



# The First Decade of Asian Research on School Leadership in a Global Context 拾載以來的全球脈絡亞太學校領導研究

## Reconciling Top-Down Policy Intent with Internal Accountability: The Role of Chinese School Principals

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the intersection of external and internal accountability systems within Chinese schools, and the role school principals take in managing this intersection. Specifically, the paper seeks to understand how principals in China build and strengthen internal accountability while responding to external demands. The data was drawn from in-depth interviews with primary school principals in these six regions in China: Shanghai, Beijing, Guangdong, Hubei, Liaoning and Guizhou. The study contributes evidence-based understandings about Chinese principals' perception of authority and responsibility, and various strategies they have adopted to strengthen and sustain the school's internal accountability system. The study suggests that a complex mix of leadership practices defines school principalship in China. On the one hand their work environment seems to be highly political and they must be conscious of their role as state employees. On the other hand, there is a strong professional expectation of school principals and they must gain legitimacy by demonstrating expert knowledge in curricula and instruction and by approaching teachers in a way that combines sincerity and benevolence.

**Keywords:** School Principalship, Accountability, China, Instructional Leadership