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## Principals' Critical Thinking in Leading Schools: A Cultural Lens

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Critical thinking is essential for school principals to navigate the growing complexities of contemporary educational environments. Instead of a neutral or universally defined skill set, critical thinking is a social practice shaped by broader sociocultural contexts. Standards of rationality and criteria for evaluating evidence are influenced by historical and cultural factors. To explore this, we adopted a case study approach to examine how three upper secondary school principals in Taiwan apply critical thinking in their leadership practices. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The findings reveal that these principals place a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships in their critical thinking and decision-making processes. This emphasis reflects the profound influence of traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly the values of moderation, balance, compromise, and the yin-yang dynamic. These philosophical foundations infuse principals' critical thinking with a culturally embedded sense of harmony and appropriateness. Principals' reliance on relational thinking is exemplified by cultural concepts such as "patience brings resolution" and the importance of timing, which signify a shift from rapid, reactive responses to more deliberate and reflective reasoning. Moreover, the inclusive mindset and collectivist orientation characteristic of Chinese cultural traditions enhance the effectiveness of principals' leadership and critical thinking.

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