



Chapter 5

Planning School Development

5.1 Introduction

The *School Development Planning* [XUE-XIAO-FA-ZHAN-GUI-HUA] as a term has not been included in the China's lexicon of school leadership and management until the late 1980s and early 1990s (Cao & Hui, 2009; Chu, 2008; Zhu, 2010). "School development planning" is valued because of the role of school leaders was intensified following the China's educational reform launched in 1985. The government policies regarding educational reform during the late 1980s and early 1990s yielded two big changes for school leadership. In the *Decision of the CCCPC on the Reform of the Educational System*, the CCCPC decided that "reform the management system, while strengthening macro-management, resolutely implement simplified administration and decentralization, and increase the level of school autonomy." (CCCPC, 1985). This position of the CCCPC resulted in the first change that a part of power was delegated from local education authority to school. As we know, the autonomy was always accompanied by accountability. The school evaluation, as one of major means of accountability in China at the time usually exercised in the light of the achievement of the objectives set in a school plan. Consequently, the *school development planning* was turned up as one of highest frequency terms in government policy documents as well as one of school leadership priorities in the early 1990s. Secondly, Chinese government called on in the early 1990s that the nation's mode of school education should transform from the *Exam-oriented Education* [YING-SHI-JIAO-YU] to the *Quality-oriented Education* [SU-ZHI-JIAO-YU] to provide children and young people with well-rounded education to foster their all-round development. In the same period, the government also advocated and encouraged schools to build up their own features and specialties rather than every school looked the same. Therefore, it was essential for school leaders to plan their school development in accordance with the government-set direction of *Quality-oriented Education* and the *Guiding Principle for Education* [JIAO-YU-FANG-ZHEN] while considering their schools tradition and status quo. Then the terms *Exemplar Senior High School* [SHI-FAN-XING-GAO-ZHONG], *Commissioned Management* [WEI-TUO-GUAN-LI], and *New Quality School* [XIN-YOU-ZHI-XUE-XIAO] were consecutively coined and widely used in China's school

leadership practice in the subsequent decade because of Chinese government's initiatives of expanding the scale of senior high school education and expanding quality schools to promote balanced-development of compulsory education. To continue to expand quality education and promote balanced-development of compulsory education, the most recent initiatives of Chinese government were the *Schools Running by Group* [JI-TUAN-HUA-BAN-XUE] and the *Neighboring Schools Networking* [XUE-QU-HUA-BAN-XUE]. For a China's principal, the leadership behavior of "planning school development" has been increasingly complex when he/she has both to develop his/her home school's development plan and the client school's plan in the context of *commissioned management*, or even to work with colleagues in several member schools to develop a very "big" plan for the school cluster in the context of *Neighboring Schools Networking*. It could be one of the reasons that the "planning school development" was set as the first one of six key leadership practices in *The Professional Standards for Principals of Compulsory Education Schools* (MOE, 2013) and *The Professional Standards for Principals of Senior High Schools* (MOE, 2015). In fact, it is almost impossible to avoid using one or more of the above-mentioned terms when school principals play the role of planning school development. In this sense, it is hardly to understand how the practice "planning school development" works in China's education context without understanding these terms at first. Thus, the *School Development Planning, Quality-Oriented Education, Guiding Principle for Education, Exemplar Senior High School, Commissioned Management, New Quality School, Schools Running by Group* and *Neighboring Schools Networking* will be explored and interpreted in this chapter.

5.2 Key Terms

5.2.1 School Development Planning [XUE-XIAO-FA-ZHAN-GUI-HUA]

School Development Planning (SDP) [XUE-XIAO-FA-ZHAN-GUI-HUA] in China's educational context is a term borrowed in 1990s from Western education literature, but with such Chinese characteristics as strongly initiating and promoting by local education authority, assuring and monitoring by the Party organization at school in the process of developing and implementing the plan, and having to submit the draft of the plan to the Staff Congress for approval before implementation.

Conventionally, the role of China's school principal as well as the school leadership team had been an agent to convey the will of the local authority and to fully implement government

instructions on school education and never taken the responsibility to plan school development until the nation-wide educational reform was launched after the publication of the *Decision of the CCCPC on the Reform of the Educational System* in 1985. With the advance of the reform, the government both delegated part of power to schools in managing the funding for teacher development, choice of teaching methods, and developing internal rules and regulations that conform to the school's history and current surrounding while at the same time maintaining the government control over the direction of school development (Liu, 2005; Cao & Hui, 2009). This change prompted the principals to consider and to make a comprehensive plan for the development of schools rather than only maintaining day-to-day operation. Moreover, in some districts where the pilot program of *Principal Career-ladder System* or *Term-Accountability by Objectives* was being exercised, it was necessary for principals to work out the development plan for their schools because the plan was one of the major bases of leadership evaluation in the *Principal Career-ladder System* and the *Term-Accountability by Objectives*. In the mid-1990s, *The empowered school: The management and practice of development planning* (1991) authored by David H. Hargreaves and David Hopkins was introduced to China and their perspectives, concepts, and strategies on *School Development Planning* (hereafter called SDP) were greatly influenced China's education sector. The SDP as a term was borrowed from Hargreaves and Hopkins's article to the practice of school planning in some districts of China at the time (Deng, 2006; Chu, 2008, 2014; Zhu, et al., 2010). The next momentum to drive the further spread of SDP in China was the joint projects implemented in a part of Western provinces of China. The projects funded by international organizations and Western countries for Chinese education, as we know, began to emerge after Chinese government decided to adopt the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978. By 1990s, the funding support of international and Western organizations for basic education in China increased and most of such projects aimed to support the primary and secondary school education in western provinces, the least developed areas of China. In the beginning, the aid funds were mainly used to improve the conditions of running schools in the least developed areas, such as increasing school buildings and teaching equipment. Yet, the results were not very satisfactory. Later, the project sponsors found that some new school buildings were almost destroyed just in a few years and a lot of apparatus and equipment had been left unused in the schools that claimed to be underfunded. There was only one reason for this phenomenon, that is, the low level of

management. As a result, the project sponsors decided to turn from “hardware” assistance to “software” development (Yin, 2004). From 1999 to 2005, The China-UK Gansu Basic Education Project mainly funded by UK Department for International Development was implemented in four counties of Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province. One of the major goals of the project was to introduce the SDP to over 670 primary and secondary schools in the four counties in order to improve leadership and management in these schools (Zhu, 2010). Another joint project, China-UNICEF project on principal training and the SDP started in 2001. The primary purpose of the UNICEF-sponsored project was to deliver the idea, concept, strategies, and skills of SDP to principals in 50 state-identified poverty-stricken counties in Western provinces of China by training and intended to improve school leadership and management in the 50 counties by spreading the SDP to the schools of these counties (Yin, 2004). After several years of implementation of the above joint projects, field investigation found that the SDP had been carried out in few member schools of the project. One of the main reasons was that the project funds were mainly used to train principals whereas teachers in project member schools didn't understand what SDP was because few trained principals were able to really convey the importance, knowledge and skills of SDP to the middle level managers and teachers for various reasons. “The leaders of many project member schools have accepted the idea of SDP, but they, in actual leadership practice, tend to only place the sign of the SDP Project School at their schools' main entrance but not to carry out the actual work, or they exercised SDP in their schools by way of mere tokenism because of the bondage of their inherent ideas and ways of thinking”, one of Chinese experts of CHINA-UNICEF project said with a sigh (Yan, 2006). On the other hand, the leadership and management practice of the schools had little improved though many principals claimed that the training program concerning SDP was helpful (Yan, 2006; Zhu, et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the joint projects indirectly promoted the further dissemination of the idea, concept, and strategies of SDP to the rest of parts of China. The original notions and strategies of SDP developed by Hargreaves and Hopkins have been widely accepted and applied in the process of the *Exemplar Senior High School* accreditation, *New Quality School* accreditation, and the evaluation of *Principal Career-ladder System* and *Term-Accountability by Objectives* in Beijing, Shanghai and other Eastern cities and provinces of China in the last 25 years.

Anyway, the last 25 years have witnessed how the SDP was introduced to China and applied

to China's school leadership practice. Today, SDP is one of the most frequently used terms in China's school leadership practice, and the hard copy of a school development plan for a certain school, as one of essential school documents, can be found either on principal's desk or in the folder of every principal's office. Many principals, particularly those in the more developed cities, are very familiar with the process of developing and implementing the school development plan in their schools and also understand how to use the process of the plan development to promote teachers to participate in it. However, the SDP in China's leadership practice is the SDP with some Chinese indigenous characteristics and a bit different from the SDP in Western context.

5.2.2 *Quality-Oriented Education* [SU-ZHI-JIAO-YU]

The term, *Quality-Oriented Education* [SU-ZHI-JIAO-YU] approximately means, in school educational context of China, the well-rounded education for all-round development of all students. It has used so far as an antithesis to the term *Exam-Oriented Education* [YING-SHI-JIAO-YU]. Before we explore the terms *Quality-Oriented Education* (hereafter called QOE) and *Exam-Oriented Education* (hereafter called EOE), it is essential to understand the historical context in which China's school system was almost completely destroyed by the Proletariat Cultural Revolution (PCR) during 1966-1976 (OECD, 2011, p. 85):

Formally the Proletariat Cultural Revolution, it was started by Mao in 1966 as a national-scale political campaign to eliminate all bourgeois influences in the country's "superstructure" (as opposed to the economic infrastructure). Violent activities sought to remove and destroy all symbols of bourgeois culture, such as music, drama, opera and novels, and to make sure their replacements were rooted in proletariat ideology. Activities in all these art forms had to start again from scratch, using a few "model" prototypes created from pure proletariat ideology. It became a social campaign and intellectuals were the most vulnerable. Among the revolution's consequences was the closing down of conventional schools. They were replaced with schools led by political teams of workers, peasants and soldiers, and the curriculum was totally revamped to reflect the essence of "class struggle." There were several attempts to resume schooling, but with little effect. Higher education institutions were suspended, replaced by new institutions admitting only workers, peasants and soldiers regardless of their academic merits.

Professors and intellectuals were sent to factories, villages and remote places to be “re-educated.” The concept reflected a utopian ideal of egalitarianism, where everybody produces for the state and the state distributes its wealth equally among its citizens. But the reality was total stagnation of the economy, a society of “equal poverty”, as economists recognised in hindsight. It is no exaggeration to say that China had to rebuild the entire education system in the late 1970s and early 1980s from the ruins left by the Cultural Revolution.

Spontaneously, the priority of post-PCR policy on school education was to terminate the chaos and re-building necessary order in education. As one of government initiatives to rebuilding a normal state of education, the *National College Entrance Examination* (NCEE) system, which had been suspended for ten years, was restored in 1977. More than 5.70 million Chinese young people took part in the NCEE in the winter of 1977, of which about 270 thousand were selected and admitted to universities and colleges of the country in the spring of 1978 (Ke, 2007). In 2007, Chinese media held a series of commemorative events to commemorate the 30th anniversary of restoration of the NCEE system. One can see that restoration of the NCEE system is really a milestone in China’s education rebuilding movement and even in the entire history of China’s contemporary education from such headlines of news reports as “The college entrance examination brings hopeful dawn to the nation” (Yi, et. al. 2007), “The restoration of the college entrance examination is a rebuilding of social justice” (Yu, 2007). In the same year, the National Education Examination Authority (NEEA), China Youth News, and ATA Inc. jointly conducted a large-scale survey to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the NCEE system. The results of the survey showed that 73.3% of the respondents believed that the NCEE system was generally fair; 89.6% of the respondents who had got chance to study in universities and colleges by taking part in the NCEE believed that their destinies had got various degree of change and such change is particularly obvious for those from the families with low socioeconomic status; 44.8% of the respondents thought that there were not many ways to success beyond the NCEE, while 25.5% of the respondents thought “few” or “no” way to success beyond the NCEE (Zhao, 2007). From here we see that the restoration of the NCEE system had positive significance for China’s education at that time. Yet, as every coin has two sides, the NCEE system is not an exception. When school leaders, teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders all attached too much importance to the

NCEE, a mode of EOE was consequently emerged in China's school education in 1980s. EOE refers to a mode of school education in which the fundamental purpose of school education is dissimilated into having students learn how to get as high a test score as possible. The most remarkable characteristics of the EOE are identified as (Liu, 1997; Zhu, et al., 2006; Tao, 2007; Wang, 2012):

- Schools focus their attention only on subjects of high-stakes test while rest of subjects are ignored;
- Teachers focus their attention only on teaching the knowledge within the scope of the examinations and the test-taking skills while rest of knowledge and skills are ignored;
- A minority of students who would get high scores in exams receive much more attention than the majority of students; and
- Students' study burden is overweight in most of primary and secondary schools, and the students' burden of senior high schools is excessively overweight.

It's fair to say that not a few educational researchers, policy makers and practitioners, some principals in particular, of China, made efforts in the early 1980s to change the tendency of EOE (Tao, 2007). Nevertheless, the EOE was like a machine running at high speed with own momentum and nobody could stop it. In his keynote speech at The Third National Congress of Chinese Society of Education in 1987, Liu Bin, the Vice Director of State Education Commission coined the term "Quality-Oriented Education" (QOE) (Liu, 1987). It is also known as the first time that the term was officially used (Zhu, et al., 2006). Following the first usage of the term in 1987, QOE as a term was highlighted in such important policy documents as the *Compendium for China's Educational Reform and Development* (CCCPC and State Council, 1993) and *Opinions of the CCCPC on Further Strengthening and Improving Moral Education in Schools* (CCCPC, 1994). In 1999, CCCPC and State Council delivered a significant decision titled *Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality-oriented Education in an All-Round Way* (CCCPC and State Council, 1999). It meant that QOE took center stage of China's educational reform, and a complete transformation from EOE to QOE was underway. Furthermore, the Article 3 of the amended edition of the *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* which went into force in 2006 specified that "[In] compulsory education, the State policy on education shall be implemented and quality-oriented education shall be carried out to improve the quality of

education and enable children and adolescents to achieve all-round development - morally, intellectually and physically - so as to lay the foundation for cultivating well-educated and self-disciplined builders of socialism with high ideals and moral integrity.” (National People’s Congress, 2006). For China’s primary and secondary schools, implementation of the QOE has been a statutory requirement since the amended edition of the *Compulsory Education Law* went into force in 2006.

What is the government’s real consideration behind this significant decision? In his memoirs titled *Li Lanqing’s Memoirs on Education*, former Politburo member of CCCPC and Vice-Premier Li Lanqing who was the top head of China’s education during 1993 to 2002 disclosed the main reason that Chinese government advocated and promoted the QOE at the time. Li said that the transformation of primary and secondary education to QOE is by no means a denial of the great achievements that had been made in basic education since EOE presented only one of aspects of educational status quo rather than the whole. Given the central government had decided that China’s economic growth mode should be fundamentally transformed to rely mainly on scientific and technological progress and the quality of labor force (rather than low labor costs), the decision of the central government to fully implement the QOE intended to enhance the employability, innovation and entrepreneurship of China’s labor force, and tried to transform the population pressure into demographic dividend as well as into human resource advantage (Li, 2003, pp.300-304). As for how to implement QOE in an all-round way, the Vice Director of the State Education Commission, Liu Bin presented a general framework in his speech at the National Experience Sharing Conference of QOE Implementation in Primary and Secondary Schools in 1997. The framework consisted of four policy initiatives and three breakthroughs (Liu, 1997):

- Initiatives: changing educational ideas and perspectives by guiding public opinion, training educators, and sharing successful experience; developing assessment system conforming to the QOE; fostering a high-quality teaching workforce to meet the needs of QOE implementation; optimizing the process of education and teaching and learning by curriculum reform.
- Breakthroughs: improving the outcomes of disadvantage and under-performing schools; reducing excessive schoolwork burden for primary and secondary school students; reform the examination system.

Later, the policy initiatives proposed by Liu in 1997 were really carried out in China and

achieving the QOE was also a steadfast direction for China's education reform. However, Liu didn't provide, in his speech in 1997, specific road map and timetable for QOE implementation. He reminded the audience at the National Experience Sharing Conference of QOE Implementation in 1997 that the QOE implementation was likely to be a complex, arduous and long-term process. Perhaps, Liu's judgment was proven over the ensuing years. Five years later, the result of a survey to teachers in primary and secondary schools conducted in Guangdong Province showed that 58.2% of the respondents said they had confidence in implementing QOE in primary and secondary schools; 58% of the respondents believed that "there are much difficulties in practice of QOE implementation, but there is indeed progress and a bright future." (Ding, and Zhou, 2003). In the *Intrview2018-EBO*, all interviewees believed that educators' ideas and notions on education has largely changed since the curriculum reform, as one of policy initiatives to promote QOE, launched in 2001. Nowadays, few educators see EOE as a normal mode of education any longer. The teaching approaches are more flexible and diversified than before, and the degree of teachers' professionalism is obviously higher than that of their previous generation. But meanwhile, 11 of the 15 interviewees admitted that the problem of excessive schoolwork burden for students and too intense competition in high-stakes examinations has not yet been solved (see Appendix B).

Over 30 years has passed since Liu first used QOE as an official term in 1987. Based on various research findings concerning the status quo of QOE implementation, we may come up with a conclusion that there is still a very much long way to go to achieve the QOE in China though much progress has been made in QOE implementation in past three decades.

5.2.3 Guiding Principle for Education [JIAO-YU-FANG-ZHEN]

The term *Guiding Principle for Education* [JIAO-YU-FANG-ZHEN], in China's educational context, refers to the general direction of the educational development and the overarching education policy set by the state or the (ruling) Party in a certain period of time (Dong, C. C. et al., 1985, p.159). In some government RHDs, the *Guiding Principle for Education* (hereafter called GPE) is called the state's GPE, while in others, it is called the Party's GPE. These two expressions are same in China's political context since the "Party" here refers to the CPC, the ruling party of China. GPE is a key term coherent with the QOE and also a term as significant as QOE in China's education context. For example, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of the GPE and the QOE at the same time when he visited a school in Beijing in 2016. He pointed out in

his remarks at the school that the basic education played a basic and precursory role in the national education system. The direction for development of the basic education should be well set and the Party's GPE should be carried out completely in order to make China's basic education getting better and better. Xi stressed at the same time that the QOE was the core of education. The school education needed paying attention to fostering students' creative spirit and practical ability and promoted students to get all-round development (Huo & Zhang, 2016).

China's GPE was first set out by Mao Zedong at the outreach meeting of Supreme State Council in 1957. Later, the GPE was enriched in 1960s and expressed as "education must serve the proletarian politics. Education must be combined with productive labor to foster the children and young people to develop morally, intellectually, and physically and become socialist and educated workers." (Tang, 2010; Yang, 2013) After Chinese government decided to adopt the "Reform and Opening-up" policy in late 1978, a new version of the GPE was gradually formulated. In spite of many times and various sorts of discussions and even controversies on the GPE for decades (Bai, 2003; Tang, 2010; Cheng, 2012, Yang, 2013; Li, 2017; Yang, et al., 2017), it was finally fixed by the Article 5 of *Education Law (amended edition)* in 2016 and expressed as, "Education shall serve the socialist modernization and the people. It must be combined with productive labor and social practice to cultivate socialist builders and successors with all round development of morality, intelligence, physique and aesthetic accomplishment for the socialist cause." (National People's Congress, 2016). It is essential for China's school principals to think over how to plan the development of their schools in the light of the GPE because it's one of the essential and statutory requirements for school and school leadership.

5.2.4 Exemplar Senior High School [SHI-FAN-XING-GAO-ZHONG]

The *Exemplar Senior High School* [SHI-FAN-XING-GAO-ZHONG] refers to the outstanding senior high schools selected in the light of official criteria. It is, in some other context, known as the government project named "Exemplar Senior High School".

From a historical point of view, the predecessor of the *Exemplar Senior High School* as a program was the *Key High School* [ZHONG-DIAN-ZHONG-XUE] project in 1950s. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the new state which was built on the ruins of the four-year Civil War immediately confronted with a shortage of talents in economic recovery and social construction. It was imperative for the newly established government to prepare

sufficient college-and career-ready personnel from the qualified senior high school graduates by improving the quality of high school education within a short time. Yet, the newly established government was unable to allocate enough resources to improve the quality of all high schools in China since the country's per capita GDP was only US\$14-19 in the first five years of the 1950s (MOE, 2003, P. 666). Thus, the Chinese government had to develop a project of *Key High School* that classified a part of schools as key schools while others as ordinary schools in order to concentrate limited resources on quality assurance in key schools. In 1953, 194 high schools of the country were named as *Key High Schools*. 194 schools were a very small portion (4.4%) of the large number of high schools in China (Li, 2003, p. 276). According to related policy, the *Key High Schools* were given priority in funding, human resource, school facilities, and selection of students. By extraordinary input, the *Key High Schools* had constantly improved the quality of their teaching and learning and prepared a number of excellent graduates for the country since then (Feng, 2007). Historically, the project of *Key High School* made a great contribution to prepare quality graduates of senior high schools for China's universities and colleges as well as for the country's industry and agriculture by concentrating limited resources during 1950s and 1960s. However, with the increasing demand for senior high school education in the early 1990s, the issue of expanding the scale of senior high school education was put on the agenda of Chinese government. The State Council called on building up 1000 high quality senior high schools throughout the country in its RHD in 1994, *Opinions of State Council on carrying out "Compendium for China's educational reform and development* (State Council, 1994). In this RHD, the old name *Key High School* was replaced by a new name *Exemplar Senior High School* (hereafter called "ESHS"). To lead the high school expansion into the direction of QOE, The State Education Commission (SEC) issued a RHD titled *the Circular of the State Education Commission on Evaluation and Accreditation of 1000 Exemplar Senior High Schools* in 1995. The SEC's RHD set out a nationwide project to select and name 1000 ESHS according to the State Council's requirement in 1994 by evaluation and accreditation in order to set an example for ordinary senior high schools in the country. In the mid-1990s, Shanghai took the lead in investing over 2 billion RMB (about 300 million USD) to reconstruct 11 key senior high schools (Li, 2003, p.279). The reconstruction of key senior high schools includes the expansion the size of campus

with a stadium and the building of new school building with science laboratories, computer rooms, gymnasium, in-door swimming pool, cinema, planetarium, etc. in which the advanced facilities and ICT devices were equipped. Of course, these 11 key senior high schools, after the reconstruction, became the first cohort of ESHS in Shanghai later on. In the local policy documents on ESHS, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (SMEC) defined the ESHS as the senior high schools with following characteristics (SMEC,1995; SMEC, 2004):

- Completely implementing the GPE, and exemplary carrying out the educational laws, regulations and relevant policies.
- Having set a correct orientation for school development, and proactively participated in educational reform.
- Having built a high-quality teacher team, and good infrastructure and equipment.
- Having got high-performance in school management and student outcomes, and created own specialty and uniqueness in education to foster students' all-round development in morality, intelligence, physique and aesthetic accomplishment.
- Having got positive feedback from stakeholders as well as universities/colleges on the school graduates.
- Having a long history, and getting a high reputation in the municipality wide.

However, the ESHS is by no means a simple copy of *Key High School* after all. As the first local education system to carry out the ESHS project, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission stipulated that every ESHS must undertake following responsibilities in addition to guaranteeing its high- quality teaching and learning and outstanding outcomes (SMEC, 2004):

- A ESHS should hold at least one public event opening to educators in the city to show the progress or outcomes of the ESHS's exploratory program in school education
- A ESHS should be the training base for local primary and secondary school principals and teachers to undertake the task of mentoring the school leaders and teachers from other schools as required.
- A ESHS should has superior human resource in one or more subjects with its own specialty and uniqueness in teaching and learning of the subjects. The school should make contributions to the improvement of the performance of school education of this city through professional impact on its neighboring schools.

- A ESHS should shoulder the responsibility of supporting disadvantage schools (one of them should be a rural school in the suburbs of the city) by teacher mentoring and classroom coaching, etc.

Obviously, it was necessary for the principals of ESHS to work with their colleagues to develop school development plan in accordance with the new requirements for ESHS. In a sense, the ESHS was another driving force behind the leadership practice of “planning school development”.

By the end of 2002, the number of students in China’s senior high schools had expanded from 9,380,000 to 16,840,000 by the ways of expansion of existing senior high schools and establishing a number of new ones (Li, 2003, p. 281). Moreover, either the expanded senior high schools or newly established ones were constructed according to the State-set standards for ESHS construction. From then on, the ESHS had replaced the *Key High School* to play the leading role in China’s high school education, and the term *Key High School* has no longer been used.

5.2.5 *Commissioned Management* [WEI-TUO-GUAN-LI]

The *Commissioned Management* [WEI-TUO-GUAN-LI] first emerged in the rapid progress of urbanization in the early 21st century in Shanghai, one of the cities with the highest urbanization rate in China, as one of policy strategies to bridge the quality gap of compulsory education between the suburbs and city center of Shanghai. Historically, the suburbs of Shanghai are mainly made up of rural areas. With the expansion of industrial enterprises, commercial business and social services from city center to suburban areas at the turn of the 21st century, the expected urbanization rate in Shanghai’s suburbs had reached 62% by 2005 (SDRC, 2006). However, the relatively rough pattern of school management and lower performance of school education still remained in suburbs of Shanghai at the time. Hence, how to bridge the quality gap of compulsory education between the suburbs and city center became one of the priorities for equalization of compulsory education in Shanghai. In 2005, the Education Bureau of Pudong District conducted a pilot project named *Commissioned Management (CM)* to commission a high performing school in the city center to take over the management of an under-performing school at rural area of Pudong District. Consequently, the rural school made a considerable progress in school management and student outcomes after two years commissioning of the school management. The welcome result of this pilot project enlightened the educational policy makers in Shanghai to adopt the CM project to try to bridge the quality gap of compulsory education between the suburbs and city

center of Shanghai. In 2007, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission kicked off a two-year municipal CM pilot project. 20 rural under-performing schools in suburbs of the city were commissioned by high performing schools or qualified education agency. The second round of municipal CM project successively started in 2009, 44 rural schools benefited from the second round CM. A survey concerning the effect of the first two rounds CM projects showed that most of member schools of the CM projects had improved in their management, student outcomes, teachers' professionalism and social reputation since they took part in the projects (Zhu, 2011). After several rounds practice of CM, the purpose of CM was clearly stated as "mobilizing quality education resource in city center to support the complete improvement of school education in suburbs, and promoting the quality and balanced development of Shanghai's compulsory education." (SMEC, 2015a). Moreover, the rules and regulations concerning the CM were also completely developed. The SMEC-proposed procedures of CM were as follows (SMEC, 2015a):

•Stage 1: CM preparation

- a) The education bureaus of city area districts provide the education bureaus of suburban districts with the recommended list of those high performing schools or the eligible non-government educational agencies willing to take the responsibility of CM.
- b) The education bureaus of suburban districts select the one or more client schools according to the status quo of the districts' compulsory education development.
- c) The individual education bureaus of suburban districts develop the bidding document and organize the tendering and bidding activities respectively.
- d) The schools or non-government education agencies winning bid sign a two-year performance contract with the education bureaus of suburban districts.

•Stage 2: CM implementation

- a) A school or an education agency as the winning bidder conducted two-year CM according to the performance contract. During the two-year CM, a task group consisted of at least three staff (usually one manager with two experienced and talented teachers) from the bid winning school/agency should be stationed in the client school, and other skillful teachers in various subjects from the bid winning school/agency will coach the teachers of the client school as necessary.
- b) The education bureau of a suburban district should provide the bid winning school/agency with

necessary fund and acts as a supervisor to take responsibility for on-going supervision in process of two-year CM.

c) The annual or mid-term evaluation of the effect of CM should be conducted.

•Stage 3: Final evaluation of CM

a) The final evaluation of the performance of CM will conduct at the end of the second year, and at least half of the evaluators should be the experts from SMEC’s expert pool according to the related rules of SMEC on CM.

b) The SMEC would publicly praise the bid winning school/agency with outstanding performance in CM (the above three-stage procedure of the CM is outlined in Figure 5.1).

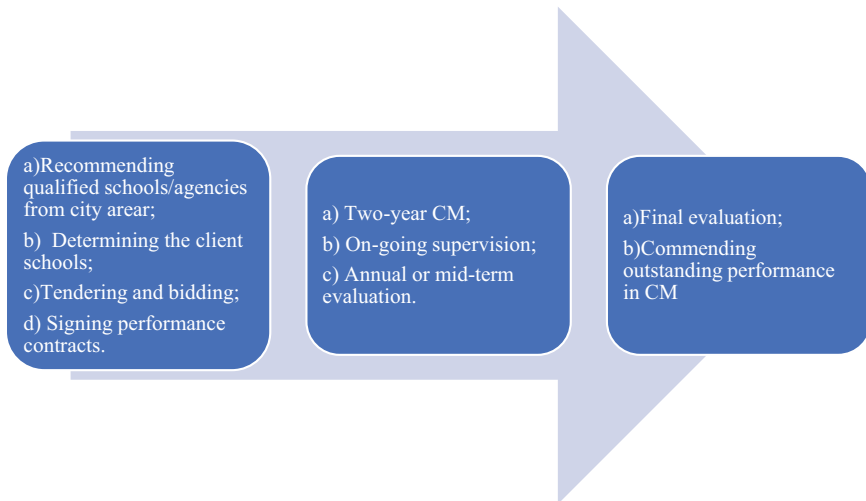


Figure 5.1 The three-stage procedure of the *Commissioned Management*

In 2017, the SMEC started the sixth round of CM. Compared with the first five rounds of the CM, there were two changes this time. First, the CM cycle was extended from two years to three years, so that the bid winning schools/agencies would get more sufficient time to improve the management, teaching and learning, and teacher professionalism in the client schools. Second, given the performance of rural schools in suburbs of Shanghai had been generally improved in the past five rounds of CM, the pertinence of the sixth round of CM was particularly stressed (SMEC, 2017). It meant that the bid winning schools/agencies should identify some of the key problems that hampered the further development of the client schools and develop appropriate strategies and approach to problem solving by “planning school development” for the client schools. In other

words, it was very important to apply the ideas, knowledge and skills of *School Development Planning* to the sixth round of CM.

The CM project was first created in 2005 in Shanghai, but then spread to other parts of China. For instance, the Lianyungang City in Jiangsu Province started to implement a pilot project of CM in 2010 by drawing on the experience of Shanghai (Zhang, 2011). At present, the CM, as one of alternatives to ensure the equality and balanced development of compulsory education has been widely adopted by local education authorities in various provinces of China.

5.2.6 New Quality School [XIN-YOU-ZHI-XUE-XIAO]

Conventionally, the term “quality school” was often used synonymously with the *Key High School* or *Exemplar Senior High School* in China’s educational context. The *New Quality School* [XIN-YOU-ZHI-XUE-XIAO] refers to an alternative type of quality school with some different characteristics from conventional ones, and more responsive to stakeholders’ demands and expectations in the 21st century. As noted earlier in this chapter, Chinese government had named 194 high-quality high schools as *Key High School* in 1950s and 1000 high-quality senior high schools as *Exemplar Senior High School* in 1990s. Nevertheless, it was only a very small number in terms of the huge school education system of China. According to the educational statistics in 2010, China’s 257 thousand primary schools and 69 thousand high schools (the vocational schools not inclusive) had an enrolment of nearly 180 million students (MOE, 2012). By 2010, when more and more parents were increasingly looking for quality schools for their children, the shortage of quality schools had become a big challenge for Chinese education policymakers. On the other hand, for decades, Chinese government hadn’t officially named any primary and junior high schools as “key school” or “exemplar school” because the basic policy for compulsory education was equality and balanced development though there were a few de facto high-quality primary and junior high schools in every district or county. Under such a circumstance, the *New Quality School* came into being.

The *New Quality School (NQS)*, as a term, was officially coined by the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (SMEC) in 2011. In the previous year, the *Shanghai’s Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* was published by Shanghai Municipal Government. The core mission of Shanghai’s compulsory education was set as “ensuring all children to have equal access to high quality education” (Shanghai Municipal

Government, 2010). To accomplish this core mission, there should be more quality schools to respond to the parents' needs and societal expectations. Since China's compulsory education schools (from primary to junior high phase) are both non-fees paying and non-selective schools, every community is designated as a certain school attendance area based on the principle to ensure every child can attend a nearby school. Thus, one of the critical indicators of achieving "ensuring all children to have equal access to high quality education" is that parents really feel that there is just right a satisfactory school in their community. In 2011, the SMEC kicked off a three-year project of NQS and 25 compulsory education schools recommended by education bureaus of districts joined the project as pilot schools. Later, the pilot schools increased to 43 because there were more schools would like to join the project of NQS. The NQS is defined as the compulsory education schools that had no high-reputation historically and no extra input of funding and human resource at present, but their students can make more progress than expected with respect to their students' original academic foundation by making efforts in providing various curriculum choices and diverse learning experiences to tailor the school provision to meet the needs of specific groups of students (e.g., gifted and talented, low attaining, with family ground of low social-economy-status), and so on (Hu, 2013; Xia, 2013; SMEC, 2015b). Moreover, an expected NQS should be with three characteristics: a) every child in the school was treated fairly and impartially; b) being concerned with not only student academic achievements, but also the healthy and happy growth of every student; and c) continuing exploring how to improve teaching and learning to foster student all-round development, and how to change a under-performing school into a satisfactory school in the community (Hu, 2013; Anon, 2015). Based on documentary review and field studies, a researcher who participated in NQS project in Shanghai identified two typical paths to achieve the goal of NQS among 43 pilot schools that: a) the self-remedy of organization: the school concentrates on solving the problems that hinder the development of schools (e.g., fragile leadership, deficient rules and regulations, insufficient human resource, unsatisfactory outcomes, unsuccessful experience, little trust from parents, low social reputation) one by one, and finally changes a poorly organized school into a well-organized one by setting up an open and interactive relationship with the parents and wider community, reconstructing school culture on the quality of teaching and learning and adopting appropriate leadership strategies; b) educational innovation: the schools are good at catching opportunities (e.g., participating in time

in some promising pilot programs funded by government, etc.) and able to transform the opportunities into school's exploring projects to improve school's performance and social reputation (Xia, 2013).

In 2015, SMEC decided to promote the further development of NQS by the pattern of NQS cluster so as to provide more compulsory education schools the opportunity to participate in a new round of NQS project (SMEC, 2015b). By 2017, the number of NQS in Shanghai had reached 380, which was equal to 25 percent of the total number of compulsory education schools of the municipality, Parents' satisfaction with their children's outcomes in NQS was over 90% (Xu, 2017). Like the project of *Commissioning of Management*, the NQS project, as one of alternative strategies to ensure the equality and balanced development of compulsory education, was also first created in Shanghai and then gradually influence the compulsory education reform in other parts of China. In 2016, the education authority of Changzhou, Jiangsu Province decided, for example, to worked out the plan to build up 100 NQS to promote balanced development for local compulsory education schools (Wang, 2017). Inevitably, for schools striving to transform themselves into *New Quality Schools*, redevelop their school development plans must be one of leadership priorities.

5.2.7 Schools Running by Group [JI-TUAN-HUA-BAN-XUE]

Schools Running by Group [JI-TUAN-HUA-BAN-XUE] is one of the terms coined in China's expansion of quality schools in the early 21st century. It usually refers to a prestigious school-centered school networking organized as a school group in which a prestigious school acts as a leading school to drive the member schools of the group to develop together, and to improve their performance to pull off the support and trust of stakeholders. *Schools Running by Group* (hereafter called SRG) as a pattern of school networking was first emerged around the year of 2000 in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province (Wang, 2013; Yan, 2016). By March 2006, there had been 51 school groups and 188 member schools were operating under the pattern of SRG in Hangzhou (Zhu, 2006). The initial model of SRG is relatively simple, and the popular model at the time was that a prestigious school annexed other related low performing schools or built new campuses of the prestigious school in the communities where there was shortage of quality schools. The SRG in Hangzhou as one of government measures to promote the expansion of quality schools aroused interest from other metropolitan governments. Beijing, for example,

began to try the SRG in 2005. Almost all the pilot projects of the SGR had achieved positive results. As one of typical cases, it only took two years for a member school of the Peking Primary School Group to change from an under-performing and undersubscribed school to a high profile and oversubscription school (Yin, 2017). In 2012, The State Council published the *Opinions of State Council on further promoting the balanced development of compulsory education*. In the section “promoting quality education resources to be shared” of the State Council’s RHD, the State Council made clear that “encouraging the establishment of school networking, exploring the *Schools Running by Group*, advocating school-to-school assistance, implementing the *Neighboring Schools Networking*, and improving the overall level of school running”(State Council, 2012). After that, the development of the SRG in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and other metropolises was greatly accelerated. Beijing started a project called "Urban-Rural Linkage School Construction" in 2012, and the municipal government allocated special funds to promote the development of the SRG in the city's newly developed areas. Later, the SRG was extended to almost all districts of Beijing (Li, 2017). By the end of November of 2017, 217 school groups had been established and 610 member schools, approximate one third of the total number of primary and secondary schools in the city were operating under the pattern of SRG in 16 districts of Beijing. At the same time, the models of SGR had been more diverse than before, including the “a prestigious school +newly established schools”, “a prestigious school +under-performing schools”, “a prestigious school + ordinary schools”, and “a prestigious middle school + a few under-performing primary schools” in which the member schools were closely coupled or loosely coupled (Yin, 2017). The specific operating mechanism of individual SRGs could be different. The SRG would be operation as a big school with one legal entity when the prestigious school fully took over management of other member schools (closely coupled). Whereas majority of SRGs were operation as a school federation with several legal entities (loosely coupled), in which the prestigious schools influenced other member schools through sharing resources with the member schools or providing member schools with professional coaching, mentoring, and supervision but without interfering in member schools’ financial and personnel affairs. In this case, the prestigious schools would receive an additional grant from their local education authorities to make up for their inputs to their member schools. In Shanghai, SMEC, the municipal education authority encouraged four districts of the city in 2014 to conduct the pilot projects of SRG. In

2015, the SMEC issued *Opinions of Shanghai Municipal Education Commission on promoting high-quality and balanced development and promoting the Schools Running by Group and the Neighboring Schools Networking*” to promote the SRG within whole city, and set out the goals that “by the end of 2017, fifty percent of the compulsory education schools in the whole city will be operation under the pattern of SRG or *Neighboring Schools Networking* (it’s the term to be explored in 3.2.8). The member schools of SRG and *Neighboring Schools Networking as a Cluster* should meet the minimum criterion of the *Basic Standards for Running Compulsory Education Schools in Shanghai*. The effect of the projects of SRG in Shanghai is encouraging since the satisfaction of students, parents and communities, on average, is over eighty-five percent. (SMEC, 2015c). By June 2018, there had been 128 school groups in Shanghai, in which 644 member schools were operating under the pattern of SRG (Shang, 2018).

The SRG has grown so fast over past decade largely because of strong administrative impetus of local education authorities. Of course, the government-driven projects, in China’s education context, will yield high efficiency. Yet, the situation of so rapid development without in-depth reflection inevitably makes some new challenges. The identified challenges include that the legitimacy of establishing SRG was questioned by some staff of the member schools, and the high-quality human resource of a prestigious school was over-diluted with the fast expansion, and so on. In some cases, the cultural conflict between the prestigious school and other member schools were emerging (Zhang, 2017; Yin, 2017). Thus, the recent policy on the SRG seems to have been more considerate. The SMEC, for example, pointed out that not every prestigious school or high performing school was qualified to play the leading role of the SRG. Rather, only the prestigious or high performing schools that meet the following four conditions could act as the leading school of a SRG: a) the principal of the school upheld educational concepts that met the needs of the times and was able to manage the school by scientific way; b) the school had the capability to allocate sufficient resources to support other schools; c) the school had a good social reputation; and d) majority staff of the school were willing to do so (Zheng,2014). Moreover, the SMEC stipulated that whether or not to be a member school of the SRG should be the voluntary choice of a school, and school leaders should listen to the opinions or suggestions of the school Staff Congress before they made the final decision to participate in a school group (SMEC, 2015c). In addition, the SMEC was aware that although the models of SRG could be varied, every SRG in

compulsory education stage should develop its development plan according to the *Basic standards for running compulsory education schools in Shanghai (2011)* and was evaluated later in the light of the objectives that set out in the SRG's development plan (Zheng,2014). Thereby, planning the development of the SRG is one of priorities for the SRG leadership, and the leadership practice of "planning school development" is highlighted again.

5.2.8 Neighboring Schools Networking [XUE-QU-HUA-BAN-XUE]

Neighboring Schools Networking [XUE-QU-HUA-BAN-XUE] refers to a community-based school network in which the neighboring schools collaborate with each other by the way of sharing various resources and successful experiences, interacting in teaching-study activities, and co-organizing network-based teacher development programs. In practice, the *Neighboring Schools Networking* (NSN) is most likely to be a loosely coupled school federation in most cases, so it is also known as a community-based school partnership. The NSN, like the SGR, was also one of government initiatives promote the balanced development of basic education emerged in the early 21st century. These two terms are often mentioned side by side in Chinese government policy documents (e.g., Shanghai Municipal Education Commission's *Opinions of Shanghai Municipal Education Commission on promoting high-quality and balanced development and promoting the Neighboring Schools Networking and the Schools Running by Group [2015]*). However, the term *Schools Running by Group* was created by the educational practitioners in Hangzhou and the first pilot project of SRG was also kicked off in 2000 in Hangzhou whereas the term *Neighboring Schools Networking* was coined by the educational practitioners in Beijing and the first pilot project of NSN was exercised in 2004 in Beijing (Li, 2006).

5.3 Summary and Discussion

In this chapter, we have explored eight key terms around the theme of "planning school development". Given the "planning school development" is placed as one of six key leadership practices for school principals by the MOE (MOE, 2013, 2015), it is no doubt for us to focus on the term *School Development Planning* [XUE-XIAO-FA-ZHAN-GUI-HUA] in the beginning of the chapter. By reviewing the process of how the *School Development Planning* (SDP) was introduced to China and applied to China's school leadership practice, one can see a typical example of the influence of Western school leadership knowledge on Chinese school leadership practice. The SDP as a whole has been well applied in China's education context thus far but there

are some things that need to be improved. As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the Chinese characteristics with which the SDP in China's education context is "strongly initiating and promoting by local education authority". The promotion of local education authority is conducive to improving the efficiency of SDP implementation, but, on the other hand, it is inevitably with some bureaucratic maladies. An education researcher cited an example that on SDP that a district education bureau required the schools in the district to develop and submit their five-year development plan within three months. The researcher believed that it was so hard for schools to work out a quality plan for next five years in such a short time (Wei, 2017). Secondly, even though principals all know the truth that SDP is a means rather than an end in itself, they still put too much effort into the perfection of the text because they also know the result of SDP review links to their future career and the reviewers hardly examine the whole process of SDP except for the text of a plan itself. Finally, the author would like to draw the attention of international researchers who have interest in Chinese culture in leadership to the case of China-UNICEF project on principal training and the SDP in which the issue of cultural adaptation emerged. Why the SDP borrowed from Western countries did not get very good results in the Western provinces of China, but had a positive impact on promotion of SDP in the eastern coastal cities? It reveals a fact that the so-called Chinese culture is made up of a lot of different subcultures, and there are differences between these subcultures. The second term *Quality-Oriented Education* [SU-ZHI-JIAO-YU] has been one of cardinal concepts in China's education reform in the last 30 years. As one of statutory requirements for school education, it is essential for principals to well understand the connotation of *Quality-Oriented Education* (QOE) and have the QOE reflected in every part of school development plan. In exploring this term, the author reviewed the historical background of QOE as well as *Exam-Oriented Education* (EOE) (as a term opposed to the QOE), the connotation of QOE and EOE in China's educational context, the purposes and policy initiatives of Chinese government for QOE implementation, and the current status of QOE implementation in China. As pointed out previously, there are still some obstacles to be overcome in achieving the QOE though much progress has been made in QOE implementation in past 30 years. One of the hardest nuts to crack in QOE implementation is how to reduce the excessive schoolwork burden for students and excessive pressure on students in preparing to take the *National College Entrance Examination* (NCEE). Liu Bin, the Vice Director of the State Education Commission pointed out in 1997, "the

essential function of the NCEE is selection, which is always contradictory to the QOE.” (Liu, 1997) The assuming solution proposed by Liu at that time was the diversification of college entrance examination. He argued that it would be difficult to exercise the EOE in schools if the college entrance examination became diversified. He conceived, “with different exam papers, and two or more times chance to take the examinations, it would not be easy to exercise ‘teaching to the test’, they have to improve their well-rounded quality to adapt to a variety of examinations.” (Liu, 1997) Unfortunately, the hardest nuts in QOE implementation has been never cracked since Liu made his prediction about the effect of examination reform in 1997. The National Assessment Center for Education Quality (NACEQ), a professional institution affiliated to MOE conducted a large-scale survey of year 4 and year 8 students from 2015 to 2017 and published the *Monitoring report on the quality of compulsory education in China* in 2018. This report revealed that the sleep time of students is generally insufficient, and the proportion of students participated in the afterschool private tutorial was quite high and student’s pressure caused by learning was high, too.(NACEQ, 2018) The results of a most recent survey on private tutoring showed that the proportion of China’s secondary school students participating in private tutorial of Mathematics, Foreign Languages and Chinese Language and Literature (these are three key subjects in NCEE) was between 65.7% and 74% and the average number of afterschool tutoring hours per week was 21.4 hours. The motivation of students to take part in the private tutorial was “to improve academic performance” (71% of the respondents) or “for the exams” (74.6% of the respondents) (Zhi & Chen, 2018). The findings of these surveys have, in a sense, demonstrated that Liu’s prediction is not true after so many rounds of NCEE reform in the last 30 years. Frankly, Liu underestimated the desire of students as well as their family to pursue their bright future or change their families’ fate through the NCEE, the most influential high-stakes and selective examination. Although many schools have been attempted to reduce students' schoolwork, parents tended to increase their children’s burden by purchasing the private tutoring. That's why most of principals and teachers agreed in *CSSLM2017-principals* and *CSSLM2017-teachers* that the major obstacle to reduce students’ excessive burden came from the parents and the society (see Appendix A). Given “almost all families, regardless of socioeconomic status, to have high hopes for their children’s future, and such hopes translated into hard work and adaptability to difficult learning environments.” (OECD, 2011, p. 84), it may be inevitable for the examination reform, which aims

at reducing the excessive schoolwork burden for students and excessive pressure on students in preparing to take the NCEE, to be defeated by the cultural tradition existing throughout the entire Chinese world, including the Chinese communities both in and out of mainland China. Perhaps, it is also one of major reasons for the failure of similar reforms in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Feng, 2017). The third term presented in this chapter is *Guiding Principle for Education* [JIAO-YU-FANG-ZHEN]. The different connotations of the term in Mao's era and in the time of "Reform and Opening-up" in the late 1970s and onwards were examined in this chapter. In carrying out the *Guiding Principle for Education* (GPE), one of salient problems in leadership practice is that the GPE is not completely carried out in some cases though significance of carrying out the GPE is repeatedly emphasized (Shi, 2017). On the other hand, some scholars criticized that the existing expression of the GPE is incomplete. They argued that it is unduly emphasized for education to meet the needs of the state whereas the education's function in fulfilling the development of individual students' personality has been overlooked to some extent (Wang, 2006; Li, 2014). The fourth term interpreted in this chapter is *Exemplar Senior High School* [SHI-FAN-XING-GAO-ZHONG]. The author began with the review of the Key School Program, the predecessor of *Exemplar Senior High School* (ESHS) program which initiated by Chinese government in 1950s to prepare quality graduates of senior high schools for China's universities and colleges as well as for the country's industry and agriculture by concentrating limited resources under the circumstance of a shortage of talents in economic recovery and social construction. Unlike the *Key High School* program, the ESHS program was to expand the scale of senior high school education to meet the social needs for quality high school education in 1990s. At the same time, the program was required to play the leading role in local school education reform and development toward the direction of QOE. Generally speaking, ESHS program has adapted to the needs of expanding the scale of high school education in the era of high-speed development of economy and urbanization of China though some new challenges associated with the ESHS program to be addressed. For instance, it is not very fair for neighboring schools of a ESHS that the ESHS always pick the high-achieving students since they have the priority in school enrolment (Liu, 2005; Tao, 2008; Tang & Fan, 2013). The fifth term *Commissioned Management* [WEI-TUO-GUAN-LI] refers to one of policy strategies to ensure the equity and balanced development of compulsory education in China. It was first developed in 2005 in

Shanghai to bridge the quality gap of compulsory education between the suburbs and city center of Shanghai, and was widely adopted by local education authorities in various provinces of China later on. Taking Shanghai as an example, we explored the term by reviewing several rounds *Commissioned Management* (CM) of the city, examining the established rules and regulations regarding the CM. Through six rounds of CM, most under-performing schools in rural area of suburban districts has improved their performance and social reputation. Concomitantly, the leadership teams and teachers in high performing schools of city center have learned a lot in rethinking the SDP and rebuilding school policy for client schools to improve the client schools' outcomes within two or three years. Findings of the survey concerning the effect of the first two rounds CM projects suggested that the most difficult part in implementing a CM project is how the staff of the client schools to emotionally accept the "invasion" of external forces (Zhu, 2011). For emotional acceptance and cultural integration, it will take a lot of time. This was probably why Shanghai municipal education authority decided to extend the CM project cycle from two years to three years in the implementation of the sixth round of CM in 2017 (SEC, 2017). The sixth term in this chapter is *New Quality School* [XIN-YOU-ZHI-XUE-XIAO]. It refers to an alternative type of quality school first emerged in Shanghai when the SMEC promoted the equality and balanced development of compulsory education in 2011. The exploration of this term began with examining the difference between conventional quality school and NQS. Also, the social background of the *New Quality School* (NQS) and the typical paths to achieve the goal of NQS in practice were reviewed. Based on reviewing the literature about NQS and the NQS case materials, it is not difficult to find that one of key leadership capacity for principals in the process of creating a NQS is still how to work with their colleagues to work on the *School Development Planning* (SDP) because, through the process of SDP, they will be likely to identify the major challenges confronting their schools, reach a consensus with colleagues as well as other stakeholders, set a new vision, and employ appropriate strategies to change the status quo of their school (Yin, 2013, pp.102-106; Xia, 2013; Hu, 2014; Shen, 2015). The last two terms in this chapter are *Schools Running by Group* [JI-TUAN-HUA-BAN-XUE] and *Neighboring Schools Networking* [XUE-QU-HUA-BAN-XUE]. The former refers to a prestigious school-centered school network while the latter refers to a community-based school network. The *Neighboring Schools Networking* (NSN) is most likely to be a loosely coupled school federation in most cases, so it is

also known as a community-based school partnership. In this chapter, we review the projects development, policy provisions and achievements of the SRG and NSN in several metropolises. So far, most educational policy makers, practitioners and researchers have acknowledged that the SRG and NSN have indeed made considerable contributions to the quality and balanced development of basic education, especially compulsory education in China. However, some researchers and even policymakers believe that some challenges, with further development of the SRG and NSN, still need to be addressed in the future. First, in practice of the NSN, quite a few leaders of leading schools tend to export their own leadership concepts and management systems to member schools indiscriminately. It would be likely to lead to a potential cultural conflict. Some researchers argued that the priority of the SRG and NSN is, after all, to bridge the gap of student academic achievements between the leading school and member schools rather than replacement of school culture and tradition of the member schools (Guo & Zheng, 2015; Guo, 2015). Second, Mr. Li, the deputy director of basic education of Beijing Municipal Education Commission recognized that the local governments should, in implementation of the SRG, act as a coordinator in allocating funds and other resources to provide the school groups with necessary support, and play a supervision role by evaluation. They should not restrict the autonomy of SRG too much. (Li, 2017). Namely, a prestigious school needs not only additional funds but also additional discretionary power in the prestigious school-centered school network. Third, a primary school principal contended in a published article that it was necessary to establish a mechanism to allow a member school withdrawing freely from a SRG when the outcomes of the member school will have been good enough after several years' efforts in the SRG. For this kind of schools, they don't have to always be under the shadow of a prestigious school (Zhang, 2018). The principal's point of view suggests that the SRG or NSN may have suppressed the development of some schools that could have become better. Another challenge behind the arguments of above researchers, policy maker, and principals is how to improve the quality of the studies on the rich and vibrant practices of the SRG and NSN. In fact, there has been too little sophisticated empirical research on the SRG and NSN thus far. As the case of the SRG we mentioned in the 3.2.7 of this chapter, it only took two years for an under-performing and undersubscribed school to become a high profile and oversubscription school after the school participated in a school group. How did this school's rapid improvement happen? What factors contributed to this big progress? How much

contribution have they made respectively? Has the school lost anything while getting its improvement? These answers are still unknown because there are no empirical research findings about this case. Last but not least, it should be noted that specific policies and practices regarding SRG and NSN may be different in different cities or provinces because local education authorities have the right to decide on the detailed rules for the implementation of SRG and NSN in their jurisdictions. For example, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission reiterated in its policy documents that neither SGR nor NSN was designed to turn many schools into one big school. The government didn't intend to create a "big principal" to map out and handle every detail of leadership and management in the member schools (Liu, 2014; SMEC, 2015c). However, the policy regarding NSN of Xi'an, the capital city of Shanxi Province was quite different from that of Shanghai. Li Yinke, the director of Xi'an Education Bureau introduced in 2014 that the pilot project of NSN started off in four districts of Xi'an in 2012, and expanded to all districts/counties of the city in 2013. By the end of spring semester, 1788 compulsory education schools in Xi'an had been integrated into 416 neighboring school network. Moreover, the "nine-unified management" had been carried out in every member school of all 416 NSN of the city. The so-called nine-unified management encompassed the unified strategies for school development, unified allocation of all equipment and facilities originally belonging to individual member schools, unified curriculum plan, unified redeployment of teachers, unified activities of lesson preparation, unified activities of teaching-study, unified network-based teacher training, unified student assessment, and unified school evaluation (Li, 2014). It is a typical case to remind international researchers who would conduct empirical studies on some local education policy or school leadership practice in China that the findings of an empirical study or the results of a policy analysis in a given city or province may not necessarily be used to infer the overall situation of China. On the other hand, the case of NSN in Xi'an raises a question that whether the NSN will become a sub-district bureau, thereby increasing bureaucracy and red tape in school leadership practice? It is a problem that researchers are worrying about (Guo & Zheng, 2015).

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