

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

## DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

of drs. Zhao Cheng

Which will take place on Thursday, **June 6, 2024 at 10 am** CET

**Promotiezaal** (building D, room D.2.01)

VUB Main Campus Brussels - Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel

Or if you wish to attend online, click here to [join the meeting](#)

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS DEVELOPMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC MEMBERS IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

### JURY

#### INTERN:

**Prof. dr. Koen Lombaerts (Chair)**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

**Prof. dr. Valerie Thomas**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

**Prof. dr. Ingeborg Placke**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

#### EXTERN:

**Prof. dr. Zhenxian Wang (Beijing Institute of Education, China)**

**Prof. dr. Merve Zayim Kurtay (Middle East Technical University, Turkey)**

### PROMOTOR(S)

**Prof. dr. Chang Zhu**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Coming by car? Please [register your licence plate](#) in advance to have access to the campus.

You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

Please confirm your attendance before 30.05.2024 [by filling out this form](#)

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## SUMMARY

This PhD dissertation focuses on academics' perception of educational leadership and its development in higher education. The aim of this dissertation is to conceptualise educational leadership in Chinese higher education, investigate the factors contributing to leadership styles, examine academics' perceived needs and challenges in leadership training, investigate academics' motivation for joining leadership training and assess the effectiveness of the leadership training programs. Seventeen research questions were addressed in this dissertation.

The general research questions are: What is educational leadership in higher education? What are the leadership styles of academic members and mid level educational leaders? What are the needs and challenges in educational leadership training? What are participants' motivations for joining the leadership training programs? What is the role of leadership training program in improving transformational leadership styles? To answer these research questions, six studies were conducted using research methods such as semi-structured interviews, mixed methods and structural equation modeling (SEM).

The results provide conceptual frameworks that can inform the development of educational leadership in higher education. They also indicate that transformational leadership styles need to be more widely adopted in Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, they stress the leadership training programs need to be well-designed to effectively meet the diverse needs and expectations of participants from different backgrounds. Additionally, engaging with peers, instructors and role models has the potential to boost the motivation and involvement of participants, eventually enhancing the outcomes of leadership training.

In conclusion, this dissertation provides a concept of educational leadership in higher education, brings evidence of the importance of educational leadership and educational leadership practices and styles, and offers valuable insights into leadership training implementation as well as the effectiveness of leadership training in the context of Chinese and international higher education.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Zhao Cheng is a PhD researcher in Educational Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). He obtained his master's degree from Renmin University of China. He has worked as a Mandarin instructor at University College Dublin (UCD), Palacký University Olomouc (UP), and VUB. In 2019, he commenced his PhD on educational leadership and its development. Throughout his PhD, he has conducted and published six conceptual and empirical research articles on educational leadership and its development. These publications cover topics such as the conceptualization of educational leadership in higher education, leadership styles, and the assessment of the effectiveness of leadership training programs.