School Management Culture, Emotional Labor, and Teacher Burnout in Mainland China

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Abstract: The literature suggests that teacher burnout is influenced by the market and hierarchy cultures of school management and teachers’ emotional labor strategies of surface and deep acting. However, studies have suggested that school management cultures and emotional labor strategies may not function independently based on the emotional labor theory. Nevertheless, the literature has paid less attention to the relationship between the school management cultures, emotional labor, and teacher burnout. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between the three variables in China via an online questionnaire survey. After surveying 425 kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers who participated in a professional development program organized by a public university in Beijing, the study found that teacher burnout was positively related to market culture but negatively related to hierarchy culture. Moreover, the impact of the market culture was fully mediated by surface acting while the impact of hierarchy culture was partially mediated by surface acting and deep acting.

Keywords: school management culture; emotional labor; teacher burnout; market; hierarchy

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, students live in an interconnected, diverse and rapidly changing world in which emerging economic, digital, cultural, and environmental forces keep shaping their lives [1]. To help students to survive in such a world, it is necessary to keep improving and developing educational and school systems to equip them with necessary competencies, skills, attitudes and values for lifelong learning and social participation in the interconnected world with diversity [2]. Nevertheless, we are witnessing many reform initiatives of educational and school development not being very successful across the globe because they tend to intensify teachers’ workload and stress, leading to teacher burnout [3–5]. The literature implies burned-out teachers tend to be less motivated and committed to making changes and improvements for better quality of education [3,6]. In this sense, burnout may not only affect teachers’ well-being, but also their support and commitment to sustainable school development for twenty-first century education. Therefore, education researchers have investigated the antecedents of teacher burnout to identify strategies to reduce teacher burnout and sustain their commitment to sustainable school development [7,8].

Burnout is generally referred to as the exhaustion of employees’ capacity to maintain involvement and commitment to their work [9]. More specifically, it is comprised of emotional exhaustion (in the sense of being emotionally overextended and drained), depersonalization (in the sense of being cynical and detached from one’s work or other persons at work), and reduced personal accomplishment (in the sense of incompetence,
Inefficacy and nonachievement) [10]. In the past three decades, burnout has become prevalent for teachers worldwide [7]. Although burnout is a psychological issue, the implication is that burnout has become a social problem beyond purely psychological explanations, as many teachers worldwide report suffering from it [4]. Therefore, education researchers like Dworkin [3] have attempted to explore the social factors related to teacher burnout from a sociological perspective.

A prevalent sociological explanation is that managerial education reforms, which aim to improve school efficacy and effectiveness by introducing the logics of accountability and performativity into school management, have institutionally exacerbated teacher burnout because the reforms create an environment emphasizing the market and hierarchy cultures of school management. Teachers are forced to do and are accountable for many duties without choice and under supervision, leading to chronic stress [3,5]. Therefore, researchers recommend that school leaders develop a school culture that supports teachers’ work and development in order to improve teacher well-being for sustainable school development and improvement in the context of education reforms [11]. However, this explanation tends to neglect teachers as agents who can cope with stress by emotional labor [12], which is defined as the emotional management done for wage or organizational goals [13,14]. According to the emotional labor theory, teachers can regulate their psychological states by the emotional labor strategies of surface acting (changing emotional expressions to change feelings) and deep acting (changing feelings to change emotion expressions) [15]. In other words, the impacts of school management cultures on teacher burnout may be mediated by teachers’ emotional labor. This means that to sustain school development for quality of education, it is important to understand how school management cultures and teachers’ emotional labor dynamically influence teacher burnout. Nevertheless, the literature has paid less attention to the working mechanisms among the variables. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between these factors to advance the understandings of teacher burnout and in turn identify recommendations to improve teacher well-being for sustainable school development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. School Management Cultures and Teacher Burnout

Since the mid-1990s, managerialism, which can be generally defined as “governmental public policy diffusing managerial thinking into public organizations to measurably improve organizational efficiency” [16], has spread worldwide and affected numerous education systems [17]. Influenced by ideology, education systems have initiated different educational reforms that emphasize the school management logics of accountability and performativity [18,19]. For example, education systems generally decentralize a certain degree of decision-making power to schools for school-based management. However, they also make schools accountable for their performance, use performance indicators to evaluate them, and publicly publish these results to help parents and students when choosing schools [20]. Consequently, a quasi-market of education emerges, and in the quasi-market, schools become more market-oriented [20]. In this situation, schools may develop a market culture of school management that emphasizes competitiveness, productivity, achievement, and goal orientation [21]. In school management adopting a market culture, teachers are inclined to be treated as frontline service workers, while parents and students are treated as consumers. It is assumed that parents and students have the right to make requests, interventions, and criticisms to teachers, while teachers have the responsibility to satisfy them unconditionally [22]. According to Guo et al. [23] and Guo and Kilderry [24], such a change in teacher–parent–student relationships is already happening in Mainland China. Their studies show that the situation may challenge Chinese teachers’ professionalism and emotionally exhaust the teachers, reduce their interest in interaction with parents and students, or affect their sense of self-efficacy in teaching. Therefore, as Tabler, et al. [25] note, market culture may accelerate burnout.
In addition to market culture, managerial education reforms may also encourage schools to develop a hierarchy culture of school management. According to Cameron and Quinn [21], hierarchy culture is characterized by a formalized and structured workplace in which formal procedures, rules, and policies govern what people do in order to maintain organizational stability, predictability, and efficiency. In this sense, school management adopting a hierarchy culture tend to develop a bureaucratic system to manage teacher performance to ensure school efficiency and effectiveness. As Pang [26] shows, Hong Kong schools have emphasized bureaucratic values such as formality and rationality since Hong Kong implemented school-based management based on managerialism in the mid-1990s. Due to school bureaucratization, the school decision-making power becomes centralized into the top-of-school hierarchy, while teachers become subject to greater administrative supervision and control [27]. Therefore, the teachers may be only responsible for the work assigned by school leaders and pressured to do less relevant duties to achieve their moral purpose of teaching, such as cultivating students’ whole-personal growth, but significant to achieving schools’ managerial purposes, such as satisfying performance indicators assigned by the top-of-school hierarchy [5]. As a result, they may be exhausted by the duties they perceive as meaningless and become cynical and detached from their work [28].

The literature suggests that a prolonged stay in this situation may make teachers prone to burnout [3]. Accordingly, hierarchy culture may exacerbate teacher burnout.

2.2. Emotional Labor and Teacher Burnout

In the last two decades, emotional labor has become a prevalent concept used to explain teacher burnout [29,30]. The concept was termed by Hochschild [14] in her seminal work, The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, which first reveals how the emotions of service workers are commodified for profit-making in postindustrial societies, implying that ownership and control over their emotions are wrested by organizations employing them [31]. Therefore, service workers have to manage their emotions based on emotional rules, including feeling rules and display rules in the workplace. Based on her study of flight attendants, Hochschild [14] identified surface acting and deep acting as two major strategies of emotional labor in the workplace: surface acting is the effort to fake unfelt emotions or hide felt emotions to display required emotions appropriately and deep acting is the effort to express desired emotions by modifying felt emotions with cognitive techniques such as distraction and self-persuasion [32].

As influenced by the Marxist theory of alienation, in Hochschild’s original theorizing, emotional labor is regarded as alienated labor [31]. This means that performing emotional labor would lead to emotive dissonance, which is the separation of feelings and displays [14], resulting in the alienation of emotions from the self [31]. Since the sense of alienation is closely related to burnout [33], it has been argued that emotional labor is a factor predicting burnout [29].

Nevertheless, some researchers, such as Bolton [34], disagree that emotional labor must be alienating. Concerning the field of education, Hargreaves [35] argues that emotional labor is not just work done for a wage or organizational goal in teaching; it is also the practice of love and care to cultivate students’ growth. It is particularly true to Chinese teachers. Yin and Lee [36] showed that teachers in China generally define themselves as “mother of students”, implying that they perceive themselves as the persons devoted to students’ growth. Therefore, performing emotional labor may help the teachers achieve the moral purposes of teaching with emotive consonance and, in turn, verify their professional identity, leading to a sense of accomplishment and self-realization [36]. In other words, the relationship between emotional labor and teacher burnout should be complex. For example, research has indicated a positive relationship between surface acting and burnout but a negative or insignificant relationship between deep acting and teacher burnout [15,29,30].
2.3. School Management Cultures, Emotional Labor, and Teacher Burnout

Although school management culture and emotional labor may have impacts on teacher burnout, they should not work independently. According to emotional labor theory, emotional rules guide how people feel and display emotions in a given situation [37]. Although the literature has indicated that the emotional rules shaping teachers’ emotional labor are related to professional ethics of teaching [12], school management culture may also influence teacher emotional labor. For instance, in Taiwan, Chen and Hsu [38] illustrated that school management may design cultural codes of emotional propriety to guide how teachers display emotions in teaching, which, compared with the professional ethics of teaching, have a more direct effect on teachers’ emotional labor and in turn influence teacher exhaustion and self-estrangement. In other words, school management culture may affect teacher burnout by influencing teachers’ emotional labor [39].

In market culture of school management, schools tend to treat parents and students as customers purchasing educational services from schools [20]. In this situation, schools may require teachers to satisfy parents and students as much as possible to enhance parents’ and students’ positive feelings towards schools and avoid negative feelings leading to conflicts and complaints. Therefore, teachers may be pressured to act professionally, be polite, keep smiling, and hide negative emotions such as anger during interactions with parents and students, even when parents and students disrespect and devalue their professionalism [40]. Emotional labor may then affect teacher burnout. In other words, the market culture of school management may force teachers to perform emotional labor, which is highly likely to impact teacher burnout; therefore, the effects of market culture on teacher burnout may be mediated by emotional labor.

Chen and Hsu’s [38] study implies that the hierarchy culture of school management may direct how teachers manage emotions in school settings in Chinese societies. According to them, schools with hierarchy culture generally have a formal and hierarchical management system by which school administrators bureaucratically supervise and monitor teachers to ensure that they perform effectively and efficiently. Therefore, Chinese teachers may choose to hide or suppress negative emotions and keep working without overt complaints even though they are dissatisfied with school management since they are expected to be subordinate and obedient to school bureaucracy [27]. In this sense, the hierarchy culture of school management may influence teachers’ emotional labor, leading to emotive dissonance, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization [29]. Thus, the relationship between school hierarchy culture and teacher burnout may be mediated by emotional labor.

3. The Present Study

According to the literature review, the market and hierarchy cultures of school management, emotional labor (surface acting, and deep acting) may affect teacher burnout. School cultures may specifically affect teacher burnout by influencing teachers’ emotional labor [39]. In other words, teachers’ emotional labor may play a mediating role in the relationship between school culture and teacher burnout. Therefore, the present study formulates the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). The relationship between market culture and teacher burnout is mediated by emotional labor.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). The relationship between hierarchy culture and teacher burnout is mediated by emotional labor.

To test the hypotheses, a quantitative study was conducted in China. Like their Western counterparts (such as in the US and UK), Chinese teachers are generally prone to burnout. For instance, a study that surveyed 42 thousand teachers in China showed that almost 30% of the teachers were emotionally exhausted, and over 80% reported that they
suffered from work stress [41]. Research has suggested that the prevalence of preschool teacher burnout is approximately 50% [42]. The literature implies that teacher burnout may be related to implementing managerial educational reforms in China [43]. Since the 1980s, China has initiated a series of reform policies based on managerialism [44]. For instance, the country has attempted to improve the quality of education by a variety of decentralization and marketization initiatives, such as allowing private individuals to run schools, decentralizing power from the central government to provincial and county authorities, and encouraging school choice [45]. In this sense, teachers may work in schools with market culture because an educational quasi-market emerged in China [23]. Inspired by decentralization and marketization, as a socialist country, China’s central government still kept a close watch on school management and teachers with different bureaucratic and accountability measures [46]. Therefore, schools tended to value hierarchy culture, such as formalization and centralization, in school management in Chinese education reform contexts [47]. In these situations, as Liu and Zhang [48] observed, schools were inclined to bureaucratically require teachers to manage their emotions appropriately in school settings. Accordingly, China was an information-rich case for the study to examine the relationship between school management cultures (market culture and hierarchy culture), emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting), and teacher burnout. The specific method for testing the hypotheses is introduced in the following section.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Participants

The study surveyed 425 teachers who participated in professional development courses offered by a public university in Beijing from March to April 2018. First, the research team created an online questionnaire with Questionnaire Star that was an online platform for questionnaire survey creation. Secondly, the team invited every teacher to complete the online questionnaire by sending the link of the questionnaire via WeChat after the courses. Questionnaire Star was used because it only showed the IP address rather than other personal identifiers of participants. Moreover, the questionnaire did not ask participants to give their names or other identifiable information. Thus, the online questionnaire survey should be able to keep participants anonymous [49]. To ensure the participants’ rights, the first page of the online questionnaire introduced the purpose of the study, clarified their role in the study, ensured no negative consequence if they chose to terminate the survey at any time, and elaborated how the collected information would remain confidential and be used for research purpose only. After reading the information, they could check the Start Button if they consented to participate the online questionnaire survey. WeChat, instead of email, was used to be the delivery channel of the online questionnaire because most of the Mainland Chinese preferred to receive messages via WeChat rather than email [50].

After deleting 8 cases with missing data, this study ultimately included 417 participants. Among these participants, 58 were male (13.9%) and 359 were female (86.1%). The average age of the participants was 32 years. The schools in which the participants worked varied in educational stage and educational quality. Specifically, 106 participants taught in kindergarten (25.4%), 182 in primary schools (43.6%), and 129 in secondary schools (both junior and senior secondary school) (30.9%). In terms of educational quality defined by students' academic performance, 142 participants reported that they came from highly achieving schools (34.1%), 228 from ordinary schools (54.7%), and 47 from low-achieving schools (11.3%).

4.2. Measurement

4.2.1. Teacher Burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators’ Survey (MBI-ES), originally developed by Maslach, et al. [51], was widely applied to measure teacher burnout. Li and Wang [52] revised and contextualized it to assess teacher burnout in the Chinese context. This
Chinese version of the MBI-ES contained 15 items measuring three dimensions of teacher burnout: emotional exhaustion (5 items), depersonalization (4 items), and reduced personal accomplishment (6 items). The sample items for each dimension are “I feel emotionally drained from my work”, “I doubt the significance of my work,” and “I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.” All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). A higher score in each dimension indicated a higher level of burnout. The Cronbach’s alpha for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment was 0.89, 0.75, and 0.78, respectively. Therefore, C. Li and Wang’s [52] Chinese version of the MBI-ES was used to measure teacher burnout.

4.2.2. Surface Acting and Deep Acting

Surface acting and deep acting as the major emotional labor strategies were measured by two subscales of the Teacher Emotional Labor Strategy Scale (TELSS), namely, the surface acting subscale and deep acting subscale, developed by Yin [32]. The subscales were chosen because the TELSS was designed to examine Chinese teachers’ emotional labor. The surface acting subscale contained 6 items; an example sample item is “The emotions I show to students or parents are different from what I really feel in my heart.” The deep acting subscale contained 4 items; an example sample item was “I try to really feel the emotions that I have to show to students or parents.” All items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha for the surface acting subscale and deep acting subscale were 0.91 and 0.84, respectively.

4.2.3. Market Culture and Hierarchy Culture

These two school cultures were measured by the market culture subscale and hierarchy culture subscale of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), developed by Cameron and Quinn [21]. Each subscale contained 6 items. An example item from the market culture subscale is “The organization is a very result oriented. A major concern is getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement oriented.” An example item from the hierarchy culture subscale is “The organization is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do.” The study asked the participants to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) [53]. This study’s data show high reliability, as the Cronbach’s alpha for the market culture subscale and hierarchy subscale were 0.81 and 0.80, respectively.

4.2.4. Demographic Variables

The teachers’ demographic information included gender, age, educational attainment, and professional level, as well as whether the teacher was a head teacher and whether the teacher held an administrative position. The features of the school (educational stage and educational quality) where the teachers work were also collected and controlled for because this information may influence teacher burnout, e.g., [7,54]. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study.
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables (N = 417).

| Variables                        | Mean   | SD    |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|
| Teacher burnout                 |        |       |
| Emotional exhaustion            | 3.374  | 1.217 |
| Depersonalization               | 2.606  | 1.200 |
| Reduced personal accomplishment  | 3.001  | 1.268 |
| Teacher emotional labor         |        |       |
| Surface acting                  | 2.063  | 0.836 |
| Deep acting                     | 3.100  | 0.923 |
| School culture                  |        |       |
| Market culture                  | 3.331  | 0.730 |
| Hierarchy culture               | 3.598  | 0.684 |
| Age (years)                     | 32.200 | 7.961 |

| Gender                          | N      | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Male                            | 58     | 13.9%      |
| Female                          | 359    | 86.1%      |
| Educational attainment          |        |            |
| Associate or below              | 83     | 19.9%      |
| Bachelor’s                      | 248    | 59.5%      |
| Master’s or above               | 86     | 20.6%      |
| Professional level              |        |            |
| None a                          | 168    | 40.3%      |
| Junior                          | 116    | 27.8%      |
| Middle                          | 94     | 22.5%      |
| Senior                          | 39     | 9.4%       |
| Head teacher                    |        |            |
| Yes                             | 202    | 48.4%      |
| No                              | 215    | 51.6%      |
| Having an administrative position|       |            |
| Yes                             | 57     | 13.7%      |
| No                              | 360    | 86.3%      |
| School-level                    |        |            |
| Kindergarten                    | 106    | 25.4%      |
| Primary school                  | 182    | 43.6%      |
| Secondary school                | 129    | 30.9%      |
| School type                     |        |            |
| High-achieving school           | 142    | 34.1%      |
| Ordinary school                 | 228    | 54.7%      |
| Low-achieving school            | 47     | 11.3%      |

Note. a. Teachers in kindergarten and the newly recruited teachers in primary and middle schools do not have a professional level.

4.3. Data Analysis

To get a reliable result, two analyses were utilized to explore whether teacher emotional labor strategy played a mediating role in the relationship between school culture and teacher burnout. First, three regression models were used. According to Baron and Kenny [35], a mediation effect exists if the following three conditions are met. (a) The independent variable significantly influences the dependent variable in the first model. In this study, school culture significantly affected teacher burnout, which was examined by the regression of teacher burnout on school culture. (b) The independent variable significantly influences the mediator in the second model. In this study, this condition was that school culture significantly affected teacher emotional labor, which was tested through the regression of teacher emotional labor on school culture. (c) The mediating variable (emotional labor) significantly affects the dependent variable (teacher burnout) in the third model, and the effect of the independent variable (school culture) on the dependent variable (teacher burnout) is less in the third model than in the first model. This was explored through the regression of teacher burnout on school culture and emotional labor. Second,
Hayes’ [56] bootstrapping technique (bootstrapping was set at 5000 samples for this study) was also utilized to obtain the confidence intervals (CIs) using the SPSS PROCESS. Both these analyses were done by using SPSS software.

5. Results

Three steps were used to examine whether schools’ market culture and hierarchy culture of school management affected teacher burnout through emotional labor. First, the two school management cultures’ effects on three dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) were estimated. Secondly, the school management cultures’ effects on two dimensions of emotional labor strategy (surface acting and deep acting) were analyzed. Thirdly, the effects of school management cultures and emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) on teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) were examined in the same regression.

Table 2 presents the effects of school management cultures on the three dimensions of teacher burnout. The results indicate that after controlling for demographic information, market culture significantly increased the degree of emotional exhaustion (coef. = 0.356, \( p < 0.01 \)) (the coefficients in this study were all unstandardized coefficients) and personalization (coef. = 0.275, \( p < 0.05 \)), while its effect on reduced personal accomplishment was nonsignificant (coef. = −0.090, \( p > 0.05 \)). In contrast, hierarchy culture significantly deceased the degree of emotional exhaustion (coef. = −0.506, \( p < 0.001 \)), personalization (coef. = −0.569, \( p < 0.001 \)) and reduced personal accomplishment (coef. = −0.398, \( p < 0.01 \)).

| Table 2. Effects of School Culture on Teacher Burnout. |
|-------------------------------------------------------|
| **Emotional Exhaustion** | **Depersonalization** | **Reduced Personal Accomplishment** |
| **Coef.** | **SE** | **Coef.** | **SE** | **Coef.** | **SE** |
|----------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| Constant | 4.238 *** | 0.563 | 4.602 *** | 0.546 | 5.253 *** | 0.568 |
| Female | −0.037 | 0.187 | 0.090 | 0.181 | 0.176 | 0.188 |
| Age | −0.013 | 0.011 | −0.034 ** | 0.010 | −0.018 | 0.011 |
| Educational attainment (ref. = associate and below) | | | | | | |
| Bachelor’s | 0.067 | 0.199 | 0.085 | 0.193 | 0.235 | 0.201 |
| Master’s and above | 0.203 | 0.245 | 0.146 | 0.237 | 0.277 | 0.247 |
| Professional level (ref. = no professional level) | | | | | | |
| Junior | −0.038 | 0.165 | 0.095 | 0.160 | −0.384 | 0.166 |
| Middle | 0.120 | 0.196 | 0.221 | 0.191 | −0.297 | 0.198 |
| Senior | 0.045 | 0.287 | 0.008 | 0.278 | −0.313 | 0.289 |
| Head teacher | 0.173 | 0.123 | −0.100 | 0.119 | −0.237 | 0.124 |
| Admin–position a | −0.186 | 0.175 | −0.043 | 0.170 | −0.069 | 0.177 |
| School-level (ref. = primary school) | | | | | | |
| Kindergarten | −0.285 | 0.201 | −0.057 | 0.195 | 0.181 | 0.202 |
| Middle school | −0.068 | 0.148 | 0.093 | 0.144 | 0.267 | 0.149 |
| School type (ref. = ordinary school) | | | | | | |
| High-achieving school | 0.231 | 0.131 | 0.068 | 0.127 | −0.175 | 0.132 |
| Low-achieving school | 0.425 * | 0.198 | 0.336 | 0.192 | −0.137 | 0.200 |
| Market culture | 0.356 ** | 0.131 | 0.275 * | 0.128 | −0.090 | 0.133 |
| Hierarchy culture | −0.506 *** | 0.143 | −0.569 *** | 0.139 | −0.398 ** | 0.144 |
| Adjusted R2 | 0.043 | 0.073 | 0.103 | 0.132 |
| F | 2.246 *** | 3.196 *** | 4.182 *** | 0.133 |

Note. a. Admin–position refers to teachers who have an administrative position in the school; All the variance inflation factors (VIFs) are below 3, showing that there is no multicollinearity in each model; * \( p < 0.05 \); ** \( p < 0.01 \); *** \( p < 0.001 \).
Table 3 presents the effects of the market culture and hierarchical culture of school management on the surface acting and deep acting of teachers. The results indicate that after controlling for demographic information, market culture significantly increased teachers’ surface acting (Coef. = 0.217, p < 0.05) but insignificantly affected teachers’ deep acting (Coef. = 0.039, p > 0.05). By contrast, hierarchy culture significantly decreased teachers’ surface acting (Coef. = −0.194, p < 0.05) while it increasing teachers’ deep acting (Coef. = 0.287, p < 0.01).

Table 3. Effects of School Culture on Teacher Emotional Labor Strategy.

|                        | Coef.     | SE   | Coef.     | SE   |
|------------------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
| **Surface Acting**     |           |      | **Deep Acting** |      |
| Constant               | 2.760 *** | 0.382| 1.428 **  | 0.425|
| Female                 | −0.234    | 0.127| 0.088     | 0.141|
| Age                    | −0.015    | 0.007| 0.005     | 0.008|
| Bachelor’s             | 0.097     | 0.135| 0.298 *   | 0.150|
| Master’s and above     | 0.202     | 0.166| 0.287     | 0.185|
| Educational attainment (ref. = associate and below) |           |      |           |      |
| Junior                 | −0.180    | 0.112| 0.028     | 0.124|
| Middle                 | −0.235    | 0.133| −0.138    | 0.148|
| Senior                 | −0.354    | 0.195| −0.092    | 0.216|
| Head teacher           | 0.079     | 0.083| 0.045     | 0.093|
| Admin–position a       | 0.010     | 0.119| 0.197     | 0.132|
| Professional level (ref. = no professional level) |           |      |           |      |
| Kindergarten           | −0.166    | 0.136| −0.141    | 0.151|
| Middle school          | 0.075     | 0.100| 0.062     | 0.112|
| School-level (ref. = primary school) |           |      |           |      |
| High-achieving school  | −0.107    | 0.088| 0.018     | 0.099|
| Low-achieving school   | 0.111     | 0.135| 0.183     | 0.150|
| Market culture         | 0.217 *   | 0.089| 0.039     | 0.099|
| Hierarchy culture      | −0.194 *  | 0.097| 0.287 **  | 0.08 |

*Adjusted R2 | 0.064 | 0.053 |
| F           | 2.909 *** | 2.558 ** |

Note. a. Admin–position refers to teachers who have an administrative position in the school; All the variance inflation factors (VIFs) are below 3, showing that there is no multicollinearity in each model; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

The above analysis indicated that market culture had no significant effect on teachers’ reduced personal accomplishment and deep acting. Thus, it might only affect teachers’ emotional exhaustion and depersonalization through teachers’ surface acting. On the other hand, hierarchy culture significantly influenced the three dimensions of teacher burnout and teachers’ surface acting and deep acting. Thus, hierarchy culture could affect three dimensions of teacher burnout through both teachers’ surface acting and deep acting. Based on the findings, mediation analyses were further computed to test (1) the mediation effects of surface acting in the relationship between market culture and two dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization); (2) the mediation effects of surface acting in the relationship between hierarchy culture and the three dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment); and (3) the mediation effects of deep acting in the relationship between hierarchy culture and the three dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment).

Table 4 presents the effects of the two school management cultures and two teachers’ emotional labor strategies on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The models explain 24.7% of emotional exhaustion, 36.5% of depersonalization, and 21.8% of reduced personal accomplishment. When including variables of emotional labor, the explained R² of variables of teacher burnout experienced a great increase (compared with Table 2), suggesting a necessity to take emotional labor into
consideration. According to Table 4, surface acting could significantly increase teachers’ emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, while deep acting could significantly decrease teachers’ depersonalization and reduce personal accomplishment, echoing findings in previous studies [15,29,30].

When surface acting was included, market culture had an insignificant effect on teachers’ emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In contrast, teachers’ surface acting had a significantly positive effect on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Therefore, market culture could increase emotional exhaustion and depersonalization by raising teachers’ surface acting. Surface acting played a mediating role in the relationship between market culture and two dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). This mediation effect was a full mediation; namely, market culture affected teachers’ emotional exhaustion and depersonalization mainly through teachers’ surface acting.

When the two emotional labor strategies were included for hierarchy culture, they still had a significant effect on teachers’ emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Furthermore, teachers’ surface acting had a significantly positive effect on the three dimensions of teacher burnout, while teachers’ deep acting had a significantly negative effect on teachers’ depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Thus, the mediation effects of the two emotional labor strategies in the relationship between hierarchy culture and teacher burnout need further examination.

Table 4. Effects of School Culture on Teacher Burnout through Teacher Emotional Labor.

|                          | Emotional Exhaustion | Depersonalization | Reduced Personal Accomplishment |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
|                          | Coef. | SE  | Coef. | SE  | Coef. | SE  |
| Constant                 | 2.344 *** | 0.532 | 2.468 *** | 0.482 | 4.362 *** | 0.565 |
| Female                   | 0.120 | 0.167 | 0.296 | 0.151 | 0.326 | 0.177 |
| Age                      | −0.003 | 0.010 | −0.021 * | 0.009 | −0.009 | 0.010 |
| Bachelor’s               | −0.004 | 0.178 | 0.041 | 0.161 | 0.292 | 0.188 |
| Master’s and above       | 0.061 | 0.218 | 0.013 | 0.197 | 0.277 | 0.231 |
| Educational attainment   | 0.017 | 0.179 | 0.064 | 0.162 | 0.215 | 0.189 |
| Professional level       | 0.017 | 0.131 | 0.037 | 0.119 | 0.250 | 0.139 |
| School-level             | 0.303 * | 0.116 | 0.160 | 0.105 | −0.114 | 0.123 |
| High-achieving school    | 0.347 | 0.177 | 0.266 | 0.160 | −0.128 | 0.187 |
| Low-achieving school     | 0.218 | 0.118 | 0.098 | 0.106 | −0.186 | 0.125 |
| Market culture           | −0.380 ** | 0.129 | −0.372 ** | 0.117 | −0.197 | 0.137 |
| Hierarchy culture        | 0.677 *** | 0.069 | 0.838 *** | 0.062 | 0.508 *** | 0.073 |
| Surface acting           | 0.018 | 0.062 | −0.125 * | 0.056 | −0.358 *** | 0.065 |
| Deep acting              | 0.247 | 0.365 | 0.218 | 7.820 *** |

Note. * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.
Hayes’ [56] bootstrapping technique was used to test the indirect effect. Hair, et al. [57] argued that there was no mediating effect if the direct effect was insignificant. Thus, this study mainly tested (1) the mediation effect of emotional labor on the relationship between market culture and teachers’ emotional exhaustion and personalization and (2) the mediation effect of emotional labor on the relationship between hierarchy culture, teachers’ emotional exhaustion, personalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. According to Table 5, the indirect effects of market culture on two dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion and personalization) through surface acting are significant, as zero was not included in the 95% CI. After the teachers’ surface acting was included, the effect of market culture became insignificant. Therefore, it was concluded that school market culture affected teachers’ emotional exhaustion and personalization through a full mediation effect of teachers’ surface acting, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. This suggests that H1 was accepted, namely the relationship between market culture and teacher burnout was mediated by teacher’s emotional labor of surface acting.

For hierarchy culture, the result of bootstrapping indicate that the indirect effects of hierarchy culture on three dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, personalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) through teachers’ emotional labor were significant, as zero was not included in the 95% CI (see Table 5). Specifically, it could decrease teachers’ emotional exhaustion directly and indirectly by reducing teachers’ surface acting. In other words, hierarchy culture affected teachers’ emotional exhaustion through a partial mediation effect of surface acting (see Figure 1). Moreover, the findings suggest that hierarchy culture decreased teachers’ depersonalization directly and indirectly by reducing surface acting and increasing deep acting (see Table 5). Therefore, hierarchy culture affects teachers’ depersonalization through a partial mediation effect of surface and deep acting (see Figure 2). Table 5 indicates that hierarchy culture could only indirectly decrease teachers’ reduced personal accomplishment by reducing teachers’ surface acting and increasing deep acting. Accordingly, hierarchy culture affected teachers’ reduced personal accomplishment through a full mediation effect of surface and deep acting (see Figure 3). These results illustrate that H2 was accepted, as the relationship between hierarchy culture and teacher burnout was mediated by emotional labor.

Table 5. Bootstrapping of the Indirect Effect.

| Independent Variable | Mediator | Dependent Variable | Direct Effect without a Mediator | Direct Effect with a Mediator | Indirect Effects | Result |
|----------------------|----------|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------|
|                      |          |                     | Coef. (SE)                      | Coef. (SE)                  | BC 95% CI       |        |
| Market → Emotional labor |          | Emotional exhaustion | 0.356 ** (0.131)               | 0.218 (0.118)               | 0.147 (0.060)  [0.035, 0.273] | Significant Full mediation |
| Market → Emotional labor |          | Deep acting         | 0.193 (0.118)                  | 0.111 (0.088)               | 0.001 (0.007)  [−0.009, 0.023] | Nonsignificant |
| Market → Emotional labor |          | Surface acting      | 0.275* (0.129)                 | 0.160 (0.106)               | 0.182 (0.073)  [0.044, 0.329] | Significant Full mediation |
| Hierarchy → Emotional labor |          | Emotional exhaustion | −0.506 *** (0.143)            | −0.380 ** (0.129)           | −0.131 (0.064)  [−0.269, −0.017] | Significant Partial mediation |
| Hierarchy → Emotional labor |          | Deep acting         | 0.012 (0.088)                  | 0.000 (0.050)               | 0.005 (0.020)  [−0.027, 0.057] | Nonsignificant |
| Hierarchy → Emotional labor |          | Surface acting      | −0.569 *** (0.139)            | −0.372 ** (0.117)           | −0.182 (0.078)  [−0.325, −0.015] | Significant Partial mediation |
| Hierarchy → Emotional labor |          | Deep acting         | 0.001 (0.064)                  | 0.000 (0.027)               | 0.036 (0.027)  [−0.089, −0.004] | Significant Full mediation |
| Hierarchy → Emotional labor |          | Surface acting      | −0.569 *** (0.144)            | −0.372 ** (0.137)           | −0.260 (0.050)  [−0.204, −0.011] | Significant Full mediation |

Note. Bootstrapping was set at 5000 samples; Teachers’ background information was included in these tests as covariates; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.
6. Discussion

Since the 1990s, teacher burnout has become a social issue in different parts of the world [7]. Therefore, education researchers have explained the antecedents of teacher burnout from sociological perspectives, in addition to purely offering psychological explanations in order to provide sociological implications to improve and sustain teachers’
well-being [3–5]. In general, the literature implies that the market and hierarchy cultures of school management induced by managerial education reforms and the emotional labor strategies of surface acting and deep acting are significant social factors affecting teacher burnout [25,29,30]. Theoretically, the effects of school management cultures on teacher burnout may be mediated by teachers’ emotional labor [39]. However, few studies are testing this line of research. Hence, the present study attempts to make contributions to advance our knowledge about the antecedents of teacher burnout by examining whether teachers’ emotional labor mediates the relationship between school management cultures and teacher burnout.

Similarly to previous studies [25,29,30], the study shows that market culture of school management tends to make teachers vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In this sense, teacher burnout is positively related to market culture. Moreover, this study’s mediation analysis suggests that such a positive relationship between market culture and teacher burnout is mediated by teachers’ surface acting. To some extent, as emotional labor theory suggests, the finding implies that teachers have the agency to reflexively manage their emotions based on emotional rules of market culture [12]. However, their agency may be restricted by market culture since the culture may strictly require teachers to act similar to service-workers and treat parents and students as customers and thus have to manage their emotions appropriately in order to create positive emotional experiences for parents and students by engaging in surface acting [40]. Since they are forced to perform surface acting chronically, it is easier for them to experience emotive dissonance and the alienation of emotions from the self, leading to burnout, especially in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization [14,31,58]. In other words, the explanation that purely and directly attributes teacher burnout to managerial education reforms due to their cause of market culture of school management may not hold since the explanation neglects the dynamic relationship between market culture of school management and the surface acting of teachers.

The hierarchy culture emphasizes a formalized and a structured workplace where teachers have to complete work for organizational goals, which may be less significant to them, based on bureaucratic regulations and under administrative supervisions from the top of school hierarchy [21]. In theory, if people work under this kind of culture, they are prone to burnout because the work environment tends to be exhausting, dehumanizing, and estranging [3,4]. Nevertheless, this study does not support the argument. As the findings illustrate, hierarchy culture of school management is negatively related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the reduced personal accomplishment of teachers. The mediation analysis further illustrates that the culture may reduce teacher burnout by discouraging teachers from performing surface acting or encouraging them to perform deep acting. In other words, the hierarchy culture of school management may be beneficial to teacher well-being. There are two possible explanations for these unexpected findings. First, Chinese people generally have an authoritarian orientation, i.e., a high tendency to respect and obey authority, and actually prefer it [59]. According to Yang [60], the Chinese (as influenced by this orientation) tend to “be sensitive and acquiescent to authorities of all kinds,” “worship their authorities . . . without doubt or suspicion, not to mention criticism,” and “regard authorities as trustworthy and ‘almighty,’ [so] they tend to psychologically depend on and obey their authorities.” Since the participants of the study are Chinese, they may also be authoritarian-oriented. Therefore, they may adapt to a hierarchy culture well. As a result, working under the culture may not be so emotionally exhausting and depersonalizing. Moreover, they may also internalize the emotional rules of hierarchy culture. Therefore, they may need not to put much effort into faking unfelt emotions or hiding felt emotions. In contrast, they may easily express those desired emotions by changing their inner feelings in a school setting. Thus, in Chinese contexts, hierarchy culture of school management may favor deep acting rather than surface acting and in turn lead to a lower degree of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among teachers.
Secondly, the negative relationship between hierarchy culture of school management and teacher burnout may be related to the existing Chinese educational management style. Green [61] observed that the Chinese educational management style is rationally chaotic. Rational chaos implies that Chinese educational institutions are bureaucratic; however, their formal rules and regulations tend to be vague, ambiguous, and even subject to change anytime the administrators want to make changes [62]. Therefore, the management style may make teachers stressed, anxious, and exhausted because they are required to complete their work in the context of following uncertain rules, regulations, and procedures [63]. As a result, if schools develop a strong hierarchy culture, school management may become more rational and less chaotic. This will lead to more certainty among teachers in terms of knowing how to complete their work to meet organizational expectations, reducing stress, anxiety, and exhaustion, leading to lower degrees of burnout.

There are some limitations to the study. First, the study only surveyed 425 Chinese teachers who attended professional development courses offered by a Beijing university. In China, teachers who participate in professional development courses tend to be motivated regarding self-improvement. Therefore, this group of teachers may share some specific characteristics that may be not necessarily representative of the general population of Chinese teachers. Thus, further studies should randomly select teachers from different Chinese cities or provinces of China to check whether the findings can be replicated. Second, the explained R-square of emotional labor (Table 3) and the explained R-square of teacher burnout without including emotional labor (Table 2) were not that high. Thus, more related variables should be included in further study. Moreover, researchers can also conduct comparative studies to examine whether there are differences in the relationship between school management cultures, emotional labor, and teacher burnout between different sociocultural contexts. Finally, the study illustrates that the relationship between school management cultures, emotional labor, and teacher burnout is more complicated than expected. For example, there are still some unresolved questions about the relationship between hierarchy culture and teacher burnout. Therefore, the relationship between the two variables needs further explanations.

7. Conclusions

Nowadays, sustainable school development is required to support students in becoming equipped with competencies, skills, attitudes and values for the twenty-first century [1]. Therefore, numerous education reform initiatives have been introduced and implemented for school improvement. Nevertheless, many of them tend to create a stressful teaching environment, resulting in teacher burnout and in turn leading teachers to be less supportive and committed to the reform initiatives. Therefore, education researchers have examined the antecedents of teacher burnout [7,8]. In the literature, a conventional sociological explanation tends to attribute teacher burnout to managerial education reforms since the reforms institutionally creates market and hierarchy cultures of school management leading to stress upon teachers, but ignore the agentive dimension of teacher burnout [3,4]. Therefore, in contrast to this explanation, this study suggests that a more robust sociological explanation to teacher burnout in the context of managerial reforms should take account of both school management cultures and emotional labor. It proposes two hypotheses that the relationship between market culture and teacher burnout is mediated by emotional labor (H1) and the relationship between hierarchy culture and teacher burnout is mediated by emotional labor (H2). These two hypotheses have been accepted, showing that teachers’ emotional labor mediates the effects of market and hierarchy culture on teacher burnout. Namely, when emotional labor is considered, market and hierarchy culture of school management may not have the expected impacts by the conventional sociological perspective. Thus, the study does not only contribute to our understandings of the relationship between school management cultures, emotional labor and teacher burnout, which is the lack of attention paid by the literature, but also remind us that teacher burnout should be considered as co-constructed by both institutional and agentive forces instead of either
one [3]. Accordingly, research on teachers’ emotions and well-being for sustainable school development should investigate how teachers’ emotions and well-being are institutionally and agentively constructed instead of either institutionally or agentively affected alone.

The study has implications for school administrators and teacher educators to reduce teacher burnout in attempt to improve teachers’ commitment to sustainable educational and school development. For school administrators, at least those in China, building a hierarchy culture of school management in their schools is recommended since school hierarchy culture may directly decrease the degree of teacher burnout or indirectly via shaping teachers’ emotional labor. On the other hand, they should avoid developing a market culture since it has deleterious effects on teacher well-being. Additionally, teacher educators should train teachers on how to appropriately manage their emotions in teaching. In training, they should equip teachers with effective deep acting skills since deep acting reduces burnout.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, K.K.T. and Y.T.; methodology, K.K.T. and Y.T.; formal analysis, Y.T.; data curation, L.W.; writing—original draft preparation, K.K.T.; writing—review and editing, K.K.T., Y.T. and Y.L.; project administration, K.K.T.; funding acquisition, K.K.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the International Join Research Project of Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, grant number ICER202004 and the APC was funded by the International Join Research Project of Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Survey and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (protocol code P55902704 and date of approval 24 January 2020).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality and research ethics.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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