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INDIGENIZATION OF SOCIAL WORK VALUES IN HONG KONG

-- A BRIEF REVIEW

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Abstract: The author argues that there is not systematic discussion on indigenization of social work values in Hong Kong. Among the scattered literature, the Chinese culture was often stereotyped as an uniform entity which was static, authoritative and reactionary. However, the author postulates that this is not true and contends that we need to have global understanding and evaluation of Chinese culture and its manifold forms in this colony. Through this, we can have more value alternatives for contemplation on indigenization, that is, to reflect on, to enrich, or even to replace, the tenets of conventional social work values.

Keywords: Hong Kong, social work, social work values, history.

Introduction

Social work values, at root, are notions of politics and ethics which cannot be discoursed on outside the boundary of moral and social philosophy. With a closer scrutiny, we will find that these notions are socially defined and some of them are culturally relative. In fact, the "conventional" social work values, which most of us are accustomed to, are not *commandments* come from the supernatural but are a part of the Western heritage and the outcome of particular social contexts. They are blessed with, if not cursed by, the cultural and temporal characters of their own "native places",

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and its universal applicability has been cast in doubt since they were proposed. This point can be further clarified with the following exposition of the structure of social work values.

Although indigenization of social work values in Hong Kong has been an important concern and being frequently mentioned (especially in recent years), it is surprising to find that there was not yet a systematic review on the discourse of it. The author hence aims at filling this gap by reviewing the discourse and appraising its achievements. Based on these, I will attempt to identify what are the challenges that we have to face in the future. Because of limited space, only part of the related work on the level of *ultimate values* will be discussed in this paper.

The Structure of Social Work Values

Social work is a value guided project and the social work values² justify *why* social work practitioners should intervene and *how* these interventions should be proceeded. These values are usually delineated by different theorists as constituting of tenets at four different levels. They are:

- (1) The *ultimate level*, which refers to the ultimate desirable state of existence of individual that are regarded as worth striving for. It is often prescribed as the self-fulfillment of a Kantian human nature which, in brief, propounds that a person possesses a capacity of exercising reason, volition and choice. Because of this capacity, a person can stand out as an independent, autonomous and active agent, and is equal to others in his/her ontological status. He/she hence should not be treated as a means for other purposes but as an end in him/herself. The actualization of this Kantian paradigm of "human" is often regarded as the cornerstone of "conventional" social work values.
- (2) The *social level*, which refers to the conceptions about the ideal relationship between individual, family and state, a certain mode of social relationship is regarded desirable because they are conducive to the attainment of *ultimate* values. In

² The "social work values" discussed here are mainly drawn from the literature of social work in the United Kingdom. These "values" are not entirely identical with those which are upheld in other "western" places, for instance, the U.S.A. The differences can be illustrated by comparing the *Codes of Ethics for Social Work* of the British Association of Social Work and its counterpart in the USA, the National Association of Social Work.

"conventional" social work values, they are identified as the ideas of positive freedom, and equality of opportunity and outcome.³

(3) The *professional level*, which is grounded on ultimate and social values, justifies the ground and defines the parameters of social work intervention. There are two important canons:

- (A) The principle of *individualization*, such that the problems of human beings are unique and their solutions, individually differentiated.⁴
 - (B) The principle of *self-determination*, such that, personal wishes are the supreme value and any social work intervention should not run contradictory to them. To propel his/her clients, no matter through whatever benevolent means, to any course of actions which are against the clients' own thoughts and decisions, is morally wrong.
- (4) The *operational level*, which are the specific principles guiding social work practices, such as confidentiality, non-judgmental attitude to the clients, and controlled involvement by the workers in their emotion.

The following is an outline⁵ of the structure of social work values:

The Structure of Social Work Values

³ It has to be noted that, in the recent few decades, "democratic socialism" has been enjoying a significant influence in British social work. Some authors even comment that, "... it is safe to assume that many social workers are socialist in their general political persuasion, and it is this same impulse which informs their commitment to social work." (Clark & Asquith, 1985:79) Partly due to this influence, social work theorists tend to favour more on the obligation of society to provide conditions for its citizens to achieve personal development and self-fulfilment (the goal of social work task) (Biestek, 1961; Levy, 1978:238; Timms, 1983:49-50; Bamford, 1990).

⁴ This principle is well exemplified by Biestek's elaboration, "Individualization is the recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities and the differential use of principles and methods in assisting each toward a better adjustment. Individualization is based upon the right of human beings to be individuals and to be treated not just as a human being but as this human being with his personal differences." (Biestek's stress, 1961:25)

⁵ References: Ho (1991), Banks (1995) and S.P. Yuen, *The lecture handout (dated 28 September, 1992)*. The Department of Applied Social Policy, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HK, 1992.

LEVELS	CONCERNS	TENETS
Ultimate	The state of "well-being" for an individual and a society.	Kantian paradigm of human nature.
Social	The relationship between individual, family, and society.	Positive concept of freedom, equality of opportunity and outcome
Professional	The general principles and parameters of professional conducts.	Principle of self-determination, respect for persons, individualization,
Operational	The specific principles guiding social work practices.	Confidentiality, non-judgmental attitude, acceptance.

According to my personal observation in Hong Kong, especially for front-line practitioners, if the "bookish" social work values are ever to be mentioned, they are always too easy to be conceived as isolated principles of conduct, or even as a set of meaningless "dogmas".⁶ What is often missed is the recognition that those tenets of "good social work" are actually interrelated and organized in a hierarchy of values, and these values can only be adequately elucidated in the wider context of social and cultural values. At the *ultimate level*, therefore, the issue of indigenization is about the discrepancies between different cultures in defining what are the states of well-being for individuals and society. It is about what should be the "goal" of self-actualization, about what should be the ideal relationship between the *self* and the *others*, and about how these goals can be acquired in a society and at what cost is permitted. For social workers of this colony in particular, as the following literature review will show, there are two issues to be confronted by the social work community in Hong Kong. Firstly, are social work values *not* the universal principles such that a particular system of "Chinese social work values" has to be constructed? Secondly, what is the "Chineseness"? What are the *genuine* essences of traditional Chinese culture and its variant in Hong Kong (the *Hong Kong Chinese culture*)?

⁶ The author does not, of course, mean to belittle fellow social workers, but want to point out that the value issue always remains in a marginal position in Hong Kong's social work community and seldom gains their attention. The following parts of this essay will lend support to this point.

So important these questions are (academically speaking, at least) and so little time for Hong Kong to end her colonial status there is, however the author finds that we have not yet satisfactory answers for them. In fact, it was not until the eighties when there were more discussion on how to relate the Western values to the indigenous culture. Nevertheless, most attempts in the aspect of ultimate values are piecemeal and lacking theoretical exploration, systematic discussion and publication⁷ are indeed rare. The search for new canons of social work values, if we ever need one, seems to have just begun.

To Indigenize, Or Not To?

As far as we can find in the related literature, the HKSWA's General Meeting on the Code of Ethics held on February 1, 1966 should be the first open occasion for Hong Kong social workers discussing on their professional values. In this meeting, a number of participants queried on the suitability of the Western social work values and asked, "Does the proposed code of ethics really reflect the code which Chinese social workers would have written had they undertaken to write it first in Chinese, or was it in fact just a carbon copy of a code more appropriate for Western social workers?" The majority of participants, according to Ian Bain (1966), did feel that "it was important to see and to study a code of ethics written in Chinese (not simply translated from the English)." An ad hoc group was hence formed to approach the subject afresh "from a purely Chinese point of view" and to draft another code of ethics for further consideration. On the other side, there was also a minority view which claimed that "the principles of social work were now accepted universally and that the proposed code provided an acceptable guide to professional behaviour in the Eastern or Western context". This view stressed the importance of developing a set of appropriate Chinese jargons so as to popularize the social workers' role and functions more effectively (Lee,1966:8).⁸ Finally, however, it was this minority view became the Ad Hoc Group's conclusion which states that, "many of the ideas in the code were ethically universal rather than Western and that similar thinking can often be found

⁷ On the contrary, contemplation on indigenization of Western skills and theories has been started quite early among practitioners and remained significant in their agenda.

⁸ This idea was opined by Thomas C.Y. Lee who was then Principal Social Welfare Officer, Social Welfare Department, and later the Director of Social Welfare (1974-1981).

in Chinese philosophy", and thence, it was not necessary to rewrite a code in Chinese so as to be "more in line with the Chinese way of thinking." (Fang,1966:15)

Despite this formal conclusion of the Group, however, a visiting professor, to Hong Kong, Nathan E. Cohen, commented that, "Since social work is culture bound a complete borrowing is never possible. ... there are also cultural differences which are important to the conceptual structure. Hong Kong is at the point where more attention might be given to refinement of borrowed concepts in relation to the cultural differences." (1966:2) Cohen was not exceptional in reminding the Chinese social workers on the issue of indigenization. The former Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong and Macau, R.O. Hall,⁹ joined the camp. He warned that modern social work, with its impersonal processes of bureaucracy, was in danger of the intoxication with excessive power over others; and these were more dangerous than the "excessive personalism" of "Chinese familism", which, though might result in nepotism and corruption, still had its worth of having intimate and sensitive concern for persons. He asked, "Has the social worker in Hong Kong responsibility for ensuring that this more personal principle presented by the Chinese family is preserved?" (1967:5-6) Different from Hall's view, Rev. K.L. Stumpf held the view that modern social work were a part of scientific and technical progress aimed at improving our economy and society, and Hong Kong was just undergoing a difficult but necessary conversion from relatively simple rural community to a complex industrialized urban city. As a corollary, social change was inevitable and the "time-honoured Chinese family principle of unlimited liability for limited numbers must now be replaced by the principle of an organized concern and commitment of all people for all people." (1967:8) The differences between Bishop Hall and Rev. Stumpf on the future of traditional Chinese culture had highlighted the major issues of indigenization. Nevertheless, this debate, probably the first one in Hong Kong's social work community, had no echo from local practitioners at that time. The discussion, surprisingly, seemed to have died down and was picked up again ten years after it was first proposed.

⁹ Bishop R.O. Hall was the pioneer of many social welfare services in Hong Kong. A commentator regarded him and Rev. K.L. Stumpf, the Director of Lutheran World Service, Hong Kong, as two Christian leaders who had dominated the developments of social welfare in Hong Kong from 1951 to 1976. Paul R. Webb, "Voluntary Social Welfare Services", in Chung Chi College (ed.), *A Quarter-Century of Hong Kong 1951-1976 - Chung Chi College 25th Anniversary Symposium*, CUHK, Hong Kong, pp.133-144.

Ken Huang, a lecturer in the Department of Social Work, University of Hong Kong, was probably the first indigenous social worker who openly challenged the "universal applicability" of social work. Drawn from his personal experience of studying and working in America, he pointed out that knowledge and techniques of the one-to-one casework approach was disposed to favour the White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle-class. The professional training derived from this approach was, actually, a "feet-binding process" which rendered no space for cultural variation, and hence there should be deliberate effort to "reshape the service shoes for the Chinese feet".(1977)¹⁰ Huang's warning on the gap between the imported social work and the indigenous culture had been illustrated by an earlier incident. In 1976, the Hong Kong University arranged some social work students for a "live-in fieldwork" in Tai-O - a native fishing village which was rather isolated at that time. After the programme, the social workers-to-be alleged to have experienced a "cultural shock", a loss in the sense of identity and orientation. A student reflected on this paradoxical situation, "I found myself a bit out of place though they were all Chinese." (Lee,1976:3-4) The indigenous Chinese culture had become a "new culture" which the students of the same small colony, and of the same race, however, got to learn and adjust with difficulties.

Yet, how much the issue of indigenization had serious attention from the community was really doubtful. As reflected in the new Code of Ethics for Social Workers (HKCESW) endorsed by the Association's Board¹¹ in 1978, the answer seemed discouraging. The Code evidently had its intellectual inheritance¹² from the International Code of Ethics for the Professional Social Worker¹³ (ICEPSW) and the

¹⁰ Note that the focus of his essay was not on the issue of indigenisation in Hong Kong, but about biculturalism of social services in America.

¹¹ HKSWA, *Annual Report 1978/79*, Hong Kong Social Workers Association, HK, 1979, pp.14-15 (English version), and pp.28-29 (Chinese version). Before the Hong Kong Social Welfare Personnel Registration Council was set up in 1991 and had its Code of Ethics for Social Workers in Hong Kong (revised, 1993), the 1978 HKCESW had been the only professional document defined on the roles and values of social work in Hong Kong.

¹² Apart from few minor changes, the HKCESW replicated the ICEPSW in its Objectives, and replicated the BCESW in the Foreword and the Principles. In some cases, the HKCESW was a combination of them, although the two Codes did have different perspectives in values and roles of social work. The drafters of the HKCESW seemed to have selective attention to their contents, but their criteria were not made open.

¹³ Adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers General Meeting, San Juan, Puerto Rico, July 10, 1976. In HKSWA, *Annual Report, 1975-76*, HKSWA, HK, 1977, pp.13-14.

Code of Ethics for Social Work of the British Association of Social Workers¹⁴ (BCESW). It did not seem to have considered on the identity of a "Chinese social worker" but followed its counterparts in stressing on the prime important position of *individual* and the profession's obligation towards *the individual*.¹⁵ The individualistic tone of the HKCESW was evident when it replicated the BCESW's prescription on social workers' basic obligation¹⁶. On the contrary, the idea of *family*, a key concept in the Chinese culture; and whether there was a relationship between Chinese familial values and social work, were not mentioned. In fact, the word "family" simply did not exist in the 1978 HKCESW.

Difference and incompatibility between Chinese culture and social work values, however, gradually gained attention. Based on his study on 160 social work students from Hong Kong and USA, Kenneth Chau (1979) found that the two groups were similar in values of universalism and people's equal rights to the access to similar services. But they are different in the definition of poverty - which the Hong Kong students were more likely to adopt an individualistic explanation and to employ "liberal remedies" than their counterparts.¹⁷ Similarly, David Yau-fai Ho called for translating the alien notions and language of the Western therapeutic model to those which were familiar to the local population. He pointed out that the western orientations were more "permissive-democratic" and were basically contradictory with the moralistic-authoritarian orientations of the traditional Chinese culture.¹⁸ Peter Hodge also pointed out that it was "cultural imperialism" "when American social work literature itself is imbued with the notion that its philosophical tenets, methods, and skills are

¹⁴ Adopted by BASW at its Annual General Meeting, Edinburgh, 1975, and slightly amended at its AGM, Nottingham, 1976. In BASW, *The Social Work Task*, BASW, UK, 1977, pp.68-69.

¹⁵ For instance, the Standards of Ethical Conduct in the HKCESW were presented as "(social workers will) ...Seek and understand the worth of each individual... Respect the client as an individual.... Recognize and respect individual goals and differences of clients and communities...." HKSVA, op.cit., 1979, pp.14-15.

¹⁶ The first item in Principles of the HKCESW: "...The profession accepts the responsibility to encourage and facilitate the self-fulfillment of the individual person..." was a replica of the BCESW (BASW, op.cit., p.68)

¹⁷ Chau was then the lecturer in the Department of Social Work, University of Hong Kong. Similar survey was also conducted by Professor Richard C. Nann, *Social Work - Local and Global: A Look at Social Work Across Ideologies and Culture*. An Inaugural Lecture, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, University of Hong Kong, May 5, 1989. It is not discussed here because the findings of this research is not relevant with the theme of this essay.

¹⁸ David Ho was then a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Hong Kong.

universally applicable." (1980:67)¹⁹ Although Hodge's major endeavour was not about the cultural character of a *Chinese social work*, he was then one of the few who was "critical of a direct transplant of western social work theories to work with Chinese people in view of their differing value bases." (Ngan,1993:47)

After the mid-eighties, though still not enthusiastic, there were more discussion on value issues related to social work. For instance, Chow (1987) compared how the idea of "social welfare" was interpreted in Chinese and Western cultures, and concluded that the Chinese idea strove for a state of harmony and integration between individual and family system, but not the Western notion of individual development which was "independent of his home". In 1987 a working group under the Education Committee, HKSWA, published a Chinese discussion paper (Leung, Lau, et.al.,1987) on roles and functions of social work. Rather generally it stated that social workers should not only help individuals', but also families' coping capacity and development. Nevertheless, it did not differ much from the 1978 HKCESW in its sensitivity to the cultural issue, nor did it have any new perspectives in the roles or definitions of social work in Hong Kong.

Evidently the issue of indigenization was attracting increasing attention from the theorists and practitioners; but what sounded depressing was, after social work first transplanted to the colony for more than half a century, the discussion was just at the stage of defining the problem. In fact, despite the rapid growth of social services after the WW II, the "superstructure" of social work in Hong Kong had not been well developed. An author coined this scenario as "growth without development." (Leung,1989) and pointed out that the knowledge base of social work was still too feeble for the goal of indigenization. This situation may be one of the factors attributed to the profession's lukewarm response towards the indigenization of social work values in Hong Kong.²⁰

¹⁹ Peter Hodge was the Professor in the Department of Social Work, Hong Kong University. However, Hodge's view on Chinese culture, though had not been fully elaborated by him, might cause some controversy. See below for more discussion.

²⁰ There are also other factors, such as the Western origins of most voluntary agencies and the Western backgrounds of nearly all social workers' training. However, without research, a conclusion cannot be arrived at.

Regardless of the underdevelopment in ideas, the sentiment that "We are different" has been growing among practitioners and academics, so has been the awareness of the need of a "Hong Kong Chinese social work" identity. In this vein, Ng Shui-lai (1989) propounded the concept of "contextualizaton" and stressed that social workers in Hong Kong should strive at better communication with the indigenous population and better understanding of their "context", so as to make social work "theories" more suitable for them. Later, Grace Ko (1990) echoed, though indirectly, that Hong Kong social workers needed to pay adequate attention to adapt the "essentially Western oriented" social work theories to the Chinese population. Though in different focus, Ho (1991) also analysed critically on the deontological liberalism of the "conventional" Western social work and cast doubt on some of its tenets about human nature. All in all, it seemed that local practitioners then were no longer accepting the Western social work unconditionally. In this vein, Richard Nann (1994) suggested that the "Eastern Spiritual tradition" could help the Western social work to be "truly holistic and cross-cultural", because the Eastern wisdom took "a more holistic approach to human and social traditions". Berkowitz and Chung (1994) also argued that Confucianism could "transcend" the Western conception of welfare to "a comprehensive welfare vision" for "the global welfare society". However, as exemplified by these few authors, a common problem that often happens in the discourse is, the so-called "Western" and "Chinese" ideas are usually not defined lucidly and the grand conclusions derived from it not well grounded. In fact, most of the related work are cursory and fragmented in discussing the issue , and only very few of them concentrated principally on it. This situation makes Kenneth Chau remark, rather disappointingly, that the idea of indigenization of social work for Hong Kong still remains no more than a nebulous concept, and the efforts "stop short of theoretical work or conceptual development of what culturally competent practice is or ought to be." (1995) This vacuum is partly filled by Julia Tao (1991) whose endeavour on identifying the basic distinction between the Chinese perception of "self" and the West could contribute to a new paradigm of ultimate values for indigenous social work.

In her thesis, Julia Tao postulated that Hong Kong people, above all, still had their "cultural roots deeply engrained in the long enduring tradition of Confucian moral values and beliefs." (1991:24) Within this culture, the "self" is understood as a

relational being, not an independent, abstract entity as the West, and one of the significant constituent of this notion is the conception of role fulfillment. Given this particular conception of selfhood, Tao further postulated that, "...grounded in a rights-centred morality in either the Kantian or the contractarian philosophical traditions of deontological liberalism, would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Chinese in Hong Kong society to comprehend and to reconcile with their cultural and philosophical traditions." (op.cit.:168-169)²¹

In the 1990s, it seems to be a more popular realization among indigenous social workers that we need a "Hong Kong breed" of social work - not just in knowledge and skills (which have been invested with more attention and effort comparatively), but also in values. The issue now seems not so much about *why* it should be, but *what* there should be and *how* it can be. The solution of these questions, however, lies outside the scope of social work but depends on the understanding and evaluation of "*the Chinese culture of Hong Kong people*". For most social workers in Hong Kong, it is the only alternative source of values ("non-western") that they can draw on. Therefore, we first need an undistorted, comprehensive and dynamic view (or views) of the Chinese culture. However, it is this task that has not yet been accomplished satisfactorily. Ironically, as the following section will illustrate, the questions of what the *genuine* essences of traditional Chinese culture are, and what the *Hong Kong Chinese culture* still remains unresolved for Hong Kong's social workers.

Chinese? What Chinese?

In the discourse of social work values in Hong Kong, there were two contrary views on Chinese culture. One was reflected by the Lutheran World Federation (1968) in whose reports Chinese people were described as having a noble feature of self-respect, and a prominent and distinct "spirit of industry" in which Hong Kong's industry was built up. Similarly, in a report published by the HKCSS earlier, Chinese culture was

²¹ Tao also points out that, this conception of "self" has significant implication to the understanding of social welfare and she hence suggested a "virtues-based approach" to the moral justification of welfare provision in substitute of the Western notion of "right" for Hong Kong. However, some of Tao's claims and postulations inevitably fall in the empirical domain and they require more evidence and argument to substantiate. Because of the limited space of this essay, the author owes the readers more discussion on Tao's ideas.

also described positively, and under its influence, the people are benevolent, civic-minded, righteous and communitarian:

"The statesmen in the past often advocated that a nation is founded on the people. It is the people who are the masters.... the Chinese people think highly of their own rights, but they do not overlook the rights of the others... the people regard mutual benefit to be more essential than personal interest... In short, the central ideal of the Chinese traditional ethics is beneficence which means 'love others'. With this as a point of departure, the attitude to human rights is centred on the community and not on the individual." (1968:38-39)

On the other side there was a negative, sometimes stereotyped, conception of the Chinese culture. If reckoned on its frequency of publication, this stream of thought seems to be dominant in the social work community. For instance, a delegation to an international conference on social welfare had the following remarks: "Traditional Chinese culture has a strong influence in Hong Kong. Dominated by Confucian teaching, it emphasizes obedience and loyalty, praises the virtue of patience and discourages challenge against authority." (Hong Kong Committee, 1974:9) Similar view was also shared by Peter Hodge²² who was critical of the Chinese culture "which to him was politically passive and family centred". (Leung, 1993:44) In his perspective, the Chinese were too "patient" to the unfavourable environment and adapted to it by withdrew into "the bosom of the self-contained family" (1972:155-156). And these seemed to be the Chinese's "cultural heritage" from their earliest history when "natural disasters had been attributed to the punishments of Heaven on the people, or in retribution for wrong doings of the rulers. Destitution and loss caused by the disasters had to be accepted fatalistically by reducing personal living expenses and thus demonstrating a sense of penitence and remorse." (1980:54)²³ This negative view

²² Note that Peter Hodge had not made systematic comments on the Chinese culture *per se* and his attention was mainly focused on social and political conditions of social welfare in Hong Kong. Besides, the comments on his viewpoints in this paper is not intended to be an overall appraisal of his work. For people who are interested in Hodge's contribution can refer to the special issue in memory of him in the *HKJSW*, Vol.27(2), Winter 1993.

²³ Probably because of this perception, Hodge seemed to share with Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, in his view of "reforming" the traditional Chinese culture. He once quoted Lee's words in length who praised British colonial contribution of introducing the English language to the immigrant Chinese communities (Hong Kong and Singapore) and hence removed their "ideographic blinkers" (Chinese) which hindered them from the great scientific and technological discoveries of the West. With the change, Lee believed that, these "learnt" Chinese could act as catalysts to accelerate social transformation of traditional agricultural societies by becoming "dissemination points of social values and disciplines, of skills and expertise" of modern societies. In reaction to Lee's anticipation, Hodge's comment was, "The link social work has with these developments is far from tenuous." Hodge, *op.cit.*, pp.5-6.

towards Chinese culture persists and is still often expressed by contemporary social workers. With regard to this conception, while the "Chinese" culture was often typecast as negative and reactionary, the Western culture (and its son - social work) was stereotyped as positive and progressive. In fact, according to Tu Wei-ming , such phenomenon is commonly found among the scholars who compare Chinese and Western cultures. Most of these scholars tend to match the weakest side of Chinese culture against the strongest side of the Western culture, and hence come to a generalized conclusion of "fixated inferiority" on the former one. Tu Wei-Ming coined this popular "methodology" as the "Dwarf Policy". (1992:234-277) The following chart quoted from one author (Ko,1990:64) is an example:

Social Work Values	Chinese Values
Individual worth & dignity	System goals
Self-determination	Societal control
Security & satisfaction	Suffering & punishment
Scientific approach of solving problem	Absolutism & obligations
Belief in change & social reform	Traditionalism
Acceptance of diversity & heterogeneity in ideas, values and life style	Homogeneity & conformity

Notwithstanding the different conceptions, both sides, however, have their Achilles' heels in lacking sufficient empirical ground, especially the support of local researches. Their images of the "Chinese" and the "Hong Kong Chinese" are often borrowed from other disciplines' researches but without careful or critical rethinking on their methodologies and conclusions. More important, there is not yet any weighty research done on the relationship between "Chineseness" and social work values in Hong Kong. Without solid research ground and theoretical contemplation, the images of "Hongkongese" portrayed by different social work theorists were often fragmented, inconsistent or even conflicting. For instance, in Peggy Chan's essay (1986), which had only two among sixteen references on "Chinese culture" and they were done in 1971, Hong Kong social workers were "westernized product" inculcated with western ideas but in dearth of awareness of their own cultural heritage. Yet, to the contrary,

Fok (1994) suggested that social workers in Hong Kong, though so familiarized with western theories and values, were actually greatly influenced by their own traditions and were indeed "still very Chinese" both in thinking and in their interaction with clients.²⁴ In fact, what exactly are the contemporary Chinese's ultimate values of themselves and society, especially the modern Hongkongese', are plainly ambiguous for most of the authors who took part in this discourse. Although few people would dispute that Hong Kong people are no longer the traditional type, they are often perceived as firmly rooted in the old thinking by various authors.²⁵ This perception is simply fallacious.

At a more theoretical level, Chinese culture was seldom well defined in the discourse of ultimate values of social work. Often done by the same author, it was sometimes treated as the mass psychology, but sometimes as the doctrines of Confucius which somehow made equivalent to the whole Chinese culture. For most authors reviewed here, Chinese culture was treated as static and homogeneous, without sufficient attention to its multifarious nature and sophisticated evolution in different stages of history. Instead, they tended to limit their scope and horizon in the orthodox Confucianism. The sayings of Confucius and Mencius were often "fixated" as the only exemplar of the "Chinese cultures", despite that there are other streams of thought which are also influential, and that even for the Confucianism itself, the doctrines were modified and re-interpreted by Neo-Confucians²⁶ continuously. Those more up-dated discussions and perspectives about Chinese culture, surprisingly, were rarely utilized by various authors in the discourse of social work values.

Also lacking in research but crucial to our contemplation of indigenization is the empirical study on what the differences are between Chinese social workers and their Western counterparts.²⁷ Although it seems to be a received wisdom among

²⁴ Peggy Chan and Fok Shiu-yeu were Lecturers in Social Administration and Social Work respectively.

²⁵ Such as, the Hong Kong Chinese are very reluctant to seek help from outsiders or from the government.

²⁶ The work of the great Neo-Confucians, such as Chu Hsi (朱熹), or the more contemporary ones such as Tang Chun-I (唐君毅), Mou Tsung-San (牟宗三), were not even cited by the authors reviewed.

²⁷ There are only two comparative studies on social work students by Kenneth Chau, *op cit*, 1979; and Richard Nann, *op cit*, 1989.

academics that the two groups are different, however, how they differ from each other and what insights we can draw from these differences have not yet been clearly delineated. Since social work values are strongly linked to practices, this intellectual exercise should not be done only through literature review, but also through scrupulous scrutiny of how they are practised in *real social work*.²⁸ Without extensive comparative studies on this aspect, indigenization of social work will not have a solid ground to advance, because, to indigenize is to compare, to critique, and to choose.. Yet, as far as we can find in publications, this point has not been recognised by the social work community in Hong Kong and there are hardly any studies in this area.

The Future

If judged from the quantity of work which are entirely or partially related to the ultimate values of social work values, it sounds doubtful if there are sufficient discussion for its indigenization. For instance, in the *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, the professional journal in Hong Kong, there were only about twenty-two articles related to this issue appeared from 1966 to 1995 (twenty-nine volumes with about fifty-four issues and more than three hundred manuscripts). Although there were more discussion about the *social values of social work*, there was nearly no discussion on the *professional* and *operational* values²⁹ which seemed to have been taken for granted too quickly by the community. A search of the *Chinese Quarterly* published by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, or the *Social Work Abstracts Database* and *Social Science Index* (Wilsondisc Version 3, 1995) did not provide us with more references neither. Since social work is such a value laden project, it is indeed curious why we could not find more discussion on indigenization of the "imported" social work values.

²⁸ One of such attempts is: M. Rhodes, *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice*, Boston, Mass., Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.

²⁹ There are two theses which are slightly relevant to these areas. They are, FONG Chi Kwun, Mary, *A Hermeneutic Dimension of the Understanding of The Mentally Ill "Self"*. HO Yuk Ying, *A Critical Study of the Educational Objective of Community Development Work with Particular Reference to its Communicative Process*. Both are M.Phil. Theses, Department of Applied Social Studies, Hong Kong Polytechnic, HK, 1994.

Quantity, of course, is merely a indicator at most. The more important issue now is *how* a whole edifice of "Hong Kong Chinese social work values"³⁰ can be built upon the foundation of the Western one which most of us are so accustomed to, or too depended on. The solution, however, must be found beyond the "conventional" social work and lies on how we interpret and compare the Western culture with our own, and then examine on how these conclusions can be "borrowed" to social work. For most of us, the indigenous culture is the only alternative, non-Western source of values which we are bestowed and from which we can have more choices for indigenization. In this process, we may need to contemplate on what indigenous culture can help us to enrich, or even replace, the tenets of social work values at different levels. This will inevitably raise more complicated issues of what the criteria of choosing are, and whether the "revised (or even "converted") *social work*" is still "social work", and what is its very identity. In fact, if knowledge, method and values of social work are to form an integrity, indigenization can never be achieved partially. Any move of indigenization in values will threaten the priori assumptions of social work itself.³¹ On the other hand, to assume that social work is a fixed entity and has unchanged identities is ignorant of its past development and its present challenges (Lorenz,1995; Harrison,1976).

Without the orientations mentioned above, it is doubtful that we can develop social work well in the soil of this colony, and still doubtful when Hong Kong is no longer a colony. Sociologists have reminded us that *neo-colonialism* may be the next choice of a society which have just struggled away from *colonialism*. This is not a void warning for Hong Kong social workers. If indigenization of social work values is not treated as a serious question, despite formal political independence after 1997, the scenario may be one in which we are still dependent upon a Western metropolis, not in economy, but in ideas and in values.

³⁰ In view of Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, it is controversial to denote "Hong Kong Chinese" as a culture entity which implies a certain degree of independence from its future sovereign. But the author wants to point out that the "Chineseness" of Hong Kong is now different from that of the mainland, and it will remain different for an unknown period of time.

³¹ This issue, in fact, has been raised by a social worker in Africa, who recently argued that "the social casework principle of client self-determination when doing casework in Zambia and Africa as a whole is inappropriate and irrelevant." (Silavwe,1995:73)

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