Confucian values and school leadership in Vietnam: exploring the influence of culture on principal decision making

Thang Dinh Truong, Philip Hallinger and Kabini Sanga

Abstract
There is an emerging global consensus that the knowledge base in educational leadership and management must offer a deeper examination of leadership practice across a more diverse set of national contexts. Nonetheless, a recent review of the literature in this field concluded that this challenge has yet to be adequately addressed with respect to research in Asia. This study was an in-depth, qualitative examination of how the decision-making practices of Vietnamese school principals respond to their socio-cultural context. The study employed Hofstede’s ‘dimensions of national culture’ to aid in this analysis of Vietnamese school leadership. Qualitative data were used to construct case studies of principal decision-making in three Vietnamese schools. The findings highlight the strong influence of power distance and collectivism on the decision making of Vietnamese school principals. The results illuminate the value of adopting an ‘indigenous perspective’ on school leadership. Our description of how socio-cultural values shape the practice of school leadership in Vietnam offers a useful contrast with descriptions from mainstream research on educational leadership and management.

Keywords
Asia, decision making, leadership, management, school principal, Vietnam

Introduction
Over the past 25 years, numerous international scholars (Bajunid, 1996; Cheng, 1995; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996; Mertkan et al., 2016; Walker and Dimmock, 2002) have voiced the need to expand the scope of theoretical discourse and empirical studies in educational leadership and management beyond their traditional locus in Western, English-speaking societies. In recent years, a consensus has emerged in support of building a ‘global knowledge base’ that represents practice across a more diverse set of cultural contexts (Hallinger
and Bryant, 2013; Mertkan et al., 2016). Nonetheless, recent reviews of the literature have concluded that this challenge has yet to be adequately addressed (for example, Hallinger and Bryant, 2013; Lumby et al., 2009; Mertkan et al., 2016; Walker and Hallinger, 2015).

These observations framed the current study which explored the decision making of school principals in Vietnam. Although values associated with Communism and globalization have reshaped Vietnamese society during past decades (Duc, 2008; Duggan, 2001; London, 2011), Confucian culture continues to lay the foundation for social behaviour in Vietnam (Borton, 2000; Goldin, 2011; McHale, 2002). This research employed in-depth, qualitative methods that addressed the question, ‘how does Vietnam’s Confucian culture shape the decision making of school principals?’

The study employed conceptual constructs adopted from Hofstede’s (1991) ‘dimensions of national culture’ in this analysis of principal practice. Data were collected through individual and focus-group interviews, observations in schools, document analysis and questionnaires. These data were used to construct case studies of principal decision making in three Vietnamese schools. Data analysis employed a phenomenological, interpretive approach to understanding how the Vietnamese cultural context shaped principal decision making across the three schools (Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994).

This study seeks to illuminate the value of adopting an ‘indigenous perspective’ (Bajunid, 1996) on the practice of school leadership. This perspective pointed us towards the use of phenomenological analysis as a means of explicating the contextual logics that shaped leader beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, rather than simply describing patterns of practice. We hope the findings will begin to ‘fill in a blank spot’ in the literature by continuing the global effort aimed at clarifying the boundaries of universal and contextually dependent leadership practices (Belchetz and Leithwood, 2007; Heck and Hallinger, 2005; House et al., 2004; Walker and Dimmock, 2002).

**Theoretical Perspective**

Scholars have suggested that ‘culture’ consists of patterns of beliefs, values, behaviours, norms, symbols and assumptions that are shared by people of a particular social group (Bodley, 2011; Boyd and Richerson, 1991; Hofstede, 1991; Schein, 1996; Schwartz, 1999). Cultural values are generally understood as beliefs about what is good, right and fair that are acknowledged and accepted by members of a social group, whether a formal or informal organization, a tribe or a society (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1996). Values are learned, shared and transmitted cross-generationally, and serve as ‘cognitive guides’ for social behaviour (Bodley, 2011; Boyd and Richerson, 1991; Hofstede, 1991; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Triandis, 1996).

Given its influence on human behaviour, scholars have studied culture both within and across organizations and societies (Hofstede, 1991; Ralston et al., 2006; Schein, 1996; Schwartz, 1999). Vietnam has been widely acknowledged as a ‘Confucian culture’ (for example, Bich, 1999; Borton, 2000; McHale, 2002). Thus, our review of relevant literature begins with an overview of Confucian cultural influence on Vietnamese society. Then we analyse how two cultural dimensions strongly associated with Confucianism, hierarchical relations and collectivism (Hofstede, 1991), are revealed in Vietnamese society. Finally, we provide background on the decision-making function of school principals, in general, as well as in Vietnam’s education system.

Before proceeding, we wish to note that the larger study from which this report is drawn examined multiple leadership functions (for example, conflict management, leadership, communication, decision making) using the full set of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Truong, 2013; Truong and Hallinger, 2015). However, due to space limitations, the current report was delimited
to the decision-making function of school principals and the two conceptual constructs that offered
the most leverage for illuminating the linkage between culture and decision making.

Confucian Cultural Influence in Vietnam

Confucianism has been defined as a worldview, an ethical system, a political ideology and a
scholarly tradition developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (Goldin,
2011). Confucianism conceives of the individual not as a detached entity, but as part and parcel of
his/her human relationships (Yao, 2000). Confucius asserted that fulfilling one’s roles in these
social relationships is essential to building harmony and stability within a society.

Dao Duy Anh stated in *Khổng Giáo Phê Bính Tiểu Luyện (Short Critique of Confucianism)* that,
‘For more than two thousand years… whether in Chinese society or in Vietnamese society, one
breathed a Confucian atmosphere, fed on the milk of Confucianism, ate Confucianism, and even
died with Confucian rites… [N]othing escaped the control of Confucian philosophy and ritual
teaching’ (cited in McHale, 2002: 422). This underlines the long-standing influence of Confucian
values on Vietnamese society.

Confucius asserted that a righteous government relied on the power of ‘moral virtues’ rather
than punitive laws to maintain order and stability in society. ‘Moral virtues could produce trust and
faith in people, while punitive measures might stop wrongdoing only for a moment’ (Yao, 2000:
22). Confucian values are based on the belief that human beings are teachable and perfectible
through a combination of individual and communal endeavour (Goldin, 2011; McHale, 2002).
Together ‘Confucian principles’ represent ‘the root of social relationships, the foundation of the
stability, peace and prosperity of the state, the family and individuals’ (Yao, 2000: 26).

Values arising from Vietnam’s Communist political system as well as from globalization have,
over time, blended with the longer-term imprint of Confucian values and norms of behaviour.
Since World War II, the Communist Party attained ascendant power over the direction of Vietna-
mese society. More recently, values emerging from globalization (for example, personal freedom,
individualism) have also begun to influence traditional Vietnamese attitudes and behaviours (Ash-
will and Diep, 2005; Doan, 2005; Duc, 2008; London, 2011; Hallinger and Truong, 2014).

Nonetheless, as suggested by the quotation from Dao Duy Anh, the core values of Confucian-
ism remain deeply rooted in Vietnamese society. Dam (1999: 470) drew a similar conclusion.

Regardless of the inexistence or collapse of the temples of literature or the shrines of Confucius;
regardless of the disappearance of ‘Confucian associations’, Confucianists or ‘teachers of Confucian-
ism’, the [Vietnamese] society will retain its Confucian relevance, morality, doctrine, and approach.

In present-day Vietnam, Confucian values remain widely evident, not only in the conduct of
social relations, but also in the form and content of the education system. Doan (2005) divided the
present system of moral education in Vietnam into two tracks: ‘traditional morality’ and ‘socialist
morality’. He asserted that traditional morality consists largely of Confucian values and beliefs that
have been transmitted by families, schools and society for many centuries. Socialist morality,
consisting of values and norms advocated by the ruling Communist Party, is fostered directly
through a national curriculum, the media, and politically directed ‘social activities’ (Doan, 2005;
London, 2006, 2011). Both types of ‘moral education’ receive explicit and continuing attention
from policymakers in Vietnam (Ashwill and Diep, 2005; Doan, 2005; London, 2006, 2011;
Truong, 2013).
For example, the Education Law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam states the explicit goal ‘to
teach students to respect, love and show good behaviour towards grandparents, parents, teachers,
older people; to love brothers, sisters, and friends; to be sincere, confident, eager to learn, and
appreciative of nature’s beauty’ (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004: ch. 1, art. 20). This
statement of Confucian values has been translated explicitly into curriculum materials that are
widely used in Vietnamese schools (Doan, 2005; Duggan, 2001; London, 2006, 2011). Thus,
observers assert that Confucianism remains a potent force in Vietnamese society (Borton, 2000;
Lan, 2002; London, 2006, 2011; McHale, 2002).

Various cultural frameworks have been used to conceptualize and study management processes
in Confucian societies as part of a global program of research on culture and management (see
House et al., 2004; Lord et al., 2001; Ralston et al., 1999, 2006; Smith et al., 1996; Schwartz,
1999; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Triandis, 1996). This research seeks to identify so-called ‘uni-
versal’ versus ‘culturally dependent’ leadership attributes. After analysing data from 62 nations in
the GLOBE study, House and colleagues concluded that leadership effectiveness is embedded in
the societal norms, values and beliefs of the people being led. This finding has stimulated con-
tinuing efforts to describe the nature and effects of leadership as practised across different societies
(Chhokar et al., 2013).

Within the global programme of research on culture and management, Hofstede’s (1991) con-
structs of power distance (hierarchical relations) and collectivism have been arguably the most
widely discussed and studied in the context of Confucian societies. Using Hofstede’s framework,
management scholars have described the influence of these cultural values and norms on workplace
behaviour including approaches to leadership, communication and decision making (Berrel et al.,
1999; Boyd and Richerson, 1991; Brew et al., 2001; Gudykunst et al., 1992; Park et al.,
2005; Ralston et al., 1999, 2006; Yi and Park, 2003). Moreover, the utility of individualism and
collectivism as lenses for interpreting patterns of managerial behaviour has actually been rein-
forced by research that has incorporated related but different constructs proposed by other culture
theorists (House et al., 2004; Ralston et al., 2006; Smith et al., 1996; Schwartz, 1999; Strauss
and Quinn, 1997; Triandis, 1996). For example, Ralston et al. (2006: 91) noted the convergence of
findings from various studies that employed alternate constructs:

Furthermore, according to the Ronen and Shenkar (1985) review, countries in the Far East cluster were
typically high power distance and high collectivism. Likewise, Schwartz (1999) found the Asian group
to emphasize conservatism and hierarchy (approximations of collectivism and power distance, respec-
tively)... Additionally, Ralston et al. (1999) found that both North and South Vietnamese, albeit
different, reported sharing more similar scores on individualism and collectivism with Chinese than
with American managers.

With these comments in mind, the current study employed power distance and collectivism as
operative constructs in the cultural lens applied to our analysis of data. Although they do not
represent the only relevant means of interpreting culture, their widespread empirical use afforded
us an additional empirical perspective against which to compare our own data. This was deemed
particularly useful given the small-scale scope of our qualitative research.

Hierarchy (Power Distance) in Vietnamese Social Relations. As indicated above, a hallmark value
underlying Confucianism is the need for order and stability (Goldin, 2011). Within Confucian
societies this is achieved in part through the clear establishment and reinforcement of hierarchical
roles in all social relations. This characteristic of Confucian-influenced societies (for example, China, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore) has been widely studied by sociologists (Dalton et al., 2001; Lan, 2002), psychologists (Gudykunst et al., 1992; Slote, 1998) and management scholars (Berrel et al., 1999; Park et al., 2005; Ralston et al., 2006).

Hofstede (1991) asserted that societies differ on a cultural dimension that he termed, ‘power distance’. Power distance refers to the extent to which differences in status and power in a society are viewed as natural and legitimate. Power distance in social relationships can be viewed as large or small. In ‘low power distance’ American society, for example, the Constitution states that ‘All men are created equal’. Both laws and social norms operate to reduce the importance of status differences based on age, rank, gender and social class (Hofstede, 1991). Conversely, in Confucian cultures, differences in power are treated as a ‘natural’ feature of social relationships. Laws, cultural norms and social structures convey and support the legitimacy of these differences (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1996). Thus, Vietnam, like other East Asian nations that have been strongly influenced by Chinese Confucian values, scores ‘high’ on power distance.

This pattern of hierarchical structure has become deeply imprinted in Vietnamese families, organizations and society (Bich, 1999; Borton, 2000; Dalton et al., 2001; Jamieson, 1993). Knowing one’s role is fundamental to building successful relationships, whether in the family, school, work and society (Slote, 1998). Two Vietnamese proverbs illustrate this point:

You have to know exactly who is above you and who is below in the family or social order: kính trên, nhường dưới (you can yield to those below and respect those above), and Trên phải ra trên, dưới phải ra dưới (above has to be above, and below has to be below).

In Vietnamese culture, age is an asset, not a liability. Within the discourse of hierarchical relations, older people are respected for their experience, knowledge and wisdom, and rarely accept the initiatives, opinions or critiques of those below them in the social hierarchy (Ashwill and Diep, 2005; Lan, 2002). This is reflected in the Vietnamese saying, ‘úng mà dồi khôn hơn vịt’ (the egg cannot be as clever as the duck). Indeed, breaking the established hierarchy is possibly the most serious and unforgivable offence within the culture. This applies regardless of the ‘reason’ or how ‘right’ the junior may be (Bich, 1999).

Collectivism in Vietnamese Social Relations. Hofstede (1991) posited the constructs of collectivism and individualism as representing opposite ends of a normative continuum. This dimension describes the extent to which the identity of people within a society reflects an individual or group-referenced orientation. In collectivist societies, personal identity is grounded in group-based values. A person defines ‘who I am’ primarily in reference to relevant social groups (that is, my family, clubs, school, church, company, community and political associations). Key collectivist values include loyalty, harmony, cooperation, unity and conformity (Hofstede, 1991; Park et al., 2005).

In contrast, people living in individualist cultures tend to focus on ‘me’ rather than ‘we’ (Holmes and Tangtongtavy, 1996). Personal goals take precedence over group or organizational goals. Consequently, less effort is made to maintain group harmony when it conflicts with individual beliefs, interests and aspirations (Boyd and Richerson, 1991; Hofstede, 1991; Park et al., 2005; Swierczek, 1991; Triandis, 1996).

As suggested above, collectivism is a central tenet of Confucianism, and remains strongly evident in modern day Vietnamese culture (Bich, 1999; Bodley, 2011; Hofstede, 1991; Jamieson,
Indeed, this strong sense of group attachment has led scholars to characterize Vietnamese society as a ‘collective community’ (Ashwill and Diep, 2005; Bich, 1999; Borton, 2000; Lan, 2002; Tran, 2009). According to Bich (1999: 18):

Collective community [is] highlighted by the absolutely dominant influence of the family as a whole vis-à-vis every one of its component members…. While the raison d’être of the Western family may be to produce and support the individual, whose maturity will signal the attainment of its objective, in the Vietnamese family the raison d’être of each individual member [is] to continue, maintain, and serve the family.

Dalton et al. (2001) found that modernization has had relatively little effect on the loyalty of Vietnamese to their families and communities. Ninety-nine per cent of the respondents in their survey indicated that parents were to be respected regardless of their qualities and faults, and 97% agreed with the statement that ‘one of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud’. These values also pervade the workplace in which choice of career and subsequent job-related decisions are often made by parents, not only among the young but also among mature adults (Ashwill and Diep, 2005; Dalton et al., 2001; Duc, 2008; Lan, 2002).

The concept of ‘losing face’ also reflects the primacy of Vietnam’s collectivist culture. People modify their behaviours and attitudes to fit with the perceptions of their primary group associations. Misconduct or failure of an individual to meet communal expectations or standards is a reflection on one’s parents, siblings and ancestors. Borton (2000: 24), for example, stressed that, ‘loss of face is painful in any society, but unbearable in Vietnam’. Conversely, success or fame achieved by an individual brings honor and pride to the family and one’s communal associations (Bich, 1999). Thus, we conclude that even in the modern era Vietnamese society continues to evidence a collectivist orientation in its social culture.

**Decision-making Function of School Leaders**

**Managerial Decision Making in Cross-cultural Perspective.** It is difficult to find a managerial job description within any sector that does not include decision making as a central function (Martinsons and Davison, 2007; Rowe and Boulgarides, 1993; Stewart, 1986). This assertion extends to school leaders for whom decision making is often conducted in publicly accountable group contexts. Arguably, this intensifies the influence of group norms on the decision-making process and raises the stakes for the outcomes (Bridges, 1967; Conley, 1991; Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Leithwood and Stager, 1989; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1991; Ryabova, 2010).

Many factors affect decision making, including the role, skill, knowledge, experience and personality of the decision maker (Conley, 1991; Hallinger and Richardson, 1988; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1991). Values of the decision maker and societal and organizational culture also shape decision processes used by leaders (Leithwood and Stager, 1989; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1991; Martinsons and Davison, 2007; Rowe and Boulgarides, 1993). For example, values shape leader perceptions of who should be involved in making decisions, as well as the extent and nature of their involvement (Boyd and Richerson, 1991; Bridges, 1967; Martinsons and Davison, 2007; Quang and Vuong, 2002; Ryabova, 2010; Stewart, 1986). Leithwood and Stager (1989) even found that values influence which problems school leaders choose to address, as well as their interpretation of causes and effects.
Management scholars have examined decision making from a cross-cultural perspective (Berrel et al., 1999; Brew et al., 2001; Ralston et al., 2006; Stewart, 1986). For example, Martinsons and Davison (2007) reported that American, Japanese and Chinese managers evidenced distinctive decision-making styles that were related to differences in cultural values. In the ‘collectivist cultures’ (that is, Japan and China), managers tended to focus on collective goals and interests and discourage the surfacing of conflicting views that could threaten group harmony or result in a loss of face among group members. Alternatively, American managers, coming from an individualist culture, tended to highlight the importance of individual contributions, accept conflict as an unpleasant but normal facet of group decision making, and value the impact of decisions on performance outcomes more than on social relationships within the group.

Quang and Vuong (2002) employed Hofstede’s (1991) constructs in a study of managerial decision making in Vietnam. They found that staff and managers perceived a low level of participation in decision making, as well as a low expectation among employees that they should be involved in decision making. Quang and Vuong (2002: 45) asserted that ‘the bureaucratic, familial, conservative and authoritarian styles of management were [still] predominant in the state sector’, and concluded that this reflected the high power distance, collectivist character of Vietnamese culture. These results reprise a broader pattern of findings from the management literature highlighting the impact of collectivism and individualism on managerial decision-making (Berrel et al., 1999; Gudykunst et al., 1992; Radford et al., 1993; Park et al., 2005; Triandis, 1996).

A similar, though less richly documented trend is also evident in the emergent school leadership literature in East Asia (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Gamage and Sooksomchitra, 2006; Hallinger, 2004; Hallinger and Kantamara, 2001; Ryabova, 2010; Truong and Hallinger, 2015; Walker and Dimmock, 2002; Walker and Hallinger, 2015). For example, Dimmock and Walker (2005) found that teachers in Hong Kong and Singapore were reluctant to be involved in decision making. They described deference to age and seniority, and a desire to maintain harmony and save face in the context of making decisions as social norms that impeded attempts to engage teachers more actively in school-level decision making. In contrast, teachers in Australia were more willing to contribute ideas in decision forums, and to challenge or criticize directly or indirectly – their leaders. Seniority in position and age were also less influential in the Australian context. In sum, as Yi and Park (2003: 36) concluded: ‘Because people’s behavior is shaped by – and adjusted to – the particular culture in which they live and mature, cultural values might influence people to exhibit different behavioral patterns, including decision-making styles’.

**Education Decision Making in Vietnam.** Next, we wish to briefly discuss the institutional and cultural contexts in which Vietnamese school principals enact their decision-making function. Two main influences can be identified with respect to the historical evolution of Vietnam’s education system. The first, as suggested above, lies in Chinese Confucian culture. Confucian values can be likened to the ‘life-blood’ that shapes structures, processes, educational content and inter-personal relations within the education system (Ashwill and Diep, 2005; Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; Lan, 2002; London, 2006, 2011; Tran, 2009; Truong and Hallinger, 2015). The second influence is revealed in political-bureaucratic features of the education system, many of which were adopted from the Soviet Union in the post-Second World War era (Duc, 2008; Duggan, 2001; Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; London, 2006, 2011). This political-bureaucratic orientation is reflected in the structures and norms that shape decision making within the education system (Duggan, 2001; Hao and Wu, 2012; Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; London, 2006, 2011; Truong and Hallinger, 2015).
The constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam grants a leading role to the Communist Party as the sole representative for the people in the state and society. The role of the Communist Party as the ‘leading force’ in the state and society is embedded in the decision-making structures of the education system. Each school in Vietnam is overseen by a Party Standing Board, all members of which are selected from the School Party Committee. A senior member of the Party Standing Board is appointed to the position of Party Secretary on the School Party Committee. The School Party Committee is responsible for decision making at the school level.

Although the role of School Party Secretary is usually filled by the principal, this is not mandatory and there are numerous cases where the position is held by a vice principal. The position power of the School Party Secretary is both absolute and reinforced by cultural norms of deference and obedience. Consistent with the Vietnamese political principle of ‘collective mastery’, the School Party Secretary acts as the ‘legitimized representative of the people’ in the school. Within this power structure, the principal, when also holding the position of School Party Secretary, holds both political and administrative power.

The concentration of political and positional authority in the principal/School Party Secretary reflects a broader trend in Vietnamese public administration. Painter (2003: 264), for example, observed that, ‘Official party doctrine does not acknowledge the principle that party officials are subject to a separate external set of legal constraints in exercising their power as state officials’. Instead, ‘the socialist state encompasses and embodies vital material interests, both those arising from official forms of privilege and status and those clustered around informal groups (Painter, 2003: 269). These findings from the public sector, while emphasizing the political sources of power, also implicitly highlight the continuing influence of Confucian culture (that is, via power distance and collectivism) as well.

Consistent with a broader program of public sector reform (Painter, 2003, 2005), recent government policies in Vietnam embody initial steps towards decentralizing education governance (see also Bjork, 2007; Duc, 2008; Griffin et al., 2006; Hamano, 2008; Martinez-Vazquez, 2005). These decrees have been issued under the broad goal of increasing grassroots democracy and staff participation in school management. In terms of school-level decision making, the policies both expand the scope of decisions that principals can make for their schools and increase the involvement of teachers in decision-making processes. Nonetheless, we were unable to find any empirical investigations of principal decision making in Vietnam either in the international or domestic Vietnamese literatures (Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015).

This review has sought to demonstrate how societal values and norms shape, support and constrain leadership practice, with a particular focus on decision making. We have highlighted how Vietnam’s Confucian culture privileges hierarchical differentiation and group norms in the conduct of social relations. In combination with existing political and bureaucratic structures, this creates a complex context within which principals make decisions. Therefore, we conclude that, to be successful, the Vietnamese principal must be capable of navigating dual lines of political and bureaucratic authority, even while maintaining cultural credibility as a leader in the eyes of teachers and the community (Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; Truong and Hallinger, 2015).

**Methodology**

We believed that qualitative methods would be best equipped to provide the depth of description needed to illuminate how patterns of leadership practice emerge in this cultural context. In this
section of the article, we describe the research design, sampling strategy, and methods of data collection and analysis.

**Research Design**

We selected a multi-site case study research design as suitable to our goal of describing patterns of principal decision making in the Vietnamese cultural context (Berg, 2004; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Yin, 2009). The case study method involves gathering copious information about a particular situation and allows the researcher to illuminate nuances, patterns and latent elements of the research context. Case studies provide illustrative examples of how people enact their roles in real situations and offer a depth of description that is impossible to achieve in survey research (Yin, 2009). A multi-site case study research design offers an opportunity to highlight similarities and contradictions among cases while also maintaining the holistic picture of each case (Herriott and Firestone, 1983; Kennedy, 1979; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Although multi-site case study designs enable comparative analysis, they are still oriented towards description, exploration and hypothesis generation rather than explanatory testing (Smith and Osborn, 2003).

In this study, three schools representing different educational levels were selected as the sample: a college, high school and secondary school (middle school). The schools, rather than individual school members, represented the analytical focus of the cases. We adopted this analytical perspective due to the belief that decision making is a relational process enacted within an organizational context rather than a characteristic of an individual (Bridges, 1967).

**Selection of Cases**

The following criteria were applied in selecting the cases: school location, type of school, principal experience, and principal gender. The three research sites were state-run schools located in the central region of Vietnam. School A was a state-run teacher training college. School B was a high school serving students between 16 and 18 years of age. School C was a secondary school serving students between 12 and 15 years of age. This multi-level sampling strategy was employed in order to surface possible differences in leadership practices due to structural features of the organizational context (Herriott and Firestone, 1983). In contrast, the schools were all located in the central region of the country in order to reduce the potential of regional differences.

The principal participants included one female and two male principals. Each had worked as principal in their schools for at least two years, thereby ensuring a sufficient base of experience in their particular contexts. Four vice principals were selected based on their availability for data collection. Six teachers were selected from each school so as to achieve a balanced distribution on age, gender and experience. This was deemed necessary in order to obtain diverse perspectives on the principal’s leadership practice. For example, younger and older teachers could have different social expectations and experiences vis-a-vis the principal, and thereby offer contrasting perspectives.

**Data Collection**

Although multiple methods of data collection were employed in the study (interview, observation, questionnaire, document analysis), the data presented in this report are largely drawn from interviews. Nonetheless we emphasize that two kinds of triangulation were employed in this study...
The first was ‘data triangulation’, in which data were collected from multiple informant groups at each case site (that is, principals, vice principals and teachers). The second was ‘method triangulation’ in which data collected through four different methods were compared for both consistency and divergence (Burns, 2000; Herriott and Firestone, 1983; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Together these offered multiple avenues for validating the perceptions of different individuals.

We employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Smith and Osborn, 2003). This allowed the researcher and participants to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions were modified in the light of participant responses (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The researchers were thereby able to probe relevant issues that arose spontaneously in the course of the dialogue (Berg, 2004; Herriott and Firestone, 1983; Patton, 2002; Smith and Osborn, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals, vice principals and teachers at each school.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants and subsequently translated from Vietnamese into English. A database was initially constructed for each case. This allowed for case data to be organized, classified, edited and coded into a manageable data file using NVivo 8 software. Once a complete database had been loaded into NVivo 8 for a school, the data were coded under four main different nodes: ‘exercising power’, ‘building relationships’, ‘decision making’, and ‘conflict managing and solving’. Within each main node, sub-nodes were created to highlight the themes and categories that emerged from each data source. Each case study was analysed independently in order to preserve its distinctiveness and holistic entity prior to cross-case comparison. As noted, due to space limitations, the current study only addresses the theme of decision making.

The study adopted ‘phenomenological inquiry’ as a means of elucidating the meaning of the data patterns arising within each case (Hycner, 1999). This entailed developing an initial ‘structural description’ that contained the ‘bones’ of the experience of the group of people within the case site (Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). We employed four analytical steps based on frameworks described by Patton (2002) and Moustakas (1994).

1. **Epoche**: We repeatedly read the database of each case to achieve a sense of the whole, then identified and categorized data aspects into the four pre-defined themes.
2. **Phenomenological reduction**: we re-read the raw data and distinguished relevant meanings from irrelevant meanings. In this critical phase we coded the data into free nodes (that is, nodes reflecting concepts that might fall outside of preconceived themes or nodes) with the help of NVivo 8 program.
3. **Imaginative variation**: we categorized data into the four pre-defined themes by re-examining the free nodes to identify the ‘units of significance’, and then incorporated, where suitable, data from the free nodes into the four pre-defined themes.
4. **Synthesis of texture and structure**: we paid close attention to the cluster of meanings within the pre-defined themes to elicit the essence of phenomenon. This involved an integration of structural descriptions, providing a synthesis of the meanings embedded in responses derived from each case.

We also wish to frame our choice of phenomenological methodology in terms of our broader perspective on the value of both contextualizing and surfacing the underlying meaning behind the
decision-making practices of Vietnamese principals. This is consistent with Bajunid’s (1996: 51) assertion of the value of adopting an ‘indigenous perspective’ on administrative practice.

Autonomous personal mastery of these processes will enable them [school leaders] to make sense of their administrative, professional and personal existence and provide ‘the purpose of the story’ of why they do what they do in the educational administration field. The purpose of their story can be at once parochial, indigenous and universal. The same is true of the linguistic and cognitive tools that they use to assign meanings to generative administrative acts and to essentially culture and context specific acts.

Bajunid’s use of the word ‘indigenous’ shaped our research in several important ways. First, it pointed us towards the collection of in-depth descriptions of practice formed out of the words of the relevant leaders and stakeholders. Second, we have, in many instances, employed linguistic vehicles such as local idioms in order to convey the ‘meaning’ behind social behaviours (Herriott and Firestone, 1983). For example, the concept of ‘collective mastery’ which flows from Vietnamese political culture has been used as a local lens for interpreting the global construct of ‘empowerment’. Third, we did not stop at the point of describing leader and follower attitudes and behaviours with respect to decision making as might be done in a typical case study. Instead, we used phenomenological analysis to link the pattern of behaviours described by the participants to ‘underlying logics’ embedded in the context.

Cross-case synthesis was conducted after case study summaries had been written for each of the three schools. Cross-case synthesis was aimed at comparing cases by themes in order to identify both commonality and dissimilarity. Although the findings reported in this article include illustrative examples from the individual cases, space limitations meant that we emphasize the cross-case synthesis.

**Results**

Data from the case studies indicated that, despite the government policy of decentralizing decision making, decision making in these Vietnamese schools relied heavily on the authority of school principals. Teachers confirmed that they had a very limited, if any, role in decision-making in their schools. They stressed that the schools relied on a small number of decision makers, such as the principal, School Party Secretary and vice principals. Teachers stated:

The principal’s decision is the highest. Everyone must accept, obey and execute it. (C3MT3)

The principal is the person who has the highest power in the decision-making process because he is responsible for all school activities. The most power is in the principal’s hands. (C3FmT4)

Unequal power distribution was accepted by teachers as both ‘natural’ and ‘legitimate’. The school leaders revealed that their fundamental duty was to comply with and implement the directives of the Party. Similarly, teachers noted that they had to strictly execute the Party’s general policies as well as the directives and decisions of the School Party Committee. This supports Jamieson’s (1993: 16) remark that in Vietnam, hierarchy has become ‘part of the intrinsic structure of the universe, a state of affairs that was both natural and unalterable’.

Consistent with the predominant trend honouring hierarchical relations, leaders supported the maintenance of ‘autocracy’ in the decision-making process. One principal explained that he felt a
need to assert his prerogative as a final decision-maker because everything occurring in the school was his responsibility. He stated:

In the decision-making process, I have full power to make decisions, to accept or refuse other people’s opinions because I am responsible for all of the school’s activities. I am supposed to be answerable for all things that happen in the school. I may face criticism from senior leaders [that is, administrative or Party leaders] if anything is to go wrong. (PC3)

At the same time, consistent with the cultural orientation of collectivism, the principals also articulated the importance of seeking teachers’ participation in making decisions. They agreed that encouraging teachers to participate in decision making was a way to share responsibility and foster harmony among leaders and teachers. In the words of one principal: ‘The leader’s decision seems to be more convincing if a discussion is open for all teachers so that school leaders can know what teachers think about it’ (PC3).

Although the principals emphasized the importance of seeking teachers’ involvement in decision-making, they also admitted that getting teachers to actively participate was a challenge. They noted that teachers were generally reluctant to give input and even less willing to offer opinions that conflicted with those of their leaders. In the words of a vice principal:

Teachers are quite reserved in expressing their ideas, particularly to school leaders and in school meetings. Although we [leaders] are quite open and encourage the democratic attitudes of all school members in discussions, it seems that it is difficult for them to ‘break the ice’ to express their ideas. (VPC3)

These perceptions of the leaders were acknowledged as accurate by the teachers. Teachers in all three schools articulated a strong reluctance to be actively involved in school decision making. They asserted that sharing their ‘individual’ ideas could only lead to problems, and feared that openly voicing their opinions could be perceived as ‘impolite’ or ‘disrespectful’ by their leaders. Teachers also evinced scepticism concerning the actual importance of their opinions in the eyes of their leaders, and further suggested that they might lack the knowledge and experience necessary to make a worthwhile contribution to school-level decision making.

In all three schools, teachers indicated that older and more experienced teachers seemed to be more willing to express their ideas than younger colleagues. Participants pointed out two reasons. First, younger teachers were considered less knowledgeable, thereby making their opinions less influential. Second, people had been raised to respect their elders making them reluctant to offer opposing opinions. As one teacher stated:

Younger teachers are not willing to participate much because if they do, other people may think that they ‘offer to teach fish to swim’. Older teachers are proud that with their age comes wisdom. (C3FmT4).

Deference to age was also evident with respect to personnel appointments. Age and experience were always given the greatest weight in decision making. As one teacher observed:

Two vice-principals were selected as candidates for the principal position. The person who was more experienced (in terms of age and working experience) was more likely to be recruited (C3MT2).
At the same time, however, teachers noted a trend of more active involvement in smaller group settings such as division, subject or grade level group meetings. One teacher observed:

Within our division, we could argue with each other for hours and hours because people have different points of view about something. It seems to me that teachers feel much more confident to confront each other and they are not afraid of speaking up about their ideas. They are even willing to express their disagreement. But in a meeting with school leaders present, things are so different. People are so reserved. (C3MT1)

The teachers at School B indicated that they were more willing to express opinions in decision making related to ‘professional issues’ or ‘classroom issues’. However, they carefully avoided expressing opinions related to administrative and managerial decisions since these were interpreted as potentially impacting the ‘benefits’ accorded to other group members. Although these findings are broadly consistent with Conley’s (1991) finding that teachers’ willingness to participate in decision making varies across decision domains, we also suggest that there was also a ‘culturally distinctive element’ to these teacher-principal interactions. More specifically, both teacher and principal attitudes towards decision-making reflected the cultural priority accorded to maintaining hierarchical roles and harmonious relations within the social group.

The impetus for increasing the involvement of teachers in decisions was selectively evident in the formal decision-making process. The recruitment of principals was, for example, more democratic than in previous times. Teachers and staff were invited to participate in the recruitment process by casting their votes for candidates using a ‘prestige index’ (phieu tin nhiem). The prestige index reflected the level of personal and professional respect accorded the candidate by the teachers.

The procedures for conducting a poll on the prestige index can be described as follows:

1. The District Education Authority nominates a school leader candidate who is believed to be the best for the principal position;
2. Teachers and staff are asked to cast their votes according to the prestige index;
3. The final result of the prestige index is used as a reliable source of information for considering the eligibility and appointability of the leader.
4. A leader candidate with a high prestige index (that is, more than two-thirds of teachers’ agreement) is more likely to be nominated as a principal.

Teachers noted that even though their input might not play a decisive role in the principal recruitment process, this was a more tangible form of empowerment than had existed in the past. This kind of internal assessment could at least increase the transparency and recognition of the teachers’ role in the personnel decision-making process. The teachers further observed that a candidate possessing strong ‘relationships with local government’ or ‘political Party connections’ could still gain appointment as principal despite a low prestige index.

They teachers expressed that it would be futile to think that it was possible to reduce the influence of relationship factors on leader promotion and appointment. Nonetheless, they asserted that even this limited level of teacher involvement was a positive step. They suggested that principals with a low prestige index upon appointment might feel a need to ‘adjust their leadership style’, ‘cultivate relationships with teachers’ and ‘make more effort for the school’s development’ in order to ‘gain prestige’ (see also Truong and Hallinger, 2015).
Relationships also have a significant impact on the ongoing decision-making processes used in the schools. School leaders identified two crucial factors that shaped managerial decisions, ‘getting things done’ and ‘preserving harmonious relationships with staff’. Teachers admitted that the working relationships between a school leader and specific teachers could result in biased decisions. For example, as teachers stated, school leaders tended to give priority to senior teachers and those with whom they had closer relationships.

Leaders also highlighted the impact of bureaucratic and political structures on school decision-making. In theory, the School Party Secretary concentrates on ideological and political work, and the principal is responsible for administration. Separate roles were established in the belief that they would limit the abuse of power by school leaders. In most schools, however, principals tend to hold both roles. In this study, the principals of School A and School B were the School Party Secretaries, while in School C, the principal was the Vice Party Secretary.

Most participants admitted that the ‘voice’ of the principal represents the ‘voice’ of the Party (politics) and the ‘voice’ of the State (administration). The school leaders believed that holding dual roles facilitated the managerial process. As one leader stated, ‘it helps bring the directives and the will of the Party into the administrative work’ (PC2).

Leaders had to implement instructions from the local government, local committees of the Communist Party, as well as senior education officials from the Ministry of Education. Failing to meet the expectations of these multiple sources of political and bureaucratic power could lead to conflict between the school principals and their political and bureaucratic leaders. Conflict represented a potential risk not only for the principal, but also for the school. Schools rely heavily on the local government for the allocation of financial and human resources and upon the local Communist Party for their legitimacy. As one principal stated:

Sometimes I feel that we school leaders seem to be the instruments of state policy. It’s quite difficult to refuse instructions from above. When we receive an instruction from above, we have to implement exactly what we are instructed without refusing it. The problem is that not all instructions or decisions are suitable for the school, but we still have to put it into action. (PC3)

This was confirmed by teacher participants who stated that:

They [school leaders] obey and execute any decisions made by higher officials such as District Education Authority, Provincial Education Authority or the Ministry of Education and Training. Last year we started the campaign ‘Each teacher is an example of morality and self-learning’ launched by the Ministry of Education and Training. We were not very happy with some of the content of the campaign. We know that the school leaders weren’t either, but they had to implement it. They don’t have any other choice. They just do what senior officials ask of them. (C3FmT5)

Even in the face of decentralization, the principals were predisposed to accept the unequal distribution of management power in the hierarchical educational system. School leaders were tolerant of the hierarchical management styles and imposition of authority by their own leaders. One of the teachers remarked:

School leaders never dare to openly question the reasoning behind the directive of senior officials at the District Education Authority and Provincial Education Authority. (C3MT2)
As suggested earlier, a similar willingness to accept hierarchical authority without question, was also evident among teachers at the school level, whether with respect to the principal or the School Party Secretary. At the school level, leaders were considered authoritative decision-makers. As indicated by one of the vice principals, all school members respectfully obey school leaders’ decisions. ‘A decision made by the principal is considered as a ‘must’ that every school member has to obey and follow’ (VPC3).

Even in the face of changing management structures designed to foster decentralized decision making in Vietnamese schools, two factors seemed to shape the actual decision-making practices of the school leaders: age/experience and an imperative to maintain harmonious relationships, especially with one’s superiors. Age and experience are hallmarks of power distance and the orderly maintenance of relationships is a key indicator of the collectivist dimension of Vietnamese culture.

Discussion

This multi-site case study was undertaken to further our empirical understanding of how socio-cultural values impact the decision making of school leaders in Vietnam. As noted earlier, our goal of explicating ‘indigenous leadership practices’ demanded that we not only describe leader behaviours and interactions, but also interpret their meaning within the cultural values and norms of the Vietnamese education context.

Culture and Decision Making in Vietnam

Consistent with recent reforms in Vietnam’s education policy, the leaders participating in this study affirmed that teacher involvement in decision making was a potentially fruitful means of motivating teachers’ sense of responsibility to the school, mobilizing collective brainpower, and expanding grassroots democracy (đản chủ cơ sở). Yet, our data collected from multiple stakeholder groups suggested that meaningful staff involvement in decision making remains limited in scope and perfunctory in execution. Indeed, the data surfaced a ‘habit of obedience’ (high power distance) and desire to maintain group harmony (collectivism) among educators at each level in the education hierarchy. Teachers were generally reluctant to offer input into school decisions or to question decisions made by their leaders and younger, less experienced teachers showed deference to the opinions of senior teachers. Similarly, principals demonstrated a deference in their relationships with system-level leaders. The practice of seeking out divergent opinions of subordinates was observed to conflict not only with the Confucian norm of deference to age and hierarchical status, but also with assumptions underlying the political authority of the single Party state. There was an ‘implicit understanding’ that active empowerment of subordinates incurred the potential risk of threatening their legitimacy as leaders.

We emphasize that this pattern of results was derived from research conducted in only three schools. Moreover, we were unable to locate any other empirical research conducted on education management in Vietnam with which we could directly compare these findings. Nonetheless, the trend is highly consistent with findings reported by scholars studying management in other public and private sector organizations in Vietnam (Berrel et al., 1999; Painter, 2003, 2005; Quang and Vuong, 2002; Ralston et al., 1999, 2006). Moreover, scholars studying school leadership in other East Asian societies such as Thailand (Hallinger, 2004), Hong Kong (Ho and Tikly, 2012), China (Walker et al., 2012; Walker and Qian, 2015), Taiwan (Pan and Chen, 2015) and Singapore (Ng et al., 2015; Tan and Ng, 2007) have surfaced a broadly similar phenomenon. Norms of
non-confrontation, deference to higher age, rank and status, and normative pressure to maintain harmonious relationships have been described in these other East Asian societies (Hallinger, 2010; Walker and Dimmock, 2002; Walker and Hallinger, 2015).

At the same time, we note that these findings contrast with predominant descriptions of decision making among school leaders in ‘low power distance’ Western societies. In Western cultural contexts, normative descriptors of principal decision making include task-focused, participatory, empowering, decentralized, self-oriented, distributed and democratic (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Ryabova, 2010). Despite the hierarchical differences that continue to exist in these societies, teachers still tend to demonstrate a stronger willingness to participate in meaningful decision making, and even to challenge the perspectives of their leaders.

It should also be noted, however, that Dimmock and Walker (2005) reported that younger teachers in Hong Kong and Singapore were more willing than older colleagues to participate in decision-making. They suggested that the ‘new generation’ of teachers has received a more liberal upbringing and through globalization absorbed more ‘Western values’. This is not yet, however, the case in Vietnam where ‘reform’ (Đổi mới) is a more recent phenomenon, socio-economic development has been slower, and where the government has maintained much stricter control over popular media.³

**Contexts for Principal Decision Making: Beyond Culture**

Our cultural analysis suggested a robust relationship between Confucian cultural values and the enactment of ‘leader-centred decision making’ in Vietnamese schools. Yet, our qualitative data also forced the researchers to look beyond a ‘cultural explanation’ in order to understand patterns of principal decision making in Vietnam. Both bureaucratic and political features of the school context emerged, alongside culture, as other important influences that shaped perspectives, attitudes and practices related to principal decision making. We suggest that these three ‘societal subsystems’ converged to form a complex ‘context’ for decision making in schools (see also Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; Truong and Hallinger, 2015).

Conceptualization of the ‘contexts of school leadership’ has, in recent years, become an increasingly important node of theory development in educational leadership and management (Belchetz and Leithwood, 2007; Bush and Crawford, 2012; Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996; Walker and Hallinger, 2015). Belchetz and Leithwood (2007) asserted that a limited set of leadership practices (for example, goal-setting, designing the organization, culture-building) characterize effective school leadership, but that these are implemented differently across cultural contexts. This study highlights the importance of incorporating ‘multiple features of context’ into leadership studies in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how principals enact their leadership roles in different settings. Indeed, we conclude that cultural analysis, though useful, offers an incomplete picture of the contexts in which principals operate.

Thus, we propose that understanding the decision-making practices of these school principals requires an examination of the values, goals and norms that guide leaders in their context. In recent years, the global discourse in educational policy has come to ‘assume’ that the primary goals of schooling are to positively impact ‘student achievement’ and foster labour market competitiveness of graduates. This has yielded a corollary recommendation for principals to more fully engage their roles as ‘transformational and instructional leaders’ (Lee and Hallinger, 2012). This trend is evident in neighbouring countries in Southeast and East Asia (Hallinger, 2004, 2010; Ho and
Tikly, 2012; Ng et al., 2015; Pan and Chen, 2015; Walker et al., 2012; Walker and Qian, 2015; Walker and Hallinger, 2015). However, in the Vietnamese context, there is no comparable intensity in either rhetoric or practice suggesting a similar focus on either transformational or instructional leadership (Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; Hao and Wu, 2012).

Consistent with recent conceptualizations of ‘culture’ (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; London, 2006; Schwartz, 1999; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Walker and Dimmock, 2002) we suggest that political values in Vietnam interact with socio-cultural values to create a multi-faceted context for principal decision making. Thus, despite sharing a cultural tradition of Confucian values with its neighbours, Vietnam’s political structures and norms are strikingly different. This, we suggest, creates a quite different context for principal decision making in Vietnam.

These findings also lead us to ask why policymakers in Vietnam, and indeed much of East Asia, have been prompted to adopt reforms aimed at decentralized decision making and teacher empowerment despite their apparent conflict with local policies, values and traditions (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Gamage and Sooksomchitra, 2006; Hallinger, 2004, 2010; Hallinger and Truong, 2014; Hallinger et al., 2015; Law, 2004). We suggest that a need to conform to globally disseminated education policies ‘requires’ policymakers throughout the world to adopt policies which ensure that their education systems ‘look like modern education systems’ (Hallinger, 2010). This global trend receives further impetus from the growing regional integration of education systems in Southeast Asia (see Gooch, 2012).

Painter (2003: 261), for example, noted that in Vietnam, ‘the overall reform agenda is an indigenous one but heavily conditioned by global and international considerations’. The government is fostering policies that both conform to ‘modern education management’ as well as to their own political theories (for example, collective mastery). Whether or not this is carried out in practice is less important than collective agreement that the policy is in place and the system is modernizing in a manner that conforms to ‘Vietnamese characteristics’. This maintains legitimacy, and in a society that actively discourages open discussion, the contradictions are easily ignored (Firestone, 2015; Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Currently the global literature in educational leadership and management offers a picture of leadership practice rendered from a limited palette of colours (Belchetz and Leithwood, 2007; Bush and Crawford, 2012; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013; Walker et al., 2012). In this global era, it becomes urgent to undertake studies that offer empirically grounded insights into school leadership practices from throughout the world (House et al., 2004). An ‘indigenous perspective’ emphasizes the need for researchers globally to contextualize leadership practices in order to reveal their local logic. As empirical investigations generate more diverse descriptions of contextualized leadership practices we will be able to make better sense of the boundaries of knowledge in our field.

**Appendix A**

Selected Questions from the Principal Interview

**Part I: Unstructured Interview**

1. Could you please tell me something about yourself?
2. Please tell me which factors influenced your achievement of this position and explain why? (for example, your expertise, your experience, your morality, your age, your gender, your interpersonal skills)
3. Could you please tell me something about your school?
4. Tell me your main roles as a school leader as defined by yourself?

**Part II: Semi-structured Interview**

1. What do you understand about the terms ‘power/authority’?
2. In what way does the role of a school leader bring with it power and authority?
3. How do you as a school leader exercise power/authority?
4. How and in what ways do the following factors affect your exercise of power/authority:
   - Your expertise?
   - Your experience?
   - Your morality?
   - Your age?
   - Your relationships?
   - Your gender?
5. How and in what ways is school improvement influenced by a leader’s exercise of power?
6. What traditional values might challenge you to exercise power/authority? Please explain.
7. Are there any social factors or traditional values that you think affect your ability to build relationships? Please explain.
8. What traditional values do you bring to the role of principal that enhance your ability to build relationships?
9. What traditional values might challenge the process of building relationships within your school community? Please explain.
10. Who makes decisions in your school?
11. How is the school decision-making process undertaken within your school?
12. What is your role as a leader in the school decision-making process?
13. What barriers are there to effective decision making?
14. How do you deal with or overcome barriers/dilemmas in decision making?
15. What traditional values do you think affect or challenge your decisions? Please explain.

**Appendix B**

Selected Questions from the Teacher Interview

1. What core traditional values do you think exist in our society?
2. Where do these values come from?
3. What new social values exist in our society?
4. Where do these new values come from?
5. What conflicts, if any, exist between the core traditional values and new ones?
6. What traditional values do you think might affect the way that your school leaders exercise power/authority? Please tell me how and in what ways?
7. How is the school decision-making process undertaken within your school?
8. In making decisions, what traditional values affect the school decision-making process?

Note: These teacher interview questions were supplemented by a questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions that asked teachers to elaborate on a similar but expanded set of questions.
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Notes
1. Given the desire to maintain anonymity, we have not specified which of these participants was associated with which school.
2. Moreover, another research question addressed in the larger study focused on gender and leadership. Therefore, a distribution by teacher gender was also deemed important.
3. For example, in Vietnam access to websites that are perceived to be critical of government policy are regularly blocked. This includes Facebook which has become a popular forum for unwanted dialogue and unconstrained discussion of government policies.

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Author biographies

Dr Philip Hallinger is Professor of Educational Management at the Faculty of Education in Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, and Distinguished Visiting Professor of Education, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Dr Truong Dinh Thang is a lecturer in the Department of Research Management and External Affairs at the Quang Tri Teacher Training College in Vietnam.

Kabini Sanga is Associate Professor of Education at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.