



International Network for School Social Work

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Introduction to the Development of School Social Work in Mainland China

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Mainland China is a diversified nation of over a billion people that cannot be understood from a unified perspective. For example, an economic gap exists between regions, between coastal and inland cities and between rural and urban areas. In this article, only the latest development of the most significant city in South China, Guangzhou, (formerly known as Canton) capital of Guangdong Province, is introduced with reference to the author's experiences working for the city in the past decade.

Since the 1978 economic reforms in Mainland China, Guangzhou has been recognized as one of the most significant urbanized areas in the nation, similar to Shanghai and Beijing. Guangzhou is the capital and largest city in South China with a population of almost 13 million, and ranked as one of the top three richest cities in Mainland China. This information supports the idea that this economically booming city in South China shares a similar urbanized context to the other major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. As a result, the sharing in this article should be also relevant to an understanding of the development in those urbanized regions of Mainland China.

Issues facing adolescents

In the Annual Report on China's Education (2010), D.Yang (Ed.), published by the Social Sciences Academic Press, the following two issues of adolescent development in the urbanized regions such as Canton are highlighted. First, the domination of an examination-oriented education culture forces the Mainland's adolescents, parents, teachers, and even education officials to strive only for academic excellence. As a result, adolescent development in terms of character formation, physical and psychological health, and social competencies are frequently neglected. For example, a number of cases of suicide and excessive fatigue amongst adolescents were reported because of examination pressure. Poor academic performance was also strongly prognostic of depressive symptoms.

Secondly, parental control styles and methods are criticized as being over-protective, authoritarian, or neglectful. Related research has indicated that the effects of parental control are similarly negative in both West and East Asian countries such as Mainland China. Parents'

understanding of different ways of handling issues such as the use of the Internet, online gaming and dating, as well as differences in paternal and maternal style are also an issue.

The beginnings of social services in Guangzhou

In facing multiple challenges of social development for a range of issues including those of adolescents' needs, the local government in Canton decided in 2011 to develop a social service called 'Integrated Family Service'. In 2016, more than 150 service units in all 11 districts of the city are now providing this type of service to people with different needs.

The service units mainly provide services for three groups of clientele: women, elderly, and adolescents.

Organizing students to participate in voluntary works is the most common type of activity. The general strategy is to organize the students serving the elderly living in the same community. However, according to my direct communication with many social workers of different service units, they seldom provide counseling service or handle the misbehaviors of students because they do not perceive themselves as being competent to do so.

Regarding adolescent services, the social workers are eager to provide various school-based activities at the schools within their service boundaries because the funder has expectations that cannot be fulfilled by working solely in the community setting.

The beginnings of school social work

In addition, the Haizhu Communist Youth League, a district-wide adolescent service organization in Canton has, with financial support from the government, funded a specialized project for the development of School Social Work since 2012. The project is now being operated by a local NGO serving 13 schools and includes both primary and secondary schools. Students would like to call school social workers "teacher" (lao shi), "big brother/sister" (ge ge/jie jie), and "social worker" (she gong). A 2014 newspaper article (use Google Translate) illustrates and describes some of the progress and challenges of the project. <http://money.163.com/14/0105/02/9HPS93DU00253B0H.html>

Regarding professional training, there is no specialized requirement for School Social Work in Mainland China up to now. People can take a national-wide qualifying examination for a social work license without studying social work in university or any other institute. Although colleagues around the nation have discussed this, no initiative has been taken so far to require professional training.

The future of school social work

In summary, the development of school social work in Mainland China is still at the beginning stage. Necessary measures including training, establishment of policy, and the mode of service provision have to be further developed. In my opinion, the government has shown efforts towards professional development.

However, there is a bottleneck in strategy and action planning by the professionals themselves. Educators, supervisors and practitioners ought to take steps to prepare themselves for developing training for social workers with specialized curriculum for working in schools, and determining how to effectively implement school social work. All these initiatives would start in the areas where projects already exist (e.g. Canton, Shanghai, and Beijing), and extending them to other provinces and regions of the country if the stakeholders could settle their issues of power and interest.