spite of its limitations, Hofstede’s model is still helpful in providing a preliminary analysis of Chinese culture and leadership.

Hofstede (1980) developed a framework for measuring cultural differences in 40 countries. The four dimensions Hofstede identified are high/low power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance. A fifth dimension, Confucian dynamism, later termed short term/long term orientation, was added to his work by a group of Chinese scholars (The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Hofstede’s dimensions are suggested as choices between pairs of empirically verifiable alternatives that allow the identification of patterns within and between cultures to emerge, and facilitate their meaningful ordering (Hofstede, 1980, 1995; Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Numerous studies (e.g. Blunt & Richards, 1993; Erz & Earley, 1993; Triandis, 1993) support Hofstede’s findings, and researchers such as Bond (1996), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) and Rodrigues (1998) have further developed his methodology and original dimensions. A brief introduction of Hofstede’s five dimensions is presented in Table 4.1.
### Table 4.1 Hofstede’s Cultural Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power distance (PD)</strong></td>
<td>This refers to the distribution of power within society and its organisations. In societies with low PD values, inequality is treated as undesirable and every effort is made to reduce it, while in societies with high PD values, inequality is often accepted and legitimized, and people tend to accept unequal distribution of power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualism/collectivism</strong></td>
<td>This dimension is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups and to which there is closeness between persons in a relationship. In individualist cultures, relations are fairly loose and relational ties tend to be based on self-interest. In group-oriented societies, ties between people are tight, relationships are firmly structured and individual needs are subservient to collective needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculinity/femininity</strong></td>
<td>This identifies the gender roles in society, and the degree to which the society allows overlap between the roles of men and women. In more masculine cultures, achievement is stressed, competition dominates and conflicts are resolved through the exercise of power and assertiveness. In feminine cultures, emphasis is on relationship, solidarity and resolution of conflicts by compromise and negotiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></td>
<td>This is how society copes with uncertainty about the future, and deals with the reality of risk. In uncertainty-accepted societies, people tend to be tolerant of different opinions and are not excessively threatened by unpredictability. In uncertainty-avoiding cultures, uncertainty is often viewed as psychologically uncomfortable and disruptive, and people seek to reduce uncertainty and limit risks by hanging on to traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term/short-term orientation</strong></td>
<td>Values associated with long-term orientation, such as thrift, perseverance and willingness to make short-term sacrifices for long-term gains, are counterbalanced by values associated with short-term orientation, such as respect for tradition, fulfilment of social obligations and protection of one’s face.</td>
</tr>
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</table>


In previous research, Chinese culture was characterised as low on individualism and high on collectivism; power distance ratios (relative inequalities of power and wealth) were amongst the highest of all countries surveyed; masculinity was found to be “medium” end; weak uncertainty avoidance (the degree of risk tolerance) was identified (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1984); and it had a long-term orientation (The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Studies conducted by Trompenaars (1993) and Reddings (1990) also indicated that in (Hong Kong) Chinese culture there is a high
level of collectivism, high power distance relations and an overriding concern with maintenance of harmonious relationships at work. The following analysis presents a brief account of how Chinese culture may influence leadership traditions through reference to Hofstede’s (1980, 1991, 1994) framework, particularly in terms of power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance.

As to the low/high power distance dimension, both Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) suggest that cultures attribute status, respect and power according to different cultural norms. In Chinese societies, respect may be attributed more to position, age or family background, whereas in Western countries respect is attributed more to personal or on-the-job performance. In China where power distance is high and power is linked to extrinsic factors, leadership tends to be from the top and exercised in an authoritarian or autocratic manner.

In China, leadership legitimacy and acceptance are often contingent on non-utilitarian qualities of the leader. The position of leader is often maintained by intra- and extra-organisational structural arrangements, in some cases with deep historical roots. It is usually not maintained by follower recognition (Blunt & Jones, 1997, p. 13). This is consistent with the higher levels of power distance in China. Goals and means for their attainment are decided by leaders and may be carefully and typically humanely imposed. There is “conformity to the “natural” order of power relations” (Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991, p. 386). There is little involvement of followers, and the authority of the leader is accepted as right and proper. Open challenges to the leader are improper and undesirable. The leader can expect to receive obedience, deference and compliance, but in return, she or he must accord followers respect and dignity (face), and show care and concern.

In terms of the individualism/collectivism dimension, Cheng (1998) argues that Chinese societies are more collectivist than individualist, and these observations are supported by Hofstede’s (1991) empirical findings. Research suggests that Chinese leaders are more group-oriented than self-oriented. As Cheng (1998) states, in European nations, schools cater to students with different aptitudes and interests, while in China education is seen as a means by which students adapt to the expectations of the community. The role of the school and the principal may focus on developing and ensuring harmony
among staff and enforcing common, standard approaches to governance, organisation, curriculum and instruction.

As to uncertainty avoidance, Hofstede (1991) and others (e.g. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997) suggest that cultures differ in their approach to change. Dimmock (2000) notes that in uncertainty-accepting countries, such as Australia, there tends to be reasonably high tolerance of change, and school personnel tend to take a proactive stance to the influence of change on their work lives. In uncertainty-avoiding societies, such as China, change is often viewed as psychologically uncomfortable and disruptive. Educational leaders may rely on established philosophies, responsibilities and power relationships to provide staff with security while accepting and implementing change, whether or not they agree with it.

**Historical and social influence model**

Chinese culture, like other great cultures of the world, is rich in history and content. Huang (1988) argued that Chinese culture and values have been quite consistent over the long years despite the change of time. Many scholars (e.g. Chen, 1995; Cragg, 1995; Seagrave, 1995; Wong, 2001a) suggest that there are certain historical-social influences on the development of management and leadership practice in China, such as Taoism, Confucianism and the strategic thinking of Sun Tzu.

**Taoism:** Taoism is a holistic philosophy that emphasises the interrelationship and interaction of every entity and everything in the world. Every entity comprises varying (or opposing) internal elements, *Yin* and *Yang*. Harmony must be maintained between these elements in order to secure the wholeness and the integrity of that entity. Nothing is static or immutable; change is natural and inevitable.

**Confucianism:** As mentioned in Chapter 3, Confucius (551BC) was a Chinese sage, whose doctrines became known as *Confucianism*. Confucianism became a structure of ethical precepts for the management of society based upon the achievement of *social harmony* and *social order* within a hierarchically arranged society. It also involved the concept of *ren*, which entails benevolence, humaneness and patronage in the treatment of others. Confucius defined five basic human relations (*Wu lun*) and principles for each person. Thus relationships are structured to deliver optimum benefits for both parties. These five principles emphasise hierarchical structure and social harmony. It became
associated with a Confucian perception that officials should act in a diligent, hard-working and ambitious manner. It is their personal responsibility to bring forth a sustained effort from their subordinates within a social or organisational context.

*The strategic thinking of Sun Tzu:* Sun Tzu’s (500 BC) book, *The Art of War*, describes effective and ineffective strategies by which to fight wars or defeat the opponent. Since Chinese tend to perceive the market-place as a battlefield, strategies for waging war have therefore been applied to strategies for *waging business* and management.

*Leadership as a practical moral art:* Morality is emphasised by traditional Chinese culture and leadership is regarded as a moral art in action (Wong, 2001a). China, since Confucius’ time, has had a long history of valuing leadership and preparing leaders on moral grounds. Chinese are known for their pragmatic approaches towards life. Although Chinese philosophers spend time on the meaning of moral value, they are more interested in the practical aspects of morality, and spend their time developing ways to do good.

*Personal relationship (guan xi) and face:* Guan xi means cultivating, developing, and maintaining personal relationships on the basis of the continuing exchange of favours. Friendship and empathy between the two parties are of secondary importance, though they are useful in reinforcing the relationship. The achievement of harmony requires the maintenance of an individual’s face. Face is a person’s dignity, self-respect, status, and prestige. Social interaction or negotiation should therefore be conducted so that nobody loses face.

Other scholars (Blunt & Jones, 1997; Child, 1994) also investigated the influence of Chinese culture upon management and leadership and came up with similar interpretations. Child (1994) concluded that Chinese cultural traditions have long been underpinned by four significant values, and suggested that leadership perceptions and practices are influenced by these values:

- *the importance of face:* giving respect and obligation to the one who possesses higher social status, giving and soliciting favours according to one’s importance and status in the family clan or society;
- *respect for hierarchy:* respect for seniority and age;
• **the importance of collectivism**: thinking and behaving within accepted social norms and avoiding hurting others within the same social group and same social environment;

• **the importance of harmony**: keeping good relationships with reciprocal obligations and duties between members of the same clan.

A major responsibility of the leader in China is the maintenance of harmony, which has deep cultural roots in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The Chinese perceive disturbance to group or interpersonal harmony as shameful, and child-rearing practices make use of “shaming techniques” to emphasise this point and the importance of group loyalty. Collectivism and “shame” are important features of social control in China (Kirkbride et al., 1991). Conformity is linked strongly to socially functional notions of interpersonal harmony and collectivism (Redding, 1990). This is in clear contrast to Western functionalist paradigms where emphasis is placed on autonomy, competition between individuals and groups, performance and self-assertion. The empirical evidence of this divergence is to be found in a study conducted by Smith and his associates (1989).

Different cultures deal with conflict and participation in different ways. According to Bond (1991), the disturbance of interpersonal relations and group harmony by conflict can cause lasting animosity in Chinese cultures. As a result, the Chinese tend to avoid open confrontation and assertiveness. In the school context, this may be manifested through teachers and principals avoiding open disagreement by a tacit acceptance that it is always the leader’s view which prevails (Walker, Bridges, & Chan, 1996). Therefore, educational leaders in China may exhibit a tendency to avoid situations which risk conflict and to rely instead on authoritarian decision-making models. As a consequence of conflict avoidance and of the requirement for harmonious relationships, decisions and policies are seldom challenged or approached creatively by the group.

It can be concluded that the Chinese cultural, historical and social contexts have great impact upon leadership traditions in China. Respect for hierarchy, maintaining harmony, conflict avoidance, collectivism, face, social networks, moral leadership, and conformity are the key values that have affected leadership traditions in China. These analyses are consistent with the findings drawn from Hofstede’s framework.
However, since Hofstede’s model is criticized as being inadequate to examine the fluidity and complexity of cultures, the four-aspect Chinese culture analysis discusses both the cumulative and enduring influence of the hybrid Chinese culture on educational leadership. An examination of it may therefore compensate for the inadequacy of Hofstede’s model.

**Four-aspect Chinese culture analysis**

Bush and Qiang (2000) have argued that the diversity and complexity of culture is reflected in the following aspects in the Chinese education system. Contemporary Chinese culture is a mixture of traditional, socialist, enterprise, and patriarchal cultures. Consequently, leadership traditions and conceptions have been influenced by different elements of culture and forces. Leadership is regarded as a culturally complex and a context dependent concept.

**Traditional culture**

The first major aspect affecting Chinese education is traditional culture which is rooted in the pervasive influence of Confucius. Many of his precepts, including respect for authority, patriarchy, worshipping traditions and collectivist rather than individual values, are still reflected in the structure of schools and wider society (Bush & Qiang, 2000). Traditional Chinese culture also emphasises a person’s self-cultivation for ethical and moral perfection. Confucian scholars advocate modesty and encourage friendly cooperation, giving priority to people’s relationships. The purpose of education is to shape every individual into a harmonious member of the society. Children are expected to comply with class rules and restrain their own personalities (Wang & Mao, 1996). This aspect of culture links with the emphasis on collectivism.

**Socialist culture**

The second major aspect of culture affecting Chinese education is socialism, which became significant following the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949. Cleverly (1991) points to the links between Confucianism and socialism in modern Chinese education and claims that communism and Confucianism have much in common. Moral education, for example, involves a blend of Confucian and communist ideals, while socialism also serves to reinforce the collectivist norms of traditional Chinese culture. The influence of socialism on school leadership and management is
embodied in the role of the Communist Party Secretary. Each school is expected to have a post of branch secretary who often wields considerable influence. The division of roles among the Party Secretary and principals is supposed to be clear, although in practice ambiguity still remains.

_Enterprise culture_

The socialist values of the Communist Party have been integrated with traditional beliefs to create a distinctive Chinese culture. Another strand of traditional Chinese culture is enterprise culture, which has been reinforced since the 1990s by the advent of market socialism, a blend of communism and enterprise. It is evident that China is able to thrive with its unique mixture of communism and enterprise, which has changed the nature of society and, in particular, tilted the balance between individual and collectivist values. In education, it reinforced the previous trend for schools to raise funds through multiple channels or supplement their limited state income from school-run business.

_Patriarchal culture_

One dimension has remained significant throughout the 2500 years since Confucius: the dominance of patriarchal leadership in education and the wider society. Coleman, Qiang and Li (1998, pp. 143-153) note that the relatively low numbers of women in positions of seniority indicates the loss of female potential, expertise and managerial ability to the educational community. Major changes in attitudes to female managers and to the proportion of women who achieve senior positions in schools are unlikely to occur without addressing the underlying values of patriarchy.

These four major elements of contemporary Chinese culture continue to shape educational leadership, which is overwhelmingly male, with a balance between hierarchy and collectivism. Although the emergence of enterprise culture and market socialism seems to be slowly changing the nature of Chinese contemporary culture and social values, such cultural change is unlikely to be radical and transformational, given the cumulative and enduring nature of the indigenous culture. A slow and incremental cultural change is expected in Chinese education in the long run (Bush & Qiang, 2000).

This section reviewed relevant literature on Chinese culture and leadership tradition. It is argued that the traditional conceptions of leadership in China are mostly associated with a directive, hierarchical and authoritarian “headship”, together with an emphasis
on moral leadership, self-cultivation, and artistry in leading. This review highlights the cumulative and enduring nature of Chinese culture and raises the need to understand contemporary Chinese educational leadership in changing contexts.

4.2.2 Contemporary Chinese Educational Leadership

Origin and historical development

The source of the words “management” and “administration” can be dated back to the Zhou Dynasty over 2000 years ago. The emergence of the word “leadership” can also be traced in early times in Chinese history. Management (Guan li) in Chinese literally means “Guan Xia” and “Chu li”, meaning “controlling”, “dealing with” and “sorting out” (Huang & Cheng, 2001, pp. 1-2). Administration (Xing zheng) literally means “governance” and “political matters” (Wu, 2000:1). Leadership (Ling dao) refers to a leading process meaning “guiding” and “directing” while leader means “head” (Ling xiu), “commander” (Shou zhang), and “director” (Ling dao ren) (Huang & Cheng, 2001, p. 196). In ancient China, many records were kept about management practice; for example, in classic books like “The Art of War” (Sun zi bing fa), “Mensius” (Meng zi), “History” (Shi ji) and “Reflections on History” (Zi zhi tong jian), many illustrations and ideas about management could be found. School management was also mentioned in a famous book “Learning” (Xue ji) in Chinese history (Wu, 2000, pp. 29-30).

Study of Chinese educational management and administration started in the early twentieth century. Chinese scholars generally agree that there are three main stages of development (see Wu Xiujuan cited in Feng, 2002a). The fist stage ranged from 1900 to 1911 (the end of Qing Dynasty); the second stage was from 1911 (the founding of Republic of China) to 1949 (the founding of People’s Republic of China); and the third stage extends from 1949 to the early twenty-first century.

The first stage was considered as the preliminary development stage. The practices of Japanese school management were introduced to China at this stage and were meant to be adapted to Chinese educational context. In 1903, “Regulation on Schools Approved by Emperor” (Zouding xuetang zhangcheng) represented an initiative to establish new educational systems all over China.
The theories and practice of Western, especially American, educational management were introduced to China at the second stage from 1911 to 1949. They played important roles in promoting educational administration and management in China. A famous scholar, Cai Yuanpei, the first Minister of Education for the Republic of China, proposed new education principles and advocated radical reforms. He had a great influence upon the research field of education administration and management. During this period, some Chinese scholars went to study in the U.S.A. and European countries. They introduced Western educational ideas to China when they came back from Western countries. Many systematic studies, focus studies and large-scale experimental studies bloomed from 1920s to 1930s, such as Tao Xingzhi’s “life education” (Shenghuo jiaoyu), Chen Heqin’s “alive education” (Huo jiaoyu), and Liang Suming’s “countryside education” (Xiangcun jiaoyu). The educational administration and management focus shifted from copying Japanese practices to borrowing American and European practices at the second stage. Between 1930 and 1949, over 200 books on education administration and management were published in China, and relevant subjects were offered in departments of education in universities or teacher’s colleges. In these decades the Chinese scholars were influenced by theories as disparate as Taylor’s (1915) “scientific management” and Dewey’s (1938) learning theories.

The study of educational administration and management came to a halt between 1949 and 1978 under the influence of planned socialist economies and the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976). During this period, Chinese scholars were more likely to be influenced by Soviet practice than by the “theory movement” in the US of the preceding decades because China’s relationship with the US had been a distant one before 1971. The research revived again after 1978 when China adopted an open-door policy to the outside world. The first course book for training principals entitled “School Management” was published in China in 1980. The Educational Management course was conducted at Beijing Educational Administration College in 1983. Later on subjects related to educational administration and management were offered in higher education institutions all over China. In 1983, a national research committee, Educational Management Sub-Council, was established under the China Education Council. Over the past two decades, educational administration and management has developed rapidly. Many Western educational management theories have been
introduced to China, and hundreds of books in this field have been published (see Wu Xiujuan cited in Feng, 2002a).

Educational administration and management is now regarded as a formal research discipline in China. Chinese scholars generally consider its knowledge base as a combination of indigenous and imported administration theories (e.g. Feng, 2002b; Wu, 2000). It is argued that there are strong indigenous leadership traditions and practices in China, but explicit discourse on leadership theory has been insufficiently developed. It is implicit in philosophical writings, like those of Confucius and Sun Tzu (*The Art of War*), but has not been defined as a distinct subject area.

**Contemporary educational administration and management issues**

A famous Chinese scholar Wu (2000, p. 7) argues that administration and management can be used interchangeably in the educational field, referring to “all kinds of activities implemented in a certain social context in order to achieve specific educational goals”. A review of educational management and administration literature in China indicates that educational leadership is often regarded as a subset of educational management or administration research rather than an independent discipline. Compared with massive works on educational management and administration, very few works deal explicitly with leadership or principalship (Lu, 1999; Song, 2001; Wang, 1998). Sections on leadership can often be found in books on educational management or administration. Some scholars (e.g. Feng, 2002b; Zhang, 1998) have argued that educational leadership is still at the early stage of development and heavily dependent upon Western general or business management theories. The knowledge base and systematic theoretical frameworks for educational leadership have not been adequately developed. Insufficient empirical studies have been conducted in this field. In this study, educational leadership is regarded as an independent discipline, which has its own distinctive boundaries but also shares some common knowledge base with educational management and administration.

The theoretical frameworks of contemporary educational management in China have been established in two ways. On the one hand, some scholars and practitioners have observed the practice in contemporary Chinese contexts, and conceptualised and then developed their theoretical frameworks and systems. Alternatively, others have
borrowed Western business management theories, and adapted them to Chinese contexts and then come up with another set of theoretical frameworks and systems (see He Lefan cited in Feng, 2002a). Both ways, whether relying on indigenous practice or integrating Western ideas, have been helpful in establishing educational management as a discipline in China. However, three important issues need to be addressed in this field: a discrepancy between theory and practice, a lack of empirical or applied studies, and an indiscriminate tendency to adopt Western theories.

**Discrepancy between theory and practice**

Firstly, there is often a missing link between theory and practice. A few Chinese educational practitioners have summarised their practical experience and produced influential works (e.g. Guo & Ren, 1996; Liu, 1994). Many academics are theorists who seldom get involved in practical management work or conduct empirical studies in educational institutions. Nor can they provide appropriate guidance to education practitioners because of their remoteness from management and leadership practice. Many practitioners find it difficult to relate the abstract theories or prescriptive models proposed by theorists to their workplaces. Some excellent practitioners have accumulated invaluable and rich management experience. However, during the process of summarizing their practical experience and crystallizing it into theories, a lack of empirical studies and supportive data or insufficient logical and analytical frameworks may have prevented them from coming up with convincing theories or models (Feng, 2002b). Therefore, there is often a gap between education management theories and the practice experienced by educational leaders. Great efforts are needed to address such discrepancies in contemporary Chinese educational administration.

**Lack of empirical or applied studies**

Secondly, few empirical or applied studies have been conducted in educational research in China. Many contemporary Chinese academics have indicated such insufficiency. Xiao Zongliu (1986) criticized some writers’ practice of citing authoritative figures’ words randomly to explain policies. Wu Zhihong (2000, pp. 27-28) raised similar criticism in educational management research. Many so-called research papers were simply an explanation or illustration of some policies or documents. No innovative theories or unique ideas could be found. Many works on educational management were often full of empty slogans, exhorting management to be “scientific”, “well-planned”,

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“rational” and so on. Moreover, research methods adopted by many Chinese researchers failed to conform to international norms. Quite a few researchers tended to propose empty rhetoric based on their assumptions, or replace factual judgement with value judgement, thus causing an alarming missing link between theory and practice.

According to Tang Linchun (1999), a review of educational management studies (from 1982 to 1999) indicated that during this 17-year period, and among 2389 papers on education management, only 203 were based on empirical studies, accounting for only 5% of the total number of papers. This is convincing evidence of a shortage of empirical or applied studies in Chinese educational management research. Unlike Western educational research supported by “well developed” or even “over developed” empirical studies, contemporary Chinese research is characterized by a lack of or “underdeveloped” empirical studies (Feng, 2002b, p. 357). A key issue for Chinese research is therefore to develop more comprehensive and field-based studies and promote a “practical and empirical spirit” (Wu, 2000, p. 28). More research focusing on practical studies rather than empty rhetoric is needed in China.

**An indiscriminate tendency to adopt Western theories**

Thirdly, since the latter decades of the twentieth century, there has been a tendency for indiscriminate adoption of Western management theories into China. Examination of the applicability of Western theories to Chinese contexts or a link between theory and practice is often insufficiently addressed. The recommended education policies may have drawn from the latest literature and experience from abroad, especially from Anglo-American countries, but they are not necessarily by themselves sufficient to bring about changes in Chinese schools or universities. The vital importance of avoiding “policy cloning”, “cultural imperialism” or “cultural borrowing” has been increasingly emphasised by recent scholars because they are not grounded in or responsive to local realities (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2000a; Wong, 2001b).

It is generally agreed that from 1949 to 1978 educational management in China was greatly influenced by theories and practices from the former Soviet Union. Since the 1980s, management and leadership theories from the contemporary Western world, especially Anglo-American countries, have been systematically introduced to China and those theories have exerted great influence upon the development of educational
management theory (e.g. Che, Li, & Zhang, 1999; Chen & Lu, 1997; Chen, 1999; Huang & Cheng, 2001; Lu, 1999; Wu, 2000, 2002; Wu, Feng, & Zhou, 2000; Xiao, 2001; Yang, 2001; Zhao, 2002). However, it should be noted that those popular Western management and leadership theories introduced to China in the 1980s and 1990s were mainly confined to general management theories and were not specific to education. These theories are generally classified into three stages by Chinese scholars: classic management theories (1900s to 1920s), interpersonal relations and behavioural science (1920s to 1950s), and contemporary management theories (1950s until now) (Huang & Cheng, 2001, p. 17). This classification was first put forward by Chinese scholar Ma Hong in the early 1980s and became dominant in the Chinese management fields (Feng, 2002b). However, Hong’s categories are too broad and inaccurate, because he refers to the period from the 1950s to the early twenty-first century as one stage, where in fact there have been massive shifts in Western management and leadership theories since the 1950s.

Many newly developed management and leadership theories have been introduced to China in recent years (e.g. Ashby & Miles, 2003; Bennis & Thomas, 2003; Senge, 1998). Efforts have also been made recently to introduce current Western educational leadership and learning theories (e.g. Blaisford, Brown, & Kergin, 2002; Clark, 2001; Feng, 2002a; Gu & Meng, 2001; Hong, 2001; Liu, 2002a). However, the relevance and applicability of Western theories to Chinese contexts continues to be inadequately explored. Few empirical and applied studies are conducted in this regard (Feng, 2002a; Wu, 2000). While some Chinese scholars draw on Western management ideas, attempting to relate them to Chinese contexts, others have focused on indigenous perspectives in recent years. Some seek wisdom and insights from the Chinese cultural heritage and interpret Chinese education and leadership from a cultural perspective (Diao, 2000; Ding, 2002; Hu, 2001; Liu, 2002b; Shi, 1999; Zhang, 1999; Zheng, 2000; Zhou, 1999; Zhu, 1996, 2001; Zhu, 1999). Some focus on contemporary leadership practices embedded in cultural, social and political contexts and propose leadership models appropriate for Chinese contexts (Lu, 1999; Song, 2001; Wang, 1998).

In conclusion, despite the rapid development in recent years, three important issues need to be addressed in contemporary Chinese management and leadership: a discrepancy between theory and practice, a lack of empirical studies, and an
indiscriminate tendency to adopt Western theories. It is more likely that when these issues are addressed, Chinese educational management and leadership research will provide more effective guidance for educational practitioners than it has in the past. This study is such an attempt to address these issues by examining Chinese leaders’ conceptions of leadership and learning, and investigating how they relate the Western theories to their leadership practice through a longitudinal, in-depth study.

**Concepts of leadership**

The previous section examined a generic area, administration and management. This section focuses on leadership as a discrete topic within the discourse. A literature review of related educational management in Chinese sources indicates that there tends to be conceptual confusions among Chinese scholars. The concept of leadership is viewed as synonymous to that of management. Leadership and management are not considered as two conceptually different terms although more recently some scholars have explored the differences between them (Huang & Cheng, 2001; Wei, 2002; Wu et al., 2000). They are interlocking concepts in administration discourse, and this can in turn lead to confusion and tensions in it. In the minds of some Chinese scholars, there is not a clear theoretical distinction between the two concepts but an amalgamation of related ideas and hybrid conceptions.

A leader in China is generally considered as one who holds an official position in an organisation and exerts influence in committing members to organisational goals (Huang & Cheng, 2001; Wu et al., 2000). Leaders exert particular influence upon certain groups and play important roles in organisations. Huang and Cheng (2001, pp. 196-197) argue that “while leaders are generally at the higher decision-making levels, managers and administrators are mainly organisers at operational and implementation levels. Leaders are expected to possess vision, strategic planning ability and non-positional authority in order to commit followers to strategic goals”. This reflects or is consistent with developments in Western discourse since the 1970s.

A Chinese scholar, Wei Zhichun (2002, pp. 302-308), summarises the illustrations of leadership given by three leading Chinese educational management scholars, Professor Xiao Zongliu, Professor Lu Xiujuan and Professor He Lefan. These authors seem to struggle with the complexity of leadership, seeking to distinguish between leadership as
a higher order function and management as a tool of leadership. They all tend to illustrate the relationship between leadership and management from a management perspective. They generally think that leadership and management are overlapping. Professor Xiao comments, “leadership and management are basically synonyms, but there are similarities and distinctions between the two concepts. They are mutually dependent, i.e. leadership is found in management and management exists in leadership.” Professor Lu believes that “management has more extensive meanings than leadership and both are basic concepts in management science”. Professor He illustrates his ideas from the roles played by school administrators, “school principals can be considered as leaders and managers”.

These Chinese scholars also pay particular attention to the differences between leadership and management. Professor Xiao classifies Chinese school administrators into three levels: leaders, managers, and operators. School principals and deputy principals are leaders, directors and heads of departments are managers, and teachers are operators. He further emphasises that “a leader sits at the highest level of management. A leader plays the key role in school management and decision-making”. Professor Wu extends the circle of leaders slightly to “higher level managers in an organisational system”. Professor He shares a similar view and distinguishes higher level managers from operational level administrators. This notion seems to be consistent with Chinese concepts of hierarchy and authority.

It can be seen from the illustrations of these Chinese academics, there is a great deal of conceptual confusion in their writings. Leadership in China is generally considered as the highest level of management although there is slight disagreement in distinguishing the leadership level and management level. Looking at how they describe the roles and functions of leaders may alleviate some of this confusion.

Professor Wu particularly emphasises the commanding role of a leader as directing, guiding, controlling, coordinating and monitoring organisational members. Leaders are not primarily concerned with general operational matters but mainly with people. Professor He makes it more explicit, “only when there are followers can a leader implement leadership. Without a formal leadership position, one cannot be a leader”. He further emphasises the authoritative role of leaders by saying “if a principal cannot establish authority in the school, his management is doomed to be a failure.”
When it comes to the functions of leaders, Professor He stresses leadership is mainly about macro level policies, “such as policy planning and implementation, decision-making and commanding”. He classifies leadership functions into five categories: representing, directing, organizing, coordinating and educating. Professor Wu states that “leadership emphasises decision-making, commanding and innovating”. Professor Xiao indicates that “a leader’s functions include mainly two aspects, firstly, committing members to achieve organisational goals, and secondly, coordinating relationships among members in order to maintain harmony in an organisation.” (see Wei, 2002).

It seems that the essential qualities advocated for Chinese educational leaders are mostly “hard skills”, like organizing, coordinating, commanding, directing, and decision-making skills, while the “soft skills” like empowering, communicating, delegating, participatory decision-making, and negotiating are given insufficient attention or emphasis in Chinese leadership literature. An effective educational leader in the changing context needs to possess both hard and soft skills.

A review of other Chinese books on education management indicates a similar result (e.g. Huang, 2002; Wei, 2002; Wu, 2000; Wu et al., 2000; Xiao, 2001). Scholars generally agree that leadership is at the highest level of management, mainly focusing on macro level policies and decision-making. There are three levels in an organisation: leaders, managers, and operators. In schools, the three levels can be manifested as principals, heads of departments, and classroom teachers. Unlike Western leadership literature fraught with complexity and confusion about the concept of leadership (Howe, 1994), the general agreement is reached that both leadership and management are not mutually exclusive but overlapping to some extent, even though some scholars attempt to distinguish leadership from management. Many Western scholars tend to clarify the difference and similarities between those two terms. These two concepts are considered as having more similarities than differences in Chinese management and leadership literature.

**Recent studies on Chinese leadership**

Empirical studies have been undertaken in recent years to investigate Chinese leadership (Chang, 2003; Ling, Chia, & Fang, 2000; Miles, 1999), or Chinese educational leadership (Bush et al., 1998; Chen, 2002; Ribbins & Zhang, 2004; Zhang,
Quite a few writings are also found on individual educational leaders’ perspectives about leadership, but these discussions are mainly based on unsystematic reports of personal experience rather than carefully designed empirical studies (e.g. Guo & Ren, 1996; Liu, 1994).

A Chinese scholar on leadership, Wang Lefu (1998), concluded that in China leadership studies are mainly related to the following themes:

- nature of leadership: leaders occupy directing and guiding roles in the leading activities while followers are main subjects in the leading process;
- basic elements of leadership: leaders mainly rely on non-positional authorities such as personal qualities to motivate followers rather than on formal positional power to coerce followers;
- functions and roles of leaders: leaders are coordinators of complex relationships inside and outside the organisation, and they are communicators of organisational goals;
- personal qualities of leaders: leaders are visionary and role models, paying attention to big picture development, macro level decision-making and strategic planning;
- leading process and system: considering feedback, modifying and adjusting plans in the leading process in order to realize organisational goals;
- leadership methods and leadership arts: leadership study is a comprehensive applied science aiming at improving leadership effectiveness.

Miles (1999) conducted a study to explore evolving Chinese leadership behaviour. The purpose of his study was to expand current understanding of the practice of Chinese leadership from the perspective of Chinese leaders. The research was based on the simple question “what behaviours do good Chinese leaders model?” Participants were asked to write stories of their experience of “good leadership” in response to the question. Subsequent thematic analysis produced a profile of 129 specific behaviours modelled by Chinese leaders. Results of the study indicate a clear and pronounced movement toward what in the West would be labelled formal management behaviours such as organizing, planning, controlling and structuring types of behaviour on the part of leaders at the local level. In contrast to the recent Communist experience where
decision-making was centralized and most frequently based on consensus amongst leadership elites, good leaders are perceived as taking decisions and persevering in those decisions, regardless of the resultant controversy. Comparison to Western management models indicates that “relationship” underlies any technical approach to leadership in a Chinese context, and that transformational rather than transactional models of leadership may be a more appropriate reference framework.

Ling, Chia and Fang (2000) explored the implicit conceptual framework of Chinese leadership. This implicit theory approach assumes the existence of a conceptual structure regarding the definition of a leader and what a leader should be in the minds of people. The researchers developed the Chinese Implicit Leadership Scale (CILS) in Study I. In Study 2, they administered the CILS to 622 Chinese participants from 5 occupational groups in Beijing (cadres, factory workers, teachers, college students, and technicians), to explore differences in their perceptions of leadership. Factor analysis yielded 4 factors of leadership: personal morality, goal efficiency, interpersonal competence, and versatility. The Chinese participants considered virtue as the most important feature of leadership. This finding indicates that, even today 2500 years after the time of Confucius, his traditional ethics continue to have tremendous influence over Chinese people. All groups gave the highest ratings to interpersonal competence, reflecting the enormous importance of this factor, which is consistent with Chinese collectivist values. Ling et al. (2000) argue that Chinese tradition, values, and perceptions are so different from those in the West that there is an urgent need to better understand each other. Western theories of leadership cannot be very effective when directly transported onto Chinese people. The results of the study suggest the ways in which Chinese people view a leader and the meaning attached to a leader. Ling et al. (2000) maintain that,

Previous researchers on Chinese leadership have used mostly Western theories and have concentrated on the descriptions of overt leadership behaviour. Future researchers must continue to explore deeper into the hearts and minds of the Chinese to find out the true Chinese meaning of leader.

Chen (2002) examined the leadership role of secondary school principals in China utilizing a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis. The findings of the
study reveal that a principal assumes a number of responsibilities in areas of planning, program development, teacher appraisal, and staff professional development, through which the principal expresses his or her educational concerns. Meanwhile, the principal also takes responsibility for personnel, student affairs, finance, liaison and daily management which demand a managerial focus. In addition, the moral dimension becomes an important characteristic in defining school leadership.

However, Chen (2002) also identified a tension between bureaucratic culture and democratic culture. He indicated that the position of principals demonstrates inconsistency in empowerment because there is a confrontation between the existing bureaucratic culture and the emerging democratic culture in Chinese schools, with the former favouring political and systemic interests and the latter stressing the interests and desires of people working in and for schools. This study thus exposed constraints and dilemmas that jeopardized the principals’ effective running of the school and engendered new tensions as the result of systemic reforms.

This literature review shows that some studies have been undertaken to explore Chinese leadership (Bush & Qiang, 2000; Chen, 2002; Ling et al., 2000; Miles, 1999; Wong, 2001b). However, to date and to the knowledge of the researcher, there is no systematic empirical study to investigate Chinese leaders’ perceptions about leadership in the context of intercultural dynamics as they bring traditional assumptions about leadership to an interaction with contemporary Western discourses. The present study addresses this gap by undertaking a qualitative in-depth study. It attempts to fulfil part of the challenge posed by Ling and his associates (2000).

4.3. Research on Leadership in the West

4.3.1 Defining Leadership

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth (Burns, 1978, p. 2).

Defining leadership is a comparatively recent academic activity in the West, though the phenomenon of leadership has been ever present in human relations. Stogdill (1974) reminds us that the word “leader” has origins back to the 1300s and the word “leadership” dates back to the 1800s. He reviewed over 3,000 studies directly related to
leadership and suggested that there are almost “as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (Stogdill, 1974, p. 7). Bennis and Nanus (1985b), through their decades of academic analysis, found more than 350 definitions of leadership, but “no clear and unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders, effective leaders from ineffective leaders, and effective organisations from ineffective organisations” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985b, p. 4). Rost (1991) found 221 definitions in 587 books and articles written from 1900 to 1990, and commented “these attempts to define leadership have been confusing, varied, disorganised, idiosyncratic, muddled, and, according to conventional wisdom, quite unrewarding” (Rost, 1991, p. 99).

Howe (1994) has lamented that the field is “fraught with contradictions, conflicting results, seemingly irreconcilable disciplinary perspectives and an inability to agree upon a definition or a general description of the phenomenon ” (1994, p. 3277). There is no singular, all embracing definition of leadership in the literature, and this also applies to educational leadership.

The conceptual confusion within the general area of leadership studies is compounded for educators by several factors, such as disagreement about conceptual unity or conceptual pluralism (Howe, 1994). There is no precise agreement as to what educational administration is, whether educational leadership is a subset of educational administration (Mintzberg, 1973), whether the two are essentially the same (Hodgkinson, 1991), or whether or not “leadership”, “administration”, and “management” are conceptually distinct terms. For the most part, scholars in educational administration use “leadership”, “administration”, and “management” indiscriminately and accept these terms unquestioningly as institutionalized synonyms. Moreover, while some scholars attempt to distinguish the terms and to define “leadership” precisely (see Greenfield, Marshall, & Reed, 1986), others argue that “leadership” is a vague term encompassing both administration and management and that “leadership is administration” (Hodgkinson, 1991).

Therefore, despite the apparent importance of leadership, researchers are often frustrated by the conceptual confusion surrounding it. Morris (1985) even suggested that the concept may be more problematic in education than in any other area.
Nevertheless, many researchers would agree with the following propositions (see Howe, 1994, p. 3277):

- Leadership is not coercion or obtaining compliance to decisions, rules, regulations, or policies by means of coercion;
- Leadership involves an influence relationship between leader(s) and followers with the intent of realizing change, accomplishing mutual purposes, or creating shared meaning;
- Leadership involves interaction with people rather than, or at least in addition to, engaging in technical aspects of work;
- Leadership is shaped by personal, organisational, and environmental factors and their interaction, and results in various outcomes, with improvement of the “technical core”—curriculum and instruction—being the most important outcome.

Several other representative definitions of leadership are as follows (see Bass, 1990; Dubrin, 2001, p. 3):

- interpersonal influence, directed through communication toward goal attainment;
- the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with directions and orders;
- an act that causes others to act or respond in a shared direction;
- the art of influencing people by persuasion or example to follow a line of action;
- the principal dynamic force that motivates and coordinates the organisation in the accomplishment of its objectives.

A review of literature indicates the wide definitional range and lack of consensus in research on leadership. The conceptual confusion identified in Chinese discourse also exists in Western discourse. The working definition of leadership adopted in this study is interpersonal influence, directed through communication toward personal and organisational goal attainment and a shared vision (Bass, 1990; Dubrin, 2001).
4.3.2 Leadership versus Management

Culture and structure, leadership and management: all are necessary if an organisation is to become highly effective (Schein, 1985, p. 171).

Recent decades have seen an increasing tendency to distinguish between leadership and management, whilst the Chinese discourse is still struggling to establish a difference. While some authors and practitioners continue to confuse the two concepts or make no distinction (see Drucker, 1954; Whetton & Cameron, 1998), more and more literature is asserting that management is not leadership and leadership is not management.

Management is defined as the act of controlling, counting, and supervising other people so that they perform in specific ways to increase the overall productivity of the system or operation (see Taylor, 1915). Gulick’s conception of POSDCORB (an acronym standing for planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting) is the traditional realm of management (Gulick, 1937; Stogdill, 1974). The words “control”, “supervision”, “incentives”, and “inducements” are equivalent, in many respects, to management (see Fairholm, 2002, p. 38).

Many scholars tend to distinguish between the two concepts. Kotter (1989) argues that leadership and management functions can be separated out fairly clearly according to context. He insists that strategic development is a key function of leadership for change, while day-to-day problem-solving is clearly a management function. Bennis and Nanus’s (1985a) research has identified that a “range of talents” is central to highly successful leadership, and this includes fostering a culture of trust, developing an openness to learning, encouraging and stimulating staff learning and communicating organisational aims/vision with clarity. Fullan (1991, pp. 157-158) argues that while management “involves designing and carrying out plans, getting things done, working effectively with people”, leadership “relates to mission, direction, inspiration”. Stoll and Fink’s (1996) examination of the relationship between educational leadership and effective schooling distinguishes “technocratic” and managerialist system approaches from “humanist” and facilitative ones, emphasising another potential leadership and management distinction.

The key difference between the two is that leadership requires higher order vision and strategic abilities while management requires operational knowledge and interpersonal
skills. These views are reinforced by some of the typical distinctions which are drawn between leadership and management in the literature (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Distinctions between Leadership and Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Building and maintaining an organisational culture” (Schein, 1985)</td>
<td>“Building and maintaining an organisational structure” (Schein, 1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Path finding” (Hodgson, 1987)</td>
<td>“Path-following” (Hodgson, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Doing the right thing” (Bennis &amp; Nanus, 1985a)</td>
<td>“Doing things right” (Bennis &amp; Nanus, 1985a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Leadership develops… inspires trust” (Bennis, 1989)</td>
<td>“The manager maintains… relies on control” (Bennis, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Focused on the creation of a vision about a desired future state” (Bryman, 1986)</td>
<td>“A preoccupation with the here-and-now of goal attainment” (Bryman, 1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Leaders have empathy with other people and give attention to what events and action mean.” (Zeleznik, 1977)</td>
<td>“Managers maintain a low level of emotional involvement” (Zeleznik, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Establishing a mission… giving a sense of direction.” (Louis &amp; Miles, 1992)</td>
<td>“Designing and carry out plans, getting things done, working effectively with people” (Louis &amp; Miles, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Learning from the organisation” (Hodgson, 1987)</td>
<td>“Being taught by the organisation” (Hodgson, 1987)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Other writers also indicate key distinctions between management and leadership (Kotter, 1990; Leonard, 1999; Whetton & Cameron, 1998):

- Management is more formal and scientific than leadership. It relies on universal skills such as planning, budgeting, and controlling. Leadership, in contrast to management, involves having a vision of what the organisation can become.
- Leadership requires eliciting cooperation and teamwork from a large network of people and keeping the key people in that network motivated, using every manner of persuasion.
- Leadership produces change, often to a dramatic degree. Management is more likely to produce a degree of predictability and order.
- Top-level leaders are likely to transform their organisations, whereas top-level managers just manage (or maintain) organisations.
- A leader creates a vision (lofty goal) to direct the organisation. In contrast, the key function of the manager is to implement the vision.
If these views are taken to their extreme, as commented by Dubrin (2001), the leader is an inspirational figure and the manager is a stodgy bureaucrat mired in the status quo. But we must be careful not to downplay the importance of management. Effective leaders have to be good managers themselves, or be supported by effective managers. The difference between leadership and management is one of emphasis. “Effective leaders also manage, and effective managers perform some aspects of leadership” (Dubrin, 2001, p. 5). Leadership and management are complementary, but not the same. Leadership encompasses mindsets that are different (not necessarily better) than management (Fairholm, 2002).

However, in practice, the distinctions between management and leadership are not always so clearly defined as visionary and strategic leadership vs. operational management. Law and Glover (1999) argue that high profile educational leaders are increasingly pressurized to use both human and material resources more creatively; the integration of leading, management and even policy making generates a complex mix of duties and responsibilities for individuals. “Each of these functions—leadership, management or administration—requires different but overlapping skills, knowledge and abilities” (Law & Glover, 1999, p. 14).

4.3.3 Historical Threads of Leadership Theories

Four threads of leadership thought help us discover the evolution of leadership thinking: trait theory, behaviour theory, situational theory, and value-based transformational theory. The first three threads lean toward a reductionist methodology of understanding leadership by aggregating data about leaders and situation. Although these three historical threads are still commonly used as a framework for understanding leadership, a new way of approaching the leadership theories goes beyond these assumptions. A fourth thread, values-based transformational leadership, begins to move the discussion towards a more holistic approach to understanding leadership. It moves the discussion from the leader to the phenomenon of leadership. Fairholm (2002, p. 25) argues, “This thread examines the relationships between leader and follower and the activity of sharing, or coming to share common purposes, values, ideals, goals, and meaning in our organisational and personal pursuits”. Table 4.3 summarises the four historical threads of leadership research, the characteristic concepts and illustrative authors.
### Table 4.3 Historical Threads of Leadership Research and Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Thread</th>
<th>Characteristic Concepts</th>
<th>Five Illustrative Authors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Trait Theory</strong>&lt;br&gt;(who)</td>
<td>Leadership depends upon who the leader is and what the leader is like (Leaders are…)</td>
<td>Wiggam (1931) Dowd (1936) Jennings (1960) Scott (1973) Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great person theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership depends upon personal qualities, personality and character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Grid</td>
<td>Describes leadership as being the sum of two important behaviours that great leaders seem to hold in common: getting things done and relating well with people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Situational Theory</strong>&lt;br&gt;(when)</td>
<td>Leadership depends upon which situations are conducive to leadership and when the leader can emerge (Leadership emerges depending on…)</td>
<td>Homans (1950) Fielder (1967) Vroom and Yetton (1973) Hollander (1978) Hersey and Blanchard (1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational and Contingency Theories</td>
<td>Leadership depends upon what leaders do in specific situations that differ because of unique internal and external forces. Leadership is not definable without the specific context of the situation in which leaders seem to emerge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader/follower relationships and the leadership/management debate</td>
<td>Emphasis is not on studying specific leaders in specific situations, doing specific things, rather, what are the common relationship elements exhibited over time that characterize this thing called “leadership”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Since the “theory movement” in the United States, many educational leadership scholars have often resisted scientific, positivistic theoretical perspectives. They frequently develop and support alternative theoretical perspectives for educational leadership (e.g. Bates, 1983; Greenfield, 1984; Gronn, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1991). The Canadian scholar Greenfield (1984) argued strongly for the use of a phenomenological theoretical lens, that is, leadership exists in people’s subjective interpretations of
experience; it is an internal phenomenon associated with values, morals, meanings, and even illusions. Hodgkinson (1991) claimed that leadership is a humane and moral art whose core problems are philosophical and “valuational” rather than scientific; “values, morals, and ethics,” he suggested “are the very stuff of leadership… yet we have no comprehensive theory about them” (Preface).

A fifth thread of leadership research focuses on a perspectival approach to holistically understanding the leadership phenomenon (Fairholm, 2002). McWhinney (1984) argues that the different ways people experience reality result in their having distinctly different attitudes toward change, and that understanding these different concepts contributes to new understanding of resistance to change and the modes of leadership. The perspectival approach looks at leadership in broader, more philosophical, holistic terms, recognizing that individual perspectives are brought to bear on understanding leadership. While leadership may contain certain elements, these elements may not be understood fully or put into practice at all, except through individual conceptions of what leadership is (Fairholm, 2002, p. 57). A perspectival approach emphasises a need to understand subjective conceptions, and therefore it has similarities with the phenomenographic approach. The aim of this study is to explore the conceptions of a specific cohort of Chinese educational leaders in an international education context using a phenomenographic approach. In leadership discourse there are various sub-fields, such as political leadership, business leadership, community leadership, and educational leadership. This thesis particularly focuses on educational leadership, a distinctive educational research field (see Begley & Johansson, 2003; Davies & West-Burnham, 2003; Gronn, 2003; Howe, 1994; Leithwood, Chapman, Corson, Hallinger, & Hart, 1996).

### 4.3.4 Emergent Themes in Recent Western Studies on Leadership

Literature shows that many studies have been conducted to investigate leadership, but few have specifically explored conceptions of leadership using a phenomenographic approach. Drawing upon G. W. Fairholm’s (1998) work, Matthew Fairholm (2002) explored five perspectives of leadership by investigating the conceptions and experiences of selected metropolitan Washington area municipal managers. The five perspectives are scientific management, excellence management, values leadership, trust cultural leadership and spiritual leadership. The first two perspectives align with
Burns’ (1978) transactional leadership, and the last three perspectives align with recent conceptions of transformational leadership. The research findings conclude that there are some perspectives of leadership that encompass and transcend lower order perspectives, and that growth and progression is evident in the ways people conceive of leadership. The hierarchical nature of the leadership perspectives suggests that the roles of leaders encompass the technical implementer or skilled mediator roles, but transcend them as well. Leaders might play a more facilitative and collaborative role—more in line with the higher order leadership perspectives—and that those roles may be more appropriate (if not necessarily more effective) roles in general.

Based on a review of some 121 relevant articles in four English language journals concerned with administration and leadership, Leithwood and Duke (1998) identified six models of leadership, including instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, and contingent forms of leadership. The six leadership models provides a reasonably comprehensive framework for cross-cultural leadership studies in Western social cultures.

In another study, Brown and Rutherford’s (1998) assessment of middle management in schools identifies five leadership images:

- servant leader: stresses empowerment through working with people;
- organisational architect: initiates and orchestrates change;
- leading professional: shows awareness of work contexts;
- moral educator: demonstrates transmissible values to guide relationships;
- social architect: shows awareness of social and development issues.

Dimmock (2000, pp. 250-251) claims leadership in the learning-centred schools is assumed to be organisation-wide. It is dispersed among faculty and students at different levels. Part of the principal’s exercise of leadership is the empowerment of leadership in others. He suggests eight dimensions of leadership in the learning-centred school: educational leadership, technological leadership, structural leadership, moral leadership, cultural and symbolic leadership, human and non-human resource leadership, political leadership, and strategic and transformational leadership.
Understanding leadership entails understanding people’s conceptions of the phenomenon, but this phenomenographic approach to leadership is relatively absent from the literature. Understanding leadership through this approach allows theorists and practitioners to approach leadership activities in more accurate and meaningful ways. Many studies have been conducted to investigate leadership phenomena in recent years. These studies inform the knowledge development of leadership field, but a phenomenographic approach is needed which may offer an alternative way to investigate actors’ understanding and experience in the real world. However, few studies have examined leadership using the phenomenographic approach. Because this approach to leadership is not fully established in literature, there are no established categories of conceptions as in research of learning conceptions. Leadership studies reveal the conceptions of leadership to be very complex and, at times, confused. Hence a phenomenographic approach can capture the complexity by focusing on the subjective understandings as compared to positivist, behavioural, and observational tendencies. This study is a qualitative study strongly inspired by the phenomenographic approach to explore personal conceptions of learning and leadership.

4.4 Implications and a Conceptual Framework for the Study

A study of the responses of contemporary Chinese educational leaders to a leadership development program delivered by a Western university enters into a very complex territory. The interviewees carry a complex set of conceptions of learning and leadership from their indigenous culture. The content of the course on Western leadership is not a coherent and unified body of knowledge and theories, and it contains tensions and dissonance. This interactive dynamic occurs within complex contemporary contexts, as can be seen from figure 4.1. This is further complicated by the different contexts within which educational leaders work (schools, systems and universities). If contexts influence conceptions and beliefs, it is unlikely that they would all see the concepts of learning and leadership through the same lens. Therefore, an interpretative study is best suited to capture this complexity of the interactions.

The common thread which draws together the literature reviews in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 is presented as Figure 4.1, which is the conceptual framework of this study.
Global context

Social and cultural context

International education context

Intercultural dialogue

Figure 4.1 A Conceptual Framework for the Study

Source: developed for this research
In Figure 4.1, three consecutive rings represent three different levels of contexts in this study. The outside ring stands for the global context in the contemporary world. The middle ring indicates the social and cultural context, namely Chinese culture and societies in the study. The inside ring represents the international educational context, where a Western course, the Master of Educational Leadership program, was conducted. Conceptions of learning and leadership, the focus of the study, sit in the centre of international educational context. Within the inside ring, four circles represent different ideas and traditions which exert influences on the conceptions of learning and leadership of Chinese educational leaders. The interaction between the Western and Chinese perspectives is underpinned by the intercultural dialogue. The two-way arrows indicate an interactive and dynamic process.

As shown in Figure 4.1, conceptions of learning and leadership brought by Chinese leaders to the course have been influenced by learning and leadership traditions in China, which will continue to exert influences after their exposure to Western ideas. Contemporary leadership and learning in the West refers to the theories and perspectives underpinning the learning process and content of the course, such as adult learning, constructivist pedagogy and exposure to a broad range of leadership perspectives. These may also have influence upon Chinese leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. The forces represented by these four circles are dynamic and interactive, mediated by various contextual and personal factors. The focus of the study is to examine how Chinese leaders perceive learning and leadership during this dynamic and interactive process, and to investigate if any conceptual and practice changes have occurred during this process.

Five key issues are related to this study. The first concerns the lack of attention devoted to learning and teaching situations from the perspective of students in Australian offshore programs. Some studies have examined academic adjustment of international students in Australian universities or offshore teaching from the perspective of teachers. Where are the voices of offshore students in an increasingly globalised context? The previous studies did not answer this question. To inform the offshore education research, systematic and in-depth studies are needed to understand the experiences of offshore students.
The second issue is the lack of a thorough examination of Chinese leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. Some studies have investigated the conceptions of learning held by secondary students or school teachers from the West or Hong Kong. However, little systematic research has been done to examine conceptions of learning and leadership held by Mainland Chinese leaders and their professional development in the changing context. A better understanding of Chinese leaders’ conceptions will inform the knowledge base of educational leadership and add value to their leadership practice.

The third issue is the lack of specific attention to conceptions of educational leaders from three sectors, namely schools, universities, and educational departments. Some previous studies focused on school principals or academic leaders, but few studies have examined the perspectives from leaders from various educational sectors, particularly from the educational bureaucracy. This study addresses this issue by looking at the conceptions of educational leaders from various educational sectors and examines if any sector differences exist as mediated by different institutional cultures.

The fourth issue centres upon the relative lack of research into conceptions of leadership employing an interpretive phenomenographic approach. Many phenomenographic studies have investigated conceptions of learning in the past twenty years, but few studies have examined leadership conceptions using the phenomenographic approach. Moreover, few studies of educational leadership take a longitudinal perspective or an intercultural perspective (Howe, 1994, p. 3278). This study was inspired by interpretive phenomenography and used this approach to examine both learning and leadership conceptions which have been rarely covered in this field.

Fifth, this review shows that to date little research has been done to investigate conceptions of both learning and leadership. Many studies have focused on conceptions of learning and teaching and examined the relations between them. The study tentatively examines the relationship between conceptions of learning and leadership. An investigation into Chinese leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership raises the question of links or synergies between the two domains. For instance, does a commitment to exploratory or active learning align with a predisposition towards team or shared leadership? Meanwhile a reflection on the relation between conceptions of learning and leadership would be helpful to deepen our understanding about the leader as key learner in changing international contexts.
4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the definitions and theories of leadership as found in relevant literature, and pointed out that indigenous and national cultures have an important role in shaping conceptions of leadership. The chapter has addressed the issue of Chinese educational leaders’ perspectives of leadership in a globalised context of educational reform. A conceptual framework which draws together literature reviews in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 has been presented and discussed. Finally, after examining relevant literature and writings from China and the West, weaknesses in previous research have been noted in five main aspects, which were addressed by the study. In the next chapter, the methodological framework and phenomonographic approach adopted in this study are discussed and analysed.
Chapter 5 Methodological Framework

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and approach used to conduct the study. It is a qualitative, interpretative study strongly inspired by the phenomenographic approach\(^8\) to explore the personal conceptions of learning and leadership. This chapter describes research design, data collection method and procedure, and data analysis techniques. It addresses the issues of dependability, credibility and transferability, and then the delimitations and limitations of the study. It concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.

5.2 A Methodological Framework

The methodological framework developed for the study draws heavily on Crotty’s (1998) work. According to Crotty (1998, pp. 2-3), the following four basic elements of any research process inform each other: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. In social research texts, the bulk of discussion and much of the terminology relate in one way or another to these four elements. He distinguishes the differences among the four basic elements as follows:

- epistemology: the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology;
- theoretical perspective: the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria;
- methodology: the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes;
- methods: the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research questions or hypothesis.

\(^8\) It should be noted that the way in which the “applied” approach used in this thesis differs from a “pure” phenomenographic approach. For applied researchers, this combination of research methods is not uncommon in the educational field and has been utilized in a number of international and peer refereed publications and theses to date (e.g. Boulton-Lewis et al., 2003; Collin, 2002; Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Fung et al., 2001; McKenzie, 2003; Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Purdie et al., 1996; Yong & Gerber, 2001).
Based on Crotty’s (1998) classification, the methodological framework for this study is depicted in Figure 5.1. Constructionist epistemology informs the interpretivist theoretical perspective. Interpretivism lies behind the case study research design and the phenomenographic approach in the study. Methodology in turn governs the choice and use of the research method of interviews.

5.3 Constructionist Epistemology

Beneath the theoretical perspectives lie three main epistemological roots: objectivism, subjectivism and constructionism (Crotty, 1998). This study draws on the constructionist epistemological tradition. The word “epistemology” is taken from the Greek and means episteme, “knowledge”, and logos, “explanation”—that is, the study of knowledge and justification (Audi, 1995, p. 233). Maynard (1994, p. 10) explains that “epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both
adequate and legitimate.” An epistemology is a fundamental understanding of the nature of knowledge, at its deepest level. Objectivism holds that meaning and therefore meaningful reality exists, as such, apart from the operation of any consciousness. In this objectivist view, understanding and values are considered to be objectified in the people we are studying, and if we go about it in the right way, we can discover the objective truth. In subjectivism, meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject. Meaning comes from anything but an interaction between the subject and the object to which it is ascribed (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9). Thus objectivism asserts that research can lead us to know and to verify an objective truth. At the opposite end of the spectrum, subjectivism claims that there are infinite interpretations of events, none of them superior to another. In between, constructionism posits an objective world mediated by an individual’s conceptual lens or framework (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004, p. 116).

Constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. Constructionists claim that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998, pp. 42-43). According to this view, there is no truth waiting for us to discover. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world, and meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9).

Constructivism and constructionism are not exactly the same, as argued by many researchers, such as Schwandt (1994) and Crotty (1998). It would appear useful to reserve the term “constructivism” for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” and to use “constructionism” where the focus includes “the collective generation of meaning” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127). Constructivism emphasises the unique experience and individual understanding of each of us. It suggests that each one’s way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other. On the other hand, the social dimension of meaning is at centre stage of constructionism, which emphasises the hold
our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things and gives us a quite
definite view of the world (Crotty, 1998).

This study is informed by constructionist epistemology because it is concerned with the
social construction of meaning and interpretation of learning and leadership by the
participants. It focuses on the collective generation of meaning, which comes from the
interaction between the participants and phenomena studied.

5.4 Interpretivist Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical perspectives are like super-structures that dictate the selection and use of
methods and, ultimately, the shape of any report on the topics under investigation
(Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004, p. 115). Positivism, interpretivism and critical theory are the
three dominant paradigms or theoretical perspectives in the research field (Crotty, 1998;
Foley, 2000a). A constructionist and interpretivist philosophy underpins this study.

A positivist approach would follow the method of the natural sciences and, by way of
allegedly value-free, detached observation, seek to identify universal features of
humanhood, society and history that offer explanation and hence control and
predictability. The interpretivist approach, by contrast, looks for culturally derived and
historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (Crotty, 1998). A third
approach, critical theory, places a much greater emphasis on the social context of
knowledge and education. Critical theory focuses on the relationship of knowledge,
power and ideology (Foley, 2000a, p. 19). Interpretivism emerged in contradistinction
to positivism in attempts to understand and to explain human and social reality. As
Thomas Schwandt (1994, p. 125) puts it, “interpretivism was conceived in reaction to
the effort to develop a natural science of the social. Its foil was largely logical empiricist
methodology and the bid to apply that framework to human inquiry”.

Interpretivism sees knowledge as both subjective and socially constructed: its
fundamental assumption is that different individuals understand the world differently.
This approach suggests that it is futile to try to discover universal laws. It is more useful
to study the different ways people make sense of situations, through language and other
symbolic systems. Interpretivists maintain that the way individuals make meanings is
not purely subjective or idiosyncratic. The focus is on the interaction of self and social
structures and culture. It is by studying these interactions that we can come to understand how people make sense of, and act on, the world. There is often a strong emphasis in this perspective on communication, on how people’s interactions are mediated through language and other symbolic systems (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Foley, 2000a; Usher & Bryant, 1989).

The interpretivist approach has three historical streams: hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998). This study follows the phenomenological stream. Phenomenology invites us to “set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking … to learn to see what stands before our eyes” (Husserl, 1931, p. 43). Phenomenology asks us not to take our received notions for granted but “to call into question our whole culture, our manner of seeing the world and being in the world in the way we have learned it growing up (Wolff, 1984, p. 192). Phenomenology suggests that if we lay aside the prevailing understandings of the phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning (Crotty, 1996).

The whole notion of phenomenology is to stand against the rationalist tradition of thinking. The phenomenological approach is to step back from ordinary assumptions regarding things and to describe the phenomena of experience as they appear rather than attempt to explain why they appear that way. The idea of phenomenography, which is a branch of phenomenology, is to find out qualitatively different ways of experiencing or thinking about some phenomena (Lam, 2003). This study is underpinned by the interpretivist philosophy and adopts the phenomenographic approach.

5.5 Research Methodology and Design

The research design of the study was a pre-post comparison case study following the phenomenographic tradition. The study was primarily qualitative, longitudinal, and phenomenographic. Conceptions of learning and leadership and self-reported leadership practice of Chinese educational leaders over a one-year period were examined. Phenomenographic methodology was followed because it was considered to provide
full descriptions that allow coherent meaning to evolve from the findings (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2003).

5.5.1 Case Study

This study adopts case study design within the phenomenographic tradition. “Case study” is a generic term for the investigation of an individual, group, or phenomenon. The distinguishing features of case study are the belief that human systems develop “a characteristic wholeness or integrity” and are not simply a loose collection of traits (Sturman, 1997, p. 61). Punch (1998, p. 150) has indicated that the case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case. Yin (1994, p. 13) defines case study as “an empirical investigation into a contemporary phenomenon operating in a real-life context, especially when the boundary between phenomenon and context is not clearly evident.” The case study is neither a data collection tactic nor merely a design feature alone, but a comprehensive research strategy.

Robert Stake has yet another approach for defining case studies, which applies to this study. He considers them not to be a methodological choice but a choice of object to be studied. The object must be a functioning specific, not a generality (Stake, 1994, 1995). Stake (1988, p. 258) has given what he calls “a pretty loose definition”. He defined a case study as “a study of a bounded system, emphasizing the unity and wholeness of that system, but confining the attention to those aspects that are relevant to the research problem at the time.” Burns (1997, pp. 365-366) observes that a case study should focus on a bounded subject/unit that is either very representative or extremely atypical. He proposes that case study is used to gain in-depth understanding replete with meaning for the subject, focusing on process rather than outcome and on discovery rather than confirmation. Investigators use a case study design in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved.

The design of this research was a case study, which focused on exploring the perceptions of learning and leadership from the perspective of Chinese participants of a Western leadership development course. A case study does not attempt to “describe everything” (Yin, 1998), it is rather an intensive description and analysis of a “bounded
for the purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. This study is a case study which is concerned with describing contemporary phenomena rather than statistically testing hypotheses or confirming cause-effect relationship.

The content of a case study is determined chiefly by its purpose, to chronicle, to depict or characterize, to teach, or to test. The end product of a case study can be primarily descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative. Interpretative case studies contain rich description (Merriam, 1998). These descriptive data are used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or to challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. As in this interpretative study, the researcher has gathered as much information about the research problem as possible and employed rich description with the intent of interpreting and theorizing about the phenomena of learning and leadership. This study is moving from knowledge-based cross-cultural comparisons to a more complex understanding of conceptual interactions between Chinese and Western conceptual frameworks.

This study is a single case study where qualitative inquiry dominates, “with strong naturalistic, holistic and cultural interests” (Stake, 1994, p. 236). A case study research methodology is appropriate for the study since it is the in-depth analysis of a phenomenon in its natural context, and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 545). The nature of the study means that interpretative case study method is preferred in order to explore conceptions of a cohort of Chinese educational leaders who participated in a Western leadership course. This sets their learning and leadership conceptions in a contemporary international education context. In this study, the interest of the researcher is in investigating the evolving and reflective process of their learning and leadership conceptions rather than the mere outcome of the graduate course, in generating culture-specific models of conceptions about learning and leadership rather than confirmation of hypotheses. The study is an exploratory and interpretative study, not a cause-effect one. The focus of the present investigation is to answer questions pertaining to the conceptions of learning and leadership in the context of international education, and especially incorporates the views of the participants under study. The end product sought through this study is the interpretation of contemporary phenomena in an international education context. A very
important advantage of the case material collected in this study lies in the richness of its
detailed understanding of the phenomena of learning and leadership. For these reasons,
the pre-post comparison case study is the most appropriate research design for this
study.

The researcher chose to study a Western university’s offshore graduate course partly
due to her intrinsic interest in this course and the advantage of getting involved in the
preparation and delivery of the course from 2001 to 2003. Being a bilingual staff
member working as a co-teacher and translator in the program, the researcher was also a
participant observer along all three intensive teaching brackets in China. Education
background in both China and Australia and working experience as an academic in both
countries enabled the researcher to investigate the research issues from a culturally
sensitive perspective. The study was undertaken because the researcher sought a better
understanding of this particular case, and investigated what can be learned from this
case. The purpose of the study was also to provide insights into issues of conceptions
about learning and leadership, professional development and leadership capacity
building in China, thus contributing to the knowledge base about educational leadership
from an intercultural perspective. This study investigated conceptions about learning
and leadership held by a cohort of Chinese educational leaders participating in the
course. The case study is bounded in time, from March 2002 to December 2003. It
began at the cohort’s orientation and continued through completion of three intensive
teaching blocks delivered by the Australian lecturers. Research questions focused on
participants’ understanding about the concepts of learning and leadership before and
after undertaking the course.

5.5.2 Phenomenography

Marton (1996) argues that to the extent that phenomenology is defined through its
object of research—human experience and awareness, phenomenography could
legitimately be seen as an offshoot of phenomenology. To the extent, however, that
phenomenology is grounded in a set of particular theories and methods which
phenomenography shares only partly, phenomenography has to be seen as no more
than a distant cousin of phenomenology.
Husserl’s (1931) *phenomenology* attempts to draw the distinction between the basic, constitutive structures of (primary or first order) perception from the mass of (second order) subjective experience. Husserl believed perception of phenomena to be possible without what he held to be the contaminating effects of (second order) history and intellectual experience. Phenomenography differs from phenomenology in that it considers only the second order or conceptual thoughts of people. Phenomenography attempts to aggregate “modes of experience . . . forms of thought” into a limited number of categories (Marton, 1981, p. 181). Phenomenographers do not claim to study “what is there” in the world (reality) but they do claim to study “what is there” in people’s conceptions of the world. This retains, at the second level, the essentially Husserlian view of the pristine nature of perception and the ability of the researcher to “bracket” his or her own socially and historically “contaminated” conceptual apparatus (Webb, 1996).

Fundamental to an understanding of the phenomenographic approach is to realize that its epistemological stance is premised on the principle of intentionality which affords a non-dualistic view of human cognition that depicts experience as the internal relationship between human and the world (Marton & Pang, 1999). The phenomenographic philosophy is therefore non-dualist. Reality is not seen as being “out there”. It is seen as being constituted as the relation between the individual and the phenomenon.

Phenomenography is the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive, and apprehend various phenomena and aspects of the world around us. These differing experiences and understandings are characterized in terms of categories of description, logically related to each other, and forming hierarchies in relation to given criteria. Such an ordered set of categories of description is called the *outcome space* of the phenomenon and concepts in question. Although different kinds of data can be used, the dominant method for collecting data is the individual interview which is carried out in a dialogical manner. The interviewee is encouraged to reflect on previously unthematized aspects of the phenomenon in question. The interviews are transcribed verbatim and the analysis is carried out in an iterative manner on those transcripts. Distinctly different ways of experiencing the phenomenon discussed in the
interview, not the single individuals, are the units of analysis. The categories of
description corresponding to those differing understandings and the logical relations
that can be established between them constitute the main results of a
phenomenographic study (Marton, 1992, 1994; Trigwell, 2000).

The phenomenographic researchers believe that all knowledge has an experiential
basis. Hence the starting point for this approach is that whatever phenomenon people
encounter, there seems to be a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which
the phenomenon is understood. There is no need for phenomenographic researchers to
interview a large number of people for any study. It is the categories of description
and the development of an outcome space diagram that demonstrate the relationships
amongst these conceptions that constitute the main results of the study (Gerber, 1995;
Yuk & Gerber, 2001).

Researchers undertaking phenomenographic studies assume that experience of a
phenomenon is a significant influence in the development of a particular understanding
of the phenomenon. Subsequently, they also assume that this understanding may not be
the same for everyone (Franz & Ferreira, 1996). The key aspects of a
phenomenographic research approach are that it takes a relational (or non-dualist)
qualitative, second-order perspective, that it aims to describe the key aspects of the
variation of the experience of a phenomenon rather than the richness of individual
experiences, and that it yields a limited number of internally related, hierarchically
categories of descriptions of the variation (Trigwell, 2000). Marton (1981) emphasises:

What we want to thematize [...] is the complex of possible ways of viewing
various aspects of the world, the aggregate of basic conceptions underlying
not only different, but even alternative and contradictory forms of
propositional knowledge, irrespective of whether these forms are deemed
right or wrong (Marton, 1981, p. 197).

This study is an interpretative study inspired by the phenomenographic tradition of
educational research (Marton, 1981, 1986; Marton & Booth, 1997). Research within
this tradition initially focused on investigating students’ learning from the perspective
of students themselves (Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden,
1992). An awareness of the meanings, or range of meanings, and the intentionality with
which students approach their studies was seen as an essential component in advancing our understanding of the nature of student learning.

In recent years, considerable research interest in education has been given to investigating students’ conceptions of learning using the phenomenographic approach (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Dahlin & Watkins, 2000; Fung et al., 2001; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton et al., 1993; Marton et al., 1996; Prosser et al., 1994; Purdie et al., 1996). Such research on student learning has given increased attention to how learning is experienced, understood, or conceptualised by learners. Phenomenographic studies have also focused on knowledge and concept formation in various domains, including students’ conceptions at various educational levels and systems (Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, & Wilss, 2000; Collin, 2002; Johansson, Marton, & Svensson, 1985).

Recent years have also seen an increasing interest in exploring how leadership is conceived by leaders (e.g. Collard, 2000; Fairholm, 2002; Hsieh & Shen, 1998). Understanding leadership entails understanding people’s conceptions of the phenomenon. This approach to leadership is relatively underdeveloped in the literature. In spite of considerable interest in phenomenographic research in education, relatively few empirical studies employing such approaches have examined conceptions of learning and leadership held by educational leaders, particularly in an international education context.

This study, undertaken from a phenomenographic perspective (Marton, 1981, 1986; Marton & Booth, 1997), investigated participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership and their conceptual development. The study is primarily an interpretative study, not a purely phenomenographic study in the strict sense, but it follows most principles of phenomenography. As with phenomenographic research, the aim of this study was to investigate variation in the underlying meaning of, or ways of experiencing, a phenomenon—in this case learning and leadership as an educational leader. Another aim was to compare participants’ conceptions before and after undertaking the course and investigate their development as an educational leader. Therefore, in this sense the study is different from other studies within the phenomenographic tradition. The desired outcome was constitution of a structured space of variation, representing key aspects of the qualitatively different ways of viewing learning and leadership amongst the group interviewed. The structure of the
resulting outcome space is based on relationship between different views, in terms of the critical aspects of variation which both distinguish and relate the different meanings from and to each other (Åkerlind, 2003; Åkerlind & Kayrooz, 2003). This focus on critical aspects of and structural relationships between different ways of understanding a phenomenon is seen as having powerful heuristic value in adding insights into learning and leadership. In particular, the various contexts in which the educational leaders worked (schools, systems or universities) were acknowledged as a potential influence upon individuals.

This research is based on the same underlying principles as the research into students’ perceptions of their own learning and participants’ perceptions of their own learning and leadership, as educational leaders. Investigating perceptions of learning and leadership from the perspective of Chinese leaders in an international education context will enhance our understanding of the nature of leadership development and thus provide insight into improving approaches to leadership development from an intercultural perspective. Highlighting the relationship between different ways of understanding learning and leadership provides a way of looking at the phenomenon holistically, despite the fact that it may be experienced differently by different individuals, and by the same individual at different points in time and context. The aim is to simultaneously portray the whole as well as the parts in a single outcome space of variation. In keeping with the phenomenographic approach, this was achieved by taking a collective view of the range of ways of experiencing learning and leadership across a sample of Chinese educational leaders. In order to capture this collective experience, it was necessary to focus on critical aspects of range in experience across individuals, as well as the structural relationships between these different ways of experiencing.

In the research field of cultural studies there is the “emic approach” and the “etic approach” (Berry, 1989; Triandis, 1972). The “emic” approach implies generalisation and uses only concepts that emerge from within a particular culture. Such an approach is associated with the traditions of anthropological research (Watkins, 1996a). The “etic” approach, in contrast, compares cultures by using supposedly universal categories (e.g. Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). Some researchers argue that the danger with the latter approach is that one imposes concepts and categories from one’s own culture onto a foreign one (Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Osland
Given the nature of this study, the phenomenographic approach seems particularly suited to a rigorous investigation of “emic” conceptions of learning and leadership held by Chinese participants.

5.6 Research Method

5.6.1 Interview

Phenomenographic studies strive to discover and describe the different ways in which people understand or experience certain phenomena. Although many possible sources of information can reveal a person’s understanding or conception of a particular phenomenon, the method of discovery is usually an open, deep interview (Booth, 1997). “Open” indicates that there is no definite structure to the interview. While researchers may have a list of questions or concerns that they wish to address during the interview, they are also prepared to follow any unexpected lines of reasoning that the interviewee might address as some of these departures may lead to fruitful new reflections that could not have been anticipated by the researcher. “Deep” indicates that the interview will follow a certain line of questioning until it is exhausted, until the participant has nothing else to say and until the researcher and participant have reached some kind of common understanding about the topics of discussion (Orgill, 2000). This study adapted an open, deep interview to a semi-structured in-depth interview. The aim of an interview is to have the participant reflect on his or her experiences and then relate those experiences to the interviewer in such a way that the two come to a mutual understanding about the meanings of the experiences (or of the account of the experiences).

Typically, in phenomenographic research, people are asked to respond to open-ended questions about the particular phenomenon being studied. Their responses are sorted into conceptual categories on the basis of similarities and differences. This study employed a qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interview technique to explore the phenomena of learning and leadership. Qualitative interview techniques usually refer to in-depth forms of interviewing with the goal of exploring and elucidating specific research questions by allowing the interaction between interviewee(s) and interviewer to shape the data collected (Mason, 1996). Qualitative interviews are conversations with a purpose (Burgess, 1984, p. 102). In other words, an interview is an interpersonal
interaction whereby one person asks others for their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours on a topic usually in a face-to-face situation (Kvale, 1996a; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995, p. 62). This interview method is appropriate for the purpose of the study because it allows for in-depth exploration of individual perspectives about the phenomena of leadership and learning. It would be suitable to conduct one to one and face-to-face interviews in order to probe respondents’ perceptions and beliefs in depth.

According to Marton (1994), in conducting interviews of this kind too many questions should not be made beforehand, nor should too many details be determined in advance. Rather, the point is to establish the phenomenon as experienced and to explore the different aspects of the experience jointly and as fully as possible. Marton argues that:

> The experiences and understandings are jointly constituted by interviewer and interviewee. These experiences and understandings are neither prior to the interview, ready to be “read off”, nor are they only situational social constructions. They are aspects of the subject’s awareness that change from being unreflected to being reflected (Marton, 1994, p. 4427).

In this study, the use of the interview marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations (Kvale, 1996a, p. 11). The interview is not exclusively either subjective or objective, it is intersubjective. Interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In this sense, the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life; it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 267). Interviewees in this study were encouraged to describe their personal experience and interpretation, as well as reflect on the situations or challenges and their way of dealing with these issues.

The interview has many advantages and disadvantages. Two of the most important advantages are that, first, a relationship or rapport is built up between the interviewer and interviewee, and, second, the depth to which topics can be explored can be determined as the interview proceeds. The main disadvantage of the interview is that it
is labour-intensive and time-consuming, and, as a consequence, potentially costly. The interview can also be disadvantageous in that interviewers are dependent on the willingness of the interviewees to report (or indeed, to remember) accurately (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004, pp. 189-190). There is also a danger of interviewees reporting what they think the interviewer is seeking to hear (Collard, 2000). In spite of these disadvantages of interviews, Gillham (2000, p. 12) states that “any research which aims to achieve an understanding of people in a real world context is going to need some interview material, if only to provide illustration, some insight into what it is like to be a person in that setting”. Interview method is therefore appropriate for exploring the phenomena of learning and leadership in the real life context and participants’ interpretation about the world in which they live.

5.6.2 Sample

The key aim of phenomenographic research is descriptive or interpretive rather than explanatory, i.e. to investigate what sort of differences in meaning and understanding occur across individuals rather than to attempt to explain or investigate causes of these differences. Consequently, the interview sample is selected to be representative of the population in terms of qualitative variation in experience, using demographic criteria that one would expect to be associated with different ways of experiencing the phenomenon concerned. However, there is no expectation that the frequency distribution of ways of experiencing constituted from the sample would be representative of the distribution in the population represented by the sample, and the sample is not selected for this purpose (Åkerlind & Kayrooz, 2003).

Fifty-two educational leaders from Zhejing Province, China enrolled in the course of Master of Educational Leadership, an offshore program offered by an Australian university (the University of Canberra). Forty participants in the course accepted interview invitations and twenty of them participated in this study. Because the focus of the study was on variations in ways people experience a phenomenon, the study included a range of individual’s experiences, and the sample was selected to maximize the possible variation (Trigwell, 2000). The Chinese educational leaders interviewed were selected to represent as much variation as possible, being from varied disciplines, ages, genders, with varying levels of experience as a teacher, and working in various
education sectors (primary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, and local educational authorities).

The profile of the participants selected in this study was also similar to that of the cohort in terms of ages, genders and education sectors. In the cohort, 77% of the participants were males and 23% were females. School principals, university administrators and system officials each accounted for approximately one third of the cohort. Participants were aged between 28 to 52 and the mean age of the cohort was 37 years. About 64% of the participants were aged between 35 to 45 years old. All except two participants had teaching experience before they undertook the administrative positions.

The sample comprised 20 participants, 15 (75%) males and 5 (25%) females. School principals (8) accounted for 40% of the respondents while university administrators (6) and system officials (6) each accounted for 30%. The ages of the participants ranged from 31 to 52 and the mean age was 38 years old. More than two thirds of the interviewees were aged between 35 to 45 years old. Twelve interviewees were from Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province while 8 interviewees were from other cities in the province.

All interviewees had teaching experience in schools or universities before taking the administrative positions. All had Bachelor degrees and about two thirds of them had participated in graduate study and obtained postgraduate certificates. Their Bachelor degrees covered a wide range of disciplines ranging from mathematics, psychology, physics, physiology, chemistry to history, Chinese, and English. More than half of them had science teaching background. It is speculated by the researcher that a scientific paradigm or scientific way of thinking may dominate among the interviewees before the interview. Three participants had formal qualifications in educational administration or management. The majority of participants had training and professional development experience in education or specific disciplines.

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9 Students who study certain core subjects in postgraduate courses can obtain Graduate Certificates, but these are not formal recognized qualifications in Chinese higher education qualification framework.
5.6.3 Procedure

In this study two sets of interviews were conducted to ascertain the conceptions of a sample of 20 participants drawn from a Western leadership development course. It examined the influence of the course upon their conceptions and self-reported leadership practice. The study elicited a portrait of the interviewees’ conceptions at the commencement of the course. It examined what they valued most highly before undertaking the course. The findings from interview data are the components of this portrait. The study then further investigated how this portrait changed after 12 month of study in the course. It tended to answer the research question on participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership. It examined what had remained constant and what had altered due to the influence of the course. It also investigated any possible similarities and differences in conceptions among the three groups (school principals, system officials, and university administrators).

The specific data collection procedures are as follows. In February 2002, the researcher contacted the President of Hangzhou Normal University (HZNU) and obtained written permission to undertake the research in HZNU (there was no formal Committee for Ethics in Human Research in China). In March 2002, the researcher obtained approval for conducting the research from the University of Canberra (UC) Committee for Ethics in Human Research.

On her first visit to HZNU in March 2002, the researcher obtained demographic data of the cohort from HZNU. On the first day of the intensive delivery session (1 April 2002) the researcher briefly introduced the study and distributed information sheets and consent forms to all students in the class. The researcher then contacted those students who agreed to be interviewed and arranged time and facilities for the interviews. A copy of interview schedule was given to each interviewee before the appointed time for the interview. The interview was semi-structured, and the interviewer usually followed the sequence of questions. Further clarifications of responses were made and probing questions were raised if needed, and the interviewer ensured that all questions were answered.

The researcher interviewed 20 students individually for appropriately 45 to 90 minutes during the first intensive teaching brackets in April 2002. Those 20 students were
interviewed again for about 45 to 90 minutes during the last week of the third intensive teaching bracket in April 2003. The average time for each interview in both sets of interviews was approximately one hour. The information sheet, consent form, and interview questions for both sets of interviews are found in Appendix A, B, C, and D. All documents distributed to participants had been translated from English into Chinese by the researcher, and all interviews were administered in Chinese. In this way the researcher could capture articulate, fluent and developed responses in the mother tongue, which would not have been possible if the interviews were conducted in English.

As phenomenography is empirical research, the researcher was not studying her own awareness and reflection, but that of the interviewees. The interview had to be carried out as a dialogue, facilitating the thematization of aspects of the subject’s experience not previously thematized. This type of interview did not have too many details determined in advance (Marton, 1994). The researcher usually followed the interview schedules but also allowed questions to follow from what the interviewees had said. The point was to establish the phenomenon as experienced and to explore its different aspects jointly and as fully as possible. The starting question could have aimed directly at the general phenomenon such as, for instance, when asking the participant after some general discussion, “What do you mean by learning, by the way?” Alternatively, the researcher had asked the participant to come up with instances of the general phenomenon, asking for example, “Can you tell me about something you have learned?” The interview thus aimed at making that which had been unthematized into the object of focal awareness (Marton, 1994).

A face-to-face, semi-structured and audiotaped interview process was used. To help ensure that each interview was conducted in the same manner, a standard interview schedule was used at every interview. The schedule assisted the researcher in verifying that the interviewee was aware of the purpose of the study as a whole and the interview in specific. The schedule broadly outlined the questions to be asked in the intended order. Pre-determined open questions, used to stimulate dialogue, covered the following topics: reasons for and expectations of taking part in the course; the meaning and understanding of learning and leadership; challenges faced as an educational leader; self-perceived leadership practice; key learnings from the course. Following
phenomenographic methodology (Svensson, 1997), the interviews were framed so that the questions related to each other and were contextualised. For example, interviewees were asked to “give examples to illustrate the change in leadership practice”, or describe specifically their key learnings from the course. The interviewer probed points to clarify meaning if necessary.

The interview process was intended to explore individual conceptions and not socially acceptable responses. Therefore, the interviews were keenly focused on exploring responses from personal experiences and beliefs rather than from popular responses, current trends, or “regurgitated ideas” from the course materials. More personal and contextual questions such as “what is your personal understanding of learning” were raised in the interviews to encourage interviewees to give personal ideas and contextualise their perspectives in their workplaces.

5.6. 5 Data Analysis

Each interview was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and analysed by the researcher following the principles of phenomenographic analysis. The 200 pages of transcripts were coded based on emergent themes and categories. Initial coding was typically descriptive and of low inference, whereas subsequent coding integrated data by using higher-order concepts (see Punch, 1998). The transcripts were also summarised as a series of typical vignettes that focused on individual’s conceptions of learning and leadership. Relevant sections of the transcripts were fully translated from Chinese into English. The researcher, also a professional translator accredited by Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), transcribed the interviews and translated the transcripts.

The responses were sorted into conceptual categories on the basis of similarities and differences. The study sought a better understanding of participants’ conceptions by making a comparison between their conceptions prior to and after undertaking the course. Potential differences across the three sectors were also considered in the analysis. In the first stage, the researcher analysed the transcriptions and identified sets of categories of descriptions meant to describe the key aspects of the variation within the set of transcripts as a whole. The analytical process was iterative. The researcher then reviewed the transcripts according to the designated categories, revised the
categories and the relationships, and revisited the transcripts and categories until stable sets of categories and relationships were developed (see Martin, Trigwell, Prosser, & Ramsden, 2003).

The outcome of this phenomenographic analysis, known as the outcome space, is a limited number of logically (internally) related categories of description. The categories of description are not pre-determined, but are constituted in relation to the data. They are identified from the data set as a whole, without regard to individual variation. Phenomenographic categories of description are not full descriptions of people’s experiences. They are descriptions of the dimensions of the experience that constitute the key aspects of the variation, and do not include dimensions for which there is little or no variation within the group (Trigwell, 2000).

Some researchers (Martin et al., 2003) argue that the categories may form an inclusive hierarchy in which categories higher up the hierarchy becoming increasingly complex by incorporating a qualitatively different new element while maintaining the essential elements of the previous category. Given that previous studies suggested a hierarchical structure in conceptions of learning and leadership (e.g. Fairholm, 2002; Marton et al., 1993), consideration was given to identifying whether such a structure in the categories could be found in this study. Also comparisons were made between conceptions of learning and leadership before and after the course. The possibility of links between the conceptions of learning and leadership was explored as well.

The responses were interpreted and categorised by the researcher into conceptions of learning and leadership. In this study, a phenomenographic analysis was carried out to extract categories of conceptions of learning and leadership before and after the course. A number of attempts were made in categorizing the responses (Collin, 2002; Dahlgren & Fallsberg, 1991; Franz & Ferreira, 1996; Marton, 1981, 1988, 1994).

1. *Familiarisation with the data by reviewing the transcripts a number of times.* Utterances relating to the topics were picked out and highlighted. Attention was then shifted from the individual subjects to the meanings embedded in the utterances, regardless of whether these meanings originated from the same individuals. Thus, the interviews were handled as a whole to extract “a pool of meanings” and read repeatedly.
2. Selection of statements significant to the focus of the study. After the initial selection process, utterances were more closely examined in order to assign utterances having a similar meaning into preliminary categories.

3. Delimitation of parts representing conceptions of significant aspects of the phenomenon. A more detailed analysis was then carried out in terms of core meaning and borderline cases between categories. This analysis established the final descriptive categories. This involved comparing significant statements in order to find cases of variation or agreement and categorizing them accordingly.

4. Description of the similarity within each category with the help of actual words forming the significant statements. The categories of description that were produced in this way also have structural significance in that they convey a relationship between the participants’ focus of attention and their understanding of the phenomenon.

In other words, the data analysis process involved a number of readings of transcripts and progressive refining of emerging categories of conceptions. The data were pooled and the researcher adopted an iterative approach to ascertain relations, similarities and differences in the responses. Attention was paid to similarities and differences in forms of excerpts, expressions and words. The fundamental concern here was to understand the meaning of learning and leadership inherent in the responses. After a number of readings of interview transcripts and analyses of responses, preliminary categories were formed. These categories were then subjected to further scrutiny for critical attributes and special features. The preliminary categories were refined until they could accommodate all perspectives indicated by the respondents.

The interview transcripts were also summarised as a series of vignettes that focused on individual’s conceptions of learning and leadership as well as self-reported leadership practice. The profiles of individual’s conceptions and leadership practice were presented and analysed. The data analysis was also conducted by moving between the full transcripts and the vignettes. The entire analytical process was carried out by the researcher and validated by another researcher.
Punch (1998, p. 206) maintains that coding is the concrete activity of labelling data, which gets the data analysis under way, and which continues throughout the analysis. Initial coding will typically be descriptive and of low inference, whereas later coding will integrate data by using higher-order concepts. Thus there are two main types of codes: low inference descriptive codes, and higher-order inference pattern codes. Punch also proposes levels of abstraction in qualitative data analysis (see Figure 5.2).

![Levels of Abstraction in Data Analysis](image)

**Figure 5.2 Levels of Abstraction in Data Analysis.**

*Source: adapted from Punch (1998, p. 208).*

This study followed these two main types of codes in analysing qualitative interview data. The first-order concepts in the study are particular categories of conceptions of learning or leadership before and after the course. The second-order concepts are orientations of conceptions (see Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2 for further details). The indicators are main descriptors in each category (see Table 8.2 and Table 8.4 for further details). Figure 5.2 indicates that some concepts are at a higher level abstraction than others. The terms “concrete” and “abstract” describe this continuum of abstraction, as do the terms “specific” and “general”. The study employed the classification of first-order and second-order concepts in designing analytical frameworks for conceptions of learning and leadership.
5.7 Dependability, Credibility and Transferability Issues

Quality in research concerns three distinct features. First, consistency or **dependability** (or reliability) is concerned with whether another researcher could reasonably be expected to get the same results. The second is internal alignment or **credibility** (or internal validity) between all aspects of the research process including consistency between researcher perceptions and judgements. Third, external alignment or **transferability** (or external validity) is integrity of conclusions that are drawn from the research, or a fit between research and external world (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004, pp. 135-136). This section deals with dependability, credibility and transferability issues respectively.

**Dependability**

The question is often raised about how the adequacy or rigor of qualitative studies can be determined. The answer is that the adequacy of any inquiry is largely dependent on the adequacy of its components. In other words, it is difficult to talk about the validity or reliability of a study as a whole, but one can talk about the validity and reliability of the instrumentation, the appropriateness of the data analysis techniques, and the degree of relationship between the conclusions drawn and the data upon which they presumably rest.

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest that the canons of reliability for quantitative research may be simply unworkable for qualitative research. Indeed, the premises of naturalistic studies include the uniqueness of situations, and generally, such studies cannot be replicated. In qualitative research reliability can be regarded as “a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched”, i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 48). Brock-Utne (1996) agrees that qualitative research, being holistic, strives to record the multiple interpretations of, intention in, and meanings given to situations and events. Here the notion of reliability is construed as dependability. Qualitative researchers commonly use any of five strategies to reduce threats to dependability: low-inference descriptors, multiple researchers, participant researcher, peer examination, and mechanically recorded data. Dependability in this study involves member checks (respondent validation), debriefing by peers, prolonged engagement in the field, and persistent observation in the field.
Dependability has to do with carefulness and sensitivity in the research process, as well as with precision in results. How sensitive was the interviewer in eliciting the respondents experience of learning and leadership? That questions and answers had to be translated from English to Chinese, and vice versa, was a drawback in this respect. It meant that details or nuances of meaning in responses may have been lost with the translation process. The sensitivity of the “research instrument” was thereby reduced. This was compensated for by the researcher’s involvement in all three teaching brackets in the course. This gave her the opportunity to familiarise herself with participants and establish rapport with them. It should be noted that as a teacher and translator in the course, the researcher has had substantial interaction with participants in this study. Interviewer effect might be one concern. The researcher made it explicit to the participants that she was not the assessor of student assignments, and they did not have to worry about having “right” answers. The rapport established between respondents and researcher, and the atmosphere of inquiry and openness in the interviews should minimise the threats to credibility of the responses.

Another aspect of dependability concerns the fidelity of the interpretation of the data. In this study, dependability of interviews was enhanced by inter-rater checks on the coding of answers to open-ended questions (Silverman, 2001, p. 229). Here the intersubjective agreement of two researchers was an indicator of a reliable correspondence between data and results. The distillation of categories is a process which is sometimes difficult to replicate for each set of data. In part, this is due to the abstract nature of the categories. Additionally, it can also be attributed to the different ways in which analysts interpret and code the data. In order to reach a high degree of intersubjective agreement on categories of the study, the categorisation was initially carried out by the researcher, and then approximately half of the categories were validated by another researcher with doctoral qualifications. Around two thirds of interpretation were the same. Where discrepancies arose between the two researchers, they re-examined the responses, discussed their different interpretations and finally reached a consensus on the appropriate classification. In providing a detailed and intersubjectively approved explanation of the category, a researcher can be reasonably assured that those interested in the study will be able to make effective use of the information (Franz & Ferreira, 1996; Marton, 1986). This practice minimised the threat of coding in validity and enhanced intercoder reliability. In this study, low inference descriptors were phrased in
terms as concrete and precise as possible, and the entire interview with each participant was audio-taped in order to increase dependability (Punch, 1998).

**Credibility**

Issues of credibility were addressed by making the analysis as contextual as possible. Rather than looking for meaning in discrete words, sentences or phrases, the analysis concentrated on “the pool of information” and the relationship between a response and other responses. Considerable attention was given to the procedures used to collect the data and produce the interpretive account. This entailed focusing on the experience of the interviewee and not allowing interviewer bias to restrict the extent or quality of the responses; encouraging the interviewees to describe their understanding of the phenomenon through examples and descriptions of previous experience; and being considerate of interviewees’ needs and rights (Bruce, 1994; Franz & Ferreira, 1996).

Three standard criteria of assessing validity are: the impact of the researcher on the setting (the so called “halo” or “Hawthorne” effect); the values of the researcher; and the truth status of a respondent’s account (Silverman, 2001, p. 233). The most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimise the amount of bias as much as possible. The participants of the study had been in training environment in which they discussed different learning theories, leadership ideas and issues about learning and leadership phenomena in general. Some respondents may have guessed the purpose of the research and altered responses according to their interpretation of the “right” answer. These participants may have tried to “game” the interviews to fit “acceptable” conceptions. To counteract this overall threat, the information sheets and interview schedules included the introduction and overview of the purpose of the research, and the structure of the interview questions. They were designed to discourage such bias or “gaming” by the participants by clearly reinforcing that personal conceptions of leadership were more useful to the study than potential “socially acceptable” responses. As has been noted already, the interviewer was keenly aware to focus on individual conceptions rather than “right” responses.

The question of credibility can be addressed by checking interpretation with individuals interviewed, asking peers to comment on emerging findings, involving participants in all phrases of the research, and clarifying researcher biases and assumptions (Merriam, 1988). Another form of validation has been suggested as particularly appropriate to the
logic of qualitative research, namely, respondent validation: taking one’s finding back to the subjects being studied. Where these people verify one’s findings, it is argued, one can be more confident of their validity. To verify the findings and analysis in this study, most interviewees were emailed a summary of the findings in Chinese and were asked through phone conversations whether the categories captured their opinion about how they perceived learning and leadership.

**Transferability**

Transferability (or generalisability) is a concern from a phenomenographic viewpoint. It is concerned with the degree by which the categories represented the range of conceptions and the degree to which the category was a generalised representation of a conception. In this study, transferability was considered by making comparisons between conceptions grouped in the same category as well as comparisons between conceptions belonging to separate categories (Franz & Ferreira, 1996; Svensson & Theman, 1983).

Generalisability can still be of concern for a qualitative case study. Some scholars argue that it is difficult to generalise findings to different settings as phenomenon and context are necessarily dependent (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2001). The most critical aspect of the case study approach is that it provides a limited basis for the traditional “scientific generalisation” (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998; Yin, 1994). However, case study results can be generalised to theoretical propositions (analytical generalisation) but not to populations or universes (statistical generalisation). Because case studies deal with unique situations, it is impossible to elaborate detailed and direct comparisons of data. Thus, the aim of this study was not to infer global findings from a sample to a population, but rather to understand the phenomena of learning and leadership, and to articulate patterns and linkages of theoretical importance within a bounded sample.

A case study may refute a universal generalisation. It can be used to confirm, challenge or extend a theory. This case study may represent a significant contribution to theory building of conceptions about learning and leadership in intercultural contexts, and assist in refocusing the direction of future investigation in the area. This study involved the collection of comprehensive data to produce understanding of the phenomena being studied. The researcher aimed to improve the usefulness of the findings to other
researchers in two ways: first, by providing a description of the dimensions of participants’ experience so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgment; and second, by establishing the typicality of the case so that users can make comparisons with their own situations. This study will be valuable as preliminary to further investigations. It may be a source of hypotheses for future research by showing that such an interpretation is plausible in a particular case and therefore might be so in other cases. Once such a case is studied it can provide insights into the class of events from which the case has been drawn.

5.8 Delimitations and Limitations

The boundaries of the research were limited to understanding the participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership and the perceived influence of the program upon their self-reported conceptual and practice change. The study compared the conceptions that participants brought to the course and their beliefs after the course. It investigated their initial conceptions and the influence of exposure to Western ideas on their understandings of leadership and learning. The study did not investigate the behaviours of the participants in their workplaces before and after undertaking the course. Since it was a self-reporting study, real verification about changes in their workplaces would require different research methods which include data collection from other members of their work communities. That was determined to be beyond the scope of the study. The influence of the course upon participants’ conceptions and practice after they completed the course and returned to work also goes beyond the scope of this study. It would be significant to investigate the long-term influence of the course upon the participants.

The research has been limited to:

- one leadership development program site in China, the Master of Educational Leadership program jointly conducted by UC and HZNU from March 2002 to December 2003;
- educational leaders between the ages of 28 to 52 years, the majority (77%) of whom were male;
- leaders drawn from primary and secondary schools, to higher educational institutions, and local, municipal and provincial education departments;
• an economically developed region (Zhejiang Province) in East China, that is not typical of China today.

The study investigated the learning and leadership perceptions of a cohort of educational leaders in Zhejiang, China. As the sample was small in relation to the total population of educational leaders in Zhejiang Province, results were specific to those in the sample. Consequently, there was no attempt to generalise findings to other educational leaders in China. However, the purpose of this research—to explore participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership and investigate the influence of the course upon their conceptions—is well suited to such a delimited focus and may be the springboard for broader research efforts.

The study presents a methodological limitation. Ideally, participants were interviewed before the commencement of the course and after three intensive teaching brackets ended. Participants should have been asked similar sets of questions about their understandings of learning and leadership. However, given the limitations of the research design and environmental constraints, the initial interviews were conducted during the first intensive teaching block. This was due to the following two reasons. Firstly, the researcher and other Australian academics arrived at Hangzhou a couple of days before the opening ceremony of the program. The participants of the course were from various regions in Zhejiang Province besides the provincial capital Hangzhou, and they were expected to be at HZNU the day before the opening ceremony. The first intensive teaching bracket commenced on the day following the ceremony. So the researcher had no opportunity to meet with the students to arrange the interviews before the course commencement date.

Secondly, the researcher started interviewing the selected participants on the second day of the first intensive teaching block. The interviews were administered in the afternoons after the teaching session finished at 1:30 pm. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the researcher interviewed two to three students each day. Thus, the researcher finished the first round interviews during the second week of the first teaching bracket, to be exact, one day after the first teaching bracket ended. It should be noted that the researcher asked questions like, “how do you understand learning and leadership”, intending to elicit their conceptions before the course. The researcher also
asked about their experience in relation to learning and teaching. However, due to the fact that participants had already been exposed to Western leadership ideas and ways of learning and teaching during the course, their responses tended to be reflective. That is why in reporting their initial conceptions, their reflective comments were referred to together with their self-reported understandings brought to the course. A point worth mentioning is that the interviewees were not at all in the same place at the same time as controlled by laboratory research, which may limit the richness of responses. In the second interviews, the researcher also asked participants about their previous perspectives about learning and leadership and how they conceived these concepts after undertaking the course. Hence, the descriptions of categories of conceptions prior to the course were actually based on the responses from two sets of interviews rather than from the first interviews. Moreover, their reflective accounts were included to show their previous assumptions and how they identified and expanded them in order to develop alternative perspectives. It should also be noted that the interviewer effect (taking the role of researcher, co-teacher and interpreter) and the power relationship between teacher and students may have affected the objectivity of the data collection and analysis and the research overall.

5.9 Ethical Considerations

This qualitative study involves an intense interest in personal views and circumstances, and this makes ethical issues inescapable. Confidentiality, privacy and voluntariness were important ethical considerations in this study. All data collected in this project were kept confidential. The project did not disclose any information which may be prejudicial to participants. No individual or workplace was identifiable by name or description in the dissertation. Pseudonyms were used to refer to particular respondents to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of their identities.

Every effort was made to obtain informed consent from the participants and protect their privacy. Before data collection, a letter of invitation was personally delivered to Hangzhou Normal University (HZNU) and to all participants in the course, together with the Initial Introductory Letter, Participants’ Information and the Informed Consent Form for those individuals who were willing to participate in the research (see Appendix A, B and C). A brief presentation was given to the participants by the researcher explaining the aims and procedure of the research. It was clearly indicated in
the information sheets and consent forms that the participants’ identities would be anonymous. The names of participants would not be used to report findings and participants would not be identifiable in the final report.

Personal information about the participants in this project was protected by using coded numbering sheets and coded numbering of data so that no person or workplace was identified. To protect participants’ privacy, the coding system can only be accessed by the researcher. The data collected was only available to the principal researcher and her supervisor. Confidentiality of responses was assured in all circumstances.

Participants were informed that participation in this research was voluntary, and they might withdraw at any stage without penalty, or avoid answering questions they did not wish to answer. Whether they participated in this study or not had no effect on their assessment in the graduate course. All information related to the project was securely stored at the University of Canberra. Upon the completion of the study, the confidential data will be securely stored at UC for the required period (five years).

The cultural and social backgrounds of the participants were also taken into consideration in this study. The participants were Chinese educational administrators undertaking a leadership development course, whose leadership perceptions and practices had been greatly influenced by Chinese culture and the social-economic reality of contemporary China. As a female academic working with a mature group of predominantly male educational leaders, the researcher respected their values, ideas, concerns and endeavoured to see issues and concepts from their viewpoints. Every effort was made so that the participants interacted in a non-threatening, unassuming situation and their dignity, self-esteem, and welfare were respected at all times. Because most participants had relatively low levels of English, all documents which were distributed to the participants had been translated from English into Chinese in order to facilitate the recruitment and their understanding. All interviews were administered in Chinese because mother tongue was considered as the most appropriate language for the interviewees who had limited English.
5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines a methodological framework for the study, justifies the use of phenomenographic research methodology and a pre-post case study design. It describes the interview method used to collect and analyse data related to the participants’ conceptions about learning and leadership. It addresses the issues of dependability, credibility and transferability, and then deals with delimitations and limitations of the study. A discussion about ethical considerations is provided at the end of this chapter.
Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion about Conceptions of Learning

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data collected at the beginning and end of the course in relation to the participants’ understanding of learning. The chapter addresses the first subsidiary research question: “What were Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?” The critical aspects of participants’ conceptions of learning are outlined in a set of seven categories of descriptions, with the first four identified as prior conceptions and the last three as perspectives developed over the course. It describes conceptions of learning that participants brought to the course and then deals with their expanded conceptions after the course. Following the descriptions, the logical relations between the categories are analysed in greater depth.

6.2 Initial Conceptions of Learning

In this section, interview data about conceptions of learning held by participants prior to the course are presented and analysed. From data analysis, four categories of conceptions emerged, which bear some resemblance to those identified by Marton, Dall’alba, and Beaty (1993).

The four categories of conceptions of learning emerged from the interview data were:

1. Category X-A Learning as acquiring knowledge and skills
2. Category X-B Learning for instrumental purposes
3. Category X-C Learning as applied knowledge
4. Category X-D Learning as understanding the world

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10 X stands for Xue Xi in Chinese, which means “learning”. This is used in order to distinguish categories of learning conceptions from those of leadership conceptions, where L is used to stand for Ling Dao in Chinese, meaning “leadership”.
Category X-A, X-B and X-C tend to be inherited traditional thinking about learning, focusing on content knowledge and a utilitarian or practical orientation. They emphasise passive acquisition of knowledge, learning for utilitarian purposes, and transfer of knowledge to applications in real life. Category X-D entails more complex, individual perspectives, or higher order thinking, focusing on learning as exploration of meaning. It involves learners going beyond the information given to engage in such processes as discovery learning, reasoning, organizing, and argumentation (Torff, 2003).

As shown in Table 6.1, interviewees gave multiple responses to the interview questions on conceptions of learning.

Table 6.1 Frequency of Responses and Interviewees about Learning Conceptions before the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency of responses and percentage of total responses</th>
<th>Frequency of interviewees and percentage of total interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
<td>17 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>13 (26%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-D</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total responses 50 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Analysis of data.

The first column indicates the range of conceptions reported by the interviewees. The frequency of responses in each category and the percentage of the total responses are shown in the second column. There are 50 categorised responses from 20 interviewees on the issue of conceptions of learning. For example, 17 responses can be classified as Category X-A and account for 34% of the total 50 responses. The third column reveals the frequency of interviewees in each category and the percentage of the total 20 interviewees. For example, 17 interviewees reported the conception of Category X-A, and 85% of the total interviewees held this conception. It should be noted that the cumulative total for all categories in the third column exceeds 100% because most interviewees held more than one conception. Moreover, in one particular category, frequency of subjects and frequency of responses is identical; for instance, 17 subjects gave 17 responses categorised as X-A. Table 6.1 is presented in this way in order to
highlight multiple conceptions held by the interviewees and the complexity of learning conceptions.

As can be seen from Table 6.1, conception X-A emerged as the predominant one, reported by 85% of the respondents. Other two commonly held conceptions were X-B, and X-C, reported by 65% and 70% of respondents respectively. The responses from these three categories account for 88% of the total responses. The category with the lowest occurrence was X-D, which was mentioned by 30% of respondents. This finding implies that the conceptions of learning brought by most students into the course tended to focus more upon a content focused and utilitarian orientation.

The four categories describing qualitatively different foci on understandings of learning are presented as follows together with typical responses from participants. In this study, pseudonyms are used in order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents. English rather than Chinese names are used for the ease of readers who are not familiar with Chinese names. In doing so, the researcher has no intention of showing disrespect for the Chinese participants.

6.2.1 Category X-A Learning as Acquiring Knowledge and Skills

This conception was reported by 85% of the respondents and was the most commonly held conception prior to the course. It reflected a quantitative assumption about learning as the accumulation or absorption of knowledge (Purdie et al., 1996). It indicated a surface approach to learning concerned mainly with gathering and accumulating a large quantity of information. It was similar to Marton et al.’s (1993) concept of “quantitative collection, consumption, and storage of ready made knowledge or information”.

Respondents invariably used terms such as “gathering”, “receiving”, “absorbing”, “accumulating” or “acquiring” to indicate this accumulative paradigm of learning. Knowledge was conceived as information or facts within books or from learned persons, which was largely transmitted by teachers or experts to learners. Learning processes were consequently viewed as “transmissive” or “receptive”. The concepts of transmissive teaching and passive learning were prevalent in their accounts. This demonstrated a conception of learning as a transmission process complementing the transmission conceptions of teaching (Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000).
This conception was prevalent across school, system and university sectors. For instance, a principal (Michael) defined learning as “closely related to knowledge acquisition”. A system administrator (Cindy) maintained that learning was “gathering information or absorbing knowledge, mostly passively”. Her view was echoed by university administrators. Paula spoke of this in terms of “individual study or acquiring knowledge and skills from teachers”. One of her counterparts (Steven) equated learning with “gaining knowledge from books or others’ experience, especially from experts”. This last point is important, which suggests the concepts of transmissive teaching and passive learning. It also has links with traditional conception of the teacher as an expert authority figure who cannot be questioned.

Two respondents described the literal meaning of learning in Chinese and commented that Chinese learning tradition did not totally neglect practice and inquiry making. A principal (Jeremy) explained Xue Xi (learning in Chinese) literally means “studying and then practice”. His view was shared by a system official (Bruce). He claimed that judging from the literal meaning of Xue Wen in Chinese, learning is “studying and asking”, or “studying knowledge and making inquiries”. In spite of this emphasis, they admitted “individual study under the guidance of teachers” was still viewed as the best way of learning (Bruce), and “learning theories and knowledge from books” were emphasised in practice (Jeremy). A university administrator (Oliver) expressed a similar view. He maintained that students, through their schooling to higher education experiences, mostly had such deeply held notions that “learning is predominantly knowledge transmission by teachers”. This also suggests an emphasis of transmissive teaching in contemporary Chinese education.

Another university administrator (Tony) explored different assumptions about learning both in China and the West, and criticized the notion of learners as recipients or empty containers.

Learning theories in China are generally different from Western theories. Learning is closely related to education. The word “Education” literally means “direct” and “lead out” in the West. The underlying assumption is that learners have prior knowledge and experience. What educators need to do is to lead them out and facilitate their learning. However, in China, we
have such assumptions that students are like empty containers or storerooms. Knowledge can be transmitted to these empty containers (Tony).

Learning was often believed to be confined to formal processes in institutions like schools or universities. A system official (Cindy) indicated that learning was usually “limited to classroom teaching and learning, with a defined teaching approach, contents, learning objectives and outcomes”. The notions of informal learning or lifelong learning were seldom mentioned. Moreover, many respondents tended to hold absolute rather than relativistic beliefs about knowledge. They were likely to view knowledge as static and universal truths which can be readily transmitted to learners. The nature of knowledge seemed to be sacred and authoritative rather than indefinite and contestable. The active role of learners in constructing their understanding and interpretation of phenomena was often neglected. The following comments from a university administrator (Steven) indicate this tendency.

Knowledge is regarded as sacred and authoritative. Theories are considered as important bodies of knowledge which should be mastered by the students. It is especially true in the field of education. Theories or definitions of concepts should be memorized. There is only one correct answer to a problem (Steven).

This conception also had implications for the relationship between teachers and students. A principal (Nathan) vividly illustrated the traditional patriarchal relationship between teacher and students. He commented that “we learn knowledge from teachers and we pay great respect for teachers”. As a Chinese saying goes, “once being your teacher for one day, he will be your father for your whole life”.

It should be noted that in the interviews the respondents tended to use “traditionally”, “generally” or “mostly” to indicate this conception. This suggests that they might be operating from inherited Chinese traditions not necessarily from their own individual experiences and expectations. However, some were critical of this inheritance. A system official (Felix) commented that traditionally learning means “knowledge transmission or passive acceptance of knowledge” and the purpose of learning was to acquire knowledge. He criticized that “little attention was paid to applying the knowledge or promoting creative thinking”. These comments seemed to indicate a
desire for a more creative application to learning and knowledge in contemporary Chinese education.

In summary, most comments from respondents suggest that receiving, gaining, absorbing, gathering and being told were the dominant processes of learning in their minds at the start of the course. There seemed to be very little recognition of a need to construct or relate elements in the given information. Learning was predominantly seen as a passive and reproductive act.

6.2.2 Category X-B Learning for Instrumental Purposes

In this conception, knowledge or skills were seen as important because they can be put to some use, such as preparing for examinations, completing assignments, obtaining degrees, or accomplishing certain work tasks. In this sense learning was simply a means to accomplishing immediate tasks. Respondents generally referred to school and workplace contexts when describing learning in this sense.

While around two thirds of respondents expressed this conception of learning, there were important differences among school principals, university administrators and system officials. School principals tended to focus more upon learning as a means to passing exams or obtaining degrees. This may be a reflection of the dominance of examination systems in Chinese schooling which have fostered this instrumental view of knowledge. A principal (Hilary) defined learning as “limited to study in formal organisations” and indicated that more often than not “obtaining a degree or certificate means the end of learning”. Her view was echoed by one of her counterparts (Jeremy), who maintained that traditionally the purpose of learning was “to pass the exams or obtain degrees”. Another principal (Luke) spoke about learning in terms of “studying subject knowledge or work related knowledge”. Their comments suggested a strong orientation towards viewing learning for utilitarian purposes.

System officials tended to analyse learning for utilitarian ends from a wider system perspective. They paid particular attention to the Chinese assessment and evaluation system. A system official (Cindy) admitted “learning activities are often instrumental” and commented that “assessment and evaluation criteria are clearly defined in terms of mastering certain knowledge and skills”. Her view was echoed by one of her
counterparts (Felix). He analysed the differences in assessment and evaluation system between China and Western countries. He claimed in Chinese education “linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are emphasised”, but it was not uncommon that “other intelligences are neglected”. He further illustrated that “without a radical reform in assessment and evaluation systems”, it would be difficult to change such an entrenched instrumental view of learning and knowledge.

Academics were likely to emphasise learning as mastery of a research field. A university academic (Steven) commented that he “separated learning from doing research very clearly”. He went on to say, “self-study, reading books or writing papers” was often limited to “learning disciplinary knowledge or conducting research work”. Another academic (William) expressed a similar view. He claimed learning was mostly related to “studying disciplinary knowledge for the sake of work”. He further explained the purpose of learning was “to get one task done or doing research”.

This conception differs from Marton et al.’s (1993) second category “learning as memorizing and reproduction”. In this study, respondents tended to emphasise the utilitarian end of learning and consider learning as an important means to a practical purpose in school, work life or research output. Rote learning or mechanical memorization was rarely mentioned as the purpose of learning, but as an instrument to achieve other ends. However, learning for instrumental purpose was a more complex concept than learning as rote memorization, and in this respect, this study moves beyond Marton et al.’s conclusions. This conception may have been due to China’s emphasis on examination systems. It also moves beyond traditional stereotypes of Chinese learners as passive rote learners (see also Watkins & Biggs, 2001b). Once again we are reminded that surface understandings disguise more complex realities.

### 6.2.3 Category X-C Learning as Applied Knowledge

Learning was also viewed as acquiring knowledge, skills, or procedures which can be used when the need arises in life. This conception corresponds with “learning as applying” as identified by Marton et al. (1993). About 70% of respondents viewed application of concepts, theories or methodologies to real life situations as a key aspect of learning. Unlike the conception X-B which viewed learning as a means to dealing
with specific tasks or utilitarian purposes, this conception considered learning as general application of knowledge but not necessarily performing a specific instrumental task.

Typical responses from all three sectors indicate that learning was perceived as a link between acquired knowledge and practices. For instance, a principal (George) defined learning as “application of knowledge and skills” learned from teachers or others. His view was echoed by university administrators. Paula spoke of this in terms of “learning some useful knowledge and relating it to professional practice”. One of her counterparts (Oliver) insisted “applying knowledge and theories learned to practice”, and helping him “solve dilemmas in workplaces.” A system official (Bruce) also put an emphasis on “learning knowledge and relating it to workplace”.

It is interesting to note that system officials and university administrators seemed to attach more importance to theories than did school principals. They tended to view theories as systematic and a static body of knowledge which can be picked up and applied in real-life situations. For example, a system official (Adam) equated learning with “studying theories and application of theories into practice”. Another system official (Felix) emphasised “studying theories systematically and using them as guiding principles in practical life”. A university administrator (William) explored learning theories in the West and commented that learning in the West was regarded as “a dynamic process mostly without fixed modes or contents”. He further illustrated that in China, more emphasis was laid on “learning authoritative knowledge or a fixed model, memorizing it and then internalising or applying into practice”. This suggests that their beliefs about knowledge tended to fall on the continuum towards the absolute rather than relativistic end because they seemed to equate learning with acquiring authoritative and universal truths. This can be linked back to the high percentage of participants whose background teaching was in science. It suggests the legacy of positivist traditions amongst Chinese leaders.

Around one fifth of respondents lamented the discrepancy between theories and practice in Chinese learning traditions and emphasised the importance of contextualising theories. A university administrator (Steven) explained that “there are four basic types of knowledge, knowing what, knowing why, knowing how, and knowing who”. He commented that traditionally more attention was paid to “knowledge per se”, but its application was often neglected. His view was echoed by a school principal (George).
He reflected on the training courses he had undertaken previously and lamented “there was often a missing link between lofty theories and practice” because he could hardly apply what he had learned to his workplace.

Previous research (e.g. Van Rossum & Schenk, 1984) has indicated that the conception which viewed learning as application was associated with a surface approach to learning. However, in this study, application explicitly referred to the ability to apply what was learned into practice. This is a more complex concept than surface learning. Through application process, transformation of theories into working knowledge may be construed as a very high level cognitive process, demanding a deep approach to learning (Fung et al., 2001). Moreover, this conception considered application as a means of contextualizing concepts and theories. It tended to see application as an attempt to develop one’s understanding or apply acquired knowledge to further build up one’s knowledge. Therefore, this conception cannot be simply classified as a surface conception of learning amongst the interviewees in this study since development of understanding and contextual awareness are also involved in the application process. In this sense, the evidence from these respondents prompts us to go beyond the pre-existing stereotypes of Chinese people as surface learners. The results also indicate that Marton et. al’s (1993) concepts of learning are not absolute but are inter-related.

### 6.2.4 Category X-D Learning as Understanding the World

Learning was also viewed by about one third of respondents as using theories or perspectives acquired to explain phenomena or understand the world. Respondents who were classified as holding this conception typically spoke of making sense, discovering meaning or knowing the world. This was consistent with the findings of Marton et. al. (1997). Respondents viewed learning as integrating, analysing, and synthesising knowledge, and getting to know how things work or understanding reality. This could be defined as a higher order thinking. It is not surprising that it was held by a minority and possibly the most reflective participants in the cohort.

Respondents from different sectors tended to illustrate their views from different angles. School principals seemed to emphasise understanding the world through application of knowledge and making inquiries. They were likely to focus on practical matters in learning and teaching. A principal (Nathan) defined learning as “acquiring, integrating,
analysing, and synthesising knowledge” as well as “making sense of the phenomena” around him through application of knowledge. His view was echoed by one of his counterparts (Isabella), who explained that “learning can be an abstract or a specific concept.” According to her, psychology defines learning as “responses to external stimuli” and learning may refer to “particular learning activities at school.” She insisted that inquiry learning was needed to “make sense of the world through making inquiry and deepening our understanding about it”.

System officials tended to pay attention to the role of learners’ experience in making sense of the world. They were likely to value personal reflection and experience in understanding the phenomena. Adam defined learning as “a new construction of understanding of the world based on a learner’s prior knowledge”. Eric commented that “the learning process is an active, proactive, emotional and inner experience.” He further illustrated that learning involved “gaining useful thinking and rewarding reflection, and developing understanding from the learning experience”.

Respondents from universities seemed to show interest in epistemology by tentatively exploring the nature of knowledge. Steven defined learning as exploring the general law of knowledge and “having a better understanding of the phenomena in the objective reality”. Tony posed the question, “how can we utilize the knowledge and perspectives learned to explain the phenomena occurring in our life?” This suggests their inquiring minds as academics in exploring the nature of knowledge and the world.

In this conception, respondents rarely related learning to formal instruction. This concept of learning tended to go beyond classroom teaching and learning. Such notions did not relate learning specifically to understanding the meaning of content. However, they emphasised exploring and explaining the meaning of the world. This view may have similarities with the hermeneutic approaches which have developed in the West since the 1970s (Collard, 2000).

6.3 Analysis of Initial Conceptions

Table 6.2 indicates the specific categories of conceptions about learning held by 20 respondents before the course. It reveals that a respondent may operate from more than one conception and it was not uncommon for an individual to hold multiple conceptions
of learning simultaneously. Table 6.2 reveals half of the respondents held three conceptions and the others held two conceptions simultaneously. None reported only one or more than three conceptions.

Table 6.2 Classifications of Learning Conceptions Held by Individuals before the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S1M</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S2M</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S3F</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>S4F</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S5M</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>S6M</td>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>George</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>P2F</td>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>P3F</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>P4M</td>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>P5M</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>P6M</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>P7M</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>P8M</td>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>U1M</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>U2F</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>U3M</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>U4M</td>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>U5M</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>U6M</td>
<td>William</td>
<td>X-B</td>
<td></td>
<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. S represents system administrators from local, municipal, or provincial educational departments, P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. X stands for Xue Xi in Chinese, which means learning in English. Source: analysis of data.

It is hard to determine the core or the most important conception held by the respondents in this study because they often gave references to a few conceptions concurrently. Moreover, these conceptions may not be mutually exclusive or independent of each other. In other words, holding a higher order concept (X-D) does not necessarily mean an individual does not holds a lower order conception (X-A, X-B,
CHAPTER 6

X-C). For instance, Adam held a conception of learning as passive acquisition of inherited knowledge (X-A), but also believed other aspects of learning involved application of theories (X-C) and attempts to develop unique understanding of the world (X-D). Conversely, Eric appears to have rejected the lower order concepts in favour of more complex understanding. Therefore, it cannot be simply assumed that the lower order conceptions are submerged or subsumed in higher order conceptions. However, it is argued that the higher order category reflects more complex conceptions than the lower order categories.

Only four categories of learning conceptions were reported before the course, which indicates a surprisingly narrow range of categories compared with categories in other studies conducted in this field (e.g. Marton et al., 1993; Marton et al., 1997; Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Purdie et al., 1996; Tang, 2001). A possible explanation was that the strong influence of Chinese learning traditions and conformity of thinking among the respondents have limited the range of conceptions before the course. If so, the limited range suggests that there is less diversity in concepts of learning amongst Chinese students than students from other cultures. They may tend to be constrained and controlled by their inherited culture. Another interpretation might be related to the methodological limitations as indicated in Chapter Five. It was likely that responses from students about their previous conceptions were from a retrospective view, which may already be influenced by their learning experience in the course and tend to be evaluative and reflective.

6.4 Conceptions of Learning after the Course

The second round of interviews yielded data about respondents’ conceptions of learning and perspectives about themselves as learners after the course. At this stage, seven categories of conceptions of learning emerged from the interview data. They included the four identified in the first interviews (X-A to X-D) and three new categories (X-E to X-G).

1. Category X-A Learning as acquiring knowledge and skills
2. Category X-B Learning for instrumental purposes
3. Category X-C Learning as applied knowledge
4. Category X-D Learning as understanding the world
CHAPTER 6

5. Category X-E Learning as transforming perspectives and personal development
6. Category X-F Learning as promoting organisational development
7. Category X-G Learning as promoting social development.

These three conceptions (X-E, X-F and X-G) developed over the course tend to be more complex and focus on meaning and development at personal, organisational and social levels. They could be defined as higher order conceptions of learning. A wider range of conceptions of learning was identified after the course. This suggests that the range of respondents’ conceptions of learning may have been expanded after the course. The first five categories are consistent with those identified by previous studies like Marton et al. (1993). Two categories (X-F and X-G) emerged which have not been identified in other studies adopting phenomenographic approaches to investigate conceptions of learning (e.g. Dahlin & Regmi, 1997; Marton et al., 1997; Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Purdie et al., 1996; Tang, 2001). However, the notions of learning as promoting organisational and social development have broadly aligned with ideas of organisational learning (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990) and learning as social transformation (Freire, 1976; Horton & Freire, 1990; Mao, 1968). In this aspect, this study extends the findings of previous phenomenographic studies.

Interviewees may have held the conceptions of X-E, X-F and X-G before the course. We cannot establish that these conceptions were developed only after it. However, in this study, conceptions of X-E, X-F and X-G were considered as expanded perspectives after the course. There was no evidence that interviewees stated these conceptions explicitly in the initial interviews. Some interviewees stated in the second interviewees that these may have existed prior to the course but were reinforced or confirmed after the course.

Interviewees gave multiple responses to the questions on conceptions of learning, as shown in Table 6.3. There are 53 categorised responses from 20 interviewees on the issue of conceptions of learning after the course. Conception X-D emerged as the predominant one, reported by 80% of the respondents. Two other commonly held conceptions were X-E and X-F, reported by 75% and 50% of respondents respectively. The responses from these three categories account for 77.4% of the total responses. The
category with the lowest occurrence was X-B, which was mentioned by one respondent. This suggests that utilitarian purposes were displaced as a consequence of participating in the course. An important finding is that conceptions of learning held by the majority of students at the end of the course tended to focus on seeking meaning and personal, organisational and social development.

Table 6.3 Frequency of Responses and Interviewees about Learning Conceptions after the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency of responses and percentage of total responses</th>
<th>Frequency of interviewees and percentage of total interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>3 (5.7%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>4 (7.5%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-D</td>
<td>16 (30.2%)</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-E</td>
<td>15 (28.3%)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-F</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-G</td>
<td>4 (7.5%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total responses 53 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

6.4.1 Category X-A Learning as Acquiring Knowledge and Skills

This conception was held by 85% of respondents prior to the course while only 15% of respondents made explicit references to it after the course. Two school principals (Luke and Jeremy) now insisted that knowledge acquisition should not be the primary concern of learning although “basic knowledge and basic skills” continue to play an important role in schooling. Jeremy emphasised “learning by doing is an important process”. In addition to acquiring knowledge and skills, developing abilities was emphasised. He went on to say, “we now need to know how knowledge came into being, how to apply the knowledge in addition to what is knowledge”. A system administrator (Cindy) echoed his view. She commented that acquiring knowledge and skills was only part of the learning process, while “the learning process per se, knowing the world” was more important. This suggests a shift in their conceptions of learning and supports the proposition that multiple conceptions may be in operation simultaneously depending on the circumstances.
Respondents who did not mention this conception after the course may not necessarily have abandoned it completely. This concept of learning simply no longer occupied as important a role as it did before the course. It was no longer the first idea coming upfront in their minds. However, such notion may continue to be in operation with other more complex conceptions. Many respondents indicated that undertaking the course confirmed some of their beliefs about learning and expanded their previous understandings. This may indicate a shift from inherited thinking to more complex thinking after the course.

6.4.2 Category X-B Learning for Instrumental Purposes

Around two thirds of the respondents claimed to hold this conception before the course, but very few of them mentioned it explicitly at the end of the course. Only one school principal vaguely indicated that “learning is a means and need for one’s professional development” (Luke). It should be noted that no other explicit responses can be categorised into this conception. However, this may not mean that respondents completely gave up their ideas about learning as a means to achieving instrumental purposes. They may have come to view it as less important than other conceptions they developed through the course. Respondents may have shifted their attention from viewing learning for utilitarian purposes before the course to focusing on more complex conceptions of learning after the course.

6.4.3. Category X-C Learning as Applied Knowledge

This conception also declined in popularity after participants undertook the course. Around 70% of respondents held this conception prior to the course but only 20% of respondents made direct references to it twelve months later. This may not suggest respondents completely abandoned their idea or view it as unimportant at all. Most probably they began to attach more importance to other new perspectives they developed through the course. A principal (Luke) indicated that learning was not limited to knowledge acquisition and skills development. He had a broader perspective of “application of knowledge in one’s personal and professional life”. His view was shared by two of his counterparts (Jeremy and Michael). They also emphasised application as not only the direct use of concepts or theories in real life situations but also the means of contextualising knowledge acquired.
It was interesting to note that a university administrator (Richard) indicated his determination to apply what he had studied, but then denied he had learned much or achieved any significant personal growth:

These are what I learned from the course. I am thinking how I can apply them into my workplace. The concept of learning should be multi-dimensional, going far beyond the range of classrooms… Learning should be an integrated and inseparable part of a human… Learning can be several cycles from single loop learning to quadruple learning. In terms of organisational learning, the ultimate objective of learning is to maximize individual skills and abilities in order to better achieve organisational goals. However, to tell you the truth, I do not think I have learned much knowledge from teachers or the course. Nor have I made significant improvement (Richard).

It is suggested that Richard was seemingly contradictory in his response. On the one hand, he cited specific concepts and theories he learned from the course and showed his determination to apply them into practice. On the other hand, he denied that he learned much knowledge or made any substantial development. This suggests that he may still hold absolute rather than relativistic beliefs about knowledge since he tended to focus on quantitative accumulation of static facts and information rather than subjective interpretation or insights gained. It should also be noted that although he emphasised the importance of organisational learning and alluded to lifelong learning, his core conception tended to be limited to the conception of viewing learning as the direct use of quantitative knowledge. It seemed that he did not fully understand the meaning of those concepts cited or that he regarded his own knowledge as more valuable. His answer is paradoxical. Or it might mean that he simply did not learn anything.

This study reveals an inherent limitation of studies based on self-perspectives and self-reports. It also highlights the need for fine-grained analyses of subjective worlds. Macro cultural theories tend to assume that individuals’ cognitive frameworks are unified and coherent. Phenomenographic approaches suggest that they can be complex and even contradictory.
6.4.4. Category X-D Learning as Understanding the World

This conception was expressed by 30% of the respondents before the course. It was reported by 80% of the respondents and became the predominant conception after the course. Participants’ understandings of the concept itself became more complex over the twelve month period. The second interviews also showed more diversified and deeper understandings about learning as making sense of the world. The concept focused on utilizing knowledge, ability, experience, or perspectives for making sense of the world. “Developing metacognition and abilities”, “personal experience”, “social interaction”, “informal and accidental learning”, and “lifelong learning” were common descriptors and they were indicated as important learning as well. All those forms of learning could facilitate individuals to understand the world, as suggested by many participants.

Respondents generally agreed that promoting metacognition and developing learning abilities were far more important than factual knowledge. For instance, a school principal (Jeremy) suggested that it is imperative to “play down the importance of knowledge per se” and pay more attention to “developing practical abilities”. Another principal (Michael) shared similar views with his counterpart. He argued that “enhancing learning abilities like inquiry making and problem solving will enable us to better know and adapt to the changing world.” A university administrator (Oliver) also emphasised “learning how to learn”. He went on to say, “cultivating learning ability and creativity is essential”, and through doing this “we can have a better understanding of reality” and keep up to date.

Around one third of respondents reiterated the importance of personal experience and social interaction to help them understand their professional lives and explore the world. A principal (Isabella) commented that, “the key elements of learning were practice, experience, inquiry, cooperation, and exploration”. One of her counterparts (Michael) emphasised that in addition to classroom learning, “social experience”, “interaction with others” and “the process of accomplishing a task” were also important. Respondents often specifically referred to their learning experience in the course and interaction with peers during or after class to illustrate their points. They especially marvelled at the “wonderful learning resources” among the “elite classmates” and claimed that exchanging ideas with them did deepen their understanding about their
“professional practice” and “emergent issues in Chinese education” (e.g. Hilary, Felix, Diana, Oliver).

About 20% of respondents placed an emphasis on lifelong learning or classified themselves as lifelong learners. Conceptions limited to learning as formal instruction were replaced by a recognition of having formal and informal learning opportunities throughout one’s life. This insight was shared across school, system and university sectors. A principal (Hilary) stressed “learning has become a lifestyle. It also represents one’s quality of life”. A system official (Diana) indicated that learning occurred in “formal situations as well as informal interactions”, because one can learn from various sources like “teachers, others, environment, and oneself”. Their views were echoed by university administrators. William stressed that learning should not “have a utilitarian end”. He went on to say learning occurs throughout one’s life, and “it has become an inseparable part of one’s life”. Paula claimed that her notion of lifelong learning had been “extended and reinforced by undertaking the course”. She further illustrated that learning was about “knowing the world” and it was related to “constant professional development and personal growth”.

Around 15% of respondents came to explore the nature of knowledge. One principal (Isabella) referred to it but did not make explicit comments. She claimed that “giving correct or standard answers to learners” was not always important. It was “thinking, critical reflection, and interaction with others that really counts in the learning process”. Two university administrators (Steven and Tony) explored their epistemological beliefs and made complex representations about learning as knowing the world. Tony commented that their previous belief that knowledge was “objective and single-dimensional” had been “challenged and modified”. In the past, all students knew similar things since “all knowledge was transmitted from teachers”. He came to realize that knowledge can be “subjective and multi-dimensional” and insisted that “everyone can have his or her opinion and interpretation about one issue”. Steven echoed his view and challenged the notion of sacred and authoritative knowledge.

Now I believe learners are studying phenomena in a real world instead of merely learning theories or knowledge from books. Course materials or books can be used as aids to understand and explore the world in depth. If we identify and challenge assumptions behind a certain theory or body of
knowledge, it means that an authoritative image of knowledge is shattered. Learning has moved from acquiring knowledge from books to inquiring the living world (Steven).

It is suggested that these respondents identified and challenged their previous assumptions about knowledge and shifted from an absolute stance about knowledge before the course to a relativistic one after the course. Their conceptions also went beyond understanding the world to thinking more critically. It appears the university-based administrators had delved more deeply into the epistemological issues. Universities have long been regarded as the place to create and promote knowledge. This suggests that the academic atmosphere and research culture emphasizing knowledge creation in universities may have played an important role in shaping the expansion of their learning concepts.

6.4.5 Category X-E Learning as Transforming Perspectives and Personal Development

This conception emerged as a new and an important category after the course, reported by 75% of respondents. Unlike the conception X-D which emphasised understanding one’s professional life or the outside world, this conception focused more upon learners’ personal perspectives and growth. Respondents declared that learning occurred when one changed one’s way of thinking about something and oneself. Personal views were formed and new perspectives were generated in the process. This could bear some resemblance with Marton et al’s (1993) conception which viewed learning as coming to see something differently. Respondents also tended to relate transforming perspectives to personal growth. This view was similar to Marton et al’s (1993) conception “learning as changing as a person”. Therefore, in this study this conception has in fact integrated these two perspectives “transforming perspectives” and “personal development” as one category because respondents tended to put them side by side and emphasise the interrelationship between them.

The notion of “expansion” dominated elaborations of this conception. For example, respondents generally spoke of “deepening the understanding”, “opening the eyes”, “extending the ideas”, “broadening the horizons”, and “widening the views”. A typical illustration came from a university administrator (Oliver). He claimed his beliefs about
learning after the course were “deeper and more extensive”, and he realized the concept of learning “had much richer meanings”.

Reflection and personal learning experience were claimed to help participants “transform”, “expand” or “modify” their previous conceptions. This view was common across school, system and university sectors. For instance, a system official (Adam) emphasised that learning was “creation and a process of innovation and transforming assumptions.” Another official (Felix) maintained that “the theme of learning is a reflective process”. He went on to say, when one was acquiring new knowledge and information, this process was not “a simple process of accepting new things” but it was “a continual process of thinking and reflection”. His view was echoed by a university administrator (William). He commented that he “was aware of the change in his learning conception”. He came to view learning as “a continuous and dynamic process” and insisted “it should become a person’s habit”. He further illustrated the importance of critical thinking and indicated “changing one’s deeply rooted beliefs about learning also means changing one’s thinking habits”. A principal (Hilary) appreciated greatly her learning experience and commented her previous understandings “had been greatly changed”. She stressed that some new perspectives “had melted thoroughly in her blood”.

The ideas about student-centred learning and humanistic approaches have melted thoroughly in my blood now. Cooperative learning, team learning, reflective learning, and interactive learning are also important. The interaction mode is now characterised by multiple dimensions and ways, such as teachers to students, students to students, and teachers to communities (Hilary).

More than one third of respondents claimed that positive changes in perspective inevitably led to “personal improvement”, “empowerment”, and “fulfillment” (e.g. Hilary, Felix, Oliver, Steven). They insisted that their learning had provided them with a stronger self-awareness and sense of empowerment, which in turn fostered their personal development. For instance, a school principal (Kevin) indicated that he came to “pay much attention to how to learn and know his learning styles”. He reflected on his learning strategies and approaches, and sought to “understand his learning characteristics”. He viewed learning as “an experiential and reflective process” and
more importantly “personal growth”. He criticized contemporary Chinese learning as being more related to “imitating and learning from teachers or supervisors”. He insisted that learning should be relevant to learners’ experience because “different experiences will lead to different perspectives and innovations”. A system official (Diana) shared a similar view. She claimed she “reflected on herself and had a more objective judgement of herself”. She further explained learning could mean “learning from oneself” since learning was also a process of “self-knowledge, self-exploration and self-development”.

These respondents also elaborated on their expanded perspectives about teaching and learning. They concluded that change in their views will inevitably lead to self growth and change in their professional practice. For example, a school principal (Nathan) emphasised the “cooperative relationship between students and teachers”. He went on to explain learning was “interactive and two-way communication”. Learners were expected “to construct knowledge based on their prior experience” while teachers were “facilitators and conductors”, who should “develop students’ multiple intelligences” and maximize their learning. He insisted that such change in his perspective would enhance his “personal improvement and professional practice”. A university administrator (Tony) echoed his view and commented that his beliefs about learning “had been extended from theoretical and practical points of view”.

Learning is related to a learner’s sustainable development. Personal reflection is also learning. If teachers explain everything very clearly and leave no room for students’ imagination, their creativity or initiative might be dampened. Active learning needs students’ engagement and deep thinking. …I believe I have improved myself in one way or another. Once a person changes his ideas, he will be somewhat different from before (Tony).

Three respondents explicitly referred to learning as developing the affective domain in addition to the cognitive domain. Felix commented that learning required efforts and hard work, but “learning should also be fun” and students should be “happy learners”. Cindy claimed that it was essential to gain “insightful enlightenment” as well as “enjoyable learning experience”. She further illustrated that “learning does not simply mean 1+1=2, but 1+1>2”. Steven shared similar views. He emphasised a learner may develop intellectually, psychologically and emotionally.
6.4.6 Category X-F Learning as Promoting Organisational Development

This conception also emerged as a new category after the course and was reported by half of the respondents. They tended to view learning from an organisational development perspective rather than from an individualistic and pedagogical perspective. They went beyond their previous conceptions of individual learning in isolation in classrooms or formal educational institutions. Respondents began to value team learning and organisational learning and relate them to the sustainable development of organisations.

Respondents generally emphasised the linkage between individual learning and organisational learning and development. This view was common across sectors. For example, a principal (Hilary) commented “personal learning is now closely related to organisational learning and development”. One of her counterparts (Kevin) shared a similar view. He maintained that a person was not only responsible for his own learning, but also for “team learning and organisational learning”. A system official (Adam) indicated that previously he “seldom associated learning with organisational development” but he came to view learning as indispensable to personal and organisational development. His view was echoed by a university administrator (William). He stressed team and organisational learning, and went on to say “learning culture should be cultivated in an organisation by openly promoting individual learning and teamwork”.

These respondents no longer viewed learning as a static and one-way transmission of authoritarian knowledge but a dynamic and continuous changing process, which ultimately leads to personal, team and organisational development. A principal (George) emphasised “multiple ways and channels of learning”. He equated learning with a continuous process “which makes individuals, teams, organisations, schools and families commit to a shared vision and achieve their goals”. His idea was shared by a university administrator (Oliver). He denied learning as a static process or “acquiring defined knowledge at different stages in formal educational institutions”. He viewed learning as “a changing and dynamic process responsive to the rapidly changing world”, which may occur at personal, team and organisational levels.
Half of the respondents mentioned the notion of “a learning organisation” or “organisational learning” in the second interviews. It was viewed as a key concept linking learning and development at individual, team, and organisational levels. They elaborated on their understandings about this concept and argued that organisation learning and development cannot be achieved without effective personal learning and sustainable personal development. For example, a school principal (Nathan) maintained that in a learning organisation, “everyone should engage in cooperative learning and interactive learning in order to achieve effective and flexible learning”. His idea was shared by a system official (Adam). He commented that his understanding about learning organisations was deepened. He viewed organisational learning as “achieving organisational goals and realizing shared vision”. He went on to say that in a learning organisation, “organisational structure is more attuned to flattened structure” rather than traditional hierarchical pyramid structure. This implies that more complex conceptions of learning also have implications for leadership in organisations. Another system official (Felix) made a more sophisticated illustration about his understanding and emphasised interrelationship between individual and organisational development.

Learning organisation will make sense only after we have deep understanding about learning. Organisational learning is based on a process of continual learning and reflection on the part of every member in an organisation. An organisation will maintain its sustainable development if everyone’s potential can be fully tapped and personal development can be ensured (Felix).

6.4.7 Category X-G Learning as Promoting Social Development

This conception was also a new category which was not evident in the conceptions before the course. It was mentioned by 20% of respondents and signifies a higher order conception of learning as social improvement. The conception emphasises the emancipative perspective of learning and the importance of being a change agent in social reform and development.

A school principal (George) viewed learning as “changing the deeply rooted ideas in society and promoting a strong sense of social responsibility”. He indicated that changing entrenched ideas about education was hard, and it was “a long and incremental process”. He went on to say those who had exposure to new ideas can
“exert an influence within their sphere of influence”, which in turn will “facilitate social development”. A system official (Bruce) also emphasised being a change agent in educational reform and social development. He defined learning as “changing one’s own behaviours, transforming society, and promoting social civilization”. He indicated this understanding had been “further reinforced after undertaking the course”. A university administrator (William) shared a similar view. He declared that he began to pay more attention to the consequences of learning, for example, “professional development, personal growth, influencing others, and making a contribution to society”. He went to explain that he would then “consciously adjust his behaviours to social reform and development”. He tended to lay more emphasis on raising one’s self-awareness in addition to a sense of social duty.

Another university administrator (Steven) made a more complex illustration about his understandings about learning and concluded that the ultimate goal of learning is to enhance social improvement. He indicated that previously an emphasis was laid on “external experience of learners rather than their internal experience”. He insisted that much importance should be attached to the inner experience of individuals in the learning process. He went on to explain:

In fact, in a learning process, some changes may occur in a learner’s emotion, consciousness, or perspectives. The purpose of learning is not to recite theories but to transform or develop learners emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually so that their perceptions about the world are expanded and problem solving abilities are promoted. I believe that the ultimate purpose of learning is to promote social progress through personal and organisational development (Steven).

This university administrator seemed to hold more complex beliefs about learning than previously. He stressed all round development of a learner in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. He also emphasised the role of individual and organisation development in achieving social development.

6.5 Analysis of Conceptions of Learning after the Course

As can be seen from Table 6.4, respondents held a variety of conceptions about learning as in pre-course data but these extended across seven (not four) categories. This
indicates that most respondents continued to hold multiple conceptions of learning simultaneously. With regard to a phenomenon like learning, it is possible for an individual to have various interpretations and understandings which may co-exist and be in operation according to specific situations. It is possible for a respondent to hold higher order conceptions (X-D to X-G) and lower order conceptions (X-A to X-C) simultaneously.

Table 6.4 Classifications of Learning Conceptions Reported by Individuals after the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>X-A</th>
<th>X-B</th>
<th>X-C</th>
<th>X-D</th>
<th>X-E</th>
<th>X-F</th>
<th>X-G</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>S1M</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X-E</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Bruce</td>
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<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S3F</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>X-A</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X-D</td>
<td>X-E</td>
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<tr>
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<td>S4F</td>
<td>Diana</td>
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<td>X-D</td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S5M</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>S6M</td>
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<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-D</td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X-E</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Jeremy</td>
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<td>X-E</td>
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<td>X-E</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Luke</td>
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<td>X-E</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Michael</td>
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<td>X-D</td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>P8M</td>
<td>Nathan</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>U1M</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X-D</td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>X-D</td>
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<td>X-C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>U4M</td>
<td>Steven</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-D</td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>U5M</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>X-D</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
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<td>U6M</td>
<td>William</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X-E</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Total Responses

53 3 1 4 16 15 10 4

Note. S represents system administrators from local, municipal, or provincial educational departments, P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. X stands for Xue Xi in Chinese, which means "learning". Source: analysis of data.

For instance, Jeremy held a conception of learning as transforming perspectives and personal development (X-E), but also believed other aspects of learning as acquisition and application of knowledge (X-A, X-C). Conversely, Nathan seemed to have rejected
the lower order concept in favour of more complex understandings of learning as personal and organisational development (X-E, X-F). It should be noted that these categories are not in a strict hierarchical order. They are inter-related and have a loosely coupled hierarchical structure. This study shows that the higher order categories reflect more complex conceptions (which view learning as understanding the world and promote personal, organisational and social development) than the lower order categories (which view learning as knowledge acquisition and application or for instrumental purposes). If we view learning as a sequence within a person’s life, it may also mean that the lower order approaches to learning may need to proceed to a platform for higher order thinking.

6.5.1 Variations in Conceptual Change about Learning

In this study, the classifications of extent of conceptual change was primarily based on self-reports from respondents, who were asked to describe specifically their conceptual change in the second interviews at the end of the course. It should be noted that conceptual change in this study is determined by qualitative rather than quantitative techniques. It is difficult to quantify particular changes in a person’s conceptions. However, a respondent’s self-reported change can be linked to the movement of conceptions from the lower level before the course to higher level after the course, as indicated in Table 6.5. The extent of conceptual change reported by respondents was identified at first. Interview data were also analysed to detect the movement across the number of categories.

In this study, “large change” refers to obvious conceptual change reported, or when a respondent’s learning conceptions moved across at least three categories; “moderate change” means some detectable change occurred or a student modified his or her previous conceptions, and such change is also signified by movement across one or two additional categories compared to pre-course reports; “small/no change” means no obvious change was reported or a student’s perceptions remained constant after the course. The “large changes” in learning conceptions held by individuals are highlighted by shading in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 shows the specific categories of learning conceptions held by 20 respondents before and after undertaking the course. Ten (50%) respondents reported large changes
in their conceptions of learning and seven (35%) respondents modified or expanded their conceptions over one year of study. Only three (15%) respondents reported no obvious change and their conceptions seemed to remain constant after the course. It can be seen that generally speaking, the course had an influence upon participants’ conceptions of learning because a high percentage (85%) of participants reported large or moderate progress in their perspectives about learning after undertaking the course.

Table 6.5 Self-Reported Changes in the Conceptions of Learning after the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Movement in categories</th>
<th>Self-reported Change</th>
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</thead>
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<td>S1M</td>
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<td>X-E X-F</td>
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<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S2M</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>X-A X-C</td>
<td>X-D X-E X-F X-G</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>S4F</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>X-A X-B X-C X-D</td>
<td>X-D X-E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Felix</td>
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<td>X-D X-E X-F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>George</td>
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<td>X-D X-E X-F X-G</td>
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<td>Steven</td>
<td>X-A X-B X-D X-D</td>
<td>X-D X-E X-F X-G</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Tony</td>
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<td>X-D E</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>U6M</td>
<td>William</td>
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<td>X-D X-E X-F X-G</td>
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<td>Large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. S represents system administrators from local or provincial educational departments, P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. Source: analysis of data.

6.5.2 Self-reported Change in Conceptions

Many scholars who have adopted the phenomenographic approach to investigate students’ learning conceptions argue that learning conceptions in individuals tend to be
moving from surface to deep conceptions of learning over time (e.g. Marton et al., 1993; Tang, 2001). In this study, Categories from X-A to X-G also tend to reflect a movement from inherited traditional thinking (X-A, X-B, X-C) to individual complex perspectives (X-D, X-E, X-F, X-G).

Ten respondents reported large changes in their conceptions as well as reporting increased awareness of the significance of the changes. A system official (Bruce: X-C to X-G) commented after undertaking the course, “I changed my perspectives, myself and the whole system I am working in”. Another system official (Felix: X-C to X-F) indicated his initial conceptions about learning were “comparatively simple, limited and shallow”. However, after the course his conceptions had “undergone great changes and deepened”. Another university administrator (Oliver: X-C to X-F) shared similar views. He emphasised that his understanding and perspectives “towards important educational issues have become more objective and comprehensive than before”. Some other interviewees (e.g. Hilary, Michael, and William) also explained their changes in similar ways. They indicated that their previous beliefs about learning were usually “limited and shallow”, which were influenced by traditional culture and Chinese educational practice. The exposure to Western educational ideas and multiple perspectives, and particularly the participative Western pedagogy made them “think deeply and seriously about learning”. Their conceptions of learning were “transformed”, “expanded” or “modified”, and therefore “deeper and more extensive” than before. Their perspectives have become “more in-depth and wider in scope”. In fact, “the concept of learning had much richer meanings” than what they previously thought.

Seven respondents reported moderate changes in their conceptions of learning. They insisted that their conceptions were not “radically transformed” but “expanded or modified to some extent”. Certain beliefs were reinforced or confirmed. Some illustrated their modification in the following manner. A university administrator (Paula: X-C to X-D) commented she used to simply view learning as “knowledge acquisition and application”. She began to place an emphasis on understanding and reflection after the course, and her belief about lifelong learning had been “further extended and reinforced”. Another system official (Adam X-D to X-F) admitted that his conceptions “had undergone some changes”. He viewed learning as “new construction of meaning” and “active creation”. He went on to say “this understanding had been
clarified and reinforced” after undertaking the course. Other respondents (e.g. Diana, Nathan, Tony) made similar comments, emphasizing some modification not significant change in their conceptions.

Three respondents claimed that the course had no obvious impact on their conceptions of learning although very slight modifications may occur. This was anticipated because not all respondents will react the same way to any learning program. Two respondents (Eric, Isabella) explained that although “the Western way of conducting class activities” was fresh, the concepts and theories were nothing new to them since they had already been “exposed to many advanced Western ideas” before undertaking the course. A system official (Eric) insisted his understanding about learning “did not undergo significant change”, in spite of the fact that “its connotation has been extended slightly”. He further argued that “in-depth discussion of emergent issues” in Chinese education and “direct clash of multiple perspectives from the East and West” were not sufficient for him to gain more insights from the course. A university administrator (Richard) admitted that he did not “learn much knowledge” and described his struggling efforts in making sense of Western concepts and theories due to differences in cultural background and way of thinking. He concluded that although there were differences, Chinese students and Australian teachers “were getting closer” in their interpretations.

In terms of understanding of certain concept, we may have different interpretations and beliefs from those of foreign teachers due to cultural differences. Sometimes it seemed that we were talking the same concept, but it was hard for us to understand them or vice versa. We tried to understand their interpretations with our understandings, come up with our interpretations, and then internalise what they have explained. We try to seek common grounds in understanding certain concepts (Richard).

6.5.3 Multiple Conceptions of Learning

Table 6.6 also reveals that respondents held several conceptions simultaneously. Sometimes these conceptions have been contradictory or not in a neat order as reported in the seven categories. For instance, a school principal (Nathan) reported three conceptions (X-A, X-C and X-D) before the course, but did not mention learning for instrumental purposes (X-B). A system official (Cindy) held more complex conceptions like X-D, and X-E after the course, but she reported X-A conception as well. Although
most respondents held more diversified and complex conceptions after the course, this does not necessarily mean that they completely abandoned their previous conceptions. In other words, holding higher order conceptions may not mean abandonment or complete subjugation of lower order conceptions. Similarly, conceptions which were unmentioned in second interviews might be in operation at the same time with other newly developed conceptions depending on the circumstances. A number of researchers (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Bowden, 1988; Gao & Watkins, 2001b; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Pratt, 1992b) have argued that an individual might have multiple or even conflicting conceptions and use them selectively, depending upon circumstances. Function at a higher level does not inhibit an individual from subsequently operating at a lower-level conceptions when appropriate (Pillay & Boulton-Lewis, 2000). The research findings in the study suggest that Chinese educational leaders held several conceptions simultaneously and tended to utilize them selectively according to different situations. These findings provide empirical support for the contentions of the theorists mentioned above.

6.5.4 Different Focus and Orientations of Learning Conceptions

Table 6.6 indicates the common learning conceptions before the course were X-A, X-B and X-C, with X-A being the predominant conception. This suggests respondents held an inherited and a narrow range of assumptions about learning, focusing on content knowledge and strong utilitarian and practical orientations. Only 30% of the sample held more complex conceptions of learning as understanding the world (X-D). No explicit references were made about conceptions beyond category X-D.

The initial conceptions of learning concentrated on a smaller range of conceptions from X-A to X-D. The conceptions of learning held by respondents after the course spread across a wider range from X-A to X-G. The common learning conceptions after the course were X-D, X-E, and X-F, with X-D and X-E being the most commonly held conceptions. The data suggest that respondents held more diversified and complex conceptions after the course. They had come to see learning as promoting personal, team, organisational, and even social development. They tended to focus more upon understanding meaning and development orientations.
Table 6.6 Frequency of Responses and Interviewees about Learning Conceptions before and after the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Before Frequency of responses and percentage</th>
<th>Before Frequency of interviewees and percentage</th>
<th>After Frequency of responses and percentage</th>
<th>After Frequency of interviewees and percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
<td>17 (85%)</td>
<td>3 (5.7%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>13 (26%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>4 (7.5%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-D</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>16 (30.2%)</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-E</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>15 (28.3%)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-F</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-G</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>4 (7.5%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total responses 50 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
<td>Total responses 53 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

6.5.5 Differences Represented among Sectors

Table 6.7 reveals that respondents from the three sectors all reported large, moderate or small/no change in their conceptions of learning after the course. Some difference can be detected among sectors in terms of large conceptual change. As can be seen from Table 6.7, 62.5% of school principals reported large change in their conceptions of learning, while 50% of university administrators and 33.3% of system administrators reported large conceptual change. A higher percentage of system officials reported moderate change than the other two groups.

Table 6.7 Extent of Change in Learning Conceptions according to Sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Small/no</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System officials</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (16.7%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School principals</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University administrators</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>1 (16.7%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

In terms of large conceptual change, school principals and university administrators in this study were more likely to adopt new ideas and transform their perspectives of
learning compared with the system officials. It is speculated that system officials were somewhat cautious, if not conservative to new perspectives. School principals seemed to be most open and receptive to the new ideas.

6.6 Relations between Categories of Learning Conceptions

Relations between categories of conceptions of learning are shown in the Table 6.8. Within each conception, the phenomenon of learning is experienced as having a referential aspect focusing on the meaning of the experience and a structural aspect. Within the structural aspect, there is a what facet referring to the content of learning, and a how aspect referring to the acts and outcomes of learning. The conceptions of learning can be put into a loosely coupled hierarchical structure according to their respective inclusiveness and complexity, in as much as each conception is depicting a part or parts of the same whole phenomenon of learning (for further details, see Bowden, 1996; Marton & Booth, 1997; Tang, 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>The meaning of learning (referential aspect)</th>
<th>The object of Learning (what aspect)</th>
<th>The act of learning (how aspect)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-A</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge: gaining more knowledge (an increase in quantifiable knowledge, adding to an existing knowledge base).</td>
<td>Knowledge within books, transmitted by teachers or experts: knowledge as authoritative and sacred, as facts or statements of truth.</td>
<td>Individual learners put in effort: reading everything and absorbing knowledge like sponge; receptive learning and individual study emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-B</td>
<td>Knowledge for instrumental purposes (externally controlled and instrumentally oriented).</td>
<td>Relevant points and theories for answering questions or solving practical problems: knowledge as facts or correct answers, or ready solutions to problems.</td>
<td>Pick up the key points and study knowledge regarded as relevant and useful, receptive learning or individual study emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-C</td>
<td>Applying: direct use of theories or methodologies in real life situations (job skills oriented).</td>
<td>Theories and methods that can be used in real life or classroom contexts: a testing ground for</td>
<td>Picking up theories and methods and applying them in real-life situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>whether the knowledge is truth or applicable for the real life.</td>
<td>Experiential and applied learning emphasised.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-D</td>
<td>Understanding/ Explaining and relating phenomena: using theories and perspectives to make sense of the world (promoting metacognition and abilities).</td>
<td>Theories and perspectives of others for analyzing and explaining phenomena: modifying theories and perspectives where necessary.</td>
<td>Picking up theories and perspectives and using them to explain and relate phenomena. Reflective learning and cooperative learning emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-E</td>
<td>Changing one's own perspectives or attitudes: comparing alternative perspectives.</td>
<td>Theories and perspectives of others as alternative framework of seeing the world: knowledge as changeable and contestable. Personal perspectives, value system, moral beliefs and attitudes reconsidered in the light of theories and perspectives.</td>
<td>Gathering new perspectives and recognizing the inadequacy of one's own perspective. Reflecting with an emphasis on the moral and belief aspects. Transformative and cooperative learning emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-F</td>
<td>Learning for organisational development: being a lifelong learner and an active member of team learning and organisational learning.</td>
<td>Personal assumptions, beliefs, philosophies and others' perspectives reconsidered in the light of organisational learning theories and perspectives.</td>
<td>Reflecting with an emphasis on the organisational development. Lifelong learning and collective learning emphasised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.
6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the findings about conceptions of learning held by the Chinese educational leaders before and after undertaking a Western leadership course. Their initial conceptions of four categories of learning and the analysis are described. Their developed conceptions of learning after the course and interpretation of those conceptions are also presented. A list of the logical relations between the categories of conceptions concludes the chapter.
Chapter 7 Findings and Discussion about Conceptions of Leadership

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data collected at the beginning and end of the course in relation to the participants’ understanding of leadership. The chapter addresses the second subsidiary research question: “What were Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of leadership before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?” The critical aspects of participants’ conceptions of leadership are outlined in a set of six categories of descriptions, with the first five identified as prior conceptions and the sixth as a perspective developed over the course. The chapter first describes conceptions of leadership that participants brought to the course and then addresses their expanded conceptions after the course. Following the descriptions, the logical relations between the categories are analysed in greater depth.

7.2 Initial Conceptions of Leadership

In this section, interview data about conceptions of learning held by participants prior to the course are presented and analysed. Five categories of conceptions of leadership emerged from data analysis:

1. Category L-A Leadership as positional power
2. Category L-B Leadership as non-positional power
3. Category L-C Leadership as practical art
4. Category L-D Leadership as teamwork leaders
5. Category L-E Leadership as vision and strategic planning

Category L-A, L-B, L-C and L-D tend to be inherited traditional thinking about leadership, focusing on task and directive leadership. They emphasise power derived from position, authority from expertise and personal quality, leadership art, and

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11 L stands for Ling Dao in Chinese, which means leadership in English.

12 This conception refers to leadership amongst a group of elite cadres as opposed to recent notions of team leadership in the West (Gronn, 1998), which emphasise collaborative participation across all levels.
teamwork among a group of leaders. Conception L-E appears to be complex perspectives, focusing on visionary and strategic leadership.

Table 7.1 indicates that interviewees reported multiple responses to the questions on conceptions of leadership.

Table 7.1 Frequency of Responses and Interviewees about Conceptions of Leadership before the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency of responses and percentage</th>
<th>Frequency of interviewees and percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>19 (28.8%)</td>
<td>19 (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>13 (19.7%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-C</td>
<td>11 (16.7%)</td>
<td>11 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>16 (24.2%)</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-E</td>
<td>7 (10.6%)</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total responses 66 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

The first column indicates the range of conceptions of leadership reported by the interviewees. The frequency of responses in each category and the percentage of the total responses are shown in the second column. There are 66 categorised responses from 20 interviewees on the issue of conceptions of leadership. For example, 19 responses can be classified as Category L-A and account for 28.8% of the total 66 responses. The third column reveals the frequency of interviewees in each category and the percentage of the total 20 interviewees. For example, 19 interviewees reported the conception of Category L-A, which is 95% of the total interviewees. It should be noted that the total percentage for each category in the third column exceeds 100% because most interviewees held more than one conception. Moreover, in one particular category, frequency of subjects and frequency of responses is identical; for instance, 19 subjects gave 19 responses categorised as L-A. Table 7.1 is presented in this way in order to highlight multiple conceptions held by the interviewees and the complexity of leadership conceptions.

As can be seen from Table 7.1, conception L-A emerged as the predominant conception reported by 95% of the respondents. Other commonly held conceptions were L-B, L-C and L-D, reported by more than half of the respondents. The responses from these four
categories account for 89.4% of the total responses. The category with the lowest occurrence was L-E, which was mentioned by 35% of the respondents. This finding suggests that conceptions of leadership brought by most respondents into the course tended to focus on accomplishing tasks and directive leadership.

The four categories describing qualitatively different focuses on understanding of leadership are presented in the next section together with typical responses from the participants.

7.2.1 Category L-A Leadership as Positional Power

This conception was reported by 95% of the respondents and was the most predominant conception prior the course. Respondents commented according to the inherited thinking about leadership, that is, the power and authority of a leader (usually male) resides in the official positions or at the top of a hierarchical pyramid. In other words, power and positions are invariably linked to leadership. It is indicative of hierarchical, bureaucratic and patriarchal leadership. Such notions are deeply rooted and their pervasive influence can still be found in contemporary China. Respondents tended to consider a leader as a person who holds power in a hierarchy, exercises it in a directive manner and draws upon his/her power base and authority to do so. A leader is supposed to use his/her official power to transmit predetermined aims and objectives in a strictly hierarchical structure. The common descriptors in this conception are “head”, “director”, “organiser”, “guide”, and “decision-maker”. The concepts like “accomplishing tasks” and “directing followers to a set goal” were also heavily emphasised.

Respondents generally placed a strong emphasis on the authoritative and unquestioned role of leaders. This view was shared across school, system and university sectors. For instance, a leader was considered as one who “holds the official position” (Michael), “head (Tou) of an institution who has power and privilege” (Felix), or the “director of a formal organisation” (Richard). A leader was also viewed as “an organiser or a boss, who directs followers to accomplish certain tasks” (Paula). A school principal (Michael) explained when he was young, he regarded a leader as a government official “who has power and is at the top of the hierarchical structure.” When he became a principal, he started to think about leadership more deeply. According to Michael, a
leader (Ling Dao) literally means a “guide” and “director”, who leads followers toward a set goal. Another principal (Jeremy) illustrated the essential role played by a leader in an organisation. He maintained that “the role of a leader is like the collar of a dress” because the literal meaning of an eminent leader (Ling Xiu) in Chinese is “the collar and sleeves of a dress”. The importance of a leader is therefore self-evident. He insisted that a leader should “play an important role in organizing the followers” and “his personal value can also be realized in this organizing process”. A system official (Adam) also viewed a leader as a very important person in an organisation, “whose leadership abilities will determine the development of the organisation.”

Around half of the respondents equated the role of a leader with that of a manager, or regarded leadership and management as similar concepts. They appeared to link their work to more operational functions or emphasise the difference between a leader and manager in terms of levels of position in a hierarchical structure. In other words, leaders were often viewed as high-level managers. Middle level managers were not regarded as leaders in the real sense. Although they may sometimes perform leadership roles, they were mainly regarded as line managers in functional departments, who were expected to carry out policies or implement plans issued from the top. This view appeared to be shared across the three sectors. For example, a school principal (Luke) considered himself as an implementer or “transmitter” who receives the policies or instructions from higher administrative level, and then “transmits them to the teaching staff.” This suggests that Luke did not regard himself as a leader, but a site level manager within a bureaucratic system. Another system official (Felix) viewed a leader as a manager, who “has positional power and ability to manage others”. A divisional director (Richard) in a university explained his understanding of his role. He declared that in a strict sense he is not a leader but “a middle level manager or implementer”. He insisted that only those who hold positions at the university level, like university presidents, or school principals can be regarded as leaders. These responses suggested their conceptual confusion about leadership and management. They also exemplified a bureaucratic conception of leadership.

Respondents from the three sectors emphasised leadership as a top-down implementation process rather than an interaction and collaboration between leaders and followers. In the process of accomplishing tasks, the strict rules and regulations are
supposed to be imposed rigidly and the exercise of strict control and scientific management is emphasised. Respondents tended to regard a good leader as one who can manage human and physical resources well and accomplish tasks in workplaces. There seemed to be a clear division between the leaders who propose a plan and followers who implement this plan. This suggests that a leader who has power bestowed by an official position is supposed to manage and govern others. The relationship between a leader and followers tends to focus on controlling and obeying.

A school principal (George) insisted that the goal of leadership work is “to manage human and physical resources well and achieve organisational goals”. Another principal (Luke) supported his view and emphasised, “control and strict management are important in achieving set goals and tasks”. Their views were echoed by another principal (Kevin). He believed the role of a leader is to design a plan, and then organise followers to implement this plan and accomplish certain tasks. He considered a leader as the decision maker and “followers as implementers, who should carry out the plan faithfully.” A system official (Felix) expressed similar ideas: a good leader is one “who can manage followers well and accomplish tasks”. Another university administrator (William) emphasised that a leader is expected to “manage and govern followers well”, while the relationship between a leader and followers is often that of “ordering and obeying”.

About one third of respondents commented that the image of a leader or “a head” is an awesome, authoritative and even fearsome figure. Principals and university administrators particularly emphasised this view. This suggests that they were more likely to criticize the hierarchical and bureaucratic culture than system administrators, who may have aligned themselves to this culture. For instance, a school principal (Jeremy) commented that a leader is often “at the top of a pyramid”, “hard to approach” and distant from followers who are below him or her in status. Another principal (Michael) shared a similar view and considered a leader as one who is “awesome and enjoyed high status”. Their insight was echoed by university administrators. One of them (Steven) commented that a traditional leader was at the top of a hierarchical pyramid, and was “serious, powerful and authoritative.” He emphasised the power represented by a leader, and insisted “without power, one cannot be regarded as a leader”. Another university administrator (Tony) also viewed a leader
as the one “at the top of a strictly layered hierarchical structure”, who is often “a symbol of authority, autocracy, and awe”. It should be noted that these respondents seldom related themselves to the awesome and authoritative images of leaders. They tended to link these images to traditional leaders from strictly layered hierarchical structures.

Respondents generally admitted the strong influence of Chinese leadership traditions on their ideas. Some, particularly system officials, criticized traditional overemphasis on task orientation and neglect of the wills of followers. These comments suggest a strong bureaucratic culture in educational systems. Decision-making power tended to belong to leaders rather than staff while consultation and delegation were often neglected in practice. A system official (Bruce) commented “the wills and wishes of leaders rather than followers are often emphasised” and followers are supposed to obey what a leader has decided. One of his counterparts (Diana) made more radical criticism. She stated that the concept of leader is often associated with position, power and authority. She went on to say, “people often hold negative attitudes towards leaders, who usually climb the ladder relying on nepotism and personal networks”. Cindy was also critical of bureaucratic and hierarchical leadership traditions.

Traditional Chinese leaders are endorsed with official power and authority. They are often autocratic and patriarchal. Their wills and decisions are usually imposed on the organisational members through the strict hierarchical structure. As a leader, how to manage the staff well is most important. Managers are expected to strictly implement plans according to the set rules and regulations (Cindy).

It should be noted that the respondents tended to use “traditionally” or “generally speaking” to indicate this conception. This suggests that respondents may operate from inherited Chinese traditions and from their own individual experiences and expectations. Moreover, some were critical of this inheritance. However, many respondents suggested the inherited thinking has inevitably influenced their conceptions of leadership, which places an emphasis on positional power and authority.

This study suggests that the notions of directive, solitary and instrumental leadership focus on task accomplishment. Such emphasis on positional power in Chinese leadership traditions shares similarities with the Western bureaucratic and hierarchical
leadership concepts that flourished in the early twentieth century (e.g. Taylor, 1915; Weber, 1947). It seems that many respondents in this study still held conceptions of leadership as positional power or scientific management. However, this conception has its limitations since it overemphasises order, control, and hierarchy in leadership processes.

7.2.2. Category L-B Leadership as Non-positional Power

About two thirds of respondents regarded leadership as power or authority based on professional expertise and personal qualities. Unlike the L-A conception of leadership as official position and power manifested externally, this conception emphasises authority or power derived personally or internally. Respondents viewed leadership as a kind of influence and authority stemming from personal qualities or professional expertise, rather than from bestowed positions. This kind of authority was termed non-positional power, indicating it has nothing to do with the official position. Leaders mainly relied on their “personal qualities”, “professional knowledge”, “professional expertise”, “personal charisma”, and “high morality” to inspire others, and set role models for followers, thus establishing authority among followers. In other words, a leader relied more on technical and moral authority rather than official authority to motivate and influence followers. This shares affinity with Western traditions of charismatic or transformational leadership (e.g. Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978; Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Respondents generally claimed that educational leaders should have profound professional knowledge and expertise, particularly domain specific knowledge. They can thereby establish their authoritative status among teachers and provide appropriate supervision. This view was shared among the three groups and particularly emphasised by school principals and universities administrators (e.g. George, Richard and William). For instance, a principal (Luke) commented that a principal’s power derive not only from his position but also from his expertise and personal qualities. He insisted that a principal should be “a subject expert so that he can instruct other teachers”. His view was echoed by one of his counterparts (Hilary). She emphasised “profound knowledge and deep understanding about education and teaching”. She went on to say that, besides qualities required by leaders generally, “an educational leader should be an authority in her field and a good instructional leader”, if teachers are to regard her highly. A
university administrator (Oliver) shared similar views. He attached importance to “high academic qualities and research abilities” in addition to discipline specific knowledge. He commented that without these it will be difficult for him “to promote professional development and research activities among teachers”. A system official (Eric) also emphasised principals as “authoritative instructional leaders” and experts in certain discipline or subject field.

In addition to authority derived from the leading role in specific subject/discipline domain or research field, a leader’s personal charisma or affinity derived from personal qualities or morality was also highly valued by respondents. This suggests another reflection of Confucian traditions of the scholarly and moral leader (Lee, 1996; Wong, 2001a). Respondents commented that a leader should make full use his or her non-positional power to “influence”, “inspire”, “encourage”, and “motivate” followers to achieve goals or accomplish tasks. Ideally a leader should be “a moral model” or “a charismatic hero” This insight was common across the school, system and university sectors. In fact, some respondents claimed to be “charismatic leaders” themselves (e.g. Bruce, Felix and Nathan).

A principal (Michael) indicated that his beliefs about leadership had been greatly influenced by Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. He explained that “morality and personal qualities of a leader” were emphasised in Confucian tradition. A good leader should be “a moral model and set good example for others”. He regarded a leader as “a charismatic hero” whose individual factors are important in achieving an organisational goal. A system official (Felix) believed that he seldom fully relied on his positional power to direct or order his followers. He insisted that a charismatic leader “utilizes his expertise, insight and self-confidence to influence others.” He considered himself as “sort of a charismatic leader to some extent”. His view was echoed by a university administrator (Tony), who emphasised a leader as “inspirational and demonstrating affinity.” He went on to say that a leader should be able to use his personal qualities and charisma to “inspire and motivate followers”, so that followers have the idea that “ a gentleman is ready to die for his close friends” (Shi wei zhi ji zhe si) and follow the leader faithfully. Another system official (Adam) recognized the importance of self-cultivation and professional authority in influencing followers. He
commented that leadership is related to a leader’s motivation to “improve his leadership styles, promote his abilities or professional development”.

This conception of leadership implies that improvement of one’s leadership ability often means dedication to personal development and self-cultivation. It derives from Chinese traditions of self-cultivation and moral leadership. This conception of leadership as non-positional power shares some similarities with Western trait theories or charismatic leadership theories. In Western leadership literature, trait theories highlight exceptional qualities required by leaders while charismatic leadership theories emphasise the importance of charisma or morality possessed by a leader (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Stogdill, 1974; Weber, 1947). This study suggests that in this conception, the leader-follower relationship involves more than rational, transactional exchanges. A charismatic leader is viewed as a directive individual with idiosyncratic vision and goals, and followers develop emotional and ideological commitments to leaders. However, power appears to reside at the top and the order/obey relationship between leader and follower prevails.

### 7.2.3 Category L-C Leadership as Practical Art

Around half of the respondents regarded leadership as practical art. The styles or approaches adopted by a leader depended on different situations and the nature of followers. It was often termed “leadership art” since leadership was considered as a set of flexible strategies or tactics rather than a cluster of rigid rules or prescribed approaches. Respondents particularly emphasised the adaptability, applicability, and contingency of leadership. They believed leadership comprised three elements: leaders, followers, and environment. They argued that the choice of a certain leadership style or approach depended on the nature of the followers, different organisational conditions, and the wider social and cultural contexts.

Such notions of leadership as practical art share some commonalities with Western contingency and situational leadership concepts (e.g. Blake & Mouton, 1964; Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1979; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). According to these leadership concepts, the qualities, characteristics and skills required by a leader are determined to a large extent by the maturity level of followers and the demands of the situation in which he or she functions as a leader. Leadership is perceived as an
interactive phenomenon within groups. Leaders are expected to be self-conscious and reflective practitioners who adapt leadership styles to different situations and followers.

Respondents traced the concept of “leadership as practical art” back to Chinese culture and Confucianism. About one third of them indicated that their conceptions of leadership were heavily influenced by Chinese traditions (e.g. Nathan, Jeremy, Diana, Oliver, Richard). A university administrator (William) made explicit comments as follows.

Traditionally, leadership is considered as a practical moral art and ways of dealing with power and politics. For instance, many of Confucius’ ideas have great influence in Chinese history and contemporary China. “The Art of War” by Sun Zi is an excellent example to show the importance of strategic planning and leadership art in Chinese history (William).

Respondents generally claimed that they adopted different leadership styles or approaches in their professional practice, depending on various factors, such as the maturity level of staff and nature of the job or the organisation. They believed their previous experience as teachers and an understanding of the nature of teaching staff have determined their leadership styles. This insight was common across the school, system and university sectors. For instance, a school principal (Isabella) commented that the role of a principal is somewhat different from that of a manager in an enterprise. A principal must consider the distinctive feature of teachers, “whose work is often self-directed and they need respect and appreciation”. She concluded that her leadership style is different from that employed by a business manager, who is “stronger and more directive”. Her view was echoed by another female system administrator (Cindy), who insisted that her previous experience as a teacher for ten years has influenced her leadership style. She regarded teachers as “intellectuals and professionals” and she believed it important to “consider the characteristics of the led and adopt their suggestions”. A university administrator (William) expressed similar ideas. He indicated his “previous teaching experience and the features of the university and followers” has greatly influenced his leadership style.

About one fifth of respondents commented that different stages of organisational development, organisational culture and wider social contexts also decided their
employment of different leadership strategies. They tended to use terms like “artistic”, “practical”, “techniques” or “tactics” to describe the leadership styles or approaches in their professional practice. This view was also common across the three sectors. A school principal (Nathan) summarised his leadership style as “charismatic and artistic, characterized by leadership arts, emotional encouragement plus strict scientific management”. Another principal (Hilary) insisted a leader may “adjust his or her leadership styles and practices according to different developmental stages of a school”. She went on to explain that both of her previous principals were successful leaders who had totally different leadership styles. She warned against “a simple conclusion that a particular leadership style is the best”, and emphasised the need to see “if this style is appropriate or beneficial to long-term development of a school”. A system official (Felix) expressed similar views. He emphasised that a leader should consider “the qualities of followers and adapt his leadership styles to different situations and followers.” As the leader of a large educational group comprising various institutions, he stated the way he manages kindergarten teachers is different from the way he deals with university professors because “the natures of staff and organisational cultures are different”. A university administrator (Oliver) commented that different leaders in different educational institutions may “adopt various leadership styles depending on the situations he works in” and the wider social and cultural contexts.

Two school principals (Isabella, Jeremy) and a university administrator (Oliver) also criticized the bureaucratic and rigid structure of educational administrative system. They commented that system officials tended to adopt more directive and top-down leadership approaches in practice. For instance, a school principal (Jeremy) indicated “rigid bureaucratic systems and hierarchical orders are more obvious in educational departments than in schools or universities”. His view was echoed by a university administrator (Oliver), who maintained that “the hierarchical structure and strict power relationship in the administrative system is prevalent”. Compared with government departments or enterprises, “schools and universities are much better”. This suggests that there were some conflicting views regarding the organisational cultures within the cohort. This also suggests the view held by most respondents that a change was needed in the bureaucratic culture in educational administrative systems in order to meet the challenges for contemporary Chinese education in the twenty-first century.
The conception of leadership art seemed to pay particular attention to the nature of followers and environmental variables. It highlighted contingency, flexibility and adaptability in adopting leadership styles and approaches. However, such notions emphasised a higher power distance between leaders and followers because the organisational goals are still determined at the top.

### 7.2.4 Category L-D Leadership as Teamwork Leaders

The majority of respondents (80%) considered leadership to be teamwork leaders, or “team leadership” or “collective leadership”. Hereby, team or collective leadership primarily focuses on the process of a group of leaders in an organisation working as a team to make decisions and facilitate achievement of organisational goals. Members of the leadership team rely on their collective wisdom and reach consensus in decision-making. Collaboration and consultation within a team of leaders are emphasised. Thus, in this conception it seems to be more appropriate to consider team leadership as teamwork among leaders who hold official positions in an organisation.

Respondents generally stressed cooperation within a team of leaders and tended to equate their notion of team and collective leadership with “democratic leadership”. This view was common across school, system and university sectors. A principal (Kevin) stated that team leadership is adopted in his school. He said he is responsible for teaching and learning management while “principal and deputies meet together regularly to make important decisions”. Another principal (Nathan) shared similar views. He believed “democratic educational leaders are not uncommon” in China. He went on to say those who insist on their own ideas without consulting other team leaders or teachers are not good leaders. A system official (Cindy) echoed his view. She insisted “decisions about important issues are usually made by a team of leaders”. One of her male counterparts (Adam) also declared that collective leadership approaches are adopted in practice and “most principals are democratic leaders”. He went on to explain that principals and deputies usually “have a clear division of labour and collaborated closely”. For instance, the principal is responsible for “general administration of the school” and deputy principals are in charge of “teaching and learning, student management, finance and logistics respectively.” A university administrator (Oliver) echoed his view. He proclaimed collective leadership was important in his college. He explained the reason why he could find time to undertake the course is that his team of
leaders collaborated very well and two deputies shared much of his work during his absence.

Around one fourth of respondents, particularly principals (e.g. Hilary, Michael) and university administrators, extended their understanding of team leadership to soliciting advice from teachers or Teacher Representatives Meetings (Jiào dài hui). Some attention was given to the voices of ordinary organisational members. For instance, a school principal (George) maintained he mainly relied on a team of leaders, middle level administrators and teachers to manage the school well. Another principal (Kevin) commented that before making important decisions he sometimes solicited suggestions from teachers and the Teacher Representatives Meeting. A female university administrator (Paula) echoed his view. She explained that most important decisions were made through Divisional Committee meetings which were held once a month. She proposed “collective consultation to seek consensus on plans”. She insisted this facilitated implementation of the plans, although it was time-consuming in the first phase.

However, three respondents were critical and they indicated that collective and team leadership in the real sense was far from being realized. It often became token rather than practice. A principal (Hilary) commented that although team leadership was proposed in schools, “a strict monitoring and evaluating system has yet to be established.” She insisted that the Teacher Representatives Meeting “should play a more important role in monitoring principals’ work than before” (Hilary). A system official (Felix) expressed similar views. He indicated a leader of the so-called leadership team often had the final say in the decision-making process. Therefore, collective leadership was sometimes “an empty word”. His view was echoed by a university administrator (Steven). He commented “the notion of collective leadership often becomes rhetoric.” He went on to explain that in Chinese universities, “good teachers or researchers were usually promoted to administrative or leadership positions”. However, they often lacked management skills or leadership capacities, and their professional development as leaders was inadequate. He maintained that “their leadership styles are usually autocratic and based on their prior experience”. According to him, they tend to emphasise “control and obedience” rather than “improving their personal charisma or professional development level”. It should be noted that his
comments highlighted this tendency in universities but this was also not uncommon in schools. This suggests important implications for dealing with this issue in contemporary Chinese education.

Two respondents’ seemingly contradictory comments showed that they still clearly wanted to achieve a balance between collective leadership and directive leadership. They suggested collective leadership may not always work in reality. They believed strong and directive leadership was also needed for radical educational reforms currently promoted in Chinese education. A university administrator (Tony) maintained that in reality “a leader cannot be too democratic, making every decision upon extensive consultation.” He insisted that “strong directive leadership is necessary when enforcing educational reforms”. Another school principal (Michael) echoed his view. He believed that principals “must adopt democratic leadership approaches if they want to motivate teachers”. Otherwise teachers may not listen to them. However, he also argued for the need of adopting directive leadership approaches.

We pay much attention to team leadership and hold the Teacher Representatives Meeting twice a year to discuss important issues…. Even if the Teacher Representatives Meeting does not pass the motion, we can still implement it if it helps to promote educational reform. As you know, resistance from teachers to educational reform is often strong. We must be directive and assertive when necessary (Michael).

It should be noted this concept of “team leadership” is somewhat different from the one discussed in Western leadership literature. The Western notion of team leadership emphasises that every one working in a team takes on leadership roles depending on their ability and skills. It is not dependent upon formal leadership structures (Gronn, 1998, 1999). The team members may not hold official positions in an organisation while team members in Chinese leadership team are often those who have authority and positional power. In other words, the power of decision-making mainly lies in a team of leaders at the top and sometimes the middle level managers rather than ordinary organisational members. A division between top-level leaders, middle level managers and lower level operators is clear. It is argued that although consultation and empowerment is suggested, the key element in team leadership conceptions in China is primarily power and authority related to a group of people who hold official positions.
Its deficiency lies in inadequate attention to consultation and a lack of active involvement of all organisational members.

7.2.5 Category L-E Leadership as Vision and Strategic Planning

In this conception, leaders were viewed as visionary and forward looking. They were characterised as thinking from a macro level and possessing a big picture of organisational or social developments. Respondents who were classified as holding this conception typically spoke of having “keen insight”, “vision”, “forward looking”, “an overall perspective”, or “a big picture”. About one third of respondents made explicit comments about the importance of being visionary and looking forward. Of course this could be defined as a more complex concept of leadership. It is not surprising that only a minority and possibly the most insightful respondents held it.

Respondents generally highlighted the importance of having vision, macro level thinking or keen insight for a leader. A principal (Michael) considered “good thinking ability” as important for a leader, who can “think from an overall perspective and have a big picture first”, not merely “from a narrow perspective or particular point”. He insisted this kind of “macro-level thinking really counts” when making important decisions. Other system administrators shared his views. Adam commented a leader should be able to “discern the emergent issues and urgent problems in educational development”. He considered this as “keen insight or a forward looking ability”. Eric echoed this view. He insisted that an educational leader should be able to show himself in front of teachers and students “as a professional educator and authority who knows education well”. He emphasised “having unique and deep understandings about educational issues, and more importantly forward thinking”. Without this, he commented, a leader may “lack his non-positional power” and cannot be regarded as a good leader.

Respondents emphasised that having vision and macro thinking ability will enable a leader to make sound judgment and correct decision in addition to enhancing his or her non-positional power. This was also regarded as a prerequisite ability for educational leaders. A system official (Felix) believed a good leader “must have keen insight and discernment about policies and plans, followers, and new issues in social development”. He viewed this as “a prerequisite for a leader”. Another university administrator
(Steven) shared his perspective. He stressed that a leader must first of all “have rational judgment about issues”. He considered this kind of judging ability or keen insight as important. He went on to say that a leader should “have a proper understanding and grasp of emergent issues and the overall situation”. This kind of analytical ability and insight is “a prelude or pre-condition to decision-making”.

Respondents frequently linked such visionary leadership could also be linked to strategic thinking and planning. For instance, a school principal (Nathan) emphasised that a good leader must understand and discern the social development trend and the overall picture. He should have very keen insight about emergent issues, “design strategic plans, then modify and decide key factors needed by organisational development”. A university administrator (Oliver) echoed his view. He insisted that a leader must “foressee the long-term effects of what he is doing today and consider what will happen in three or five years time”. He went on to explain that it takes three to four years to educate a college or university student, and therefore “appropriate long term thinking and planning” is important. He believed a visionary leader is helpful for effective leadership work and organisational development. However, it should be noted that such visions or strategic planning appeared to be the job of leaders while consultation with or involvement of organisational members in shaping the vision or strategic plan was rarely mentioned.

It is interesting to note that on the whole, system administrators seemed to attach more importance to visionary and strategic leadership than the other two groups. It suggests that system administrators tended to think from an overall perspective and a macro level due to the nature of their work. Moreover, little reference of this conception by female leaders implies that they were more likely to care about operational matters than their male counterparts.

7.3 Analysis of Conceptions before the Course

Table 7.2 indicates the specific categories of conceptions about leadership held by 20 respondents before the course. It shows that a respondent may operate from multiple conceptions of leadership simultaneously. The majority of respondents held more than three conceptions simultaneously. None reported only one conception, while three reported five conceptions.
In this study, conceptions from L-A to L-E tend to reflect a range from inherited traditional thinking (L-A to L-D) to more complex perspectives (L-E). It is hard to determine the core or the most important conception held by the respondents in this study because they often referred to several conceptions concurrently. Moreover, these conceptions were not mutually exclusive or independent of each other. They were not in a strict hierarchical order or in a linear fashion. In other words, having higher level conceptions (L-E) did not mean holding all loosely coupled lower level conceptions (L-A to L-D).

Table 7.2 Classification of Conceptions of Leadership before the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>L-A</th>
<th>L-B</th>
<th>L-C</th>
<th>L-D</th>
<th>L-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S1M</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>L-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S2M</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S3F</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>S4F</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S5M</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>L-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>S6M</td>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>P2F</td>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>P3F</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>P4M</td>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>P5M</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>P6M</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>P7M</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>P8M</td>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>U1M</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>L-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>U2F</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>U3M</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>U4M</td>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>L-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>U5M</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>U6M</td>
<td>William</td>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses 66 19 13 11 16 7

Note. S represents system administrators from local, municipal or provincial educational departments. P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. Source: analysis of data.

For instance, a respondent (Adam) who held conception L-E of visionary and strategic leadership did not report conception L-A of leadership as positional power. Another
respondent (Paula) who reported conception L-D of leadership as teamwork leaders also held inherited conceptions of leadership (L-A) as positional power. But she did not report conceptions of leadership (L-B and L-C) as non-positional power or leadership arts. Therefore, it cannot be simply assumed that the missing conceptions between the lower and higher level conceptions were subsumed in higher level conceptions. However, it is argued that the higher level category reflects more complex conceptions than the lower level categories.

7.4 Conceptions of Leadership after the Course

The second round of interviews yielded data about respondents’ conceptions of leadership and beliefs about themselves as leaders after they undertook the course. At this stage, six categories of conceptions of leadership emerged from the data analysis.

1. Category L-A Leadership as positional power  
2. Category L-B Leadership as non-positional power  
3. Category L-C Leadership as practical art  
4. Category L-D Leadership as teamwork leaders  
5. Category L-E Leadership as vision and strategic planning  
6. Category L-F Leadership as consultation and collaboration.

The categories include the five identified in the initial interviews (L-A to L-E) and one new category (L-F). The additional conception developed through the course tended to be more complex and focus on consultative and collaborative leadership. Conceptions L-E and L-F could be defined as higher level conceptions of leadership. They moved beyond inherited thinking which tended to focus on task and directive leadership. The scope and depth of the six conceptions after the course seemed to go beyond the five initial conceptions. This suggests that respondents’ conceptions of leadership had been expanded by the course.

Interviewees may have held the conception of L-F (Leadership as consultation and collaboration) before the course. We cannot establish that this conception was developed only after undertaking the course. Some interviewees stated in the second interviews that this notion may have existed prior to the course but was reinforced or confirmed after the course. However, there was no evidence that interviewees stated
this conception explicitly in the initial interviews. Therefore, in this study, conception of L-F was considered as an expanded perspective after the course.

Table 7.3 indicates that Category L-E emerged as the predominant conception amongst twenty respondents after the course. Other common conceptions were L-B, L-C, and L-F, reported by more than half of the respondents. The responses from these four categories account for 92.4% of the total responses. The category with the lowest occurrence was L-A, which was mentioned by only one respondent. This conception was less dominant after the course than it had been prior to the course. An important finding is that conceptions of leadership held by the majority of respondents at the end of the course tended to focus on motivation and collaborative orientations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency of responses and percentage</th>
<th>Frequency of interviewees and percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-C</td>
<td>12 (22.6%)</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>3 (5.7%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-E</td>
<td>15 (28.3%)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-F</td>
<td>12 (22.6%)</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>Total responses 53 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

7.4.1 Category L-A Leadership as Positional Power

This conception was the predominant category prior to the course. However, very few respondents mentioned it explicitly at the end of the course. A university administrator (William), who was also an academic specializing in educational management and administration, made explicit comments about Western definitions of leadership and his understanding of this concept. He commented “Western leadership theories do not emphasise positional power as we do.” He said he was not satisfied with their definitions and did not think Western theorists explored the nature of leadership thoroughly. He insisted leadership should be linked with official position and power in a formal organisation. According to him, one cannot be called a leader without
bestowed power. As can be seen from the following excerpt, he seemed to find it hard to change his deeply held ideas about leadership.

In China, it is hard to define leadership if we take out power. We mostly rely on influence through formal organisational structure, such as designing plans, issuing orders, implementing plans, monitoring and evaluating results. Decisions are made from the top and implemented through different layers. According to Western leadership theories, it seems that leaders rely more on consideration, communication and role models in order to achieve organisational goals (William).

It seemed that this university administrator still believed in top-down implementation and directive leadership. The notion of student leadership or teacher leadership may be foreign or unacceptable to him. He appeared to value his own ideas and reflect on, if not resist, the Western perspectives. This may also be regarded as an example of critical response, as opposed to passive adaptation of Western leadership discourse.

Other respondents commented they had been influenced by inherited thinking and tended to link leadership with official position and power. After the course they appeared to expand their previous perspectives and think “more deeply and reflectively” about the notion of leadership. Whether or not they gave up their previous conceptions about leadership as positional power posed great difficulty for the researcher to prove. This study suggests that not mentioning this conception may not indicate complete abandonment or subjugation of it because it may be in operation with other conceptions depending on the circumstances. However, a conclusion can be drawn that this conception was no longer the first idea coming upfront in their minds after the course. This suggests a shift from inherited thinking to more complex and reflective thinking about leadership after the course.

**7.4.2 Category L-B Leadership as Non-positional Power**

About two thirds of respondents claimed to hold this conception prior to the course. They emphasised the professional expertise and personal qualities of an educational leader. At the end of the course, around half of respondents also claimed to hold this conception but their previous perspectives appeared to have been expanded.
About one third of respondents stressed continuous learning and sustainable development in enhancing their non-positional power to motivate followers. They also began to think from an organisational perspective, relating improvement of non-positional power more closely to organisational development. A principal (Michael) insisted a good leader should attach much importance to “constantly improving personal qualities and abilities.” He believed “without adequate capability and vision”, a leader cannot provide guidance for followers. His view was shared by system administrators. Eric claimed that an educational leader should not only be a subject expert and a scholar, but also “a lifelong learner who can maintain sustainable development to adapt to changing contexts and educational reform”. Other system officials (e.g. Adam, Cindy, Diana) expressed similar ideas. Adam believed the personal qualities and competence of a leader and proper leadership styles “help to promote sustainable development of an organisation”. He began to “view leadership from an organisational perspective rather than from a personal perspective” as he had done before. A university administrator (Paula) considered a leader as a ceremonial figure of an organisation, a guide and facilitator in addition to an organiser and implementer. She believed “leadership styles, philosophy, personal charisma are all integrated parts of leadership”. She insisted a leader relies on both positional and non-positional authority to commit followers to organisational goals.

Two university administrators explicitly linked moral leadership to Chinese tradition and viewed an ideal educational leader as “a moral model” and “spiritual guide” who inspires followers. Similar comments could also be found prior to the course. Respondents commented that Chinese culture has a long history of preparing leaders on moral grounds, and that Confucianism emphasises moral and ethical leadership. They placed emphasis on the quality of being moral and altruistic required by educational leaders in the twenty-first century. For instance, Steven explained that traditional culture emphasises moral leadership and “strategies and arts of governance”. He believed a leader in the current society “should utilize his charisma, personal quality and high morality to influence and inspire others”. Through improving his non-positional authority, he becomes a moral model for followers. His view was shared by Tony, who believed their leadership beliefs had been influenced by Chinese culture and Confucian traditions. Tony went on to make vehement comments about leadership.
A leader should have stronger learning ability, higher spiritual level, higher moral standards, and more affecting emotion than others. He is a moral model, a spiritual guide, and an engine of an organisation. He relies more on non-positional authority than power bestowed by an official position (Tony).

Two respondents compared the concept of moral leadership in Chinese tradition with Western values and moral leadership. They commented that the concepts of moral and emotional leadership in China are often related to non-positional power. Contemporary Chinese government and scholars advocate “governing the nation and organisation with high morality” in recent years, and high moral standards are called for leaders. However, they suggested that merely relying on morality or ethical codes to lead is inadequate. They also questioned the applicability of Western moral leadership ideas in Chinese contexts. For instance, a system official (Felix) believed “moral leadership, emotional leadership, and substitutes for leadership or self-managing teams are desirable leadership approaches.” However, he commented that these seem to be idealised leadership ideas which may be difficult to apply into Chinese contexts. Another university administrator (William) maintained that emotional leadership or moral leadership is often viewed as leadership with non-positional power in China while “the idea of substitute for leadership is rarely mentioned since it contradicts traditional Chinese ideas.”

It is suggested that the conception of leadership as non-positional power relates closely to the idea of moral leadership in addition to professional expertise and personal qualities. Moral leadership in Chinese tradition seems to share some similarity with Western concepts of moral, value and ethical leadership (Begley & Johansson, 2003; Burns, 1978; Hodgkinson, 1991). In Western leadership literature, moral leadership is designed to bring people together in a common cause for altruistic purposes. Leadership is morally based, and community ideas like moral authority, social bonds, emotions, duties and responsibilities are advocated. Moral leadership in China appears to be associated with a leader’s own moral standard or self-cultivation while enhancement of the morality of followers in the manner advocated by Burns (1978) seems to be neglected.
7.4.3 Category L-C Leadership as Practical Art

This conception was reported by 55% of the respondents before the course and 60% after the course. Prior to the course, they tended to focus on personal leadership art and adapting personal leadership styles or approaches to organisational culture and the nature of followers. Responses from participants after the course classified in this category mostly dealt with wider social and culture background and applicability of Western leadership ideas in Chinese contexts. Their comments after the course indicate more reflective and deep understandings about leadership as practical art in relation to the characteristics of followers, organisational culture, and local contexts.

Around one third of respondents maintained that China is different from Western countries in terms of historical, social and cultural background, and economic development. It was therefore believed to be important to “adapt leadership practice to the local context and followers” (e.g. Bruce, Eric). It was considered inappropriate and questionable to “adopt Western leadership ideas indiscriminately without considering the contemporary Chinese context” (Steven). They commented that given the economic, social and cultural constraints, Western leadership ideas like distributed leadership, flattened structure, or learning organisations may not work in reality. However, they also valued striving to realize these ideals in practice. This view was shared across the three sectors. Some respondents analysed organisational culture and the nature of followers in Chinese contexts. They suggested that a strong bureaucratic culture prevails and Chinese staff generally “lack democratic and participative awareness” (Richard) so that leaders resort to directive leadership. This suggests a strong bureaucratic culture and directive leadership in contemporary Chinese education, which also implies a need to change such situation.

For instance, a principal (Isabella) claimed that social pressure is so severe that she as an individual has to “conform to the social norm”. Another principal (Luke) commented Chinese teachers were used “to following the orders from the top without asking any questions.” Their critical thinking abilities are severely hampered and democratic awareness is rather weak. He insisted “the reality is they may not know how to use democracy when you give democracy to them”. He placed an emphasis on improving the maturity or acceptance level of followers when “promoting democratic decision-making and participation.” His idea was echoed by university administrators. One male
(William) commented that it is often “unrealistic to achieve the desirable goal of shared vision”. He further illustrated that organisational goals are usually decided at the top, while organisational members “have little say in planning processes”. They are supposed to “follow the order at all costs”. His view was shared by one of his female counterparts (Paula). She claimed China has a long history of autocratic feudalism and “traditionally it is an official’s words that count”. Ordinary people have no say in decision-making. Therefore they may “lack democratic awareness or seldom actively participate in consultation or decision-making processes”. They are worried about consequences of being rejected if they speak out their mind. She insisted that “we cannot always blame Chinese leaders for holding positional power tightly or being unwilling to empower followers”. She also doubted if Western distributed leadership ideas are applicable to Chinese context. She seemed to demonstrate a more complex understanding of Chinese organisational realities after the course.

Respondents also claimed that efforts should be made to integrate the essence of Chinese leadership ideas with advanced Western leadership perspectives. About 20% of respondents made it explicit that an appropriate leadership model in China is to “integrate scientific management with humanistic approaches” (Nathan). It should be noted that many contemporary scholars also echo this view. However, it remains to be seen whether this really works in view of the seemingly conflicting philosophies and conceptions embedded in these two perspectives. A system official (Diana) placed an emphasis on “achieving a balance between democratic decision-making and scientific management”. Her view was shared by one of her counterparts (Bruce). He insisted “scientific management emphasizing control and strict regulations” should be integrated with contemporary Western management notions “which stress shared vision, consultation and empowerment”. Another system official (Felix) made similar comments and also emphasised such balance in leadership practice.

Local context, cultural background and qualities of followers need to be considered when adapting Western leadership theories. We may rationally propose that we should have flattened organisational structure and democratic management. But in reality this can hardly be achieved. We need to consider the qualities of organisational members. If their qualities are not up to the desirable standard, enforcing shared leadership or flattened structure may bring trouble to an organisation. … We need to incorporate
scientific management characterised by control and strict regulations with modern humanitarian management ideas (Felix).

About a quarter of respondents further analysed the structural, cultural and social constraints. They commented that “changing entrenched ideas” and “promoting democratic awareness” will be “a long and incremental process” (e.g. George, Felix and Steven). As educational leaders, they will try to exert their influence and promote democratic processes in China. For instance, a principal (Nathan) commented that the Chinese leaders have made great efforts in engaging followers and developing their wisdom and creativity. He insisted that due to structural constraints, a leader is always situated in a hierarchical pyramid, separated by different layers. He went on to say, “vertical or top down leadership is prevalent in such a structure, but horizontal leadership or coordination is neglected.” According to him, it seems to be unrealistic to adopt democratic management or flattened structure without considering Chinese contexts. However, he was optimistic that Chinese educational leaders will promote this democratic process within their sphere of influence. A system official (Diana) shared his view. She commented that with regard to decision-making, Western leaders seem to “emphasise consultation and collective wisdom” while Chinese leaders “rely more on their own experience, wisdom or even positional power.” Decisions may sometimes be made based on extensive inquiries, but mostly made on whimsical or sudden ideas of a leader. She insisted that “the percolation model is more appropriate and it will be an incremental changing process”.

This study suggests that there is a discourse of reflective exploration here which should be emphasised. It supports the claims that countries with developed traditions of leadership do not simply accept or import other cultural traditions of leadership without reflection.

### 7.4.4 Category L-D Leadership as Teamwork Leaders

This conception was reported by 80% of respondents before the course. At that time, they emphasised collaboration and collective wisdom of members of leadership teams. However, only three respondents made explicit comments about this after the course. Little explicit reference was made about “teams of leaders” or “leadership teams”. Respondents appeared to use “teamwork” or “team leadership” in a much broader sense
than they did before. Collaboration and consultation among team members, not necessarily leaders who hold official positions, was suggested. It is interesting to note that respondents believed many Western theories are not new to them, including team leadership or cultivating teamwork spirit. This suggests that their conception of leadership as teamwork leaders may have been extended somewhat in a conscious or an unconscious way by the course.

For instance, a school principal (Isabella) summarised her understandings about her role as a leader. She viewed a leader as a spiritual guide in an organisation, a manager, a coordinator of human relationship, and an organiser. She believed “team leadership should be emphasised to involve teachers in decision-making and achieve organisational goals”. A system official (Eric) indicated many theories were not new to them at all and had similarities with the ideas they already knew. For example, learning organisation theories may share similarities with humanitarian management ideas. He insisted on the belief that “leaders are collaborators, service providers and coordinators in a team or organisation”. He seemed to place more emphasis on team spirit than before. His view was echoed by a university administrator (Paula). She claimed there seemed to be no fundamental differences between tenets of Western and Chinese leadership ideas. She believed basic theories from both traditions contained similar beliefs even although Chinese differ in values and cultural background from Westerners. She emphasised “the purpose of leadership is to achieve a goal, and teamwork spirit is important”. This suggests that respondents may have paid more attention to teamwork spirit or team leadership as collaboration among a broader base of members than they did before. Explicit references to collaborative or participative leadership will be classified as another conception L-F and discussed later.

7.4.5 Category L-E Leadership as Vision and Strategic Planning

Around one third of the respondents claimed to hold this conception prior to the course but it was reported by three fourths of respondents after the course. This suggests a growth in their awareness of visionary and strategic leadership. Respondents believed a leader should be visionary and forward looking, foresee the trend of organisational and social development, act proactively, and adopt strategic plans to achieve goals. It is suggested that leadership goes beyond the boundary of authority or power. For instance, a university administrator (Steven) considered a leader as a guide or facilitator of an
organisation, “who is situated at the forefront of the complex environment and organisation”. A leader is expected to respond quickly and proactively to the external environment. Steven believed that in terms of insight and observing ability, “a leader is more visionary and forward looking, whose philosophy and values also count when making decisions.” Another system official (Tony) expressed similar views. He stated that a leader is a visionary and charismatic person who directs followers to achieve certain tasks or shared organisational goals. A leader seldom relies on positional power to force followers to obey his order. He insisted that “a leader is not a privileged person above others, but a visionary person ahead of others”. This suggests a major shift from managerial and operational perspectives of leadership.

This view was reflected in the conceptions held by respondents before the course but their perspectives seemed to be deeper after the course. Around 40% of respondents indicated that they began to realize being a solitary visionary leader was not enough since a leader should “get staff involved in shaping the vision and make them own the vision” (e.g. Bruce, Steven). Their perspectives about organisational goals or vision were broadened after the course, because vision is no longer limited to “keen insight” or “an overall perspective” of individual leaders. It is more of a common goal owned and shared by all organisational members. In other words, creating a vision or strategic planning was no longer regarded as the job of official leaders. Involvement of organisational members in forming the vision or strategic plan was now considered equally important. The notion of shared vision and motivation was heavily emphasised in achieving organisational goals. This insight was shared across school, system and university sectors.

For instance, a school principal (Hilary) believed a leader should not be the ultimate decision maker of everything. She proclaimed her role is to “solicit good ideas from organisational members, help them to reach consensus, and then commit them to the shared vision.” She also placed an emphasis on teamwork and collective wisdom of everyone in the leadership process. Her view was echoed by system officials. Bruce used to regard a leader as one “who has personal charisma and proposes encouraging slogans or goals at appropriate times so that others can follow.” He began to realize that proposing a slogan was far from being enough. He believed “the slogan should be a shared vision, which comes from followers, shared and owned by them”. Felix also
reiterated that the role of a leader is to “create a shared vision or common goals” and then “motivate and commit followers to achieve the goals”. Cindy expressed similar ideas. She insisted that a leader “engages all organisational members to the common goals and fully tap their potentials.” Other university administrators (Oliver, Steven) also placed an emphasis on motivating and engaging organisational members to achieve shared vision or goals.

Respondents further illustrated the importance of “promoting a learning culture in an organisation” in order to create a shared vision (e.g. Eric, Michael, Cindy). They suggested that different educational sectors may have different cultures, thus determining the way of shaping the vision or organisational goals. A principal (George) commented that educational system administrators acted like line managers, “who carry out policies from higher level administrators faithfully or modify them slightly according to the local contexts.” He claimed that they may seldom have opportunities to sketch a blueprint for their organisations or commit the followers to a shared vision. Comparatively speaking, school leaders have more flexibility than system administrators. He as a principal usually proposes ideas and consults teachers extensively. He believed that “staff play an active role in creating a vision or mission statement for the school.”

About one fifth of respondents elaborated on their understandings about differences between leadership and management, or between a leader and a manager. This suggests a shift in their conceptions from an operational or managerial orientation prior to the course to a visionary and strategic leadership orientation after the course. It is interesting to note that principals tended to regard themselves as both leaders and managers who take on the roles of facilitators and implementers in school contexts (e.g. Hilary, Jeremy). System officials and university administrators appeared to show more interest in clarifying their previous conceptual confusions and emphasised their role as leaders. A system official (Eric) claimed that “a leader is a decision maker at macro level and a manager is an implementer at micro level”. A university administrator insisted “management is like putting a ladder against a wall in a right way, while leadership is like putting a ladder against a right wall”. Leadership is doing right things while management is doing things rightly. Leadership is at a macro strategic level while management is at micro operational level. Management is technically oriented while
leadership is artistically oriented. Another system official (Bruce) further illustrated the difference between leadership and management. He placed an emphasis on a leader who plays a decisive role in planning a shared vision of an organisation.

Management is related to rules, regulations, accountability, control and obedience. Leadership has broader meanings in addition to control. It is mainly about creating a vision and making the team or organisational members commit to the shared vision. Leadership emphasises strategic planning and management emphasises tactics. A leader acts as a director of board while a manager acts as a professional agent (Bruce).

Three respondents (Kevin, Nathan, Adam) emphasised that they began to link visionary leadership with strategic leadership and organisational development after the course. They also associated visionary leadership to personal, team, and organisational learning and development. The notion of a leader as “a conductor” and “facilitator” was emphasised. This suggests that their perspectives had become more integrative and extensive after the course. A school principal (Nathan) viewed a leader as “a conductor of an orchestra, a coordinator of human relationship, promoter of problem solving, and facilitator of organisational learning.” He believed a leader was not necessarily the most intelligent or capable person in an organisation, but one who could “create a cohesive organisational culture” to engage every one to work for a shared vision. He insisted a leader should “constantly improve his mental model, engage in personal, team and organisational learning” so that every organisational member committed to common goals. A system official (Adam) expressed similar ideas. He used to stress the importance of personal leadership or self-cultivation but began to place an emphasis on a leader’s influence upon the followers. He believed “the main function of leadership has shifted from control and implementation to vision and motivation”. He considered the role of a leader as a conductor “who sometimes is at the front or at the back of staff, motivating them to commit to a common goal”.

The research findings suggest that this conception places an emphasis on the role of leaders who shape the visions shared and owned by organisational members and commit them to the shared visions. It also stresses strategic thinking and planning in the leadership process. Such visionary and strategic leadership was viewed as essential for Chinese educational leaders in the twenty-first century.
7.4.6 Category L-F Leadership as Consultation and Collaboration

This conception emerged as a new one after the course, and 60% of the respondents made explicit comments about it. They tended to illustrate their understandings mainly from two perspectives: leadership as consultation or consultative leadership, and leadership as collaboration or collaborative leadership. Both perspectives are similar in that attention has been paid to involvement and empowerment of staff in the decision-making process. However, the difference seems to lie in the high level of participation and equal relationship between leaders and staff particularly stressed by the collaborative leadership perspective.

The consultative leadership perspective places an emphasis on “extensive consultation” and “empowering followers” in formulating policies or making decisions. A leader is expected to consult, facilitate, mentor or empower ordinary organisational members so that they voice their opinions in the consultation and decision-making process. Some respondents suggested “democratic consultation and consensus making” (Min zhu ji zhong zhi) advocated in China is similar to such consultative process. A school principal (Michael) commented that a leader cannot only rely on ordering followers, but guiding and facilitating followers towards a right direction is essential. He believed a good leader keeps information channels flowing smoothly and collects information from multiple sources. He placed a strong emphasis on “extensive consultation with teachers, students, and parents.” A system official (Adam) commented that he paid more attention to “consulting staff in his department or soliciting opinions from a wider circle’ before making or implementing a local educational policy. A university administrator (Oliver) shared similar views, who considered “listening to teachers and raising their participatory awareness” as important.

In consultative leadership a leader becomes an active participant and listener in soliciting feedback while staff have the opportunity to get involved in decision-making processes. However, a leader may assume that it is his prerogative to decide whether or not to adopt their suggestions. Consequently staff enthusiasm in participation will be dampened if they think such consultation is only “a token”. A school principal (Kevin) made explicit comments about it. He placed an emphasis on the result and process of leadership. He commented in the process of accomplishing a task, “constant reflection, feedback, modification and adjustment are needed”. He insisted that in the leadership
process “a leader should make decisions based on extensive consultation in the real sense, not a token”. This suggests a warning against such tendencies and an imperative to ensure transparent and effective consultation in practice.

Collaborative leadership was also termed as “shared”, “participative”, or “distributed leadership”. This perspective emphasises shared and collective learning and dispersed decision-making in an organisation. Leadership is no longer seen as the preserve of a single person but is distributed at the different levels of an organisation (Gronn, 1998, 1999; Lakomski, 1999, 2001). Multiple notions of leadership are valued and multiple forms of leadership are believed to exist in an organisation. Moreover, an equal and collaborative relationship between staff and leaders is stressed. Leaders are leading learners, and everyone is a learner who can also play leadership roles depending on his or her particular skill, expertise or ability. The key element to collaborative leadership is the shared ownership of decisions and active involvement of every member. Leadership is no longer viewed as a privilege but a right and responsibility of everybody.

Respondents began to place an emphasis on shared and distributed leadership after the course. They maintained that ordinary organisational members should get involved in the decision-making process and take on leadership roles. They also explicitly proposed the notion of “teacher leadership” and “student leadership”. This view was particularly stressed by principals and university administrators. This suggests they were more receptive to Western ideas of shared leadership than system officials. A school principal (George) explained the literal meaning of leadership (Ling Dao) in Chinese was “lead” and “facilitate”. He considered a leader as a guide, a facilitator and a service provider who also takes on managerial roles sometimes. He emphasised that a leader directs, motivates and inspires followers to accomplish tasks and achieve organisational goals. Simply managing followers is not enough for a good leader. He insisted that “teachers and students should get actively involved in decision-making processes”. University administrators expressed similar ideas. Tony proposed distributed and participative leadership notion in an organisation, and believed leadership “should be shared at different levels of an organisation”. Oliver gave more complex illustrations about his understanding. According to him, “leadership means a leading process, a concept, a working style, or an awareness”. A person with leading awareness commits others to a common goal and common approach, for which they are mutually accountable. He
proclaimed that it is possible for a person “who has no official position to play the role of leadership.” He also made it explicit that “everyone including ordinary teachers may have leadership awareness or exert some influence on others.” This suggests a radical departure from earlier assumptions about leadership as positional power.

About one fifth of respondents indicated that in participative leadership, leader and followers are collaborators, indicating an equal relationship rather than a hierarchical natured relationship characterized by “control and obey” or “order and implement” (e.g. Bruce, and Steven). This view was shared across the three sectors. A university administrator (Oliver) emphasised that leadership is not limited to a particular person or position. He regarded it as “an interpersonal relationship, a force of influence, or a change of leadership style.” He insisted that “leadership emphasises a relationship of cooperation and coordination”. His view was echoed by another school principal (Jeremy), who reported significant change in his conceptions of leadership. He viewed a leader as a key figure in an organisation, “who is a proposer and designer of organisational goals, an implementer in the operational process, a monitor and evaluator of this process”. He went on to make further illustrations.

In the process of achieving organisational goals, leaders and followers are collaborators. My previous belief was that a leader is a pioneer or a fire fighter, who is at the front to guide followers or urge them with whips at the back. I now believe a leader should get involved in the process and become an organisational member. With regard to leadership, control and guidance were emphasised, but now cooperation and collaboration are stressed (Jeremy).

Respondents (e.g. George, Hilary, Felix, Steven) believed it is unrealistic to adopt Western leadership theories and practices without aligning them with Chinese contexts. They stated “promoting democratic leadership” will be a long and incremental process in China. However, they indicated that “extensive consultation” and “democratic leadership” will gradually become a future trend in China. For instance, a school principal (Hilary) commented that Chinese educational leaders can incorporate some Western ideas, especially democratic ideas, to their practice. She believed “an integration of the essence of Western and Chinese ideas will be a desirable alternative for Chinese educational leaders to respond to the changing environment.” She went on
to say “China is moving towards a democratic society, although it takes time.” She maintained that social development has posed high demands for educational leaders. “An individual or a think tank can hardly deal with all complex issues in reality” and therefore shared leadership and flattened structure will become more needed in the future.

This study suggests that conceptions of consultative leadership and participatory decision-making were more valued by respondents after the course than before its commencement. Humanistic approaches were also proposed to replace predominant bureaucratic and patriarchal commands and rational scientific management. This conception of leadership as consultation and collaboration is similar to some key ideas proposed in transformational leadership, leadership for learning communities, and distributed leadership in Western literature (e.g. Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978; Gronn, 1999; Lakomski, 2001). This suggests an impact of these Western perspectives on the participants.

**7.5 Analysis of Conceptions after the Course**

Table 7.4 reveals that respondents held a variety of conceptions about leadership after the course, as they did before the course, but these conceptions now extended across six (not five) categories. This indicates that it continued to be common for individuals to hold multiple conceptions of leadership simultaneously.

This study suggests that it is possible for an individual to have various understandings and interpretations about leadership which may co-exist and operate according to specific situations. It suggests that categories L-A to L-D focus more on inherited thinking about leadership while categories L-E and L-F reflect more sophisticated and complex conceptions. A respondent may hold inherited leadership perspectives (L-A to L-D) and more complex conceptions (L-E to L-F) simultaneously.

For example, as can be seen from Table 7.4, Michael held a conception of leadership as vision and strategic planning (L-E), or leadership as consultation and collaboration (L-F), but also believed leadership involved non-positional power (L-B). Conversely, Kevin seemed to have rejected traditional thinking and espouse more complex perspectives of visionary and collaborative leadership.
Table 7.4 Classification of Leadership Conceptions Held by Individuals after the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>L-A</th>
<th>L-B</th>
<th>L-C</th>
<th>L-D</th>
<th>L-E</th>
<th>L-F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S1M</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-B</td>
<td></td>
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<td>L-E</td>
<td>L-F</td>
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<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
<td>L-E</td>
<td>L-F</td>
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<td>Eric</td>
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<td>L-C</td>
<td></td>
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<td>L-E</td>
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<td>L-E</td>
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<td>L-B</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* S represents system administrators from local, municipal, or provincial educational departments, P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. Source: analysis of data.

7.5.1 Variations in Conceptual Change about Leadership

In this study, the classifications of extent of conceptual change was primarily based on self-reports from respondents. Such principles of classification also applied to conceptual change in leadership. It should be noted that conceptual change in this study is determined by qualitative rather than quantitative techniques. It is difficult to quantify particular changes in one’s conceptions. However, a respondent’s self-reported change can be linked to the movement of conceptions from inherited thinking before the course to more sophisticated understanding after the course, as indicated in Table 7.5. The extent of conceptual change reported by respondents was identified at first. Interview data were also analysed to quantify the movement across the number of categories.
In this study, “large change” refers to obvious conceptual change reported, or when a participant’s leadership conceptions moved across two categories; “moderate change” means some detectable change occurred or a student modified his or her previous conceptions, and it is also signified by movement across one additional category compared to pre-course reports; “small/no change” means no obvious change was reported or a student’s perceptions remained constant after the course. The “large changes” in leadership conceptions held by individuals are highlighted by shading in Table 7.5.

Table 7.5 Self-Reported Changes in the Conceptions of Leadership after the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Before 66 cases</th>
<th>After 53 cases</th>
<th>Movement in categories</th>
<th>Self-reported change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S1M</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>L-B L-D L-E</td>
<td>L-B L-E L-F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S2M</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-C L-E L-F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S3F</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>L-A L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-B L-E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>S4F</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>L-A L-C</td>
<td>L-B L-C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S5M</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-D L-E</td>
<td>L-B L-C L-D L-E</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>S6M</td>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-B L-C L-E L-F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-D</td>
<td>L-C L-E L-F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>P2F</td>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-E L-F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>P3F</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>L-A L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-C L-D L-E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>P4M</td>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>L-A L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-E L-F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>P5M</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>L-A L-D</td>
<td>L-E L-F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>P6M</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>L-A L-B</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>P7M</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-D L-E</td>
<td>L-B L-E L-F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>P8M</td>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-C L-E L-F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>U1M</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C L-D</td>
<td>L-E L-F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>U2F</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>L-A L-D</td>
<td>L-B L-C L-D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>U3M</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C</td>
<td>L-C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>U4M</td>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>L-A L-D</td>
<td>L-B L-C L-E L-F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>U5M</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-D</td>
<td>L-B L-E L-F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>U6M</td>
<td>William</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C</td>
<td>L-A L-B L-C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note*: S represents system administrators from local or provincial educational departments, P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. Source: analysis of data.

Table 7.5 shows the specific categories of leadership conceptions held by 20 respondents before and after undertaking the course. Six (30%) respondents reported large changes in their conceptions of learning and nine (45%) respondents modified or
expanded their conceptions over one year of study. Five (25%) respondents reported no obvious change and their conceptions seemed to remain constant after the course. It can be seen that generally speaking, the course had a relatively strong influence upon participants’ conceptions of leadership because a high percentage (75%) of students reported large or moderate change in their perspectives about leadership after undertaking the course.

7.5.2 Self-reported Change in Conceptions

Six respondents reported large changes in their conceptions as well as reporting increased awareness of the significance of such changes. A principal (George) commented that he did not expect to have “gained so much insight about leadership” because his major was educational management. A system official (Bruce) declared he was different after taking the course “in terms of leadership practice, strategies and plans proposed, ways of thinking, and presentations at meetings”. A university administrator (Tony) reported the significant expansion in his leadership perspective, commenting it had become “more comprehensive and deeper than before”. Some other principals (e.g. Hilary, Jeremy, and Kevin) also explained their change in similar ways. They indicated that they had not “thought deeply or seriously” about the issue of leadership and had tended to take it for granted. Their ideas were heavily influenced by the traditional thinking and contemporary practice. The exposure to Western leadership ideas, sharing perspectives with peers, and personal reflection had “modified”, “expanded” or “transformed” their previous assumptions about leadership. They began to have a deeper understanding about leadership and relate leadership with learning and personal, organisational and social development. Before the course, they had seldom associated learning with leadership, but now had come to place an emphasis on their role as leading learners in an organisation.

Nine respondents reported moderate change in their conceptions of leadership. They insisted that their conceptions did not undergo major change, but some modification or confirmation of previous ideas were reported. A school principal (Nathan) commented that he used to emphasise standard management. His views were expanded after the course and emphasised the importance of aligning consultative leadership with strict scientific management. A system official (Cindy) declared the course made her reflect on many leadership issues like strategic planning, and she had began to place an
emphasis on strategic and visionary leadership. Other respondents (Adam, Felix, Michael, and Steven) made similar comments, stressing modification and reinforcement rather than radical change in their conceptions.

Five respondents denied the course had any important influence upon their conceptions of leadership, although they admitted slight modifications may have occurred during the course. A university administrator (William) disagreed with Western definitions of leadership and valued Chinese leadership perspectives. Another university administrator (Paula) and a system official (Cindy) commented that there are little differences between the basic tenets of Chinese and Western leadership ideas although China differs in values and cultural background from the West. Another senior system official (Eric) insisted that the Western leadership theories or concepts introduced in class were not new to him. For instance, he believed the learning organisation theories shared similarity with humanistic approaches currently advocated in China. Another university administrator (Richard) appeared to show little change in his leadership conceptions and had some difficulties in study. It should be noted that he found it hard to describe his understanding of leadership and even skipped this question during the second interview.

7.5.3 Multiple Conceptions of Leadership

Table 7.5 also reveals that respondents held several conceptions simultaneously. Sometimes these conceptions were not in a neat sequential order as reported in the six categories. For instance, a school principal (Jeremy) reported three conceptions of leadership as positional power, leadership art, and teamwork leaders (L-A, L-C and L-D) before the course, but did not mention leadership as non-positional power (L-B). A system official (Felix) held more complex conceptions of visionary and consultative leadership (L-E, L-F) after the course, but he reported inherited thinking of leadership as non-positional power (L-B) and leadership art (L-C) as well.

Although most respondents held more diversified and complex conceptions after the course, this does not necessarily mean that they completely abandoned their previous conceptions. Similarly, conceptions which were unmentioned in second interviews might have been in operation at the same time with other newly developed conceptions depending on the circumstances. A number of researchers have argued that an individual might have multiple or even conflicting conceptions and use them
selectively, depending upon circumstances (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Bowden, 1988; Gao & Watkins, 2001b; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Pratt, 1992b). This study indicates that the Chinese educational leaders held several conceptions simultaneously and tended to utilize them selectively according to different situations. This provides empirical support for the contention of these researchers.

### 7.5.4 Different Focus and Orientations of Leadership Conceptions

Table 7.6 shows the frequency of responses and interviewees about leadership conceptions prior to and after the course. The common leadership conceptions before the course were L-A, L-B, L-C and L-D, with L-A being the predominant conception. This suggests respondents held inherited assumptions about leadership, mainly focusing on accomplishing tasks and directive leadership. About 35% of the respondents held more complex conceptions of leadership as vision and strategic planning (L-E). No explicit references were made about conceptions of leadership as consultation and collaboration (L-F). The initial conceptions of leadership concentrated on a smaller range of conceptions from L-A to L-D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Before Frequency of responses and percentage</th>
<th>Before Frequency of interviewees and percentage</th>
<th>After Frequency of responses and percentage</th>
<th>After Frequency of interviewees and percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>19 (28.8%)</td>
<td>19 (95%)</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>13 (19.7%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-C</td>
<td>11 (16.7%)</td>
<td>11 (55%)</td>
<td>12 (22.6%)</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-D</td>
<td>16 (24.2%)</td>
<td>16 (80%)</td>
<td>3 (5.7%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-E</td>
<td>7 (10.6%)</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>15 (28.3%)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-F</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>12 (22.6%)</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total responses 66 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
<td>Total responses 53 (100%)</td>
<td>Total interviewees 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

Table 7.6 reveals that the conceptions of leadership held by respondents after the course spread across a wider range from L-A to L-F. The prevalent conceptions after the course were L-B, L-C, L-E, and L-F, with L-E and L-F being the most commonly held
conceptions. The data suggest that respondents enriched their perspectives and held more complex conceptions after the course. They had come to attach more importance to visionary and strategic leadership, and consultative and collaborative practice than they did before. They also emphasised the importance of leadership art as relating Western leadership theory to Chinese context. They tended to focus upon motivation and collaborative orientations.

### 7.5.5 Differences Represented among Sectors

As shown in Table 7.7, all sectors reported some large or moderate change, but school principals were the only group whose total membership reported large or moderate change. Half of school principals reported large change in their conceptions of learning, while one university administrator and one system administrator reported large conceptual change. Half of system officials and school principals reported moderate change while one third of university administrators reported moderate change. Half of university administrators and one third of system officials reported little change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Small/No</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System officials</td>
<td>1 (16.7%)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School principals</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University administrators</td>
<td>1 (16.7%)</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

Some difference can be detected among sectors in terms of large conceptual change. The finding suggests that school principals were more likely to adopt new ideas and transform their perspectives of leadership compared with their counterparts from two other sectors. In this study, university administrators and system officials tended to place greater value on their original ideas. School principals seemed to be most receptive to the new ideas and university administrators seemed to be most resistant to alternative perspectives. This can be related to the types of organisations they worked in. Principals seemed to have more opportunities to develop expanded leadership approaches whereas university administrators and system officials tended to have less discretionary power because they worked in larger, less flexible organisations.
7.6 Relations between Categories of Leadership Conceptions

Relations between categories of conceptions of leadership are presented in Table 7.8. Within each conception, the phenomenon of leadership is experienced as having a referential aspect focusing on the meaning of the experience and a structural aspect. Within the structural aspect, there is a what facet referring to the content of leadership, and a how aspect referring to the acts and outcomes of leadership. The conceptions of leadership can be put into a loosely coupled hierarchical structure according to their respective inclusiveness and complexity, in as much as each conception is depicting a part or parts of the same whole phenomenon of leadership (see Bowden, 1996; Marton & Booth, 1997; Tang, 2001).

Table 7.8 Relations between Categories of Leadership Conceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership categories</th>
<th>The meaning of leadership (referential aspect)</th>
<th>The objective of leading (what aspect)</th>
<th>The act of leading (how aspect)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L-A</td>
<td>The power and authority resides in the official positions and at the top of the organisational pyramid (hierarchical, bureaucratic and patriarchal leadership).</td>
<td>To transmit predetermined objectives in a strictly hierarchical structure.</td>
<td>The exercise of control and management is emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-B</td>
<td>The power stems from personal qualities or expertise, professional authorities (charismatic and authoritative leadership).</td>
<td>A leader is a directive individual with idiosyncratic vision and goals.</td>
<td>Followers develop emotional and ideological commitments to leaders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A leader relies heavily on charisma, morality and personal qualities to motivate followers.
### L-C
**Leadership as practical art**

The qualities, characteristics and skills required by a leader are determined to a large extent by the demands of the situation in which he functions as a leader and by the maturity level of followers (situational and contingency leadership).

Leadership is perceived as an interactive phenomenon within groups. Leaders are self-conscious and reflective practitioners who could be trained to adapt leadership styles to situations. The organisational goals have been determined at the top. Consideration for subordinates is emphasised. There is still a high power distance between the leader and followers.

### L-D
**Leadership as teamwork leaders**

Collaboration and consultation among a team of leaders are emphasised (collective and team leadership).

The decision-making power lies with a team of leaders at the top and the middle level rather than individuals at the broader base of organisations. The division among top level leaders, middle level managers and low level followers is still clear.

### L-E
**Leadership as vision and strategic planning**

Foresee the trend of organisational and social development and adopt strategic plans to achieve the goal (visionary and strategic leadership).

A leader is visionary who facilitates and empowers followers to achieve the strategic goals and shared vision. The division between leaders and followers becomes blurred. Leaders sometimes become participants.

### L-F
**Leadership as consultation and collaboration**

Consultative leadership emphasises extensive consultation and empowerment. Leadership is shared and distributed at the different levels of an organisation (shared and collaborative leadership).

Leaders play pivotal roles as designers, teachers and stewards of the learning process. Multiple notions of leadership are valued and deliberate efforts are made to share power throughout organisations. There is no absolute distinction between followers and leader. Leaders are leading learners and everyone is a learner who can also play leadership roles.

Source: analysis of data.
7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the findings about conceptions of leadership held by the Chinese educational leaders before and after undertaking a Western leadership course. Their initial conceptions of five categories of leadership and the analysis are described. Their conceptions of leadership developed after the course and interpretation of those conceptions are also presented. A list of the logical relations between the categories of conceptions concludes the chapter.
Chapter 8 Implications of Findings about Conceptual Changes

8.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the third subsidiary research question “What changes (if any) have occurred in Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership after undertaking the course, and what accounted for such changes from their perspective?” An analytical framework for learning conceptions is first presented. Change from a content-focused and utilitarian orientation to a meaning-focused and developmental orientation is described in terms of participants becoming increasingly and focally aware of the critical aspects of understanding learning. Based on the analytical framework, five themes about learning are then examined to give a more comprehensive picture of the conceptual change path undergone by participants. An analytical framework for leadership conceptions is also presented. Change from a task-focused and directive orientation to a motivation-focused and collaborative orientation is then described in terms of participants becoming increasingly and focally aware of the critical aspects of understanding leadership. Based on the analytical framework, five themes about leadership are examined. A discussion of the conceptual change process and self-reported interpretations of conceptual change is presented in the final section.

8.2 An Analytical Framework about Conceptions of Learning

In this study, the researcher proposed a general framework for describing the categories of learning conceptions held by educational leaders who undertook the Western leadership development course in Zhejiang, China, and the relationship among these learning conceptions (see Figure 8.1).

At the lower part of Figure 8.1 are the seven conceptions identified from the interviews where participants reported their conceptions of learning before and after the course. The two orientations stand at the upper part of the figure. These seven conceptions of learning can be considered as first-order concepts and the two orientations as second-order concepts (see Punch, 1998).
As shown in Figure 8.1, Category X-A (Learning as acquiring knowledge and skills), Category X-B (Learning for instrumental purposes), and Category X-C (Learning as applied knowledge) are covered by a content focused and utilitarian orientation.

Another orientation, meaning focused and developmental orientation, covers four first-order conceptions: Category X-D (Learning as understanding the world), Category X-E (Learning as transforming perspectives and personal development), Category X-F (Learning as promoting organisational development), and Category X-G (Learning as promoting social development). An arrow from a content focused/utilitarian orientation to a meaning focused/developmental orientation suggests the conceptual change path undergone by most Chinese educational leaders in this study. Category X-D is shaded implying that it is a linking conception between the two orientations because a better understanding of the world could be a necessary step leading to personal, organisational and social development.

The research findings in Chapter 6 show that before the course, participants’ conceptions were limited to categories X-A to X-D and most reported conceptions from X-A to X-C. After the course, most respondents reported categories X-D to X-G. This study suggests a tendency of movement from lower order thinking to higher order, more complex conceptions among most participants.

Based on this analytical framework and research results in Chapter 6, the researcher examined categories of conceptions about learning reported by 20 interviewees prior to and after the course. Table 8.1 indicates that around two thirds of the respondents
reported a shift of their conceptions from a content/utilitarian orientation towards a meaning/developmental orientation after undertaking the course. Almost one third of interviewees reported that their conceptions either developed or remained constant within a meaning/developmental orientation after the course. Two interviewees’ conceptions of learning were limited to a content-utilitarian orientation prior to and after the course.

Table 8.1 Changes in Orientations of Conceptions of Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in orientations</th>
<th>Individual Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed from a content/utilitarian orientation to a meaning/developmental orientation</td>
<td>Bruce, Cindy, Diana, Felix, George, Hilary, Jeremy, Kevin, Michael, Oliver, Paula, William (n=12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or remained within a meaning/developmental orientation</td>
<td>Adam, Eric, Isabella, Nathan, Steven, Tony (n=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or remained within a content/utilitarian orientation</td>
<td>Luke, Richard (n=2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

As shown in Table 8.1, Luke and Richard still held limited, lower-order understandings about learning after undertaking the course. Among six interviewees who reported a meaning/developmental orientation prior to and after the course, Eric and Isabella did not seem to report any obvious change in their conceptions (both held X-D before and after the course). Adam, Nathan, Steven, and Tony indicated an expanded awareness of learning after the course (see Table 6.5 for detailed information on conceptions of learning reported by individual interviewees).

It is not surprising that different participants may report various extent of conceptual change after a professional development program given the mediating factors like backgrounds, workplace culture, personal experience or other contextual factors. This result confirms the findings in Tang’s (2001) study where participants reported various extent of conceptual change in learning and teaching after undertaking teacher education courses. In this study, interviewees’ self-reported interpretations about their conceptual change will be further explored in the final section of this chapter.

Table 8.2 summarises the qualitatively different ways of experiencing learning by interviewees prior to and after undertaking the course. The description of each category
of conception and examples from individual respondents are listed as well. The summary reveals the complexity of learning conceptions and also suggests the participants’ self-reflection and conceptual development.

Table 8.2 Conceptions of Learning in General

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-A Learning as acquiring knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Accumulate, gather, receive, absorb information</td>
<td>Self-study and acquiring knowledge from teachers (Diana). Learning process is a transmissive or receptive process (Tony). Gaining knowledge and skills (Paula). Absorb knowledge from books or experts. (Steven).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquire and develop skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get to know systematic theories and body of knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-B Learning for instrumental purposes</td>
<td>Prepare for exam</td>
<td>Obtaining a degree or certificate means the end of learning (Hilary). The purpose of learning is to complete assignments, pass the exams or gain qualifications (Jeremy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete assignments</td>
<td>The contents of learning are limited to work related or subject knowledge (George).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtain degrees</td>
<td>Assessment criteria are defined in terms of mastering knowledge and skills (Cindy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accomplish work tasks</td>
<td>Learning disciplinary knowledge for the sake of work. The purpose of learning is to get one task done or doing research (William).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mastery in discipline and research field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-C Learning as applied knowledge</td>
<td>Apply knowledge acquired to real life situations</td>
<td>Study theories systematically and apply them into practice (Adam). Learn some useful knowledge and relate it to my professional practice (Paula).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relate theories to professional practice</td>
<td>Apply knowledge and theories into practice and help solving dilemmas in workplaces (Oliver).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contextualise concepts and theories; Further build up knowledge base</td>
<td>To contextualize concepts and theories acquired, then further develop existing knowledge base (George).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-D Learning as understanding the world</td>
<td>Develop understanding through application and making inquiry</td>
<td>To make sense of the phenomena and develop understanding through application of knowledge (Nathan). Utilize knowledge and perspectives gained to deepen understanding (Tony).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use theory or perspectives to make sense of the world</td>
<td>To acquire, integrate, analyse and synthesise knowledge (Nathan).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrate, analyse and synthesise knowledge</td>
<td>Enhancing learning abilities enables us to better know and adapt to the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Develop metacognition and abilities

Experiential learning, cooperative learning, informal learning, and lifelong learning can facilitate understanding

changing world (Michael).
Thinking, critical reflection, and interaction with others count in the learning process (Isabella).
Learning occurs throughout one’s life and happens in formal institutions and informal interactions (Diana).

| X-E Learning as transforming perspectives and personal development | Change ways of thinking; Identify, reflect on and challenge assumptions; transform, expand, modify perspectives | To change one’s deeply held beliefs and thinking habits (Tony).
Learning is creation and a process of innovation and transforming assumptions (Adam).
Widening views and extending my understanding through learning (Oliver).
Learning means self-knowledge, self-exploration and self-development (Diana).
Learning is personal growth, an experiential and reflective process (Kevin). |
| X-F Learning as promoting organisational development | Facilitate organisational learning as well as individual learning |
A dynamic changing process leading to personal and organisational development
Organisational learning is to achieve organisational goals and shared vision |
| One is not only responsible for his own learning but also for team and organisational learning (Kevin).
Learning is indispensable to personal and organisational development (Adam).
Learning is a changing and dynamic process responsive to the rapidly changing world (Oliver).
Organisational learning is based on continual learning and reflection by every organisational member (Felix). |
| X-G Learning as promoting social development | Emancipative perspective of learning |
Facilitate community development
Being a change agent in social reform and development |
| Change the deeply held ideas in society and promote a strong sense of social responsibility (George).
Changing one’s behaviours, transforming society and promoting social civilisation (Bruce).
Influence others and make contributions to society (William).
The ultimate goal of learning is to promote social progress through personal and organisational development (Steven). |

Source: analysis of data.

### 8.3 Themes Derived from Conceptual Change in Learning

Given the analytical framework and the summary of conceptions of learning reported by the interviewees, some general comments are made about the important themes that emerged from this study. The following themes indicate the particular conceptual
change path undergone by most participants in the course. The five themes are presented here as differences between extremes on a continuum of learning conceptions. Respondents were not entirely clustered around their respective extremes before or after the course. It would be more appropriate to think of the conceptions as unevenly spread along a line, one end marked “Chinese learning traditions before the course”, and the other marked “newly developed conceptions after the course”.

Respondents tended to occupy the full range, from one end (a content/utilitarian orientation) to the other end (a meaning/developmental orientation). However, the distribution was decidedly skewed, with responses before the course toward one end and responses after the course toward the other. This situation can also be illustrated by the analogy of a seesaw. Before the course, the weight of the seesaw tended to be placed on one end (a content/utilitarian orientation). After the course, its weight was placed on the other end (a meaning/developmental orientation).

The findings relate to five themes or patterns of conceptions of learning:

- role of learner: passive recipient of knowledge vs. active constructor of knowledge;
- learning approaches: individual learning vs. cooperative learning;
- nature of knowledge: sacred and authoritative knowledge vs. indefinite and contestable knowledge;
- purpose of learning: acquiring knowledge and skills for practical purposes vs. transforming perspective and promoting personal, organisational and social development;
- forms of learning: formal learning vs. informal and lifelong learning.

8.3.1 Role of Learner: Passive Recipient of Knowledge vs. Active Constructor of Knowledge

This theme indicates the dichotomy between the positivist and constructivist views of learning. This can be seen when many respondents shifted their initial conceptions from viewing learning as acquiring established knowledge and skills passively to seeing learning as active construction of meaning and multiple interpretations of the phenomena after the course. Interviewees tended to have positivist ideas about learning and teaching before the course. Their personal learning experience in the class and
exposure to Western learning theories such as adult learning, constructivism and experiential learning helped them change their perspectives. They commented that their understandings about learning had been “expanded” or “reinforced” to a belief that it is about “active personal construction of knowledge” based on prior experience. The parallel shift was to see the role of teacher as a “facilitator” and “guide” of student learning rather than “a knowledge provider to empty containers”. Unlike the passive transmission of knowledge previously emphasised by respondents, “active learning”, “self-directed learning”, “experiential learning” and “reflective learning” were more likely to be emphasised after the course.

The participatory teaching approaches adopted by Australian teachers was fresh to respondents who were used to teacher-centred approaches in their previous learning experiences. Many commented that although they had been exposed to or even studied constructivism before, it was the first time for them to personally experience Western teaching approaches and what constructivism meant in the classroom. Such learning experience also helped them change their conceptions about the role of learners.

Not all respondents liked the Western ways of teaching and learning at the beginning of the course, and it took some time for most participants to get used to more participatory pedagogy. During the first intensive teaching block in April 2002, many students were deeply impressed by a teaching approach which emphasised active interaction between teachers and students, and students with students. But quite a few students questioned the effectiveness of this approach and requested foreign teachers to “elaborate on theories systematically and comprehensively”. They complained that they did not learn much because teachers focused on “knowing students’ views rather than clearly introducing key concepts and theories”. However, there were fewer complaints like this at the second intensive block in October 2003. According to the student feedback from a focus group conducted at the end of the second session, many students indicated they were “gradually getting used to inquiry and interactive learning” and even demanded more time for interaction and participation. By the end of the third teaching block in April 2003, most interviewees proclaimed that they enjoyed participatory learning and believed learning was an active construction of knowledge rather than passive absorption from books or teachers.
As commented by some Chinese scholars, although many current Western educational theories have been introduced to China as a systematic scientific body of knowledge, they may often remain as abstract theories or empty rhetoric hardly applicable to Chinese contexts (e.g. Feng, 2002a; Wu, 2000). This study suggests that personal learning experience might be a good way to relate abstract theories to practice. It also implies that a participatory teaching model and adult learning principles can be adapted to an international education context and maximize student learning outcome.

8.3.2 Learning Approaches: Individual Learning vs. Cooperative Learning

Before the course, the majority of respondents seemed to place a strong emphasis upon individual learners and view “individual learning under the guidance of teachers” as the best way of learning. Self-study or structured learning from books, teachers, experts or authorities was highly valued. “Interaction or collaboration among learners” in the learning process tended to be neglected. Comparatively speaking, respondents attached more importance to cooperative and collaborative learning after the course. A belief that learning is “a social construction of meanings and knowledge” appeared to develop or was reinforced after the course. Most participants began to emphasise cooperative learning and “making full use of rich learning resources” among learners. They realized “a learner is responsible not only for his own learning outcome but also for other learners’ learning”. Learning from others, society, environment, and personal experience was increasingly valued after the course.

The development of participants’ beliefs about cooperative learning and group work can be traced through the three intensive teaching blocks of the course. During the first block, many respondents complained about group work. They questioned the “effectiveness” and “efficiency” of this learning approach, and a few even criticized that “it was totally a waste of time” since they wanted to “learn more knowledge from teachers” and “could hardly learn anything from other students”. However, during the second session, many students claimed that they were coming to “realize the benefit of group work” and were getting gradually used to group discussion. Some claimed that they enjoyed group work and even suggested more time be allocated for group discussion. During the third block, most respondents viewed cooperative learning and group work as an effective learning approach. There were comments about effective management of group work, but not an opposition to it. For instance, appropriate
facilitation, structured topics, and proper size of groups were considered as essential to ensure the effectiveness of group work.

Given the collective and group-related characteristics of Chinese culture, it would seem likely that small groups involving collaboration and cooperation would be a natural way to structure learning for Chinese learners. Yet within the arena of education, the institutions of learning and their infrastructures are highly individualistic (Tang, 1996). Previous research suggests that Chinese learners traditionally value individual learning. Although collaborative approaches like group discussion, pair work, and group presentation are sometimes adopted, they have been far from becoming formal or regular learning approaches in Chinese schools or universities (e.g. Gu & Meng, 2001; Su & Su, 1994; Tang, 1996; Zhu, 2002). Social constructivism emphasises collective sense-making and construction of knowledge. Learning is not considered to be the accretion of bits of information; it involves meaning making and knowledge transformation as learners construct their new and revised understandings integrating new information with existing prior knowledge (Chan, 2001). This study confirms Chan’s (2001) study in Hong Kong schools and suggests social constructivist approaches may promote learning and understanding among Chinese learners.

8.3.3 Nature of Knowledge: Sacred and Authoritative Knowledge vs. Indefinite and Contestable Knowledge

Before undertaking the course, many respondents tended to hold absolute rather than relativistic beliefs about knowledge (Perry, 1968, 1970). They regarded knowledge as static and universal truth which can be readily transmitted from teachers to learners. Knowledge was viewed as “sacred and authoritative” instead of indefinite and contestable. Theories or definitions of concepts were expected to “be mastered by students”, and “there is only one correct answer to a problem.” Many respondents seemed to view knowledge differently after the course. They placed an emphasis on an indefinite, subjective and pluralist notions of knowledge. Their previous assumptions about “objective and single-dimensional” knowledge had been challenged and “an authoritative image of knowledge had been shattered”. They came to realize that knowledge may be “subjective and multi-dimensional” and everyone may have his or her interpretation about a phenomenon. Some interviewees began to view learning as “making inquiry and interpreting the world from different perspectives” rather than
mastering sacred knowledge from books or experts. Multiple interpretations about a phenomenon or personal insight gained from the learning experience were increasingly valued.

A change in respondents’ attitudes towards systematic theories suggests a modification in their epistemological beliefs. Many respondents placed a strong emphasis on “learning systematic theories and using them as guidance in practice” when asked about their initial expectations of the course. They tended to view theories as a well-structured or static body of knowledge which can be readily picked up and applied in real-life situations. During the first teaching block, some respondents felt somewhat disappointed when Australian teachers did not give “comprehensive and systematic illustrations of key theories and concepts” which they expected to master. A few respondents even doubted if the Australian teachers possessed “profound theoretical knowledge”. This is not surprising, because Chinese learners expect teachers to deliver well-structured lectures and elaborate fully on key theories so that they can “internalize and then apply them into practice”. However, during the second block, many respondents commented that they were beginning to like the interactive teaching approaches and appreciated a close link between theories and practice. Some even requested Australian teachers “to spend less time on illustrating theories but introduce more practical models and case studies”. At the end of the course, some respondents commented that their initial expectation of learning systematic theories had not been fully met. However, they did not expect to learn so much since they had changed “some of their educational beliefs and ways of thinking”. For instance, their conceptions about learning as acquiring systematic and absolute truths had been shifted to beliefs about learning as “understanding a phenomenon from multiple perspectives”.

This tendency of change has implications for Chinese educators. In contemporary Chinese education an emphasis has been placed on studying systematic, sacred and authoritative knowledge or theories while insufficient attention has been paid to learners’ prior experience and active roles in constructing their own interpretations about knowledge. This study suggests that learners may interpret a certain phenomenon and construct their understandings from different perspectives. Their interpretations about certain issues are inevitably shaped by their cultural, philosophical and personal positions. There is hardly any absolute truth in social science. Recognizing the existence
of indefinite and contestable knowledge may help to promote creative and critical thinking of Chinese learners to meet the challenges in rapidly changing and complex contexts (Gu & Meng, 2001; Zhu, 2002).

8.3.4 Purpose of Learning: Acquiring Knowledge and Skills for Practical Purposes vs. Transforming Perspectives and Promoting Personal, Organisational and Social Development

Before the course, respondents tended to hold utilitarian and practical views about learning as acquiring certain knowledge or skills to achieve certain ends. The purposes of learning were mostly preparing for examinations, fulfilling course requirements, obtaining degrees or accomplishing certain tasks in the workplace. Learning was also viewed as “application of knowledge in personal and professional life” and helping them “solve dilemmas in workplaces.” Many respondents tended to regard learning as a personal matter and seldom associated individual learning with team or organisational learning. They appeared to “accept the authoritative and objective knowledge” and took it for granted. They “seldom explored the underlying assumptions or ideologies” and often neglected critical reflection in the learning process.

After the course, many respondents emphasised learning as “identifying”, “challenging”, “critically reflecting on”, or “changing assumptions”, and then “transforming perspectives”, which will in turn promote personal, organisational and social development. The implication is that in addition to individual learning stressed in the past, other forms of learning such as “cooperative learning”, “reflective learning”, “team learning”, and “organisational learning” came to occupy important roles in personal, organisational, and social development. Personal growth and acquiring alternative perspectives was highly valued. Moreover, their conceptions tended to move from a limited perspective of individual learning for practical purposes towards more complex and broader concepts of learning as development at individual, team, organisational and social levels.

During the first teaching block, many respondents commented they were impressed by Western interactive teaching approaches but indicated that these approaches seemed to be discursive and lack structure. A few complained that Australian teachers spent too much time “getting students’ ideas” or “citing specific examples” rather than
elaborating on theories. During the second teaching block, many respondents came to appreciate the efforts from Australian teachers to “encourage and push them to identify their assumptions and think reflectively.” At the end of the course, more students commented on the alternative perspectives gained from personal critical reflection and interaction with peers. Their learning experience and exposure to Western ideas also made them “reflect on their previous assumptions and professional practice.” Moreover, they began to link their personal learning to team and organisational learning in the broader sense.

Such an emphasis on learning as personal, organisational and social development rather than a means to certain ends may have implications for contemporary Chinese educational leaders. This study suggests that more extensive and complex views of learning may help them become more reflective and effective practitioners or change agents with a stronger sense of social responsibility than they possessed prior to the course.

8.3.5 *Forms of Learning: Formal Learning vs. Informal and Lifelong Learning*

Before the course, respondents tended to associate learning with formal learning activities or acquiring knowledge from teachers in formal educational institutions. The notion of learning was often confined to “classroom teaching and study”. After the course, many respondents began to place an emphasis on “incidental learning”, “informal learning” and “lifelong learning”. They classified themselves as lifelong learners and stressed that learning may go beyond individual study in formal situations. “Exchanging ideas with peers”, “incidental conversations with others”, “attending meetings and seminars” or “conducting field visits” were viewed as important forms of learning, which were also related to one’s personal and professional development. Their conceptions about learning had been extended from “single-dimensional” and “limited forms” to “multi-dimensional” and “multiple-forms”. Learning was viewed as a dynamic and continuous process, occurring across one’s life and at multiple levels from individual, to team, organisation and society. Learning was considered as essential not only to promote economic and social development, but also enhance self-actualisation and life quality. Learning had become “an inseparable part of one’s life from the cradle to the grave”.
An increasing awareness about informal and lifelong learning has important implications for Chinese educational leaders’ professional development. Teachers and students may raise their awareness of lifelong learning accordingly through educational leaders’ influences. An overall increased awareness in the educational institutions will contribute to the promotion of a lifelong learning culture in the whole society, as advocated by the Chinese government. It will also equip educational leaders to deal more creatively with unanticipated changes and even crises in the future.

8.4 An Analytical Framework about Conceptions of Leadership

In this study, the researcher proposed a general framework for describing the categories of leadership conceptions held by educational leaders who undertook the leadership course in Zhejiang Province, China, and the relationship among these learning conceptions (see Figure 8.2). At the lower part of this figure are the six conceptions identified from the interview descriptions describing their ideas about leadership. The two orientations stand at the upper part of the figure. These six conceptions of leadership can be considered as first-order concepts and two orientations as second-order concepts (Punch, 1998).

As shown in Figure 8.2, Category L-A (Leadership as positional power), Category L-B (Leadership as non-positional power), Category L-C (Leadership as practical art), and Category L-D (Leadership as teamwork leaders) are covered by a task focused and
directive orientation. Another orientation, focused on motivation and collaboration, covers two conceptions: Category L-E (Leadership as vision and strategic planning), Category L-F (Leadership as consultation and collaboration). An arrow from task focused and directive orientations to motivation focused and collaborative orientations suggests a conceptual change path undergone by most interviewees. Category L-D is shaded implying that it is a linking conception between the two orientations. This conception focuses on teamwork within a group of leaders, and is primarily a directive leadership perspective because leadership is viewed as concentrated amongst a few at the top or middle level of administration. However, attention has been paid to collaboration within a group of leaders or middle level managers. Conception L-D therefore seems to be a necessary step leading to collaborative and participative leadership shared with a much broader base of organisational members.

The research findings in Chapter 7 reveal that before the course, participants reported conceptions from L-A to L-E and most held conceptions of L-A to L-D. After the course, participants seemed to report a wider range of perspectives and many reported conceptions of L-E and L-F. This suggests a tendency of shift from a task/directive orientation to a motivation/collaborative orientation.

Based on this analytical framework and research results in Chapter 7, the researcher examined categories of conceptions about leadership reported by 20 interviewees prior to and after the course (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3 Changes in the Orientations of Conceptions of Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in orientations</th>
<th>Individual Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed from a task/directive orientation to</td>
<td>Bruce, Cindy, George, Hilary, Isabella,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a motivation/ collaborative orientation</td>
<td>Jeremy, Kevin, Tony (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or remained within a motivation/ collaborative</td>
<td>Adam, Eric, Felix, Michael, Nathan, Oliver,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orientation</td>
<td>Steven (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or remained within a task/directive orientation</td>
<td>Diana, Luke, Paula, Richard, William (n=5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: analysis of data.

Table 8.3 shows that about 40% of respondents reported a shift of their conceptions from a task/directive orientation towards a motivation/collaborative orientation after
undertaking the course. Around one third of respondents reported that after the course their conceptions of leadership either developed or remained constant within a motivation/collaborative orientation. About one fourth of interviewees reported conceptions limited to a task/directive orientation.

For example, respondents like Dianna, Luke and William still held limited, lower-order understandings about leadership after the course. Among seven interviewees who reported a motivation/collaborative orientation prior to and after the course, Eric did not seem to report obvious change in his conceptions while the rest indicated an expanded awareness of leadership after the course (see Table 7.5 for detailed information on conceptions of leadership reported by individual interviewees). In this study, different participants had reported various extents of conceptual change after a professional development program. Their self-reported interpretations about conceptual change will be further examined in the final section of this chapter.

Table 8.4 summarises the qualitatively different conceptions of leadership held by interviewees prior to and after undertaking the course. The description of each category of conception and examples from individual respondents are listed as well. The summary not only reveals the complexity of leadership conceptions but also suggests the participants’ self-reflection and conceptual development.

Table 8.4 Conceptions of Leadership in General

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L-A Leadership as positional power</td>
<td>Power or authority resides in official positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head, boss, and decision-maker, an awesome, serious and authoritative figure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmit predetermined goals in a hierarchy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplish tasks and top down implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage, control and govern followers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A leader has power and is at the top of the hierarchy (Michael). Without power, one cannot be regarded a leader (Steven). The role of a leader is like the collar of a dress (Jeremy). A leader is the decision maker and followers are implementers (Kevin). A leader is a symbol of authority, autocracy, and awe (Tony). A leader's personal wills are often imposed on the followers (Cindy). A good leader can manage followers well and accomplish tasks (Felix). Manage human and physical resources well and achieve goals (George).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L-B Leadership as non-positional power</strong></td>
<td><strong>L-C Leadership as practical art</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power or authority derived from personal qualities or professional expertise</td>
<td>Leadership as a value-based, contextualised art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set role models for followers</td>
<td>Leadership art as flexible strategies and tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use personal charisma and high morality to inspire and motivate others</td>
<td>Adaptability and contingency of leadership approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely on technical and moral authority to influence others</td>
<td>Adopt different styles or approaches depending on circumstances, nature of employees, organisational culture, and wider social and cultural contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A principal should be a subject expert so that he can instruct other teachers (Luke).</td>
<td>Leadership is practical art and ways of dealing with politics and power (William).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An academic leader is supposed to have high academic qualities and research abilities besides discipline specific knowledge (Oliver).</td>
<td>Different leaders may adopt various leadership styles depending on the situations they work in (Oliver).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals should be authoritative instructional leaders (Eric).</td>
<td>Changing entrenched ideas and promoting democratic awareness is a long and incremental process (George).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good leader is a moral model and a charismatic hero (Michael).</td>
<td>Adapt leadership approaches to different development stages of a school (Hilary).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize expertise, insight and self-confidence to influence others (Felix).</td>
<td>It is inappropriate to adopt Western leadership ideas indiscriminately without considering contemporary Chinese context (Steven).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrate scientific management with humanistic approaches (Nathan).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Extensive consultation and empowering followers
Leadership is shared and distributed at different levels of an organisation
Collaborative and equal relationship between staff and leaders
Leaders are leading learners
Consulting staff in the department or soliciting opinions from a wider circle (Adam).
Constant reflection, feedback, modification and adjustment are needed in leadership (Kevin).
Teachers and students should get involved in decision-making process (George).
Leadership emphasises a relationship of cooperation and coordination (Oliver).
Promoting democratic leadership will be an incremental and long process in China (Steven).
Leaders should be leading learners. An individual or a think tank can hardly deal with all complex issues in reality (Hilary).

Source: analysis of data.

8.5 Themes Derived from Conceptual Change in Leadership

Based on the analytical framework and summary of conceptions of leadership reported by the interviewees, some general comments are made about the important themes that emerged from this study. The following themes indicate a conceptual change path undergone by most participants in the course. Similar to the presentation of the analysis in the previous section about conceptions of learning, the five themes about leadership are presented here as differences between extremes. Respondents were not entirely clustered around their respective extremes before or after the course. It is more appropriate to think of the conceptions as unevenly spread along a continuum, one end marked “inherited thinking about leadership before the course”, and the other marked “newly developed perspectives after the course”.

Respondents tended to occupy the full range, from one end (a task/directive orientation) to the other end (a motivation/collaborative orientation). However, the distribution was decidedly skewed, with responses before the course toward one end and responses after the course toward the other. This situation can also be illustrated by the seesaw analogy. Before the course, the weight of the seesaw tended to be placed on one end (a task/directive orientation), and after the course, its weight was placed on the other end (a motivation/collaborative orientation).
The findings relate to five themes or patterns of conceptions of leadership:

- role of leader: operational implementer vs. visionary strategic planner;
- leadership approach: directive vs. participative;
- relationship between leaders and staff: command and obey vs. collaborate and participate;
- creating goals: idiosyncratic wills vs. shared vision;
- leading process: task oriented vs. motivation oriented.

### 8.5.1 Role of Leader: Operational Implementer vs. Visionary Strategic Planner

Before the course, many respondents tended to regard leadership and management as similar concepts and believe that leaders and managers take on similar roles. A leader was generally viewed as a manager, “who is supposed to manage human and physical resources well and accomplishing certain tasks.” Great attention was paid to their operational functions and managerial roles. An important difference if any between a leader and a manager seemed to lie in the different levels of position they held in a bureaucratic structure. In other words, “leaders are high-level managers” in an organisation while “middle level managers are not leaders in the real sense” but implementers. General or teaching staff members were generally regarded as operators who rarely take up leadership roles.

After the course, respondents emphasised they had “clarified their conceptual confusions about leadership and management”. These two concepts were viewed by many interviewees as different but somewhat overlapping sometimes. This suggests a shift in their perspectives from a managerial orientation focused on micro level operation and implementation to a visionary orientation focused on macro level decision-making and strategic planning. They began to place an emphasis on a forward-looking leader who commits followers to a shared vision rather than on forceful top down implementation. Some interviewees realized that an ideal leader should be a head in terms of morality, emotion, spirit and intelligence. They also stressed that a leader is sometimes a manager who emphasises implementation and a manager can also take on the role of a leader who focuses on strategic planning.
8.5.2 Leadership Approach: Directive vs. Participative

Before the course, respondents generally believed a leader was a head of an organisation or an official with a formally appointed position. He or she was at the top level of the hierarchical structure or organisational pyramid. A leader was also viewed as a symbol of power, authority, privilege and status. Many respondents tended to place an emphasis on solitary and directive leadership with individuals making decisions from the top of the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure. They valued personal wisdom, charisma and insight of the leaders rather than collective wisdom from the followers. Improving leadership in an organisation often meant promoting personal qualities and moral standards of individual leaders. Empowerment, delegation and leadership distributed at various levels seemed to be often neglected.

After the course, due to participants’ deep thinking and reflections and exposure to Western leadership theories, such as shared leadership, learning organisations, single and double loop learning theories, their ideas about the functions of leadership were modified or expanded. The notions of visionary and strategic leadership, consultative and collaborative leadership, and shared and distributed leadership expanded their views. Participation and involvement of organisational members in decision-making were valued. The orientation of their leadership conceptions was moved from strong, directive, solitary, bureaucratic leadership to more consultative, collaborative, collegial and democratic leadership. Collective wisdom of organisational members and active participation in decision-making process were valued. Improving leadership seemed to take up new meanings, such as promoting personal qualities, professionalism, moral standards, and democratic awareness of organisational members to equip them to play leadership roles in an organisation.

8.5.3 Relationship between Leaders and Staff: Command and Obey vs. Collaborate and Participate

Before the course, many participants indicated that the traditional leader-follower relationship tended to be that of “commanding and obeying” or “directing and conforming”. Leaders were often viewed as decision makers, organisers, planners, and coordinators while followers were supposed to be managed strictly or obey the orders from their supervisors without any questions. The decisions were often made at the top,
passed down and implemented at the lower levels faithfully. A leader was often “a guide in front of followers or a whip behind others” to make them conform to orders or social norms. Traditionally a leader was regarded as a decision maker and thinker. Since reflective followers may raise doubt and cause trouble in implementing plans, they were generally not encouraged. Conformity and obedience on the part of the followers were essential if they were to be favoured by the leaders.

After the course, participants believed that the leader-follower relationship should be that of “collaborating and participating” or “motivating and engaging”. A leader’s role as a co-operator and collaborator was emphasised. The two-way interaction and communication between leaders and followers was stressed during the decision-making process. A leader was supposed to be not only at the front of an organisation but also at the back or in the middle if necessary, that is, to be a participant and organisational member at appropriate times. Many respondents emphasised that leadership may be an interactive phenomenon within groups, or an extensive and multi-level influence. Some interviewees clearly indicated that a leader is an ordinary member of an organisation, while someone without official titles can also exert some influence or take on leadership roles. A few interviewees explicitly proposed the notions of teacher leadership and student leadership. Their awareness of increasing extensive participation and exerting influence upon others seemed to be raised or reinforced after undertaking the course. Many respondents indicated that in order to survive and thrive, and achieve sustainable development in a competitive and complex world, it is important for an educational organisation to promote a collaborative relationship between leaders and followers, utilize the wisdom and knowledge of organisational members, and harness their collective cognitive power (Lakomski, 1999).

8.5.4 Creating Organisational Goals: Idiosyncratic Wills vs. Shared Vision

Before the course, many respondents regarded a leader as the decision-maker who has positional power or non-positional authority. Some interviewees indicated that personal wishes or wills of a leader often determined the organisational goals and they were implemented through top down enforcement. The feasibility of such goals was seldom challenged and the evaluation or moderation of proposed plans was often neglected. A leader was usually considered as a designer and followers were often viewed as implementers. Some respondents commented that an effective leader or team of leaders
may come up with policies or plans based on consultation or collective thinking, but a mediocre leader may rigidly follow orders from the higher administrative levels or propose empty slogans.

After the course, participants emphasised that wisdom and the cognitive power of the collectives should be fully utilized in decision-making process. Many respondents indicated that such ideas were nothing new to Chinese leaders, as traditional Chinese culture also attaches much importance to collective wisdom. For example, as a saying goes, “three ordinary persons’ wisdom is greater than that of Zhuge Liang” (a saint in Chinese history). However, the active participation and extensive consultation of followers in decision-making processes in reality seemed to be often neglected in contemporary Chinese educational institutions, as indicated by many participants. They emphasised that collective thinking comes up with good ideas. Consultative and collaborative leadership may gradually replace the predominant solitary and directive leadership in bureaucratic institutions. According to some interviewees, every member in an organisation ideally becomes a learner, thinker and implementer. A leader is expected to be an organiser or synergizer of collective wisdom in order to motivate others to achieve the organisational goals. Many respondents seemed to place great emphasis on visions shared and owned by the organisational members. A leader’s role in shaping, forming and communicating the shared visions was also stressed. The role of a leader was expected to commit organisational members to the shared version by engagement motivation, and persuasion rather than by coercion or command.

8.5.5 Leading Process: Task Oriented vs. Motivation Oriented

Before the course, many respondents tended to focus on accomplishing certain tasks or carrying out policies in a top-down manner. Decision-making power seemed to invariably belong to a hierarchy, and implementation was meant to be the task of followers, who were supposed to follow the orders from the top and accomplish the set tasks. Some respondents indicated that a leader generally placed an emphasis on task orientation or “set the goal and just do it”. Insufficient attention tended to be paid to motivating staff or “getting feedback, monitoring the plan, making evaluations, and adopting adjustments and modifications” in the decision-making and implementation processes.
After the course, many respondents attached more importance to motivating and engaging staff to shared visions or organisational goals. They also tended to have raised or reinforced their awareness of strategic planning and implementation. Some interviewees emphasised that a leader is supposed to design a plan based on careful environmental scanning and extensive consultation, get involved in implementing the plan, monitor the plan and evaluate its outcomes, modify, and adjust the plan. According to them, the leading process is not simply a process of decision-making and implementation; leadership also means strategic planning, motivating the staff, and adjusting the plan to accomplish the set goals.

The research findings show that before the course, many respondents seemed to value strong individual leadership, and collaboration amongst teams of leaders. After the course, their conceptions tended to move to more complex perspectives of visionary, strategic, consultative and distributed leadership. Some respondents emphasised a balance between scientific management and humanistic leadership approaches. They believed rational, standardized scientific management and situational, contingency leadership approaches are suitable for contemporary Chinese educational institutions, given the influence of Chinese leadership traditions and social, economic, and political contexts. However, they also stressed that humanistic and shared leadership should be further promoted in China in view of the changing and networked nature of the world, although this change is a long and incremental process.

8.6 Conceptual Change Process and Self-reported Interpretations

This study suggests that most interviewees experienced the following stages during their conceptual change process:

- confrontation stage: exposure to alternative perspectives and experiences;
- self-awareness stage: diagnosis of conceptual framework and assumptions;
- disequilibrium and conceptual conflict stage: reflecting on alternative perspectives and challenging assumptions;
- reconstruction and refreezing stage: developing new beliefs, attitudes and perspectives, and freezing again at the new level.
This four-stage change process shows a strong resemblance to Gow and Kember’s (1993) three-stage change model (diagnosis of conceptual framework, disequilibrium and conceptual conflict, and reconstruction and reformation) and Ho’s (2001) four-stage conceptual change approach (confrontation, self-awareness, availability of alternative conceptions, commitment building and refreezing). These two models have been explained in Chapter 3. This study confirms Ho’s argument that the four stages are in logical order of occurrence, and the conceptual change process is iterative. However, the study emphasised the first confrontation stage when people are exposed to different ideas and experiences. According to Gow and Kember’s model, the confrontation stage is embedded in the conceptual conflict stage, while in Ho’s model, the stage of availability of alternative conceptions is separated from the confrontation stage. These theories about change process are based in the positivist paradigm and are limited by their need to advance the abstract models identified. The phenomenographic method actually helped to identify some individuals who do not conform to the models. This suggests the complexity of the conceptions and conceptual change.

Not one single factor but a cluster of interactive influences can account for the interviewees’ conceptual change in this study. However, all these may derive from one main influence, exposure to a Western leadership development course and direct exposure to Western pedagogy. Respondents’ own accounts of their conceptual changes provided evidence to understand the contributing factors. The conceptual changes in learning and leadership can be explained by the following factors:

- direct experience as stimulus to change;
- intellectual content as stimulus to change;
- self-reflection as stimulus to change;
- peer interaction as stimulus to change;
- assessment and application of knowledge as stimulus to change.

### 8.6.1 Direct Experience as Stimulus to Change

Direct exposure to Western pedagogy rather than the intellectual content of the course was viewed by the respondents as the primary cause of their conceptual change in this study. For most respondents, there was a clear linkage of the conceptual change to their own personal learning experiences as students. Many respondents made it explicit that
their personal experience of Western ways of teaching and learning made them examine their own learning styles and reflect on their previous assumptions about learning and teaching. Their personal learning experiences had great impact on changing their deeply held notions. “The confrontation and clash with different perspectives and practices from Western countries” was a stimulus to personal change. Some respondents commented “seeing is believing” because it was the first time for them to personally experience Western teaching and learning, which was like “studying overseas without going abroad”. Thus, the totally different learning experiences and exposure to Western participatory pedagogy could be the primary factor which led to their conceptual change.

When participants had the new learning experiences and reflected on some issues, they realized that the same phenomenon could be seen from different angles. It was not one or more of these different angles that impressed them, but the general experience of seeing things from many perspectives. Their previous assumptions were identified and challenged. They compared the alternative perspectives with the previous ones, and then reconfirmed or transformed their conceptions. The argument here is that the changes in their conceptions, especially conceptions of learning, were experiential rather than cognitive; personal experience was the primary stimulus to cognitive change. They had experienced learning differently rather than directly seeing learning as defined differently. For example, many respondents indicated that although they had “studied constructivist theories systematically and comprehensively” before the course, it was still difficult for them to fully believe in the idea that learning is about a learner’s active construction of knowledge. However, their ideas about learner-centred teaching were “melted thoroughly in the blood” after the course. This suggests that the changes in the conceptions of learning have been brought about through experience rather than as a direct consequence of theoretical justification.

Reviewing the seventeen cases where a large or moderate change in the conception of learning was identified, fifteen cases of the change can be primarily accounted for by the actual experience of learning rather than response to certain theories or insight. The majority of cases were explicable in experiential rather than cognitive or content-specific terms. Only two university administrators (Steven and Tony) reported their change in conceptions mainly through explicitly analyzing the course content and their
beliefs about the nature of knowledge and cognitive development. This was anticipated because they were academics and therefore more likely to change through speculations on the theoretical level. The findings suggest that the main road to conceptual change, at least in relation to the conceptions of learning and teaching, was in experiencing learning differently.

8.6.2 Intellectual Content as Stimulus to Change

The conceptual change was also a result of the influence of studying the course material and related resources. Another important pathway of change is the consequence of coming across some theories or pieces of information which bring new light into the understanding of some current phenomena. This pathway has been documented in research about conceptual change in science education contexts (e.g. Guzzetti & Hynd, 1998).

Some respondents suggested that the cause of their conceptual changes in learning and leadership was the direct impact of some theoretical views that allowed them to see some phenomena from new perspectives. As indicated by many respondents (e.g. Bruce, Diana, Jeremy, Nathan, and William), constructivism, adult learning theories, Kolb’s learning cycle, Gardner’s multiple-intelligences, lifelong learning, and organisational learning were among the Western learning theories which had direct influences on their conceptions of learning after they undertook the course. Some Western theories, such as shared and distributed leadership, and flattened organisational structure, also expanded their previous perspectives. For instance, a respondent (Bruce), who previously considered learning as “knowledge acquisition through passive learning approaches”, studied constructivism. He then held the conception of learning as “active construction of meaning through social interactions”. Another respondent (Jeremy) initially emphasised learning as preparing for exams or obtaining a degree. He changed his perspective after having exposure to lifelong learning theories (related to personal development and social democracy). Such change was logical and consistent with the change in their theoretical frameworks.

It is argued that the alternative perspectives made it possible for respondents to transform or modify their previous conceptions after identifying, challenging and reflecting on their assumptions. Thus, having exposure to the alternative perspectives
and new ideas in the content of course materials or relevant learning sources was another important factor leading to their conceptual change. However, it may be difficult to measure how durable are these conceptions, newly developed through the course. This goes beyond the scope of this study and needs to be explored in future research.

8.6.3 Self-reflection as Stimulus to Change

Many respondents made it explicit that their change in conceptions was a result of an increase in self-reflection or in deep thinking about some issues. Some indicated that keeping learning journals or reflecting on readings while completing assignments also helped them deepen their thinking. In trying to see one’s experience through the course material or in reflecting more as stimulated by the material, many respondents increased their personal involvement in learning. Such an increase in involvement brought about learning more focused on something meaningful and relevant to them. In short, such personal involvement, in terms of self-reflection or in-depth thinking, was one of the reasons behind their conceptual change.

However, it is important to note that many respondents did not think their changes in conceptions were a result of specific insights reached in the self-reflection or thinking processes. Instead, they saw those changes as a general consequence of increased reflections and deep thinking. A system official (Diana) explained that this leadership development course “supplied a platform or a golden opportunity” for her to reflect on and think deeply about her work and “important contemporary Chinese educational issues.” She emphasised personal reflection as an important impetus for her conceptual change. A school principal (Michael) expressed his idea in a similar way. He proclaimed that “the most important learning from the course is that we should emphasise self-reflection”. He viewed deep thinking and critical reflection as an important way to “identify and analyse the underlying assumptions” in order to “improve work performance” and “become reflective practitioners”. It is argued that such in-depth thinking and self-reflection made participants identify, challenge and analyse their assumptions, and therefore stimulated their intellectual growth and conceptual change.
8.6.4 Peer Interaction as Stimulus to Change

The collaborative learning and group activities during class and interaction with peers after class generated multiple perspectives amongst the respondents and further stimulated their conceptual change. The encouraging and collegial learning environment promoted by the course may have played an important role in changing their perceptions about learning, especially about experiential learning and cooperative learning.

Some respondents indicated that they seemed to learn more from group discussion or incidental conversations with classmates than from the teachers. A female principal (Isabella) observed that she “never expected that there were so many excellent elites” in their class and it was such a rewarding experience to “have stimulating conversations and heated discussions” with them. A male principal (Michael) shared her enthusiastic views. He commented that the classmates were from different sectors and had rich working experiences. He considered them as “very thoughtful and insightful” and “wonderful learning resources”. He emphasised that “Even if you sit there listening to their accounts without making any comments, you can still benefit a lot”. He felt it amazing to learn so much from peers, and also changed his previous conceptions about learning as “acquiring systematic knowledge from teachers”.

It can therefore be concluded that exchanging ideas among the professional practitioners who had rich working experience and profound insights may have broadened participants’ views and deepened their understanding about emergent issues in Chinese education, thus bringing about their conceptual change. However, the durability of these newly developed perspectives needs to be explored in future research.

8.6.5 Assessment and Application of Knowledge as Stimulus to Change

Completing assignments required by the course and relating theories to workplaces was regarded as another factor leading to the conceptual change. Many respondents commented on the close link of theories and practice emphasised in the assessments and found completing assignments a rewarding learning experience. They were encouraged to transform abstract theories into local working knowledge through deep thinking and
creativity. A system official (Adam) commented that the format or requirements of assignments “were completely different from those they were used to before”. Participants were not supposed to summarise their working experience or some abstract theories. He observed that most assignments in the course were about designing an innovative proposal or action plan. Students were expected “to be creative and come up with innovative ideas”. More importantly, they were encouraged to implement these innovations or action plans in their workplaces. He insisted such emphasis on a close link between theory and practice further reinforced and extended his ideas that “learning is application” as well as “learning is creation”.

Many interviewees reported that they did apply some innovative proposals or action plans into their workplaces afterwards, and the encouraging results and constant reflection further promoted their professional thinking and practice. Some case studies and further analysis will be presented in Chapter 9 to document their professional growth in practice.

8.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter first presents an analytical framework for learning conceptions. Change from a content-focused/utilitarian orientation to a meaning-focused/developmental orientation is discussed. Based on the analytical framework, five themes about learning are examined. An analytical framework for leadership conceptions is also presented. Change from a task-focused/directive orientation to a motivation-focused/collaborative orientation is described. Five themes about leadership are examined to give a more comprehensive picture of conceptual change paths undergone by most participants. A discussion of the conceptual change process and self-reported interpretations on conceptual change concludes the chapter.
Chapter 9 Self-Reported Change in Leadership Practice

9.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the fourth subsidiary research question in the study “To what extent did Chinese educational leaders perceive that their conceptual changes in learning and leadership affected their self-reported leadership practice?” The chapter begins with a presentation of the self-reported profiles of leadership practice change of all participants. Ten vignettes selected from school, system and university sectors are then discussed to further examine their leadership practice changes. Self-reported reasons for little change in practice are examined. The limitations of self-reporting of leadership practice and the implications of the results are also addressed. The importance of this chapter lies in its illustrations of examples cited by respondents to support the argument that conceptual changes in learning and leadership did lead to changes in actual leadership practice in this study. Changing conceptions did not simply mean the end of learning in this study. Most participants did make efforts to relate the learning to their leadership practice. However, many lamented structural and environmental constraints and their dilemma in addressing the discrepancy of their “theory espoused” and “theory in use” (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

9.2 Leadership Practice Change Profile

Self-reported changes in respondents’ leadership practice over one year are presented in the following Table 9.1. The variations in the extent of practice change (large, moderate or small/no) were based on the self-reports of respondents. Content analysis of the examples cited by the respondents was also utilized to justify the variations. Self-reported leadership practices which focused on organisational, structural or cultural changes were deemed as large changes. In the words of respondents, large (Hen da in Chinese) changes occurred in leadership practice. Those focusing on modifying or improving previous practices were regarded as moderate changes, or some (Yi xie in Chinese) changes in their words. Respondents who reported small or no change in practice did not cite any example of practice change or admitted they made little change (Hen xiao in Chinese) in their work places.
Table 9.1 Self-Reported Changes in Conceptions, Leadership Practice and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Code/Name</th>
<th>Conceptions of learning</th>
<th>Conceptions of leadership</th>
<th>Leadership practice</th>
<th>Themes of examples or cases cited by respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S2M Bruce</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Promote shared vision and create mission statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>P1M George</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Promote participative leadership and student involvement in decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>P2F Hilary</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Promote participative leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P5M Kevin</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Adopt a percolation model in policy implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>U1M Oliver</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Promote empowerment and delegation of power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>S1M Adam</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Pay attention to a practical orientation in policy planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>S3F Cindy</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Raise a sense of strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>S6M Felix</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Establish multiple channels of information flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>P4M Jeremy</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Encourage team and collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>P7M Michael</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Encourage the use of case study and action learning research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>P8M Nathan</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Improve performance management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>U2F Paula</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Encourage team learning among staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>U4M Steven</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Motivate followers and facilitate their development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>U5M Tony</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Encourage active involvement of followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>U6M William</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Show concern for staff’s feeling and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>S4F Diana</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Have little change in leadership practice due to the nature of job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>S5M Eric</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Report no substantial change in leadership practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>P3F Isabella</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Pay attention to soliciting suggestions from teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>P6M Luke</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Pay more attention to communication with teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>U3M Richard</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Ask for suggestions from colleagues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. S represents system administrators from local or provincial educational departments, P represents school principals and U represents university administrators. M stands for male and F stands for female. Source: analysis of data.

Table 9.1 indicates that five (25%) respondents reported large change in their leadership practice, and ten (50%) declared moderate change in practice. Five (25%) respondents claimed small or no change after undertaking the course. The research finding suggests that interviewees’ conceptual changes made a difference to their leadership practice.

The research findings in Chapter 8 show that five respondents who demonstrated large change in leadership practice reported to have developed or maintained their learning conceptions to a meaning/developmental orientation. They also reported to have maintained or developed their leadership conceptions to a motivation/collaborative orientation. Seven out of ten students who reported moderate change in their practice also shifted their learning and leadership orientations. This study suggests that an expanded awareness and understanding of learning and leadership may lead to positive change in leadership practice. However, Eric, Isabella, and Luke, who held more complex understandings about learning and leadership, also reported little change in practice. Tony who kept lower order conceptions still reported moderate change in practice (see Table 8.1 for detailed information on changes in the orientations of conceptions of learning, and see Table 8.3 for detailed information on changes in the orientations of conceptions of leadership). These exceptional cases suggest the mediating influence of personal and environmental factors. They also suggest that change is not a linear or whole group process. There were individual differences within the cohort.

Respondents generally commented that when they came back to their workplaces, they either advocated new educational ideas and perspectives in various meetings to exert their influences as leaders or related newly developed perspectives to their teaching or leadership practice. Many school principals and university academics indicated they paid particular attention to cooperative learning and active constructivist learning in their teaching practice. As can be seen from Table 9.1, various themes emerged from examples and illustrations given by respondents.

The interviewees from three sectors appeared to differ in their focus of change in leadership practice. School principals tended to place an emphasis on relational and
operational issues, such as participative leadership, team learning, or policy implementation. Three principals who reported large change in practice all focused on promoting active participation and extensive consultation. George indicated that he had begun to place an emphasis on teacher and student leadership by widening the base of decision-making. He also indicated his different practice and attitudes towards professional development of teaching staff in his school after the course. Hilary described how she designed a regulation on teachers’ duties through extensive consultation, feedback, and modification. This practice was completely different from her previous experience of top-down enforcement without any consultation of staff. Kevin gave details about how he adopted a percolation model when implementing a national policy after the course. Three other principals indicated moderate change in practice. Jeremy cited examples to show how he promoted team and collaborative learning among staff through seeking feedback and suggestions, and conducting collaborative projects. Michael indicated that he encouraged staff to use case study to analyse their work and get involved in action research. Nathan reported how he integrated humanistic approaches with their performance management system based on scientific management principals. Isabella and Luke reported little change in practice but they indicated that they had begun to pay more attention to communicating with or soliciting advice from staff or students.

System officials tended to be interested in the big picture issues like macro level thinking, strategic policy planning, and organisational structure. Bruce reported large change in practice and described his efforts in promoting shared vision and creating mission statements in twelve schools. Three officials indicated moderate change in practice. Adam illustrated how he had begun to pay more attention to feasibility or practicality of policy proposals and designing specific strategies to achieve the plan. Cindy described how she made it a rule to have monthly strategic meetings regularly with the department heads in her bureau. They checked implementation of last month’s plans and designed operational plans for the next month while referring to the long-term plan at the same time. Felix described how he had gained some insights from Western flattened structure and then established multiple channels of information flow to improve the existing organisational structure. Diana and Eric denied any obvious change in their leadership practice, indicating personal or structural constraints as the reason for this.
University administrators seemed to pay particular attention to relational issues like empowering, motivating, and involving staff. Oliver reported a large change in practice and cited an example to illustrate how he delegated the power of recruiting staff to heads of departments. Four administrators indicated moderate change in practice. Paula described how she encouraged team learning among staff by preparing teaching plans together. Others cited examples to show that they had begun to empower and encourage the staff to reflect on their work practices (Steven), promote the staff’s participation in order to achieve their recognition and support (Tony), or communicate with staff effectively when setting tasks (William). Richard reported small change in practice, but he indicated he may now sometimes ask for advice before designing plans.

It should be noted that the common themes among examples cited by school principals and university administrators are extensive consultation, empowerment, motivation and involvement of staff. They seemed to pay more attention to consultative and participative leadership in practice after the course. System officials tended to focus on visionary and strategic leadership in practice, emphasizing vision and mission statement, strategic planning, or improving organisational structure. Different sector cultures and nature of different respondents’ work places may explain such differences in their leadership practice.

As indicated in Chapter 5, the study was primarily qualitative and interpretative, based, as it is, on the interview responses from the participants. Further, the study was exploratory; the researcher tentatively indicated the sectoral differences between groups with no intention to generalize the findings to the wider population.

9.3 Vignettes from Respondents Who Reported Large Change

Five respondents reported large change in their leadership practice after undertaking the course and cited examples to illustrate such change. Table 9.1 shows that three of the eight (37.5%) school principals reported large change in practice, while one of the six (16.7%) system officials and one (16.7%) university administrator reported large change. In this study, the school principals appeared to be more receptive to new perspectives and likely to make larger changes in practice than system officials or university administrators. It also suggests that principals may have more autonomy to
put their learning into practice than their counterparts in other sectors. Four vignettes from the three sectors are presented and analysed in this section.

**Vignette 9.3.1 George**

A school principal (George) illustrated the way he promoted participative leadership and student involvement in decision-making. He also cited an example to show his different practice and attitude toward professional development of teaching staff in his school. He declared that he had become more democratic in decision-making compared with his previous practice. He commented that in the past, school leaders may have made important policies about consulting team leaders, or sometimes School Council (Xiao wei hui) including a few teacher representatives, but that nowadays, the circle of consultation was not limited to middle level managers, and more teachers were involved. Before making important policies in the school, he often consulted teachers extensively, soliciting suggestions from different subject groups (Jiao yan zu) and grade groups (Nian ji zu). He regarded this as one obvious change after undertaking the course.

Another large change he indicated is that he began to attach more importance to students’ active involvement in school management. Students generally had little say in decision-making processes in school in the past and they were supposed to be managed strictly by school leaders and teachers. Now George’s ideas were liberated. Three students were selected to act as Assistants to the Principal, who could attend some School Council meetings or school team leader meetings. George believed student development should be the primary consideration for whatever school leaders do. Previously, school leaders may have solicited students’ suggestions through Principal’s Letterbox or emails, but students were absent when they made policies. Now students had begun to have rights in important decision-making in the school.

George also proposed different requirements for teachers’ professional development after undertaking the course. In the past, school leaders generally followed the directions from the local educational department, which allowed teachers to participate in some mandatory training courses. But sometimes they were reluctant or even refused to let teachers attend due to financial considerations. After the course, George adopted a completely different attitude and practice. In addition to mandatory training
arrangements, the school provided school-based professional development courses or activities for teachers. In his school, there tended to be a shift from a focus on mandatory training or even unwillingness to support teachers’ further education to supplying more opportunities for teachers to design their individual career development paths.

George adopted more consultative and collaborative leadership approaches after the course. He believed in the notion of teacher and student leadership and did “walk his talk” in practice. Moreover, he proposed other relevant and positive strategies for staff professional development after the course. In fact, George sent a deputy principal and a head of department to study the Master of Educational Leadership Course in 2004. This may echo his determination to promote staff professional development and a learning culture in his school as indicated in the interviews. From his own assessment of change, he would appear to be a reflective practitioner and a proactive change agent in his school. The researcher’s recent interview with George and site visit to his school in April 2004 confirmed his claim of developments in leadership practice.

**Vignette 9.3.2 Kevin**

A school principal (Kevin) explained how he adopted the percolation model in implementing an educational policy. His school was one of six experimental schools in China which were required to deliver the Inquiry Learning Subject. This subject became a compulsory subject in 2004 for all senior middle schools in China after the experimental period. Instead of following the common practice of strict top-down implementation, Kevin adopted a multiple percolation model this time.

After school leaders had distributed the policy documents and training materials to teachers, feedback indicated that they encountered strong resistance from teachers. Teachers were worried that the three hours allocated to this subject per week would be wasted and the university admission rate of their school would be affected negatively. In order to address this issue, school leaders established various consultation groups at different levels from the Principal and Deputy Principals, to middle level heads of departments, subject groups, and even students. Through a series of meetings and extensive consultation at different levels, new ideas were percolated from the top to middle level administrators and then to teachers, finally accepted by most teachers.
Extensive consultation, feedback, evaluation and modification were stressed along the implementation process. Unlike the previous enforcement model from the top, the percolation model was effective in implementing the reform policy. Through this percolation process, most teachers began to understand the significance of promoting inquiry learning and accept the new policy. They were then ready to take action. Kevin realized that it would be extremely difficult to implement the policy if teachers held resistant attitudes towards it. He stated that this course had greatly influenced his strategies in dealing with this issue.

Kevin used to depend on top-down implementation and strong enforcement of administrative orders. After the course, he had begun to place an emphasis on extensive consultation and percolation in the implementation process. He also stressed the importance of getting feedback, evaluating the impact, and making adjustment accordingly. This percolation model worked in practice because the staff’s ideas and attitudes were taken into account. Kevin not only changed his previous conceptions about leadership as top-down forceful implementation but also improved his leadership practice and capabilities.

**Vignette 9.3.3 Bruce**

A director from a district bureau of education (Bruce) described how he promoted shared vision and created mission statements in the schools of his district. He indicated that at the first intensive teaching block in April 2002, he was exposed to some new educational ideas such as learning organisation theories. He considered these ideas to be impressive, inspiring and useful and was determined to apply them in his workplace. He proposed the main theme of a working plan and activities in the District from May 2002 to April 2003 to establish learning organisations. The first step was to create vision and mission statements in some schools. At first, they had no idea how to form a vision or mission statement because they had little previous experience to draw upon. They did have goals or slogans but these were often abstract or empty. They tried to figure out a way of creating or shaping the vision or mission statements. They spent a lot of time consulting teachers, students, educational experts or a wider circle in order to come up with new vision or mission statements, which showed the uniqueness of a school and help it meet the challenges of the new century. This consultation process underwent several cycles and gradually the vision and mission statements were shaped, shared and
accepted by schools. About twelve schools were involved in this process. Two special editions in the municipal daily newspaper (on 25 November 2002 and 25 March 2003) reported a process of creating shared visions and mission statements through extensive consultation in these schools in the District. He regarded it as a very good beginning. The next step he proposed was to promote distributed leadership and flattened structure through reducing middle administrative layers and improving efficiency in the Bureau in order to establish a learning bureau.

Bruce indicated that his colleagues and principals in his district found he was different after taking the course in terms of leadership practice, strategies and plans proposed, ways of thinking, and presentations at meetings. He seemed to be obviously different from other directors of the District Education Bureau who had not participated in the course. He believed that this leadership development course made the difference. Before the course, Bruce emphasised that the key role of a leader was to put forward a plan and “just did it”. After the course, he tended to place an emphasis on vision shared and owned by organisational members. He made great efforts in getting some schools involved in creating vision and mission statements. This brought about a positive change in school culture and produced widely acclaimed recognition and support from communities. Judging by his own accounts, Bruce appeared to be a visionary and ambitious leader who initiated changes in a resolute manner.

Vignette 9.3.4 Oliver

A president (Oliver) from a higher education institution illustrated how he began to place an emphasis on empowerment and delegation of power in his leadership practice. After undertaking the course, he came to realize that his previous leadership style tended to be a bureaucratic, closed or chief executive officer model. Oliver indicated that he was now trying to adopt more open, democratic, collaborative and empowering leadership to manage his college. For example, in the past he interviewed all job applicants and he was the one who made the final decision whether to employ them or not. The advantage was to ensure the quality of new teaching staff, but this also brought another problem. The deans of departments or other teachers were sometimes unsatisfied with the teacher he selected. But due to respect for him, they had to employ this applicant even if they were unwilling to do so. After undertaking this course, Oliver believed he should delegate the recruitment power completely to individual
departments. From then on, deans of departments had the authority to choose from applicants and decide which teacher they were going to employ. In principle, he reserved the right to veto their decisions. However, he generally respected their choices and made no alteration afterwards. In this way, his burden of interviewing and employing new staff was greatly reduced. More importantly, deans and other middle level managers were empowered and motivated to choose and use human resources in a better way. They were also gathering essential experience for preparation as future leaders.

Oliver used to have concentrated power in recruitment but he had begun to delegate such power to heads of departments and middle level managers. He realized that he should trust and motivate them to take on leadership roles and responsibilities because it is impossible for a leader to take on all responsibilities in the changing context. This suggests he began to place an emphasis on empowerment and distributed leadership. He did make efforts in accommodating more democratic and collaborative leadership approaches in practice.

9.4 Vignettes from Respondents Who Reported Moderate Change

Ten respondents reported moderate change in their leadership practice after undertaking the course and cited examples to illustrate such change. Table 9.1 shows that three of the six (50%) system officials reported moderate change in their leadership practice, while three of the eight (37.5%) school principals and four of the six (66.7%) university administrators claimed moderate change in their leadership practice. In this study, university administrators were more likely to have some moderate change in practice than principals and university administrators. Four vignettes from the three sectors are presented and analysed in this section.

Vignette 9.4.1 Nathan

A school principal (Nathan) described the way he improved performance management in his school and explained how a traditional scientific management model was integrated with motivation and humanistic approach. The underlying assumption of the Teacher Recruitment and Appraisal System they previously implemented was mainly strict and rational management. The performance appraisal of teachers in his school was
based on strict quantitative assessment of teaching quality, teaching attitude, student learning outcomes and teaching workload. He stated that what they implemented in practice in the past was mostly a scientific management model, focusing primarily on strict system and regulations. After study he realized in addition to rational and standard management, humanistic approaches and a positive organisational culture should be integrated as well. This system was later on incorporated with practice, such as Appraisal of Star Teachers, which tended to be based on motivating and engaging teachers to strive for excellence. Teachers were awarded different stars ranging from one to five based on a comprehensive and qualitative performance appraisal system. Excellent teachers would be awarded five-star medals, and have great respect from students and parents. He maintained that the very idea about the humanistic approach in performance management and appraisal adopted in his school did come from the course.

Nathan also reported moderate change in his conceptions of learning and leadership. He used to depend heavily on strict control and scientific management principles to implement performance appraisal and management in his school. After the course, he realized that recognition, motivation and encouragement should be integrated with strict and standard management to improve performance management. He began to place an emphasis on humanistic approaches which showed concern for staff instead of on rigid and indifferent rules. This suggests his efforts in achieving a balance between strict management and more participative leadership in practice. Nathan did not mean to produce radical change in his school but aimed at improving previous practice by drawing on new perspectives or insights gained from the course.

**Vignette 9.4.2 Adam**

A director (Adam) from a municipal bureau of education illustrated how he began to place an emphasis on a practical orientation in planning local educational policies. He indicated that the course emphasised relating theories to practice and the assignments required workplace application. He stated that Australian school policies, such as the Adelaide Declaration, indicated very specific and feasible objectives. The teaching plans designed by Australian teachers or student assessments also listed specific objectives or criteria. According to Adam, the policies or visions proposed by Chinese education administrators tended to be comparatively abstract and macro level
guidelines. He indicated that sometimes these policies became empty rhetoric or unrealistic slogans. He lamented the difficulty to implement many policies in China. He commented that one of the reasons was that those policies were abstract guidelines and not specific or practical enough. He explained that he gained insights from an emphasis on practicality and feasibility of plans in the course. For example, he presented a paper entitled “The Practices and Developing Strategies of Community Education in Hangzhou” at the Across the Taiwan Strait Community Education Development Forum in 2003. This paper outlined five specific, clearly defined and feasible strategies. This proposal became a local educational policy and was later published in some leading journals in China. He stated that his way of proposing a plan and developing strategies had been greatly influenced by the practical orientation of the course. He believed policy makers should propose policies and plans with specific objectives and strategies, rather than empty slogans, political rhetoric, or abstract principles.

Adam also reported moderate change in his conceptions of learning and leadership. He reflected on many Chinese policies or plans which tended to be empty rhetoric or abstract guidelines. A practical orientation and strategic planning emphasised in the course helped him to address such a problem in policy planning in contemporary Chinese education. As a senior official and policy maker at the local level, he seemed to have improved his strategic thinking and leadership practice in strategic policy planning.

**Vignette 9.4.3 Felix**

A president of an educational group (Felix) described how he reflected on the Western theory of flattened structures and began to emphasise establishing multiple channels of information flow in a school. The organisational structure of a primary school in his educational group used to be hierarchical, with the Principal at the top, Deputy Principals at the next level, then Heads of Department at another lower level. This was a typical pyramid administrative model. Gradually one serious problem emerged. Teachers felt that the Principal’s evaluation of them was not important at all but the comments or opinions from Heads of Departments counted. The Principal made decisions mainly based upon information reported by middle level managers. The problem was that information or feedback sifted by different layers may have gone to the Principal in a distorted form. It seemed that the Principal had accumulated the first
hand information from the middle level managers, but in fact he had not. The Principal was isolated from teachers and relied upon some unreliable information reported by the middle level managers. Felix believed this problem was caused by congested information flow channels leading to distorted information and he determined to solve this problem.

Felix considered it as premature and unrealistic to change the traditional organisational structure completely at first. After undertaking the course he believed he could draw on the idea of flattened organisational structures to improve communication. According to this idea, multiple channels of information flow were established although the basic organisational structure remained the same. The Principal could get information directly from teachers and Heads of Departments rather than only listening to reports from Deputy Principals. The Principal could therefore make decisions based on reliable information collected from different channels. Moreover, Heads of Department no longer put too many personal interpretations when reporting feedback from teachers since the Principal had a reliable channel to check with teachers. Teachers also had the opportunity to talk with the Principal directly. This practice of establishing multiple channels of information flow proved to be effective in the school.

Felix maintained that this course had not only improved his theoretical level but also changed some of his leadership practice. He reported a large change in his learning conceptions and moderate change in leadership conceptions. He had drawn upon some new perspectives and insights from the course to improve the existing pyramid organisational structure in a school. In view of the context and structural constraints, he regarded it as unrealistic to adopt Western ideas completely or initiate radical structural reform. He helped to establish multiple channels of communication in a school in order to solve the problem of congested information channels and distorted information. This suggests that he tended to be a reflective leader who reflected on and modified his previous beliefs about bureaucratic organisational structure. From his own assessment of change, he also appears to be a proactive practitioner who tried to align Western ideas with local contexts in a cautious but positive manner.
**Vignette 9.4.4 Steven**

A divisional director of a university (Steven) described how he began to place an emphasis on motivating and facilitating followers. He viewed the change process in leadership practice as a gradual and incremental process. After undertaking the course, his perspectives about the relationship between leaders and followers had been transformed greatly. In the past, he had considered himself more as a line manager, following orders from the top and implementing plans faithfully. He also asked his followers to do this. He believed that the nature of his job determined his role to be a manager. For example, he used to ask the staff to follow his instructions strictly. When assigning tasks to a staff member, he usually gave him a detailed list of things to do. The staff would obey Steven’s instructions faithfully but rarely did more than what was asked. Steven stated that he now often gave staff more freedom and asked about their ideas and experience in dealing with the issues. Steven had come to realize that it was important for a leader to empower and encourage the staff to reflect on their work practice. He used to think of staff members as one of his hands, but now he viewed them as independent workers. Steven believed that he should undertake the leadership role under certain circumstances. A leader should not always demand others to obey him. A good leader should consult staff extensively and work with them to address an issue or solve a problem.

Steven used to emphasise top-down implementation and strict management. Staff members were supposed to follow instructions strictly and accomplish assigned tasks accordingly. However, their initiative and participative awareness were severely hampered. Steven was influenced by the ideas of collaborative leadership after the course. He no longer regarded himself as primarily a line manager but one who could take on active leadership roles. He also placed an emphasis on motivating and encouraging staff to take on initiative and reflect on their own practice. He viewed staff members as independent workers who would have their ideas, capabilities, or influences rather than puppets following instructions rigidly. Steven reported large changes in his conceptions of learning and moderate change in leadership conceptions, but reported moderate change in leadership practice due to structural and cultural constraints as indicated in the interviews.
9.5 Responses from Respondents Who Reported Small Change

Five respondents reported small or no changes in their leadership practice after undertaking the course. Two (33.3%) system officials reported small change in practice, while two (25%) school principals and one (16.7%) university administrators reported small change in their leadership practice. In terms of small change in leadership practice, in this study, system officials were more likely to be cautious, if not resistant to change in practice than principals and university administrators. Two vignettes and self-reported reasons for small change declared by three other respondents are described and analysed in this section.

Vignette 9.5.1 Diana

A system official (Diana) denied any change in practice. Neither did she cite any examples to illustrate change. She admitted that the course had expanded her perspectives, but she could not change her leadership practice due to the nature of her job. She stated she simply could not put her plans or ideas into practice because she is only the head of a department, not the Director of an Education Bureau. She went on to explain that if she was a director, she would play a more important role in promoting learning organisations or teachers’ professional development. She maintained that she endeavoured to apply what she had learned within the sphere of her influence. However, due to the constraints of her lower position in her organisation, it was impossible for her to make any great difference in reality. This suggests that Diana had the intention and enthusiasm to improve her leadership practice, but her lower position in a bureaucratic system prevented her from exerting greater influence in her workplace.

Vignette 9.5.2 Eric

A senior executive (Eric) from the local educational bureau also reported small change in his leadership practice. Nor did he cite examples to illustrate his change. He insisted that his previous leadership ideas or behaviours had actually been influenced by some Western educational ideas long before he attended this course. He believed a leader certainly has decision-making power within his sphere of influence. He regarded a good leader as a decision maker, a service provider, and facilitator. Eric stated his purpose for taking part in the course was to learn some knowledge and broaden his foresight.
However, he maintained “there are no ready theories for you to solve the practical problems you encounter in your workplace.” From his descriptions about beliefs of learning and leadership, it seemed Eric already had some deep understandings before the course although he reported no substantial changes in his conceptions or practice. This suggests that he may value his own perspectives and be very critical and reflective to Western perspectives.

Three other respondents reported small or no change in their leadership practice, but they cited examples to show their intentions and slight improvement in practice. A principal (Isabella) indicated that undertaking this course did not help her a lot to meet the challenges or solve the dilemmas in her workplace. She explained that since these dilemmas or conflicts derived from the local context, suitable solutions should be sought in this local context not from Western countries. However, she believed she would try to change certain aspects of her leadership practice, for example, soliciting suggestions from teachers and promoting a learning culture in her school. Another principal (Luke) believed the course broadened his perspectives but did not think it brought about any obvious change in his leadership behaviours. However, he believed he might pay more attention to communicating with teachers and students so that he can get more comprehensive information through sufficient communication. A university administrator (Richard) denied he gained much knowledge from the course and the influence on his leadership practice seemed to be limited. Richard said one of the reasons might be that he did not study hard enough. He went on to say that in the past, the plans he proposed mostly represented the wills of higher-level leaders or his own interpretation of their ideas. When proposing or writing up a plan, he may now sometimes discuss it with other colleagues and ask for their suggestions. Richard commented, “This might be a change, I think.”

To sum up, the study suggests that structural and cultural constraints or personal factors may account for a lack of change in some interviewees’ leadership practice. It also suggests that self-reports are sometimes unreliable. There is a contradiction between the self-classifications of some respondents and their quotations. This again justifies an interpretative, phenomenographic research approach which can expose these nuances of understandings, while a quantitative method would mask them.
9.6 Implications of Conceptual Change and Leadership Practice

A change in conceptions of learning and leadership is likely to lead to improvement in teaching and leadership practice

A question of this study was to investigate whether a change in Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership towards more elaborated levels and complex perspectives would bring about improvement in their leadership practice. A very encouraging finding of this study was that all those who espoused more complex conceptions of learning and leadership after undertaking the course reported to have changed their leadership practice over the year of study. In addition, all interviewees were able to illustrate their claims of change in practice through relating credible examples of new leadership practices as reported in the previous vignettes. This implies that a change in conceptions did not only remain at the espoused level; there was a high probability that it would bring about changes in practice. Moreover, because students invested so much in their learning, they would be motivated to see some improvement in practice. In the case of this study, consequential changes in leadership practices happened within a short time frame during a one-year course. The researcher did not conduct a longitudinal study of leadership practices in the workplaces of the participants to see if changes were maintained. This was beyond the scope of this study but would be a worthwhile focus for further research.

This finding suggests that a change in conceptions of learning and leadership may bring about change in leadership practice. This belief underlies the leadership development course. The ultimate goal of educational leadership development is improvement of learning, teaching and leadership practice. Many theorists have argued if teachers’ conceptions of learning and teaching are developed to a higher level, their teaching practices should accordingly be improved (Gibbs, 1995; Gow & Kember, 1993; Ho, 2001; Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell, 1995). The argument here is that in the case of this study, if educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership are developed to a higher level, their leadership practices may accordingly be improved. The issue of transition between a change in conceptions of learning and leadership to a change in leadership practice has not been studied in a systematic way previously.
On the other hand, there are research findings which suggest that discrepancies between espoused ideas and actual practices are common (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Gow, Kember, & Sivan, 1992; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992). It is therefore probable that newly developed conceptions will exist as espoused conceptions, or that it will take some time before new conceptions are put into operation in actual practice (Ho, 2001). Contemporary research only informs us of the static relationship between existing conceptions and leadership practices, but lacks findings relating to the dynamics of the way changes in learning and leadership conceptions are transferred to changes in leadership practices and at what rate.

The findings of this study present a promising picture that a development in learning and leadership conceptions is likely to lead to improvement in leadership practices and this may happen within a relatively short period of time. However, this study primarily aimed at exploring participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership and the influence of the course on their conceptions. The study was not originally designed for the investigation of the transfer from conceptual change to practice change but it emerged as a theme from interviews in the course of the research. Since there were only a small number of twenty interviewees, we have to be cautious in drawing generalizable conclusions.

*Advancement in conceptions of learning and leadership seems to be a basis for improvement in leadership practices; lack of change in conceptions may result in no change in practices.*

Another result of this study is that a change in conceptions of learning and leadership towards more complex perspectives seems to be a basis for improvement in leadership practices. Lack of change in conceptions may lead to little change in leadership practice.

Table 9.2 shows the self-reported change profile in conceptions and leadership practice according to the extent of change. Half of the respondents reported large change in conceptions of learning and nearly one third declared large change in conceptions of leadership. One quarter of the respondents reported large change in leadership practice. Around one third reported moderate change in learning conceptions and 45% declared moderate change in leadership conceptions; half of the respondents reported moderate
change in leadership practice. About 15% of respondents reported small change in learning conceptions and one quarter of respondents reported small change in leadership conception; one quarter of them also reported small change in leadership practice.

Table 9.2 Self-Reported Change Profile in the Conceptions and Leadership Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of change</th>
<th>Changes in learning conceptions</th>
<th>Changes in leadership conceptions</th>
<th>Changes in leadership practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small/no</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total subjects 20 (100%) 20 (100%) 20 (100%)

Source: analysis of data.

Table 9.1 in Section 9.2 presents all respondents’ self-reported changes in their leadership practice along with corresponding changes in their conceptions of learning and leadership. A noteworthy result of this study is that all of the three respondents who reported small change in their previous learning conceptions also reported small change in their leadership practice after attending the course, while all but two who expanded their learning conceptions described large or moderate changes in leadership practice (the two exceptions were Diana and Luke). Seven of ten respondents who reported large change in conceptions of learning also reported large change in leadership conceptions. Among those who reported change in their leadership practice, a variation in the degree of change was also observed. Five of the seven respondents who described large change in their conceptions of learning and leadership also reported large change in leadership practice. Of the ten respondents who reported moderate change in leadership practice, eight reported large or moderate changes in either conceptions of learning or conceptions of leadership. The five respondents who reported small change in leadership practice were found to have small change in either conceptions of learning or conceptions of leadership, with one exception of Luke.

This result can be interpreted to mean that a change in conceptions of learning and leadership seems to be a basis for change in leadership practices to occur. In this study, in only two cases (Tony and Isabella) did the extent of change in leadership conceptions
exceed changes in learning conceptions, and in only three cases (William, Isabella and Paula) did the extent of changes in leadership practice exceed changes in learning conceptions or leadership conceptions. In this study, it seems that without a change in conceptions of learning and leadership, no change in practice was likely. The greater the conceptual change, the greater the change in practice that was likely to follow. This provides further support for a belief in this study that changes in conceptions may precede changes in leadership practice. One implication of this finding for educational leaders is that effort needs to be directed to developing conceptions of learning and leadership in order to bring about desirable change in leadership practice.

9.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter addresses the issue of participants’ self-reported leadership practice. It first presents the self-reported leadership practice change profiles of all participants. Ten vignettes from the three sectors are featured to further examine their leadership practice change. Self-reported reasons for small change in practice are examined. The limitation of self-reports of leadership practice and implications of the result are also discussed. The examples cited by respondents support the argument that conceptual changes in learning and leadership are likely to lead to changes in actual leadership practice. However, environmental, cultural and personal factors may constrain the change of leadership practice in reality.
Chapter 10 Summary and Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter revisits and reflects on the previous chapters to summarise and integrate the major findings and implications of the overall study. It begins by examining how the research questions have been addressed by the research outcomes described in Chapters 6 to 9. These are then related to the literature described in Chapters 3 and 4, highlighting this study’s contribution to the further understanding both of Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership and their conceptual and leadership practice development in an international education context. The discussion of the research findings probes the conceptual, theoretical and practical significance of the study and the implications for leadership development. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and directions for future research. It concludes with a summary of the study.

10.2 Major Findings and Discussion

The two main research questions for this study, as stated in Chapter 1, were:

- How do Chinese educational leaders conceive learning and leadership in an international education context?
- What is the influence of a Western leadership development course on Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership and their self-reported leadership practice?

The study has examined the following four specific subsidiary research questions in Chapters 6 to 9:

1. What were Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?
2. What were their conceptions of leadership before and after undertaking a Western leadership development course?
3. What changes (if any) have occurred in their conceptions of learning and leadership after undertaking the course and what accounted for such changes from their perspective?

4. To what extent did they perceive that their conceptual changes in learning and leadership affected their self-reported leadership practice?

In addressing the research questions, this thesis has presented findings from the data analyses and discussion in the previous four chapters. Chinese educational leaders in this study reported comparatively traditional conceptions of learning and leadership in quite a limited range prior to undertaking a Western leadership development course. Comparison of reported conceptions prior to and after the course indicates an expanded range of conceptions, showing a general movement towards more complex and diversified perspectives. Learning experience and exposure to Western educational ideas and practices seems to have led participants to reflect on their assumptions and to expand their conceptions. Many leaders also reported using an expanded range of leadership strategies after the course. While a range of issues related to specific conceptions of learning or leadership is discussed in the previous four chapters, the focus of this chapter is to integrate these specific findings into more general reflections on both learning and leadership in the following dimensions:

- a shift from lower-order, limited conceptions to more complex and expanded conceptions;
- variations in conceptual and practice changes;
- differences in changes represented among sectors;
- multiple conceptions of learning and leadership;
- loosely coupled hierarchical structures of categories.

Two other emergent findings are also discussed in this chapter: a) a dual focus on conceptions of learning and leadership, and b) a close relationship between conceptions of learning and leadership. The major findings in each of these dimensions are outlined and discussed below through review of the findings and their relevance to the literature.
10.2.1 A Shift from Lower-Order, Limited Conceptions to More Complex and Expanded Conceptions

A general shift in orientations and an increased understanding about learning and leadership expanded participants’ range of perspectives, and also increased the availability of operational strategies in their leadership practice. As such, the study shows that conceptions of learning and leadership are not necessarily stable over time. This finding is consistent with the findings from previous research that conceptions can be changed or expanded after undergoing an intervention (e.g. Fairholm, 2002; McKenzie, 2003; Tang, 2001).

The longitudinal nature of this research enabled developmental trends in participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership to be investigated. What emerged from the data over one year was that most of the participants in this study had more complex and expanded understandings compared with their previous conceptions. A developmental awareness of aspects of learning and leadership was evident in that many students had moved to expanded conceptions by the end of the course. It could be argued that studying the course allowed these students to develop a changed awareness of themselves as learners and leaders (see also Boulton-Lewis et al., 2003).

The participants’ initial beliefs about learning primarily focused on knowledge acquisition and application, instrumental learning, and understanding knowledge as objective phenomena. These beliefs can be explained by the influence of learning traditions in China, which are described in literature (e.g. Chan, 1999; Cortazzi & Jin, 2001; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Kennedy, 2002; Pratt, 1992a; Pratt et al., 1999; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001a; Zhu, 2002). Before the course, learning was mostly perceived as knowledge transmission from teachers to students in the formal educational institutions. Participants’ conceptions, after undertaking the course, tended to focus on active learning, interactive learning, experiential learning, reflective learning and organisational learning. Participants also emphasised the need to develop an international perspective and adapt Western educational ideas to the Chinese context. Their conceptual focus on learning seemed to have generally shifted from content/instrumental orientations to meaning/developmental orientations. They seemed to have moved toward more complex understandings about learning, for example, learning came to be regarded as a dynamic, multi-level process of reflection,
interaction, creation and development. It came to be perceived to be a multi-dimensional concept, which had been extended from specific individual learning to team learning, organisational learning and then to individual, team and organisational development.

The participants’ previous beliefs about leadership were often related to positional power and hierarchical structure. This finding is congruent with the observations and analyses in previous studies about Chinese leadership traditions (e.g. Bush & Qiang, 2000; Chen, 2002; Child, 1994; Feng, 2002a; Hofstede, 1991, 1994; Ling et al., 2000; Miles, 1999). Before the course, decision-making, command, control and management were regarded as the major functions of leaders. After undertaking the course, participants tended to emphasise motivation, empowerment, consultation and engagement of followers. Their conceptual focus on leadership seemed to have generally shifted from task/directive orientations to motivation/collaborative orientations. Leadership came to be regarded as a power or influence, a democratic awareness, an empowerment ideology, or a collaborative relationship. It came to be viewed as a dynamic, interactive and multi-level process of achieving shared vision or common goals. Participants tended to believe that leadership can be dispersed at various levels of an organisation and closely related to learning and development. Many respondents indicated that leadership for learning would be the key to the survival and viability of an organisation.

The course has generally brought about a positive movement in most participants’ understandings of learning and leadership. It was considered as a positive shift because they reported that exposure to different perspectives expanded their views and equipped them with a wider range of strategies in leadership practice. An interesting finding from the study is that many respondents reported large or moderate changes in their conceptions of learning and leadership. At the same time, they were cautious about radical changes in practice, reiterating that local contexts and cultures must be taken into account when accommodating Western educational ideas. They felt that there was insufficient attention to the features of the Chinese context. A few interviewees were quite critical about the limitations of the course and doubted the applicability and transferability of the course contents.
Many interviewees indicated the tensions existing in their workplaces between the traditional Chinese orientation and Western orientation, that is, transmission-based teaching and student-focused learning, examination-oriented education and problem-solving-oriented education, top-down implementation and participative decision-making. They also indicated their dilemmas in addressing these issues, for example, on the one hand, many participants claimed that participatory learning and shared leadership would inevitably become a trend in China in the near future; and on the other, they commented on strong cultural influences, environmental constraints and resistance. The above comments suggest that change will be an incremental and slow process in China. The research findings suggest that participants’ conceptions about learning and leadership were heavily shaped and influenced by the surrounding environment. They were subjected to the strong forces of various contexts, which mediated the influence of Western ideas. Thus, while the results showed the generally positive influence of the course, there were reservations from some that a greater contextual appreciation was needed and questions by others about the application of learnings to the Chinese context.

10.2.2 Variations in Conceptual and Practice Changes

Most participants reported some change in their conceptions of learning and leadership and their leadership practice. However, the extent of change in the conceptions and practice claimed by individuals varied. This may be explained by the different cultures of the sectors they worked in or by mediating personal factors. Their learning experience and exposure to Western ideas generally had a positive influence upon their conceptions and practice. They had confirmed, reinforced, extended, modified, or changed their previous perspectives. Many participants had consequently changed their leadership practices, and cited some concrete examples to illustrate their points. While commenting on their conceptual and practice change, some participants tended to use the comparative terms like “changed greatly” or “dramatically” while others preferred to employ terms like “modifying” or “expanding” ideas.

It should also be noted that a minority of respondents denied any change in their conceptions or leadership practice. One possible interpretation of this finding is that these participants had already experienced considerable exposure to Western educational ideas before training, as indicated by, for example, Isabella and Eric. The
Western educational theories introduced in the course seemed to be nothing new to them and they gained little enlightening information or insight. Another possible interpretation might be that they valued their previous beliefs and were skeptical of, if not resistant to Western ideas. A more plausible explanation is that they emphasised the differences between Chinese and Western contexts, and the environmental constraints in adapting Western ideas. This view was shared by the majority of participants, although they did report change in their conceptions or leadership practice. Consequently, the influence of the course on their conceptions about learning and leadership was less pronounced than for other participants.

The research results suggest that conceptual changes are likely to lead to practice changes, although the degree of change varies according to the circumstances of the participants. Exposure to different perspectives may have widened many participants’ understandings of learning and leadership, yet these did not automatically lead to dramatic change in their leadership practice because of various mediating factors like personal situations or environmental constraints. One explanation is that the duration of the course and its integration with the workplace will affect transfer of learning (see Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000). These findings are consistent with previous research which suggests that discrepancies between espoused ideas and actual practices are common (e.g. Argyris & Schon, 1974; Gow et al., 1992; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). Furthermore, the findings are also congruent with Ho’s (2001) contentions that some newly developed conceptions will probably exist as espoused conceptions, or that it may take some time before new conceptions are put into operation in actual practice.

10.2.3 Differences in Changes Represented among Sectors

Respondents from school, university or system sectors all reported large, moderate or small change in their conceptions and leadership practice after the course. Some difference can be detected among the three sectors regarding the changes in their conceptions and practice. In terms of change in learning conceptions, school principals seemed to be most receptive to learning new ideas while system officials tended to place more value upon inherited ideas and appeared somewhat resistant to new perspectives. In terms of change in leadership conceptions, school principals were more likely to adapt new ideas and transform their perspectives of leadership compared with
their counterparts from other two sectors. University administrators seemed to be most skeptical of, if not resistant to, alternative perspectives.

The themes of leadership practice cases reported by respondents varied, with different emphasis in each sector. In terms of leadership practice change, school principals reported greater change in practice than their counterparts from the other sectors. School principals tended to place an emphasis on relational and operational issues, like participative leadership, team learning, or policy implementation. System officials tended to be interested in the big picture issues, like macro level thinking, strategic policy planning, and organisational structure. University administrators tended to emphasise relational issues like empowering, motivating, and involving staff.

The different cultures of the three sectors and the nature of their work may explain such differences in their conceptions and leadership practice. School principals were generally educational practitioners and site-based leaders who were practically oriented. Compared with system officials and university administrators, they tended to pay more attention to operational issues related to learning, teaching, and site-based leadership. They also seemed to have considerable autonomy in running the schools within a broadly prescribed framework. They generally operated in a less bureaucratic culture than the other two groups. They tended to hold an open and positive attitude toward Western ideas, emphasizing adapting Western learning and leadership theories to their workplaces.

Officials from local and provincial educational authorities were mostly bureaucrats and policy makers. They were likely to be policy oriented and tended to focus on macro level policy issues. They attached considerable importance to policy planning and implementation at various levels. They tended to focus on emergent, big picture issues of educational reform in China and generally held a more cautious if not skeptical or resistant attitude towards Western ideas compared with the other two groups. Constrained by a more bureaucratic and hierarchical culture, they might have been concerned that any radical decisions may lead to irreparable impact on educational development in the local systems. Consequently, they generally seemed to be conservative and critical toward alternative perspectives, and likely to take discreet measures in practice.
University administrators were generally professional academics as well. They were academically oriented and therefore paid more attention to the course contents and academic disciplinary knowledge. They were more likely to focus on the controversial issues arising from the course contents compared with their counterparts from the other two sectors. They tended to hold a reflective and inquiring attitude towards Western theories and ideas. It is speculated that the academic freedom fostered by university culture and their analytical minds as academics helped them to develop their conceptions and leadership practice in a reflective and gradual manner.

It should be noted that in spite of these observable differences in conceptions and practice reported by participants from the three sectors, there seemed to be more similarities than variance in these aspects. One of the implications that can be drawn from these findings is that these educational leaders had been trained and operated in a broader Chinese cultural, social, and educational context, which played a more important role in shaping their perspectives and practical work than the subcultures of different sectors. In other words, a generic educational culture in China plays a unifying role across different educational sectors. This finding is congruent with Hallinger and Leithwood’s (1996) argument that the societal culture exerts a significant influence on educational administrators beyond that of the specific organisation’s culture. Another implication of sectoral differences for the development of international education is that some allowance needs to be made not only for broad cultural differences but also for differences in sectors. In spite of the small sample and the difficulty of gaining a “typical” or “representative” sample in this study, the accommodation of sectoral differences in the preparation of course materials would likely enhance course delivery.

10.2.4 Multiple Conceptions of Learning and Leadership

Participants in this study generally reported several conceptions of learning and leadership simultaneously. Sometimes the conceptions reported were contradictory or not in a neat sequence ranging from the lower order to higher order conceptions. Although most respondents reported more diversified and complex understandings about learning and leadership after the course, this may not directly indicate that they completely abandoned their previous conceptions. In other words, holding higher order conceptions did not mean abandonment or complete subjugation of lower order conceptions. Similarly, their previous conceptions might be in operation at the same
time with other newly developed conceptions depending on the circumstances. It is also likely that the categories of conceptions reported by participants might be those coming foremost in their minds in terms of importance.

The research findings in the study indicate that respondents may hold several conceptions simultaneously; they also reported that they would utilize them selectively according to different situations. This study confirms previous research findings where an individual might have multiple or even conflicting conceptions and use them selectively, depending upon circumstances (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Bowden, 1988; Gao & Watkins, 2001b; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Pratt, 1992b). This study has provided empirical support for the above contention, and it continues to exemplify the complexity and contingency of the conceptions of leadership and learning.

It was beyond the scope of this research to focus specifically on examining why participants had more than one conception of learning and leadership. However, it was clear from the findings that participants did have different conceptions to support their conceptual framework about learning and leadership. Exploration of the occurrence of multiple conceptions of learning and leadership would be an interesting theme for further study as it is one indication of the complexity of learning and leadership.

10.2.5 Loosely Coupled Hierarchical Structures of Categories

It is important to note that the categories of descriptions found in this research do not form as strict a hierarchy as is usually the case in phenomenographic studies (e.g. Marton et al., 1993; Tang, 2001). One may question whether it is possible to locate such hierarchy in conceptions of learning and leadership in this study since the categories of conceptions are not necessarily in strict hierarchical order, although the tendency from lower order to higher order thinking can be detected. Generally, respondents referred to a number of conceptions simultaneously, and it is difficult to determine their core or most favoured conception. Where responses of an individual included different perspectives, these responses were classified to different categories accordingly instead of assigning the highest level or core conception to the respondent.

The categories of conceptions in the study are not classified in a neat, strict hierarchical order. In other words, they are not strictly linked in a completely hierarchical
However, the categories have logical relationships, arranged from lower order, simpler conceptions to higher order, more complex understandings. Unlike some studies insisting on strict hierarchical nature of categories (e.g. Fairholm, 2002; Marton et al., 1993; Marton et al., 1997; Tang, 2001), the researcher would argue that the categories in this study are arranged in a loosely-coupled hierarchical structure. It was not possible to constitute a strictly hierarchical system, as seems to be the case in many phenomenographic studies mentioned above. Sometimes there are clear logical overlaps or vague boundaries between categories. The categories might not be independent of each other, although they are arranged from lower order to higher order thinking. In other words, holding a higher order concept does not automatically mean an individual does not simultaneously hold a low order conception. Indeed, lower order conceptions may provide an instrumental platform for higher order conceptions. In this study it cannot be simply assumed that lower order conceptions are implied or subsumed in higher order conceptions. However, the study suggests that the higher order categories reflect more complex conceptions than lower order categories.

In this sense, the study has extended phenomenographic research by demonstrating a loosely-coupled rather than strict hierarchical structure of categories. The categories of description can be seen as hierarchically ordered to some extent but, due to the nature of this preliminary analysis, this should be seen as tentative only. The findings are in line with similar contentions raised by some researchers in this aspect (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Collin, 2002). For example, the hierarchical and logically related categories may not necessarily be the most appropriate way of thematising types of conceptions. This way may lead to an unwarranted emphasis on the “authorised conceptions”, while other conceptions are merely deviations from the ideal (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998). The implication of this for research is that it adds to the growing body of literature that suggests categorisation of conceptions is not as neat and orderly as formerly supposed. Researchers need to be aware of the “messiness” of categorisation.

This study has also discovered two categories of learning (learning as promoting organisational development, and learning as promoting social development), which were not identified by previous phenomenographic studies. The addition of these two categories reveals the limited nature of the previous focus on singular classroom
Chapter 10

environments. Learning is identified at both organisational and social levels. The notions of learning as promoting organisational and social development have broadly aligned with ideas of organisational learning (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990), learning for community purposes (Chapman, Aspin, & Taylor, 1997), and learning as social transformation (Freire, 1976; Horton & Freire, 1990; Mao, 1968). In this aspect, this study extends previous phenomenographic studies.

10.2.6 A Dual Focus on Conceptions of Learning and Leadership

The way in which this study developed meant that the researchers explored both conceptions of learning and leadership. Given the nature of the leadership development program, the researcher initially meant to mainly focus on participants’ conceptions of leadership. However, the initial interviews and the researchers’ observations revealed that participants were particularly impressed by their learning experience rather than the leadership content of the course. They were enthusiastic about and interested in reporting their learning experience and the development of their conceptions about learning. A dual focus hence emerged which looked to understand both learning and leadership and examine the relationship between them. Any educational program comprises both the learning process and a substantive teaching subject area. There was a good case in this study for examining both the learning process and substantive content of leadership from participants’ perspectives.

The findings show that more participants reported large change in their conceptions of learning than in conceptions of leadership, which is an unexpected outcome from this study. It is speculated that experiential learning, as the involvement of other ways of appreciating information, played an important role in changing participants’ conceptions of learning. Since leadership cannot be experienced as personally and directly as learning in a formal academic course, the influence of the course upon their leadership conceptions was less profound than that of their learning conceptions.

Compared with their learning experiences, the substantive content appeared not to be the most significant factor in changing their conceptions. This finding has significance for conducting offshore programs. The precise weighting of the relationship between content and process in producing positive effects has yet to be determined in the educational leadership area. More research needs to be conducted to explore the relative
importance of each component. One of the major implications for practice is that attention needs to be paid to the process of delivery as well as to the content given the impact of process in this particular course. Another implication is that if we wish to provide experience in leadership, courses may have to be expanded to include an internship, simulations or scenarios. The relevance of this finding for other subject areas also needs to be further explored in future studies.

10.2.7 A Close Relationship between Conceptions of Learning and Leadership

Another emergent finding of this study was the existence of a relationship between the conceptions of learning and leadership. In terms of learning, most participants emphasised knowledge contents, instrumental learning, and a hierarchical relationship between teacher and students before the course. After the course, there was reportedly a shift to participatory learning and learning for developmental purposes. In terms of leadership, most participants stressed top down implementation and a hierarchical relationship between leaders and followers before the course. After the course, participatory relationships and shared leadership were repeatedly emphasised. There was generally a shift from an authoritarian orientation to a collaborative orientation. An increasing awareness of equal participation, empowerment and collaboration seemed to be the key to conceptual and leadership practice changes.

The study suggests that participants’ previous learning conceptions emphasised authority of teachers and knowledge while their previous leadership conceptions stressed authority of leaders in hierarchical structures or their professional positions. Participants’ previous conceptions generally emphasised authority and obedience while their developed conceptions came to stress empowerment and collaboration. There seemed to be a link between authoritative knowledge/passive learning and authoritarian leadership before the course. There also seemed to be a link between conceptions of contestable knowledge/participative learning and shared leadership after the course.

Many participants developed learning conceptions which emphasised the contestable and fluid nature of knowledge. For these participants, knowledge was considered to be socially constructed and the authoritative image of knowledge was consequently reduced. Their expanded leadership conceptions stressed utilizing collective learning and the cognitive power of organisational members. Dispersed leadership at different
levels of an organisation and participation in decision-making became valued. Learners
came to be viewed as active constructors of their own learning, and effective
organisational learning to be based on effective individual learning and team learning.
Consequently, leaders were viewed as leading learners and participators in
organisational development (see Chapman et al., 1997). The study suggests a link
between constructivist conceptions of learning and participative leadership. The
findings also show that many respondents discerned the links between learning and
leadership. Some participants stated explicitly that leadership for learning was the key
theme of the course. One implication that can be drawn from this finding is that leaders
need to be leading learners in organisations striving for constant improvement in
changing contexts.

10.3 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the perspectives of a relatively small sample of educational
leaders in Zhejiang Province, a well-developed region in China. Generalisation of their
conceptions to Chinese educators in other regions requires caution. Given the huge
territory of China, there are gaps between rural and urban areas, economically
developed coastal areas and underdeveloped inland areas. Moreover, there are great
differences in educational levels and leader profiles in various regions. Thus, the
capacity to develop generalisations about conceptions of educational leaders throughout
China is limited. Further research which covers a greater number of participants and
wider range of samples in various regions in China would be required to have a more
comprehensive picture about the perceptions of broader populations of Chinese
education leaders.

Another limitation is that the study was exclusively based on the self-reports of the
respondents. The reliability of such reports is always questionable. There might be
differences between professed beliefs and embedded beliefs in practice. In this study,
there might be a discrepancy between what participants said, what participants thought
they did, and what they actually did. They may have been tempted to agree with beliefs
that they may suppose were expected of them and mask socially undesirable or
contentious opinions. Moreover, the respondents as students may have felt the need to
please the teacher or give right answers to the interview questions, given the Chinese
cultural tradition which pays high respect to teachers. Confirmation of leadership beliefs
and behaviours in their workplaces would require confirmatory or observation strategies. Consequently, the study does not claim that leadership understandings reported could be automatically translated into changes in leadership behaviour. However, the study hopes to provide exploratory insight into beliefs and values in a manner which is not possible for observational methodologies, which ignore subjective terrains.

It should be noted that the belief that conceptual change precedes practice change in leadership is not a proven case. It is a suggestion based on self-reports of a small sample in this study. Moreover, interviewees were highly motivated to get something out of the course, and they were in a culture where students may tend to please the questioner. These factors need to be considered in interpreting participants’ self-reported conceptual change and practice change. Caution should therefore be exercised in putting too much confidence in the inferences from a single study such as this.

There is merit in analysing the conceptions and experiences of the participants, and investigating the change process of their beliefs. However, it is likely that while people go through their lives, they adjust thinking or behaving constantly in order to adapt to circumstances. Lifelong learning is supposed to occur in the changing world (Chapman et al., 1997; Gu & Meng, 2001). The provision of a formal graduate course for those adult students is an aspect of continued lifelong learning. Furthermore, other informal forces such as ageing, changes in family relations, and workplace reforms may have influenced these participants.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the study provide an exploratory indication of Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions in an international educational context. The findings also constitute a basis for further research.

10.4 Contributions to Theory and Practice

The focus of the thesis is on understanding Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership in an international education context. The research findings show that the course generally had a positive role in developing the conceptions and leadership practice of Chinese educational leaders. Readers interested in the research will be various, including educators engaged in international education and offshore
programs, scholars interested in understanding conceptions of learning and leadership from an intercultural perspective, and Chinese educators interested in conceptual change and leadership development.

Taking into account the limitations, the study makes its contributions to theories and practice in the following aspects. Firstly, the study makes its contribution to knowledge development and further understanding of learning and leadership, particularly in international education contexts. It extends categories of conceptions of learning identified by previous research based on phenomenographic approaches. It is one of a few phenomenographic studies exploring conceptions of leadership, and the first empirical study examining Chinese leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. This study makes its contribution to the knowledge base of learning and educational leadership especially from an intercultural perspective. To date and to the knowledge of the researcher, few empirical studies have been conducted in this field to explore Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. This study is the first empirical research to depict the conceptions of Chinese educational leaders in an international education context.

The findings show that most participants developed their conceptions towards more complex understandings of learning and leadership. Although limited in application, they generally increased their awareness of key aspects of variations in learning and leadership. Many participants reported a limited expansion in their leadership practice after the course. The findings also reveal some differences regarding conceptual change across the three sectors. A strong theme coming from the study is that Chinese educational leaders are generally open to Western ideas and eager to apply useful theories and concepts into their workplace. However, precautions must be taken because Chinese educational contexts and traditions, cultures and practices are different from Western countries.

Secondly, the study shows that international education programs can play a limited but positive role in expanding participants’ conceptions of learning and leadership. It is suggested that such programs may also help to enhance their international perspective and intercultural awareness, develop alternative perspectives, and to some extent, improve their leadership practice.
Thirdly, the study provides recommendations regarding designing, developing and delivering international programs. Within the context of international education programs, some effort needs to be made to tailor course provision to adapt to the local culture and nature of the learners. The following recommendations are worth mentioning in relation to educational leadership courses:

- paying attention to both learning process and substantive subject contents;
- adopting participatory pedagogy and adult learning principles;
- enhancing course deliverers’ knowledge of the host culture and its current development;
- customizing the course materials to the needs of learners from another culture;
- providing relevant readings and case studies in the local cultures;
- employing bi-lingual staff in the development and delivery of the international programs to bridge cultural gaps.

Fourthly, the study suggests that leadership is value-based and contextualised. The learning and leadership conceptions and practices are context dependent and inevitably influenced by particular cultural contexts. It is understandable that participants held beliefs and conceptions which were compatible with the existing contexts and teaching and leadership practice in China. Exposure to Western educational ideas and pedagogies has made them reflect on their own learning and leadership practice and given impetus for further reflection. The study suggests that a successful international leadership development program may offer the opportunity for a dynamic interactive process between ideas from different cultures. The argument is that an open, positive and discerning attitude of “absorbing any essence of advanced cultural heritage from other cultures” will facilitate expanded leadership conceptions and strategies in an international education context.

Last but not least, the study illustrates the tension between different cultural forces in the international education. This tension can be illustrated by the experiences of the researcher and respondents. As a PhD candidate and academic in a Western university, the researcher has to follow Western norms of academic study, and adapt to Western ways of thinking and doing things. However, the researcher’s Chinese cultural background and values have a strong influence and sometimes have been in conflict.
with Western values and culture. For instance, in Western academic writing and
critique, it is common to critically analyse other theorists’ assumptions; in the Chinese
context, it is common to acquire the knowledge of eminent scholars, not to critique it. In
order to adapt to a Western culture, the researcher needs to mediate these forces, adopt a
tolerant and flexible attitude toward the culture she is living in, and constantly adjust the
tension between two cultures. The researcher has managed to adapt her way of thinking
and doing things to the local cultural contexts, whether Western or Chinese. This
requires intellectual flexibility and a complex appreciation of different ways of thinking
and doing. This also means suspension of the way she previously judged situations,
openness to new ways of thinking, and tolerance of frustration and cultural dissonance.

It is also interesting to note how Chinese leaders interviewed in this study addressed the
tensions. They enrolled as students of a Western offshore program, attended the course
delivered by Australian academics, studied Western course materials, and followed
Western approaches of learning and teaching. They were also exposed to Western
culture, values, philosophies and ideologies. In order to fulfill the requirements of the
course and develop professionally, they were supposed to accommodate the needs of
Western academic norms and transfer the knowledge learned to their workplaces. But in
order to develop in the Chinese context, they needed to continue to be mindful of the
way things are done there. During the process of intercultural dialogue and
understanding, as intended in this international leadership development course, cultural
dissonance seemed to be unavoidable. People may generally escape cultural dissonance
by retreating to the dominant culture in which they are living. In practice, after the
course participants continued to be subjected to the strong forces of the Chinese culture
and context, while mediated the influence of Western culture and ideas.

10.5 Implications of the Study for Leadership Development

10.5.1 Develop an International Perspective and Enhance Intercultural Dialogue

The study shows that participants reportedly held comparatively traditional perceptions
about leadership because of the influences of Chinese cultural, social and economic
factors. They reported that their learning experiences and exposure to alternative
perspectives helped to enhance their leadership development in the following aspects:
reflecting on their previous assumptions and practices, enhancing their intercultural
sensitivity and awareness, developing an international perspective, and facilitating the
development of their conceptions and practice. At the same time, they reiterated that the
unique Chinese culture and local contexts would also continue to influence their
conceptions and choice of strategies of learning, teaching, and leadership in practice.

It is argued that the delivery of offshore programs is not simply a direct transfer of
Western theories and ideas to a developing country, which has different cultural,
historical, political, economic and social backgrounds. To some extent, the delivery is
actually a process of dissonance, interaction and integration between different cultures,
values, philosophies and beliefs. It is a process of intercultural dialogue rather than
indiscriminate “cultural borrowing” (Walker & Dimmock, 2000a), or imperative
“cultural imperialism” (Bush & Qiang, 2000). Most importantly, it can be a rewarding
learning process for both learners and course deliverers.

The responses from this cohort of participants at least seemed to suggest that to ensure a
genuine intercultural dialogue, it is inappropriate for Western academics or practitioners
to regard themselves as the privileged holders of Western ideas who can impose radical
prescriptions for the situation of developing countries. It is advisable for them to be
flexible reflectors ready to cater to the needs of learners from different cultures and
critical helpers of their capacity building. At the same time, it is necessary for learners
from recipient countries to give up resistant attitudes towards alternative perspectives or
feelings of superiority about their own culture, and attempt to absorb and adapt to the
best of the ideas and essence from other cultures. In this sense, intercultural dialogue
and integration is actually a significant aspect of this leadership development program,
which may also apply to other international programs.

10.5.2 Address Cultural Dissonance and Cultural Imperialism

The study suggests that it is problematic to transplant Western theories to non-Western
countries without considering local contexts and cultures. It is up to the educational
leaders from developing countries to reflect on, adapt and apply Western ideas or best
practices to local contexts. Due to differences in national characteristics, history,
culture, economic, social, and political systems, policy cloning or transferring Western
ideas without alignment with local contexts will bring about failure in practice. When
Western ideas are promoted which are contradictory to Chinese traditional culture and
political ideology, it is probable that cultural dissonance occurs and misunderstanding, resistance and open defiance are likely to be encountered in practice.

As stated previously, Western course developers and deliverers need to take precautions to avoid cultural imperialism or the indiscriminate imposing of Western theories upon the recipients. Leadership developers from Western countries may act as cultural and knowledge brokers in introducing alternative perspectives and practices rather than radical change agents in bringing about immediate transformation in recipients’ leadership conceptions and practices. For instance, many participants claimed that they shared some Western educational ideas, such as student-centred learning, developing student creativity, participatory decision-making and distributed leadership. However, there were many systemic and environmental constraints in their workplaces. Most often they had to conform to the prevalent social norms and continue to respect old practices. There was generally a big gap between their theories espoused and theories-in-use. However, they were confident that it was a trend for Chinese educators to accommodate participatory learning and shared leadership in their practice although it will be a long term and incremental change process.

This study suggests that intercultural interaction is a complex and multidimensional process. It is more complex than “cultural borrowing” from another culture which is perceived to be more advanced by many political authorities. Nor is it always a stubborn resistance to outside forces. It is a process of interaction where individual players consciously mediate between cultures and choose to amalgamate knowledge and values from both in unique ways. The result is a group of educated leaders with more sophisticated repertoires than agents from both the indigenous and foreign cultures. Such individuals may be examples of an emerging international culture composed of diverse origins which is more complex than that of any one nation or culture. It can be seen from this study that the result of intercultural contact is not a cultural loss on the part of recipient country (Gronn, 2001). It is rather a process of cultural dialogue, interaction and integration based on mutual understanding and benefit.

This study also suggests a trend toward the integration of Chinese and Western leadership ideas. Internationalisation and exposure to Western ideas may have led to Chinese educational leaders to reflect on their beliefs and practices. Rapid social,
economic and political development and radical educational reforms in China may also help enhance democratic and participatory awareness. In an increasingly networked world, some Western ideas such as participatory leadership, reflective and creative thinking, and flattened structures are likely to be adopted by many Chinese educational leaders. At the same time, Chinese classical ideas such as promoting the personal qualities of individual leaders and moral leadership may continue to be cherished by Chinese educational leaders (Wong, 2001b).

In this study, the participants generally held an open and reflective attitude towards Western ideas. They also reiterated the need to keep the essence of Chinese national culture and basic values, to critically reflect on Western ideas, and to absorb and adapt useful Western ideas to their workplaces. The study depicts a dynamic process of cultural dissonance, interaction, dialogue and integration. It highlights the intercultural understanding and critical accommodation of Western ideas, and cultural sensitivity of international education.

10.5.3 Professional Development of Chinese Leaders

One of the implications that can be drawn from this study is that the professional development of Chinese leaders needs to be enhanced in order to develop their perspectives and respond to the changing and complex world. Professional development activities are not limited to formal training courses or seminars. In addition to conducting formal training courses emphasizing interactive and reflective learning, various forms are suggested to facilitate the professional development, such as workshops, informal seminars, professional networks, field visits, and job rotation and change. The purpose of professional development activities is not constrained to studying policy documents or introducing state-of-the-art educational theories or practices. It is viewed as important to cultivate participants’ critical reflection ability, promote professional dialogue and networks, and enhance application of theories into practice.

The study suggests that in contemporary Chinese education, terms like “student-centred learning,” “inquiry learning subject”, “new curriculum reform”, “creative education” and “quality education”, are so popular that they may sometimes become empty political rhetoric. In addition to dramatic top-down educational reforms and system
restructures, great attention needs to be paid to the professional development of educational leaders and facilitating effective organisational cultures. It is suggested that besides system restructures, re-culturing of educational institutions and re-learning of staff also need to be emphasised. The grand visions will become reality when educational leaders have developed their perspectives and practice, and every organisational member is engaged in questioning traditional ideas and opting for continuous improvement. It should be noted that this is an incremental change process rather than a revolutionary process. Recent years have seen a good beginning and encouraging initiatives in China. The exterior forces from outside the nation may play a role in facilitating and speeding up this change process. The leadership development initiative described in this study is a good example.

To sum up, the study adds to the suggestions that leadership is a value-based and contextualised practice. The subject field of educational leadership in China is still at its early stage of development. It mostly either borrows Western management theories or resorts to traditional wisdom or moral tales from Chinese culture and history. The indigenous theories or models developed from current local culture and contexts are not well established (Feng, 2002a). Western leadership theories and ideas are deeply rooted in Western culture and philosophy. The underpinning assumptions and ideology may be different from those of Chinese ideas. For example, judgments about effective leaders are likely to be different in different cultures. There is a need to develop the indigenous leadership theories and frameworks related to the local contexts and establish the knowledge base while adapting appropriate aspects of Western theories. How can Chinese researchers review the best practices in Chinese education and come up with theories, models, and strategies to facilitate leadership practices? How can Chinese educational leaders adapt and absorb Western leadership ideas while keeping the essence of national culture? The negotiation of these sometimes opposing tendencies will require much consideration and reflection on the part of Chinese leadership researchers and practitioners.

10.6 Directions for Future Research

This study focuses on the perspectives of participants in an offshore leadership development program rather than those of the course deliverers. In order to investigate the dynamic interactive learning process in an international educational context, further
research is needed to examine the experience and perspectives of the Western academics and the adaptation that they have made.

The study is limited to the influence of an Australian offshore educational program upon Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership during a one-year course from 2002 to 2003. The influence of the course on participants’ perspectives and practice after they completed the course goes beyond the scope of this study. It would be significant to investigate the long-term influence of this leadership development program upon Chinese leaders. Follow-up research is therefore suggested to further examine the applicability of Western theories and how those participants are relating these perspectives to their workplaces longitudinally, through observations of the participants and consultation with relevant stakeholders like teachers, students, parents, and superintendents.

This study implies and critically reflects on a prevalent practice in contemporary China, namely that Western educational and management theories have been introduced to China as scientific knowledge systems. However, a close link between those abstract theories and practice often seems to be missing. It is not uncommon for Chinese educators to be familiar with many concepts or theories of Western education or leadership disciplines. However, they may find it hard to relate abstract theories to their workplaces. This suggests implications for contemporary Chinese educational researchers and practitioners. What is needed is more empirical research on critical adaptation of Western ideas to Chinese contexts rather than the current focus on translating Western books into Chinese or introducing theories systematically to China.

The research findings indicate that the leadership or management field is more about contextualised and applied practices than a pure objective science. Multiple perspectives and voices rather than one right angle are suggested to inquire into and interpret the world in order to give more comprehensive interpretations of a complex mosaic-like phenomenon. This study challenges the beliefs held by many Chinese academics that management or leadership disciplines are a science comprising objective, authoritative, irrefutable knowledge or truth. Indeed, it can be argued that educational leadership and management in the West is not actually a discipline in the traditional academic sense. Rather it is a field of endeavour which incorporates diverse and even contradictory assumptions about human beings, their organisations and
cultures (Gunter, 2003). As such, it will continue to pose fundamental heresies for traditional Chinese thinking. Further research is expected to explore philosophical paradigms underpinning Chinese learning and leadership.

10.7 Conclusion

This study explores the conceptions of learning and leadership from the perspective of Chinese educational leaders in an international education context. It also depicts how Chinese educators may see Western learning and leadership ideas. The study describes and analyses a developmental process in their conceptions. After having exposure to Western perspectives, they may have reflected on these ideas and their learning experience, modified or extended their previous conceptions, and then accommodated and applied their newly gained insights into practices. The study highlights the importance of critical reflection and adaptation on the part of practitioners when importing Western educational ideas to non-Western countries. It also questions the universal applicability of Western theories and ideas in non-Western contexts.

The study implies the significance of changing traditional ideas about learning and teaching in Chinese education. While emphasizing a systematic body of knowledge, knowledge transmission, and acquiring basic knowledge and skills, more attention needs to be paid to developing the learning abilities of students, promoting self-directed learning, independent thinking and critical thinking abilities in order to achieve a balance between the two seeming extremes: a solid-knowledge-based focused orientation and a problem-solving focused orientation. The implication of the study for leadership development in China is also significant. In addition to rational, standardized scientific management and situational contingency leadership arts, which are generally advocated in contemporary Chinese educational management and leadership, humanistic, consultative, shared leadership ideas need to be further investigated in China.

It is beneficial for Chinese educators to become familiar with Western educational theories and practices. It is also advisable for Western educators and academics to appreciate the perspectives of Chinese educators. It is actually a reciprocal and mutually beneficial process. Chinese educators can inform their Western counterparts about their teaching, learning and leadership practice and therefore enrich the international
knowledge base of educational leadership. Chinese educators and researchers can make their own contribution to leadership research and have their voices heard in the international research arena.

As indicated by the Chinese educational leaders in this study, there is a trend to integrate Chinese and Western educational and leadership ideas. At least in this instance, leadership development programs across the national boundaries are helpful for educators from developing countries to enhance intercultural awareness, develop an international perspective, get to know contemporary educational ideas and best practices from other countries, reflect on their own perspectives and practices, and then accommodate alternative perspectives and ideas critically to improve their leadership practice.

Under the influence of globalisation and internationalisation, it has been noted that education development trends in various countries are tending to converge on common issues such as mass higher education, information and communication technology, site-based management, economic rationalism emphasizing accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, and curriculum reform (e.g. Marginson, 1997; Wu, 2002). Collective efforts have been called to seek synergy while still valuing the unique characteristics of each country’s educational heritage. While the East turns to the West to promote student creativity and problem solving ability, the West turns to the East to demystify the high academic performance of Asian students in international mathematics tests. The argument in this study is that intercultural dialogue and integration of educational ideas and practice are likely to come about when East meets West in an open and reflective dialogue.
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13 The listed references are processed through EndNote 6. The reference style is based on the modified form of American Psychology Association (APA) 5th system of referencing. Headline style capitalisation rather than sentence style capitalisation is used in the references in order to accommodate the style of references in Chinese sources.
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Appendix A: The Initial Introductory Letter

30 March 2002

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Ting Wang and I am currently a PhD candidate in Education at the University of Canberra, Australia.

As you know, the educational reform, decentralisation and marketisation in the educational field in P. R. China in recent years have brought about a number of changes in the way schools, higher education institutions and educational departments are administered. The educational administrators are expected to improve their competencies in order to adapt to the changes. Therefore, the professional development of educational administrators is essential for the effectiveness and efficiency of educational organisations.

This project seeks to obtain an accurate picture of the perceptions of learning and leadership held by the participants in the course of Master of Educational Leadership, which is jointly conducted by the University of Canberra (UC) and Hangzhou Normal University (HZNU). The study also aims to investigate the influence of the professional development intervention on your conceptions of leadership and learning.

Upon reading the above information, if you decide that you wish to participate in the project, please sign the Informed Consent Form included with this letter and return it to me in the envelope provided.

I will contact you in a few days to finalize an interview date and discuss the procedure of the interview. Please feel free to contact me to discuss any aspects of the project.

Yours sincerely,

Ting Wang

School of Professional and Community Education

Division of Communication and Education

University of Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia
Appendix B: Participants’ Information

30 March 2002

Dear Sir /Madam

You are welcome to participate in Masters of Educational Leadership course offered in partnership by UC and HZNU. In order to obtain an accurate picture of the perceptions of learning and leadership held by the participants, I am undertaking a PhD study at UC. The title of my research project is “Understanding Chinese Educational Leaders’ Conceptions of Learning and Leadership in an International Education Context”. The research aims to describe your perceptions and to investigate the influence of the course upon your conceptions. In order to have an in-depth understanding of research issues two sets of interviews will be held, during the first and the last teaching block respectively.

Interview

If you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to talk about your understanding and perceptions of learning and leadership. The time and venue for interview will be decided according to the convenience of the interviewee and the researcher. You may be interviewed twice, once before training and once after training. The interviews will be, with your permission, tape-recorded, then transcribed and translated into English. The transcript of the interview will be available to you upon request. It is important that you share only what you feel comfortable and willing to discuss during the interview. The interview will run for approximately an hour and you may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

Benefits to be expected from the research

Your participation will be of great help in understanding your conceptions of learning and leadership. You will have opportunities to enter into a process of reflective learning about educational leadership. Your participation will also be helpful in determining an appropriate joint leadership development model for Chinese educational administrators. Participation in this research is not expected to create any discomfort or risk.
Safeguards
Official permission to conduct this study has been obtained from Hangzhou Normal University and the University of Canberra Committee for Ethics in Human Research. The information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and no reference will be made to any individual or institution in the analysis or reporting of the data. Only the researcher and the project supervisor will have access to the original data. The data associated with the project will be securely stored at the University of Canberra for five years on completion of the project. Participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any stage without penalty, or avoid answering questions you do not wish to answer. Whether you participate in this study or not will have no effect on your assessment in the course.

If you agree to participate in the project, please complete and sign the Informed Consent Form attached, and return it in an envelope provided. The code number is used in this study, which will be only accessible and known to the principal researcher and the particular participant. The reason for using the code is to safeguard your identity. Your code number rather than name will appear on the interview transcripts.

Signing the consent form is not binding as you are still free to withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason. Access to the results of the study will be available from Hangzhou Normal University on completion of the project, and you will have a copy of the summary if you desire. I am more than happy to answer any other questions you may have regarding the project. Please contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>If you have any other inquiries or concerns about the project you may contact my supervisor.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ting Wang</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Professional and Community Education, Division of Communication and Education, University of Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia</td>
<td>Dr John Collard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 0061 2 6201 2495</td>
<td>Phone: 0061 2 6201 2386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax: 0061 2 6201 2263</td>
<td>Fax: 0061 2 6201 2263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:wangt@comedu.canberra.edu.au">wangt@comedu.canberra.edu.au</a></td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:johnc@comedu.canberra.edu.au">johnc@comedu.canberra.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course: PhD in Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Doctoral Research Project
Understanding Chinese Educational Leaders’ Conceptions of Learning and Leadership in an International Education Context

I ________________________________ (the participant), declare that I:

(Participant’s name)

1. willingly volunteered to participate in the study;
2. am aware of the purpose of the study;
3. understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time;
4. am aware that all information relating to my participation in the study will be treated ‘in confidence’;
5. agree to information collected about me being used in the study, and published;
6. wish to remain anonymous in the study’s report of findings.

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Contact telephone number: ________________________________

☐ I agree to participate in the pre-training interview and post-training interview

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the summary (Please write your postal address)

________________________________________

________________________________________

Code number: ________________________________
Appendix D: Interview Schedules

*Initial Interview Questions*

1. Could you please introduce briefly your workplace, position and job duty?
2. Please indicate critical challenges you are facing as an educational leader.
3. What are the motivators for your participating in this course? What do you expect to get from it?
4. How do you understand leadership and learning? What is your personal understanding of these concepts?
5. Do you think your perceptions and leadership practice will change after undertaking the course? Why?

*Final Interview Questions*

1. Could you please introduce briefly your previous training and professional experiences?
2. How did you understand learning before the course and how do you understand it now? What is your personal understanding of the concept? Has your understanding of learning changed as a result of the course? Could you illustrate in what ways your understanding of learning has changed, if any?
3. How did you understand leadership before the course and how do you understand it now? What is your personal understanding of the concept? Has your understanding of leadership in educational organisations changed as a result of the course? Could you illustrate in what ways your understanding of leadership has changed, if any?
4. How do you perceive the relationship between leadership and learning?
5. In what ways has the course helped you to respond to the critical challenges you face as an educational leader?
6. Has your leadership practice in your workplace changed as a result of the course? Could you provide examples of your behavioural change, if any?
7. Could you identify three most important learnings you have gained from the training course? Have your expectations of the course been met?