SURVIVAL IN AN EMERGING PROFESSION: NARRATIVES OF SOCIAL WORKERS

IN MAINLAND CHINA

ZHANG YANGYONG

PhD

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

2020

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Department of Applied Social Sciences

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China

ZHANG Yangyong

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2019

Certificate of Originality

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it reproduces no material previously published or written, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due acknowledge has been made in the text.

_____(Signed)

ZHANG Yangyong

Acknowledgements

Dedication

To my beloved wife Ling Tang, and my daughter Zi-meng Zhang, for your unconditional

love, support, and sacrifices throughout the years.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China

Since national licensure in 2008, Chinese social workers have encountered challenges arising from changes in social structures and personal daily practices. Consequently, many of them have left this emerging profession after only a few years. Survival in the social work profession is fragile and a concern for both academics and practitioners in mainland China. The major question guiding this research was: "What do Chinese social workers do to ensure their professional survival?" Three sub-questions related to this were: (a) What challenges do Chinese social workers face in the context of changing social structures, and what coping strategies do they utilize to cope with these challenges? (b) What challenges do Chinese social workers encounter in their personal daily practices and what specific survival strategies do they use? and (c) What are the survival coping processes of social workers in mainland China? This dissertation employed the Theory of Practice (ToP) and a social constructionist paradigm to explore the survival code utilized by social workers in the context of an emerging Chinese profession.

This qualitative research employed in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection and the use of focus groups as a means of conducting participant reviews of the major findings. Forty-nine participants from Shenzhen, Shanghai and Xiamen were interviewed. The inclusion criteria for both the interviews and the focus groups were as follows: participants were licensed social workers holding a social work diploma and with more than five years' experience in social work. Various service areas and categories of social workers were represented and gender and marital status were also considered. NVivo 12 Plus software was used to assist in coding, searching, defining, and naming themes, and in producing the final report. Thematic analysis was the primary method used to analyze the data.

This research comprised three interrelated studies. Study 1 was entitled "*Survival in Changing and Challenging Institutional and Professional Contexts in China: Narratives of Social Workers*" and sought to answer the first research question. Two essential themes

emerged relating to the aforementioned challenges: (a) constraining social structures; and (b) immature professionalization. These challenges varied in terms of social workers operating at three different professional stages: the frontline social worker, program manager or officer, and organizational manager. Three coping strategies were identified with regard to the aforementioned challenges: (a) building a partnership and integrating resources; (b) utilizing a professional and personal social support network; (c) improving organizational governance and strategic management.

Study 2, entitled "*Coping Strategies with Survival Practice Challenges: Chinese Social Workers' Narratives in a Fledging Profession*", answered the second research question. Four themes emerged relating to the challenges associated with personal practice: (a) excessive workload; (b) economic pressure; (c) inadequate competence; and (d) values and ethical dilemmas. These themes present distinct characteristics in terms of social workers at three professional stages. Four coping strategies were identified to deal with the above challenges: (a) improving and utilizing personal agency through the adoption of learning by doing approach; (b) utilizing social and symbolic capital; (c) using cultural capital in a work-life balance and commitment to the social work mission; and (d) using personal agency to improve economic capital. The findings show that intrinsic motivations such as a belief in, and commitment to, the social work mission are not enough to empower Chinese social workers to remain in the profession; however, the satisfaction of extrinsic realistic needs drives their professional survival in the long-term.

The final study, entitled "*Coping Processes in an Emerging Profession: Mainland Chinese Social Workers' Survival Narratives*", explored the professional survival coping processes employed by Chinese social workers. The findings showed that survival as a social worker involved an ongoing coping process that reconciled social structures and individual agency during daily practices. Chinese social workers combined the two interrelated processes of "inside-out" and "outside-in" to cope with the range of challenges they encountered. Specifically, "inside-out" was an internalized strength-oriented survival coping process, while "outside-in" was a resource-based survival coping process. Four interconnected processes were

identified as elaborating these two processes: a) initial survival motivation internalized from previous experience and social structures; b) improvement of professional capacities through the "learning by doing" approach; c) utilizing personal agency (inside-out) while performing the outside-in process; and d) utilizing personal agencies to reshape the way they survived as social workers and reproduce social structures. This study also showed that Chinese social workers preferred the inside-out process as a survival mode. Furthermore, the strength-oriented coping process was more influential than the resource-based coping process.

This dissertation advances the ToP through an examination of structure, field, position, capital, agency, and habitus based on Chinese social workers' narratives of coping and surviving in terms of structural contexts and daily practices. Implications for the newly developing social work profession in China and in other developing countries include understanding social structures and concentrating on promoting personal capacities during the survival coping processes employed by social workers. Implications for governments, non-profit organizations, and tertiary education in working with multi-faceted social structures are also discussed.

Chapter One: Introduction

Research background

Social work has been an emerging profession in mainland China since the national licensure of social workers came into effect in 2008. However, social work has existed in mainland China for almost four decades since the early 1980s, and has been growing exponentially (Bai, 2014; Levine & Kai, 2010; Wang, 2014; Yan & Tsui, 2007; Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002). There are currently some 330 and 148 approved university social work programs at Bachelor's and Master's levels, respectively (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2017). Social work service organizations (SWSO) are generally non-profit organizations (NPOs) in China. Following the government purchase of social services, the numbers of SWSOs and NPOs quickly increased to 10,000 and 810,000, respectively by the end of 2018 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2019). These SWSOs and NPOs have become vital work settings for Chinese social workers. Notably, the number of licensed social workers had increased significantly to 440,000 by the end of 2018 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2019).

Many social workers working in SWSOs and NPOs in China confront a range of challenges (Gao & Yan, 2015; Lam & Yan, 2015; Lam *et al.*, 2016; Niu & Haugen, 2019; Yan, 2017). First, many Chinese social workers working in NPOs, especially males, eventually choose not to work as social workers due to relatively low salaries (Wang, 2013). Second, many social workers in NPOs often lack professional experience and do not receive professional support. Hence, they may frequently consider leaving the field (An & Chapman, 2014; Bai, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Yan *et al.*, 2013). Third, the Chinese government usually regards social workers as an instrument of social governance and social harmony rather than as professional service providers. This undermines the professionalism of social workers and may lead many social workers to question their roles (Yan, 2013; Yan & Cheng, 2009). Fourth, NPOs, together with SWSOs, are part of the third sector, which is competing with governmental and commercial sectors for survival space and resources in China (Yan & Cheng, 2009; Yan *et al.*, 2009). In sum, Chinese social workers are facing multi-dimensional challenges, tensions or dilemmas at structural, organizational and individual levels, which

impact on their continued existence in this emerging profession. This in turn impacts on the sustainability and professionalization of social work in China.

Research on survival and foci

Despite rapid growth, the development of the emerging social work profession in China has been under-researched. Although existing studies have discussed multiple issues related to Chinese social workers (An & Chapman, 2014; Wang, 2013, 2014), little has been done to explore the survival of Chinese professional social workers, especially those who work in NPOs. To encourage more social work graduates to choose a social work career and maintain the number of social workers working in NPOs, further in-depth research is urgently required involving the exploration of Chinese social workers' survival narratives. The foci of this research therefore includes: a) the broad social structures as part of which social work is an emerging profession in China; b) the NPOs in which the majority of professional social workers are situated; and c) licensed social workers holding a social work diploma who have been working in NPOs for more than one year and are familiar with the exact roles and tasks of a social worker, including case work, group work, and program design.

Terminology of survival

In the online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2017), the word "survival", is defined as "a. the *act or fact* of living or continuing longer than another person or thing, and b. the *continuation* of life or existence". In the online *Oxford Dictionary* (2017), survival is defined as "the *state or fact of continuing* to live or exist, typically in spite of an accident, ordeal, or difficult circumstances", or "an *object or practice* that has continued to exist from an earlier time". These two definitions both refer to *the continuation of existence and object,* including practice, act, and life. Based on these definitions, "the continuation of existence in the social work profession" was addressed in this research.

In social work research, there is frequent discussion regarding the "survival" of service users or vulnerable groups in difficult circumstances. The literature explains how service users physically, mentally, or socially survive various difficulties and experiences of disasters, diseases, abuse, and so on (Grimes & Hou, 2013; Katz, 2013; Sinha, 2007; Tum, 2006). Several

studies have focused specifically on the survival of social workers, including social, emotional, physical and professional dimensions (Geisler *et al.*, 2019; Niu & Haugen, 2019), while others have explored how social workers deal with the challenges or difficulties they face (An & Chapman, 2014; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013), others have provided a survival guide for newly qualified social workers, (Cheung & Ngai, 2009; Donnellan, 2010; Galpin *et al.*, 2012; Ungar, 2004), have emphasized the need to provide social support (McCullagh, 1982), or have highlighted the need to ensure the work sustainability and effectiveness of the work of social workers (Curtis *et al.*, 2012).

In sum, the survival of social workers has been considered in terms of a) "staying or existing" in the profession (based on the dictionary definitions) and b) maintaining and continuing practice in a professional context. In this study, the "survival" of social workers has focused on two major facets: (a) the sustainability of working in social work positions, and (b) the maintenance of professional standards for licensed social workers. As such, survival in this study, was *not* simply understood as maintaining physical or material living. At an operational level, it was specified as: a) remaining in social work positions, especially working in NPOs or social work service organizations for five or more years; and b) feeling competent and motivated to fulfill their social work mission as professionals; c) applying appropriate adjustment, coping skills, and resilience as social work professionals; and d) maintaining well-being and hope as social work professionals.

Gaps in the literature

In the western literature, there have been studies on survival issues pertaining to social workers and practitioners in NPOs (Coffey *et al.*, 2004; Collins, 2008; Geisler *et al.*, 2019; Koeske & Koeske, 1989; Ravalier, 2018). However, several apparent research gaps remain regarding the survival of social workers.

First, previous studies have primarily focused on survival and related issues of social workers at the structural and organizational levels, such as issues related to policy, educational, professional, and organizational development. Diverse strategies and coping skills at an individual level have been examined from an "outsider" perspective (Geisler *et al.*, 2019;

Ravalier, 2018). For instance, social support has been a dominant discourse concerned with professionalizing social work and enhancing social workers' survival and development from an "outsider" perspective, the external support and resources are highlighted (Sánchez-Moreno *et al.*, 2015; Shi & Shi, 2013; Yürür & Sarikaya, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; Zhang, 2015) , but how social workers narrate and utilize their own abilities to survive is seldom considered.

Second, previous studies have usually applied quantitative methods based on empirical or positivist paradigms (Tesi *et al.*, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2019), such as work engagement related to social workers in different countries (Aiello & Tesi, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Geisler *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). There have been few in-depth qualitative investigations of social workers' professional survival. Hence, we know little about: a) the unique narratives of social workers regarding their survival as professionals in China or other countries; b) vital concerns and issues specific to social workers' survival; c) the strategies or skills needed to survive as professionals; d) the ways in which personal efforts and internalized motivations or capacities are applied to help social workers' daily practice.

Third, social workers generally possess capacities or competences in terms of empowerment, self-awareness, and resource integration and utilization that can help them to become progressively more resilient. In a comparative study of coping and occupational stress on the part of social workers and nurses in the US, Gellis (2002) found that social workers tend to employ more problem-focused coping strategies whereas nurses tend to employ emotion-focused coping strategies. Studies have shown that problem-focused coping is more effective at reducing stress in the work setting than emotion-focused coping (Latack *et al.*, 1995; Long, 1990; Zevon *et al.*, 1990). However, little is known about the individual and in-depth coping strategies employed by social workers. Moreover, there is almost no research on the survival of Chinese social workers in unique emerging professional contexts.

The significance of this research is therefore that it will help illuminate the way Chinese social workers survive in the mainland Chinese context. Moreover, it may provide a useful reference for social workers in other developing countries where social work is also an emerging profession.

Research questions

This dissertation aimed to answer a major research question: "What do Chinese social workers do to ensure their professional survival?" Three sub-questions related to this are as follows:

(1) What challenges do Chinese social workers face in the context of changing social structures, and what coping strategies do they utilize to cope with these challenges?

(2) What challenges do Chinese social workers encounter in their personal daily practice and what specific survival strategies do they use?

(3) What are the survival coping processes of social workers in mainland China?

Epistemological position

Based on a comparison of several general research paradigms (see below sub-heading) and my personal working experience (see below sub-heading), a social constructionism paradigm was adopted that emphasizes a *collaborative inquiry* process, and is based on the idea that knowledge is socially constructed or co-created through a process of interpersonal or social interactions within the external society (Gehart *et al.*, 2007; Ngai, 2014; Young & Collin, 2004). Social constructionists accept there are realities, concerns on both things in the real world, and ideas in our mind or perceptions, but realities are also relative and perceived multiply under different interpretations and social interactions (Burr, 2003; Weinberg, 2014), "…the focus of enquiry should be on interaction, processes, and social practices" (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377).

I consider there are multiple realities due to different interpretations based on human interactions in the objective society. In this respect, realities are subjective. The knowledge of survival of Chinese social workers needs to be socially constructed between the participants and myself. Meanwhile, I also believe that social interactions and daily practice reveal individual social workers' capacities or competences, which will constantly reproduce the objective social structures, and construct the knowledge of survival of Chinese social workers (Bourdieu, 1977; Burr, 1995).

A comparison of several general research paradigms

I would like to present a brief introduction to research paradigm, and compare several general research paradigms. I will then to elaborate on the reasons for choosing social constructionism as the research paradigm in this study.

Research paradigm

A research paradigm relates to holistic beliefs and agreements with regard to approaching reality and truth, and how problems should be understood and solved. Glesne (2011) defined a research paradigm as "…a framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to go about doing so" (p. 5).

The choices of a research paradigm play a vital role in conducting a research project. Kuhn (1962) stated that "…paradigms, a term that relates closely to normal science…provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research" (p.10). Usher (1996) stated that "…paradigms…function as maps or guides for scientific communities, determining important problems or issues for its members and defining acceptable theories or explanations, methods, and techniques to solve defined problems" (p. 15). Specifically, a consideration of research paradigms can be divided into ontology, epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods (Glesne, 2011; Guba, 1990; Usher, 1996). In brief:

- *Ontology:* Focuses on "What is reality or truth?" It is "…often used to refer to beliefs regarding reality or what kinds of things make up the world" (Glesne, 2011, p. 5). It concerns itself with whether and in what form the world exists. One common way is thinking of the world as a matter that is observable and measurable. This is considered to be realism. Another way is thinking of the world as matter-shaped, one that is constructed or interpreted through social interactions and the mind or perception. This is referred to as relative realism.

- *Epistemology:* Examines "How can we know reality or truth?" It "…used to refer to the study of the nature of knowledge" (Glesne, 2011, p. 5). One major source of knowledge is objectivist-oriented; reality can be objectively measured or measured in

a modified way. Another is subjectivist-oriented, whereby reality should be subjectively interpreted or as matter of perspective, or socially constructed, criticized and negotiated.

– *Theoretical framework:* Asks "What approaches do we use to know reality or truth?" It provides researchers with a structure that allows us to understand and explain a phenomenon, even to challenge the knowledge of a reality or truth, and why the knowledge exists according to the theory.

– *Methodology:* Concerned about "What epistemological position and procedures do researchers use to find out reality or truth?" Different methodologies might result in various data collection methods and data analysis.

– *Method:* Focuses on "What specific techniques, instruments or tools do researchers use to collect data in order to find out reality or truth?" Common data collection methods include questionnaires, experiments, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation.

Several typical research paradigms

Seven typical research paradigms can be briefly summarized (Babbie, 2016; Glesne, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Pan, 2003; Salma, 2015; Usher, 1996): positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, subjectivism, critical theory, and postmodernism (please refer to *Table 1.1* for more details on general research paradigms). The following general discussion of different research paradigms serves to provide the basis for the choice of social constructionism for the purposes of this dissertation.

1. Positivism

The term *positivism*, was coined by Auguste Comte, and was later regarded by social scientists as an approach to gain objective knowledge in such a way to change the social world. Positivists believe that there is a fixed reality that is external to people, which can be measured and known through objective measurements, observations, and well-designed experiments. Consequently, positivists are more likely to use *quantitative* methods (Glesne, 2011; Guba, 1990; Salma, 2015).

Table 1.1 General research paradigms

Research paradigms	Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Method
Positivism	Realism	Positivism objectivism	Positivism empiricism experimentalism deductive approach	Usually quantitative experimental and survey research	Sampling/measurement /questionnaire
Post-positivism	Critical realism	Modified objectivism	Post-positivism Quasi-experimentalism	Mostly quantitative (quasi)experimental and survey research	Mainly sampling/measurement /questionnaire/focus group, interview
Pragmatism	Relative realism	Pragmatism	Pragmatism/(Deweyan),research through design	Mixed research design-based research/action research	Combination of any methods
Interpretivism	Relative realism	Interpretivism subjectivist	Interpretivism, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics	A qualitative approach	In-depth interview, observation, case study, narrative, content analysis, etc.
Subjectivism	Relative realism	Subjectivism	Postmodernism (Post)structuralism discourse theory	Usually qualitative approach	Ethnography/auto-ethnography, semiotics, literary analysis, interview, observation, case study, narrative, etc.
Critical theory	Critical/historical/virtual realism	Criticism Subjectivism	Queer theory, Theory of empowerment Neo-Marxism	Usually qualitative approach	Discourse analysis, interviews, observation, (self)reflection critical discourse, critical ethnography, action research etc.
Postmodernism	Relativism	Skepticism De-constructivism	Postmodernism Post-structuralism Post-colonialism	Usually qualitative approach	Discourse analysis, interviews, observation, etc.

(Table 2 is adapted from Crotty (1998, p. 256), Pan (2003, pp. 38-59), and Salma (2015))

The positivistic approach is mostly applied in research adopting a realism perspective allowing researchers to figure out correlations or social facts statistically, rather than through in-depth interpretations or descriptions. A positivistic approach is not suitable for this study, since the overarching goal is to explore Chinese social workers' narratives of survival. As a result, a positivistic approach cannot meet this goal as it focuses on a positivist perspective of accessing linear correlation with reality instead of deeply interpretating the truth from an "outside" perspective.

2. Post-positivism

Post-positivism, also referred to as *logical empiricism*, was developed in the 1930-1940s. Most post-positivists believe that the world is not knowable with any certainty, so there is no absolute reality. But post-positivists believe that researchers can use scientific methods and techniques to reduce the influential factors leading to an accuracy in terms of reality, and to allow them to use "good enough" objective facts. Similar to positivists, post-positivists are more likely to use *quantitative methods*, especially modified ways such as quasi-experiment approaches, to measure reality (Glesne, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Salma, 2015), and may also use qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews (Glesne, 2011; Pan, 2003).

Even though post-positivists may use both quantitative and qualitative methods to consider "good enough" objective facts, I will not apply post-positivism because I believe that the lived-experience of Chinese social workers' survival is not an absolute reality, and that it is socially-constructed by human interactions with the "objective" society. So, the post positivist approach is inconsistent with my perspective in this study, since I believe reality may be multiply-interpreted based on individual positions. That is, reality is relative and is socially-constructed through social interactions.

3. Pragmatism

Pragmatism arose in the 1870s based on a relative realism ontology. Charles Peirce is the representative philosopher of pragmatism. Pragmatists believe that reality is constantly renegotiated, debated, and interpreted, and therefore the best method to use is the one that could solve diverse problems. Thoughts and ideas are instruments or tools for problem solving and

actions through actually testing in terms of human experiences, given that the objective of pragmatism is to change the universe world (Crotty, 1998; Salma, 2015).

> *"It appears, then, that the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows: Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object"* (Peirce, 2011, p. 176*)*.

Pragmatists adopt a vivid problem-solving approach; they may engage in actions or experiments during the process of research, and find efficient solutions to social problems. However, a pragmatic approach is not consistent with this study, since this is neither an action research nor an experimental study. Rather, the objectives of this study is to understand the survival of Chinese social workers based on their lived-experience, and not only focuses on figuring out the solutions to survive the social work profession in China. Another critical issue is that I will apply survival discussions to philosophy, and not only on the practical level (Andrews, 2012).

4. Interpretivism

Interpretivism was a contribution from Immanuel Kant, and was subsequently developed by several idealists including Wilhem Dilthey, Max Weber, and Edmund Husserl. Idealists believe that the world is not independent of ideas (mind), and that "…the world is always interpreted through mind" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 143). The idea of interpretation is understanding from the inside (Harrington, 2005). Consequently, interpretivists consider there is no single reality or truth. Reality needs to be interpreted or constructed through interacting and talking with people in certain social contexts. Social scientists holding an interpretivist viewpoint prefer to focus on in-depth, participant observations, narratives or life histories, and interactions with people. Therefore, they are more likely to use *qualitative methods* to reflect those multiple realities. Interpretivism is a philosophical paradigm based on a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998; Glesne, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and hermeneutics are several common approaches that are frequently found the heading of interpretivism.

An Interpretivistic approach emphasizes the importance of subjective ideas or mind in the process of interpreting reality, and may result in an in-depth and meaningful conversation or interpretation when describing reality. However, the interpretivistic approach is anti-positivism, and refuses to accept a reality independent or external to the mind, including social structures, policies, and so on. This does not match my perspective in this study. Moreover, I am interested in examining the survival of Chinese social workers, which is socially-constructed through social interactions. An interpretivist approach does not match the intentions of this study.

5. Subjectivism

Subjectivists believe that reality is what we perceive to be real, and subjectivism is a typical subjective epistemological approach. Subjectivists claim that knowledge cannot exist without individuals constructing it. Knowledge is essentially *subjective*, as each individual constructs his/her world in a unique way, depending on his/her background, the social forces acting on them, and so on. It is the constructivist view (based on relativism and subjectivism) that makes most sense to us. One of the key lessons this teaches us is that every learner is individual, and will approach learning in his/her own way, and construct meaning that is unique to them (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Salma, 2015). *Constructivism*, as one typical subjectivist approach, claims that individuals construct the world of experience through cognitive processes, i.e. people construct an internal understanding of reality by interactions between people and within environments. It denies the acceptance of an objective reality instead of a perceived subjective reality.

Subjectivists assert that an individual's subjective perception, idea or mind play a vital role during the process of constructing and obtaining a knowledge of reality. Obviously, this does not accept an external reality independent of the mind, whatever the objective social structures or society under consideration. However, this study believes that there is an external reality, i.e. subjective reality would be created through social interactions, and the knowledge of reality about the survival of Chinese social workers is socially constructed as a result of

human interactions. In this respect, subjectivism is inconsistent with the epistemological position.

6. Critical theory

Critical theory is based on a historical or virtual realism ontology. Glesne (2011) reckoned that critical theory "…critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions" (p. 9). Criticists believe that there is no universal truth since specific reality can only be constructed partially in local and historical contexts. Virtual reality is a socially-constructed entity that is under constant internal influence (Babbie, 2016; Pan, 2003; Salma, 2015), and is "…shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethic, and gender values crystallized over time" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 168). Criticists work to criticize "…distorting ideologies and the associated structures, mechanisms", and to assist them, especially oppressed or marginalized groups like female and racial groups, to stay at places where they find out how conditions serve them (Glesne, 2011, pp. 9-10). Critical theory, queer theory, and feminist theory are several typical perspectives.

Critical theory has several distinct advantages: it mostly focuses on oppressed or marginalized groups through a dialogic approach, leads a research topic and discussion with regard to social injustice, criticizes and reconstructs social injustice, and finally achieves the goal of empowerment. In this study, the critical approach will be useful to further discussions of linking survival of Chinese social workers to related social injustice or policy issues, but the major task of this study is not to apply a critical approach in order to criticize or reconstruct survival issues. I will instead employ a social constructionism approach to examine the social construction of social workers.

7. Postmodernism

Postmodernism, as well as poststructuralism and postcolonialism, are quite different from critical theory, and are regarded as *post* traditions, "…the term *post* is more than a marker of time, it refers to break with the past and to regeneration and constellation of new ideas and social practices" (Glesne, 2011, p. 14). Even though these perspectives are distinct from each other, they "…can be described as deconstruction" (Glesne, 2011, p. 14), so their *post* traditions

share similar philosophies: they insist on a deconstructive approach, remain skeptical about beliefs, knowledge and so on. So they focus on neither questioning about causality or meaning, nor constructing the social world. Instead of deconstructing or reconstructing it, several key concepts are highlighted in these *post* traditions: plurality, indeterminacy, and fragmentation.

In this study, these *post-* perspectives are apparently unsuitable, because social work in China is regarded as a new profession since the national licensure of social worker was only effective in 2008. This study aims to figure out the knowledge of survival of social workers, which is believed to be socially-constructed by interactions between social workers and other stakeholders. The main purpose of this study is to construct the knowledge of survival of social workers, not to deconstruct it through the deconstructive and skeptical perspectives noted above.

Social constructionism: The research paradigm of this study

1. The epistemological position of this study

Based on the above discussions, the research paradigm of social constructionism was employed in this study. Consequently, I accept that there are objective social structures, policies, rules, or society. These objective realities are external and independent of the mind or perception of Chinese social workers. These would be internalized into social workers' daily practice, and influence their survival as social work professionals in the Chinese context (Burr, 1995; Young & Collin, 2004). On the other hand, I am of the opinion that there are multiple realities due to different interpretations based on human interactions in the objective society. In this respect, realities are subjective. The knowledge of survival on the part of Chinese social workers needs to be socially-constructed between the participants and myself. Meanwhile, I also believe that social interactions and daily practice present the individual social worker's capacities or competences. These will constantly reproduce the objective social structures, and construct the knowledge of survival of Chinese social workers (Bourdieu, 1977; Burr, 1995). The following section will further elucidate the tenets of social constructionism in relation to my epistemological position.

2. Social constructionism as the epistemology of this study

In their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger & Luckmann (1967) defined reality as "quality of life", that is perceived to be independent of the individual mind. It can be categorized as the objective and subjective forms based on human perception. Almost all elements in society may be regarded as belonging to one certain form of reality. Berger & Luckmann (1967) also regarded society as existing both as objective and subjective reality, and as an "ongoing dialectical process" (p. 129), in which the individual and the collective may conduct social interactions in order to continue continuous constructing or reconstructing a specific version of reality, including society (Wyckoff, 1994, p. 5).

Debates on how to define and apply social constructionism still exist in academia, but in order to further understand social constructionism as applied in this study, it is necessary to clarify the differences between *constructivism*, *interpretivism* and *social constructionism*. *Constructivism* claims that individuals construct the world of experience through cognitive processes, i.e. people construct an internal understanding of reality by interactions between people and within environments, one that denies the acceptance of an objective reality. However, social constructionism focuses on the social or external, rather than on the individual or internal perspective. It shifts the focus from reality that is constructed internally through the process of learning and perception, to a reality that is constructed externally through the process of social interaction. In constructivism, the individual's cognition and ideas plays a dominant role during construction of reality, but in social constructionism it is social interaction that play this role (Young & Collin, 2004). Social constructionism is also different to interpretivism. Generally, *interpretivism* refuses to accept an objective reality, and concentrates on the process of how meanings are interpreted, negotiated, and constructed subjectively. So social constructionists would combine the roles of being a realist and being a constructionist (Andrews, 2012; Schwandt, 2003).

"The idea that disease can and does exist as an independent reality is compatible with the social constructionist view. The naming of disease and indeed what constitutes disease is arguably a different matter and has the potential to be socially

constructed… It is in this sense that disease is socially constructed but importantly

makes no claims about its ontological status" (Andrews, 2012, p. 43).

In this study, social constructionism was regarded as an epistemological approach to that focuses on how knowledge is socially-constructed through human interactions within the external society. Moreover, "socially constructed" refers to the historical and cultural location of that construction. Social constructionism accepts that there are realities, concerns about both things in the real world, and ideas in our mind or that are perceived. However, realities are also relative and perceived to multiply under different interpretations and social interactions (Burr, 2003; Weinberg, 2014). Language "…constitutes rather than reflects reality, and is both a pre-condition for thought and a form of social action", and "…the focus of enquiry should be on interaction, processes, and social practices" (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377).

"It is concerned with how knowledge is constructed and understood. It has therefore

an epistemological not an ontological perspective… Society is viewed as existing both

as a subjective and an objective reality. Meaning is shared, thereby constituting a

taken-for-granted reality" (Andrews, 2012, p. 39).

We may explore our understanding of social constructionism in terms of two key components: unstable realism and relativism, i.e. objective and subjective reality, and human interactions or social construction, i.e. social reality.

2.1 Unstable realism and relativism--Objective vs subjective reality

Social constructionism deems there is an existence of reality, or subtle realism. Social structures in society exist objectively. They are an objective reality that is independent of human perception. As Andrews (2012) submitted "…[social constructionists] do not deny the existence of reality…social constructionism accepts that there is an objective reality" (p. 44). Nevertheless, scholars also criticize reality's instability and self-evident when they accept an existence of reality (Bury, 1986; Schwandt, 2003). In this respect, critiques of realism lead to a relative reality (or relativism) in social constructionism. Reality may be changed or

constructed, has multiple interpretations, even that "…social world is constructed by social processes and relational practices" (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377), i.e. reality means "subjective" reality. So some scholars have criticized social constructionism is being anti-essentialist and anti-realist (Burr, 1995). Actually, social constructionism focuses more on knowledge, i.e. how knowledge is socially-constructed through interactions, instead of on the ontology of reality itself. Whether social constructionists accept an objective reality or instable reality (relativism or subjective reality), they insist that "…being a realist is not inconsistent with being a constructionist" (Andrews, 2012, p. 40).

"What knowledge is, and the comparative value of the social sciences for illuminating knowledge as an empirically observable and researchable phenomenon rather than a merely imagined normative ideal"(Bryan & Aymer, 1996, p. 282).

As discussed above, social constructionism has a relativistic tendency (Andrews, 2012; Hammersley, 1992; Young & Collin, 2004), since it believes that there are multiple realities (or subjective realities) under different interpretations. These are based on social interactions in various contexts. So, knowledge is a subjective reality because it is socially-constructed by human interactions. Realities exist relatively or subjectively; the truth is socially-constructed during the process of human interactions.

*"[Social constructionism] claim that we are not just individually encapsulated information processors, but are inherently social beings who go through a remarkable process of becoming enculturated adults and experience the world in all its glories and disappointments: simply put, we are humans who are constructed though our inherent immersion in a shared experiential world with other people" (*Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 4*).*

"While [we]…do not deny the existence of reality, … maintain that the meaning of reality is socially constructed… Relativism maintains that because there are multiple realities, there are multiple interpretations of those realities" (Andrews, 2012, p. 44).

Moreover, with regard to the combination of objective reality and subjective reality, Wyckoff (1994) argued that: "…objective reality is believed to have an existence that is independent of human perception. Subjective reality, on the other hand, is born of human perception and ratified through social consensus. Once particular versions of objective and subjective existence are combined into a coherent, workable composite, this composite begins to establish itself as the primary determinant of what counts as 'real'" (p. 4).

2.2 Human interaction or social construction--Social reality

Social constructionism emphasizes social interactions between people and how such interactions socially construct reality (Lock & Strong, 2010; Young & Collin, 2004). Social construction is "…the product of specific socio-historical or social interactional processes" (Weinberg, 2009, p. 283). Social interactions play a vital role during the process of socially constructing the primary determinant of reality. So, the key focus of social constructionism is to disclose the ways in which individuals and groups engage in the construction of their perceived social reality, and through which they continuously construct the dominant version of "reality" via human interactions, specifically, including the ways which social-phenomena are developed, institutionalized, known, internalized, and made into tradition through human interactions. In this respect, reality definitely means "social reality" in social constructionism. Moreover, Wyckoff (1994) demonstrated that "This dominant version of 'reality' (established and maintained through social interaction) manifests the communally-accepted norms for knowledge and behavior into which any individual is inducted and which must be internalized by the individual in order for her or him to become a full and proper 'member' of the society. 'Society', however, holds the upper hand." (p. 5)

"Social construction is usually meant to convey that something that has been widely considered beyond the scope of social influence is actually the product of specific sociohistorical or social interactional processes" (Bryan & Aymer, 1996, p. 283).

17

"Social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practices people engage in as the focus of enquiry" (Andrews, 2012, p. 46).

In this study, as per the above discussions about social constructionism research paradigm, *a relativist ontology* indicates there is an existence of reality that is independent of the mind or perception of social workers. This external society including social structures, policies, and rules and creates an objective reality. At the same time, there are multiple or social realities of interpretations based on social workers' social interactions and daily practice. *A social constructionism epistemological position* insists that the knowledge of survival on the part of Chinese social workers is socially-constructed through social interactions within society. The external society, including social structures, policies and rules is an objective reality for social workers. But these external factors will be internalized by social workers and will influence their subjective daily practice. Through social interactions and daily practice, social workers will reconstruct these external factors.

The researcher's personal working experience

My personal social work study experience and more than 15 years of work experience in the social work field as both researcher and practitioner have contributed the motivation to conduct this research. I have had four major roles that need to be elaborated and related to the current research: social work learner, social work practitioner, NPO manager, and social work researcher and educator.

First, I graduated in 2002 with Bachelor's degree in social work from a university in China and obtained a Master's degree in social work in from university in the United States at 2010. I directly experienced the development of social work education in China, and knew the extent to which the curriculums met the needs of intending social workers, and to what extent the social work knowledge and skills I learned at university could be employed in practice later. Actually, I had a similar social work study experience as have the participants in this study.

Moreover, I have a comparative understanding of social work education between in both China and the US, which would contribute insights to dialogue with the participants.

Second, I worked as social work practitioner before and after the national licensure of social workers became effective in 2008, I felt that being a social worker at that time was definitely tough and challenging, since I had to solve many different problems by myself given that I had not received much enough effective social work education and was unable to seek sufficient professional support in during my daily practice. I felt so helpless, and I definitely struggled.

Third, I have been working as a founder and director of a social work service organization in Xiamen for more than three years. Prior to that I had been working for more than seven years as directors of two social work service organizations in Chengdu and Xiamen, China. As a manager of social work service organizations, I encountered a high turnover rate on the part of social workers, and many multi-dimensional challenges to both frontline social workers and project managers or officers. I also struggled in terms of pursuing the strategies and coping skills needed for maintaining a longer survival for social workers in the NPOs I was responsible for.

Fourth, as a social work university researcher and educator, I have experienced and have been highly engaged in the whole social work development process since the beginning of the 21st Century, especially the fast development of social work professionalization in China since 2008. In previous research, I interviewed many different social workers, NPO practitioners and leaders at various levels and in various service fields. I also closely worked with more than 500 social workers and NPO practitioners or leaders at the national level by providing capacity building workshops, trainings, consultation, and supervision. I was deeply impressed by the difficulties and challenges they faced. Throughout I frequently wondered about how they managed to remain in this emerging profession, and to continued work professionally. I came to form the opinion that these aspects would be worthy of further study.

Theoretical framework

Why chose the theory of practice?

The theory of practice (ToP) was employed as a theoretical framework for two main reasons.

First, it is consistent with the epistemological position of social constructionism which I adopted for this study (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Weinberg, 2009; Zheng, 2014). Pierre Bourdieu is the major contributor to the ToP. Derived from a structure-oriented approach (Harrington, 2005), it focuses on understanding reality in terms of social interactions within objective society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Weinberg, 2009; Zheng, 2014). Bourdieu described the ToP as "*constructivist structuralism*" or "*structuralist constructivism*" (Harrington, 2005; Zheng, 2014). "Structuralism" is used to recognize objective social structures that are independent of an agent's mind and perception and can guide and constrain the agent's practice. It shares the same epistemological position as social constructionism in that it regards social structures as an objective reality that can also be reproduced through action or agency. Conversely, "habitus" are socially constructed through interactions and daily practice. In this respect, knowledge is socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Burr, 2003; Weinberg, 2009).

Second, the ToP reconciles the objectivist (with an emphasis on structure) with the subjectivist (with an emphasis on agency), which aligns with the goal of this study, which is to understand the survival strategies employed by Chinese social workers. Specifically, the ToP focuses on social structure and agency, and argues that "…social structure is reproduced by the actions of individuals through the mediation of rules, roles, and other resources" (Harrington, 2005, p. 215). Unlike other social theories, one of the key features of the ToP is that it balances individual actions and social structure. In this research, I focus on the "habitus" of social workers, which "…compromises perceptual structures and embodied dispositions which organize the way individuals see the world and act in it" (Harrington, 2005, p. 222). Additionally, this theory focuses on field, cultural capital and practice, and explains how habitus can effectively link individuals to their positions in different fields. As Walther (2014)

argued: "…structures act as rules and determine and condition individuals' thoughts and behaviors…the voluntarism or agency perspective rather suggests that individuals are completely free in their choices and always have an array of alternatives" (p. 7).

"Structure and agency are often described as the 'objective' and 'subjective' sides of social reality. The 'objective' elements refer to those aspects of society that are not reducible to individual knowledge or activity, while the 'subjective' aspects refer precisely to individuals and their personal capabilities" (Harrington, 2005, p. 216).

The ToP aims to achieve a reconciliation between structure and agency, macro and micro, in order to find a way to balance individual actions and social structures (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 2005; Harrington, 2005), is "a synthesis of interactionist and interpretive thinking on the one hand, with its emphasis on agency, understanding, and subjective meanings, and functionalist and structuralist thinking on the other hand, with its focus on the operation of social systems and the resilience of objective structures" (Harrington, 2005, p. 218). The ToP explains how social structures are reproduced by individual agency, and describe agents in real life scenarios (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 2005; Harrington, 2005). Bourdieu attempts to overcome "dualities" (p. 7), and to "…explain the reproduction of social structures through the agency of individuals acting in conformity with cultural rules and resources" (Harrington, 2005, p. 217).

Key concepts of the theory of practice

Several key concepts drawn from the ToP guided this study: structure, field, position, capital, agency, practice, and habitus, as shown in Table 1.2.

Structure refers to external social structures, social institutions or systems, and the generalized features of social life.

Field refers to "…the structure of social relations where an individual (agent) is located", and "…in a field, groups struggle for supremacy and social distinctiveness" (Harrington, 2005, p. 223). Walther (2014) postulated that "…fields are places of power relations where practices of agents are not arbitrary" (p. 9). Fields are spaces of practice constituted by a unique

combination of social relations, rules and capitals (including economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) (Bourdieu, 2005; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993; Reed-Danahay, 2005; Swartz, 1997; Walther, 2014). Bourdieu suggested the field is a structure, an individual's position is located in fields in which distinct rules are engrained or rigid; however, fields are relatively autonomous when they are embedded into social structures (Bourdieu, 1977, 1996).

Table 1.2: Concepts, description, and operationalization

Concepts	Description	Operationalization
Structure	External social structures, social institutions or systems, generalized features of social life.	Policies, organizational or institutional management, rules, ethics, mission, norms, standards related to social work practice.
Field	The structure of social relations where an individual is located. Fields are places of power relations where the practices of agents are not arbitrary.	Including NPO field, community field, media field, governmental field, work field, non-work field, entertainment field, and organizational field related to social workers.
Position	Social status in a social hierarchy is a product of individuals' economic capital and cultural capital combined.	The social status of social workers in the Chinese context, where they conduct social interactions with relevant stakeholders.
Capital	Capital refers to particular resources in fields, and includes four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.	Social workers' salary and welfare (economic), family, Bachelor's degree and educational experience and professional status (cultural), partnership, social relations and networks (social), recognition and honors (symbolic).
Agency	Subjective ability or capacity of human individuals.	Social workers' capacities and abilities in the Chinese context.
Habitus	The internalization of externality and the externalization of internality.	The internalization of external factors such as social structures, norms, standards and so on. The externalization of internal factors such as individual dispositions and capacities.
Practice	Individual strategy is based on the dispositions inherent in habitus and guided by habitus. Practice is the combination of habitus, field, and capital.	Individual social workers' daily practice of survival as professionals. This is related to social structures, fields, forms of capital surrounding social workers, position, and agency.

(Table 1.1 modified from Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986, 2005); Bourdieu & Johnson (1993); Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992); Harrington (2005); Walther (2014))

Position refers to "…social status in the social hierarchy, and is a product of individuals' economic capital and cultural capital taken together" (Harrington, 2005, p. 224). Each field consists of a network of positions.

Capital refers to particular resources in fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1986) identified four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. *Economic capital* is related to an individual's fortune and income. *Cultural capital* refers to status and assets in the social order obtained through conducting individual cultural practices. It is "…transferred by family and education and maybe institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications" (Walther, 2014, p. 10) and motivates both individual actions and cultural authority. Cultural capital exists in three forms: the incorporated, the objectivized, and the institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Individuals located in different positions possess distinct forms of cultural capital based on their cultural practices. An individual's agency is "…prescribed by the culture of which they are members" (Harrington, 2005, p. 222). *Social capital* denotes an individual's social relations. *Symbolic capital* refers to the individual's honors and recognition that comes from external and internal sources. Cultural capital is regarded as "…the primary cause for status and relative positions within a social field" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 10; Walther, 2014). Different types of capital are affiliated with individual positions in different fields, social relations and different types of capital are part of individual's habitus.

Agency refers to the subjective ability or capacity of human individuals or agents.

Habitus is the core concept in Bourdieu's theory of practice. Bourdieu (1990) defined "habitus" in his book, *The Logic of Practice*, as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (p. 108). In this respect, habitus is transposable and would structure or reproduce structures, but it is more or less exercised unconsciously. Specifically, habitus was denoted as "…the permanent internalization of the social order in the

human body" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2001, p. 130) and refers to a series of dispositions that individuals or groups possess. Habitus "…compromises perceptual structures and embodied dispositions which organize the way individuals see the world and act in it" (Harrington, 2005, p. 222). Additionally, it is also regarded as "…a kind of grammar of actions which serves to differentiate one class from another in social 'fields'", a system of "schemas" for the production of particular practices, and the articulation of dispositions in social "fields" where the "positions" construct "a system of relations based on stakes (power) …" (Lechte, 2008, p. 68). In this respect, habitus combines external social factors and internal individual dispositions, and thus denotes "…the internalization of externality, and the externalization of internality" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72), i.e. as "structured structures" and "structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 108). Common belief or popular opinion ("Doxa") refers to deeply internalized societal or field-specific presuppositions (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 37; Hargreaves, 1998, pp. 66-67). Bourdieu (1977) explained that habitus is "…the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (p. 72). It guides an individual's strategy or unconscious practice through ways of investing different types of capital in fields. As such, habitus is related to the "field" in which an individual's position originates (Walther, 2014).

According to Bourdieu's theory of practice, habitus is specific in different fields, individuals will locate themselves in positions, and an individual's habitus is the product of their positions in different fields. Habitus "…is not simply a reflection of a prior economic base, it reveals the shared commonality of particular groups who mobilize themselves and exclude on the bases of that culture", it also "…facilitates the reproduction of social structures by imposing certain dispositions on the individual" and investing capital in fields (Bourdieu, 1977; Harrington, 2005, pp. 223,226; Walther, 2014). Habitus links individuals to their positions (possessing cultural capital) in different fields (possessing objective status) and guides practice, however, individuals seem not always easy and flexible to transfer habitus from one field to another.

Practice is "…based on the dispositions inherent in habitus" and is expanded as "strategic improvisations – [i.e. strategies] – against a background of doxa…" (Parkin, 1997, p. 376).

An individual's agency or practice reproduces habitus and social structures through their appropriate actions (agency) (Harrington, 2005). The interplay between habitus, field and practice was expressed by Bourdieu in the following equation (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101; Walther, 2014, p. 14). The key concepts are operationalized in the following section.

$$[(habitus) (capital) + field] = practice$$

Operationalization of the theory of practice

By operationalizing the key concepts of the ToP to the survival of Chinese social workers, this study focused on their *survival practice*; specifically, how their habitus is formed and influences their survival practice. It therefore examined the ways in which individual social workers combine their habitus, fields, and capital to present their subjectivity and reshape their habitus to survive as social work professionals. The application of the ToP to examine the survival practices of Chinese social workers (*Table 1.1)*, shows that each social worker can have his/her own fields and subfields consisting of diverse stakeholders (e.g., local government officials, media, NPO leaders or supervisors, NPO colleagues, sponsors, friends, family members, and so on), positions (e.g., service provider, facilitator, advocator, and so on), and capital (e.g. financial, cultural, social, and symbolic) (Bourdieu, 1977). These subfields are strongly based on the interactions and distinct social relations with various stakeholders, including the NPO field, the community field, the media field, the government field, the work field, the non-work field, the entertainment field, the religion field, and so on. Each field has its own characteristics, rules, dynamics, and principles or norms (Walther, 2014). Diverse forms of capital are correspondingly allocated in each field. For instance, economic capital (e.g., salary and welfare), cultural capital (e.g., organizational atmosphere and position status), social capital (e.g., partnership, social relations, and networks) and symbolic capital (e.g., social recognition and honors), would be combined in order to be allocated to the NPO field, whereas social capital (e.g., informal relations with friends and classmates) would be allocated to the entertainment field. Social workers would position themselves in terms of where they are located in social spaces or fields, and they would invest in certain forms of capital to

functionalize these positions during their daily actions (Bourdieu, 1986; Walther, 2014). Conversely, all external factors in terms of social structures and fields, such as policies, institutional and organizational management, rules, ethics, mission, norms, standards of social work development, and so on, would be internalized into the habitus of social workers to potentially organize and guide their daily agency or actions. More importantly, when social workers feel dominant or are dominated within different fields or subfields, various strategies based on individual subjectivity are applied to reshape their habitus and to reproduce fields. Thus, individual agency or actions have the subjective functions of reshaping habitus and motivate the social worker to build their own practice. Social workers' survival practice, along with individual agency or actions, is related to resilience, adjustment and coping, well-being and hope, as well as to the externalization of internality through a mission, ethics and values, and policies. Therefore, both external and internal factors impact on social workers' survival practice; however, individual agency or actions play a key role during the process of reshaping habitus and reproducing social fields or structures. In sum, social workers' survival practice consists of habitus, fields, and different forms of capital.

Moreover, the habitus of social workers involves both the internalization of the externality, and the externalization of the internality. In this study, the internalization of the externality of Chinese social workers means that they are in similar social fields and share a similar habitus. This would generally guide their daily practice in different fields (where different forms of capital are allocated), and they would have general social behaviors they use for survival. Conversely, the externalization of internality involves applying habitus to the level of the individual social worker, although practice will vary due to each social worker's different agency and subjectivity. Consequently, their actions or behaviors are diverse and will reshape habitus, and reproduce social fields or even structures. Therefore, for social workers, habitus is "durable, but not eternal" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133) and is shaped or reproduced with under changeable individual agency and daily practice, as well as involving the internalization of new rules or factors in social fields. This process will contribute to the creation of new subjectivities on the part of social workers.

Research design

Methodology

Based on the social constructionism research paradigm, several key guidelines or principles were highlighted in this study: collaboration, transparency, dialogue, contextualization, and reflexivity (Anderson, 1997; Burr, 2003; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Glesne, 2011; Haene, 2010; Ng, 2016; Ngai, 2014). In accordance with social constructionism, I took the view that narratives of survival among Chinese social workers are socially constructed or co-created by myself and the social workers. I played several roles in this study, including: a) the learner or non-expert actively learning about social workers' survival from conversations with social workers; b) the facilitator who consciously facilitate and motivate the participants to conduct in-depth discussions of their experience by asking guiding questions or "miracle questions" (Shazer, 2017; Sheppard, 2017); and c) the contributor of meanings, ideas, and knowledge during interactions with social workers.

Methods

This study employed *qualitative research* methods. This is consistent with the social constructionist epistemological position as it involves the subjective interpretation of participants' narratives and can be usefully be applied to social work research (Payne & Payne, 2004; Reamer, 1993). *In-depth interviews* and *focus groups* were the two methods used to collect data (Halmi, 1996; Ng, 2016; Ngai, 2014). In-depth interviews were the main method, while focus groups were used to conduct a participant review of the major findings.

Study sites

Three Chinese cities were *purposefully sampled* as research sites: Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Xiamen. The selection criteria for these research sites included their *representativeness*, their *diversity*, the *sufficiency* of eligible participants, and *feasibility* with regard to data collection (Glesne, 2011; Gringeri *et al.*, 2013; Halmi, 1996; Hannu *et al.*, 2011). Shenzhen is recognized as supporting the development of the most advanced social work in China and is the city closet to Hong Kong. It has therefore had the advantage of frequent communication and cooperation with Hong Kong social workers in the past decade. Shanghai was the first pilot

city in mainland China to develop professional social work and use licensed social workers in the judicial service field. This began in 2003, and therefore pre-dated the national licensure of social workers in 2008. Although social work in Xiamen is less developed than in Shenzhen and Shanghai, it is the nearest city to Taiwan, with which it has engaged in on-going exploration and meaningful interaction. Incidentally, I have established professional and personal networks in these three cities and was able to recruit an adequate number of eligible social workers. In total, 49 social workers were interviewed.

Participants and selection criteria

Forty-nine Chinese social workers were invited to participate in individual in-depth interviews, and three focus group discussions were conducted. The inclusion criteria for both the interviews and the focus groups were as follows: participants must be licensed social workers holding a social work diploma with more than five years' social work experience, and have worked at NPOs for more than one year. Various service areas and categories of social workers were represented, including those serving the elderly, children, youth, family service, community service fields, who took the form of frontline social workers (FSW), project officers or managers (PM), and organizational managers (OM). Gender and marital status were also duly considered.

The demographic information was collected using a simple guide (see *Appendix 1*). Demographic details of the participants are as shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Demographic details of the participants

Demographic information	Number of participants (N=49)	Percentage of participants (%)
City		
Shanghai	15	30.6
Shenzhen	16	32.7
Xiamen	18	46.9
Gender		
Male	8	16.3
Female	41	83.7
Marital status		
Married	31	63.3

Unmarried	18	36.7
Age		Average: 32.7
Years of working as a social worker		Average: 8.6
Stage		
Organizational Manager (OM)		22
Project Manager (PM)		25+22=47
Front-line Social Worker (FSW)		2+25+22=49
Monthly income (RMB)		
4999 or less	1	2
5000-5999	8	16.3
6000-6999	7	14.3
7000-7999	9	18.7
8000-8999	11	22.4
9000-8999	2	4.1
10000 or above	11	22.4

There were 15, 16 and 18 participants from Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xiamen, respectively, comprising eight males and 41 females; 31 participants were married, 18 were single, and none were divorced. The average age and years spent working as social workers were 32.7 and 8.6, respectively. Twenty-two participants were categorized as organizational managers (OM), including a director and deputy director, while all OMs had experience as the stages of front-line social workers (FSW) and project officers or managers (PM), 22 participants' experiences, i.e. survival narratives about challenges and coping strategies corresponding to the FSW and PM stages, were also coded into each stage respectively during data coding process. Twenty-five participants were listed as being at the PM stage, either as a supervisor, project or departmental director, regional manager, or service center director, and all had experienced the FSW stage, 25 participants' experiences, i.e. survival narratives about challenges and coping strategies corresponding to the FSW stage, were also coded into this stage during data coding process. Two participants were at the FSW stage. All participants narrated the survival experience of the FSW stage. Therefore, during data coding process, the number of narratives about the survival experiences of the FSW stage was 49, the number of narratives about the survival experiences of the PM stage was 47, the number of narratives about the survival experiences of the OM stage was 22.

During the recruitment process, I used my *personal and professional networks* in the sampled research sites to recruit the participants (Patton, 2002). Simultaneously, a *snowball* strategy was also applied. First, I invited eligible participants in my personal networks to participate via telephone, email or WeChat; at the same time, I asked four participants serving as gatekeepers in Shenzhen and Shanghai to introduce eligible colleagues and friends based on their own networks, following which I then invited these recommended participants.

The data collection process was divided into two phases: phase one comprised 49 individual in-depth interviews, and phase two comprised three focus group discussions. Each phase had different foci, as shown in Table 1.4. The initial interview questions (see *Appendix 2*) were created based on the ToP and were sent to participants for revision and feedback. Regarding the participants' survival in social work, the survival stories recounted by participants during the in-depth interviews started with tertiary education and encompassed their entire career.

All interviews recordings were transcribed, following which the participants were asked to provide revisions and offer feedback (see *Appendix 3*). After the preliminary findings had been generated, three parallel focus groups were carried out in the three cities of Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xiamen to report on the findings and to obtain feedback from participants. Twenty of the 49 interviewees took part in the focus group discussions.

Table 1.4: Two phases of data collection

Phase	Methods	Purpose/Focus
Phase One	49 in-depth interviews in Shenzhen, Shanghai and Xiamen	To focus on individual survival stories of Chinese social workers, and the in-depth concerns, challenges, and coping strategies employed in the pursuit of survival in the social work profession in China.
Phase Two	3 focus groups in Shenzhen, Shanghai and Xiamen	To report preliminary findings, obtain feedback (e.g., similarities and differences), and discover new ideas or themes pertaining to the survival of Chinese social workers.

The verbatim transcripts of the in-depth interviews and focus groups totaled 1.6 million and 80,000 words, respectively. The NVivo 12 Plus software program was used to assist

preliminary and secondary coding, searching for and naming themes, and writing up the research. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data, and comprised six key phases: 1) familiarization with the collected data; 2) generating initial codes and collating data into labelled groups; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes and generating a thematic map; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ng, 2016; Ngai, 2014).

This study complied with four ethical principles for research on human beings: informed consent, autonomy or self-determination, privacy and confidentiality, and no harm (Gates *et al.*, 2001; Ng, 2016; Ngai, 2014). After revising the initial interview questions following feedback from participants (see *Appendix 4*), individual in-depth interviews were conducted in participants' offices, meeting rooms, a closed room in a tea house, and venues they considered as safe and comfortable. Informed consent was obtained for all in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (see *Appendix 5 and 8*). Email access for this study was password protected and all consent forms, demographic questionnaires, and recorded documents were saved in a locked space or stored in a password-protected computer. The participants' real names were concealed in the findings; instead, nicknames or the names they preferred to use in focus group discussions were used. I pre-assessed sensitive issues at macro, mezzo and micro levels in preparation for the possibility of the participants' distorted representations and struggling feelings and to avoid any refusal to participate further in this research. All participants had the right to withdraw from this research at any time, and any replacements were arranged accordingly. Finally, this study was approved by the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Reference number: HSEARS20180131010).

Significance

Social workers and NPOs are playing increasingly important roles in producing and providing social services in modern Chinese society (Bai, 2014; Wang, 2014). However, given the multiple challenges Chinese social workers face, and a lack of in-depth understanding regarding their survival, this dissertation fills an important gap.

At a theoretical level, this dissertation advances the ToP through an interpretation of the structure, field, position, capital, agency and habitus deriving from the survival practice and processes enshrined in the narratives of Chinese social workers. It applies and diversifies the application of the ToP in mainland China as an emerging social work professional context. This study also discusses previous research on the survival of social work practitioners and broadens our current understanding of such survival. The insights gained can be applied in other contexts in which social work is emerging.

At a practice level, the findings will benefit new social workers by enhancing their personal daily survival practice, thus helping such workers remain in the profession. The findings will also help NPOs, especially SWSOs, to promote the management of social workers or support interventions at an organizational and regional level, enabling stakeholders to deal effectively with challenges, and to ensure their survival in this emerging profession in China.

The findings may also be a useful point of reference for Chinese central or local government, as well as professional bodies (e.g., the China Association of Social Work Education), when issuing appropriate polices for social workers and NPOs, as it will ensure social workers and NPOs have adequate professional support and space to provide quality services. Implications for the newly-developing social work profession in China and other developing countries include understanding social structures and promoting the survival of social workers. Implications for governments, non-profit organizations, and tertiary education in terms of working with multi-faceted social structures are also discussed.

This study also informs future research. There is a need to interview stakeholders outside NPOs or social work profession to further understand the survival of social workers. It will also be instructive to interview participants from other Chinese provinces or cities to develop more meaningful themes. Longitudinal and quantitative designs, participant observation, and ethnography can also be usefully employed in future research on this topic.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three interrelated studies (publishable journal papers), and conclusions; each study answers a specific research question and discusses different concepts of the ToP (see Table 1.5).

Table 1.5: Structure of the dissertation

Chapter	Research questions/content	Theoretical concepts of the ToP
Chapter One: Introduction	Introduction to the research background, exposition of the survival of social workers, gaps in the literature, research questions, the ToP, research methodology and significance. The major research question: What do Chinese social workers do to ensure their professional survival?	
Chapter Two: Study 1	What challenges do Chinese social workers face in the context of changing social structures, and what coping strategies do they utilize to cope with these challenges?	Structure, field, practice
Chapter Three: Study 2	What challenges do Chinese social workers encounter in their personal daily practice and what specific survival strategies do they use?	Capital, position, agency, practice
Chapter Four: Study 3	What are the survival coping processes of social worker in mainland China?	Habitus, practice
Chapter Five: Conclusions	Provides an overall conclusion regarding challenges, coping strategies, and the survival coping processes of Chinese social workers, and discusses the implications and limitations of the research.	

Specifically, Chapter 1 – the Introduction begins by introducing the overall research background, research questions, the conceptual framework based on the theory of practice, epistemology and research methodology, research significance, and potential significance. Chapter 2 presents Study 1, entitled "*Survival in Changing and Challenging Institutional, and Professional Contexts: The Narratives of Chinese Social Workers*". This chapter answers the first research question and discloses the challenges mainland Chinese social workers face in terms of social structures, and the coping strategies they utilized. Early social work education,

policies and regulations, social work professionalization and relationships with stakeholders, non-profitable organizational management, and impacts on social workers caused by the above aspects are discussed. Chapter 3 presents Study 2, entitled *"Coping with Personal Survival Challenges: Chinese Social Workers' Narratives in a Fledging Profession"*. This chapter answers the second research question and explores the challenges Chinese social workers encountered at a personal level, and the coping strategies they subsequently used. Specific foci include their previous life and work experience, burnout, high turnover intentions, insufficient practice skill and management experience, confused professional identify, personal career plans, and mental health concerns. Chapter 4 presents Study 3, entitled *"Survival Coping Processes in an Emerging Profession: Chinese Social Workers' Survival Narratives"*. This chapter answers the third research question and aims to demonstrate how the survival coping processes employed by Chinese social workers reconciles social structures and individual agency, i.e., the process whereby Chinese social workers use resources from external social structures and access personal capacities and capital, when they encounter challenges in order to survive as social work professionals. Chapter 5 – the Conclusions presents an overall discussion regarding challenges emerging from changing social structures and personal daily practice, and the coping strategies utilized accordingly, and then summarizes the coping processes of Chinese social workers in order to ensure their professional survival. This chapter also discusses the implications and limitations of the research.

References

Aiello, A., & Tesi, A. (2017). Psychological Well-Being and Work Engagement among Italian Social Workers: Examining the Mediational Role of Job Resources. *Social Work Research, 41*(2), 73-84. doi:10.1093/swr/svx005

An, Q., & Chapman, M. V. (2014). The early professional experience of a new social worker in China. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(2), 322−333.

Anderson, H. (1997). *Conversation, language, and possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy* (1st ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism? *Grounded Theory Review: An International Journal, 11*(1), 39-46.

Babbie, E. R. (2016). *The practice of social research* (14th ed.). Boston, MA: Boston, MA : Cengage Learning.

Bai, J. (2014). What is the role of social work in China? A multi-dimensional analysis. *Advances in Social Work, 15*(2), 495−506.

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and work-engagement: The JD-R approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 389–411. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality : A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Allen Lane.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2005). The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field. In R. Benson & E. Neveu (Eds.), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (pp. 29-47). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Johnson, R. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Cambridge: New York: Polity Press; Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77−101.

Bryan, A., & Aymer, C. (1996). Black social work students and practitioners: Survival strategies. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 10*(2), 113-117. doi:10.1080/02650539608415106

Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social Constructionism* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Bury, M. R. (1986). Social constructionism and the development of medical sociology. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 8*(2), 137-169. doi:10.1111/1467-9566.ep11340129

Cheung, C., & Ngai, S. (2009). Surviving hegemony through resistance and identity articulation among outreaching social workers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 26*(1), 15−37.

Coffey, M., Dugdill, L., & Tattersall, A. (2004). Stress in social services: Mental well-being, constraints and job satisfaction. *The British Journal of Social Work, 34*(5), 735-746.

Cole, A. L., & Knowles, J. G. (2001). *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Collins, S. (2008). Statutory social workers: Stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences. *The British Journal of Social Work, 38*(6), 1173-1193.

Crotty, M. (1998). *Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Curtis, L., Moriarty, J., & Netten, A. (2012). The costs of qualifying a social worker. *The British Journal of Social Work, 42*(4), 706−724.

Donnellan, H. (2010). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers: Hitting the Ground Running*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Eriksen, T. H., & Nielsen, F. S. (2001). *A History of Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press.

Galpin, D., Bigmore, J., Parker, J*., et al.* (2012). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Adult and Mental Health Services: Hitting the Ground Running*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Gao, J. G., & Yan, M. C. (2015). Social work in the making: The state and social work development in China. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 24*(1), 93-101. doi:10.1111/ijsw.12089

Gates, K., Church, K., & Crowe, C. (2001). Fidelity and ethical ideals. In A. L. Cole & J. Knowls (Eds.), *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research* (pp. 152-163). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gehart, D., Tarragona, M., & Bava, S. (2007). A collaborative approach to research and inquiry. In H. Anderson & D. Gehart (Eds.), *Collaborative Therapy: Relationships and Conversations that Make a Difference* (pp. 367-387). New York, NY: Routledge.

Geisler, M., Berthelsen, H., & Muhonen, T. (2019). Retaining Social Workers: The Role of Quality of Work and Psychosocial Safety Climate for Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 43*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/23303131.2019.1569574

Gellis, Z. D. (2002). Coping with occupational stress in healthcare: A comparison of social workers and nurses. *Administration in Social Work, 26*(3), 37-52. doi:10.1300/J147v26n03_03

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Grimes, T., & Hou, S.-I. (2013). "A breast ain't nothing but a sandwich": Narratives of Ella, an African American social worker breast cancer survivor. *Social Work in Public Health, 28*(1), 44-53. doi:10.1080/19371918.2010.513667

Gringeri, C., Barusch, A., & Cambron, C. (2013). Examining foundations of qualitative research: A review of social work dissertations, 2008–2010. *Journal of Social Work Education, 49*(4), 760-773. doi:10.1080/10437797.2013.812910

Guba, E. (1990). *The Paradigm dialog*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. London: : Sage Publications.

Haene, L. D. (2010). Beyond division: Convergences between postmodern qualitative research and family therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 36*(1), 1-12. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00174.x

Halmi, A. (1996). The qualitative approach to social work: An epistemological basis. *International Social Work, 39*, 363−375. doi:10.1177/002087289603900403

Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's Wrong with Ethnography? : Methodological Explorations*. London: Routledge.

Hannu, S., Eeva-Liisa, K., & Günter, L. H. (Eds.). (2011). *Epistemologies for Qualitative Research*. Germany: Tübingen: Center for Qualitative Psychology.

Hargreaves, I. (1998). On television and journalism. *New Statesman, 127*(4387), 52.

Harrington, A. (2005). *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hombrados-Mendieta, I., & Cosano-Rivas, F. (2013). Burnout, workplace support, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among social workers in Spain: A structural equation model. *International Social Work, 56*(2), 228-246.

Katz, C. (2013). The narratives of abused children who have survived attempted filicide. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*(10), 762-770.

Koeske, G. F., & Koeske, R. D. (1989). Work load and burnout: Can social support and perceived accomplishment help? *Social Work, 34*(3), 243-248.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lam, C. M., & Yan, M. C. (2015). Driving ducks onto a perch: the experience of locally trained Shenzhen supervisor. *China Journal of Social Work, 8*(2), 182-194. doi:10.1080/17525098.2015.1039169

Lam, C. M., Yan, M. C., & Liang, Y. (2016). Continuing Education for the Emerging Social Work Profession in China: The Experiment in Shenzhen. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 36*(4), 390-406. doi:10.1080/08841233.2016.1205165

Latack, J., Kinicki, A., & Prussia, G. (1995). An intergrative process model of coping with job loss. *Academy of Management Review, 20*, 311-342.

Lechte, J. (2008). *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Post-humanism* (2nd ed.). London ; New York: Routledge.

Levine, K. A., & Kai, Z. (2010). The changing context of China: Emerging issues for school social work practice. *International Social Work, 53*(3), 339-352. doi:10.1177/0020872809359751

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lock, A., & Strong, T. (2010). *Social Constructionism: Sources and Stirrings in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Long, B. C. (1990). Relation between coping strategies, sex-typed traits, and environmental characteristics: A comparison of male and female managers. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 37*(2), 185-194.

McCullagh, J. G. (1982). Survival strategies for school social workers. *Children & Schools, 4*(3), 5-15. doi:10.1093/cs/4.3.5

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/survival

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2017). Data Talks Social Work (In Chinese). Retrieved from

http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA5NDc3Nzc2Nw==&mid=2651521112&idx=3&sn=566a9741642baec7d0372d441850bfdd&chksm=8bb6d890bcc151869dc5f76f65c4ce2c1b25ea55010120bfcb95c2cabba77f4218d4d5f863b3&mpshare=1&scene=5&srcid=0322gXWNuX8h7OJ5yowSiYCA#rd

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2019). A New Chapter for the Reform and Development of Civil Affairs in the New Era: National Video Conference of Civil Affairs 2019. Retrieved from

http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/mzyw/201901/20190100014249.shtml (In Chinese)

Ng, K. T. (2016). *Exploring the Professional Supervisory Dyad Working Alliance in Children and Family Integrated Services in Hong Kong.* (Ph.D), Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Hong Kong.

Ngai, S. W. (2014). *Experiences of adult children with intergenerational ambivalence in a Chinese society : sources and management*. Hong Kong: Deptartment of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Niu, D., & Haugen, H. Ø. (2019). Social workers in China: Professional identity in the making. *The British Journal of Social Work, 49*(7), 1932-1949. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy107

Oxford Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Oxford Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/survival

Pan, S. (2003). *Qualitative Research: Theory and Application* (1st ed.). Taipei: Psychology Press (In Chinese).

Parkin, R. (1997). Practice theory. In T. Barfield (Ed.), *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (pp. 375-377). Oxford: Blackwell.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Payne, G., & Payne, J. (2004). *Key Concepts in Social Research*. London: SAGE.

Peirce, C. S. (2011). How to make our ideas clear. *Problemos, 79*, 169-184.

Ravalier, J. M. (2018). The influence of work engagement in social workers in England. *Occupational Medicine, 68*(6), 399-404. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqy087

Reamer, F. G. (1993). *The Philosophical Foundations of Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Reed-Danahay, D. (2005). *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Salma, P. (2015, July 15). The research paradigm: Methodology, epistemology and ontology, explained in simple language. Retrieved from http://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-methodology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language

Sánchez-Moreno, E., De La Fuente Roldán, I.-N., Gallardo-Peralta, L. P*., et al.* (2015). Burnout, informal social support and psychological distress among social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work, 45*(8), 2368-2386.

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 66*(4), 701-716. doi:10.1177/0013164405282471

Schwandt, T. A. (2003). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretativism, hermeneutics and social constructionism. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and issues* (pp. 292-331). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Shazer, S. d. (2017). The Miracle Question. Retrieved from http://www.netzwerk-ost.at/publikationen/pdf/miraclequestion.pdf

Sheppard, T. (2017). Stategies Binder: Selective Counseling Strategies. Retrieved from https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jJVC219Ee1kJ:https://tommysheppardcounselling.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/strategies-binder-useful-counselling-strategies-and-skills.doc+&cd=7&hl=zh-CN&ct=clnk&gl=th

Shi, Y., & Shi, T. (2013). The study on social worker's burnout based on the social support perspective. *Social Sciences Review, 28*(01), 150-152 (In Chinese).

Sinha, S. (2007). Essays on Economic Development and the Survival of Girls in India. In P. Pattanaik & A. B. Deolalikar (Eds.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tesi, A., Aiello, A., & Giannetti, E. (2019). The work-related well-being of social workers: Framing job demands, psychological well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 121-141. doi:10.1177/1468017318757397

Tum, T. (2006). The Street Children Phenomenon: A Qualitative Study on How Street Children Survive in Eldoret, Kenya. In K. Ohman (Ed.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Ungar, M. (2004). Surviving as a postmodern social sorker: Two Ps and three Rs of direct practice. *Social Work, 49*(3), 488−496.

Usher, R. (1996). A critique of the neglected epistemological assumptions of educational research. In D. Scott & R. Usher (Eds.), *Understanding Educational Research* (pp. 9-32). New York: Routledge.

Walther, M. (2014). *Repatriation to France and Germany: A Comparative Study Based on Bourdieu's Theory of Practice*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Wang, E., Jiang, W., & Mao, S. (2019). Job autonomy and turnover intention among social workers in China: Roles of work-to-family enrichment, job satisfaction and type of sector. *Journal of Social Service Research*. doi:10.1080/01488376.2019.1698487

Wang, S. (2013). Toward recognition: The development of professional social work in China. *Hebei Academic Journal, 33*(06), 108−113 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2014). Participation of social work in social governance innovation. *Social Construction, 01*, 8−15 (In Chinese).

Weinberg, D. (2009). Social constructionism. In B. Tunner (Ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory (Blackwell Companions to Sociology)*. Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom; Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Weinberg, D. (2014). *Contemporary Social Constructionism Key Themes*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Wyckoff, D. L. G. (1994). *Speaking about Life Experiences: Personal Narrativizing and Social Constructionism.* Thesis (Ph.D.)--The Ohio State University, 1994.

Yan, M. C. (2013). Towards a pragmatic approach: a critical examination of two assumptions of indigenization discourse. *China Journal of Social Work, 6*(1), 14-24. doi:10.1080/17525098.2013.766135

Yan, M. C. (2017). Social policy and social work indigenization in China. *Social Work*(02), 6-10 (In Chinese).

Yan, M. C., & Cheng, S.-L. (2009). Searching for Chinese characteristics: A tentative empirical examination. *China Journal of Social Work, 2*(1), 5-19. doi:10.1080/17525090802692112

Yan, M. C., Gao, J. G., & Lam, C. M. (2013). The dawn is too distant: The experience of 28 social work graduates entering the social work field in China. *Social Work Education, 32*(4), 538-551. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.688097

Yan, M. C., Ge, Z.-M., Cheng, S.-L*., et al.* (2009). Imagining social work: A qualitative study of students' perspectives on social work in China. *Social Work Education, 28*(5), 528-543. doi:10.1080/02615470802368959

Yan, M. C., & Tsui, M. S. (2007). The quest for western social work knowledge: Literature in the USA and practice in China. *International Social Work, 50*(5), 641-653. doi:10.1177/0020872807079924

Young, R. A., & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: Constructivism and social constructionism in the career field. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 64*(3), 373-388. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2003.12.005

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K., & Wang, S. (2002). Tensions confronting the development of social work education in China: Challenges and opportunities. *International Social Work, 45*(3), 375−388.

Yürür, S., & Sarikaya, M. (2012). The effects of workload, role ambiguity, and social support on burnout among social workers in Turkey. *Administration in Social Work, 36*(5), 457-478.

Zevon, M. A., Donnelly, J. J. P., & Starkey, E. A. (1990). Stress and coping relationships in the medical environment: A natural experiment. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology, 8*(1), 65-77. doi:10.1300/J077v08n01_05

Zhang, D., Zheng, Y., & Li, J. (2014). Social environment, social support and social worker's burnout: Baed on a survey of 100 social workers in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan. *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, 206*(2), 79-84 (In Chinese).

Zhang, X. (2015). Social work professional's cultivating based on the social support perspective. *Educationa and Vocation, 854*(34), 88-90 (In Chinese).

Zheng, Z. (2014). *An alternative: Western social constructionist sociology* (1st ed.). Beijing: China Social Sciences Press (In Chinese).

Chapter Two: Study 1 – Survival in Changing and Challenging Institutional and Professional Contexts: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China

Abstract

Mainland Chinese social workers struggle to survive in this emerging profession. This study aims to explore the challenges Chinese social workers encounter in the face of changing social structures and the coping strategies they utilize as a result. A qualitative approach was adopted which involved interviewing 49 social workers from three cities in mainland China, followed by conducting three focus groups. Two themes relating to the challenges emerged: (a) constraining social structures; and (b) immature professionalization. The challenges vary in terms of different professional stages. Three coping strategies were identified: (a) building a partnership and integrating resources; (b) utilizing a professional and personal social support network; and (c) improving organizational governance and strategic management. The study advances the theory of practice in mainland China through an examination of structure, field, and practice, and contributes to helping social workers develop a long-term survival plan.
Keywords: survival, social worker, challenge, coping, Chinese context

Introduction

Following the national licensure of social workers in 2008, social work has been regarded as an emerging profession in mainland China (An & Chapman, 2014; Bai, 2014; Guo, 2016; Wang, 2014). This changing context has resulted in a series of positive impacts on the development of social work. For instance, 440,000 national social worker licenses were issued within a decade by the end of 2018. In the same period, the number of social work service organizations (SWSOs), an example of typical non-profit organizations (NPOs) in China, increased from 600 in 2012 to over 7,500 in 2018 (Liu, 2012), driven by government purchase of social work services. NPOs, including SWSOs, have become a vital work setting for Chinese social workers (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2019), as their values and missions are consistent with those of social work (Liu, 2012). Nevertheless, tensions and challenges

resulting from the changing contexts are squeezing the professional space: many Chinese social workers are leaving the emerging profession after a few years and survival as a social work professional is vulnerable to such pressures (An & Chapman, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Wang, 2011b; Yan *et al.*, 2013). The instability of the workforce in this profession has raised concerns in both the academic and practical community (Wang, 2013). Existing studies of Chinese social workers have focused on structuralist or functionalist approaches, statistical descriptions of relationships, and the linear correlation or association between different factors related to survival issues. Topics include the embeddedness of professional social work in the power relationships of government sectors, in particular the civil affairs system (Wang, 2011b; Zhu & Chen, 2013); tensions in the professionalization of social work (Yip, 2007); social support and burnout (Zhang *et al.*, 2014) and professional competence (Lei & Huang, 2017). However, the previous literature fails to disclose Chinese social workers' narratives regarding their own survival experience, including the challenges faced and the coping strategies used. Thus, it is essential to conduct an in-depth exploration of survival among social workers in mainland China, in order to reveal the survival code needed to maintain a stable army of Chinese social workers. The primary research question for this study was: What challenges do Chinese social workers face in the context of changing social structures, and what coping strategies do they utilize to cope with these challenges? The study discusses both challenges and coping strategies at a macro or structural level. Related challenges and coping strategies at the personal level will be discussed in a parallel study.

Literature Review

Uneven development history: social workers as new professionals

Social work is a concept which has been imported into China, and its development history is uneven (Table 1). Its development can be conceptualized in terms of four stages. The first of these spans its introduction from the 1920s to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Social work was imported with the advent of social work education at Yanjing University in 1925, and quickly expanded to approximately 20 universities (Bai, 2014; Yan &

Tsang, 2005). Professional social workers, however, did not emerge at this stage. The second stage is the abolishment stage from the early 1950s to the 1980s, when social work education was abolished because it was considered incompatible with the communist ideology and vision of a socialist country (Bai, 2014; Yan & Cheng, 2009). At this stage, no professional social workers existed. The third stage is the reinstatement stage from the 1980s to 2008, when a reform and open-door policy was implemented. In view of the widening gap between rich and poor, the government saw social work as an instrument to ensure a harmonious society (Bai, 2014; Wang, 2014). Social work was restored as a discipline in universities. Following the turn of the millennium, regional pilot projects began in Shanghai in 2003, although at that time there was no national licensure of social workers. The fourth stage is the professionalization stage which spans from 2008 to the present day. This stage has thus far been short; however, social work is developing at a phenomenal speed and by 2018 the number of social work programs at Bachelor's and postgraduate levels increased to 330 and 148, respectively (Ministry of Education of China, 2018). The national social worker licensure came into effect in 2008, following which the number of social workers increased rapidly to more than 440,000 by the end of 2018 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2019). The government purchase of social work services has speeded up the development of social work. Despite these phenomenal developments, the turnover rate among Chinese social workers remains high, and survival in this new profession therefore merits further investigation (An & Chapman, 2014).

Terminology of survival

"Survival" in the online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2017) and the online *Oxford Dictionary* (2017) is defined as "the continuation of existence", including practice, act, life and fact. This is therefore the fundamental meaning of survival adopted in this study, i.e., continuing to work in the social work profession. In the social work field, "survival" is frequently employed to describe the way service recipients or vulnerable groups survive physical, mental or social adversity, for instance disaster, disease and abuse (Grimes & Hou, 2013; Katz, 2013; Sinha, 2007; Tum, 2006). However, studies with regard to the survival of social workers are limited. While no specific definition has been elaborated, social work

scholars have highlighted "survival" in various social, professional, emotional and physical dimensions, including challenges, survival guidance for newly qualified social workers, marginalization, skills or capacities, social support, work sustainability, and effectiveness (Bryan & Aymer, 1996; Cheung & Ngai, 2009; Curtis *et al.*, 2012; Donnellan, 2010, 2014; Galpin *et al.*, 2012; Ungar, 2004).

Coexisting advantages and disadvantages in policies, regulations, and government

The rapid changes that have taken place in policies and regulations in China since the 1980s have been both advantageous and disadvantageous for the development of social work. Two advantages for such development in China are particularly notable. First, the top-down approach adopted by the Chinese government has promoted the rapid development of social work. Since the regional licensure of social workers was piloted in Shanghai in 2003, the Chinese government has issued a series of new policies and regulations (Table 2.1) and social work has rapidly emerged as a new profession (Bai, 2014; Feng & Peng, 2016), advancing in diverse practice areas including community work, school social work, and medical social work. Several national professional guidelines have been issued successively since 2012. Second, the government purchase of social work services from NPOs has hastened the development of social work in China. Such a purchase was initially piloted in Shanghai in 2003, followed on a larger scale by Shenzhen in 2007. In the light of the positive outcomes of these pilot projects, the *Guiding Opinions of the Government Purchase of Social Work Services* was issued in 2012 and led to a significant national expansion. The amount spent nationally reached RMB4.268 billion in 2016, while the amount spent in both Shanghai and Guangdong province reached over RMB1.0 billion in the same year (Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, 2016; Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau, 2016).

Table 2.1: Milestones of social work development in China

Stage	Year	Milestone of events, policies, and regulations
Introduction	1925	Social work education first developed at Yanjing University. Approximately 20 universities had social work-related programs or social work departments before 1949.
Abolishment	1950s	Social work education was eliminated.
Reinstatement	1986	Social work was restored as a discipline in four universities.

	1994	China Association for Social Work Education was founded.
	2003	Temporary Measures of Qualifications for Social Workers Registration was issued in Shanghai. The government purchase of social work services was piloted in Shanghai.
	2004	Regulation on the Professionalization of Social Workers was issued by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. The 15th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee decided on "the establishing of a large strong team of social workers".
	2006	Temporary Regulation on the Social Workers Vocational Standard Evaluation, and Measure of Implementation of the Vocational Examination for Assistant Social Workers and Social Workers were issued.
	2007	The government purchase of social work services was expanded to Shenzhen and then nationwide.
	2008	The first national social worker licensure examination was carried out in June.
	2009	Regulation on the Social Worker Licensure Certificates was issued. Master of Social Work (MSW) programs officially began in universities. MSW programs recruited students in universities.
	2010	Social workers were considered equal to other professionals in the "Outline of the Mid-term Development Strategy of Human Resources" published by the central government.
	2011	Eighteen ministries and commissions of the Chinese Central Government jointly issued Guidance on Strengthening the Construction of a Team of Social Work Professionals (2011-2020). Policy for the mid-long-term development of social work professionals was implemented.
Professionalization	2012	Guidance with regard to the Government Purchase of Social Work Services was issued nationally. Guidance with regard to Social Workers' Professional Ethics was issued.
	2013	Notification of Determining the First Batch of Pilot Regions and Organizations of Social Work with Enterprise, Notification of the Supporting Plan for the Team of Social Workers of the First Batch of Outlying Poverty-Stricken Regions, Ethnic Minority Regions in the Borderland, Old Revolutionary Base Regions, Guidance on Accelerating Community Social Work Services, and Guidance on Accelerating Disaster Social Work Services were issued.
	2014	Guidance on further Accelerating the Development of Social Work Service Organizations, Services Guideline of Social Work with Children and Guidelines of Performance Evaluation of Social Work Services Program were issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Guidance on Strengthening the Team of Social Workers for Social Work with Adolescents was issued.
	2015	Guidance on Accelerating the Development of Social Work with Social Relief was issued.

2016	Annual financial expense on social work services reached RMB 4.268 billion nationally. Expenditure in both Shanghai and Guangdong Province reached over RMB 1.0 billion.
2017	Two professional forms of guidance were issued: Guidance of Gerontological Social Work Service, Guidance of Community Social Work Service. The number of social work Bachelor's and Master's programs increased to 330 and 105 respectively in March. The number of MSW programs reached 148 in January.
2018	Guidance of Method of Social Work: Case Work, and Guideline of Method of Social Work: Group Work were issued in January. Regulation on Senior Social Workers Evaluation was issued in March. The number of social workers climbed to more than 440,000.

(Table 2.1 adapted from Bai (2014); Leung (2007); Li *et al.* (2012); Liu (2012); Wang & Yuen-Tsang (2009))

Three disadvantages with regard to the development of social work in mainland China also became apparent. First, social work policies and regulations remain incomplete. Social workers have found it difficult to apply suitable policies to serve clients. Moreover, the fiscal budget in social work is restricted and uncertain, and social workers have realized it is tough to obtain stable financial resources to support a sustainable program (Liu, 2012). Second, the Chinese government views social work as a means of social control in terms of promoting social stability and a harmonious society, rather than as the provision of services (Bai, 2014; Tsang & Yan, 2001; Wang, 2014; Yan & Cheng, 2009). This results in low professional autonomy and contradicts social work mission commitments (Niu & Haugen, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Yip, 2007; Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002). Consequently, social workers find it hard to obtain social recognition (Wang, 2013). Third, social workers face tensions in striking a balance between professional and administrative tasks because social work also has to cope with a rigid government administrative system (Guo, 2016; Wang, 2011b). The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) sector has a 40-year history and nearly 500,000 officers (Li *et al.*, 2012) and is in charge of most social work resources. However, the officers have very little social work education, and view "…their work as administrative and executive duties", thus social workers have to "…strive for their place both within and outside the historical structure" (Bai, 2014, p. 499) through the "embedded model" in China (Wang, 2011b; Zhu & Chen, 2013). This means

professional social work is embedded into the power relations of government sectors, in particular the civil affairs system. The ways in which these disadvantages influence Chinese social workers, and how they survive, requires a thick description from their own lived perspective.

Influences from early social work education

Since the reinstatement of social work as a discipline at universities in 1986, social work education has experienced rapid development (see Table 2.1) (Bai, 2014; Law & Gu, 2008; Leung, 2007; Yuen-Tsang, 2012). However, studies have revealed the inadequacy of early social work education, where unqualified social work educators had "…neither the professional knowledge nor the practical experience in social work necessary for effective teaching" (Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002, p. 377). They were inexperienced in curriculum planning, and taught with little in the way of localized practice experience, or adequate teaching materials (Guo, 2016; Tsang & Yan, 2001; Yan *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, most students were unwilling to choose to learn social work. Nevertheless, when the small number of early social work graduates began their career (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2017), the question remains regarding the extent to which they were affected by these inadequacies. Little is known about the strategies they utilized to cope with the professional challenges they faced.

Opportunities and tensions NPOs face in China

China has witnessed a significant growth in the number of NPOs since the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. NPOs, especially the registration of SWSOs, are encouraged and, due to the relaxation of registration constraints and the government purchase of social work services, the number of NPOs increased to around 620,000 in 2016 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2017). NPOs, especially SWSOs, possess similar values and missions with regard to social work, and have become the major employers of social workers, who play a vital role in providing services and promoting social harmony in different areas (Lei & Huang, 2017; Zhu & Chen, 2013). Nevertheless, several tensions faced by NPOs also extend to social workers. First, the relationship between the Chinese government and NPOs is inequitable (Huang, 2015) and the government continue to distrusts NPOs. Consequently, social workers in NPOs struggle

for professional autonomy and survival (Guan, 2015; Wang, 2011b; Zhu & Chen, 2013). Second, the vagueness of the roles of NPOs confuses social workers. The uncertainty regarding whether their function is to deliver social services or maintain social control reduces social workers' aspiration to work in NPOs (Tsang & Yan, 2001). Third, social workers might be influenced by Chinese NPOs' unprofessional management and uncompetitive capacities (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Existing studies have discussed multidimensional strategies in regard to NPOs with a view to enhancing the government-NPO relationship (Fan & Cheng, 2005; Zhao *et al.*, 2016). However, the ways in which social workers in NPOs are affected, and how they utilize survival strategies in response to these tensions, requires further elaboration.

In sum, the current environment for social work development in mainland China is uncertain, Chinese social workers have been part of an uneven history of social work development and have experienced insufficient early social work education (or pre-service training). Thus, a survival issue has emerged from the development process. Moreover, they have also faced the coexisting advantages and disadvantages brought about by social structures, including policies, regulations, governments, and NPOs. Nevertheless, the ways in which these disadvantages influence Chinese social workers, and how they have utilized detailed coping strategies to survive, requires a thick description from their own lived perspective.

Work engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive work-related state associated with an individual's high levels of energy, enthusiasm and involvement, and a high recognition of the work role. Work engagement consists of three components: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, 2011; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Geisler *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Vassos *et al.*, 2013). Vigor refers to the high level of energy put into work, dedication refers to enthusiasm and high involvement in the work role, while absorption relates to concentrate on one's work (Aiello & Tesi, 2017; Tesi *et al.*, 2019; Vassos *et al.*, 2013). In the social work context, few scholars have identified their correlates with structural and organizational factors, including quality of work, job resources, and social support. For instance, quality of work has been strongly related to work engagement on the part of Swedish

social workers (Geisler *et al.*, 2019), job resources have been associated with work engagement among Italian social workers (Aiello & Tesi, 2017), while Bakker *et al.* (2014) also pointed that organizational support from supervisors and colleagues improved work engagement. However, we know little about work engagement among Chinese social workers, and what and how structural and organizational factors influence their work engagement.

Theoretical concepts

As discussed previously, the research perspective in this study is related to social structures in China and social workers' personal daily practice. Therefore, the theory of practice (ToP) was adopted as a suitable theoretical framework for addressing the research questions in this study. The ToP was employed to interpret how Chinese social workers reconcile social structure and personal actions in order to elaborate their real world survival in the profession (Bourdieu, 1977; Harrington, 2005). Concepts of structure, field, and practice will be discussed with regard to Chinese social worker's survival issue. In the ToP, structure refers to external social structures, social institutions and the generalized features of social life. This study therefore considers what social structures Chinese social workers face, and the ways these affect their survival practice. Field denotes the space of practice and is constituted by a unique combination of rules and capital, consisting of a network of positions (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993; Walther, 2014). Bourdieu suggested that field is a structure, an individual's position is located in fields in which distinct rules are engrained or rigid; however, fields are relatively autonomous when they are embedded into social structures (Bourdieu, 1977, 1996). This study specifies the fields related to professional social workers in China, and considers the rules, relationships or power relations that remain in these fields. Practice is "…based on the dispositions inherent in habitus" and is expanded in the form of strategies against common beliefs or popular opinions (Parkin, 1997, p. 376). This research explores the coping strategies Chinese social workers utilize to deal with the challenges resulting from the aforementioned social structures.

Research Methods

Methods

This qualitative research applied in-depth interviews as its main method, and focus groups as a supplementary method for conducting a participant review of the major findings.

Research sites

Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Xiamen were purposefully sampled as the three research sites to be used. Shenzhen is most advanced in terms of social work development and is the city closet to Hong Kong; Shanghai is the earliest pilot city to develop professional social work and has licensed social workers since 2003; Xiamen is characterized by inadequate development of social work and is the nearest city to Taiwan. The authors' professional and personal networks in these three cities were used to recruit adequate eligible participants. Hence, the three cities ensured the representativeness, diversity, and sufficiency of participants, and the feasibility of data collection (Glesne, 2011; Halmi, 1996).

Participants and inclusion criteria

Forty-nine participants were interviewed, and the inclusion criteria for both the interviews and focus groups were as follows: (a) participants were licensed social workers holding a social work diploma, (b) had more than five years' social work experience, and (c) had been working at NPOs for more than one year. Various service areas and categories of social workers were represented, and gender and marital status were also duly considered.

There were 15, 16 and 18 participants from Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xiamen, respectively, comprising eight males and 41 females; 31 participants were married, 18 were single, and none were divorced. The average age and years spent working as social workers were 32.7 and 8.6, respectively. Twenty-two participants were categorized an organizational manager (OM), including director and deputy director, while all OMs had experienced the stages of front-line social worker (FSW) and project officer or manager (PM); 25 participants were listed as being at the PM stage, either as a supervisor, project or departmental director, regional manager, and service center director, and all had experienced the FSW stage; two participants were at the FSW stage. All participants narrated the survival experience of the FSW stage.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection consisted of two phases: in-depth interviews in phase one and three focus groups in phase two. In addition to professional and personal networks, snowballing was used to recruit participants. Once the initial interview questions had been created based on the ToP and sent to participants for revision and feedback, individual interviews were audiotaped with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim. The stories participants recounted in interviews began from tertiary education and covered their entire career experience. Each participant was asked to give feedback on the transcription. When the preliminary findings had been generated, three parallel focus groups were carried out in the three cities to report on the findings and collect feedback from the participants.

The verbatim transcription of interviews and focus groups amounted to 1.6 million and 80,000 words, respectively. NVivo 12 Plus software was used to assist in managing preliminary and secondary coding and searching for themes; however, the coding was manually conducted in NVivo by the author. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes, following six traditional phases comprising familiarization with data, coding data, searching for themes, generating a thematic map, defining and naming themes, and producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Two prominent themes emerged relating to challenges affecting the survival of Chinese social workers: (1) constraining social structures; and (2) immature professionalization. Distinct characteristics emerged in three career stages of FSW, PM and OM (see Table 2.2).

Constraining social structures

This theme shows that Chinese social workers received inadequate support in terms of policies, regulations, government and education. This theme is elaborated in four aspects: (a) inadequate professional education: most participants stated that early social work education (or pre-service training) could not adequately make them become qualified social workers, and teachers lacked the necessary clinical service skills; (b) insufficient support for NPOs and social workers: the

Table 2.2: Themes, challenges, and coping strategies at the macro or structural level

Themes	Characteristics in three stages		1. Building a partnership and integrating resources			2. Utilizing a professional and personal social support network		3. Improving organizational governance and strategic management		
			1.1. Establishing a cooperative relationship with the government.	1.2. Integrating external resources.	1.3. Enhancing social status through voicing, actions, and policy advocacy.	2.1. Seeking teamwork and support from peers, supervisors, and volunteers.	2.2. Participating in training and communications, cultivating supervisors, and enhancing practice standards.	3.1. Clarifying the organizational mission and vision, improving the strategy and business model, and creating brand projects and standards.	3.2. Strengthening authorization and participation rights, adjusting departments and the allocation of human resources, and promoting inter-departmental collaboration.	3.3. Creating free, open, equal, and participatory culture and atmosphere.
Constraining social structures	FSW	1) Challenges resulting from inadequate social work education;	✓			✓				
	PM	2) Facing a fuzzy boundary;	✓		✓					
	OM	3) A stressful relationship with a dominant government and boundary spanning;	✓		✓			✓		
		4) Low operationalization of policies, regulations, and standards.	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Immature professionalization	FSW	1) A confused professional identity and low social status;				✓	✓			
		2) Inadequate organizational support;				✓	✓			
	PM	3) Project management pressure;				✓	✓			
		4) A human resources shortage and team instability;				✓	✓		✓	✓
	OM	5) Organizational governance pressure.				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

56

fiscal budget invested in NPOs and social work is insufficient in many Chinese cities; (c) barriers resulting from regional and departmental policies: regional policies in different cities limit social work service referrals; for example, when one homeless client was sent from Shenzhen back to his hometown in Henan Province, the social worker felt frustrated because they had failed to build a referral. Furthermore, the normal social worker flow is affected, and social workers are not able to flow freely once they receive a welfare package in Shenzhen and Xiamen; and (d) high social control with regard to NPOs and social workers: the participants agreed that Chinese NPOs and social workers were instrumentally expected to work as part of the government "sector" or as government employees, and the autonomy, dependence, and professionalism of services were weakened. For instance, with regard to social stability and political correction (Huang, 2015; Tsang & Yan, 2001), NPOs are required to found the branches of the Communist Youth League and the Communist Party of China (CCP). All the community service centers in Shenzhen were renamed as party and mass service centers. Furthermore, the diverse characteristics of constraining social structures were identified in the three stages of FSW, PM and OM.

The FSWs: inadequate social work education

This characteristic elaborates the first aspect. When entering the social work field, FSWs faced challenges mainly resulting from inadequate social work education and regarding education as a pre-existing social structure influencing current daily practice. They expressed disappointment in unqualified teachers, the lack of professional teaching of courses, non-indigenous textbooks, and low participation in professional practice.

> *At that time, I was so confused why we learnt a lot of courses in other disciplines, for instance politics, human resources, and demography. Now I can't remember what I learnt. (SH12: 32-year-old female OM in Shanghai)*

The PMs: facing a fuzzy boundary

For PMs, facing a fuzzy boundary was the main characteristic of the challenges they faced. This characteristic is connected to the second and third aspects. PMs felt stressed and unequal when having to deal with inter-organizational relationships. The Chinese government is the most influential stakeholder and PMs felt frustrated with the blurred boundary between government and NPOs, and the domination with regard to NPOs. Other stakeholders, including the Community Neighborhood Committee (CNC), tender companies, and evaluation and audit enterprises, are common cooperators. PMs also felt they had a fragile and unequal relationship with these stakeholders and experienced difficulties arising from the existence of boundary spanning external stakeholders.

Social workers were frequently required to take administrative work from the CNC, but as a PM, I had to ensure the provision of quality services, so I was very frustrated. (SZ13: 34-year-old female OM in Shenzhen)

The OMs: a stressful relationship with a dominant government and boundary spanning, and the low operationalization of policies

Two characteristics were present at the OM stage: (a) a stressful relationship with the dominant government and boundary spanning; and (b) low operationalization of policies, regulations, and standards. These are connected to the third and fourth aspects. In comparison with the FSWs and PMs, the OMs felt more tension due to dominant government, and stated that NPOs and social workers were extremely vulnerable due to their high dependence on the government purchase of social work services. They also were critical of the government's bureaucracy and managerialism, formalism, and the uncertainty of successive funding rounds influencing NPOs: social workers were the most serious victims of administrative disturbance. With regard to external stakeholders, the OMs also felt the difficulties arising from boundary spanning. Regarding low operationalization, the OMs frequently complained that the policies, regulations, and standards issued were too abstract to serve clients, and also realized there was no continuous governmental fiscal budget in Shanghai and Xiamen.

The former leader has already approved two projects, but the contracts have not been signed yet; however, when the new leader was in place, he totally refused to consider these two projects…. Another case is that of a leader commented favorably on our business model last year, but he totally denied it this year. (SH09: 34-year-old female OM in Shanghai)

Immature professionalization

The second theme of challenges concerns the immature professionalization of social work and NPOs. Three specific aspects unfolded in terms of the theme of immature professionalization: (a) unclear career prospects: the participants witnessed the offer of inadequate jobs and a low employment rate among social work graduates; most graduates chose non-social work jobs in the government and commercial sectors, so were not confident about working as social workers; (b) the low thresholds with regard to qualifying as a social worker and registering an NPO: the top-down oriented social work development has been regarded as main stream over the past decade in China, and this has resulted in the low thresholds for the licensure of social workers. Consequently, many people don't have any social work education but have been rushed into this field and been qualified as licensed social workers. Moreover, a large number of commercial sectors and government dominant relationships interfered the social work field for profit. Consequently, social workers felt confused regarding their mission and professional roles; (c) the inexperienced NPO management and an immature atmosphere: the participants often felt frustrated when the organization failed to offer them sufficient support, and an intention to move on might then emerge.

The immature professionalization can be further analyzed in terms of the three stages of FSW, PM and OM.

The FSWs: confused professional identity, low social status and inadequate organizational support

The FSWs demonstrated and expressed concerns about two characteristics in line with the theme of immature professionalization: (a) a confused professional identity and low social status: this characteristic is connected to the first and second aspects mentioned earlier. The FSWs were confused about the professional social worker identity, and current low social status, since they have repeatedly experienced the service recipients' and government's doubts regarding the professionalism and irreplaceability of social work, and the public's social recognition of social workers. In this respect, they felt there was a limited social network in the social work field. All of these factors led to confusion regarding their professional identity; (b) inadequate organizational support: this characteristic is connected to the third aspect. The FSWs suffered from inadequate organizational support in their early career, including patchy professional supervision, few exchange and training opportunities, insufficient peer support, and the absence of an organizational accumulation of service experience or appropriate social work services model. Worse, when engaged in exploring new projects, they usually felt nervous.

When I worked in a public hospital, I felt my role was doubted by doctors, nurses, patients and hospital leaders. They even devalued social work and did not cooperate with me. (SZ04: 31-year-old female PM in Shenzhen)

The PMs: project management pressure, and a shortage and instability of social workers

Regarding the PMs, two characteristics are exhibited with regard to the immature professionalization of NPOs: (a) project management pressure, and (b) a human resources shortage and team instability, with both characteristics present in the challenging intra-organizational field. These are connected to inexperienced NPO management and unclear career prospects. The first pressure resulted from the increasing number of new projects, as well as inadequate organizational support and authorization, and inexperienced leadership. The PMs were occupied in starting new projects, training new social workers, and developing new modes of cooperation. Occasionally they felt disappointed as they could not take part in the decision-making process. In addition, conflicts between social work values and managerialism

increased the pressure. A corruption scandal happened with one NPO in Shenzhen, illustrating the conflict between commercial pursuit and altruism. The second characteristic expounds the impact of the shortage and the lack of a stable workforce in terms of social workers. The PMs always took on multiple duties or positions or had to assign an additional workload to colleagues. This led to a high turnover among social workers that further exacerbated this pressure. When new social workers arrived, their low capacity increased the training and supervision burden of PMs. The adjustment of organizational departments, and the transformation of positions between different projects, service areas, or even organizations, also caused new maladjustment and meant the PMs had to work for a new form of cooperation in novel circumstances.

> *In 2004, when we finished a project and began another one, a high turnover happened, with all social workers in that project resigning…. A similar phenomenon happened again in 2005. (XM16: 29-year-old female PM in Xiamen)*

The OM: organizational governance pressure

As for the OMs, the major challenge was organizational governance pressure. This is connected to the inexperienced NPO management and atmosphere. The OMs argued that the challenge stemming from NPO governance included the high cost of administrative and project management, the low participation of board members, and the need for strategic management. They also stated that the core competitiveness of the organization was fragile due to the limited amount of human resources and a limited budget that could be invested in research and development of new service models, creating known brands of services or projects, and exploring diverse fundraising and the possibility of sustainable development.

> *As the co-founder, I needed to create project brands and a business model, and make our service specialty known…. In recent years, a lot of SWSOs were founded; I feel more survival pressure and competition, since resources are limited. (XM01: 32-year-old male OM in Xiamen)*

What coping strategies were utilized?

In response to the above challenges, three main coping strategies were identified, as shown in Table 2.2: (a) building partnerships and integrating resources; (b) utilizing a professional and personal social support network; and (c) improving organizational governance and strategic management. Each coping strategy consists of different sub-strategies. Firstly, these sub-strategies were utilized to respond to two challenges, elaborated in the following section. Secondly, they could be further analyzed to cope with challenges at the three stages of FSW, PM and OM.

Coping strategies in response to the two challenges

From an ongoing career perspective, this study demonstrates the coping strategies that were utilized by Chinese social workers at three career stages in order to respond to two challenges and to allow them to survive in the uncertain context of an emerging profession.

In the case of the FSWs, when encountering the two themes relating to challenges, the survival coping strategy was the same (as shown in Table 2.2): utilizing a professional and personal social support network. They sought to develop teamwork along with peer support and the use of volunteers, and participated in supervision, training, and communication to enhance their professional survival skills and knowledge, and to compensate for the insufficient early professional education. This also provided recognition of their professional identity and social status. During this process, the PMs and OMs played the role of supporters.

In the case of the PMs, mastering the survival coping strategies adopted by the FSWs that all participants experienced at this stage, is the basic requirement. Moreover, the survival coping strategies for PMs not only depend on whether they can build a partnership and integrate resources to construct appropriate professional boundaries and enhance their social status, it also depends on whether they can utilize a professional and personal social support network to improve their project management capacities and acquire essential supplementary human resources. In addition, the PMs expressed better organizational governance; for instance, authorization, participating in decision-making, and a free and equal culture enabled them to survive for longer.

For the OMs, they undoubtedly had to obtain the survival coping strategies for both the FSWs and PMs to overcome the challenges relating to professional skills, project management and external cooperation, especially with regard to the stressful government relationships. They also integrated resources to counter the government constraints, and to explore diverse funding approaches. Most importantly, the key survival strategy for the OMs was whether they could find the right direction and a series of appropriate strategies to improve organizational governance and development, so that their own personal and professional pursuit of a higher income and increased social status, the organizational mission, and a better career and promotion for social workers could be achieved. As part of this process, the professionalization of social work and that of NPOs is improved.

Coping strategies utilized at three stages

Each coping strategy is specified as consisting of various sub-strategies. Consequently, it is necessary to clarify the key points regarding the different specific sub-strategies that were used at the three stages of FSW, PM and OM.

Building a partnership and resource integration utilized with regard to the three stages

This includes three sub-strategies: (a) actively establishing a cooperative relationship with the government; (b) integrating external resources; (c) enhancing social status through voicing, actions, and policy advocacy.

All participants agreed on the importance of using these coping categories. Furthermore, differences were noted with regard to each of the three stages. The FSWs seldom employed them directly because they were concerned with providing social work services. The PMs applied them to construct professional boundaries and to realize project effects. The OMs took the major responsibility for using these coping strategies to develop external cooperation and resource integration. Comparatively, the OMs frequently ensured their voice was heard through relationship building and policy advocacy in order to develop a broader degree of cooperation and to enhance the social status of social workers.

I always keep a good relationship with the local government… Later I explored the
connection with the Women's Federation and got a project funded…. Two years
later, I was recommended to the Trade Union and developed a project…In 2005, I
was elected as the Vice-president of the District Social Work Association, and the
deputy of the District People's Congress (NPC); these titles brought the
organization broader cooperation, and I could make our voice heard better through
policy advocacy. (SH09: 34-year-old female OM in Shanghai)

Three approaches with regard to developing a cooperative relationship with the government were: selective cooperation, a compromised and concessive solution, and initiative cooperation. Selective cooperation refers to choosing appropriate cooperators that align with social work values. A compromised and concessive solution refers to social workers compromised by the government's needs in order to achieve project or organizational cooperation; this solution was shown to be the main approach. Initiative cooperation suggests that social workers positively initiate projects and cooperative intentions in order to seek potential government cooperators.

Utilizing a professional and personal social support network utilized with regard to the three stages

This includes two sub-strategies: (a) seeking teamwork and support from peers, supervisors, and volunteers; and (b) participating in training and communications, cultivating supervisors, and enhancing practice standards.

All participants confirmed that supervision, training, and communication were accepted ways to improve their capacities, but identified certain differences. The FSWs prioritized supervision, and they used peer support and volunteers when supervision or organizational support was inadequate. The PMs preferred to seek supervision, and to develop teamwork and peer support when they experienced project management pressure. At the same time, volunteers or interns and peer support were used to supplement the shortage of human resources or changing teams. The OMs offered support to the FSWs and PMs by organizing supervision,

training, and communication, and thus attempted to maintain a stable and competitive team. The OMs were responsible for motivating the board members to participate in organizational governance and to enhance practice standards. Senior social workers, including the OMs and PMs, were cultivated as internal supervisors; social work professors from universities, and local or non-local supervisors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau, were usually the external supervisors. The Associations of Social Work in the three cities were appraised highly as they initiated the Social Work Supervisor Training Scheme.

> *When I began my career in 2004, the organization offered a three-week training… I learnt a lot of knowledge and skills then…. When I was a PM, I took similar responsibilities to the FSWs because of inadequate supervision, we helped each other through peer support and teamwork. (SH14: 46-year-old female OM in Shanghai)*

Improving organizational governance and strategic management

Three sub-strategies are identified: (a) clarifying the organizational mission and vision, improving the strategy and business model, and creating brand projects and standards; (b) strengthening authorization and participation rights, adjusting departments and the allocation of human resources, and promoting inter-departmental collaboration; and (c) creating a free, open, equal, and participatory culture and atmosphere.

The OMs took on the major responsibilities in this category, although the FSWs and PMs were highly engaged in a series of organizational initiatives, for instance revising organizational rules, hiring part-time or retired workers from the local community, editing the practice manual and establishing the International Organization for Standardization (ISO9001) for service standards.

> *Since 2008, we have spent six years on the ISO9001 authentication, now we have expanded it to each social worker. So, 30 senior social workers were selected and trained to be qualified assistant supervisors. (SH14: 46-year-old female OM in Shanghai)*

Discussion and Conclusion

The challenges that Chinese social workers encountered are related to constraining social structures and to the immature professionalization of social work and NPOs. The findings also demonstrated three categories of coping strategies utilized by Chinese social workers to respond to the challenges arising from the existing social structures. These coping strategies demonstrated the importance of building a partnership with stakeholders in social structures, using social networks, and improving the social work field. Specific findings are discussed as follows.

The top-down approach: pros and cons coexisting with regard to Chinese social workers' survival

The top-down social structures in mainland China apparently affect the social work fields and social workers' survival, and the need to improve the social work field. This study shows that the Chinese government could continue promoting the soaring development of social work via a top-down approach, in terms of issuing appropriate policies and regulations; social work is expanding to every single city and community under top-down power relations, and the number of social workers and NPOs is increasing rapidly. The top-down approach was therefore regarded as the factor that determines whether social work develops, and whether or not social workers can emerge and survive. The findings also show that the government is the most important source of power affecting the development of social work, which is why it has developed according to "the Embedded Model" in China (Wang, 2011b; Wang & Yuen-Tsang, 2009). In this respect, this study shows that the social work professional boundaries have not yet been established: the field of professional social work is ambiguous in China because the top-down power relations from the government continually interferes with social workers and the work they do.

It also indicates that the relationship between the Chinese government and social workers and NPOs is likely be an employer-employee relation, while the social work professional field is actually "the field of power" or "the dominant or pre-eminent field", this strong power

structure is "…the source of the hierarchical power relations" (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 53-54) within the professional field in China. The Chinese government could easily cross the social work professional boundary based on strong power relations to interfere in the services provided and with regard to project or organizational management. In this respect, to understand Chinese social workers' survival issue with regard to work engagement, the top-down social structures, especially the dominant Chinese government, play a vital role of influencing Chinese social workers' work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Whether or not Chinese social workers continue professional practice with high enthusiasm, dedication and recognition of work role, the top-down social structures act as dualistic roles, i.e., making Chinese social workers full of energy and hope to enter this field during the early career, and also disappointing them when high power relations and social control appear. The above points expand the structural factors that may improve work engagement, this is beyond Bakker *et al.* (2014)'s arguments that the organizational support from supervisors and colleagues improved work engagement. The FSWs in this study realized the difficulties of distinguishing between professional and administrative social work and wondered what services they should provide or avoid. The PMs and OMs noticed that project management and organization governance and development were highly constrained by this power relationship, and felt it was difficult to break the constraints in order to build this professional field. Consequently, they were dismayed by the superficial prosperity and weak professionalism of social work.

Intra-organizational solutions

This study shows that the Chinese NPO environment plays an influential role and impacts directly on social workers' survival in the emerging social work profession. NPOs, especially SWSOs in mainland China are considered a more specialized field of social work practice than that of the government and commercial sectors. This study also demonstrates that the rapid expansion and shortage of human resources are distinct factors in this field, and such circumstances make it easy for Chinese social workers to start their career at NPOs. Nevertheless, the negative influences stemming from the NPO field are clearly visible, and the

findings echo the immature professionalization of NPOs (Guan, 2015; Zhu & Chen, 2013), which has placed a lot of pressure on the PMs and OMs, and has even hindered their survival as social workers. However, given that all the participants involved in the research process eventually survived, a review of the second and third coping strategies in detailed in Table 2.2, enables us to readily assert that Chinese social workers, whether they are FSWs, PMs or OMs, have always utilized strategies based on intra-organizational solutions to cope with the challenges emerging from changing social structures, such as seeking peer support, developing teamwork, seeking supervision, clarifying the organizational mission and creating a participatory culture. The findings echo previous research that the organizational support from supervisors and colleagues improved work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2014).

Pragmatic survival practices

In terms of the pragmatic survival practice, Chinese social workers generally cope with the challenges brought about by changing social structures and eventually survive. This study shows that Chinese social workers have played the roles of self-endorser and demonstrator in order to survive in changing and challenging contexts. As Healy (2008) stated, "…[the] external [social] recognition of social work contributions remains limited" (p. 744), which is certainly the case in China, and Chinese social workers have been immersed in self-recognition over the past ten years (Wang, 2013). This study echoes these arguments, and expands the self-endorsement of social workers as a sufficient way to bridge self-recognition and the social recognition of social work in China. Self-endorsement is a demonstrative pragmatic process of high work engagement (Aiello & Tesi, 2017; Geisler *et al.*, 2019) based on social work services and effectiveness to enhance longevity among social workers (Kincaid, 2017), which means that social workers allow themselves to trust and to work for social work commitments (self-recognition) to eventually improve the social recognition of social work through the provision of quality services and the resulting social impact. If self-recognition is the preliminary step of self-endorsement; social recognition is the final destination. In view of "…the interrelated and mutual reinforcing relationship between self-recognition and social recognition" (Wang, 2013, p. 113), this study elucidates how self-recognition develops and enhances the social recognition

of social work in China, based on social workers' survival practices. Self-endorsement instils in Chinese social workers the initial intrinsic motivation or survival in this profession, but this is not enough to help them survive in a long-term career. More importantly, when they played the demonstrator role and faced the relevant stakeholders, such as the dominant government and commercial sectors, they broke through the constraining social structures in an attempt to construct a professional field. This is because they have not only applied multidimensional strategies to cope with the challenges, but have also used service effectiveness and organizational governance to demonstrate the professionalization of social work and its irreplaceability. During this process, they might break through the constraints of social structures to achieve better social recognition and then build professional boundaries and explore professional autonomy to ensure longer and better survival.

Conclusions

Chinese social workers encounter challenges from constraining social structures and the immature professionalization of social work and NPOs when surviving in emerging contexts. These challenges take on various characteristics at three professional stages. For the FSWs, the survival code is to improve professional service skills and knowledge. For the PMs, the survival code is to construct appropriate professional boundaries, improve project management capacities and seek essential supplementary human resources. For the OMs, the survival code is to find the best ways to improve organizational governance and development. All participants play the part of self-endorser and demonstrator to enhance social recognition and to pursue long-term survival in the emerging, changing, and challenging contexts that exist in China.

Implications

The findings can be applied to understand the structure, field, and practice in the Chinese social work context under the ToP, and to interpret the challenges faced and coping strategies used to survive in this emerging profession. Among social workers, the findings could be applied to better interpret the profession in this emerging context, with political thinking being necessary to understand the constraints of these social structures. This study also illuminates

the appropriate survival strategies that social workers need to employ at different stages to ensure a longer and better career.

Limitations

Future research could focus on social workers in one city or one organization, either to pursue deeper insights into their survival stories by conducting participant observation or adopting an ethnographic approach, or to follow up career changes over time using a longitudinal method. Additionally, researchers could interview social workers outside NPOs, and stakeholders from the government and commercial sectors to obtain a more diverse range of voices. A quantitative method could also be utilized to create a survival scale for social workers.

References

Aiello, A., & Tesi, A. (2017). Psychological Well-Being and Work Engagement among Italian Social Workers: Examining the Mediational Role of Job Resources. *Social Work Research, 41*(2), 73-84. doi:10.1093/swr/svx005

An, Q., & Chapman, M. V. (2014). The early professional experience of a new social worker in China. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(2), 322−333.

Bai, J. (2014). What is the role of social work in China? A multi-dimensional analysis. *Advances in Social Work, 15*(2), 495−506.

Bakker, A. B. (2011). An Evidence-Based Model of Work Engagement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*(4), 265-269. doi:10.1177/0963721411414534

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and work-engagement: The JD-R approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 389–411. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Johnson, R. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Cambridge: New York: Polity Press; Columbia University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77−101.

Bryan, A., & Aymer, C. (1996). Black social work students and practitioners: Survival strategies. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 10*(2), 113−117. doi:10.1080/02650539608415106

Cheung, C., & Ngai, S. (2009). Surviving hegemony through resistance and identity articulation among outreaching social workers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 26*(1), 15−37.

Curtis, L., Moriarty, J., & Netten, A. (2012). The costs of qualifying a social worker. *The British Journal of Social Work, 42*(4), 706−724.

Donnellan, H. (2010). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers: Hitting the Ground Running*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Donnellan, H. (2014). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers, Hitting the Ground Running* (2nd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Fan, M., & Cheng, J. (2005). Research on the building and development of the interactive relationship between government and NGO in urban community. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 5*(35), 118−142 (In Chinese).

Feng, Y., & Peng, H. (2016). Background, power and value of soical work policy development in China *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, 1*(229), 62−68 (In Chinese).

Galpin, D., Bigmore, J., Parker, J*., et al.* (2012). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Adult and Mental Health Services: Hitting the Ground Running*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Geisler, M., Berthelsen, H., & Muhonen, T. (2019). Retaining Social Workers: The Role of Quality of Work and Psychosocial Safety Climate for Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 43*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/23303131.2019.1569574

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Grimes, T., & Hou, S.-I. (2013). "A breast ain't nothing but a sandwich": Narratives of Ella, an African American social worker breast cancer survivor. *Social Work in Public Health, 28*(1), 44-53. doi:10.1080/19371918.2010.513667

Guan, B. (2015). Competition and counter-embeddedness: Government procurement for public services and the development of social organizations. *Journal of Public Management, 12*(03), 83−92 (In Chinese).

Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs. (2016). The report for the ten years' social work development in Guangdong Province. *The Ten Years of Social Work*

Development (In Chinese). Retrieved from

http://mzzt.mca.gov.cn/article/sggzzsn/jlcl/201611/20161100887284.shtml

Guo, W. (2016). Insights from the fifth plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee on indigenisation of the path of development of social work in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 9*(1), 92−95.

Halmi, A. (1996). The qualitative approach to social work: An epistemological basis. *International Social Work, 39*, 363−375. doi:10.1177/002087289603900403

Harrington, A. (2005). *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Healy, L. (2008). Exploring the history of social work as a human rights profession. *International Social Work, 51*(6), 735−748.

Huang, X. (2015). The institutional environment and the develpment of contemporary Chinese social organizations. *Social Sciences in China, 09*, 146−164, 206−207 (In Chinese).

Katz, C. (2013). The narratives of abused children who have survived attempted filicide. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*(10), 762-770.

Kincaid, M. (2017). *Longevity among social workers: A multiple case study.* (Ph.D), Capella University.

Law, A. K. c., & Gu, J. X. (2008). Social work education in mainland China: Development and issues. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review, 2*(1), 1−12. doi:10.1111/j.1753-1411.2008.00006.x

Lei, J., & Huang, W. (2017). Pragmatic professonalism: Definition of professional competence and its relationality for social workers in comprehensive family service, Guangzhou. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 37*(1), 211−241 (In Chinese).

Leung, J. (2007). An international definition of social work for China. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 16*(4), 391−397.

Li, Y., Huang, C., & Han, W. (2012). Development of social work education in China: Background, current status, and prospects. *Journal of Social Work Education, 48*(4), 635−653. doi:10.5175/JSWE.2012.201100049

Liu, Z. (2012). The development of social work policy in China: Current status and strategies. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(1), 81−90.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/survival

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2017). Data Talks Social Work (In Chinese). Retrieved from http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA5NDc3Nzc2Nw==&mid=2651521112&idx=3 &sn=566a9741642baec7d0372d441850bfdd&chksm=8bb6d890bcc151869dc5f76f65 c4ce2c1b25ea55010120bfcb95c2cabba77f4218d4d5f863b3&mpshare=1&scene=5&s rcid=0322gXWNuX8h7OJ5yowSiYCA#rd

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2019). A New Chapter for the Reform and Development of Civil Affairs in the New Era: National Video Conference of Civil Affairs 2019. Retrieved from http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/mzyw/201901/20190100014249.shtml (In Chinese)

Ministry of Education of China. (2018). Announcement of the Results of Degrees Authorization in 2017 (In Chinese). Retrieved from http://www.moe.edu.cn/s78/A22/A22_gggs/s8476/201801/t20180108_324005.html

Niu, D., & Haugen, H. Ø. (2019). Social workers in China: Professional identity in the making. *The British Journal of Social Work, 49*(7), 1932-1949. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy107

Oxford Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Oxford Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/survival

Parkin, R. (1997). Practice theory. In T. Barfield (Ed.), *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (pp. 375-377). Oxford: Blackwell.

Schaufeli, W., Salanova, M., González-romá, V*., et al.* (2002). The Measurement of
Engagement and Burnout: A Two Sample Confirmatory Factor Analytic Approach.
Journal of Happiness Studies, 3(1), 71-92. doi:10.1023/A:1015630930326

Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship
with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational
Behavior, 25*(3), 293-315. doi:10.1002/job.248

Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. (2016). The Report for the Ten Years' Social Work
Development in Shanghai. *The Ten Years of Social Work Development (In Chinese)*
Retrieved from
http://mzzt.mca.gov.cn/article/sggzzsn/jlcl/201611/20161100887267.shtml

Sinha, S. (2007). Essays on Economic Development and the Survival of Girls in India. In P.
Pattanaik & A. B. Deolalikar (Eds.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Tesi, A., Aiello, A., & Giannetti, E. (2019). The work-related well-being of social workers:
Framing job demands, psychological well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of
Social Work, 19*(1), 121-141. doi:10.1177/1468017318757397

Tsang, A. K. T., & Yan, M. C. (2001). Chinese corpus, western application: The Chinese
strategy of engagement with western social work discourse. *International Social
Work, 44*(4), 433.

Tum, T. (2006). The Street Children Phenomenon: A Qualitative Study on How Street
Children Survive in Eldoret, Kenya. In K. Ohman (Ed.): ProQuest Dissertations
Publishing.

Ungar, M. (2004). Surviving as a postmodern social sorker: Two Ps and three Rs of direct
practice. *Social Work, 49*(3), 488−496.

Vassos, M., Nankervis, K., Skerry, T*., et al.* (2013). Work engagement and job burnout within
the disability support worker population. *Research in Developmental Disabilities,
34*(11), 3884-3895. doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2013.08.005

Walther, M. (2014). *Repatriation to France and Germany: A Comparative Study Based on
Bourdieu's Theory of Practice*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Wang, E., Jiang, W., & Mao, S. (2019). Job autonomy and turnover intention among social workers in China: Roles of work-to-family enrichment, job satisfaction and type of sector. *Journal of Social Service Research*. doi:10.1080/01488376.2019.1698487

Wang, S. (2011). The embedding development of social work in China. *Social Science Front, 02*, 206−222 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2013). Toward recognition: The development of professional social work in China. *Hebei Academic Journal, 33*(06), 108−113 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2014). Participation of social work in social governance innovation. *Social Construction, 01*, 8−15 (In Chinese).

Wang, S., & Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2009). The development of social work in China in the context of building a harmonious society. *Social Sciences in China, 5*, 128−140 (In Chinese).

Yan, M. C., & Cheng, S.-L. (2009). Searching for Chinese characteristics: A tentative empirical examination. *China Journal of Social Work, 2*(1), 5-19. doi:10.1080/17525090802692112

Yan, M. C., Gao, J. G., & Lam, C. M. (2013). The dawn is too distant: The experience of 28 social work graduates entering the social work field in China. *Social Work Education, 32*(4), 538-551. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.688097

Yan, M. C., Ge, Z.-M., Cheng, S.-L*., et al.* (2009). Imagining social work: A qualitative study of students' perspectives on social work in China. *Social Work Education, 28*(5), 528-543. doi:10.1080/02615470802368959

Yan, M. C., & Tsang, A. K. T. (2005). A snapshot on the development of social work education in China: A delphi study. *Social Work Education, 24*(8), 883−901. doi:10.1080/02615470500342314

Yip, K.-S. (2007). Professionalization of social-work practice in the People's Republic of China: A tri-tensional analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 17*(2), 56−69.

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2012). IASSW and social work development in Indonesia, Vietnam and China. *International Social Work, 55*(5), 757−761.

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K., & Wang, S. (2002). Tensions confronting the development of social work education in China: Challenges and opportunities. *International Social Work, 45*(3), 375−388.

Zhang, D., Zheng, Y., & Li, J. (2014). Social environment, social support and social worker's burnout: Baed on a survey of 100 social workers in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan. *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, 206*(2), 79-84 (In Chinese).

Zhao, R., Wu, Z., & Tao, C. (2016). Understanding service contracting and its impact on NGO development in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 27*(5), 2229−2251. doi:10.1007/s11266-016-9714-3

Zhu, J., & Chen, A. (2013). The embeddedness of professional social work into the power relations of urban community: A case study of government service purchase. *Sociological Studies, 01*, 43−64 (In Chinese).

Chapter Three: Study 2 – Coping Strategies with Survival Practice Challenges: Chinese Social Workers' Narratives in a Fledgling Profession

Abstract

Many Chinese social workers leave the emerging profession after one or two years, while others survive for a longer term. This study focuses on the challenges Chinese social workers face in their daily practice and the coping strategies they utilize to survive. This qualitative research interviewed 49 social workers from three Chinese cities, followed by three focus groups, and revealed four challenges: (a) excessive workload; (b) economic pressure; (c) inadequate competence; and (d) values and ethical dilemmas. These challenges present distinct characteristics at three professional stages among social workers. Four coping strategies were identified: (a) improving and utilizing agency through a learning-by-doing approach; (b) utilizing social and symbolic capital; (c) using cultural capital in terms of work-life balance and commitment to the social work mission; and (d) using agency to improve economic capital. Interestingly, intrinsic motivation such as belief in and commitment to the social work mission, was not enough to enable Chinese social workers to survive. Consequently, satisfaction with extrinsic realistic needs helped them survive in a long-term career. The study advances the theory of practice through an examination of agency, capital and practice, and suggests that social workers should treat the profession as an ordinary job and utilize pragmatic ways to survive.

Keywords: social worker, survival, practice, agency, capital, China

Introduction

The licensure of social worker came into effect in China in 2008 and social work was then regarded as an emerging profession. The number of social work service organizations (SWSOs), non-profit organizations named as such in China, increased to over 6,000 in 2018 following the government purchase of social work services since 2013. NPOs including SWSOs are the primary workplaces for Chinese social workers. 440,000 national social worker licenses were

issued by the end of 2018 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2019). Policies related to social work have developed year by year, and impacted on Chinese social workers' intentions to remain in the profession. However, the challenges arising from daily practice result in a high turnover (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Yan *et al.*, 2013), many Chinese social workers leave the profession after a few years. Others survive and continue to work in the profession for more than five years. However, it is not easy to survive for a long time. Existing studies have revealed statistical relationships, linear correlations or associations between different factors, or derived reasons and implications through the application of structuralist or functionalist approaches (Liu *et al.*, 2012b; Wang, 2011b; Yuan & Xu, 2016). However, previous studies have rarely focused on surviving social workers who have stayed for several years, and will continue in social work as a long-term career, nor have they elicited narratives in terms of the coping strategies they adopt when encountering challenges arising from personal survival practice. The academic and practical community has called for an in-depth interpretation of social workers' survival stories in mainland China, in order to reduce turnover and maintain a long-term and stable social work force. This study aimed to unveil: (a) the challenges Chinese social workers face during daily practice; and (b) the coping strategies utilized to survive in this profession. Challenges emerging from structural and organizational levels and the coping strategies subsequently utilized are discussed in a parallel study. The theory of practice (ToP) was employed to elaborate on concepts of agency, capital and practice.

Literature Review

Terminology of survival

The term "survival" in the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) and Oxford Dictionary (2017) is defined as "the continuation of existence", including practice, act, life and fact. This is therefore the fundamental meaning of survival adopted in this study, i.e., continuing to work in the social work profession. In the social work field, "survival" is frequently used to describe the way service recipients or vulnerable groups survive physical, mental or social adversity, such as disasters, diseases and abuse (Grimes & Hou, 2013; Katz,

2013; Sinha, 2007; Tum, 2006). However, studies on the survival of social workers are limited. While no specific definition has been elaborated, social work scholars have highlighted "survival" in various social, professional, emotional and physical dimensions, including challenges, survival guidance for newly qualified social workers, marginalization, skills or capacities, social support, work sustainability, and effectiveness (Cheung & Ngai, 2009; Curtis *et al.*, 2012; Donnellan, 2010, 2014; Galpin *et al.*, 2012; Ungar, 2004).

Challenges facing social workers

Social workers face a myriad of challenges during practice, such as increasing paperwork and caseloads, problems with tough clients (Guerin *et al.*, 2010; Koeske & Koeske, 1989), staff shortages, low retention rates and a relatively high degree of job mobility (Guerin *et al.*, 2010), poor morale (Collins, 2008), role ambiguity (Van Robaeys *et al.*, 2018; Yürür & Sarikaya, 2012), job dissatisfaction, poor pay, low recognition (Coffey *et al.*, 2004), growing bureaucratization and intermittent supervision (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013), burnout and stress (Bennett *et al.*, 1993; Weinreich, 2015), confusing legislation , and even marginalization (Bryan & Aymer, 1996). Chinese social workers also suffer diverse challenges including burnout and stress, depression, a fragile professional identity (Liu *et al.*, 2012b), confused roles, deficient skills and capacity, a lack of supervision, high workload, low wages and social status (An & Chapman, 2014), a shortage of staff and high turnover (Jiang *et al.*, 2017), organizational bureaucracy and managerialism, constraints from government sectors, and low social recognition (Wang, 2011b; Wang & Yuen-Tsang, 2009). With so many multidimensional challenges, it is not easy to survive in this profession in the long term. Nevertheless, some have done so for several years, although previous studies seldom focus on these surviving groups.

Related issues: the uncertainty and unknown to achieve survival remains

Several intrinsic issues related to survival are worthy of discussion, including social work as a mission-driven profession, hope, professional competence, adjustment and coping, resilience, and well-being. Since social workers are driven by mission and hope to work in the social work field (Healy, 2008), social workers possess internal motivations and exhibit

professional competence or capabilities, and could utilize personal efforts to cope with the challenges they face during daily survival practice (Collins, 2015). These issues are also related to agency and capital of the ToP, which provides an appropriate theoretical framework to address the research objectives.

Mission driven profession?

Social work is a typical mission-driven profession, as their stated mission motivates social workers to struggle for human rights (Healy, 2008) and a better world. The visible statement of this mission in different countries shows a dual commitment to individual well-being and social justice (Zhao *et al.*, 2017), while core values and ethics serve as "…the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective" (NASW, 2017). However, scepticism arises when dual commitments encounter low social recognition (Fine & Teram, 2009; Gibelman & Sweifach, 2008): as Healy (2008) stated, "…external recognition of social work contributions remains limited" (p.744). An *et al*. (2014) also added that a commitment to social work in itself does not maintain Chinese social worker in their positions as multiple factors, such as larger pay bonuses and greater job security in other jobs or professions, affect turnover. The extent to which social workers are driven by a mission, or whether other realistic considerations enable them to survive as professionals, requires further empirical evidence.

Professional or personal hope

In the social work field, professional hope stems from belief, and is related to the sense of mission (Collins, 2015; Koenig & Spano, 2007); it motivates social workers to make a better tomorrow (Boddy *et al.*, 2018; Schwartz *et al.*, 2007). Professional hope, also regarded as critical for effective practice (Bent-Goodley, 2015), inspires social workers to "…maintain resistance and persistence in the face of difficulties" and to "…look forward to progress and growth" (Collins, 2015, p. 209). Nevertheless, social workers are aware that it is not easy to generate and retain hope, as hope is negatively influenced by factors such as burnout (Lizano & Barak, 2015), lack of internal motivation (Boddy *et al.*, 2018), and external relationships (Koenig & Spano, 2007; McCarter, 2007; Tsui, 2005; Tsui, 2006). Moreover, little is known about the way in which Chinese social workers generate and conceptualize personal hope

(Koenig & Spano, 2007), and how they are motivated by personal hope to survive as professionals.

Professional competence

Professional competence, as a key element of core values, ensures social worker survive in the profession (Damron-Rodriguez, 2008). Multidimensional competence is developed in the Chinese context (Chan *et al.*, 2017). However, compared with western countries differences exist, thus "…despite social work in China being reconstructed 30 years ago, the question of whether it has built its own professional value system still remains" (Zhao *et al.*, 2017, p. 2). Professional competence might be ineffective (Zeng *et al.*, 2016) yet social workers still need to develop competence and struggle for survival as professionals. The extent to which professional competence is developed and applied during personal practice therefore requires further exploration.

Resilience

Resilience is strongly related to resources and abilities. In the context of social service recipients, resilience is defined as a strengths-based approach to determine the potential and available strengths individuals possess with regard to resolving stress (Beddoe *et al.*, 2014, p. 114). Furthermore, it is also used to advocate "resistance and rebellion" to change oppressive relationships (Guo & Tsui, 2010, p. 236). For social workers, resilience plays a positive role in building well-being and competence and enabling them to survive and develop from a novice into an experienced practitioner (Beddoe *et al.*, 2014; Grant & Kinman, 2013). Moreover, *personal factors* such as capacity building and organizational environments such as adequate supervision and collegial support are emphasized as vital ways of fostering resilience, which result directly in survival in this profession (Shier & Graham, 2011). In emerging Chinese contexts, the extent to which social workers foster and employ resilience in survival practices requires further empirical investigation.

Adjustment and coping

Among social workers, adjustment and coping strategies have been broadly investigated; however, discussions based on personal perspectives are lacking. Social support has been

reported as a major coping strategy (Collins, 2008; Radey *et al.*, 2017) through which social workers are able to "…deal with both instrumental and emotional issues" to remain in the profession (Sánchez-Moreno *et al.*, 2015, p. 2371). Practically, scholars also summarize survival guides for newly qualified social workers in the UK (Donnellan, 2010, 2014; Galpin *et al.*, 2012). Topics addressed include understanding professional status, defining roles and tasks, developing professional expertise, transitional change, time management, dealing with emotions and exhaustion, and finding support. These are based on the UK but can be imported into Chinese contexts. In addition, to survive as a postmodern social worker, Ungar (2004) discussed the following in relation to direct practice: positioning, power, resource sharing, resistance, and reflection. Furthermore, when the unit costs of qualifying as a social worker increase, Curtis *et al.* (2012) suggest it is important "…to invest in policies to retain existing staff rather than recruit and train new social workers" (p.723). Regarding China's social workers, scholars have discussed the multidimensional adjustment and the coping strategies needed to survive in the profession, such as diverse social support and training (Wang, 2011a; Zhang *et al.*, 2014), maintaining enthusiasm and self-adjustment, and improving the organizational environment (Yuan & Xu, 2016). Moreover, "resistant discourses" has been revealed as a strategy to resurrect professional identity and to survive hegemony on the part of the government (Cheung & Ngai, 2009).

Well-being

Well-being is often highlighted in the literature dealing with job or life satisfaction, and burnout or stress among social workers. Workplace support (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013; Shier & Graham, 2011), informal social support (Sánchez-Moreno *et al.*, 2015), interpersonal communication, perceived social support, and personal accomplishment (Koeske & Koeske, 1989) act as a buffer or mediator between job satisfaction, affective well-being or life satisfaction, and burnout or stress, to enhance the well-being of social workers. A similar trend has also been observed in the Chinese literature (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2012b; Yuan & Xu, 2016). Previous studies have tended to focus on the linear relations between well-being and relevant factors, and have emphasized the organizational and interpersonal

perspectives. However, they have rarely obtained thick descriptions based on social workers' personal narratives. Therefore, in the Chinese context, more knowledge is needed regarding the way in which social workers' narratives of their well-being are driven by personal efforts and internal motivations or capabilities, and how well-being influences survival in this profession.

To sum up, Chinese social workers have faced multiple challenges in daily practice, and it is not easy to survive in this emerging profession. When reviewing issues related to survival, such as social work as a mission-driven profession, hope, professional competence, adjustment and coping, resilience and well-being, previous studies have presented their linear correlations, or discussed insights from structuralism or organizational perspectives (Collins, 2008; Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Stoner, 2008). However, few have been conducted from the social worker's perspective (An & Chapman, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2012b), and the uncertainty and unknown with how Chinese social workers employ these strategies to achieve survival still remains. A further empirical exploration of Chinese social workers' survival based on their own narratives is therefore required.

Work engagement

Literature informed that work engagement is highly related to social workers' survival issue. Work engagement is defined as a positive work-related state associated with an individual's high levels of energy, enthusiasm and involvement, and a high recognition of the work role, it consists of three components: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, 2011; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Geisler *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Vassos *et al.*, 2013). Vigor refers to the high level of energy put into work, dedication refers to enthusiasm and high involvement in the work role, while absorption relates to concentrate on one's work (Aiello & Tesi, 2017; Tesi *et al.*, 2019; Vassos *et al.*, 2013). In the social work context, Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) shed light on concentration on work engagement among social workers, and highlighted that they had experienced low levels of work engagement compared to other professionals. At the personal level, few studies have discussed work engagement and its correlates with factors, including stress, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and quality of

work (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Ravalier, 2018; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Ravalier (2018) deemed that high levels of work engagement alleviated perceived stress and turnover intentions, and improved presenteeism and job satisfaction in English social workers. Scholars also found that quality of work was strongly related to work engagement to Swedish social workers (Geisler *et al.*, 2019), psychological well-being was positively related to work engagement and high work engagement contributed occupational health (Tesi *et al.*, 2019). The existent research has also stated similar correlations between work engagement and job satisfaction, and turnover intention among other professionals, such as retail industry managers, business leaders in the accounting profession, nurses, and disability support workers (Edwards-Dandridge, 2019; Jones, 2018; Owusu-Ansah, 2018; Vassos *et al.*, 2013). However, there is a lack of knowledge of work engagement among Chinese social workers, and how they narrate work engagement related to professional survival from their own perspectives.

Theoretical concepts

The ToP was employed to analyze the ways in which Chinese social workers survive their real lives in the profession. Concepts of capital, position, agency, and practice were therefore discussed. Capital refers to particular resources in a given field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1986) defined four types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. Economic capital is related to an individual's fortune and income; cultural capital refers to status and assets in the social order obtained through individual cultural practices; social capital refers to an individual's social relations; and symbolic capital refers to the honor and recognition coming from external and internal sources (Bourdieu, 1986; Harrington, 2005; Walther, 2014). This study explores the specific forms of capital Chinese social workers have. Position suggests that "…social status in the social hierarchy is a product of individuals' economic capital and cultural capital taken together" (Harrington, 2005, p. 224). This study adopts the notion of social status denoting where Chinese social workers are located, and this changes in line with career stage development. Agency refers to the subjective ability or capacity of individuals or agents (Bourdieu, 1977). This study explores the degree of agency utilized to cope with challenges throughout the social worker's career. Practice is "…based on

the dispositions inherent in habitus". These is expanded in the form of strategies against common beliefs or popular opinions (Parkin, 1997, p. 376). This research explores the coping strategies utilized to deal with the challenges found in daily survival practice.

Research Methods

Methods

This qualitative research applied an in-depth interview as its main method and focus groups as a supplementary method to conduct a participant review of the major findings.

Research sites

Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Xiamen were purposefully sampled as the three research sites. Shenzhen is more advanced in terms of social work development and is the closest city to Hong Kong; Shanghai is the earliest pilot city to develop professional social work and has licensed social workers since 2003; Xiamen is characterized by inadequate development of social work and is the nearest city to Taiwan. The authors' professional and personal networks in these three cities were used to recruit adequate eligible participants. Hence, the three cities ensured the representativeness, diversity, and sufficiency of participants, and the feasibility of data collection (Glesne, 2011; Halmi, 1996).

Participants and inclusion criteria

Forty-nine participants were interviewed, and the inclusion criteria for both the interviews and focus groups were as follows: participants were licensed social workers holding a social work diploma, had more than five years' social work experience, and had been working at NPOs for more than one year. Various service areas and categories of social workers were represented, and gender and marital status were also duly considered.

There were 15, 16 and 18 participants from Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xiamen, respectively, comprising eight males and 41 females; 31 participants were married, 18 were single, and none were divorced. The average age and years spent working as social workers were 32.7 and 8.6, respectively. Twenty-two participants were categorized an organizational manager (OM), including director and deputy director, while all OMs had experienced the stages of front-line

social worker (FSW) and project officer or manager (PM); 25 participants were listed as being at the PM stage, either as a supervisor, project or departmental director, regional manager, and service center director, and all had experienced the FSW stage; two participants were at the FSW stage. All participants narrated the survival experience of the FSW stage.

Data collection and thematic analysis

Data collection consisted of two phases: in-depth interviews in phase one and three focus groups in phase two. In addition to professional and personal networks, snowballing was used to recruit participants. The survival stories participants recounted in interviews began from tertiary education and covered their entire career experience. When the preliminary findings had been generated, three parallel focus groups were carried out in the three cities to report on the findings and collect feedback from participants.

The verbatim transcription of interviews and focus groups amounted to 1.6 million and 80,000 words, respectively. NVivo 12 Plus software was used to assist in managing preliminary and secondary coding and searching for themes; however, the coding was manually conducted in NVivo by the author. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes, following six traditional phases comprising familiarization with data, coding data, searching for themes, generating a thematic map, defining and naming themes, and producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Four challenges

Four themes relating to challenges are identified as existing at a personal level during daily practice (see Table 3.1).

Excessive workload

The FSWs felt that a large caseload caused burnout or stress, as well as frequent turnover intentions; the PMs and OMs had to invest more effort to deal with project and organizational administrative work overload, respectively.

Table 3.1 Challenges and coping strategies at personal level

Themes		Characteristics in three stages	1. Improving and utilizing agency through a learning-by-doing approach.			2. Utilizing social and symbolic capital.				3. Using cultural capital in terms of work-life balance and commitment to the social work mission.	4. Utilizing agency to improve economic capital.
			1.1. Improving competence and capacity in daily practice.	1.2. Clarifying personal career plan.	1.3. Participating in trainings and continuing education.	2.1. Using peer support.	2.2. Seeking formal professional support.	2.3. Seeking informal support.	2.4. Getting promotion and high position.		
Excessive workload	FSW	1) A large caseload, burnout and stress.	✓			✓		✓		✓	
	PM	2) Frequent personal turnover intentions.					✓		✓		
	PM	3) Project administrative work overload.	✓			✓			✓	✓	
	OM	4) Organizational administrative work overload.	✓			✓				✓	
Economic pressure	FSW	1) Low starting salary.		✓						✓	
	PM/OM	2) A comparatively low income.		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
	PM/OM	3) The temptation of higher salaried jobs.		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Inadequate competence	FSW	1) Insufficient early social work education experience.	✓		✓	✓	✓				
	FSW	2) Shortage of direct service skills.	✓		✓	✓	✓				
	PM	3) Role transition pressure.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
	PM	4) Inadequate project management capacity.	✓		✓	✓	✓				
	OM	5) Organizational governance and development pressure.	✓		✓	✓	✓				
	OM	6) Frustrated role transition, high capacity and responsibility challenges	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Values and ethical dilemmas	FSW	1) The direct service dilemmas.	✓		✓	✓	✓				
	PM/OM	2) Confusion of personal career plans.		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
	PM/OM	3) Conflicts between universal and professional values and ethics.		✓	✓	✓	✓				

When I began to work as a FSW...I worked a lot every day, often worked home overnight, but continued to work the next morning. (SH03: 32-year-old female PM in Shanghai)

Economic pressure

All participants complained about their low monthly salary; the PMs and OMs always felt they had a comparatively lower income than friends working in the commercial and government sectors, and also needed to resist the temptation of well-paid jobs outside NPOs and the social work area.

The salary was pretty low when I was a FSW, around 3,000 RMB monthly…Now, I am an OM, but the salary is still lower than that of my friends in companies. Two companies offer me a deputy CEO position and an attractive salary. (XM10: 29-year-old female OM in Xiamen)

Inadequate competence

FSWs talked about the shortage of direct service skills, which partially resulted from their insufficient pre-service training. The PMs and OMs often discussed the transition pressure they faced when striving to move from a lower position to a more senior one. While the PMs referred to inadequate project management experience due to the quick promotion from the FSW stage, OMs worried about the high capacity requirements for organizational governance and development, as well as their responsibility regarding social work mission commitments.

For an FSW, the pressure was lacking experience, no matter how long I practiced or what my ambition was. (SH02: 38-year-old female PM in Shanghai)

Values and ethical dilemmas

The FSWs highlighted dilemmas emerging from direct services, for instance how to deal with conflicts between the need for informed consent and effective services delivery when faced with emerging scenarios. Conversely, the PMs and OMs were confused about their

personal career plans when faced with the temptations of other well-paid jobs, and the current challenging social work contexts. They also struggled to deal with the conflicts between professional and universal values and ethics. For instance, should services be provided based on clients' needs or on the satisfaction of government officials?

> *When we were required to change the service model from the center-based to home-based, I was quite confused: Shall we follow clients' needs or a leader's requirements? (SZ09: 34-year-old female PM in Shenzhen)*

Four coping strategies utilized

Overall four coping strategies were used in response to four challenges (see Table 3.1): (a) improving and utilizing agency through a learning-by-doing approach; (b) utilizing social and symbolic capital; (c) using cultural capital in work-life balance and commitment to the social work mission; (d) utilizing agency to improve economic capital. Each includes different specific sub-coping strategies. The following is elaborated in terms of two aspects: coping strategies for dealing with the aforementioned four challenges, and coping strategies for dealing with challenges relating to the three stages of FSW, PM and OM.

Coping strategies with regard to the four challenges
Coping with excessive workload

In a horizontal review of Table 3.1 we can identify, in response to excessive workload: (a) Chinese social workers firstly chose the direct solution of improving and utilizing agency through a learning-by-doing approach to improve work efficiency. The competence in dealing with direct services and project or organizational management capacities were two essential issues. (b) Social capital is another common way to reduce work overload. Chinese social workers would like to ask for peer support to share their workload, and to seek formal professional support from supervisors, project and organizational managers, to handle the personal turnover intentions caused by work overload. They also sought informal social and emotional support from friends, family members and classmates to ease work pressure. (c) The

FSWs and PMs emphasized personal hopes with regard to gaining promotion to compensate for their excessive workload. This means that they expected a higher salary and increased social status, i.e., better economic and symbolic capital could be achieved. (d) If these solutions failed, they often utilized cultural capital in terms of their work-life balance, and commitment to a social work mission. This means that, they were driven by a social work mission, especially in their early career. (e) They also adopted various leisure and entertainment practices learnt from previous life experience to release psychological pressure, such as watching movies, hanging out with friends, surfing the Internet and participating in sports. Thus, resilience to excessive workload comes not only from personal professional competence and collegial support but also from previous life experiences and professional education.

> *When I felt frustrated by excessive workload, I took a break and tried to release pressure through sports, eating, and traveling….We [three founders] discussed appropriate solutions to challenging issues. (XM01: 32-year-old male OM in Xiamen)*

Coping with economic pressure

In response to economic pressure, (a) all participants had utilized social capital to seek informal financial support from families and friends, especially in their early career when earning a low salary. When they could not change their social status, they utilized cultural capital to maintain commitment to a social work mission and to a work-life balance. (b) They also emphasized personal hope with regard to gaining promotion in order to increase economic capital, i.e., a higher salary, as a short-term plan, and in clarifying a better personal career plan to recognize professional identity and pursue a better future as a long-term plan. (c) Most importantly, many PMs and OMs sought to maximize agency or professional competence and their financial quotient (FO) to increase income in part-time or associated ways, for example, by providing training and supervision to new social workers in other SWSOs, and participating in social work program evaluation, commercial services, online and social media sales.

> *Many social workers use different ways to 'slash' themselves [earn income] …I also do that through investing in a friend's company that is highly related to my current*

work. Offering part-time training, supervision, and evaluation also bring me income.

(SZ13: 34-year-old female OM in Shenzhen)

Coping with inadequate competence

Two sub-strategies were utilized and were consistent throughout all three stages.

(a) All participants wanted to improve and utilize personal agencies through the learning-by-doing approach. This means that their daily practice was a common trail-and-error process in the emerging Chinese context, whereby new Chinese social workers tried services and methods they had never been told about or practiced before, in order to improve fundamental professional services skills and competence. They also preferred participating in different forms of training to purposefully improve their professional competence, and attended continuing education programs to obtain a higher academic degree. In the three research cities, senior social workers always liked to attend the Social Work Supervisor Training Scheme, because this was deemed a competitive way to improve professional competence and capital. Some participants were qualified to be a social work supervisor and shortly afterwards received promotion, as a result of which their social status or symbolic capital, and their social and economic capital were enhanced. To obtain a Master's degree part-time was an option adopted by a few participants to improve both agency and different forms of capital.

I participated in the Social Work Supervisor Training Scheme…to broaden my social networks…I really learnt a lot. That allowed me to survive the confused period.
(SH05: 31-year-old female PM in Shanghai)

(b) All participants focused on utilizing social capital to compensate for their inadequacy in terms of professional competence. They liked to ask for peer support and formal professional support, such as support from senior social workers, suggestions from program managers, and advice from professional supervisors. Conversely, when roles changed for PMs and OMs, role transition pressure emerged. They then emphasized the need to clarify personal career plans to understand new roles or a new professional identity, and the competence required.

Coping with values and ethical dilemmas

To deal with values and ethical dilemmas, almost all participants utilized professional competence, or agency and social capital. They sought answers or suggestions from senior social workers, professional supervisors, and experts from external training and continuing education. The FSWs stated that the learning by doing process, in particular direct services or even an unsuccessful experience, provided them with great opportunities to learn how to handle dilemmas. All genuine knowledge originates from direct experience. The PMs and OMs disclosed that getting promotion alleviates confusion regarding their personal career plan, which was caused by conflicts between universal commercial values and social work altruism. Economic and symbolic capital also work for this scenario.

> *When I was promoted as a PM, my salary was increased and my career plan became clearer. More importantly, supervisors from Hong Kong always gave me direct guidance when it came to handling ethical dilemmas (SZ02: 30-year-old female PM in Shenzhen)*

Coping strategies with challenges in three stages of FSW, PM and OM

In a vertical review of Table 3.1, challenges at each stage present various characteristics, while the coping strategies utilized accordingly at each stage also varied.

Fledgling FSWs rushed into the profession: challenges and coping strategies

Challenges facing the FSWs

The FSWs faced: (a) a large caseload leading to burnout, stress, and frequent turnover intentions (excessive workload); (b) a low starting salary (economic pressure); (c) insufficient early social work education experience (pre-service training) and a shortage of personal service skills (inadequate competence); and (d) direct service dilemmas (values and ethical dilemmas). At this stage, almost all the participants felt that they had rushed into the profession without appropriate training and skills, therefore encountered the toughest career challenges.

> *So many challenging values dilemmas I had never met before, and so many services skills I had never learnt at university, apparently affected me as a FSW. (SZ03: 28-*

year-old female PM in Xiamen)

Coping strategies for FSWs

To cope with above challenges, the FSWs adopted three coping sub-strategies.

The first is improving and utilizing agency through a learning-by-doing approach. Among the agency they utilized were social work direct service skills and methods, a commitment to social work mission and values, learning ability (learning-by-serving), environment adapting ability, resilience, self-adjustment ability, and an open and active attitude.

The second is utilizing social and symbolic capital. Social networks, professional resources, and social status were major points in this regard. The FSWs were located in a low position both inside and outside the organization, i.e., their social status was low. Therefore, the FSWs needed more social capital than in the other two stages, and sought economic and emotional support from families and friends, professional support from supervisors and colleagues, professional training, and communication opportunities. They also held personal hope of pursuing a better career in the social work area and gaining promotion.

The third is using cultural capital in promoting a better work-life balance and commitment to the social work mission. The FSWs were used to adopting various forms of leisure and entertainment diversions learnt from previous life experience to alleviate the psychological pressure caused by an excessive workload, such as watching movies, hanging out with friends, surfing the Internet, and participating in sports. With regard to maintaining an acceptable work-life balance, they had to recognize or ignore the low salary and status quo, while retaining commitment to the social work mission. Thus, improving agency in terms of services, hoping for a better career, and commitment to the social work mission, are three essential survival coping strategies for the FSWs.

All-round PMs were swiftly promoted: challenges and coping strategies

Challenges among PMs

Many PMs were swiftly promoted from being a FSW when social work developed quickly in China. The PMs encountered: (a) project administrative work overload (excessive workload); (b) comparative low income and temptation to move to higher salaried jobs (economic pressure); (c) inadequate project management capacity and role transition pressure (inadequate competence); and (d) conflicts between universal and professional values and ethics (values and ethical dilemmas). These aspects occurred because most PMs were hastily promoted in a short period of time, but were expected to be all-round professionals for NPOs: managing projects, building a cooperative team, handling the external relationships, and even supervising new social workers. Many scenarios were new to them, which gave rise to challenges and associated pressures.

> *When I was in charge of a new project, I did not know what the term 'project' meant...I felt I was in a chaotic situation and failed to be a competent project manager, services provider or supervisor. (SZ07: 28-year-old female PM in Shenzhen)*

Coping strategies for PMs

The PMs also utilized coping strategies similar to those adopted by FSWs. In addition, two coping sub-strategies were also demonstrated.

The first is improving management capacity and leadership through the learning-by-doing process. Their personal career plans were further clarified when they were promoted and began to participate in the organizational decision-making process. This meant that their professional agency and symbolic, cultural and social status were improved. In comparison with the FSWs, the agency the PMs possessed for survival strategies were project management, leadership or team building capacity, learning and adapting ability, research and development ability, and communication ability.

The second is using professional competence to earn part-time and associated income related to social work professional services. During this process, the PMs enhanced their professional agency, economic and cultural capital, and/or income. Although social and cultural capital remained important to the PMs, they had more chances to participate in training

in the three research cities, for instance by undertaking the Social Worker Supervisor Training Scheme. Moreover, the PMs began to raise economic capital by earning part-time income, and the achievement of realistic needs supported them in surviving longer in this mission-driven profession. The PMs also improved symbolic capital when promoted, in that their position and social status increasingly grew as they participated in making organizational or project decisions, and had more opportunities to communicate with stakeholders. Therefore, for the PMs, the survival code focused on both improving personal expertise and increasing income, while simultaneously improving agency and capital.

OMs bearing triple pressures: challenges and coping strategies

Challenges facing OMs

The OMs referred to several challenges: (a) organizational administrative work overload (excessive workload); (b) comparatively low income and the temptation of higher salaried jobs (economic pressure). The rest are similar to the challenges the PMs faced; (c) organization governance and development pressure, frustrated role transition, and high capacity and responsibility challenges (inadequate competence); and (d) conflicts between universal and professional values and ethics (values and ethical dilemmas), and subsequent confusion regarding personal career plans. The OMs therefore had to handle three sets of pressure: ensuring organizational development, pursuing a better personal life and increased income, and contributing to the development of social work.

> *I feel more pressure than before… Now I play the two roles of supervisor and director,*
> *and it is hard to handle the relationship with colleagues.... An organization's pressure*
> *is much higher than that from one person. (SZ08: 35-year-old male OM in Shenzhen)*

Coping strategies for OMs

As the OMs had survived the two stages of being an FSW and a PM, they possessed all the aforementioned agency and capital that the FSWs and PMs had achieved. However, the OMs highlighted the following pressures:

96

(a) Improving organizational governance capacity and professional competence in supervision and services to satisfy realistic needs. They stated that a sense of mission and hope in social work could not support them sufficiently; instead, a series of satisfied realistic needs, such as organizational sustainable development and the pursuit of higher social status and a decent income, stimulated them to survive longer in this profession. This indicates that they became more realistic and rational in solving specific problems that they, the organization, and the profession had encountered.

(b) Key agency and capital to survive in the long-term. The OMs demonstrated agency based on personal practice demands, including social work supervision capacity, organizational management and leadership, learning and adapting ability, research and development ability, and communication ability. Social, symbolic, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital were improved and interrelated to help them survive at this stage. Typical examples were shown in all three cities: when several social workers were entitled to be a representative of the Communist Party of China (CPC), a member of the Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and a deputy of People's Congress (NPC) at national, municipal or district levels, they were given the opportunity to submit proposals for the development of social work and the public good, and these actions worked effectively in circumstance they had never encountered before.

Thus, the OMs contributed to social work development, while their social status or symbolic capital was apparently improved to make their voices heard more easily than those of other participants, especially when dealing with government officers. Their social network was broadened so that they could seek more effective social support from experts. They also had the authority to make decisions and build a better working atmosphere at an organizational level. When their agency or professional competence improved, they had opportunities to increase income on a part-time basis using their professional competence and broader social networks, thus their financial quotient and economic capital were increased.

Discussion and Conclusions

Four themes summarize the challenges Chinese social workers encountered at a personal practice level: (1) excessive workload; (2) economic pressure; (3) inadequate competence; and (4) values and ethical dilemmas. These challenges presented distinct characteristics on the part of social workers at three professional stages. Moreover, four coping strategies were utilized by Chinese social workers in response to these challenges. These highlighted the importance of commitment to a social work mission, improving and utilizing agency or professional competences, and using different forms of capital during their survival practice. The participants also shed light on satisfaction in terms of the realistic needs of Chinese social workers.

Mission and intrinsic factors

A sense of mission and intrinsic factors failed to empower Chinese social workers to survive in the profession in the long-term. This echoes the statements made in previous studies (An & Chapman, 2014; Gibelman & Sweifach, 2008; Healy, 2008) where a commitment to social work in itself may not motivate social workers to remain in the profession. Early in their career, Chinese social workers were driven by a social work mission that frequently empowered them to stay for months or even years. As they became more deeply embedded in services or even management positions, they increasingly encountered challenges that were novel. Mission and intrinsic factors did not always empower them effectively when it came to solving such problems. Consequently, frequent turnover intentions emerged, especially at the later stages of being an FSW, a point when many colleagues of the participants left the profession. Daily practice challenges consumed their passion, and the social work mission was not regarded as a priority when they had to deal with the burden of a living and rearing a family. This was not because their commitment to the social work mission had disappeared, but rather because it had faded in the light of complicated external factors and internal inexperience skills. When daily practice challenges increased, both quality of work and commitment to social work reduced. Then, enthusiasm, dedication, and recognition of social work role, i.e., work engagement, was alleviated accordingly. These points specify previous statements that quality

of work was strongly related to work engagement (Geisler et al., 2019), and low levels of work engagement would exacerbate perceived stress and turnover intentions (Ravalier, 2018). When the participants stated that social work was a mission that the empowered them and encouraged retention, the narratives did not seem firm enough to ensure they would not leave at any moment.

Personal hope works

A similar situation was found in relation to hope, as almost all the participants had "professional hope" (Koenig & Spano, 2007, p. 48) to pursue a better world, and believed that the spring of social work in mainland China would come one day (Yan *et al.*, 2013). These findings add empirical evidence to the existing research (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Schwartz *et al.*, 2007). However, this study also discovered a surprising finding that, Chinese social workers focused more on "realistic hope" (Collins, 2015, p. 209) or "personal hope" (Koenig & Spano, 2007, p. 48), whereby their personal pursuit of professional development, a better life, promotion, quality of work, or helpful supervision is perceived as being achievable. The satisfaction of personal hope makes Chinese social worker's survival realistic.

The satisfaction of realistic needs impelled Chinese social workers to survive in terms of a long-term career or as "committed survivors" (Westbrook *et al.*, 2006, p. 57). Such needs included promotion opportunities, continuous accumulation of expertise, an achievable decent income, solving families' or friends' problems, and the feeling of a democratic working atmosphere. The surviving Chinese social workers tried to regard the profession as an ordinary job and clarified their professional identity, rather than immersing themselves in the pursuit of dual commitments to social work. When challenges increased, the turnover rate also increased and promotion opportunities arose quickly for the surviving social workers. They could be promoted from the FSW to a PM or even an OM in a short period, and such promotion stimulated them to stay longer in the profession. At the same time as opportunities for promotion and expertise increased, their salary also increased, and the opportunities for obtaining a part-time income and improving their social status were more easily realized. The findings certify and specify previous studies where quality of work was strongly related to

work engagement to Swedish social workers (Geisler *et al.*, 2019), psychological well-being was positively related to work engagement, and high work engagement contributed occupational health (Tesi *et al.*, 2019).

Capital enhances survival

As a result of improving expertise and achieving realistic needs, their specific social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital improved, and were utilized at each stage, and their social status or position was also elevated. These findings echo those of Beddoe *et al.* (2014) who found that social workers "…were very active in taking responsibility for their own well-being" (p. 125). Meanwhile, the findings also complement the personal reasons and coping strategies identified in previous studies that focused on a structural and organizational analysis in terms of retention in the social work profession, such as with regard to organizational and social support (Kim & Stoner, 2008). The findings also advance elaborations and applicable strategies regarding the way Chinese social workers enhance their professional identity (An & Chapman, 2014) and survive in early professional contexts (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2012b). Furthermore, compared with commercial and bureaucratic workplaces, Chinese social workers preferred the democratic working atmosphere found at NPOs, which also encouraged them to stay longer in the profession.

Diverse agency empowers survival practice

Diverse agency was presented by the Chinese social workers in this study, demonstrating that they personally possess the flexible capacity or ability to cope with challenges and survive, as existing studies show that these play a positive role in enhancing well-being and competence (Beddoe *et al.*, 2014; Grant & Kinman, 2013), resilience, creating a work-life balance, and developing professional expertise (Donnellan, 2014; Sánchez-Moreno *et al.*, 2015). More importantly, in order to survive and become more experienced, learning by doing or service learning was a common and effective approach used by Chinese social workers to develop professional competences, and build service and management experience in the emerging contexts. This provides empirical evidence to counter the claims of previous studies that professional competence might be lacking in China (Zeng *et al.*, 2016; Zhao *et al.*, 2017). It

was clear that agency empowered Chinese social workers' survival practice, and directly impacted on organizational and institutional changes.

Conclusions

The surviving Chinese social workers treat the social work profession as an ordinary job, seek diverse and pragmatic ways to improve their capital and agency, in order to ensure their survival in the profession, and then think about pursuing their commitment to the social work mission. Surviving first and pursuing mission next allows Chinese social workers to be long-term survivors in the profession.

Implications

For early social workers in China and other developing countries where social work is newly emerging, the realistic approaches are to work in this profession for several years and invest themselves in daily service and management practice, and to improve their agency and capital via the learning-by-doing approach. Payback in the form of promotion and a decent income will come, sooner or later. Focusing purely on a mission or hope in the profession appears to fail to drive social workers to persevere in the profession. Regarding the ToP, for Chinese social workers, capital and agency play the essential roles when it comes to survival practices.

Regarding the state or local government and the public in developing and developed countries, we need to understand that the development of social work professionalism involves a long journey, especially in emerging profession contexts such as are found in China. More space and patience should be offered to social workers to allow them to explore the indigenization of social work practice. Moreover, we need to challenge the misconception that social workers in China are volunteers; they are professionals and deserve a normal and decent salary matching that of the commercial and government sectors. Consequently, more resources and an improved budget should be invested in the social work profession.

In terms of tertiary education in the emerging profession context, teaching and learning is a dynamic process, and mutual understanding should be enhanced. Social workers should be invited to co-teach and co-design courses and become involved in a continuous education

process. For NPOs, especially SWSOs, the unit costs of qualifying as a social worker will increase (Curtis *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, efforts expended on encouraging retention, such as training and supervision, reasonable human resource provision, and higher salaries, are recommended.

Limitations and future research

This study chose just three cities in mainland China and social workers without a social work diploma or outside NPOs were excluded. Consequently, the diversity of survival narratives might be limited. The participants came from various social work fields, therefore, the survival description of one specific area needs more in-depth exploration. Future researchers could interview social workers without a social work diploma, and stakeholders outside NPOs, to provide more diversity. Researchers could also use participant observation or ethnographic methods to focus on social workers in one NPO or in one specific social work field to obtain deeper insights.

References

Aiello, A., & Tesi, A. (2017). Psychological Well-Being and Work Engagement among Italian Social Workers: Examining the Mediational Role of Job Resources. *Social Work Research, 41*(2), 73-84. doi:10.1093/swr/svx005

An, Q., & Chapman, M. V. (2014). The early professional experience of a new social worker in China. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(2), 322−333.

Bakker, A. B. (2011). An Evidence-Based Model of Work Engagement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*(4), 265-269. doi:10.1177/0963721411414534

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and work-engagement: The JD-R approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 389–411. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235

Beddoe, L., Davys, A. M., & Adamson, C. (2014). 'Never trust anybody who says "I don't need supervision"': Practitioners' beliefs about social worker resilience. *Practice, 26*(2), 113-130.

Bennett, P., Evans, R., & Tattersall, A. (1993). Stress and coping in social workers: A preliminary investigation. *The British Journal of Social Work, 23*(1), 31-44.

Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2015). A call for social work activism. *Social Work, 60*(2), 101-103. doi:10.1093/sw/swv005

Boddy, J., O'leary, P., Tsui, M.-S*., et al.* (2018). Inspiring hope through social work practice. *International Social Work, 61*(4), 587-599.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77−101.

Bryan, A., & Aymer, C. (1996). Black social work students and practitioners: Survival

strategies. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 10*(2), 113−117.

doi:10.1080/02650539608415106

Chan, C., Holosko, M. J., Wang, Y*., et al.* (2017). Development and validation of the

perceived social work competence scale in China. *Research on Social Work Practice,*

27(1), 91-102.

Cheung, C., & Ngai, S. (2009). Surviving hegemony through resistance and identity

articulation among outreaching social workers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work*

Journal, 26(1), 15−37.

Coffey, M., Dugdill, L., & Tattersall, A. (2004). Stress in social services: Mental well-being,

constraints and job satisfaction. *The British Journal of Social Work, 34*(5), 735-746.

Collins, S. (2008). Statutory social workers: Stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support

and individual differences. *The British Journal of Social Work, 38*(6), 1173-1193.

Collins, S. (2015). Hope and helping in social work. *Practice, 27*(3), 1-17.

Curtis, L., Moriarty, J., & Netten, A. (2012). The costs of qualifying a social worker. *The*

British Journal of Social Work, 42(4), 706−724.

Damron-Rodriguez, J. (2008). Developing competence for nurses and social workers. *Journal*

of Social Work Education, 44(3), 27-37.

Donnellan, H. (2010). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Child and Family Social*

Workers: Hitting the Ground Running. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Donnellan, H. (2014). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers, Hitting the*

Ground Running (2nd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Edwards-Dandridge, Y. (2019). *Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Nurse Turnover*

Intention. (Doctor of Business Administration), Walden University.

Fine, M., & Teram, E. (2009). Believers and skeptics: Where social worker situate themselves

regarding the code of ethics. *Ethics Behav., 19*(1), 60-78.

doi:10.1080/10508420802623682

Galpin, D., Bigmore, J., Parker, J*., et al.* (2012). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Adult and Mental Health Services: Hitting the Ground Running*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Geisler, M., Berthelsen, H., & Muhonen, T. (2019). Retaining Social Workers: The Role of Quality of Work and Psychosocial Safety Climate for Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 43*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/23303131.2019.1569574

Gibelman, M., & Sweifach, J. (2008). Acting on our values: Do social workers volunteer? *Social Work, 53*(1), 53-64.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Grant, L., & Kinman, G. (2013). 'Bouncing back?' Personal representations of resilience of student and experienced social workers. *Practice, 25*(5), 1-18.

Grimes, T., & Hou, S.-I. (2013). "A breast ain't nothing but a sandwich": Narratives of Ella, an African American social worker breast cancer survivor. *Social Work in Public Health, 28*(1), 44-53. doi:10.1080/19371918.2010.513667

Guerin, S., Devitt, C., & Redmond, B. (2010). Experiences of Early-Career Social Workers in Ireland. *British Journal of Social Work, 40*(8), 2467-2484. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcq020

Guo, W., & Tsui, M. S. (2010). From resilience to resistance: A reconstruction of the strengths perspective in social work practice. *International Social Work, 53*(2), 233-245.

Halmi, A. (1996). The qualitative approach to social work: An epistemological basis. *International Social Work, 39*, 363−375. doi:10.1177/002087289603900403

Harrington, A. (2005). *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Healy, L. (2008). Exploring the history of social work as a human rights profession. *International Social Work, 51*(6), 735−748.

Hombrados-Mendieta, I., & Cosano-Rivas, F. (2013). Burnout, workplace support, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among social workers in Spain: A structural equation model. *International Social Work, 56*(2), 228-246.

Jiang, H., Wang, Y., Chui, E*., et al.* (2017). Professional identity and turnover intentions of social workers in Beijing, China: The roles of job satisfaction and agency type. *International Social Work, 62*(1), 146-160.

Jones, R. L. (2018). *The Relationship of Employee Engagement and Employee Job Satisfaction to Organizational Commitment.* (Doctor of Business Administration), Walden University.

Katz, C. (2013). The narratives of abused children who have survived attempted filicide. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*(10), 762-770.

Kim, H., & Stoner, M. (2008). Burnout and turnover intention among social workers: Effects of role stress, job autonomy and social support. *Administration in Social Work, 32*(3), 5-25.

Koenig, T., & Spano, R. (2007). The cultivation of social workers' hope in personal life and professional practice. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 26*(3), 45-61.

Koeske, G. F., & Koeske, R. D. (1989). Work load and burnout: Can social support and perceived accomplishment help? *Social Work, 34*(3), 243-248.

Liu, Y., Lam, C. M., & Yan, M. C. (2012). A challenged professional identity: The struggles of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(3), 189-200.

Lizano, E., & Barak, M. M. (2015). Job burnout and affective wellbeing: A longitudinal study of burnout and job satisfaction among public child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 55*, 18-28.

McCarter, A. K. (2007). The impact of hopelessness and hope on the social work profession. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 15*(4), 107-123.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/survival

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2019). A New Chapter for the Reform and Development

of Civil Affairs in the New Era: National Video Conference of Civil Affairs 2019.

Retrieved from

http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/mzyw/201901/20190100014249.shtml (In Chinese)

NASW. (2017). NASW Code of Ethics. Retrieved from

https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English

Owusu-Ansah, S. (2018). *Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction: An Exploratory*

Qualitative Study of Retail Industry Managers.

Oxford Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Oxford Dictionary.* Retrieved from

https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/survival

Parkin, R. (1997). Practice theory. In T. Barfield (Ed.), *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (pp.

375-377). Oxford: Blackwell.

Radey, M., Schelbe, L., & Spinelli, C. L. (2017). Learning, negotiating, and surviving in child

welfare: Social capitalization among recently hired workers. *Journal of Public Child*

Welfare, 12(1), 79-98.

Ravalier, J. M. (2018). The influence of work engagement in social workers in England.

Occupational Medicine, 68(6), 399-404. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqy087

Sánchez-Moreno, E., De La Fuente Roldán, I.-N., Gallardo-Peralta, L. P*., et al.* (2015).

Burnout, informal social support and psychological distress among social workers.

The British Journal of Social Work, 45(8), 2368-2386.

Schaufeli, W., Salanova, M., González-romá, V*., et al.* (2002). The Measurement of

Engagement and Burnout: A Two Sample Confirmatory Factor Analytic Approach.

Journal of Happiness Studies, 3(1), 71-92. doi:10.1023/A:1015630930326

Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship

with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational*

Behavior, 25(3), 293-315. doi:10.1002/job.248

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 66*(4), 701-716. doi:10.1177/0013164405282471

Schwartz, R. H., Tiamiyu, M. F., & Dwyer, D. J. (2007). Social worker hope and perceived burnout: The effects of age, years in practice, and setting. *Administration in Social Work, 31*(4), 103-119.

Shier, M. L., & Graham, J. R. (2011). Work-related factors that impact social work practitioners' subjective well-being: Well-being in the workplace. *Journal of Social Work, 11*(4), 402-421.

Sinha, S. (2007). Essays on Economic Development and the Survival of Girls in India. In P. Pattanaik & A. B. Deolalikar (Eds.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Tesi, A., Aiello, A., & Giannetti, E. (2019). The work-related well-being of social workers: Framing job demands, psychological well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 121-141. doi:10.1177/1468017318757397

Tsui, M. S. (2005). *Social Work Supervision: Contexts and Concepts*: SAGE.

Tsui, M. S. (2006). Hopes and dreams: Ideal supervision for social workers in Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 16*(1), 33-42.

Tum, T. (2006). The Street Children Phenomenon: A Qualitative Study on How Street Children Survive in Eldoret, Kenya. In K. Ohman (Ed.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Ungar, M. (2004). Surviving as a postmodern social sorker: Two Ps and three Rs of direct practice. *Social Work, 49*(3), 488−496.

Van Robaeys, B., van Ewijk, H., & Dierckx, D. (2018). The challenge of superdiversity for the identity of the social work profession: Experiences of social workers in 'De Sloep' in Ghent, Belgium. *International Social Work, 61*(2), 274-288. doi:10.1177/0020872816631600

Vassos, M., Nankervis, K., Skerry, T*., et al.* (2013). Work engagement and job burnout within the disability support worker population. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 34*(11), 3884-3895. doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2013.08.005

Walther, M. (2014). *Repatriation to France and Germany: A Comparative Study Based on Bourdieu's Theory of Practice*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Wang, D. (2011a). *Study on Job Burnout from the Perspective of Social Support Theory.* (PhD), Wuhan University (In Chinese). Wuhan, China.

Wang, E., Jiang, W., & Mao, S. (2019). Job autonomy and turnover intention among social workers in China: Roles of work-to-family enrichment, job satisfaction and type of sector. *Journal of Social Service Research*. doi:10.1080/01488376.2019.1698487

Wang, S. (2011b). The embedding development of social work in China. *Social Science Front, 02*, 206−222 (In Chinese).

Wang, S., & Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2009). The development of social work in China in the context of building a harmonious society. *Social Sciences in China, 5*, 128−140 (In Chinese).

Weinreich, H. M. (2015). *Burnout among National Association of Social Workers Healthcare Social Workers.* (Ph.D), Walden University.

Westbrook, T. M., Ellis, J., & Ellett, A. J. (2006). Improving retention among public child welfare workers: What can we learn from the insights and experiences of committed survivors? *Administration in Social Work, 30*(4), 37-62.

Yan, M. C., Gao, J. G., & Lam, C. M. (2013). The dawn is too distant: The experience of 28 social work graduates entering the social work field in China. *Social Work Education, 32*(4), 538-551. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.688097

Yuan, X., & Xu, W. (2016). Motivation factors for social workers in social service organizations. *Social Construction, 3*(4), 62-75 (In Chinese).

Yürür, S., & Sarikaya, M. (2012). The effects of workload, role ambiguity, and social support on burnout among social workers in Turkey. *Administration in Social Work, 36*(5), 457-478.

Zeng, S., Cheung, M., Leung, P*., et al.* (2016). Voices from social work graduates in China: Reasons for not choosing social work as a career. *Social Work, 61*(1), 69-78.

Zhang, D., Zheng, Y., & Li, J. (2014). Social environment, social support and social worker's burnout: Baed on a survey of 100 social workers in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan. *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, 206*(2), 79-84 (In Chinese).

Zhao, F., Fu, F., & Yang, B. (2017). Social work value system in mainland China: Construction of a scale and value commitment assessment. *International Social Work, 61*(6), 917-929.

Chapter Four: Study 3 – Coping Processes in an Emerging Profession: Chinese Social Workers' Survival Narratives

Abstract

Surviving the profession is a concern for both social work academics and practitioners in mainland China. This study aims to understand the coping processes of Chinese social workers reconciling individual agency and social structures in order to survive in the profession. Forty-nine social workers at NPOs were interviewed individually, followed by three focus groups convened to review the results. The findings showed that Chinese social workers combined two processes of "inside-out" and "outside-in" to cope with the range of challenges they encountered. The "inside-out" process was an internalized strength-oriented survival coping process, while the "outside-in" was a resource-based survival coping process involving the use of external resources. Four interconnected processes were identified: (a) the initial survival motivation internalized from previous experience and social structures; (b) the improvement of professional capacities through the "learning by doing" approach; (c) utilizing personal agency while conducting the "outside-in"; and (d) utilizing personal agency to reshape the way they survived in the profession and reproduce social structures. Notably, Chinese social workers regarded the "inside-out" as a preferred survival code vis-a-vis the "outside-in". In regard to survival way, the strength-oriented coping process was more influential than the resource-based process. The findings suggest social workers should take realistic actions to pursue long-term survival.

Keywords: survival; social worker; China; coping process

Introduction

Chinese social workers have encountered numerous challenges arising from changing social structures (Bai, 2014; Guo, 2016; Wang, 2013) and personal daily practice (An & Chapman, 2014; Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2012b) since national licensure in 2008. Survival as professionals is fragile, and many Chinese social workers leave the emerging profession after a few years (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Wang, 2011b; Yan *et al.*, 2013). On a

positive note, emerging Chinese contexts have driven radical changes in policies, measures and management that have stimulated the rapid development of social work. The number of licensed social workers climbed to 440,000 by the end of 2018, indicating the scale of social work service organizations (SWSOs), while one type of non-profit organization (NPO) increased from 600 in 2012 (Liu, 2012) to over 7,500 in 2018 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, 2019). However, these emerging contexts also compress the professionalization and autonomy of social work development (Yip, 2007; Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002). When interacting with social structures, Chinese social workers face diverse challenges (Wang, 2013). However, the ways in which structural factors influence the survival of social workers remain unknown. Challenges from daily practice result in high turnover of Chinese social workers, few remaining longer than five years, and this has grave implications for the new profession (Jiang *et al.*, 2017). Many previous studies have revealed the relationships between survival and related factors from the standpoint of structuralist or functionalist approaches (Liu *et al.*, 2012b; Yuan & Xu, 2016). However, few have focused on the survival of social workers who have successfully coped with the challenges. Little attempt has been made to explore their narratives explaining how they have utilized their own capacities to survive the challenging and emerging contexts. Furthermore, little effort has been made to understand the process by which Chinese social workers utilize their professional capacities in relation to social structures to survive as professionals. Specific coping strategies used to deal with the challenges arising from social structures and daily practice have been discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, respectively. This study aims to uncover the coping process of experienced Chinese social workers reconciling individual agency and social structures in order to remain in the profession.

Literature Review

Uneven development history: Social workers as new professionals

Social work as an imported concept has experienced a fluctuating history in China, which can be conceptualized as comprising four stages.

At the introduction and abolishment stages, social work education was imported and then eliminated because it was considered incompatible with communist ideology and endeavoring vision of a socialist country (Bai, 2014; Yan & Tsang, 2005). Professional social work services, however, were not developed in the community at these two stages. At the reinstatement stage (1980s-2008), social work education was restored in universities in 1986 and then developed as an instrument and lubricant to ensure a harmonious society (Bai, 2014; Wang, 2014; Yan, 2017; Yan & Cheng, 2009). Regional licensure of social workers was piloted in Shanghai as early as 2003. At the professionalization stage (2008 until now), social work developed at a phenomenal speed as result of the top-down policy push. The national licensure of social workers came into effect in 2008, since then a series of policies and regulations related to social work have been issued and the number of licensed social workers has increased rapidly. However, the turnover rate of social workers remains high, and survival in this newly profession therefore needs to be researched to promote the long-term survival of social workers and enhance the development of social work in China.

Terminology of survival

The term "survival" in the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) and Oxford Dictionary (2017) is defined as "the continuation of existence", including practice, act, life and fact. This is therefore the fundamental meaning of survival adopted in this study, i.e., continuing to work in the social work profession. In the social work field, survival is frequently employed to describe the way service recipients or vulnerable groups survive physical, mental or social adversity, such as disasters, diseases and abuse (Katz, 2013; Tum, 2006). However, studies on the survival of social workers are limited. While no specific definition has been elaborated, social work scholars have highlighted "survival" in various social, professional, emotional and physical dimensions, including challenges, survival guidance for newly qualified social workers, marginalization, skills or capacities, social support, work sustainability, and effectiveness (Bryan & Aymer, 1996; Cheung & Ngai, 2009; Curtis *et al.*, 2012; Donnellan, 2010, 2014; Galpin *et al.*, 2012; Ungar, 2004).

Dual challenges: Social structures and individual daily practice

At the level of social structure, Chinese social workers encounter at least three constraints caused by the rapid policy changes (Yip, 2007; Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002). First, they are expected to maintain social stability (Bai, 2014; Tsang & Yan, 2001) yet enjoy low autonomy and social status, and are faced with the challenge of the "counter-embeddedness" of social work. Specifically, administrative social work embeds itself into professional fields and directly impedes the professionalization of social work in China (Yan, 2017; Yan & Cheng, 2009; Yin *et al.*, 2016, p. 91). Second, social work is dominated by the rigid official administrative social welfare system; the tensions between professional and administrative social work influence Chinese social workers, as evidenced by the lack of "stable professional position systems" and clear professional boundaries (Guo, 2016, p. 93; Niu & Haugen, 2019). Third, social work policies and regulations are still incomplete, as social workers often find it difficult to gain social recognition and social support in utilizing appropriate resources for service development (Liu, 2012; Wang, 2013).

The above constraints are complicated by underdeveloped social work education (or pre-service training) and inadequate indigenization of social work, as many early social work teachers were not qualified to teach and this resulted in many social workers being inadequately trained (Yan *et al.*, 2013; Yan *et al.*, 2009; Yan & Ka Tat Tsang, 2005; Yuen-Tsang & Wang, 2002). Students were assigned to the social work discipline in universities, and the low employment rate among social work graduates led to a perpetual shortage of professionals and low professional recognition (Wang, 2013). Moreover due to the fact that there is inadequate indigenization of social work in China, and while western models are useful but not always suitable (Guo, 2016; Yan, 2013), early social workers had to "…resolve the dilemma between practice and research in terms of generating useful knowledge" (Tsang & Yan, 2001, p. 442).

China's NPOs face on-going tensions that further affect social workers. The inequitable relationship between the government and NPOs (Huang, 2015), and the distrust of the government, means that social workers working in NPOs must invest in extra effort to survive, including seeking policy support and resources, contending with a rigid administration,

reducing bureaucracy, and improving professional autonomy (Yin *et al.*, 2016; Zhu & Chen, 2013). Moreover, the inexperienced management and low competitive capacities of Chinese NPOs increase the survival pressure on social workers (Huang, 2015).

In their daily practice, social workers face a myriad of challenges, such as increasing paperwork and caseload, problems with tough clients (Guerin *et al.*, 2010; Koeske & Koeske, 1989), staff shortages and low retention (Collins, 2008; Itzick & Kagan, 2017), role ambiguity and low recognition, job dissatisfaction or poor pay (Coffey *et al.*, 2004), growing bureaucratization and intermittent supervision (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013), burnout and stress (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Bennett *et al.*, 1993; Weinreich, 2015), confusing legislation, and even marginalization (Bryan & Aymer, 1996). Chinese social workers also face multidimensional challenges, including burnout and stress, a fragile professional identity (Liu *et al.*, 2012b; Niu & Haugen, 2019), deficient skills and capacity, a lack of supervision, high workload, low wages (An & Chapman, 2014), a shortage of staff and high turnover (Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2019), organizational bureaucracy, constraints from the government, and low social recognition (Wang, 2011b; Wang & Yuen-Tsang, 2009).

Having to face dual challenges at structural and individual levels means that it is tough for Chinese social workers to survive. However, little is known about the coping processes they employ to reconcile social structures and individual agency in order to survive.

Survival strategies and related issues: Perspective switch

Earlier research has provided insights into survival strategies among social workers from structuralist, functionalist, organizational and interpersonal perspectives (Collins, 2008; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2013; Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Stoner, 2008). Few studies have explored the survival of social workers from an individualistic perspective, i.e., hearing social workers' voices. Scholars have found survival to be related to a sense of mission in social work (Healy, 2008; Zhao *et al.*, 2017), hope (Collins, 2015; Tsui, 2006), professional competence (Chan *et al.*, 2017; Damron-Rodriguez, 2008), resilience (Beddoe *et al.*, 2014; Grant & Kinman, 2013), adjustment and coping, well-being (Sánchez-Moreno *et al.*, 2015), and work engagement (Aiello & Tesi, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Geisler *et al.*, 2019). Social

workers likely rely on intrinsic factors and personal capacities to survive professionally. Furthermore, past studies have identified linear correlations between survival and relevant factors such as heavy workload (Koeske & Koeske, 1989), burnout and stress (Bennett *et al.*, 1993), turnover (Jiang *et al.*, 2017) and low recognition (Coffey *et al.*, 2004). However, Chinese researchers have made several notable discoveries. Firstly, commitment to social work in itself does not maintain Chinese social workers in their positions (An & Chapman, 2014). Secondly, whether or not the professional value system within Chinese social work has been built remains open to question. It is therefore not easy for social workers to generate and maintain personal and professional hope (Zhao *et al.*, 2017). Thirdly, professional capacity is inadequately developed (Zeng *et al.*, 2016) and Chinese social workers still need to develop skills to survive.

People need to find a way to balance individual actions and social structures in order to recapture real life (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Harrington, 2005). With regard to work engagement, social workers' retaining in this profession and quality of work are also highly related to structural and organizational factors, and individual involvement and actions (Aiello & Tesi, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Ravalier, 2018; Tesi *et al.*, 2019). In the case of Chinese social workers, they often use social resources and individual agency from these two sides to cope with challenges, in lieu of focusing on one or the other. This study therefore switches from a single perspective to reconcile both social structures and individual perspectives.

Research Methods

Methods

This qualitative research applied an in-depth interview as its main method, and focus groups as a supplementary method to conduct a participant review of the major findings.

Research sites

Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Xiamen were purposefully sampled as the three research sites. Shenzhen is more advanced in terms of social work development and is the city closest to Hong Kong; Shanghai is the earliest pilot city to develop professional social work and has licensed

social workers since 2003; Xiamen is characterized by inadequate development of social work and is the city nearest to Taiwan. The authors' professional and personal networks in these three cities were used to recruit adequate eligible participants. Hence, the three cities ensured the representativeness, diversity, and sufficiency of participants, and the feasibility of data collection (Glesne, 2011; Halmi, 1996).

Participants and inclusion criteria

Forty-nine participants were interviewed, and the inclusion criteria for both the interviewees and members of the focus groups were as follows: participants were licensed social workers holding a social work diploma, had more than five years' social work experience, and had been working at NPOs for more than one year. Various service areas and categories of social workers were represented, and gender and marital status were also duly considered.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection consisted of two phases: in-depth interviews in phase one and three focus groups in phase two. In addition to professional and personal networks, snowballing was used to recruit participants. Once the initial interview questions had been created based on the ToP and sent to participants for revision and feedback, individual interviews were audiotaped with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim. Regarding the participants' survival in social work, the stories participants recounted in interviews began from tertiary education and covered their entire career experience. Each participant was asked to give feedback on the transcription. When the preliminary findings had been generated, three parallel focus groups were carried out in the three cities to report on the findings and collect feedback from participants.

Thematic analysis was used to generate themes, following six traditional phases comprising familiarization with data, coding data, searching for themes, generating a thematic map, defining and naming themes, and producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo 12 Plus software was used to assist in managing preliminary and secondary coding and searching for themes; however, the coding was manually conducted in NVivo by the author. The verbatim

transcription of interviews and focus groups amounted to 1.6 million and 80,000 words, respectively.

Findings

Participants: demographic details

There were 15, 16 and 18 participants from Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xiamen, respectively, comprising eight males and 41 females; 31 participants were married, 18 were single, and none were divorced. The average age and years spent working as social workers were 32.7 and 8.6, respectively. Twenty-two participants were categorized as an organizational manager (OM), including director and deputy director, while all OMs had experienced the stages of front-line social worker (FSW) and project officer or manager (PM); 25 participants were listed as being at the PM stage, either as a supervisor, project or departmental director, regional manager, and service center director, and all had experienced the FSW stage; two participants were at the FSW stage. All participants narrated the survival experience of the FSW stage.

The findings show that Chinese social workers' survival involved a successive coping process of reconciling social structures and individual agency. Two processes, i.e., the "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes, were adopted as a theoretical framework to summarize the overall survival coping processes. Meanwhile, to understand survival issue based on work engagement, factors emerging from both social structures and personal daily practice highly influenced on work engagement among Chinese social workers, which was related to their survival or longevity in this profession. Moreover, four interconnected processes are identified to detail these two processes. The "inside-out" process was preferred more frequently than the "outside-in" process.

The internalization of the externality (outside-in) and the externalization of the internality (inside-out)

Throughout Chinese social workers' careers, survival process involves a two-way interaction between social structures and individual practice, as shown in below Figure 4.1.

This figure serves to explain what are the details of the "inside-out" and "outside-in" processes as a theoretical framework, and how these two processes actualized Chinese social workers' survival in this profession.

Figure 4.1: The interactive survival process
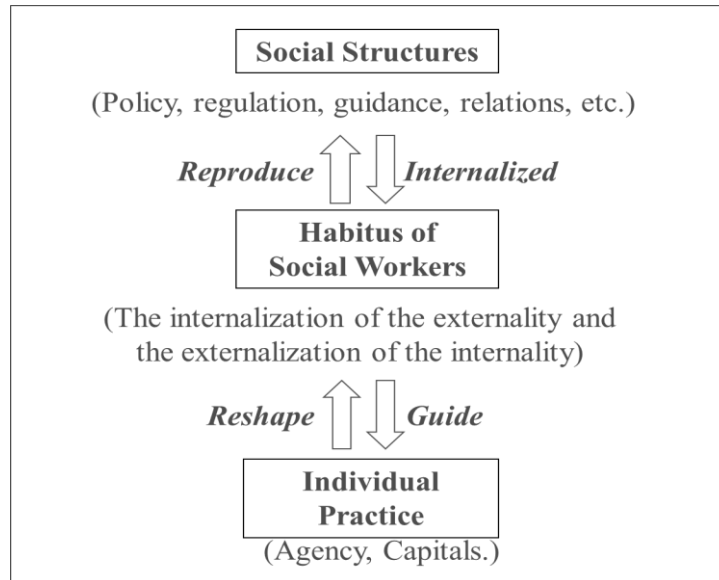
Specifically, Chinese social workers were inevitably influenced by external social structures, which were internalized in the form of internalities, i.e. capacities, abilities or knowledge, the process is known as the "outside-in", and is the top-down way as shown in Figure 4.1. Conversely, they actively utilized capacities or abilities to cope with challenges or reconstruct social structures and reshape survival habitus, i.e., the "inside-out" process, which is the bottom-up way as shown in Figure 4.1.

Internalization (outside-in)

Three major externalities, i.e., elements in social structures, were highlighted by Chinese social workers, as those were internalized.

The first externality is a series of new policies, regulations and professional guidelines related to social work. As shown in Table 2.1, these include the national licensure of social workers in 2008, the Temporary Regulations on the Social Workers Vocational Standard Evaluation in 2006, the government purchase of social work services throughout the country since 2007, and so on. Chinese social workers needed to introduce active initiatives to follow

and learn these policies and regulations, so that they could master the changes, implications and rules, and apply them in their survival practice.

> *I always actively study new policies and regulations, in order to follow the trend of social work development and guide our actions…I have to keep studying since everything is changing in China.   (SH01: 32-year-old male OM in Shanghai)*

The second externality is that of the key social relations of social workers. These consist of organizational management and peer relationships, and interactions with government, NPOs, community organizations, and the media. Intra- and inter-organizational social capital or resources were simultaneously internalized when surviving professional challenges. During the survival coping process, Chinese social workers needed to enhance good social relations by both active and passive actions: actively building up relationships with cooperative stakeholders to guide their subsequent work, and also compromising or yielding to dominant stakeholders such as organizations in the government and commercial sectors to obtain resources and funding.

> *Sometimes, we were required to take extra work for the government sectors, I even refused the phenomenon…but turned to use this inequality to rebuild the government relationship. (SZ02: 30-year-old female PM in Shenzhen)*

The third externality, life and educational experience, was continuously internalized. Most notably, personal dispositions utilized to cope with common challenges from childhood to adulthood, and social work values and ethics gained from university education, were internalized to help guide the survival of Chinese social workers. As Liu *et al.* (2012a) argued that "through social work training at the school, they [new social workers] had been taught that some key social work values were core elements of their social work professional identity. These values have informed their daily practice" (p. 189). Chinese social workers trusted and made use of what they had learnt from early life and education experience through to the present day, in order to survive in the profession.

I felt the best way was to solve problems alone, instead of talking to somebody…In my childhood, I talked to my sister about my negative emotions, but she pushed me away…so I learnt from then. (SZ02: 30-year-old female PM in Shenzhen)

Internalization (outside-in) process

The "outside-in" began from their early life and education experience, and lasted until their current period of work. What Chinese social workers learnt from both early life experience and university education (or pre-service training), i.e., personal dispositions and social work values and ethics, were internalized as the fundamental elements of survival practice. Secondly, when they began their social work career, the first three externalities aforementioned were internalized and they have endured to the present day.

To explicate the internalization (outside-in) process, it is important to note that Chinese social workers utilized both active and passive processes. Active processes mean that they actively integrated the externalities to improve their survival practices. They learned the implications and lessons from policies and regulations, and the government purchase of social work services; they also studied conventional instructions to build up relationships with local government and other stakeholders. Passive processes included their reluctance to compromise or to yield to factors in external social structures in order to adapt to unequal relationships or bureaucratic management. For instance, they were disgusted with the top-down decisions made by the government and the intense competition with the commercial sector but had to make concessions to seek external resources.

Externalization (inside-out)

The "inside-out" process refers to the phenomenon whereby Chinese social workers draw on their capacities and abilities to cope with challenges. Three types of internalities were externalized.

The first internality comprised experiences obtained from their early life and education, such as knowledge and skills, values, hopes, their mission in life, and personal dispositions. These experiences contributed their high work engagement to remain in the social work

profession, i.e., being involved in social work jobs with high senses of enthusiasm, commitment, and inspiration. "The internalization of these values and knowledge, as a form of personal knowledge, indeed not only became their primary source of reference to understand the field, but also sustained their involvement during the transition process [entering the social work field in China]" (Yan *et al.*, 2013, p. 544). Kwan & Reupert (2019) also added that social workers were influenced by personal knowledge and experiences when delivered services. Chinese social workers learned from and applied past experience to cope with current challenges.

> *I learned to solve problems alone since childhood through to university…now, I still firstly refer to my own ability and independently consider solutions when encountering challenges. (SH03: 32-year-old female OM in Shanghai)*

The second internality consisted of the professional capacities or abilities learnt during their work. They always kept improving capacities through the learning by doing approach, and applied what they had learned to daily practice.

> *When facing challenges, I can apply self-reflection and think about it by myself to search for solutions, instead of seeking support from other people. (SH14: 46-year-old female OM in Shanghai)*

The third internality comprised three of the aforementioned externalities: social work policies, social relations, and life and education experience, which were internalized and transferred to become the internality, such as the basic knowledge and capacities for understanding government or dealing with social relations.

> *I always learn the government language from interactions with government officers, and internalize it to guide future actions. (SH01: 32-year-old male OM in Shanghai)*

Externalization (inside-out) process

The "inside-out" process appeared to commence after they began their social work career. Specifically, when encountering challenges, they would access and utilize the three aforementioned internalities, i.e. knowledge and capacities, or abilities to cope with challenges. Notably, learning ability, adapting ability, and communication were often highlighted at all stages, i.e., the FSW, PM, and OM. However, specific professional capacities for each stage differed. In the FSW stage, social work service skills and professional values and ethics were most prominent in surviving challenges. In the PM stage, project management, leadership or team building capacity, and research and development ability were most apparent. In the OM stage, social work supervision capacity, organizational management and leadership, and research and development ability, were most salient.

Four interconnected processes:

Four successive interconnected processes were identified to elaborate the details of survival process based on the "outside-in" and "inside-out" theoretical framework.

The first interconnected process was the initial motivation for becoming a social worker, which was internalized from the externalities, transferred to become an internality, and then externalized once again to cope with challenges during their early career. This partially describes the processes of "internalized" and "guide" in Figure 4.1. Specifically, previous life and education experience, and factors in terms of social structures, were internalized first. The early life experience cultivated their disposition to cope with challenges and the way in which they interacted with people, i.e., preferring either to seek external assistance or utilize their personal capacities, or a combination of both. These dispositions developed through childhood to adulthood and were eventually internalized.

> *I don't think I am able to cope with challenges by myself, since I always pour out worries, or find a place to adjust myself from childhood. (SH09: 34-year-old female OM in Shanghai)*

University education instilled social work values and ethics, mission and skills into the social workers' minds. These were then internalized as fundamental commitments to social work and the attributes of a qualified social worker, i.e., the basic internalities of a social worker to empower them entering this profession and to survive the early career challenges. When Chinese social workers entered the emerging social work field, the above externalities were internalized as the initial motivation for becoming a social worker. This explains why they chose to be social workers and could survive challenges early in their career.

The second was the improvement of professional capacities through "learning-by-doing". This process partially describes the processes of "internalized" and "guide", "individual practice" and "agency" in Figure 4.1. After the first interconnected process, Chinese social workers would realize that the initial motivation was insufficient to support their long-term survival, so they had to continue internalization of the externalities, i.e., learning from their working experience. The participants explained that the "learning-by-doing" approach was actively proceeding alongside their career development; it involved a circulating reconciliation between the "outside-in" and the "inside-out", i.e., what they learnt was internalized and applied to solve problems and improve personal capacities.

The foci of the "learning-by-doing" approach varied in each stage, as the challenges differed. The FSWs primarily improved their social work services skills, the PMs concentrated on their project management and team building capacities, while the OMs focused on organizational management, supervision, and their strategic planning abilities. Irrespective of whether Chinese social workers at various stages could successfully improve personal agency through the "learning-by-doing" approach, it was nevertheless the basic influential factor that enabled them to survive challenges. What they learnt at the lower stage was therefore always internalized and transferred to the higher stage as stepping-stones.

> *I have learned a lot of services skills and project management knowledge when I was a FSW and PM. These were internalized as personal capacities, and transferred to help my current work as an OM. (SZ01: 34-year-old female OM in Shenzhen)*

The third was utilizing personal agency and different types of capital to cope with challenges (inside-out) during the outside-in process. This relates to the processes of "guide" and "internalized" in Figure 4.1. The "inside-out" process indicates that Chinese social workers preferred to rely on personal capacities or abilities to cope with challenges. However, this process was strongly related with the "outside-in", i.e., their capacities or abilities were partially internalized from the aforementioned externalities. Thus, the "outside-in" process continuously transferred the externalities and provided potential resources for the "inside-out" process, which then utilized or consumed what was internalized to enable social workers to cope with challenges.

Moreover, the participants highlighted the "inside-out" process as a major approach to surviving challenges using social work perspectives such as empowerment and strength. These perspectives were first employed to allow them to help themselves when challenges emerged. The majority of participants also stated that the "outside-in" process was a back-up method they could use to solve problems. This process demonstrated how both social structures and individual agency were reconciled. Although both are used to survive challenges, Chinese social workers clearly preferred to utilize their own agency.

> *When I meet challenges from interactions with government officials, I mostly apply what I have learnt, such as a strength perspective, to adjust myself... if all my own efforts fail, I will approach experts or external supervisors for solutions. (XM05: 34-year-old female OM in Xiamen)*

The fourth was utilizing personal agency to reshape the survival process, furtherly to influence survival habitus, and to reproduce social structures or impact on stakeholders, which enabled Chinese social workers to improve their social status and professional recognition to support their long-term survival. This principle elaborates the processes of "reshape" and "reproduce" in Figure 4.1. These directly promoted and reshaped SWSOs and social workers' professionalism and competitiveness based on their supportive services, for instance social

work research, evaluation, counseling, and training. Moreover, they would impact on government officers' and stakeholders' attitudes and behaviors by increasing the quality of professional services and the delivery of values.

> *When the government saw our professionalism, they changed a lot and actively cooperated with us. Now, we always play a leading role in designing and conducting activities. (XM05: 34-year-old female OM in Xiamen)*

Conversely, Chinese social workers utilized professional capacities, at least to a certain extent, to influence social work policies and professional development by participating in policy advocacy and regional social work services scheme making processes, achieving a series of positive changes in all three cities. Thus, they apparently promoted their social status and professional recognition.

> *This year, we were invited by the Civil Affairs Bureau to participate in drafting policy for severe illness in Shenzhen, because we edited a practical manual for severe illness rescue last year. We contributed a series of suggestions to simplify the complicated application process. (SZ05: 33-year-old female FM in Shenzhen)*

Impact of the "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes

The "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes can be used to summarize the coping processes that Chinese social workers employed to deal with challenges. Most importantly, rather than approaching the external stakeholders for solutions using an "outside-in" process, the majority of participants would often employ the "inside-out" process to draw from their internalized or personal capacities, and reflect and/or motivate themselves to solve the problems at hand.

> *I will calm down first [when faced with challenges] and prefer dealing with them by myself, instead talking to somebody else. I think, as a social worker, I possess the basic abilities to deal with our own challenges or pressures. (SH01: 32-year-old male OM in Shanghai)*

A few participants stated that they initially trusted external stakeholders to access resources or provide support when they faced challenges, rather than using their own agency as part of an "outside-in" process.

I would like to pour out my stress to someone who has similar values to me, such as colleagues, supervisors and friends. I might use both formal or informal ways to cope with challenges. So I prefer to seek external assistance or resources. (XM03: 28-year-old female PM in Xiamen)

The "inside-out" process was utilized much more frequently than the "outside-in" process. Chinese social workers admitted that, in the context of the emerging profession in China, their entire career was an uninterrupted learning process; the "learning-by-doing" approach happened in the "outside-in" process, and personal capacities or abilities were improved accordingly. They then utilized these capacities to cope with challenges and played an agent role to build a cross-over between the "outside in" and the "inside out" processes through the "learning-by-doing" approach. Thus, they employed two interconnected processes to cope with challenges, even though the "inside-out" process was clearly highlighted as the fundamental and complementary choice.

When facing challenges, I always brooded by myself…since I believe in my own abilities... Later, I found I could ask somebody, especially experienced social work experts, who helped a lot. (SH04: 29-year-old female PM in Shanghai)

Discussion and Conclusion

Chinese social workers' survival is a successive coping process of conciliating social structures and individual agency. The "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes could be adopted as a theoretical framework to specifically summarize their survival coping processes. Furthermore, four interconnected processes were identified to elaborate these two processes. Notably, Chinese social workers regarded the "inside-out" process as a more preferable

127

survival coping process than the "outside-in" process. The following section expands this discussion.

Chinese social workers presented an ongoing coping process involving reconciling social structures and individual agency, rather than just focusing on one side. Firstly, the findings echo previous arguments that Chinese social workers encounter constraining social structures and a fuzzy social work field (Yan *et al.*, 2012; Yan *et al.*, 2013). The findings agree with the literature in that emerging Chinese social work contexts have had a negative impact on social workers' survival status (Liu, 2012), social work developing in an embedding manner (Wang, 2011b), and the fact that a social work professional value system has not yet been built in China (Zhao *et al.*, 2017). For early Chinese social workers, professional competence is still under construction in emerging contexts (Tsang & Yan, 2001; Zeng *et al.*, 2016). In this respect, we understand the structural factors negatively influencing Chinese social workers' work engagement and further on their survival in this profession.

Secondly, Chinese social workers were active professionals and could utilize agency and capital to cope with challenges and make changes. Lacking sufficient early social work education (pre-service training) and mature professional contexts, they did not immerse themselves in complaints. Instead, they learnt to benefit from social structures, professional and personal experiences in order to carry out services, to seek resources and to use capital to survive challenges (Kwan & Reupert, 2019). As Collins (2008) stated, the "internalization of difficulties" was one means of coping (p. 1178). Chinese social workers were therefore active agents in forming their survival process, and mastered the professional methods and perspectives of social work to help people, which in turn were the major aspects applied to "their own coping skills" when challenges emerged. These points supplement work engagement literature with Chinese social workers' personal efforts, i.e., actively utilizing professional skills and values when facing challenges, in order to enhance higher work engagement for long-term survival in this profession. Moreover, Chinese social workers also opened up "…flexible possibilities for developing new ones [coping skills]" (Collins, 2008, p. 1179), rather than first approaching external stakeholders for solutions.

Thirdly, to develop discussion in terms of habitus and practice in Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), Chinese social workers activated and utilized agency to cope with challenges (the inside-out process), including self-reflection, generating hope, accumulating and summarizing experience, using personal ability to seek resources, self-adjustment, new knowledge and skills, and coping strategies. Moreover, they specified the process underlying the internalization of externality (the outside-in process), whereby factors in social structures were internalized, irrespective of whether they were active or passive, conscious or unconscious. Therefore, constraints in social structures were transformed from factors to be avoided in their career, to beneficial factors regarded as the stepping-stones to longer survival. These findings, to some extent, echo Bourdieu's points about habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (1990, p. 127). However, being active agents, during survival process, Chinese social workers were aware of their professional role of subjective change-maker who could be able to exercise more consciously than Bourdieu's arguments with habitus "as principles…can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 108).

Finally, to conceptualize the "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes, the "inside-out" process is seen as a strength-oriented survival coping process, and is the major path for pursuing long-term survival in the profession. Conversely, the "outside-in" process is a resource-based survival coping process and an intermediate instrumental process, i.e., the resource-based process serves the strength-oriented survival coping process. It seems that there is a boundary between the internality and externality based on the ToP (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). However, the empirical evidence shows that the continuous survival coping processes bridged this boundary, and that the two processes were interconnected to enable Chinese social workers to survive challenges. This means that they employed the "outside-in" process to internalize the externalities so that they become knowledge, professional capacities, capital or abilities (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2001) that then guide practice. The "inside-out" process activated the internality and enabled social workers to seek resources and cope with challenges, whether the

internality was personal dispositions fostered in previous life experience, professional capacities obtained in early social work education, or factors internalized from external social structures during uninterrupted working experience (Harrington, 2005). All the aforementioned externalities were constantly internalized and transferred into individual agency. Thus, social workers not only utilized them to cope with challenges, reshape professional identity, and reproduce social structures, but they also applied a strength-oriented survival coping process to empower themselves to achieve higher work engagement, and seek a realistic career path that would enable them to satisfy personal hopes, achieve promotion, and earn a decent income. These findings challenge arguments that organizational atmosphere and feelings of accomplishment regarding client change encourage Chinese social workers to stay longer in SWSOs (Yuan & Xu, 2016). Social work is more realistically regarded as a "job" than a "commitment", personal accomplishments become effective motivations to highly improve their work engagement and longer survival.

Conclusions

Chinese social workers presented an apparent survival habitus of reconciling social structures and individual agency, whereby "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes were interconnected to elaborate the survival coping processes. Furthermore, the strength-oriented coping process was the major realistic choice while the resource-based coping process was secondary solution.

Implications

Implications for policy: Chinese top-down social structures and dominant governments have played an influential role in social workers' survival. A long journey will need to be taken to develop social work professionalism in the context of an emerging profession. Chinese central and local government are responsible for devising appropriate social work policies and regulations, and offering social workers and SWSOs annual financial support from the fiscal budget. The government also needs to provide professional space and authority, such as a decent salary and more stable positions in different social work fields. This will encourage social workers to stay in this profession, lead to the creation of a stable army of social workers,

and expand the indigenous social work practices. Chinese social workers should make their voice heard during the policymaking process, in order to contribute their practical experience to promote social work policies.

Implications for research: Chinese social workers reconciled social structures and individual agency to survive challenges in this emerging profession. The general understanding of survival in an emerging profession context, like social work in China, has been constructed in this respect. The universal applicability of survival to social workers could inform relevant research on other social service practitioners such as nurses and psychologists. The findings also advance the ToP by interpreting the key concepts of habitus and practice in the specific context of a new profession. Based on the findings, quantitative research could be used to create a survival scale for social workers. In terms of research on Chinese social workers, the findings have established an ongoing coping process of survival applied to social workers. Future research could target social workers in one organization or one city, either to provide deeper insights into survival stories through participant observation and ethnography, or to probe career changes via a longitudinal study. Additionally, further research could interview social workers outside NPOs and stakeholders from different sectors, to gather diverse voices and comparative narratives.

Implications for practice: Firstly, the findings show that a social work mission and hope cannot support Chinese social workers to any great extent. Rather than being driven by social worker mission and commitments, they realistically treat the profession as a common job and acknowledge the status quo in order to rationally find realistic ways to first pursue long-term survival and then seek dual commitments to social work (Zhao et al., 2017). Newly qualified social workers in China and other developing countries should not only understand social structures, such as newly issued policies, regulations and sophisticated relationships, they should also work in the profession for several years to concentrate on improving their professional capacities and utilizing these to reproduce social structures and reshape their professional identity to ensure higher social status and better survival. Secondly, as the unit costs of qualifying a social worker increase (Curtis *et al.*, 2012), NPOs, especially SWSOs,

need to invest in efforts to retain social workers in the profession; for example, by offering a higher salary and reasonable human resource support, organizing adequate training and supervision, and improving organizational management.

Limitations

Several limitations to this research should also be addressed. First, using just three research cities may have limited the diversity of the survival narratives. All participants were social workers in NPOs who held a social work diploma; licensed social workers who did not have a social work diploma, or who worked outside NPOs, were excluded. Second, the participants also came from different social work fields, rather than one specific area, such as school and medical social work. This may have limited the in-depth description of social workers' survival to one specific area. Third, participants talked about challenges and coping strategies that happened several years ago. Time might have limited the recall of past survival experience. Finally, space constraints meant that a comparison of social workers who worked in different areas could not be made.

References

Aiello, A., & Tesi, A. (2017). Psychological Well-Being and Work Engagement among Italian Social Workers: Examining the Mediational Role of Job Resources. *Social Work Research, 41*(2), 73-84. doi:10.1093/swr/svx005

An, Q., & Chapman, M. V. (2014). The early professional experience of a new social worker in China. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(2), 322−333.

Bai, J. (2014). What is the role of social work in China? A multi-dimensional analysis. *Advances in Social Work, 15*(2), 495−506.

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and work-engagement: The JD-R approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 389–411. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235

Beddoe, L., Davys, A. M., & Adamson, C. (2014). 'Never trust anybody who says "I don't need supervision"': Practitioners' beliefs about social worker resilience. *Practice, 26*(2), 113-130.

Bennett, P., Evans, R., & Tattersall, A. (1993). Stress and coping in social workers: A preliminary investigation. *The British Journal of Social Work, 23*(1), 31-44.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77−101.

Bryan, A., & Aymer, C. (1996). Black social work students and practitioners: Survival strategies. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 10*(2), 113−117. doi:10.1080/02650539608415106

Chan, C., Holosko, M. J., Wang, Y*., et al.* (2017). Development and validation of the perceived social work competence scale in China. *Research on Social Work Practice, 27*(1), 91-102.

Cheung, C., & Ngai, S. (2009). Surviving hegemony through resistance and identity articulation among outreaching social workers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 26*(1), 15−37.

Coffey, M., Dugdill, L., & Tattersall, A. (2004). Stress in social services: Mental well-being, constraints and job satisfaction. *The British Journal of Social Work, 34*(5), 735-746.

Collins, S. (2008). Statutory social workers: Stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences. *The British Journal of Social Work, 38*(6), 1173-1193.

Collins, S. (2015). Hope and helping in social work. *Practice, 27*(3), 1-17.

Curtis, L., Moriarty, J., & Netten, A. (2012). The costs of qualifying a social worker. *The British Journal of Social Work, 42*(4), 706−724.

Damron-Rodriguez, J. (2008). Developing competence for nurses and social workers. *Journal of Social Work Education, 44*(3), 27-37.

Donnellan, H. (2010). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers: Hitting the Ground Running*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Donnellan, H. (2014). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers, Hitting the Ground Running* (2nd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Eriksen, T. H., & Nielsen, F. S. (2001). *A History of Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press.

Galpin, D., Bigmore, J., Parker, J*., et al.* (2012). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Adult and Mental Health Services: Hitting the Ground Running*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Geisler, M., Berthelsen, H., & Muhonen, T. (2019). Retaining Social Workers: The Role of Quality of Work and Psychosocial Safety Climate for Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 43*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/23303131.2019.1569574

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Grant, L., & Kinman, G. (2013). 'Bouncing back?' Personal representations of resilience of student and experienced social workers. *Practice, 25*(5), 1-18.

Guerin, S., Devitt, C., & Redmond, B. (2010). Experiences of Early-Career Social Workers in Ireland. *British Journal of Social Work, 40*(8), 2467-2484. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcq020

Guo, W. (2016). Insights from the fifth plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee on indigenisation of the path of development of social work in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 9*(1), 92−95.

Halmi, A. (1996). The qualitative approach to social work: An epistemological basis. *International Social Work, 39*, 363−375. doi:10.1177/002087289603900403

Harrington, A. (2005). *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Healy, L. (2008). Exploring the history of social work as a human rights profession. *International Social Work, 51*(6), 735−748.

Hombrados-Mendieta, I., & Cosano-Rivas, F. (2013). Burnout, workplace support, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among social workers in Spain: A structural equation model. *International Social Work, 56*(2), 228-246.

Huang, X. (2015). The institutional environment and the develpment of contemporary Chinese social organizations. *Social Sciences in China, 09*, 146−164, 206−207 (In Chinese).

Itzick, M., & Kagan, M. (2017). Intention to Leave the Profession: Welfare Social Workers Compared to Health Care and Community Social Workers in Israel. *Journal of Social Service Research, 43*(3), 346-357. doi:10.1080/01488376.2016.1246402

Jiang, H., Wang, Y., Chui, E.*, et al.* (2017). Professional identity and turnover intentions of social workers in Beijing, China: The roles of job satisfaction and agency type. *International Social Work, 62*(1), 146-160.

Katz, C. (2013). The narratives of abused children who have survived attempted filicide. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*(10), 762-770.

Kim, H., & Stoner, M. (2008). Burnout and turnover intention among social workers: Effects of role stress, job autonomy and social support. *Administration in Social Work, 32*(3), 5-25.

Koeske, G. F., & Koeske, R. D. (1989). Work load and burnout: Can social support and perceived accomplishment help? *Social Work, 34*(3), 243-248.

Kwan, C. K., & Reupert, A. (2019). The relevance of social workers' personal experiences to their practices. *British Journal of Social Work*. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy017

Liu, Y., Lam, C.-M., & Yan, M.-C. (2012a). A challenged professional identity: the struggles of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(3), 189-200. doi:10.1080/17525098.2012.721166

Liu, Y., Lam, C. M., & Yan, M. C. (2012b). A challenged professional identity: The struggles of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(3), 189-200.

Liu, Z. (2012). The development of social work policy in China: Current status and strategies. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(1), 81−90.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/survival

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2019). A New Chapter for the Reform and Development of Civil Affairs in the New Era: National Video Conference of Civil Affairs 2019. Retrieved from http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/mzyw/201901/20190100014249.shtml (In Chinese)

Niu, D., & Haugen, H. Ø. (2019). Social workers in China: Professional identity in the making. *The British Journal of Social Work, 49*(7), 1932-1949. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy107

Oxford Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Oxford Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/survival

Ravalier, J. M. (2018). The influence of work engagement in social workers in England. *Occupational Medicine, 68*(6), 399-404. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqy087

Sánchez-Moreno, E., De La Fuente Roldán, I.-N., Gallardo-Peralta, L. P*., et al.* (2015). Burnout, informal social support and psychological distress among social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work, 45*(8), 2368-2386.

Tesi, A., Aiello, A., & Giannetti, E. (2019). The work-related well-being of social workers: Framing job demands, psychological well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 121-141. doi:10.1177/1468017318757397

Tsang, A. K. T., & Yan, M. C. (2001). Chinese corpus, western application: The Chinese strategy of engagement with western social work discourse. *International Social Work, 44*(4), 433.

Tsui, M. S. (2006). Hopes and dreams: Ideal supervision for social workers in Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 16*(1), 33-42.

Tum, T. (2006). The Street Children Phenomenon: A Qualitative Study on How Street Children Survive in Eldoret, Kenya. In K. Ohman (Ed.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Ungar, M. (2004). Surviving as a postmodern social sorker: Two Ps and three Rs of direct practice. *Social Work, 49*(3), 488−496.

Wang, E., Jiang, W., & Mao, S. (2019). Job autonomy and turnover intention among social workers in China: Roles of work-to-family enrichment, job satisfaction and type of sector. *Journal of Social Service Research*. doi:10.1080/01488376.2019.1698487

Wang, S. (2011). The embedding development of social work in China. *Social Science Front, 02*, 206−222 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2013). Toward recognition: The development of professional social work in China. *Hebei Academic Journal, 33*(06), 108−113 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2014). Participation of social work in social governance innovation. *Social Construction, 01*, 8−15 (In Chinese).

Wang, S., & Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2009). The development of social work in China in the context of building a harmonious society. *Social Sciences in China, 5*, 128−140 (In Chinese).

Weinreich, H. M. (2015). *Burnout among National Association of Social Workers Healthcare Social Workers.* (Ph.D), Walden University.

Yan, M.-C., Tsui, M.-S., Chu, W. C. K.*, et al.* (2012). A profession with dual foci: Is social work losing the balance? *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(2), 163-172. doi:10.1080/17525098.2012.680943

Yan, M. C. (2013). Towards a pragmatic approach: a critical examination of two assumptions of indigenization discourse. *China Journal of Social Work, 6*(1), 14-24. doi:10.1080/17525098.2013.766135

Yan, M. C. (2017). Social policy and social work indigenization in China. *Social Work*(02), 6-10 (In Chinese).

Yan, M. C., & Cheng, S.-L. (2009). Searching for Chinese characteristics: A tentative empirical examination. *China Journal of Social Work, 2*(1), 5-19. doi:10.1080/17525090802692112

Yan, M. C., Gao, J. G., & Lam, C. M. (2013). The dawn is too distant: The experience of 28 social work graduates entering the social work field in China. *Social Work Education, 32*(4), 538-551. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.688097

Yan, M. C., Ge, Z.-M., Cheng, S.-L.*, et al.* (2009). Imagining social work: A qualitative study of students' perspectives on social work in China. *Social Work Education, 28*(5), 528-543. doi:10.1080/02615470802368959

Yan, M. C., & Ka Tat Tsang, A. (2005). A snapshot on the development of social work education in China: A delphi study. *Social Work Education, 24*(8), 883-901. doi:10.1080/02615470500342314

Yan, M. C., & Tsang, A. K. T. (2005). A snapshot on the development of social work education in China: A delphi study. *Social Work Education, 24*(8), 883−901. doi:10.1080/02615470500342314

Yin, A., Zhao, H., & Xu, X. (2016). Bidirectional embedding: A new perspective of Chinese social work development path. *Journal of Social Work, 03*, 47-55 (In Chinese).

Yip, K.-S. (2007). Professionalization of social-work practice in the People's Republic of China: A tri-tensional analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 17*(2), 56−69.

Yuan, X., & Xu, W. (2016). Motivation factors for social workers in social service organizations. *Social Construction, 3*(4), 62-75 (In Chinese).

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K., & Wang, S. (2002). Tensions confronting the development of social work education in China: Challenges and opportunities. *International Social Work, 45*(3), 375−388.

Zeng, S., Cheung, M., Leung, P*., et al.* (2016). Voices from social work graduates in China: Reasons for not choosing social work as a career. *Social Work, 61*(1), 69-78.

Zhao, F., Fu, F., & Yang, B. (2017). Social work value system in mainland China: Construction of a scale and value commitment assessment. *International Social Work, 61*(6), 917-929.

Zhu, J., & Chen, A. (2013). The embeddedness of professional social work into the power relations of urban community: A case study of government service purchase. *Sociological Studies, 01*, 43−64 (In Chinese).

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Research questions

This dissertation answered the major research question: "What do Chinese social workers do to ensure their professional survival?" Three sub-questions followed: (a) What challenges do Chinese social workers face in the context of changing social structures and what coping strategies do they utilize to cope with these challenges? (b) What challenges do Chinese social workers encounter in their personal daily practice, and what specific survival strategies do they use? and (c) What are the survival coping processes of social workers in mainland China? This dissertation employed the Theory of Practice (ToP), and advanced several key ToP concepts including structure, field, agency, capital and practice, to explore Chinese social workers' survival in the emerging context.

Challenges and coping strategies with regard to changing social structures

Challenges

Study 1 (Chapter Two) answered the first sub-question: What challenges do Chinese social workers face in terms of changing social structures and what coping strategies do they utilize to cope with these challenges? Two themes emerged in relation to the challenges Chinese social workers encountered in terms of external social structures: (a) constraining social structures; and (b) immature professionalization of social work and NPOs. These challenges also exhibited various characteristics at three professional stages: front-line social worker (FSW), project managers or officers (PM), and organizational managers (OM).

Coping strategies

The findings found three coping strategies that were utilized by Chinese social workers in response to the aforementioned challenges: (a) building a partnership and resource integration; (b) utilizing a professional and personal social support network; and (c) improving organizational governance and strategic management. These coping strategies indicate the importance of building a partnership with stakeholders, using social networks, and improving social work fields to address the challenges arising from external social structures, in order for

social workers to survive in this profession. Specifically, when facing changing and challenging social structures, for the FSWs, the major survival code was to improve professional service skills and knowledge; for the PMs, the key survival code was to construct appropriate professional boundaries, improve project management capacities and seek essential supplementary human resources; for the OMs, the vital survival code was to find the right way to improve organizational governance and development.

Discussions regarding the ToP

This study advances the concepts of structure, field, and practice based on empirical evidence in emerging social work context in China. Firstly, top-down social structures affect social work fields and social workers' survival. The top-down approach is regarded as the factor that determines how social work develops, and whether or not social workers can emerge and survive. This study also shows that the boundary between professional social work and administrative social work has not yet been established. The Chinese government and stakeholders outside the social work field may cross over the boundary and interfere in the development of professional social work, including services delivery, project management and organizational development. Consequently, the professional boundary of social work is ambiguous. Also, the top-down power relations from the government have continuously interfered with social workers' survival. Thus, the professional social work field is actually "the field of power" (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 53-54), and the professional identity of social workers needs further recognition in mainland China. The structural factor, i.e., the top-down approach and dominant Chinese government, is regarded as a vital role of influencing Chinese social workers' work engagement, which was an external impacting factor for their longevity in this profession.

Secondly, this study shows that the NPO environment played an influential role and directly impacted on Chinese social workers' survival, the findings explicate previous findings that organizational support improved work engagement among social workers (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). NPOs, especially SWSOs in mainland China, are considered a more specialized field of social work practice than the government and commercial sectors.

Thirdly, this study highlights the pragmatic survival practice of Chinese social workers, who played the roles of self-endorser and demonstrator to enhance social recognition and pursue long-term survival in challenging contexts. This study expands on the self-endorsement of social workers as a sufficient way to bridge the self-recognition and social recognition of social work in China. Self-endorsement is a demonstrative and pragmatic process of improving work engagement among Chinese social workers based on social work services and their effectiveness, which means that Chinese social workers make themselves believe in social work mission and work to fulfil social work commitments (self-recognition), primarily to improve the social recognition of social work through quality services and social impact.

Challenges and coping strategies with regard to personal daily practice

Challenges

Study 2 (Chapter Three) answered the second sub-question: What challenges do Chinese social workers encounter in their personal daily practice and what specific survival strategies do they use as a result? Four themes emerged relating to the challenges Chinese social workers encountered in their personal daily practice: (a) excessive workload; (b) economic pressure; (c) inadequate competence; and (d) values and ethical dilemmas. These challenges presented distinct characteristics at the three professional stages of FSW, PM and OM. The FSWs faced: (a) a large caseload, which caused burnout, stress, and frequent turnover intentions (excessive workload); (b) low starting salary (economic pressure); (c) insufficient early social work education experience (pre-service training) and a shortage of personal service skills (inadequate competence); and (d) direct service dilemmas (values and ethical dilemmas). The PMs encountered: (a) project administrative work overload (excessive workload); (b) comparative low income and temptation of higher salary jobs (economic pressure); (c) inadequate project management capacity and role transition pressure (inadequate competence); and (d) conflicts between universal and professional values and ethics (values and ethical dilemmas). The OMs narrated the following challenges: (a) organizational administrative work overload (excessive workload); (b) comparative low income and temptation of higher salaried jobs (economic

pressure); (c) organization governance and development pressure, and frustrated role transition, along with high capacity and responsibility challenges (inadequate competence); and (d) conflicts between universal and professional values and ethics (values and ethical dilemmas), which caused confusion over personal career plans.

Coping strategies

Moreover, Study 2 also demonstrated the four coping strategies utilized by Chinese social workers in response to the aforementioned challenges: (a) improving and utilizing agency through a learning-by-doing approach; (b) utilizing social and symbolic capital; (c) using cultural capital to ensure a work-life balance, and commitment to the social work mission; and (d) using agency to improve economic capital. In response to the different themes and challenges at each stage, different coping sub-strategies were accordingly utilized by Chinese social workers. In the case of the FSWs, there were three essential aspects of the survival code: improving agency of direct services, having hope of a personal better career, and commitments to a social work mission. For the PMs, their survival code focused on both improving personal expertise and increasing income through various possible means, simultaneously improving agency, capital, and position. The OMs possessed all the coping strategies owned by the FSWs and PMs; however, the OMs highlighted more concerns with regard to improving organizational governance capacity and the development of greater personal professional competence with regard to supervision and the provision of services.

Regarding survival in the social work profession in China, these coping strategies emphasize the importance of commitment to a social work mission, improving and utilizing agency or professional competences, and using capital during their survival practice. These also shed light on the satisfaction of the realistic needs of social workers. Firstly, early in their career, Chinese social workers were driven by a social work mission, which periodically empowered them to stay for months or years. However, a mission and intrinsic factors failed to empower Chinese social workers to survive in the profession permanently. As they became more deeply embedded in services or even management positions, and increasingly encountered novel challenges, their mission did not always empower them to solve problems

effectively. Consequently, frequent turnover intentions emerged, especially at the stage of FSWs, and many colleagues of the participants left the profession. Notably, this study revealed that Chinese social workers focused more on "realistic hope" (Collins, 2015, p. 209) or "personal hope" (Koenig & Spano, 2007, p. 48), i.e., their personal pursuit of professional development, a better life and promotion, or helpful supervision was seen as achievable. Secondly, this study showed that the satisfaction of extrinsic realistic needs drove Chinese social workers to survive in a long-term career or as "committed survivors" (Westbrook *et al.*, 2006, p. 57). These needs include promotion opportunities, continuous expertise accumulation, achieving a decent income, solving families or friends' problems, and the feeling of a democratic working atmosphere. The surviving Chinese social workers tried to regard the profession as an ordinary job and clarified their professional identity rather than purely immersing themselves in the pursuit of dual commitments to social work.

Discussions regarding the ToP

This study develops the understanding of agency, capital, position, and practice in the social work context. Diverse agency and forms of capital were presented by Chinese social workers at different stages. This also shows that they personally possess the flexible capacities or abilities to cope with challenges and survive during their practice, as existing studies have shown that these play positive roles in enhancing well-being and competence (Beddoe *et al.*, 2014; Grant & Kinman, 2013), resilience, ensuring a work-life balance, and developing professional expertise (Donnellan, 2014; Sánchez-Moreno *et al.*, 2015). When mission and commitment to social work was internalized from professional training in university, Chinese social workers were motivated to enter social work career with high work engagement. However, the decreasing subjective well-being in any moment when facing challenges at personal level reduced their work engagement (Tesi *et al.*, 2019) and longevity in the social work profession (Kincaid, 2017).

The survival coping processes of Chinese social workers

The "outside-in" and "inside-out" coping processes

Based on the analysis of Study 1 and 2, Study 3 (Chapter Four) answered the third sub-question: What are the survival coping processes of social workers in mainland China? Study 3 combined challenges and coping strategies derived from both external social structures and on the personal level to explore the survival coping processes employed by Chinese social workers in emerging contexts. In terms of the ToP, the habitus and practice were prominently discussed. The findings showed that survival as social workers in China was an ongoing coping process involving the reconciliation of social structures and individual agency, i.e., Chinese social workers had to face challenges and balance coping strategies on both sides. Two survival coping processes were described to illustrate this reconciliation: the "outside-in" and the "inside-out". Specifically, the "inside-out" means that Chinese social workers actively utilized their capacities or abilities to cope with challenges when interacting with external social structures in their daily practice, or they reconstructed social structures and reshaped survival habitus. This was therefore a strength-oriented survival coping process. The "outside-in" means that Chinese social workers were inevitably influenced by external social structures, which they internalized to guide daily practice in order to cope with the challenges they faced. This was a resource-based survival coping process.

Four interconnected processes

Four interconnected processes were identified to elaborate these two processes. The first interconnected process was the initial survival motivation internalized from previous experience and social structures. This process focuses on the "outside-in" process, while using the internality to guide practice. The second was the improvement of professional competence through the "learning-by-doing" approach, which highlights both the "outside-in" and "inside-out" processes: the internalization of the externality and the externalization of the internality. The third was utilizing personal agency and capital to cope with challenges while conducting the "outside-in" process. This emphasizes the "inside-out" process. The fourth was utilizing personal agency to reshape the way social workers survive and reproduce social structures.

This is an "inside-out" process and focuses on improving social workers' professional identity and recognition, along with relevant social structures.

Strength-oriented survival coping process as the major choice

More importantly, when Chinese social workers encountered challenges in external social structures or in their daily practice, the majority of participants employed the "inside-out" process to draw from their personal capacities and to reflect and/or motivate themselves to solve the problems at hand, rather than approaching external stakeholders for solutions using an "outside-in" process. This indicates that a strength-oriented survival coping process was the major realistic survival choice for Chinese social workers in the emerging professional contexts. A resource-based survival coping process was therefore a secondary survival solution.

Discussions regarding the ToP

To respond to the concepts in the ToP and the arguments in the literature, this study firstly echoes previous findings that Chinese social workers still encountered constraining social structures and a fuzzy social work field (Liu, 2012; Wang, 2011b; Yin *et al.*, 2016; Zhao *et al.*, 2017). It also concurs with existing studies which suggest the social work professional value system has not yet been built up in China (Liu *et al.*, 2012b). For new Chinese social workers, professional competence is still under construction in these emerging contexts (Tsang & Yan, 2001; Zeng *et al.*, 2016). Secondly, this study also demonstrates that Chinese social workers were active professionals who could utilize agency and various forms of capital, including self-reflection, generating hope, accumulating and summarizing experience, using personal ability to seek resources, making self-adjustments, and generating new knowledge, skills and coping strategies. These enabled them to cope with challenges and make changes to the profession and to external social structures. As Collins (2008) stated, the "internalization of difficulties" was one style of coping (p. 1178). Chinese social workers mastered the social work professional methods and perspectives of social work in helping people, which in turn were the major survival strategies applied to "their own coping skills" when challenges emerged. Thus, this study specifies the process of the internalization of externality (outside-in) in a survival habitus. Finally, this study highlights that for Chinese social workers, competence-oriented survival

146

practice was the chief path to pursuing a long-term career, while resource-based survival practice is an intermediate instrumental process. Based on the ToP, there appears to be a boundary between internality and externality (Bourdieu, 1977). However, this study has provided the empirical evidence to demonstrate that a continuous survival practice process based on "learning-by-doing" was bridging this boundary.

Conclusions

In order to ensure their professional survival in the Chinese emerging social work profession, Chinese social workers needed to cope with challenges from both changing social structures and personal daily practice. In addition to the specific coping strategies Chinese social workers utilized, they have played the part of self-endorser and demonstrator to break the constraints of social structures, and to enhance the social recognition of social work. At the personal practice level, they have to treat the profession as an ordinary job, and seek diverse and pragmatic ways to satisfy their realistic needs. Furthermore, to combine the above two sides, Chinese social workers have also presented their survival coping process of reconciling social structures and personal agency. They preferred the strength-oriented coping process as the major realistic choice, while the resource-based coping process was regarded as the secondary solution.

Implications

The findings can be applied to further understand concepts of structure, field, agency, capital and practice in the Chinese social work context under the ToP, and to interpret the challenges and coping strategies arising from social structures and Chinese social workers' daily practice. Among social workers, the findings could be applied to better interpret the profession in emerging contexts, with political thinking being necessary to understand the constraining social structures. This study also highlights the specific agency and forms of capital utilized to form the appropriate survival codes for social workers at different stages of their professional life enable them to survive for longer and have a better career.

The findings can also be applied to the government, NPOs and SWSOs, social workers or practitioners in NPOs, and other developing countries. The following section will elaborate on this discussion.

Firstly, the implications could help the Chinese central or local governments introduce well-directed social work policies and build "…a collaborative partnership with social services organizations" (Wang & Yuen-Tsang, 2009, p. 140). This will enable social workers to provide high quality services and promote solutions to social problems. At the same time, the governments and the public in emerging professional contexts will comprehend that a long journey is needed to develop social work professionalism in any country. To the state or local government and the public, especially in emerging profession contexts such as is found in China, more space and patience should be offered to social workers to explore the indigenization of social work practice. Moreover, we need to challenge the misconception that social workers in China are volunteers. They are professionals, and deserve a normal and decent salary matching that of employees in the commercial and government sectors. More resources and an increased budget should be invested in social workers.

Secondly, for NPOs, especially SWSOs, the findings can be applied to improve organizational governance, strategic management, and policy advocacy to reduce the turnover of social workers and to maintain a stable social worker team. As the unit costs of qualifying a social worker increase (Curtis *et al.*, 2012), the efforts spent on retaining social workers in the third sector are worth highlighting; for instance, offering a higher salary and reasonable human resource support, organizing adequate training and supervision, and improving organizational management.

Thirdly, for newly qualified social workers in China or other developing countries, especially in the context of social work as a new profession, it should be understood that challenges are a common issue. Social workers therefore need to take action to cope with such challenges, which arise from both external social structures and their daily practice. To ensure their long-term survival in the profession, social workers are advised to not only master how to understand and learn from social structures (e.g., newly issued policies, regulations, and

sophisticated relationships), they should also concentrate on how to improve personal professional competence during daily practice. This research also suggests that social workers need to utilize individual agency to reproduce social structures and to reshape their professional identity to ensure higher social status and better survival. At the same time, rather than being utterly driven by a social work mission and commitments, newly qualified social workers in China or other developing countries need to treat the profession rationally as an ordinary job, and acknowledge the status quo in order to seek diverse and pragmatic ways to survive in this emerging and challenging profession. Only then should they think about pursuing dual commitments to social work (Zhao et al., 2017). The realistic approach is to work in this profession for several years and to invest themselves in daily service and management practice to improve their expertise. Payback, including promotion and a decent income, will come sooner or later. Relying solely on a mission or hope will not support social workers when it comes to pursuing a long-term career.

The findings could also help developing countries better balance the relationship between the government and NPOs, and support social workers in pursuing more survival space and professional autonomy.

Limitations

Several limitations to this research should also be addressed. First, using just three research cities may have limited the diversity of the survival narratives. All participants were social workers in NPOs who held a social work diploma; licensed social workers who did not have a social work diploma or worked outside NPOs were excluded. Second, the participants also came from different social work fields, rather than one specific area, such as school and medical social work. This may have limited the in-depth description of social workers' survival to one specific area. Third, participants talked about challenges and coping strategies that happened several years ago, time might have limited the recall of past survival experience. Finally, space constraints meant that a comparison of social workers who worked in different areas could not be discussed.

Future research could target social workers in one organization or one city, either to provide deeper insights into survival stories through participant observation and ethnography, or to probe career changes via a longitudinal study. Additionally, further studies could interview social workers outside NPOs and stakeholders from different sectors to acquire a diversity of voices and comparative narratives. A quantitative research method is also worth employing to create a survival scale for social workers.

<div align="center">**References**</div>

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and work-engagement:
The JD-R approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and
Organizational Behavior, 1*, 389–411. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235

Beddoe, L., Davys, A. M., & Adamson, C. (2014). 'Never trust anybody who says "I don't
need supervision"': Practitioners' beliefs about social worker resilience. *Practice,
26*(2), 113-130.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Collins, S. (2008). Statutory social workers: Stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support
and individual differences. *The British Journal of Social Work, 38*(6), 1173-1193.

Collins, S. (2015). Hope and helping in social work. *Practice, 27*(3), 1-17.

Curtis, L., Moriarty, J., & Netten, A. (2012). The costs of qualifying a social worker. *The
British Journal of Social Work, 42*(4), 706−724.

Donnellan, H. (2014). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers, Hitting the
Ground Running* (2nd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Grant, L., & Kinman, G. (2013). 'Bouncing back?' Personal representations of resilience of
student and experienced social workers. *Practice, 25*(5), 1-18.

Kincaid, M. (2017). *Longevity among social workers: A multiple case study.* (Ph.D), Capella
University.

Koenig, T., & Spano, R. (2007). The cultivation of social workers' hope in personal life and
professional practice. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social
Thought, 26*(3), 45-61.

Liu, Y., Lam, C. M., & Yan, M. C. (2012). A challenged professional identity: The struggles
of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(3), 189-200.

Liu, Z. (2012). The development of social work policy in China: Current status and strategies.
China Journal of Social Work, 5(1), 81−90.

Sánchez-Moreno, E., De La Fuente Roldán, I.-N., Gallardo-Peralta, L. P*., et al.* (2015). Burnout, informal social support and psychological distress among social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work, 45*(8), 2368-2386.

Tesi, A., Aiello, A., & Giannetti, E. (2019). The work-related well-being of social workers: Framing job demands, psychological well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 121-141. doi:10.1177/1468017318757397

Tsang, A. K. T., & Yan, M. C. (2001). Chinese corpus, western application: The Chinese strategy of engagement with western social work discourse. *International Social Work, 44*(4), 433.

Wang, S. (2011). The embedding development of social work in China. *Social Science Front, 02*, 206−222 (In Chinese).

Wang, S., & Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2009). The development of social work in China in the context of building a harmonious society. *Social Sciences in China, 5*, 128−140 (In Chinese).

Westbrook, T. M., Ellis, J., & Ellett, A. J. (2006). Improving retention among public child welfare workers: What can we learn from the insights and experiences of committed survivors? *Administration in Social Work, 30*(4), 37-62.

Yin, A., Zhao, H., & Xu, X. (2016). Bidirectional embedding: A new perspective of Chinese social work development path. *Journal of Social Work, 03*, 47-55 (In Chinese).

Zeng, S., Cheung, M., Leung, P*., et al.* (2016). Voices from social work graduates in China: Reasons for not choosing social work as a career. *Social Work, 61*(1), 69-78.

Zhao, F., Fu, F., & Yang, B. (2017). Social work value system in mainland China: Construction of a scale and value commitment assessment. *International Social Work, 61*(6), 917-929.

Appendix 1: A Demographic Questionnaire

THE HONG KONG
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
香港理工大學

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China

A Demographic Questionnaire for the participants

Name:_____   Title in social work:_____

The name of organization:_____

Service field:_____

Age:_____   Education level:_____

Gender:_____   Marital status:_____

Ethnic: _____   Religion:_____

Monthly income:_____

Years of professional social work experience:_____

Email:_____

Telephone number:_____

Address:_____

THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
香港理工大學

"职业初生存：中国大陆社会工作者的叙事"研究项目

访谈对象基本信息表

姓名：_____ 社会工作职位/职称：_____

机构名称：_____

目前个人从事社会工作服务领域：_____

年龄：_____ 教育程度：_____

性别：_____ 婚姻状况：_____

民族：_____ 宗教信仰：_____

个人月收入：_____ 专业社会工作服务年限：_____（年）

Email: _____

电话号码：_____

地址：_____

154

Appendix 2: Operationalization of theory and initial construction of starter questions

Operationalization of the theory of practice	Initial interview questions related to survival practice
Structure: Policies, organizational or institutional management, rules, ethics, mission, norms, standards related to social work practice.	In what ways national and local social work policies, social work service organizational management, and social work rules, ethics, mission, norms 1) result in your challenges at work as a social worker? and 2) influence your decision to continue working in social work positions?
Agency: Social workers' capacities and abilities in the Chinese contexts.	3) What types of capacities and abilities do you carry on you to work professionally and efficiently on a regular basis despite of the challenges and struggles?
Habitus: The internalization of external factors such as social structures, norms, standards and so on. The externalization of internal factors such as individual dispositions and capacities.	4) In what ways do you form your "habitus", i.e. in what ways do you combine the external social factors and internal individual dispositions into your daily work. 5) What is the process guided by habitus for your survival in your positions and agency?
Field: Including NPO field, community field, media field, governmental field, work field, non-work field, entertainment field, and organizational field related social workers.	6) What specific fields are social workers involved in? 7) What interactions emerge from these fields? (What is the socially construct survival?)
Position: The social status of social workers in the Chinese contexts, where they conduct social interactions with relevant stakeholders.	8) What are your positions in the professional relationships vis-a-vis those of their stakeholders? 9) In what ways do these positions influence your survival?
Capital: Social workers' salary and welfare (economic), family, bachelor's degree and educational experience, and professional status (cultural), partnership, social relations, and networks (social), and recognition and honor (social).	10) What specific capitals do you have in your fields? 11) In what ways are these capitals helpful to your survival?
Practice: Individual social workers' daily practice of survival as professionals. It is related to social structures, fields, forms of capital surrounding social workers, position, and agency.	12) What survival strategies do you use on a daily basis? 13) What survival skills emerge from your survival practice? 14) To what extent do you externalize your internality and reconstruct the external structures?

Appendix 3: Feedback for Verbatim Transcription of In-depth Interview

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China

Feedback for Verbatim Transcription of In-depth Interview

If you have any feedbacks or suggestions to the verbatim transcription of your in-depth interview, please specify as the followings.

1. The details should be revised (Please specify the page number(s) and directly revise the content in the verbatim transcription WORD document).

2. The contents you would like to add to your in-depth interview.

Note: Please send both the revised verbatim transcription WORD document and the completed feedback form to ZHANG Yangyong via email: <u>1690   @</u>   , or <u>charleszhang@</u>   .

THE HONG KONG
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
香港理工大學

"职业初生存：中国大陆社会工作者的叙事"研究项目

深度访谈逐字稿 反馈表

对于深度访谈访逐字稿，如果您有任何反馈意见，请详细列明：

1. 需要修改纠正的地方（请标注页码，并在深度访谈逐字稿 WORD 类直接修改即可）

2. 针对深度访谈内容，需要补充的内容：

备注：如果您对深度访谈逐字稿内容有修改意见，或者有内容补充，请将此表填写好，连同修改后的深度访谈逐字稿，一并发送 Email 给张洋勇（1690＿＿＿@＿＿＿＿＿＿＿，或

charleszhang@＿＿＿＿＿）。

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China

Feedback Note for the Initial Interview Questions

If you have any feedbacks or suggestions to the initial questions for the in-depth interview, please specify as the followings.

1. The initial questions that would be deleted.

2. The initial questions that would be adjusted.

3. The questions that would be added.

Note: Please hand in the completed feedback note or send email to ZHANG Yangyong before the in-depth interview. 1690   @   , charleszhang@   .

"职业初生存：中国大陆社会工作者的叙事"研究项目

初拟访谈提纲反馈表

对于初拟访谈提纲，如果您有任何反馈意见，请详细列明：

1. 需要删除的初拟访谈问题：

2. 需要修改的初拟访谈问题：

3. 需要增加的访谈问题：

备注：如果您对初拟访谈提纲有反馈意见，请将此表填写好，并在接受深度访谈前交给或发送 Email 给张洋勇（1690   @   ，charleszhang@   ）。

THE HONG KONG
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
香港理工大學

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China
Information Sheet

14ᵗʰ February 2018
To Whom it may concern

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Mr. ZHANG Yangyong, who is a PhD student of the Department of Applied Social Sciences in The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The project has been approved by the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee (HSESC) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Reference Number: HSEARS20180131010).

The aim of this research is to study the survival of Chinese social workers by examining the challenges they face and their ways of coping to stay in this emerging profession. This study will involve completing in-depth interviews and city-level small group feedback discussions in Shenzhen, Xiamen and Shanghai, each interview and group discussion will take about two hours. It is hoped that this information will help to better understand the survival of Chinese social workers in order to benefit both social workers and social services organizations.

Both interview and group discussion should not result in any undue discomfort, but both interview and group discussion will need to be videotaped. Besides, you are asked to take part in the collaborative inquiry process of this study, for instance co-creating the guided questions for in-depth interview and the outline for small group discussion, providing feedbacks and revision to the analysis reports of all in-depth interviews and small group discussions, and contributing to themes defining in thematic analysis. All information related to you will remain confidential and will be identifiable by codes only known to the researcher. You have every right to withdraw from the study before or during this study without penalty of any kind.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact the co-principal investigator of this study Mr. ZHANG Yangyong (Tel: 86-1506077　, 852-9791　；Email: 1690　@　　　, charleszhang@　　　).

If you have any complaints about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact Miss Cherrie Mok, Secretary of the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-Committee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in writing (c/o Research Office of the University) stating clearly the responsible person and department of this study as well as the HSESC Reference Number.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Best regards,

Dr. Sim Boon Wee, Timothy
Associate Professor
Department of Applied Social Sciences
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Email: timothy.sim@　　　　, Tel: 852- 2766 5015

Hung Hom Kowloon Hong Kong 香港 九龍 紅磡
Tel 電話 (86) 1506077　, (852) 9791
Email 電郵 1690@
　　　charleszhang@
Website 網址 www.apss.polyu.edu.hk

"职业初生存：中国大陆社会工作者的叙事"研究项目
简　介

"中国大陆社会工作者的职业生存研究"项目是由香港理工大学应用社会科学系张洋勇开展的博士课题研究。该研究项目已获香港理工大学人类学科伦理小组委员会的审核批准（批准号：HSEARS20180131010）。

社会工作者在中国大陆是一个新兴的职业群体。该研究项目旨在分析中国大陆社会工作者所面临的挑战，以及在社会工作者在这一新兴职业中相对应的生存应对方法，以达到深入剖析中国大陆社会工作者职业生存的目的。研究将采用质性研究的方法，选取深圳、厦门和上海为研究地点，通过深度访谈、焦点小组访谈（基于城市）这两种方法来收集研究资料。您将分别参与**一次深度访谈**和**一次焦点小组访谈**，每个深度访谈和焦点小组将分别持续大约两个小时。鉴于此，希望该研究项目的成果能帮助我们更好的掌握中国大陆社会工作者的职业生存情况，以便后续对社会工作者和社会服务机构带来更多的利好。

以便后续深入研究分析，您参与的深度访谈和焦点小组将会被录音，但由此不会造成任何身体的不适。此外，该研究将是一个"协同研究"的过程，您将会被视为"共同研究者"，因此在整个研究过程中将深度参与，比如：共同商定深度访谈提纲和焦点小组提纲，针对深度访谈和焦点小组报告进行反馈并提出建议，在主题性分析中贡献自己的观点和想法等等。所有涉及您个人的隐私信息将被编码，除研究者知晓外，将被严格保密。在研究开始和进行当中，您如感到不适或风险，均可随时退出，而不必承担责任或受到任何形式的惩罚。

如想获取更多关于该研究项目的信息，您可以与张洋勇联系。电话：86-1506077　　，852-9791　　，邮箱地址：1690　　@　　　　　　　　，charleszhang@　　　　　。

关于该研究项目的实施，如您有任何投诉意见，可通过书面的形式直接联系香港理工大学人类学科伦理小组委员会秘书 Miss Cherrie Mok，邮件同时转送香港理工大学研究事务处，并备注清楚项目负责人、所在院系、以及研究项目批准号。

感谢您参与该研究！

祝好！

沈文伟
博士，副教授
香港理工大学应用社会科学系
timothy.sim@
852- 2766 5015

Hung Hom Kowloon Hong Kong 香港 九龍 紅磡
Tel 電話 (86) 1506077　　, (852) 979
Email 電郵 1690　　@
　　charleszhang@
Website 網址 www.apss.polyu.edu.hk

Appendix 6: Consent form

THE HONG KONG
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
香港理工大學

Survival in an Emerging Profession: Narratives of Social Workers in Mainland China
Consent to Participate in Research

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research conducted by_____Mr. ZHANG Yangyong_____.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e. my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefit and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. I agree / disagree for the interview to be audiotaped (please delete accordingly).

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Name of research interviewer_____Mr. ZHANG Yangyong_____

Signature of research interviewer _____

Date _____

"职业初生存：中国大陆社会工作者的叙事"研究项目
参与研究同意书

本人_____同意参与由_____张洋勇_____开展的上述研究。

本人知悉该研究所取的资料可能被用作日后的研究及发表，但本人的私隐权利将得以保留，即本人的个人资料不会被公开。

研究人员已向本人清楚解释列在所附项目简介中的研究程序，本人明了当中涉及的利益及风险；本人自愿参与研究项目。

本人知悉本人有权就程序的任何部分提出疑问，并有权随时退出而不受任何惩处。我同意 / 不同意 参与的访谈被录音 （请勾选）。

参与者姓名　_____

参与者签署　_____

研究人员姓名　_____张洋勇_____

研究人员签署　_____

日期　_____

References to the dissertation

Aiello, A., & Tesi, A. (2017). Psychological Well-Being and Work Engagement among Italian Social Workers: Examining the Mediational Role of Job Resources. *Social Work Research, 41*(2), 73-84. doi:10.1093/swr/svx005

An, Q., & Chapman, M. V. (2014). The early professional experience of a new social worker in China. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(2), 322−333.

Anderson, H. (1997). *Conversation, language, and possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy* (1st ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism? *Grounded Theory Review: An International Journal, 11*(1), 39-46.

Babbie, E. R. (2016). *The practice of social research* (14th ed.). Boston, MA: Boston, MA : Cengage Learning.

Bai, J. (2014). What is the role of social work in China? A multi-dimensional analysis. *Advances in Social Work, 15*(2), 495−506.

Bakker, A. B. (2011). An Evidence-Based Model of Work Engagement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*(4), 265-269. doi:10.1177/0963721411414534

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. I. (2014). Burnout and work-engagement: The JD-R approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 389–411. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091235

Beddoe, L., Davys, A. M., & Adamson, C. (2014). 'Never trust anybody who says "I don't need supervision"': Practitioners' beliefs about social worker resilience. *Practice, 26*(2), 113-130.

Bennett, P., Evans, R., & Tattersall, A. (1993). Stress and coping in social workers: A preliminary investigation. *The British Journal of Social Work, 23*(1), 31-44.

Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2015). A call for social work activism. *Social Work, 60*(2), 101-103. doi:10.1093/sw/swv005

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality : A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Allen Lane.

Boddy, J., O'leary, P., Tsui, M.-S*., et al.* (2018). Inspiring hope through social work practice. *International Social Work, 61*(4), 587-599.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2005). The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field. In R. Benson & E. Neveu (Eds.), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (pp. 29-47). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Johnson, R. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Cambridge: New York: Polity Press; Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77−101.

Bryan, A., & Aymer, C. (1996). Black social work students and practitioners: Survival strategies. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 10*(2), 113-117. doi:10.1080/02650539608415106

Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social Constructionism* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Bury, M. R. (1986). Social constructionism and the development of medical sociology. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 8*(2), 137-169. doi:10.1111/1467-9566.ep11340129

Chan, C., Holosko, M. J., Wang, Y*., et al.* (2017). Development and validation of the perceived social work competence scale in China. *Research on Social Work Practice, 27*(1), 91-102.

Cheung, C., & Ngai, S. (2009). Surviving hegemony through resistance and identity articulation among outreaching social workers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 26*(1), 15−37.

Coffey, M., Dugdill, L., & Tattersall, A. (2004). Stress in social services: Mental well-being, constraints and job satisfaction. *The British Journal of Social Work, 34*(5), 735-746.

Cole, A. L., & Knowles, J. G. (2001). *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Collins, S. (2008). Statutory social workers: Stress, job satisfaction, coping, social support and individual differences. *The British Journal of Social Work, 38*(6), 1173-1193.

Collins, S. (2015). Hope and helping in social work. *Practice, 27*(3), 1-17.

Crotty, M. (1998). *Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Curtis, L., Moriarty, J., & Netten, A. (2012). The costs of qualifying a social worker. *The British Journal of Social Work, 42*(4), 706−724.

Damron-Rodriguez, J. (2008). Developing competence for nurses and social workers. *Journal of Social Work Education, 44*(3), 27-37.

Donnellan, H. (2010). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers: Hitting the Ground Running*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Donnellan, H. (2014). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers, Hitting the Ground Running* (2nd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Edwards-Dandridge, Y. (2019). *Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Nurse Turnover Intention.* (Doctor of Business Administration), Walden University.

Eriksen, T. H., & Nielsen, F. S. (2001). *A History of Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press.

Fan, M., & Cheng, J. (2005). Research on the building and development of the interactive relationship between government and NGO in urban community. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 5*(35), 118−142 (In Chinese).

Feng, Y., & Peng, H. (2016). Background, power and value of soical work policy development in China *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, 1*(229), 62−68 (In Chinese).

Fine, M., & Teram, E. (2009). Believers and skeptics: Where social worker situate themselves regarding the code of ethics. *Ethics Behav., 19*(1), 60-78. doi:10.1080/10508420802623682

Galpin, D., Bigmore, J., Parker, J*., et al.* (2012). *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Adult and Mental Health Services: Hitting the Ground Running.* London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Gao, J. G., & Yan, M. C. (2015). Social work in the making: The state and social work development in China. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 24*(1), 93-101. doi:10.1111/ijsw.12089

Gates, K., Church, K., & Crowe, C. (2001). Fidelity and ethical ideals. In A. L. Cole & J. Knowls (Eds.), *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research* (pp. 152-163). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gehart, D., Tarragona, M., & Bava, S. (2007). A collaborative approach to research and inquiry. In H. Anderson & D. Gehart (Eds.), *Collaborative Therapy: Relationships and Conversations that Make a Difference* (pp. 367-387). New York, NY: Routledge.

Geisler, M., Berthelsen, H., & Muhonen, T. (2019). Retaining Social Workers: The Role of Quality of Work and Psychosocial Safety Climate for Work Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 43*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/23303131.2019.1569574

Gellis, Z. D. (2002). Coping with occupational stress in healthcare: A comparison of social workers and nurses. *Administration in Social Work, 26*(3), 37-52. doi:10.1300/J147v26n03_03

Gibelman, M., & Sweifach, J. (2008). Acting on our values: Do social workers volunteer? *Social Work, 53*(1), 53-64.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Grant, L., & Kinman, G. (2013). 'Bouncing back?' Personal representations of resilience of student and experienced social workers. *Practice, 25*(5), 1-18.

Grimes, T., & Hou, S.-I. (2013). "A breast ain't nothing but a sandwich": Narratives of Ella, an African American social worker breast cancer survivor. *Social Work in Public Health, 28*(1), 44-53. doi:10.1080/19371918.2010.513667

Gringeri, C., Barusch, A., & Cambron, C. (2013). Examining foundations of qualitative research: A review of social work dissertations, 2008–2010. *Journal of Social Work Education, 49*(4), 760-773. doi:10.1080/10437797.2013.812910

Guan, B. (2015). Competition and counter-embeddedness: Government procurement for public services and the development of social organizations. *Journal of Public Management, 12*(03), 83−92 (In Chinese).

Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs. (2016). The report for the ten years' social work development in Guangdong Province. *The Ten Years of Social Work Development (In Chinese).* Retrieved from http://mzzt.mca.gov.cn/article/sggzzsn/jlcl/201611/20161100887284.shtml

Guba, E. (1990). *The Paradigm dialog*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. London: : Sage Publications.

Guerin, S., Devitt, C., & Redmond, B. (2010). Experiences of Early-Career Social Workers in Ireland. *British Journal of Social Work, 40*(8), 2467-2484. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcq020

Guo, W. (2016). Insights from the fifth plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee on indigenisation of the path of development of social work in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 9*(1), 92−95.

Guo, W., & Tsui, M. S. (2010). From resilience to resistance: A reconstruction of the strengths perspective in social work practice. *International Social Work, 53*(2), 233-245.

Haene, L. D. (2010). Beyond division: Convergences between postmodern qualitative research and family therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 36*(1), 1-12. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00174.x

Halmi, A. (1996). The qualitative approach to social work: An epistemological basis. *International Social Work, 39*, 363−375. doi:10.1177/002087289603900403

Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's Wrong with Ethnography? : Methodological Explorations*. London: Routledge.

Hannu, S., Eeva-Liisa, K., & Günter, L. H. (Eds.). (2011). *Epistemologies for Qualitative Research*. Germany: Tübingen: Center for Qualitative Psychology.

Hargreaves, I. (1998). On television and journalism. *New Statesman, 127*(4387), 52.

Harrington, A. (2005). *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Healy, L. (2008). Exploring the history of social work as a human rights profession. *International Social Work, 51*(6), 735−748.

Hombrados-Mendieta, I., & Cosano-Rivas, F. (2013). Burnout, workplace support, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among social workers in Spain: A structural equation model. *International Social Work, 56*(2), 228-246.

Huang, X. (2015). The institutional environment and the develpment of contemporary Chinese social organizations. *Social Sciences in China, 09*, 146−164, 206−207 (In Chinese).

Itzick, M., & Kagan, M. (2017). Intention to Leave the Profession: Welfare Social Workers Compared to Health Care and Community Social Workers in Israel. *Journal of Social Service Research, 43*(3), 346-357. doi:10.1080/01488376.2016.1246402

Jiang, H., Wang, Y., Chui, E.*, et al.* (2017). Professional identity and turnover intentions of social workers in Beijing, China: The roles of job satisfaction and agency type. *International Social Work, 62*(1), 146-160.

Jones, R. L. (2018). *The Relationship of Employee Engagement and Employee Job Satisfaction to Organizational Commitment.* (Doctor of Business Administration), Walden University.

Katz, C. (2013). The narratives of abused children who have survived attempted filicide. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*(10), 762-770.

Kim, H., & Stoner, M. (2008). Burnout and turnover intention among social workers: Effects of role stress, job autonomy and social support. *Administration in Social Work, 32*(3), 5-25.

Kincaid, M. (2017). *Longevity among social workers: A multiple case study.* (Ph.D), Capella University.

Koenig, T., & Spano, R. (2007). The cultivation of social workers' hope in personal life and professional practice. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 26*(3), 45-61.

Koeske, G. F., & Koeske, R. D. (1989). Work load and burnout: Can social support and perceived accomplishment help? *Social Work, 34*(3), 243-248.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kwan, C. K., & Reupert, A. (2019). The relevance of social workers' personal experiences to their practices. *British Journal of Social Work*. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy017

Lam, C. M., & Yan, M. C. (2015). Driving ducks onto a perch: the experience of locally trained Shenzhen supervisor. *China Journal of Social Work, 8*(2), 182-194. doi:10.1080/17525098.2015.1039169

Lam, C. M., Yan, M. C., & Liang, Y. (2016). Continuing Education for the Emerging Social Work Profession in China: The Experiment in Shenzhen. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 36*(4), 390-406. doi:10.1080/08841233.2016.1205165

Latack, J., Kinicki, A., & Prussia, G. (1995). An intergrative process model of coping with job loss. *Academy of Management Review, 20*, 311-342.

Law, A. K. c., & Gu, J. X. (2008). Social work education in mainland China: Development and issues. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review, 2*(1), 1−12. doi:10.1111/j.1753-1411.2008.00006.x

Lechte, J. (2008). *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Post-humanism* (2nd ed.). London ; New York: Routledge.

Lei, J., & Huang, W. (2017). Pragmatic professonalism: Definition of professional competence and its relationality for social workers in comprehensive family service, Guangzhou. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 37*(1), 211−241 (In Chinese).

Leung, J. (2007). An international definition of social work for China. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 16*(4), 391−397.

Levine, K. A., & Kai, Z. (2010). The changing context of China: Emerging issues for school social work practice. *International Social Work, 53*(3), 339-352. doi:10.1177/0020872809359751

Li, Y., Huang, C., & Han, W. (2012). Development of social work education in China: Background, current status, and prospects. *Journal of Social Work Education, 48*(4), 635−653. doi:10.5175/JSWE.2012.201100049

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Liu, Y., Lam, C.-M., & Yan, M.-C. (2012a). A challenged professional identity: the struggles of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(3), 189-200. doi:10.1080/17525098.2012.721166

Liu, Y., Lam, C. M., & Yan, M. C. (2012b). A challenged professional identity: The struggles of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(3), 189-200.

Liu, Z. (2012). The development of social work policy in China: Current status and strategies. *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(1), 81−90.

Lizano, E., & Barak, M. M. (2015). Job burnout and affective wellbeing: A longitudinal study of burnout and job satisfaction among public child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 55*, 18-28.

Lock, A., & Strong, T. (2010). *Social Constructionism: Sources and Stirrings in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Long, B. C. (1990). Relation between coping strategies, sex-typed traits, and environmental characteristics: A comparison of male and female managers. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 37*(2), 185-194.

McCarter, A. K. (2007). The impact of hopelessness and hope on the social work profession. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 15*(4), 107-123.

McCullagh, J. G. (1982). Survival strategies for school social workers. *Children & Schools, 4*(3), 5-15. doi:10.1093/cs/4.3.5

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/survival

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2017). Data Talks Social Work (In Chinese). Retrieved from http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA5NDc3Nzc2Nw==&mid=2651521112&idx=3&sn=566a9741642baec7d0372d441850bfdd&chksm=8bb6d890bcc151869dc5f76f65c4ce2c1b25ea55010120bfcb95c2cabba77f4218d4d5f863b3&mpshare=1&scene=5&srcid=0322gXWNuX8h7OJ5yowSiYCA#rd

Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2019). A New Chapter for the Reform and Development of Civil Affairs in the New Era: National Video Conference of Civil Affairs 2019. Retrieved from http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/mzyw/201901/20190100014249.shtml (In Chinese)

Ministry of Education of China. (2018). Announcement of the Results of Degrees Authorization in 2017 (In Chinese). Retrieved from http://www.moe.edu.cn/s78/A22/A22_gggs/s8476/201801/t20180108_324005.html

NASW. (2017). NASW Code of Ethics. Retrieved from
https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English

Ng, K. T. (2016). *Exploring the Professional Supervisory Dyad Working Alliance in Children and Family Integrated Services in Hong Kong.* (Ph.D), Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Hong Kong.

Ngai, S. W. (2014). *Experiences of adult children with intergenerational ambivalence in a Chinese society : sources and management*. Hong Kong: Deptartment of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Niu, D., & Haugen, H. Ø. (2019). Social workers in China: Professional identity in the making. *The British Journal of Social Work, 49*(7), 1932-1949. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy107

Owusu-Ansah, S. (2018). *Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction: An Exploratory Qualitative Study of Retail Industry Managers*.

Oxford Dictionary. (2017). Survival. *Oxford Dictionary.* Retrieved from
https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/survival

Pan, S. (2003). *Qualitative Research: Theory and Application* (1st ed.). Taipei: Psychology Press (In Chinese).

Parkin, R. (1997). Practice theory. In T. Barfield (Ed.), *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (pp. 375-377). Oxford: Blackwell.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Payne, G., & Payne, J. (2004). *Key Concepts in Social Research*. London: SAGE.

Peirce, C. S. (2011). How to make our ideas clear. *Problemos, 79*, 169-184.

Radey, M., Schelbe, L., & Spinelli, C. L. (2017). Learning, negotiating, and surviving in child welfare: Social capitalization among recently hired workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 12*(1), 79-98.

Ravalier, J. M. (2018). The influence of work engagement in social workers in England. *Occupational Medicine, 68*(6), 399-404. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqy087

Reamer, F. G. (1993). *The Philosophical Foundations of Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Reed-Danahay, D. (2005). *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Salma, P. (2015, July 15). The research paradigm: Methodology, epistemology and ontology, explained in simple language. Retrieved from http://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-methodology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language

Sánchez-Moreno, E., De La Fuente Roldán, I.-N., Gallardo-Peralta, L. P*., et al.* (2015). Burnout, informal social support and psychological distress among social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work, 45*(8), 2368-2386.

Schaufeli, W., Salanova, M., González-romá, V*., et al.* (2002). The Measurement of Engagement and Burnout: A Two Sample Confirmatory Factor Analytic Approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 3*(1), 71-92. doi:10.1023/A:1015630930326

Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*(3), 293-315. doi:10.1002/job.248

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 66*(4), 701-716. doi:10.1177/0013164405282471

Schwandt, T. A. (2003). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretativism, hermeneutics and social constructionism. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and issues* (pp. 292-331). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Schwartz, R. H., Tiamiyu, M. F., & Dwyer, D. J. (2007). Social worker hope and perceived burnout: The effects of age, years in practice, and setting. *Administration in Social Work, 31*(4), 103-119.

Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. (2016). The Report for the Ten Years' Social Work Development in Shanghai. *The Ten Years of Social Work Development (In Chinese)* Retrieved from http://mzzt.mca.gov.cn/article/sggzzsn/jlcl/201611/20161100887267.shtml

Shazer, S. d. (2017). The Miracle Question. Retrieved from http://www.netzwerk-ost.at/publikationen/pdf/miraclequestion.pdf

Sheppard, T. (2017). Stategies Binder: Selective Counseling Strategies. Retrieved from https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jJVC219Ee1kJ:https://tommysheppardcounselling.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/strategies-binder-useful-counselling-strategies-and-skills.doc+&cd=7&hl=zh-CN&ct=clnk&gl=th

Shi, Y., & Shi, T. (2013). The study on social worker's burnout based on the social support perspective. *Social Sciences Review, 28*(01), 150-152 (In Chinese).

Shier, M. L., & Graham, J. R. (2011). Work-related factors that impact social work practitioners' subjective well-being: Well-being in the workplace. *Journal of Social Work, 11*(4), 402-421.

Sinha, S. (2007). Essays on Economic Development and the Survival of Girls in India. In P. Pattanaik & A. B. Deolalikar (Eds.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tesi, A., Aiello, A., & Giannetti, E. (2019). The work-related well-being of social workers: Framing job demands, psychological well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 121-141. doi:10.1177/1468017318757397

Tsang, A. K. T., & Yan, M. C. (2001). Chinese corpus, western application: The Chinese strategy of engagement with western social work discourse. *International Social Work, 44*(4), 433.

Tsui, M. S. (2005). *Social Work Supervision: Contexts and Concepts*: SAGE.

Tsui, M. S. (2006). Hopes and dreams: Ideal supervision for social workers in Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 16*(1), 33-42.

Tum, T. (2006). The Street Children Phenomenon: A Qualitative Study on How Street Children Survive in Eldoret, Kenya. In K. Ohman (Ed.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Ungar, M. (2004). Surviving as a postmodern social sorker: Two Ps and three Rs of direct practice. *Social Work, 49*(3), 488−496.

Usher, R. (1996). A critique of the neglected epistemological assumptions of educational research. In D. Scott & R. Usher (Eds.), *Understanding Educational Research* (pp. 9-32). New York: Routledge.

Van Robaeys, B., van Ewijk, H., & Dierckx, D. (2018). The challenge of superdiversity for the identity of the social work profession: Experiences of social workers in 'De Sloep' in Ghent, Belgium. *International Social Work, 61*(2), 274-288. doi:10.1177/0020872816631600

Vassos, M., Nankervis, K., Skerry, T.*, et al.* (2013). Work engagement and job burnout within the disability support worker population. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 34*(11), 3884-3895. doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2013.08.005

Walther, M. (2014). *Repatriation to France and Germany: A Comparative Study Based on Bourdieu's Theory of Practice*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Wang, D. (2011a). *Study on Job Burnout from the Perspective of Social Support Theory.* (PhD), Wuhan University (In Chinese). Wuhan, China.

Wang, E., Jiang, W., & Mao, S. (2019). Job autonomy and turnover intention among social workers in China: Roles of work-to-family enrichment, job satisfaction and type of sector. *Journal of Social Service Research*. doi:10.1080/01488376.2019.1698487

Wang, S. (2011b). The embedding development of social work in China. *Social Science Front, 02*, 206−222 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2013). Toward recognition: The development of professional social work in China. *Hebei Academic Journal, 33*(06), 108−113 (In Chinese).

Wang, S. (2014). Participation of social work in social governance innovation. *Social Construction, 01*, 8−15 (In Chinese).

Wang, S., & Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2009). The development of social work in China in the context of building a harmonious society. *Social Sciences in China, 5*, 128−140 (In Chinese).

Weinberg, D. (2009). Social constructionism. In B. Tunner (Ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory (Blackwell Companions to Sociology)*. Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom; Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Weinberg, D. (2014). *Contemporary Social Constructionism Key Themes*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Weinreich, H. M. (2015). *Burnout among National Association of Social Workers Healthcare Social Workers.* (Ph.D), Walden University.

Westbrook, T. M., Ellis, J., & Ellett, A. J. (2006). Improving retention among public child welfare workers: What can we learn from the insights and experiences of committed survivors? *Administration in Social Work, 30*(4), 37-62.

Wyckoff, D. L. G. (1994). *Speaking about Life Experiences: Personal Narrativizing and Social Constructionism.* Thesis (Ph.D.)--The Ohio State University, 1994.

Yan, M.-C., Tsui, M.-S., Chu, W. C. K*., et al.* (2012). A profession with dual foci: Is social work losing the balance? *China Journal of Social Work, 5*(2), 163-172. doi:10.1080/17525098.2012.680943

Yan, M. C. (2013). Towards a pragmatic approach: a critical examination of two assumptions of indigenization discourse. *China Journal of Social Work, 6*(1), 14-24. doi:10.1080/17525098.2013.766135

Yan, M. C. (2017). Social policy and social work indigenization in China. *Social Work*(02), 6-10 (In Chinese).

Yan, M. C., & Cheng, S.-L. (2009). Searching for Chinese characteristics: A tentative empirical examination. *China Journal of Social Work, 2*(1), 5-19. doi:10.1080/17525090802692112

Yan, M. C., Gao, J. G., & Lam, C. M. (2013). The dawn is too distant: The experience of 28 social work graduates entering the social work field in China. *Social Work Education, 32*(4), 538-551. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.688097

Yan, M. C., Ge, Z.-M., Cheng, S.-L.*, et al.* (2009). Imagining social work: A qualitative study of students' perspectives on social work in China. *Social Work Education, 28*(5), 528-543. doi:10.1080/02615470802368959

Yan, M. C., & Ka Tat Tsang, A. (2005). A snapshot on the development of social work education in China: A delphi study. *Social Work Education, 24*(8), 883-901. doi:10.1080/02615470500342314

Yan, M. C., & Tsang, A. K. T. (2005). A snapshot on the development of social work education in China: A delphi study. *Social Work Education, 24*(8), 883−901. doi:10.1080/02615470500342314

Yan, M. C., & Tsui, M. S. (2007). The quest for western social work knowledge: Literature in the USA and practice in China. *International Social Work, 50*(5), 641-653. doi:10.1177/0020872807079924

Yin, A., Zhao, H., & Xu, X. (2016). Bidirectional embedding: A new perspective of Chinese social work development path. *Journal of Social Work, 03*, 47-55 (In Chinese).

Yip, K.-S. (2007). Professionalization of social-work practice in the People's Republic of China: A tri-tensional analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development, 17*(2), 56−69.

Young, R. A., & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: Constructivism and social constructionism in the career field. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 64*(3), 373-388. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2003.12.005

Yuan, X., & Xu, W. (2016). Motivation factors for social workers in social service organizations. *Social Construction, 3*(4), 62-75 (In Chinese).

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. (2012). IASSW and social work development in Indonesia, Vietnam and China. *International Social Work, 55*(5), 757−761.

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K., & Wang, S. (2002). Tensions confronting the development of social

    work education in China: Challenges and opportunities. *International Social Work,*

    45(3), 375−388.

Yürür, S., & Sarikaya, M. (2012). The effects of workload, role ambiguity, and social support

    on burnout among social workers in Turkey. *Administration in Social Work, 36*(5),

    457-478.

Zeng, S., Cheung, M., Leung, P*., et al.* (2016). Voices from social work graduates in China:

    Reasons for not choosing social work as a career. *Social Work, 61*(1), 69-78.

Zevon, M. A., Donnelly, J. J. P., & Starkey, E. A. (1990). Stress and coping relationships in

    the medical environment: A natural experiment. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology,*

    8(1), 65-77. doi:10.1300/J077v08n01_05

Zhang, D., Zheng, Y., & Li, J. (2014). Social environment, social support and social worker's

    burnout: Baed on a survey of 100 social workers in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and

    Dongguan. *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, 206*(2), 79-84 (In Chinese).

Zhang, X. (2015). Social work professional's cultivating based on the social support

    perspective. *Educationa and Vocation, 854*(34), 88-90 (In Chinese).

Zhao, F., Fu, F., & Yang, B. (2017). Social work value system in mainland China:

    Construction of a scale and value commitment assessment. *International Social Work,*

    61(6), 917-929.

Zhao, R., Wu, Z., & Tao, C. (2016). Understanding service contracting and its impact on

    NGO development in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and*

    Nonprofit Organizations, 27(5), 2229−2251. doi:10.1007/s11266-016-9714-3

Zheng, Z. (2014). *An alternative: Western social constructionist sociology* (1st ed.). Beijing:

    China Social Sciences Press (In Chinese).

Zhu, J., & Chen, A. (2013). The embeddedness of professional social work into the power

    relations of urban community: A case study of government service purchase.

    Sociological Studies, 01, 43−64 (In Chinese).