

# The self-concept of Chinese women and the indigenization of social work in China

● Maria Cheung and Meng Liu

The development of social work in China has a history of only 15 years (Wang, 1998). The term ‘social work’ is a foreign concept to the Chinese, since it originated in a western context that is completely different from the social, economic and religious background of China. Some even go as far as arguing that it is impossible to apply the principles and theories of social work to social life in China (Yan, 1991). Up to today Chinese academia has not made a systematic attempt to analyze the experiences of other developing countries in transferring social work knowledge. Neither has any empirical study been conducted to explore an indigenous model of social work. In this article we take social work with women as an example so as to examine the necessity and possibility of developing indigenous social work.

The two authors draw upon their empirical findings on the self-concept of Chinese women from two respective studies in China and Canada to discuss the implication of the indigenization of social work knowledge in working with women in China. The data collection for both studies took place in 1996–7. The research conducted by Meng Liu (1999) is on marital conflicts in a city in south-east China. Maria Cheung’s research (1999) is on the contributing

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factors to long-term marital satisfaction in Euro-Canadian and Chinese Canadian couples in Canada. We discuss the western ideological basis of social work and feminism; a literature review of the principles in developing indigenous social work; the need for developing indigenous social work in working with women in China; the empirical data on the self-concept of Chinese women in the authors' two studies; and the implications for the indigenization of social work practice with women in China.

### **A critique of the western ideological basis of social work and feminism**

In the last several years authors writing about international research and curriculum development in social work in developing countries have critiqued the western ideological basis of social work. They have argued that the philosophical basis of social work, mainly drawn from Protestant ethics, Fabianism (a reaction to capitalism and social Darwinism) and western middle-class individualism is irrelevant and inappropriate for the development of social work in developing countries (Prager, 1985; Midgley, 1981; Hammond, 1988; Nagpaul, 1993; Nimmagadda and Cowger, 1999).

Midgley (1981) and Ragab (1990) contend that the transfer of social work knowledge to developing countries is based on a belief that there is a universality in social work methodology and professional identity. In fact, social work, especially that from the United States, is ethnocentric. Furthermore, Hammond (1988) and Ho (1998) have raised alarms about the imposition of 'professional imperialism' (Midgley, 1981: xiii) or 'cultural imperialism that perpetuates the colonization of the mind' (Ho, 1998: 88) in developing countries.

Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999) found that students from Taiwan and China reported difficulties in applying western theories to social work education and practice, because they created conflict and confusion. This is mainly because in the application and operationalization of social work knowledge in developing countries there has been a failure to respond in a culturally appropriate manner (Osei-Hwedie, 1993).

#### *Deconstructing western feminism*

Feminism is overwhelmingly a western middle-class white female enterprise. Most feminist writing treats women as a homogeneous group with universal concerns (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974;

Sacks, 1974; Ortner, 1974, 1981; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; Dominelli, 1997). Dominelli (1997: 74) argues that 'It [feminism] misses the specificity and complexity of women's lives, and in doing so ignor[es] their realities as they experience them . . . [and] do not take account of women's relevant cultural, spiritual, and ethnic sensitivities'. She adds that social work needs to develop a 'women-driven and gender-sensitive response' (p. 75).

If women's voices in the academic discourses in social development are weak, the voices of women from developing countries are even weaker (Dominelli, 1997). Marchant and Parpart (1995) comment that although feminists from the white western middle class have made efforts to deconstruct the category of 'woman' in the literature on developing countries, this has not led to significant social change in promoting the interests of women in these countries. Some feminist authors treat women in developing countries as a homogeneous group which has achieved less in terms of social position as compared with white western women. White middle-class feminists in the West often present women from developing countries 'as the victims of either capitalist forces or the private patriarchy practiced by men in their own countries' (Dominelli, 1997: 78). This kind of portrait gives privilege to women in developed countries, giving them a status superior to women in developing countries.

Dominelli (1997) suggests that western feminist scholars should address the power imbalance between white western middle-class women in wealthier countries and women from less affluent parts of the world. Furthermore, they should address the different needs of women in various parts of the world. For example, women in most developing countries are more concerned about the basic needs of survival such as food, water, jobs and the health of their children. Individual and collective factors should also be taken into account in women's capacity to adapt to circumstances that shape their own lives and those of their families.

## **A literature review**

The indigenization and authentization of social work have become two important concepts in the development of social work in developing countries. The former was first mentioned at the Fifth United Nations international survey of social work training in 1971. Indigenization is defined as 'the process of relating social work function

and education to the cultural, economic, political, and social realities of a particular country' (Resnick, 1976: 22). Midgley (1981: 170) further elaborated that 'professional social work roles must be appropriate to the needs of different countries and social work education must be appropriate to the demands of social work practice'. Authentization is defined as the 'identification of genuine and authentic roots in the local system, which would be used for guiding its future development in a mature, relevant and original fashion' (Ragab, 1982: 21).

For the last 30 years or so, developing countries have been importing social work knowledge from the West to solve the social problems which resulted from rapid industrial and economic development. Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) conceptualize three main stages in the development of social work in developing countries.

First is the transmission stage, where developing countries import the western model of social work without questioning the suitability and applicability of its components in their own countries whose culture and society are markedly different from western countries. These countries use North American textbooks and reference North American journals. The belief behind the direct transmission of western social work to developing countries is that social work is a scientific profession that aims to solve common human needs across different countries with different cultural and societal contexts.

The second stage is the indigenization stage, which begins as a reaction to the undesirable consequences derived from the direct transmission of western social work knowledge. The importing countries realize the need for modification of some concepts of the western model of social work to fit with their own values, needs and problems.

The third stage is authentization, which, according to Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988: 141), is 'to reorganize all aspects of the social work profession in the light of the domestic circumstances and systems'. Authentization also means 'to become genuine' (Ragab, 1990: 38). These writers argue that although indigenization can occur to make western social work practice more suited to the needs and problems of developing countries, local social work educators and practitioners need to be creative and develop their own strategies to address domestic problems and needs. There is a reciprocal relationship between indigenization and authentization. 'When the rate of indigenization decreases from one phase to another, the rate of authentization increases from one phase to another' (Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988: 141).

Prager (1985: 136) states in his discussion of the indigenization of social work in Israel, 'If helping, in all its nuances, is to be securely rooted in the cultural patterns and systems of the people to be helped, then education for the profession, in order to be meaningful, should be developed from within our border'. From the review of literature on the indigenization and authentization of social work knowledge in developing countries such as Israel, India, Egypt and other African countries, the following guidelines can be summarized (Prager, 1985; Hammond, 1988; Walton and Abo El Nasr, 1988; Ragab, 1990; Nagpaul, 1993; Osei-Hwedie, 1993; Ho, 1998; Nimma-gadda and Cowger, 1999).

1. Social work education should be developed with an indigenous foundation, including a philosophical basis, theories, working principles and approaches, and study materials, since working with people calls for indigenous orientation and skills.
2. Social work educators in developing countries need to take into consideration social structures and development issues, and address the problems in ways that are familiar to social work professionals and local communities in their own countries. They need to develop their own strategies in order to be responsive to the economic, social, political and psychological contexts in which social work is practiced.
3. In order for social work to play an effective role, social work educators need to redefine the central focus, knowledge and value bases of social work practice. In the process of transferring knowledge and practice from the developed countries, social work educators need to redefine western concepts such as 'community' and 'person-in-environment'. They need to modify and develop conceptual frameworks and methodologies rooted in their own socio-cultural practice contexts.
4. Social work education should address the historical and cultural experiences and realities of their people and be respectful of the cultural beliefs and practices of a country. Social work educators need to attend to the human needs, beliefs, myths, values, traditions, goals, roles and aspirations of the people.
5. Social work educators should emphasize the importance of local community expertise and resources in delivering social services. Social work practice should reflect local inputs and processes.

## **The need for developing indigenous social work in working with women in China**

The issue of indigenization was raised at the beginning of the development of social work in China. Some authors focus on the possibility of transferring western social work to China (Sun, 1998). Others claim that indigenous social work already exists in China (Wang, 1991; Gao, 1999; Guo, 1999), arguing that elements in the traditional work undertaken by the Civil Affairs Departments, All-China Women's Federation, trade unions and youth leagues are very similar to those of western social work.

Here we focus on the work of the All-China Women's Federation, which is the largest women's organization in China, set up in April 1949. It is a social organization for the mass of women and serves as a bridge between the party and all women in the country (All-China Women's Federation, 1979). It is an umbrella national network which is responsible for implementing policy and direction for the local chapters at the provincial and township levels, which are under the auspices of the local government.

Most work on behalf of women in China has been undertaken by the Women's Federation in China (Judd, 1994). Some have viewed it as a form of social work for women in China since it involves helping and problem-solving for women (Zhang and Liu, 1998). According to its charter, the federation's main functions are: representing women's interests; educating women in government and party policies; protecting women's rights; and networking among government agencies (All-China Women's Federation, 1979). It is a bridge between the party (the government) and all Chinese women. Work on behalf of women includes the following.

1. Protecting women's rights, enhancing women's political participation, encouraging unemployed women's re-employment, providing assistance for women who are confronted with marriage and family problems.
2. Improving women's situation as a whole, providing information about the party's policies on women, training women about self-respect, self-reliance, self-esteem and self-love, and organizing national mass movements like 'Women Creating New Careers', and 'Five-merits Family Competition'.
3. Providing community-based services, such as day-care for the elderly and young children; family-life education; and activity centers for women, elderly and children.

For many years the federation has played a very important role in stabilizing families and society and providing assistance to women with marriage and family problems (Jiang, 2000). The major responsibilities of the federation are publicizing, instructing, mobilizing, persuading, advocating, networking and administering services (Judd, 1994; Li, 1998). With the recent changes that have accompanied urbanization and economic reform, and in particular the release of the government's control over personal lives (Yu, 1991; Shaw, 1996; Liu, 1999), the work of the federation is being criticized as failing to meet some women's needs (X.J. Li, 1988, 1994, 1997; S. Li, 1993), especially protecting women's rights. It is more concerned about implementing government policy than promoting women's interests. X.J. Li (1988, 1994, 1997) throws down the challenge that the federation is only for the women who work in it, but not for women. And most women do not have input into it. The federation is conservative on women's issues such as domestic violence and prostitution, and often re-victimizes women in the process of helping them (S. Li, 1993). At the hotline counseling service in Beijing, women who came for help were often blamed for causing failed marriages. They were encouraged to stay in an abusive marriage in order to look after the children's interests. The federation is facing the problem of how to meet women's needs in the middle of a changing social and economic situation in China.

### **Empirical findings on the self-concept of Chinese women in Canada and China: the Canadian study**

The empirical data discussed here are drawn from a cross-cultural comparative study which examined the gender and cultural factors that contribute to long-term marital satisfaction in two cultural groups in Canada (Cheung, 1999). One group consisted of Euro-Canadian couples who were at least second-generation in Canada and whose first language is English. The second group was immigrant couples from Hong Kong who had immigrated to Canada 3–12 years ago at the time of the interview. Cantonese is their first language. The couples were in their first marriages and had been married for 30–36 years. The study took place during 1996–7 in Southern Ontario, Canada, including the cities of Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and their neighborhoods. The methodology of the research was an in-depth qualitative study using a narrative approach (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993; Denzin and Lincoln,

1994). Marital satisfaction was determined by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, a standardized measure of marital satisfaction and adjustment (Spanier, 1976), and was confirmed by each respondent in their individual interviews.

Two major themes emerged. First, the self-identity of Chinese wives was embedded in the family as a collective. The sense of self was connected to that of their husbands and children. In comparing the Chinese group with the Euro-Canadian group, children occupied the center stage of the Chinese women's stories while the Euro-Canadian group focused on the dyadic relationship and the woman's own fulfillment in the marriage. For the Chinese women, the success of their children was a major source of marital satisfaction. Second, Chinese traditional values could be identified in the majority of the Chinese group. They were particularly dominant among those respondents who were home-makers.

Confucian values have dominated in China for a long time. The ideology prescribes a set of expected behaviors for people. Principles like the 'three cardinal guides' underscore the hierarchies of human relationship: the monarch guides the citizens, the father guides the son and the husband guides the wife. The 'three obediences' expected of a woman are to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage and to her son as a widow. The 'four virtues' refer to a woman's virtues, speech, appearance and work (in the family).

Contrasted with the individual freedom described by the Euro-Canadian wives, the Chinese wives were more constrained by the rules they had created to accommodate their marriages. The majority of the Chinese wives saw themselves as less important than men. They put their needs after their husbands' and identified with Chinese society's view of men's privileged status. They derived certain rules to make their husbands happy and keep the family together, for example:

I don't disturb my husband in the morning. I wouldn't feel good if he didn't have enough energy for work.

I endure his temper, so as to make him feel attached to me and have fidelity toward the family.

I won't talk back to him even if he annoyed me especially in public, as I give face to him. I did get back when it is safe at home.

Sacrifice was a major theme in the Chinese wives' stories. Most of them said that they had given up things they liked to do because of

the family. They gained their marital satisfaction from the intimate relationships with their husbands who could appreciate their efforts in nourishing the family and the successful raising of their children. But the Euro-Canadian wives' stories focused on their enjoyment of freedom and individuality in their marriages. For both groups, the bottom line is that there had been no violence in their marriage. The following song of sacrifice recited by a Chinese wife contrasts with the enjoyment portrayed in the Euro-Canadian wife's narrative.

**Chinese wife:** There is a Chinese idiom song which said:

'If you marry a chicken, you follow the chicken.

If you marry a dog, you follow the dog.

If you marry a monkey, you follow him and run all over the hill.'

So I have that value.

Our relationship has been very good, so it's impossible to be apart.

**Euro-Canadian wife:** Umhum. I know I can distinctly remember when I was, when we were married, oh, I don't know, four or five years, I thought that you know, this is just perfect, like this is just what I wanted [yeah], a house and two little children and you know, I was in my glory. I remember, I mean I'm not saying I never was since then, but I just remember distinctly that it was a very very happy time in my life [umhum], I was just, I just had everything that I wanted [umhum] and there couldn't be anything added to it.

It is interesting to find that the Chinese women in the study were brought up in Hong Kong and most of them had received a British colonial education. However, they still revealed that they possessed many dominant traditional Chinese values when they defined their self-concept in the marital relationship.

### **The Chinese study**

The empirical data are drawn from a study of marital conflict in a city in southeast China. Twenty women were interviewed, 10 from rural areas and 10 from urban areas. The study took place in 1996–8. Convenience sampling and in-depth interviews were used for data collection. The study explored the reasons and patterns of marital conflicts in rural and urban families, and the impacts of social changes and gender equality policy on marital conflicts in contemporary China. It was found that social, economic and political changes China experienced in the past half-century have a great bearing on both conjugal relationships and family relationships (Liu, 1999).

There was a very sharp contrast between rural women and urban women in terms of their self-concepts. Urban women had a stronger sense of equality than their rural counterparts, and this might have influenced their self-concept. The self-concept was revealed in the following ways for both groups.

*The sense of self: rural women*

Rural women paid less attention to themselves. Their sense of self was largely dependent on their family and husbands.

*Husband-centered family life* When talking about preparing meals for the family, Lian said:

I make two kinds of meals for the family every day, I make something special for him [her husband], he needs more nutrition, I cook the pig's liver and meat for him, and eggs, and the stuff. My boy wants to eat his father's meal, you know, you can't say no to him. My girl and I, we don't care much about the food, we can eat the best and the worst . . .

For her the daily meal's preparation depended on the husband's needs, and the best food in the family was only for the husband and son. It means that the husband and son were more important than her daughter and herself, and therefore, male was superior to female.

*Family needs are more important* When beaten by her husband, Qiu said that after she had stayed in bed for half a day she had to get up because:

I'm not important, but you have to care about the family, you have children to take care of, and pigs and chickens to feed, and so on.

*Need to save face for husband in public even at the expense of wife* When Xiang was told that her husband was gambling, she tried to persuade him to go home:

He was not reasonable at that moment, he drank alcohol, and he refused to go home with me. He lost his temper, and scolded me in bad words. I kept silent. Possibly, he thought I didn't save face for him in public. OK, I just let him curse me, and I returned home myself.

It is apparent that rural women in this study paid more attention to their husbands' and their families' needs. In the village where the interviews took place, there was a special term for adult men, 'the

major laborers'. This implies that men are the major breadwinners in the family, and it reflects male superiority over female in family life.

*The sense of self: urban women*

For urban women, the sense of equality was more apparent, and this influenced their self-perceptions.

*Husband and wife are equally important* In the interviews, when talking about the conjugal relationship, women talked in the following ways.

You have your work, and I have mine, I don't depend on you to live.

You work outside the home, so do I. Why can't you share the household chores with me?

You want to save face in public. Don't I also need to save face in public?

You want to support your parents, what about my parents?

Women perceived themselves as equal partners to their husbands. The strong sense of equality came from the Chinese government's equality policy, which tends to be more thoroughly implemented in urban areas than in rural areas. The sense of equality among urban women resulted in more marital conflicts in family life since in the last half-century men have never been taught that women are equal to them (Liu, 1999).

*Children are more important* Similar to their rural counterparts, urban women attributed more importance to their children than to themselves. When considering divorce, women would give priority to their children's interests:

If not for my daughter, I would have divorced him [her husband]. I don't want her to lose her father.

I stay, only for the sake of my daughter. I don't earn enough to support her.

I planned to divorce, but when I imagined how poor his life would be with a step-mother, I just gave that up.

Comparing these two groups, it is clear that rural women had a lower self-image than urban women. In rural family life, a husband

ranked first, a son second, and a wife and daughter last. In the urban area, children were most important, and the husband and wife were perceived as equally important. The difference might be a result of the differing social, economic and educational situations in rural and urban areas, since the latter provide urban women with more access to economic independence and educational attainment.

### *The conjugal relationship*

Rural women had a more traditional perception of the conjugal relationship, they believed that their husbands were dominant in the public sphere, and wives belonged to the domestic sphere. Some women narrated their conflicts with their husbands:

Husband has the final say at home, if you don't follow his instructions, he will be upset.

Husband is entitled to beat me if I did something wrong.

Husband has the right to divorce me if I did something wrong.

These rural women had to submit to their husbands, who had the right to discipline their wrong-doing. In contrast, urban women had different views of the conjugal relationship.

Husband is not entitled to beat me even if I did something wrong.

Husband cannot divorce me even if I am at fault.

Couples should respect each other.

To sum up, the self-concept of women in this study was constructed on the basis of family life. Husbands and children served as the important reference for them. Rural women, who were more family- and husband-oriented, could sacrifice themselves to save face for their husbands. Urban women were more children-oriented, and viewed themselves as equal to their husbands.

### **Implications of the findings on Chinese women's self-concept: searching for indigenous social work practice with women in China**

Social work is a context-bound profession (Jinchao, 1995). It was first developed as a response to the social problems caused by indus-

trialization and urbanization in western countries in the 19th century. It has since evolved into a distinct profession with a core set of values, knowledge and skills. The western model of social work is based on the culture, history and economic development of western countries. According to Walton and Abo El Nasr's (1988) three main stages in the development of social work in developing countries, China is undergoing a transition from the first stage of transmitting knowledge from the West to the second stage of indigenization. In order to develop an indigenous social work in China, local educators should not blindly import the western model. China has a different culture, history and economic development from western countries. The development of social work should be rooted in the socio-economic and cultural context of China. Drawing on the empirical findings of women's self-concept in the studies described, the authors suggest the following principles for an indigenous social work practice with women in China.

#### *Understanding women in the context of family*

Both empirical studies on Chinese women in China and Canada showed that Chinese women's self-concept is heavily embedded in the family (Cheung, 1999; Liu, 1999). Women pay more attention to their families' interests than their own. In China, when women approach service agencies for help, their personal emotional issues may be camouflaged beneath their families' problems. The common questions that women bring to social service agencies for help are around the problems their families are facing at that time. Their typical responses are: 'What should I do?' and 'How can I do that?' (Liu and Zhang, 1997). The social worker's response to women's help seeking is to attend to 'both/and', not 'either/or'. It means that both the women's own interests and their families' interests need to be considered simultaneously, since Chinese women do not see their own concerns as separate from their families'.

Western social work literature, which is rooted in the concepts of individualism and privacy, should be read with caution. Some western social work principles, such as self-determination and non-directiveness, have to be modified in order to meet the needs of Chinese women clients. According to Liu's (1996) experience in the hotline counseling service in China, directiveness, in contrast with the western notion of self-determination, is more applicable to Chinese women clients. The women who came for help believe that the counselors have authority and knowledge, and they can provide advice and direction for their problems. Moreover, in China,

people are taught to respect authority, and individuals are not encouraged to make decisions by themselves. Because of the three cardinal rules (mentioned above) which guide the majority of Chinese women's behaviors, western principles like self-reliance and self-determination cannot be imported without modification. Chinese women usually come for advice when they seek help, while western women view counseling as a way to explore and gain insight into ways they can solve their own problems. Service providers in China need to provide concrete useful information for women who seek help, and at the same time empower clients to find their own solutions.

*Understanding the origins of social work knowledge*

In developing professional social work in China, the western philosophical basis of the origin of social work needs to be examined. Systematic comparison and critiques should be made of the merits of the western system and its implications in local situations. A primary task for social work educators in China is to first conduct a comprehensive review of western social work knowledge. They will also need to acquire an understanding of the development of social work in the West and other developing countries. The basis of social work development in different cultural and socio-economic contexts is the shared knowledge, so that social workers from all over the world can communicate with each other and exchange their experiences, including mistakes and learning, in applying the dominant western knowledge base and shaping their own local knowledge of social work.

*Define the needs of women from their own voices*

The mission of social work in China, particularly for women, needs to be explored. Some issues are pressing, for example the following.

1. What is the orientation of the mission of social work in China, government-directed or individual-oriented?
2. Apart from providing direct services to clients, what other roles can social workers play, especially in alleviating problems that confront women in China, such as domestic violence?
3. To what extent can social workers contribute to policy-making?

Violence against women is on the rise in China (Cardillo, 1997). The data from the Chinese study on family violence show that

women do not want to be beaten by their husbands. However, due to their belief systems (for rural women) and concern for their children (particularly for urban women), many women continue to endure domestic violence. Service providers should not re-victimize those women who come for help by asking them to stay in a violent marriage for the sake of family and societal stability. Indigenous supportive networks need to be developed for women who want to leave abusive relationships.

*Social work should start from within*

This quote from Osei-Hwedie (1993: 22) shows how indigenous leaders and systematic training need to be developed. The training program should reflect local inputs and processes. As mentioned above, the Women's Federation is an indigenous government-directed organization which provides services for women. The current work of the federation overlaps with professional social work practice with women. In a way, both can be seen as helping institutions providing assistance to women. With the rapid social transformation caused by massive economic reforms in China, the efforts of the federation cannot easily meet the changing needs of women in the country. Some even argue that the federation does not provide adequate supports and services to women. It is hoped that the work of the federation can be professionalized so that it employs indigenous methods (Liu and Zhang, 1997).

The development of social work in China bring both hopes and challenges to the federation. One of its major challenges is how to raise the standard of provision by providing professional training for the service providers in meeting the needs of women. If social work principles can be successfully integrated with the original mandates of the federation for protecting women's rights, it will be a significant step in developing indigenous social work with women in China.

In the process of professionalizing women's work, it is hoped that the federation can play a role in advocacy for the needs of women. Different programs should be initiated to reflect women's needs. For example, based on the findings of the Chinese study discussed in this article, the local chapters of the federation could initiate a program to empower women who have gone through domestic violence. This can be done by forming a supportive network for these women.

Social work in China needs to develop services and policies that reflect the reality of women and define women's needs in their own

terms. Ethnographic methods (Dominelli, 1997), which systematically study people's life stories, can be used to collect detailed documentation of how women live their daily lives, how they cope with their families' difficulties and crises, and how they develop their own resilience in face of adversities such as violence and loneliness.

#### *Professional communication and debate*

An open atmosphere is needed to address differences among social work educators and practitioners. Different opinions should be open to debate. The recently established journal of *China Social Work Research* by the China Association of Social Work Education can serve as a forum for communication and debates among social service providers in China. Regular conferences and symposiums should be organized, and international exchanges need to be encouraged by the government and the relevant agencies.

### **Conclusion**

Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999) note that the models of social work in developing countries have been imported. Efforts towards indigenization have been particularly slow in Asia. With the rapid growth of schools of social work in China in recent years, social work knowledge is undergoing a rapid transformation. Scholars from Hong Kong and Canada are making great contributions in furthering social work development in China. Moreover, more young social work educators have chances for advanced studies in social work in other countries. These factors could expedite the development of an indigenous social work in China, in particular for women.

The efforts to develop indigenous social work in China will not only benefit China, they will also cause an impact on the broader international context of social work development. What we will define for social work in China may have a ripple effect on the changing discourses of the world on the definition of social work. As Osei-Hwedie (1993: 25) points out, 'Social work throughout the world has undergone several changes – how the profession adapts to new demands, the shifts in practice base, and evolving new perceptions.' We hope that by drawing upon the authors' research findings on Chinese women's self-concepts, we can promote discussion on the development of an indigenous social work practice for women in China.

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