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## Editorial

Although there are different definitions of the ‘Asia-Pacific region’, the term typically includes countries and territories in Southeast Asia, East Asia, Polynesia, Australia, New Zealandia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and South Asia. Since the end of the Second World War, there have been many changes in this region. Economically, the region has enjoyed much economic growth in the past few decades, although volatility and stagnation have become emergent attributes in some countries such as Japan and Taiwan. In terms of social change, transformation of traditional social structure is widespread, such as growth of the middle class and rising influence of non-governmental organizations. Culturally speaking, traditional values such as filial piety and familism have weakened whereas Western values such as individualism and social justice have grown. In the realm of politics, with the collapse of colonies, weakening of monarchies and retreat of Communist ideologies, there is a growing emphasis of the rule of law, democracy and civil society in the region. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the pace of economic, social, cultural and political changes in countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region varies substantially.

There are several challenges to the social work profession in the Asia-Pacific region. Fundamentally, social workers have to re-consider the role of social work. On the one hand, in those countries where Western democracy is not fully developed, social work is basically seen as an instrument to promote social stability or social control. On the other hand, social work is regarded as an important tool to promote social development, social justice, civil society and human rights in places identifying the Western values. In addition, there is a tension of whether the goal of social development should focus on economic growth or development of the civil society. In some societies such as Hong Kong, economic development has received much stronger emphasis than balanced social development. This unique developmental pattern is in sharp contrast to Australia and New Zealand where business corporations are strictly regulated and there are strong emphases of social justice, equality and sustainability.

The next challenge is on the essence of social work practice. The basic question we should ask is whether social work theories and intervention methods developed in the West can be used in the Asia-Pacific Region without problems. On the conceptual level, the issue surrounds around whether social work theories are universally applicable (i.e. cultural universalism) or there are unique cultural characteristics impairing the generalizability of theoretical models (i.e. cultural relativism). One criticism about Western social work theories is that they are grounded primarily

on individualistic ideologies which may not be applicable to Asian societies with collectivistic features. On the intervention level, one should also ask whether successful psychosocial interventions developed in the West are applicable to Asian people. For example, Western family therapies may need modification because Asians are not so expressive and they tend to avoid interpersonal confrontation within the family. Another example is community work. While community empowerment is perfectly legitimate in Western communities, protests against the Government and civil disobedience may be regarded as subversive acts in Asia-Pacific countries where Western democracy is not well-developed.

In view of the above concerns, there is a call for indigenization of social work theories and intervention approaches. For example, regarding end of life care for elderly people, social workers should not just look at how different psychosocial systems may affect the adjustment of old people. They should also look at how aging and dying are culturally defined and examine how different cultural ideologies can serve as 'cultural resource' in intervention. When we attempt to help Chinese elderly people, there is a need to look at how life and death are seen in Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist thoughts.

Another challenge is on social work education. In view of growing social needs, there is a demand for more social workers. For example, the Government of China has decided to train 2 million social workers by 2015 and 3 million social workers by 2020. Several questions should be asked as far as training of social workers in the Asia-Pacific region is concerned. First, do we have enough social work programs to train qualified social workers? Second, do we have an appropriate higher education environment to cultivate the humanistic temperament of social work students? As helping the vulnerable groups is the core mission of social workers, social work education does not stand alone. Social work students' exposure to humanistic thoughts such as General Education and service-learning subjects is helpful to the holistic development of social work students.

Besides adequacy of social work programs and existence of an environment facilitating the development of social work, another thorny question is whether there are enough qualified social work teachers. In many territories in the Asia-Pacific region, the first generation social work teachers are not professional social workers, although some of them may have a doctoral degree in social welfare, sociology or social work (i.e. not professionally qualified practice degree). In fact, in some countries such as China, many senior social work educators are sociologists who do not have frontline social work practice experience. There are two problems of this situation. First, it is doubtful whether 'authentic' social work is taught. Second, as related senior social work educators usually determine the accreditation standard and requirement, there may be biases involved.

There are other difficulties facing social work education in the Asia-Pacific region. First, with the under-development of social work, it is questionable whether we can have adequate social work placements and qualified social work supervisors. Second, English textbooks and their translated versions are still widely used which are commonly regarded as authoritative sources. At the same time, there is a lack of indigenous teaching materials particularly on social work intervention approaches in different cultural contexts. Finally, although the demand for social workers is huge, job prospect and monetary gains are not necessarily attractive to social work graduates in many places in the Asia-Pacific region.

Finally, there are several challenges with respect to social work research in the Asia-Pacific region. First of all, most of the existing psychosocial assessment tools are developed in the West (i.e. English version) and there is a severe lack of validated psychosocial assessment tools. While researchers in the non-English speaking Asia-Pacific countries may use translated Western measures, such translated measures are seldom validated. Besides, there are few attempts to develop indigenous assessment tools and conduct related validation studies. Second, theoretical models used in social work research in the region are mostly imported from the West and there are relatively few research studies on the development of indigenous theoretical models. Third, there are very few longitudinal studies in the region. Obviously, without longitudinal studies, the dynamic changes in the clients over time cannot be properly captured. Fourth, studies on social work education are few in the region (Shek *et al.*, 2007). Finally, compared with the West, evidence-based practice research in the region is on the very low side.

With the above observations, we have to address many issues related to social work in the Asia-Pacific region. Obviously, publication of a special issue on social work in the Asia-Pacific is desirable. As such, the present special issue is a modest attempt to do this.

There are several categories of articles in this special issue. Articles in the first category are related to different dimensions of human behavior, particularly the role of spirituality and biomedical processes. Regarding spirituality, it is noteworthy that spiritual and religious beliefs are widespread in the Asia-Pacific region, such as in different Chinese communities (Shek, 2010). In the first article, Wallace Chan reports the validation of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire based on clinical samples. There are three unique features of this article. First, as spirituality such as meaning of life is a neglected area in mainstream social science and social work, this is an interesting addition to the literature. Second, the development of an indigenous measure of meaning of life can facilitate social work practice. Third, data were collected from three samples including students, older adults and care-givers.

In the second article, Groves, Ho and Siu reflects on the 'sacred-secular' dialect in the social work practice context by analyzing the narratives of outreaching social workers on managerialism. This paper is important for two reasons. First, although many social work organizations and social workers share religious beliefs, this attribute is grossly under-researched in the social work literature, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Second, as we do not really know how religious beliefs influence the coping responses of social workers, this study is an interesting addition to the literature. Finally, the findings can help social work theorists to develop theoretical models on the coping behavior of social workers.

In the next article, Xu similarly examines the issue of religious coping with reference to the model proposed by Pargament. The author first asks whether social work is a profession 'without spirit' and argues that the holistic emphasis of social work fully justifies the inclusion of the spiritual dimension in social work theories and practice. Based on a critique of Pargament's theory, Xu further reflects on the implications of Pargament's theory of religious coping. Clearly, the paper is a provocative move to place spirituality as a legitimate focus of social work practice. Nevertheless, how to address the issue of spirituality in different territories in the Asia-Pacific region which has a wide spectrum of spiritual beliefs and practice is a question for further consideration. Besides, how to integrate spirituality and evidence-based practice is a challenge to be addressed.

In contrast to the focus on spirituality, the article by Healy focuses on a contrasting theme on the biomedical dimension. In the article, the author examines the challenges for the use of the bio-psychosocial approach in social work practice with reference to biomedical sciences and technology development, particularly in the fields of neuroscience and human genomics. Obviously, social workers should have a basic understanding of biomedical knowledge to help their clients. Nevertheless, instead of fully retreating to the position of reductionism, how to keep a balance amongst the biomedical, psychosocial and spiritual domains is a challenge task for social workers.

The next category of papers is on family and related issues. Family is an important social building block in the Asia-Pacific region. In different Chinese societies (Shek, 2006), Korea, Japan, and Southeastern countries, family ties and filial piety are strongly emphasized. In the article by Connolly, Kiraly, McCrae and Mitchell, the authors propose a kinship care practice framework based on a life course approach. The proposed model has several elements, including system focus, family and cultural responsiveness, relationship support and child centered focus. The proposed model has insight for family practice and utilization of family resources and it is theoretically and practically important for three reasons. First, kinship care has been regarded as a more desirable form of care in different Asian-Pacific countries. Second, reliance on kinship care is a common practice in the Asia-Pacific region. Third, the practice model is derived from an initiative involving practice and research.

In the article by Leung and Shek, the role of family functioning and filial piety on adolescent psychosocial competence in Chinese single-mother families was examined in a cross-sectional study. The study is a pioneer study because the related research questions have not been adequately examined in the social work literature. The study suggests that family functioning and filial piety are important family determinants of adolescent competence. As single-mother families are usually deprived of economic resources, family resources may help to provide non-monetary resources to the family concerned. Another unique feature of this paper is that instead of looking at adolescent pathologies, the focus is put on adolescent psychosocial competencies (Leung and Shek, 2015). Besides cross-sectional data, it would be helpful to conduct longitudinal studies with the inclusion of additional family processes.

Many risk behaviors take place in the family context. From a prevention point of view, it is desirable if family tragedies can be prevented as early as possible. In his article on predictive risk modeling (PRM), Gillingham considers the possibility of using big data and computer technology to prevent child maltreatment and other adverse developmental outcomes. Besides outlining the background and successful cases, issues on substantiation are also discussed. Undoubtedly, PRM is a promising tool to identify family at-risk cases as early as possible and it is a desirable prevention initiative. Nevertheless, its success ultimately depends on the availability of valid and reliable information as well as appropriate treatment of false positive and false negative cases.

In the next article by Pitman, the issue of domestic violence is explored with reference to the construct of coercive control. It is argued that while physical violence is easily measured and recognized, social workers should be sensitive to assessment and intervention related to coercive control. Based on a study of thirty separated women in the domestic violence context, it was found that the 'trap' of coercive control has the elements of double-binds, double standards, lack

of empathy from partners and boundary violation. This paper offers insights on the nature of coercive control and it is particularly relevant to the Asia-Pacific region for two reasons. First, the prevalence of domestic violence is rising in the region. Second, gender inequality still exists in many non-English speaking societies in the region.

The next three articles in the special issue are concerned about social work education. The first article by Egan, Maidment and Connolly focuses on social work supervision. Based on the data collected via online survey and focus groups, the authors identified the challenges of supervision in social work practice with particular reference to managerialism. The findings showed that the tension created by managerialism was on the rise. Besides re-iterating the importance of professional supervision in social work, this study also identified several themes underlying professional supervision, especially the tension between professional and managerial discourses. The author's discussion on the possibility of separating both functions is interesting, although it is necessary to further explore how to 'integrate' them in a tactful manner.

In another article by Gair, reasoning on activism, empathy and racism among social work students is explored. Based on a study examining barriers to activism, findings showed that students' non-commitment to action for social justice was due to a lack of confidence, time and information. This study is important because the colonial history of Australia strongly contributed to racial divisions and the colonial mindset of treating the indigenous people as inferior. The study also suggests that promotion of empathy alone in social work students is not enough. There is a need to empower social work students and provide more opportunities for them to engage in activities to promote social justice.

In the final article in this category, Cleak, Roulston and Vreugdenhil from Australia and the United Kingdom studied field education program in social work training. Based on the work previously done in Australia, data were collected from two universities in Northern Ireland, where the authors examined the supervision models, learning activities and experiences, and frequency of learning opportunities provided to the students. Similar to the Australian findings, the present findings showed that the students were generally satisfied with their fieldwork placements. The study also showed that several factors, including service settings, year of study, and providers of learning opportunities determined supervision frequency and learning experiences. This paper is interesting for two reasons. First, as field work is commonly regarded as the 'soul' of social work training, this study promotes our understanding of social work supervision. Second, as the study was based upon an earlier Australian study, this is a good example of international collaboration and knowledge transfer.

There are two articles on social work research in this special issue. In the article by Downes, Lakhani, Maujean, Macfarlane and Kendall, the question of whether care farming practices such as animal assisted therapies would help those clients with abuse or neglect experience. Despite the common belief that care farming intervention can provide positive attachment which would eventually be beneficial to the development of children with adverse experience, the authors reported that no research study could be included for review, thus making it impossible to draw any conclusion on the effectiveness of the related intervention methods. This paper is interesting for two reasons. First, it is commonly believed that animals can heal emotional problems. As I have two cats and I have raised many dogs, I firmly believe in the therapeutic value of pets which is also shared by pet lovers. Second, it reminds us about the importance of the spirit of

evidence-based practice - while we can have favorable perceptions of certain interventions, we still need evidence to substantiate the related claims.

In another literature review study, Parsell, Eggins and Marston explore the issue of human agency and social work research through search and synthesis of the social work literature. The review showed that social work research on human agency was on the surprisingly low side. The authors argue that expressions of human agency are in fact socially mediated and the review underscores the complexity involved in the person-in-environment framework. The study is interesting because it explores the role of the 'person' and the 'environment' in human behavior, which is closely related to the tension on the 'micro' versus 'macro' intervention of social work practice.

Migration is a common phenomenon in the Asia-Pacific region, with the dominant trend of people migrating from non-English speaking countries to English speaking countries. In the last article by Papadopoulos, the ethics of recognizing the migrating qualifications and related issues are discussed. The author explores the assumptions behind the existing migration assessment policy. It is argued that existing policies are not consistent with the principle of internationalization which might exclude 'qualified' social workers who do not conform to the dominant model of assessment. The paper is important because it raises interesting discussion on what standards should be used to assess migrant social workers and the related justifications.

In the Chinese culture, there is a saying of "throw a brick to attract a jade". In this spirit, we hope this special issue can attract more academic and professional articles from colleagues in the Asia-Pacific region.

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