



**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

**Girls' Access to Education in China:  
Actors, Cultures and the Windmill of  
Development Management**

**Xiaojun Grace Wang**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
Research Monograph No. 39**

**July 2010**



**Leading education  
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Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity  
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## **List of Acronyms**

ARR	Assistant Resident Representative
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
DFID	Department for International Development
DICE	Department for International Cooperation and Exchanges
EFA	Education for All
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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I am heartily thankful to Professor Angela W. Little. It is her inspiration and guidance that has led me through the entire process of the research and compilation of this monograph. As a development practitioner and researcher, I often face challenges in balancing pressing managerial routines and availing myself of space and time for research and reflections. This monograph would not be possible without Professor Little's unfading confidence, encouragement, and persistent support whenever I need.

I am also very grateful to Professor Little for bringing me into this amazing network: the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE). CREATE offers me a wealth of resources and connections to peer researchers, practitioners, and partners, all contributing towards achieving the same goal – reducing educational exclusion and expanding access to basic education for children all over the world. While I benefit from their rich analysis and recommendations, I hope this monograph will also contribute to the network in an important way.

## Preface

This contribution to the CREATE Pathways to Access series focuses on the management of an intervention designed to promote girls' access to education in rural China. It draws attention to the complex array of actors who design and support intervention programmes - all the way from those who work in a United Nations agency and Government Ministry to local level managers and teachers on the ground. Employing a wide range of literature from development studies, cultural theory and development management, Xiaojun Grace Wang develops a conceptual framework for understanding the cultural and human dimensions of actor's perceptions and behaviour and applies this framework to selected components of the intervention. She suggests that the metaphor of a windmill might usefully be used to describe and understand the realities of development management, in this particular case and more generally.

The monograph is a distillation of a much more extended analysis of the full case presented in the author's unpublished PhD thesis *Actors, Cultures and Development management: a case study of an international collaboration project in girls' education in China* awarded by the University of London in 2009. We are delighted that Xiaojun Grace agreed to join our CREATE endeavour and to re-introduce the all-important dimension of management to our understanding of interventions designed to promote education access.

Angela W Little  
Partner Institute Convenor  
Institute of Education  
University of London



## Summary

The world has a mixed record towards achieving EFA and the MDGs in relation to the targets on gender equity in basic education. For researchers and practitioners, this raises the question of which factors influence the processes leading to the improvement of access and quality of girls' education and how. This case study from China examines the human and cultural dimensions of project management in determining the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions designed to improve gender equity.

The monograph combines concepts from the actor-oriented approach of development studies, with theories of culture and development management. It generates an analytical framework composed of two super ordinate 'cultural landscapes'. One is the 'relational' landscape with its dimensions of power distance, masculinity-femininity, and collectivism-individualism. The other is the 'time-orientation' landscape with its dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and universalism-particularism. The 'cultural landscapes' and dimensions provide a powerful description of how the perceptions and strategies of interaction vary and change between and within individual actors.

The monograph illustrates how managers act as innovators with varied perceptions and interaction strategies influenced by multiple levels of culture, social and political contexts. Using the metaphor of a windmill, the monograph suggests that project management moves beyond the linear cyclical logic presented in many of the planning texts and manuals of development agencies. The steps and stages of development management are the windmill's blades. The cultural interactions between actors form the wind that gives the blades energy and speed. The blades run both synchronically and sequentially depending on the wind strength.

The monograph recommends that development managers should move beyond superficial concerns for outputs and products to a deeper concern for human and cultural processes that lead to results for achieving EFA and the MDGs.



# **Girls' Access to Education in China: Actors, Cultures and the Windmill of Development Management**

## **1. Introduction**

This monograph brings together a concern for access to education as well as development project management. In this introductory section I will describe some of the contextual background to my empirical focus on access to education for girls in China.

### **1.1 Background – towards achieving EFA and the MDGs**

In September 2000, leaders of 189 countries came together to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration and committed their nations to the 8 Millennium Development Goals, aiming at reducing extreme poverty by 2015. Among these goals, two are directly about educational development. The target of Goal 2 – the achievement of Universal Primary Education - is to:

Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3 aims to promote gender equality and empower women. Its first target is to:

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

In April of that year, the World Education Forum adopted the Dakar Framework for Action as a follow-up to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), convened ten years earlier in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990. The 1,100 participants of the forum from 181 countries reaffirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015. The Framework for Action sets out an ambitious agenda on gender equity, both in terms of enrolment and in educational opportunities and outcomes. Such a combination was considered broader in scope than the targets set in the MDGs (UNESCO, 2009). Dakar Goal 5 focussed on:

Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

How is the world performing against the MDG targets and the Dakar benchmarks? According to the MDG report 2008 and the EFA report 2009, the record is mixed. At the primary level, two thirds of the countries have achieved gender parity. However, regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia are lagging behind. More than half the countries in these regions had yet to achieve gender parity at the primary level. At the secondary level, the gaps are wider. Only 37% of countries with data, mostly in North America and Europe, have achieved gender parity. The disparity is marked by girls falling behind in 58 countries, mostly from less developed regions, including sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia. It is marked by boys' under-participation, particularly at secondary level, in 53 countries, mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2009).

With over half of the countries missing the target of gender parity, it is recognised that the world progress is slower than it is required if the MDGs and broader Dakar targets are to be achieved by 2015. In this regard, the world needs to learn lessons from past practices and experiences. Researchers and practitioners all need to reflect on the questions: Why is the world making insufficient progress regardless of the increasing commitment and investment? How can we leap forward to achieving the targets?

One of the important dimensions that demand serious rethinking for achieving Education for All is suggested by Little (1990). Advancing the need for a cultural analysis of development management she suggests:

In their search for cost-effective technical panaceas for 'universal' problems, many international change agents borrow an apparently successful strategy or policy from one culture and elevate it to the status of international policy having universal relevance. The economic question is: under what conditions is such elevated decontextualisation cost-effective and under what conditions is it cost-ineffective? The cultural/political question is: who is borrowing and who is lending, and why? (Little, 1990:68)

Little (2008) also points out that the determinants of educational access, participation and quality are 'rooted differentially in the wider political, social and economic system, the local community and the classroom' (Little, 2008:1). A universal philosophy and pedagogy of education should not be imposed on a process that is culturally diverse.

This CREATE monograph offers a cultural analysis of a development project designed to promote girls' participation in education in China.

## **1.2 Girls' education in China – applying the CREATE Zones of Exclusion**

China is making progress on achieving gender equality in primary and junior secondary education, particularly in terms of enlarging and equalising access. Applying the CREATE Zones of Exclusion (Zone 1 to Zone 6)<sup>1</sup> at national level: the concerns are not immediately obvious.

CREATE Zone 1 to Zone 3 concerns enrolment, retention and the quality of primary education. According to UNESCO, in 2007, the primary Net Enrolment Ratios for girls and boys were 99.52% and 99.46% respectively. This indicates that the access to school question is largely resolved in China for both girls and

### **CREATE Zones of Exclusion**

- Zone 0 – children who are excluded from pre-schooling
- Zone 1 -children who have never been to school, and are unlikely to attend school;
- Zone 2 - children who enter primary schooling, but who drop out before completing the primary cycle
- Zone 3 - children who enter primary schooling and are enrolled but are "at risk" of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement, and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning
- Zone 4 – children who fail to make the transition to secondary school grades
- Zone 5 children who enter secondary schooling but who drop out before completing the cycle
- Zone 6 children who enter secondary schooling and are enrolled but are "at risk" of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning

<sup>1</sup> CREATE Zone 0 is not discussed in this monograph. For a fuller discussion of the CREATE zones of exclusion see Lewin (2007)

boys at primary education level. The five-year survival rate of girls for primary schools stood at 98.46%, higher than 98.42% for boys.

CREATE Zone 4 to Zone 6 concerns the enrolment, retention and the quality of junior secondary education. In China, the gross enrolment rate of girls for junior secondary schools was up to 95%, with no obvious difference from that of the boys. The three-year survival rate of girls of the junior secondary school stage was 93.29%, slightly higher than 92.14% for boys (Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, 2008).

Yet, national statistics overlook in-country disparities in enrolment and in education quality. It is still too early to claim that China has achieved the target of “elimination of gender disparity in primary and junior secondary education” (MOF, China and UN China, 2008:45). If we apply a geographical lens to examine the CREATE Zones of Exclusion, then the concerns become acute throughout the 6 Zones defined. In China, educational development is unbalanced among different regions. In 2006, there were still dozens of counties in China that had not attained 9-year compulsory education. These counties are largely located in the plateaus, deserts, high mountains, ethnic areas, and border areas. They are economically underdeveloped, have unfavourable natural conditions, and a low educational base. More importantly, many schools of the compulsory education stage have poor teaching conditions and the education levels of their teachers are quite low. As a result, many of their students cannot meet the basic requirements of compulsory education. Due to the poor quality of education, some slower students have to repeat years. Hundreds of thousands of students drop out of school in rural areas, and fail to accomplish the 9-year compulsory education.

Gender disparity in learning outcomes is particularly wide in these areas, due to a lack of awareness of gender equality, a lack of gender sensitivity in the curriculum, and stereotypes about the value of men and women. As a result, girls in these areas are more likely to drop out before completion of the compulsory 9 years, due to low achievement, gender-biased treatment and social prejudices.

### **1.3 Development management dynamics – lessons learned**

To improve the access and quality of girls' education in China's underdeveloped areas, the Chinese Government has cooperated closely with international agencies. International collaborative education programmes include the China-UNDP Girls Education Project (1996-2002), the China-UNDP Distance Learning Project (2002-2009), the China-UNICEF Basic Education Project (1996-2000, 2000-2005, 2006-2010), and the China-DFID Gansu Basic Education project. All these international collaborative projects are of a scale that has influenced the processes of national advancement in improving girls' education. The management of these projects offers lessons for the next phase towards full achievement of the EFA and MDG targets.

I was engaged in managing an international development project in China between 1998 and 2002 in the Ministry of Education, and from 2002 to 2009 in the United Nations Development Programme. My experience has shown me that development project planning, implementation and evaluation are not smooth processes. The planning process can be extremely time-consuming and involve conflict between different stakeholder priorities. Implementation always involves a process of tension and reconciliation of the different perspectives held by project managers. Despite the availability of many clearly written project texts on the principles of project evaluation, evaluation practices vary from actor to actor.

These realities challenge what we have been trained to expect in our roles as development managers. Well equipped with standardised sets of procedures, skills and criteria to ensure the success of development interventions, we experience instead a dynamic management process, in which gaps in perception and interactions between actors can lead to variable project management results.

As I reflected upon such issues, I realised that these realities could be understood through an actor-oriented perspective of development studies. Development management, like other management disciplines, has long practiced and evolving procedures, methodologies and techniques. The textbooks suggest a relatively smooth and linear process from planning, through implementation and on to evaluation and institutionalisation.

But development is managed by people. Project managers interpret the 'reality' of a project through their own values and cultural assumptions. They also bring their own social and economic interests or benefit concerns into the project management. Cultural ignorance and recognition, misreading and understanding, conflict as well as agreement ensue. All these lead to the fact that one person or group might accept or resist an idea from another, might alter or insist upon their own approaches. The outcomes expected for projects might be shaped and re-shaped through these informal processes of personal interactions between the managers. I started to question the linear logic of development management that implied that a good design with solid implementation steps and well organised evaluations, would naturally lead to expected development results.

The research<sup>2</sup> reported in this monograph is about the human and cultural dimensions of development management. It examines the managers' perceptions and interactions during the processes of project planning, implementation and evaluation, using a UNDP-China collaborative project in education in China as a case study. The main question addressed by the research is:

How do managers bring their varied perceptions and strategies into planning, implementing and evaluating a development project and influence project management outcomes through their interactions with each other?

The research findings will benefit development practitioners working in or with China in improving the effectiveness of multilateral development project management in the context of China. Beyond China, the research is also expected to provide a reference point for development practitioners working in comparable social, cultural, and development contexts. It will help them to have a better understanding of the human, social and cultural dimensions of development management and international cooperation for achieving EFA and the educational targets in the MDGs.

#### **1.4 Structure of the monograph**

The monograph is composed of four sections. This first section has introduced the case study, in the context of international and China's progresses towards achieving EFA and the MDGs, relating the CREATE model of zones of exclusion in thinking about access and quality in girls' education in China. The second section will summarise the conceptual framework of the

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<sup>2</sup> The research is drawn from the author's unpublished thesis *Actors, Cultures and Development Management – A case study of an international collaboration project in girls' education in China*, 2009: University of London.

research, combining the actor-oriented approach of development studies with theories of culture and development management. The third section uses the girls' education project as an illustrative case to demonstrate the dynamic interaction among multiple development actors and multiple cultures in the process of development project management. The fourth section synthesizes the findings of the case study and their implications for the CREATE research and policy agenda.

## **2. Conceptual and analytical framework**

This monograph adopts a conceptual and analytical framework that combines concepts from the actor-oriented approach of development studies, with theories of culture and theories of development management. While this monograph draws upon these approaches it does not offer a full discussion or critique of them here.

### **2.1 Actor-oriented development studies**

Two schools of thought have dominated recent trends in development studies. One school focuses on analysing the large-scale structures, political and economic systems with their basic concern being testing the macro-system models in social change. The other school is primarily concerned with how people manage their lives and life world, taking the impact of macro and structural dimensions into their analytical consideration. The actor-oriented approach (Long, 1989, 2001) belongs to the latter.

From an actor-oriented perspective, although structural forces have an impact on social change, they are mediated and transformed through people's lived experiences and perceptions. People do not merely react to forces of change. They themselves are active participants in the change process. As such it is necessary to focus on the interaction of external structures and the important roles of human action during the change process (Long, 2001).

Such an approach enjoys certain advantages. Firstly, it corrects the people-less image of development as depicted by general structural analysis. It acknowledges the central role played by people actively as well as reactively in shaping the course of development. Thus it carries the message that development cannot just be imposed from the outside. Secondly, it reveals the dynamic and heterogeneous character of development process, by describing different responses under similar structural circumstances and how they relate to or act on others.

Such an approach also carries risks. One risk is to reduce the actors' interaction to individual voluntarism, thus ignoring the impact of culture, social or economic structures on people's choices. Another risk is to be too descriptive to be helpful to 'interventionists' (Roling and Leeuwis, 2001). It problematises a number of issues that were previously thought to be relatively straightforward, and thus creates the image that reality is very complex and not easily manageable by experts or practitioners (Henbinck and Verschoor, 2001). To avoid falling into these analytical traps, the actor-oriented analytical framework employs three core concepts:

**a. social actor.** In actor-oriented studies, the person (actor) is neither merely a person *per se*, nor a mechanical part of an organisation. She/he is a social actor with human agency, contributing to the building of cultures and structures as well as carrying out the activities of and influenced by the cultures of social organisations.

**b. collective actor.** This term recognises a coalition of actors sharing a common understanding of the situation and agreeing on certain courses of social action, at least, at a given moment. In international development projects, categorisations of 'national government officials', 'expatriate experts', 'local community people' could be useful in forming part of an understanding of the interaction. However, it is problematic to adopt these black-boxed



entities as primary frameworks to analyse human actions in projects following predetermined assignments. Social actions should be interpreted based on empirical evidence (Arce and Long, 2000).

**c. social interface.** Long defines a social interface as ‘a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found’ (Long, 1989). The interactions studied are mainly around the problem of ‘bridging, accommodating, segregating, or contesting’ each others’ different social and cognitive worlds’ (Long, 2001:65).

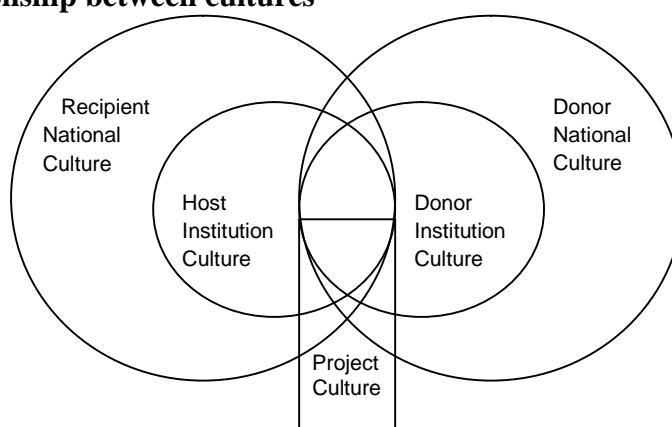
## **2.2 How do actor-oriented studies relate to the concept of culture?**

Central to the actor-oriented approach is the process through which social actors give meaning to their experiences. As Long (2001) points out, the process is framed by cultural perceptions and these cultural perceptions in turn, are constructed and transformed through the dynamic interactions between actors. Therefore, actor-oriented studies have a strong interest in the impact of culture on people’s choices, ‘grounded methodologically in the detailed study of everyday life, in which actors seek to grapple cognitively, emotionally and organisationally with the problematic situations they face’ (Long, 2001:51).

Actor-oriented studies address culture in its broad, heterogeneous and dynamic sense, Culture is viewed as collective and neither inherent nor static. It recognises the categorisation of people into groups, or, in the language of Latour (1994) and Callon and Law (1995), heterogeneous actor networks. Such networks take various forms and present different levels of culture. There is not space here for an exhaustive discussion of the various conceptual uses and abuses of ‘culture’ or of ideas about cultural hybridity and mixing which fill journals, books and disciplines elsewhere (Rosaldo, 1993). In this paper, I mainly address three levels of culture: national, ethnic and organisational / project cultures. Project culture is considered as a sub-level of organisation culture as projects can be seen as temporary organisations.

In development cooperation projects, the different levels of culture co-exist, overlap and even may conflict with each other. Delens (1999) schematically illustrated the relationships between national, organisational and project culture in the context of a development project in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Relationship between cultures**



Source: (Delens, 1999)

Delens’ scheme shows that a donor national culture influences the donor institution culture and a recipient national culture influences the host institution culture. The project culture has

commonalities with the cultures of both sides, but there are also features of project culture that go beyond either the host or the donor's culture.

Delen's scheme may well explain the relations within a bilateral project, but does not address the slightly different case of multilateral projects. For the latter, usually a UN agency or other multilateral body receives funds from and represents several donors in the field. Although the multilateral body is perceived from the recipient's side as a single organisation, there is no single donor national culture that dominates the organisation's culture. One might think of replacing the donor national culture circle in Delen's scheme with a wider international community culture, for example, the culture of the UN. However, if we take an actor-oriented viewpoint, it is not as simple as that. Any level of culture needs to be represented by its people. People working within the UN community come from different nations. They draw their perceptions not only from the particular organisation's culture, and from the UN community culture, but also from his/her respective national culture.

Furthermore, Delen's model does not allow for competition between the cultural values of different organisations and projects. As Faure has observed, while a number of multinational companies and international organisations create organisational cultures powerful enough to counterbalance the influence of national cultures, when these are combined with personality variable and strategic behaviours, 'the final attitude becomes far less predictable' (Faure, cited in Kremenjuk, 2002:397).

### 2.3 Cultural Dimensions and Cultural Landscapes

A number of writers have suggested ways of describing differences between national and organisational cultures (eg. Ho, 1991, 1993; Kluckhohn, 1953, 1961; Hofstede, 1980, 1984, 1991, 1994, 2001, 2002; Inkeles and Levinson, 1954; Parsons and Shils, 1951; and Trompenaars 1993, 1997). These are reviewed extensively by this author elsewhere (Wang, 2009). Those found most useful for this particular case study are summarised below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Cultural Landscapes and Dimensions**

<b>Landscapes</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
<b>Relational Orientation (Ho)</b>	Power distance (Inkeles and Levinson) → (Hofstede)
	Masculinity –Femininity (Inkeles and Levinson) → (Hofstede)
	Collectivism –Individualism (Inkeles and Levinson) → (Hofstede)
<b>Time Orientation (Kluckhohn, Hofstede, Trompenaars)</b>	Uncertainty –avoidance (Inkeles and Levinson) → (Hofstede)
	Universalism –Particularism (Parsons and Shils) → (Trompenaars)

Table 1 presents a framework for analysing national cultures. The framework comprises two landscapes with five dimensions. The first landscape is 'relational orientation', a conceptual framework developed by Ho (1991) pointing to a tendency for some people to act in accordance with external expectations or social norms, rather than internal wishes or personal integrity. Such a tendency leads to common Chinese behaviour patterns such as social conformity to avoid conflict and rejection, non-offensive strategies, and face saving. Chinese

people's personalities are shaped through interpersonal relations. The relational orientation landscape embraces the meaning of Hofstede's three dimensions of *power distance*, *masculinity-femininity*, and *collectivism-individualism*.

The *power distance* dimension measures the degree of inequality in societies or the extent to which a culture accepts that power is distributed unequally. The higher a society ranks in power distance, the more it accepts status differentials in that society.

*Masculinity – femininity* originally refers to the expected difference of gender roles in a culture. The cultures that scored towards what Hofstede referred to as 'masculine' tend to have very distinct expectations of male and female roles. The more 'feminine' cultures have a greater ambiguity in what is expected of each gender. But this dimension is not just about gender roles. The connotations of this include certain values of a society. 'Masculine' societies favour achievement, competition, assertiveness, self-realisation and material success as opposed to the stereotypical 'feminine' values of relationships, harmony, cooperation, tolerance, modesty, caring and the quality of life.

The *individualism – collectivism* dimension is the measure of the extent to which people are supposed to take care of themselves and be emotionally independent from others. In this sense, some societies tend to be more individualistic and others more collectivist.

The second landscape is time oriented. Cultures may be viewed as past-oriented, present-oriented, or future-oriented (Kluckhohn, 1961). They are long-term or short-term in their orientation (Hofstede, 2001). They can also be sequentially oriented or synchronically oriented (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). For sequential thinkers, everything has its time and place and any change or turbulence in this sequence will make the sequential person more uncertain. They tend to care about the near future and what happens next and would prefer clear blueprints rather than vague plans. This landscape embraces two dimensions -- *uncertainty avoidance* and *universalism-particularism*.

*Uncertainty avoidance* measures a society's tolerance of the unknown and its comfortable level with risks and ambiguity. High uncertainty avoiding societies prefer stability and treasure past experiences. They are oriented towards the past and tend to view things in a sequential order. A low uncertainty avoiding society can be more ready to accept changes and welcome new phenomena. They focus on the present situation, and view time as synchronic.

The dimension of *universalism - particularism* concerns whether one feels obliged more to laws, principles, rules, procedure and processes and applies them universally to all cases, or whether one feels more obliged to attend to specific contexts and relations. People in universalistic cultures believe that principles and rules are the best way of dealing equally and fairly with all people and all cases, achieving long-term sustainability. People in particularistic cultures are more inclined to break the principle or rules for particular cases or immediate targets. They are more pragmatic and short-term oriented.

The cultural dimensions discussed above are not only applicable to national culture, but also relevant in comparing ethnic, organisational and project cultural differences (Wang, 2009).

## **2.4 Development project management**

Since the Second World War, in the first three decades of international development, the literature mainly tended to conceptualise development management as a linear and mechanical process. Development organisations, bilateral or multilateral, followed either the same or a similar project cycle, where plans were formulated, implemented and evaluated in order to establish how far the original objectives had been achieved (Long, 2001:25). It left limited room for flexibility and little consideration for multiple stakeholders and their dynamics in the project.

Little (2008) reviews various models of planning, implementation and evaluation in practice. Aware of the limitations of the project cycle, she outlines the work of Haddad with Demsky (1995:26-27) who proposed a policy or programme cycle designed to involve balancing contradictory demands, and soliciting support or tolerance from the many different stakeholders in education. She also describes the work of Evans, Sack and Shaw (1996) who describe policy making and policy implementation as a 'messy, fluid process' which cannot be reduced to a simple linear model.

In practice, the elements of the policy cycle do not take place as a series of discrete steps, but are experienced as a continuously interactive process. At all stages, affected stakeholders seek to make changes which address their concerns ... Instead of seeing these stages as rigidly sequential, each one can be viewed as a challenge to be faced at some point in the process of policy formation and implementation. Nonetheless thinking of the policy process as a logical sequence of steps can help to make sense of the challenge, even though it does not provide fully applicable guidelines for policymakers working in real world settings (Evans, Sack and Shaw, 1995, quoted in Little, 2008).

### **3. Actors, cultures and management of the girls education project**

The project entitled *Promoting Nine-year Compulsory Education in Poor Areas Focusing on Girls*, was funded by a UNDP grant and the Chinese government's in-kind contribution. It started in 1996 and was completed in 2001, covering five provinces/autonomous regions located in China's remote west -- Gansu, Guangxi, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet. This monograph examines only the components of the project in Guangxi and Sichuan. A full presentation of the project can be found in the author's PhD thesis (Wang, 2009).

Management of the project involved a variety of actors. They operated from different types of organisations – an international development agency, a national government ministry, a provincial government's educational department, a county government and national or local research institutes. They played different roles as project administrators or consultants. They brought to these organisations and roles different national and ethnic identities - Chinese as well as non-Chinese, Chinese Han as well as Chinese non-Han ethnic minorities. The diversity of actors involved in the management of this project makes it not only worthy of study in itself, but also renders the case as representative of international education development projects in China.

#### **3.1 The process of planning – a dictated theme with negotiated strategies**

In December 1996, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the UNDP considered setting up a new project. The Department for International Cooperation and Exchanges (DICE) in MoE entrusted a national consultant, Mr. Lee<sup>3</sup>, to work with the Assistant Resident Representative (ARR) of UNDP, Dr. Hu. After a brief discussion, they identified that the theme of the project could be 'to improve nine-year compulsory education focusing on girl students in the poorer areas'. This was soon approved by both the UNDP and the MoE.

Dr. Hu had anticipated much harder negotiation on the focus on girls education, as he perceived that the MoE treated gender equality as a side issue. Dr. Hu attributed this smooth and successful theme identification process to Mr. Lee, and judged that 'the right person had been selected by the Ministry' to work with him.

Mr. Lee had worked with Dr. Hu on the previous UNDP project and developed personal familiarity and trust. They both had a strong sense of being within the same group. They recognised each other's professional quality as being complementary. They considered their ethnic kinship and common language as advantages that made their cultural understanding and communication easier. As Lee explained,

I understood better the situation in China and our education problems as well as policies. He knew better what UNDP would like to support ...and it was not difficult to have agreement regarding special features of China since he is also Chinese ... plus, I don't need to struggle with my poor English.

Their familiarity and trust enabled them to take a pragmatic, particularistic approach in reaching an agreement. Dr. Hu made it clear that the theme must be chosen from the priorities of the UNDP: poverty reduction, gender equity, environmental sustainability, democratic

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<sup>3</sup> All the names of people referred to in this paper are pseudonyms.

governance, and combating HIV and AIDS. This would justify it for UNDP funding. Mr. Lee, despite representing the national government, accepted this and did not insist that Chinese government priorities should dominate, as long as the result of the planning turned out to be a good match of the national policy as well. There was little tension of the usual kind of negotiation between the 'international' and 'national' sides.

Their proposal was supported by the officials of DICE. In the words of Yi, Director of DICE,

China had enough challenges which needed international aid to help overcome. This theme addresses one of the challenges anyway.

This reflected that international aid in China was seen as a good add-on and not expected to be necessarily of core value to the country's development. It was often said in China that 'Matters in China have to be dealt ultimately by Chinese people.' Chinese openness was based on such a self-centred mindset that the MoE officials seemed not to bother whether the selected theme was the national priority. They automatically switched on the green light towards the proposal of Mr. Lee and Dr. Hu.

After the theme was identified, the DICE officials then intended to push it to the provincial planners during a formulation workshop in Beijing at the end of 1996. Mr. Lee thought this workshop was only to assign the 'homework' of writing up sub-project documents to the participants from the provinces, as the vice-minister's approval of the theme had left in reality little room for change. However, this was not fully accepted by the provincial planners.

Among others, the officers in Sichuan and Guangxi, Mr. Dong and Mr. Chang, did not want to support the theme. They both considered that girls' education was marginal to their work, but they were concerned that if they expressed their rejectionist attitudes at the planning meeting, they could have lost the funding brought by the project. As Dong explained,

I had to accept it, anyway. You will get money to do something good. Who could say no to that?

In the middle of the 1990s, international development cooperation in China was considered first of all a good source of financial aid. Gaining aid was considered as a credit of the local officials. That explained largely why the local partners often accepted the agenda attached to the aid, which might not be a priority of their work at that time.

Furthermore, Dong said the donor representative Dr. Hu made him reluctant to negotiate. He was described as 'unfamiliar' and 'authoritative' by Dong,

I did not feel comfortable to argue with Dr. Hu at the meeting, where we met the first time. I heard he was educated in US. Maybe that's why he had a very different manner ... I still remembered he used a flip chart 'teaching' us how to draw up project documents ... now I can argue with him as we have become old friends, no need to be too polite now.

Although being Chinese, Dr. Hu's overseas background and donor agency identity, as well as being a newcomer, made Dong feel that there was a need to be polite with him as an outsider. In Chinese culture politeness often meant that disagreement should not be raised in public.

This feature of a collectivist culture influenced Dong's interaction strategy with Dr. Hu and indirectly resulted in his acceptance of the project theme.

The national consultant Mr. Lee also influenced the decision of Mr. Chang and Mr. Dong. He insisted that the theme should be fully accepted and criticized in public that 'marginalizing girls education is abnormal and against the national laws and policies'. The provincial officials said that they had to accept the theme to show their respect to the national 'senior advisor'.

Thus, apart from the financial concerns, some cultural considerations also influenced the decision of the two provincial officers. These cultural considerations included avoiding conflicts with unfamiliar people, respecting seniority, obeying upper-level authority, which reflected their collectivist and high power-distance standings. While making a decision on how to act upon certain matters, the two provincial actors both referred first and foremost to the relationship they had with the other actors, rather than the substance of the matter itself.

They then both accepted the project focus on girls' education. The Guangxi officer later developed their sub-project based on an on-going initiative – girl-only classes. Sichuan's sub-project chose to focus on girls' psychological education. Both also highlighted labour skill training for girls at school.

### **3.2 Girl-only classes**

In Guangxi, the girls who had dropped out or were going to drop out of school due to financial constraints within their families were funded by the project to continue their primary education in girl-only classes. The lead researcher of Guangxi who initiated the idea of setting up girl-only classes, Ms. Xiu, believed this was an effective way not only to address the low enrolment rate of girls, but also to ensure the quality of education that the girls received in school. She said,

The girls in rural villages needed more encouragement in school. In the co-ed classes, boys could naturally become a dominant force and girls, might lose their confidence easily in an unprotected environment, especially those girls from poorer families ... the girl-only classes could create an atmosphere of girl-girl camaraderie and mutual acceptance. In girl-only classes, the teachers could be trained to care more about girls' psychological characteristics...

When Xiu first communicated her idea of setting up girl-only classes with the provincial officer, Mr. Chang, right after the planning workshop, Chang was uncertain whether this was the right set-up to improve girls' education. He knew that there were disagreements among researchers about single-sex school/classes. But he thought, by financially supporting the girls and getting them into girl-only classes, the project could be more manageable and visibly show the enhancement of the enrolment of girls in the two poor counties. Chang decided not to tell Ms. Xiu the real reason that he supported setting-up girl-only classes, as he believed, 'she was after all a researcher not a manager ... she might think I was too pragmatic if I told her the real reason why I agreed...'

Ms Xiu actually knew that Chang's acceptance of her proposal was only due to its managerial convenience, but she also chose not to point this out.

Anyway, we ended up in the same resolution. It was better to seek for similarities while allowing the differences to exist.

The girl-only classes were finally set up in Guangxi with the 'the similarities and differences' in their views 'coexisting'. However, these differences in the views of project staff affected subsequent interactions when they tried to manage the resources during the implementation of the project. Xiu would prioritise investment in teacher training and curriculum adaptation to create a gender-responsive learning environment. However, Chang invested a lot of human resources, time, leadership support, and project funding, on recruitment campaigns and social mobilization to increase enrolment. The resources available for teacher training and teaching material development were diminished. Xiu became very concerned, but she felt she was not in a position to challenge Chang as she regarded the officer as the decision maker of the project. Later she sought a chance to have the NTA, Mr. Lee, to help persuade Chang.

Lee totally agreed with Xiu to prioritise the gender-responsiveness of content and pedagogy. He even went further to suggest that Chang should design a special curriculum for girls based on research findings of competencies required by the modern labour market.

In the long run, our schools could help readjust the social discriminative aspirations laid upon girls. We should not limit ourselves just within the scene of the local area. We should aim at the future and the wider context of national and global development. We need to study what talents are most needed when the girls grow up and start to prepare them from school.

Chang however felt that Lee had set an irrelevant target for the rural schools.

Lee's views went too far from our reality. Facing financial constrains and sex discrimination, girls-only classes were a have-to option for us. Lee's expectation of girl-only classes only suited the schools in big cities where girls' schools or classes were actually a luxurious arrangement for girls rather than just something to keep them in school...

Xiu felt that Chang was not convinced by Lee mainly because he was too much driven by superficial achievements, managerial convenience, and visibility. She would not appreciate such an approach. She decided to devote her energy to the girl-only classes and to convince the officer in the future by successful evidence.

Anyway, he agreed in setting up the girl-only classes, for whatever reason...at least he gave me an opportunity to show him how to improve the quality of education for girls. That was good enough for me. No need to argue with him about our difference.

Although lacking financial and leadership support from Chang, Xiu continued securing opportunities and resources for gender sensitive training for the teachers. She led her research team to the schools and spent time with the teachers there, observing their teaching behaviour and providing advice on improving their responsiveness to girls' learning needs. She used her own research fund to conduct a gender analysis of the Chinese textbooks from Class 3 to Class 6, in order to guide the teachers to properly use the textbooks and avoid passing on sex-discriminatory messages to students. This situation lasted through the first three to four years of the project. During the process, she observed that Chang's views had gradually changed.



Chang admitted that he started to agree with Xiu's approach in the later stages of the project, especially after the mid-term evaluation took place. The mid-term evaluation was conducted by an international consultant Dr. M and a national consultant Dr. Jin. They both commended the result of teachers training on gender sensitivity and asked Chang to disseminate this experience to other schools, counties and even other project provinces. Chang felt very proud that this had been recognised by the evaluators. He had thought that the training would not bear any visible results within the project life.

In the meantime, with the foreign aid phasing out, he became concerned about the sustainability of the project. Chang said,

Fortunately, Xiu's practice would leave us a legacy. The teachers trained remained in school and they influenced other teachers. Their gender-sensitive teaching approaches nurtured through the project were what was truly sustainable ... I started to be grateful to her personally as she was so committed to the work during the early years when I was not so supportive.

Therefore, during the last two years of the project, Mr. Chang transferred his allocated budget on recruitment to research and teacher training. He supported Xiu to enable her to compile her theories and practices into a book entitled '*Girls' Education Practices in Poor Mountainous Areas of Guangxi*' (2001). The book was later used as a textbook for teacher students in the normal schools of Guangxi region.

The interaction between Mr. Chang and Ms. Xiu provided interpretations of their differences and similarities along several cultural dimensions.

Firstly, their different perceptions of the project focus -- quality or access, revealed their different standing along the universalism-particularism dimension. Xiu was more universalistic and process-oriented, focusing on nurturing the environment and developing quality standards for girl-only classes. She cared less of the immediate outputs of a particular project. However, Mr. Chang cared more about the particular project and its measurable outputs and less about the long-term concerns.

Secondly, the strategy of their interaction reflected their similar standing along the power distance dimension. Both Chang and Xiu considered the social distinction of being an officer or a researcher was important and it determined who could hold the power – a typical mindset within an official-dominant culture.

Thirdly, the way that they dealt with their differences also reflected their common concern of maintaining harmonious relations. They chose not to talk about their conflicts directly. Instead, Xiu resorted to a third-party and expected him to act as a bridge between them. When this indirect approach did not work, she decided to take a silent approach, trying to use 'needless-to-say' evidence to convince the other.

Such avoidance of confrontation is related to the concept of 'face' in Chinese culture, which was considered to be a long-term oriental cultural norm by Hofstede, but also reflected the 'femininity' of the culture. Chinese perceptions of face are linked with one's social status. If one's social status is respected with the matching social norms of behaviour, one's face is saved. If it is over respected, face is 'lit up'. If under-respected, face is lost. Xiu felt that not challenging Chang was to respect his social status as an officer and to save face for him. She

also knew that it would not be considered by Chang as losing face if someone senior in status, like Lee, challenged him. In other words, face is not only personal, but also collective, belonging to a social group in facing another social group, in this case, an officer vis-à-vis a researcher, and a provincial officer vis-à-vis a national researcher.

Finally, there was a paradox associated with Chang. He is pragmatic in practice, but he would avoid being labelled as pragmatic. Pragmatism is a phenomenon of particularistic culture, as one would prioritise specific demands by reality and may compromise principles to find ways to accommodate reality. Chang considered himself pragmatic, because he attempts to find shortcuts to achieve his purposes, regardless of his theoretical doubts over the single-sex educational arrangements. In the Chinese context, such pragmatism was traditionally attributed to 'short vision', 'lacking of moral judgement', and 'utilitarianism'. It was often held in contempt by people considering themselves as upper class or intellectual. That explained why Chang felt better not letting Xiu know about his pragmatic considerations. It also explained why Xiu pretended that she did not know, in order to save face for Chang. However, modern China has experienced several revolutions towards adopting a pragmatic approach to development. The most recent one was Deng's opening up strategy. His message that 'the colour of cat does not matter as long as it catches mice' was a very pragmatic statement that influenced Chinese way of thinking greatly. Both the traditional teachings and the evolving modern beliefs had exerted influence on people like Chang.

The result of the interaction between Chang and Xiu seemed to celebrate a success of 'feminine universalism' in dealing with differences. Femininity refers to Xiu's approach whilst universalism refers to her perception. The combination featured the following:

- *Harmony* – She chose not to argue with her opponent directly but instead tried to use a third party to communicate the differences and use evidence to convince the other.
- *Contention* – With the girl-only classes set up but under-budgeted, Xiu could accept what could be best achieved given the reality and even value such a defective arrangement as an opportunity.
- *Tolerance* – Chang being unsupportive, she demonstrated high tolerance and tried to muddle her way through the difficult time.
- *Persistence* – She persisted in practicing her beliefs at her own cost and continued for three to four years.
- *Gradualism* – She demonstrated a great patience with change, with a modest starting point, practice bit by bit, and belief in the long-term effect to change the others' mind.

Men's actions too could be described as 'feminine universalism' (see Wang, 2009 for examples).

### **3.3 Confidence building for Girls**

Confidence building for girls was another component of the project. There were two different approaches in the project schools to build girls' confidence. One approach was to encourage the girls to show their individual characteristics and talents. For instance, in a project school in Guangxi, girls were nominated to address the entire class or the whole school each week

and thereby conquer their fears and build confidence. In a project school in Gansu, girls were encouraged to 'Laugh with Your Hearts Open' despite the traditional norm of practice that required girls not to 'speak loud, walk fast or laugh with an open mouth'. These activities planned to enhance the individuality of girls were difficult to implement at the grassroots level, where some teachers even needed to convince themselves of the value of showing off one's individual talents and uniqueness among a group. However, since this approach was strongly supported by the provincial researchers, 'leaders' and international 'experts', the principals and teachers felt motivated and encouraged to overcome all the difficulties.

Another approach designed at the grassroots level was to enhance girls' connections with the group, valuing their contributions to a team. One example of such activities took place in a very small village primary school in Sichuan. 'Feed Our Sheep with a Bunch of Grass Everyday' is an activity designed by the two teachers there. In this activity, every student, girl or boy, was required to bring a bunch a grass on his/her way to school in the morning to feed the sheep belonging to his/her class. The teachers believed that by so doing, the girls felt equal to the boys because they made same contribution to the class. They meant to enhance the girls' confidence through building 'a sense of ownership in a collective' among them. The students felt happy to join the activity. 'When I saw our sheep grow, I knew I was very useful. I could help,' said one of the girl students to her teacher.

The teachers were praised by the county researcher, Ms. Lu, who recommended them to report the case as a successful story to a monitoring team. The team was led by a US researcher, Ms. K, who felt that such an activity was irrelevant to confidence building. She asked the teachers,

Why did you think this was to encourage the girls? Everybody just fed that sheep. I can't see the point.

The teachers fell silent for a while. Lu helped to explain that the girls felt encouraged to be equally useful to a group. But Ms. K still felt that was about collectivism and not self-confidence. To her, the two were very different. She debated with Lu in order to clarify this. Not used to debating with visitors, Lu and the teachers became very nervous and all fell silent. Ms. K was puzzled by this. She became suspicious that the school did not really carry out any confidence building activities and that Lu was covering up for it.

This case had an impact on Lu. She felt discouraged by the international expert, and did not give any further visibility to such activities when reporting to others on the project or during evaluations to the project.

We had been very proud of that activity, but it seemed not worth a cent to her. Maybe we were too backward, too narrowly visioned. After all, we were in a closed small county and our schools were too far away from the outside world...

The activity continued but it was no longer talked about and reflected upon by the local managers as much as it had been before the incident.

In this case, the US researcher Ms. K interacted with the Chinese county-level researcher Ms. Lu along the collectivism-individualism dimension. The Chinese Han culture advocates one's integral relationship with groups -- self exists in the collective. Through contributing to the collective, one becomes important and wins respect from the others, which in turn brings self-

confidence. However, to the US researcher, self-confidence is about realising the value of oneself as an independent person, rather than as an integral part of a collective.

When the US researcher tried to communicate with the Chinese local researcher, a cultural gap emerged along the masculinity-femininity dimension. The county researcher and the teacher were not used to debating with others, especially with someone that they considered as a 'foreign guest'. They felt that discussion of differences signalled a 'serious conflict', would disrupt harmony and lead to an unpleasant atmosphere. 'Direct questioning', they felt was more like 'criticising'. They preferred a more feminine type of communication. Being different in ethnicity, a 'foreigner', an outsider, the US researcher's efforts of seeking clarification through debating and direct questioning failed the local cultural expectations and were misunderstood.

More importantly, as the researcher was perceived by the local managers as representing the developed world and the advanced culture, this misunderstanding seriously discouraged the local managers and led to lessening of their passion for original ideas.

### **3.4 Life-skill training**

To enhance the relevance of curriculum and encourage parents to send girls to school, life-skill training activities were strengthened in the project schools. Gender sensitivities in life-skill training were debated among the managers. I will give an example in Guangxi.

Several ethnic minorities including Dong, Miao, Yao and Zhuang live in the project county of Sanjiang in Guangxi. In their custom, girls were expected to master embroidery to make wedding dresses. Boys were expected to be good at playing their traditional musical instruments like 'Lusheng', flute, long drum, and 'Yueqin'. When they grew up, they needed these skills to express themselves to their loved ones and to find partners. However these were not taught in school. Parents were disappointed, saying:

girls in school were not as good as their younger sisters in embroidery and singing, neither could they compete with their elder sisters-in-law in farm work.

The County Education Director, Mr. Rangs (of Miao ethnicity) managed to set up embroidery courses for girls in the project schools. He was very proud of this. When visitors came, he always wanted them to see the girls demonstrate their embroidery skills. However among the visitors there were great concerns raised in contrast to the local people's pride.

During the mid-term review of the project a German researcher Dr. L came to visit. She perceived the girls' embroidery class as practising discriminatory division of labour in school. She suggested to Mr. Rangs that schools should not mislead girls into thinking that they could only do needlepoint work. Mr. Rangs thought she was too feminist and did not understand the Miao culture. He said,

Just as Miao boys were expected to master musical instruments, girls were supposed to master embroidery. This is just part of our culture. I see nothing wrong with it.

Dr. L felt it was not easy to have her idea accepted by somebody 'locked within the local culture'. She then turned to the provincial officer, Mr. Chang, who accompanied her during

her visit, as her observation told her that he was someone that made decisions in the project. However, Chang told Dr. L,

The burning issue for us was to ensure enrolment of the girls. Embroidery class offered a practical solution. Should we change the ethnic culture to be equal for boys and girls? Ideally, yes. But could we? To be honest, I didn't think so... That is too ambitious for our generation.

Dr. L's intention was to persuade Chang to buy into her gender-equality perspective. However, Chang actually redirected Dr. L to interact with him along the uncertainty avoidance dimension. He took with him only achievable 'realistic' targets, rather than something that might not be practically possible.

Dr. L found that Chang would not listen to her. She then tried to advise a national officer, Ms. Xue, to instruct Chang and Rangs.

Chang would not listen to me because I was just a researcher, come and go. But I hoped that he could care what his seniors told him. It was often the case in China, like in some other countries.

Xue understood her point that emphasizing the traditional skills as girls' duty tended to further the social stereotype of gender difference. Xue then talked to Chang and asked him to pass on the idea to the county (officers). Chang promised to do so. But the next time when Xue visited the county, she found that nothing had changed.

Xue suspected that the message was lost somewhere between her and the school. She then decided to have a direct talk about this with the principal. During a working lunch, she suggested that the principal should let boys and girls have free choices of life-skill courses, either embroidery or machinery repairing. The principal did not know how to respond to her suggestion. The county officer Rangs felt that the idea was ridiculous. He very dramatically imitated a girl doing embroidery and made many people at the table laugh...The provincial officer, Chang was annoyed by the way that Rangs behaved in front of Xue, and he ordered Rangs,

You are asked to try. Just try it! The time is changing. You can't always judge it with the old idea in mind.

Xue realised that Chang had to order Rangs to accept the idea just to give face to her, but Rangs and the principal would not feel convinced to make the change. Xue did not get another chance to visit the county and could not know what happened in the end. She said with a sigh,

Anyway, there was no systematic feedback from the grass-root level to us ... Sitting in Beijing, you know little about the field.

There were two key proactive actors in this case, the international researcher Dr. L and the national officer Ms. Xue. Both of them failed to generate the changes they expected. What had led into their failure as agents of change?

The German researcher could attribute her failure to the fact that she came unprepared for the change. She brought with her only a theoretical argument and no useful tools or evidence to convince the local people. Such an approach could not influence the high uncertainty-avoiding and particularistic provincial officer Mr. Chang.

Her failure was also linked to her superficial understanding of China's centralized political culture. For outsiders, China was described as a highly controlled country so that one might easily think that upper level authority should be able to generate changes at the local levels. But in fact this did not always happen. Ownership at each level was needed for such a change to take place.

As for Xue, the national officer, it was hard for her to have effective communication with the local managers due to their power distance. Superficially speaking, the biggest power distance was between the national officer and the principal, and the smallest was between the principal and the county officer. But, again, it would be wrong to assume that the principal would most likely listen to the national officer. In practice, the power of the county officer was more respected by the principal because it has the most direct impact on him.

## **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The evidence discussed in the previous section demonstrates that managers' perceptions and interaction strategies vary and change. They are influenced by their national, ethnical, organisational cultural backgrounds, as well as by political and social contexts and personal experiences.

The managers had their own cultural assumptions or beliefs about their social identity, as belonging to a certain social organisation -- nationality, ethnicity, generation, gender, project or task group. They brought their own cultural standings into their comprehension and responses to the project management elements, as well as to their interaction approaches with other managers. These cultural standings came from their cultural reference framework composed of multi-levels of culture and multi-dimensions of cultural tendencies.

The development project management was also influenced by an international development agenda, the Chinese national political system, and national development contexts. These macro-level contextual factors influenced the managers' attitudes towards the role of international development projects and their strategies in managing changes. Comparatively, national development contexts were more influential to the local managers than the international agenda. Moreover, some personal factors like managers' individual preferences, working styles, and life experiences also mattered. This aspect is elaborated further in the author's thesis (Wang, 2009).

The evidence from the three cases reported in this monograph and the cases presented in Wang, (2009) indicate that planning, implementation and evaluation are not clear cut separate stages of a project. The planning process did not just involve design, but also actions to implement and introduce innovations and change. The planning of one intervention may be building on implementation of other existing interventions. Planning often continues into the implementation processes, where the implementers' perceptions often helped to generate new ideas for the project and the implementers became innovators. Evaluation was an on-going process throughout the project life and often took the form of self-reflection. Therefore, the clear cut, linear, and logical steps of planning, implementation and evaluation did not exist in reality.

This research suggests that the metaphor of a windmill is helpful in describing and understanding development project management. Planning, implementation and evaluation are presented as the blades of the windmill. They run in sequence one after another and form cycles in low speed, but run into each other when the speed is high. Division of the steps by development managers hinders the introduction of new elements to the project during implementation, slows down the windmill, and eventually makes it stop. The recognition of such a windmill model could enable development managers to be flexible and more accommodating to new initiatives.



While critics of linear cycles focus their interpretation mainly on the interaction between the steps in space, Little (2008) suggests that these interactions in space are mediated by the linear logic of time. While planning, implementation and evaluation mutually feed into each other, it is planning at time X that feeds into implementation at time X+1, and implementation at time X+1 influences planning at time X+2. (Little, 2008:26) Evaluation feeds into the process at any time. The windmill model recognizes both the logic of space and the logic of time. With regard to the logic of time, the windmill model recognizes both the sequential logic and the synchronic logic of time. Rather than 'a messy fluid process' (Evans, 1995), the processes are exchanging so fast that the steps' sequences are hardly distinguishable and can almost be viewed as synchronic.

It is the people who manage the project that give energy and different speeds to the windmill. As Chambers (2005) put it, 'the personal dimension of development is pervasive. It is like the air we breathe, so universal that we rarely notice it'. This case study demonstrates that human and cultural dimensions are actually not just the air. They form the wind that is influenced by the environment and gives the energy for the exchanges between the steps. The constant interactions of actor's perceptions develop or alter project plans, implement or brake innovations, and exercise reflective or manipulated evaluations. In such a way, the wind of actors' interaction makes the windmill run fast or slow, balanced or in turbulence.

The world only has 5 years to go before the 2015 deadline towards achieving the MDGs and EFA targets and the international community is advocating accelerating and scaling-up efforts, focusing mainly on macro-policy and financial resources. However, macro-level policies and reforms do not guarantee an improvement of services, unless they are successfully implemented through project-level innovations. When it relates to the achievement of educational targets, while system wide changes might gain some quick improvements in access, bringing students to school or back to school, meaningful learning and sustained enrolment has to rely on targeted interventions and improved services. To the students classified in the CREATE Zones 3 and 6, where risks lie in quality of learning and completing of primary and secondary schools, the successful implementation of these interventions is particularly important. It is very important for development practitioners to better understand the processes of management of interventions that support improvements in Zone 3 and Zone 6.

More generally the findings of this research suggested that successfully developed plans, implemented innovations and reflective evaluations were characterised by the following:

- Perception similarities and gaps were recognised; Gaps were closed or tactically disguised temporarily;
- Local ownership was nurtured;
- In-group sense with local actors were formed or nurtured;
- Alliances were formed or bridging forces were invited to overcome and resolve disagreements;
- A 'feminine' communication style was adopted;
- Capacities, knowledge and understanding levels were raised among managers

Aborted plans, failed innovations or superficial and partial evaluations, were characterised by the following:



- Perception gaps were ignored;
- Local ownership was not or failed to be established;
- Cultural incompatibilities remained;
- Managers were insensitive to choice of communication styles, ignorant of cultural preferences of communication styles, or, power distance led to non-communication or passive acceptance;
- Stereotypical cultural assumptions or lacking of knowledge required led to rejection of new ideas.

The research reminded development practitioners, including myself, of the human dimensions of development management and its relation to cultures. As a result of the interactions among the managers, influenced by various cultures, macro-environmental, as well as individual factors, development management did not rely on the perfection of techniques, but rather was shaped and reshaped by the actors involved in the management processes. To achieve the best effects of development management, as Little (1990) suggested, cultural gaps needs to be bridged. Similarly, Crossley and Herriot et al. (2005:105) have suggested that:

Success in development cooperation requires increased cross-cultural sensitivity, and much greater attention to the nature of the relationships between various levels of actors; and to the political dimensions of development cooperation; to implication of power differentials; and to the management and processes of changes.

The cultural landscape and dimensions adopted in this research provide us with a useful reference framework for better analysing and comparing cultural similarities and differences, at national, ethnic, organisation and project levels, between actors who are involved in project management. We should also be reminded constantly that, given the importance of cultural understanding, stereotypical impressions of other cultures can create problems.

From this case study, we know that planning is necessary. More importantly we have learnt that planning should not be used mechanically or on a one-time manner. Planning has to evolve along with the project, merging into each step of implementation and evaluation, taking into consideration all the actors' dynamics during the process. One way to address this dilemma is to mainstream cultural and actor concerns into the normal processes and tools of project management. Actor analysis and cultural analysis should be an integral part of all decision making, regarding issues ranging from thematic focus to selection of evaluation methodologies.

The findings from this study imply that the innovations have to be accompanied by sufficient and on-going capacity building of institutions and managers, on the core determinants of successful innovations – 'actors' ownership', 'culturally sensitive communications' and 'institutional and managerial capacity'. The researcher would recommend that training of development managers should move beyond the superficial focus on products and outputs to a deeper concern of human and cultural processes that lead to results.

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### Report summary:

The world has a mixed record towards achieving EFA and the MDGs in relation to the targets on gender equity in basic education. For researchers and practitioners, this raises the question of which factors influence the processes leading to the improvement of access and quality of girls' education and how. This case study from China examines the human and cultural dimensions of project management in determining the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions designed to improve gender equity. The monograph combines concepts from the actor oriented approach of development studies, with theories of culture and development management. It generates an analytical framework composed of two super ordinate 'cultural landscapes'. One is the 'relational' landscape with its dimensions of power distance, masculinity-femininity, and collectivism-individualism. The other is the 'time-orientation' landscape with its dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and universalism-particularism. The 'cultural landscapes' and dimensions provide a powerful description of how the perceptions and strategies of interaction vary and change between and within individual actors. The monograph illustrates how managers act as innovators with varied perceptions and interaction strategies influenced by multiple levels of culture, social and political contexts. Using the metaphor of a windmill, the monograph suggests that project management moves beyond the linear cyclical logic presented in many of the planning texts and manuals of development agencies. The steps and stages of development management are the windmill's blades. The cultural interactions between actors form the wind that gives the blades energy and speed. The blades run both synchronically and sequentially depending on the wind strength. The monograph recommends that development managers should move beyond superficial concerns for outputs and products to a deeper concern for human and cultural processes that lead to results for achieving EFA and the MDGs.

### Author notes:

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