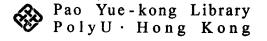# Towards A Theoretical Framework for An Indigenous Value Base for Social Work Practice:

A Conceptual Exploration

By

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requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the

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Abstract

The practice of social work has long been recognized as a moral, practical activity. Given the significance attributed to social work's values and ethics, it seems that recent discussions of the indigenization of social work have overlooked this crucial dimension of social work practice. The present project is an endeavour to address this seldom-explored area. My central concern in the present study is two-fold. First, since the endeavour of exploring the "indigenous value base for social work practice" faces a number of theoretical and conceptual difficulties, the author hopes to prepare the ground for this endeavour by clarifying one theoretical dilemma. That is, the dialectic of universal norm and particular cultural understanding that besets our discussions of the need for developing an indigenous perspective on social work values. Second, the author attempts to outline a preliminary approach or, say, perspective for the study of social work values in the local context.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the author establishes that the endeavour to develop an indigenous perspective of social work values is beset by a theoretical dilemma. In the second chapter, the author surveys the relevant literature of indigenization in social sciences and social work to identify the connections of the prevalent understanding of the idea of

'indigenization' with a positivistic conception of empirical validation and the idea of value neutrality. At the end of the second chapter, the author points out that the prevalent understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' presupposes that the language of social explanation and normative evaluation is discontinuous. To pave the way for a re-consideration of this seemingly self-evident assumption, in chapters three and four we articulate an account of values as constituted by shared social meaning. In the fifth chapter, the author explores the relationship between social work values and local cultural values by focusing on a representative value of contemporary social work discourses: empowerment. The author argues that a critical-hermeneutical analysis will enable us to see that in evaluating the moral beliefs of the local people, we could not avoid the issue of mediation. That is, in evaluating the moral beliefs of the local people, it is necessary that both the perspectives of the critical outsider and the local people have to be taken into account. In this light, the tragic choice of either neglecting local cultural values or denying the relevance of social work values is not inevitable. The reason for this is that the assumption that it makes sense to adopt either perspective is unwarranted. Hence, the dilemma is dissolved because the assumption that constitutes the dilemma is discarded.

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 acknowledgement has been made in the text.

_____ (Signed)

_____ (Name of Student)

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Chapter One

Introduction:

A Theoretical Dilemma in Addressing the Justification for Developing An

Indigenous Perspective on Social Work Values

I

The practice of social work has long been recognized as a moral, practical activity.[1] Some commented that social work's value component is not only essential to its professional identity, but also distinguishes social work from other professions. [2] Others noted moral discourse was once seen as the basis of the justification of the existence of the social work enterprise, and they stated that its continual development

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[1] Nigel Parton & Patrick O'Bryne, *Constructive Social Work: Towards a New Practice* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000); Frederic Reamer, 'Evolution of Social Work Ethics,' *Social Work* 1998 vol. 43, 488-500; Max Siporin, 'Moral Philosophy in Social Work Today,' *Social Service Review* 1982 vol. 56, no.4,   p.516-538; Michael Whan, 'On the Nature of Practice,' *British Journal of Social Work* 1986 vol.16,   243-250.

[2] William Horner & Les Whitbeck, 'Personal versus Professional Values in Social Work: A Methodological Note,' *Journal of Social Service Research* 1991, vol. 14, no.1/2, 21; Noel Timms, *Social Work Values: An Enquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 16-17.

should be defended on normative grounds.[3] That is, significant moral and political values, for instance, notions of 'public good', 'distributive justice', 'anti-discrimination' and 'equal opportunities' etc., were invoked when people talk about the purposes and intentions of the profession of social work. Given the significance attributed to social work's values and ethics, it seems that recent discussions of the need of critical reception of the social work tradition that originated in the West and the related issue of indigenization of social work have overlooked this crucial dimension of social work practice. The present project is an endeavor to address this seldom-explored area.

My central concern in the present study is two-fold. First, since the endeavour of exploring the "indigenous value base for social work practice" faces a number of major theoretical and conceptual difficulties, the author hope to prepare the ground for this project by clarifying some of these issues. In the present study the author would focus on one theoretical dilemma: the dialectic of universal norm and particular cultural understanding. The author would argue the tensions between universal norm and particular cultural understanding constitute a theoretical dilemma that besets our discussions of the need for developing an indigenous perspective on social work

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[3] P. Reid & Philip Popple, *The Moral Purposes of Social Work: The Character and Intentions of a Profession* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc., 1992).

values. Second, the author will outline a preliminary approach for a study of indigenous social work values.

In order to set the stage for an investigation of the above issues, in the following pages of this introduction, I would attempt to elucidate in what senses the tensions between universal norm and particular cultural understanding pose conceptual difficulties for a study of indigenous social work values. The following discussions will be guided by a major question. One of the central motivations that underlie the call for indigenization of social work practice is a recognition of cultural and moral diversities. However, some critics may say that recognition of cultural and moral diversities may not constitute sufficient grounds for an articulation of indigenous social work values. In fact, they may argue that if the core social work values have independent rational justifications, then these values logically ought to be accepted as universally valid. That is, if the values of social work are informed by valid universal norms, then it is questionable whether we need to take into account of the particular cultural understanding of local people. Thus, the recognition of the existence of cultural and moral diversity does not warrant the need of an indigenous value base for social work practice. In this light, there may be a tension in recognizing particular cultural understanding and social work values that are said to be informed by

universal norms. In other words, in posing the issue of the need of an indigenous value base for social work practice, it seems that we were got caught between Scylla and Charybdis. Hence, in what follows, I would address the question whether the recognition of cultural and moral diversities justifies the call for an articulation of indigenous social work values. Before we proceed, the discussions of indigenization of social work practice in the local context will be briefly reviewed.

II

In Hong Kong, discussions of indigenization of social work dated back at least to the mid-seventies.[4] In a recent review, some observed that the discussions of indigenization in the last twenty years largely fall into four areas:[5] first, the role of cultural differences in the application of Western social work ideas and skills to non-Western societies; second, development of cooperation of local social work sector with corresponding welfare organizations in the Mainland; third, case presentations of

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[4] Kenneth Chau, 'Social Work Practice in a Chinese Society: Reflections and Challenges,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1995, vol.29, 2, 1-9, Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 22-30.

[5] 朱偉志，〈香港社會工作本土化藍圖再檢視〉載於《邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢》，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司，1999)，414。

applications of Western social work theories and skills in the local context; and fourth,

contributions of the proliferation of case materials in Chinese towards indigenization

of local social work practice. Evidently, diverse concerns and issues are placed under

the heading of indigenization of social work, and in what follows only the first issue

in the preceding list of issues will be our concern.

The raising of the issue of the role of cultural differences in the application of

social work ideas and skills developed in the Anglo-Saxon world to the local setting

may be informed by a dissatisfaction of the pre-dominant condition of the transfer of

social work knowledge and skills in the international context. According to one

incisive comment, the pre-dominant view of social work practice in Hong Kong

conceives local social work practice as a variant of its Western counterpart that

modifies or fine-tunes the prescriptions developed in the West for effective

interventions with local clients.[6] However, if we take James Midgley's thesis of

'professional imperialism'[7] seriously, we would conceive the pre-dominant view that

Kwong Wai Man criticized may not be promoting a critical and reflective attitude

towards the application of Western theories and skills.

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[6] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 22-30.
[7] James Midgley, ***Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World*** (London : Heinemann Publisher, 1981).

According to Midgley, after the Second World War, social work theories and knowledge produced in the United States were exported to Third World countries at a time when social work began to get a foothold in these societies. In the process, these social work theories and knowledge, which were developed in particular socio-cultural and historical contexts, were transplanted to other societies as though these theories and knowledge have universal application. Midgley's work, in this regard, helps to promote awareness of the need to examine how the local social work community appropriates social work ideas from Western countries like the United States and Britain.

In my view, a critical attitude towards social work ideas originated in the West is based on a number of insights. First, the theories and ideas of social sciences along with the intervention models and therapeutic approaches developed in particular socio-cultural and historical contexts may embody and presuppose cultural understandings and values of that particular community. Second, the professional community comes to recognize the existence of cultural and moral differences. That is to say, the existence of different understanding of cultural norms and presuppositions of personhood and social relations between the birthplace of social work theories and

skills and the local community is acknowledged.

Given these understandings, we have to concede that theories and skills from the Anglo-Saxon world may embody cultural understandings and values that are dissimilar, or even at odds, with that of the Hong Kong society. If we grant the understanding that Western theories and skills are grounded in assumptions that do not fit the local context, it is an obvious step that local scholars start to question the explanatory power of these imported theories and the effectiveness of foreign intervention models. That is, once we concede that theories and ideas from the West presuppose conceptions of personhood and social relation that differ from the local community, it is not hard to see that uncritical adoption of western social work ideas is problematic.

Take the case of parenting as an example, approaches that prize equality between parent and child and the significance of open communication in successful parenting may embody a set of implicit understandings of the nature of family and parent-child relationship. Nonetheless, these understandings are seldom explored, not to say given adequate articulation in the process of transfer and appropriation of social work theories and skills. Yet, if we consider that first, the basic concepts of 'family',

'lineage', 'clan' defined by the Anglo-American social scientific community have no exact counterparts in the Chinese language,[8] and second, it is also well known that traditional Chinese familism is informed by a hierarchical understanding of the status of the parents (especially the father) and their children, we will notice the emphasis on equality, communication, and democratic spirit might not be the family values that the local community shares. Hence, if the tacit understandings of these models of parenting are clearly articulated, it is hardly surprising that one will prone to raise certain critical questions about the relevance and aptness of adopting these approaches in the local context. Seen in this light, the worry that unreflective application of these concepts in the local context may be founded on distorted understanding of the nature of parenting in Chinese families, and might give rise to further distortion and disruption of their practice is not unwarranted. Thus, given the preceding recognition of cultural differences and the dangers that accompanied its neglect, it is natural to consider the possibility of developing indigenous theories and practice that acknowledges the cultural understandings of the local community.

Yet, in Hong Kong calls for reflexive/critical reception of Western theories and skills or construction of indigenous theories and practice seem to be a recent

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[8]朱偉志，〈香港社會學研究的社會科學本土化意義〉 載於 《社會科學本土化：多元視角解讀》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司，2001) ，368。

phenomenon.[9] Concerning the domain of professional ethics, apart from a handful of

pleas for serious discussion of values and ethics of the local social work community,

[10] it remains an untrodden virgin land, as the following comments may testify:

"Although indigenization of social work values in Hong Kong has been of important

concern and being frequently mentioned, it is surprising to find that there was not yet

a systematic review on the discourse of it."[11]   However, as I have pointed out, if the

values and ethics of social work should be a central concern of the profession, the

current discussions of indigenization of social work in Hong Kong seems to neglect

the issue of indigenous social work values. Seen in the above light, there may be a

need to address the issue of developing an indigenous value base for social work

practice.[12]

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[9] See Kenneth Chau, 'Social Work Practice in a Chinese Society: Reflections and Challenges,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1995, vol.29, 2, 1-9; Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 22-30; Lam Chiu Wan, 'Indigenization of Social Work Values in Hong Kong: A Brief Review,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 10-21; Raymond Ngan 'Cultural Imperialism: Western Social Work Theories for Chinese Practice and the Mission of Social Work in Hong Kong,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1993, vol.28, 2, 47-55; Tsang Nai Ming, 'Examining the Cultural Dimension of Social Work Practice: The Experience of Teaching Students on a Social Work Course in Hong Kong,' *International Social Work* 1997, vol.40. 133-144; 朱偉志， 〈 香港社會工作本土化藍圖再檢視 〉 載於 《 邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢 》 ，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 1999)，414-440; 李潔文， 〈 社會工作文化問題初探：從社會科學本土化到社會工作文化反思 〉 載於 《 邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢 》 ，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 1999)，391-413。

[10] Lam Chiu Wan, 'Indigenization of Social Work Values in Hong Kong: A Brief Review,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 10-21; Julia Tao, *Report on a Study of Ethical Issues in Social Work Practice and Social Welfare Administration in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong : City University of Hong Kong, 1996).

[11] Lam Chiu Wan, 'Indigenization of Social Work Values in Hong Kong: A Brief Review,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 10.

[12] Not every scholar will concur with this view. For example, Chau Wing Sun claimed that even given

In what follows, however, I would argue that the idea of an investigation of indigenous social work values faces peculiar conceptual difficulties. One central difficulty is that a prevalent view of the social work ethics would query the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice. This view would contend that the recognition of cultural and moral diversities does not justify the call for an indigenous value base for social work practice. In their eyes, the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice may be the results of a conceptual confusion.

III

In order to lay the groundwork for an elucidation of the above conceptual

the recognition of cultural differences of the local community and the contemporary Western societies, there may not be a need to develop an indigenous value base for social work practice. His reason seems to be that as the local community modernizes, the impact of cultural factor is less and less significant. See 周永新，〈社會工作的哲理基礎〉載於《社會工作新論》，周永新主編，(香港：商務，1999)，10-12。However, the author would contend that such view may be based on the belief that modernized societies exhibit certain similar institutional and cultural arrangements. This belief is under serious challenge, or even be said to be discarded in recent discussions of modernity. Consider the following words of Shmuel Eisenstadt: "A very strong- even if implicit- assumption of the studies of modernization, namely that the cultural dimensions or aspects of modernization (the basic cultural premises of western modernity) were inherently and necessarily interwoven with the structural ones, became highly questionable. While the different dimensions of the original Western project constituted the crucial starting point and constant frame of reference for the processes that developed in different societies throughout the world. Developments in these societies have now gone far beyond their original premises of modernity have taking place in Western societies." See Shmuel Eisenstadt, 'The Challenge of Multiple Modernities,' in *New Horizons In Sociological Theory And Research: The Frontiers of Sociology at The Beginning of The Twenty-First Century* ed. Luigi Tomasi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 100, see also Charles Taylor, 'Inwardness and the Culture of Modernity,' in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project Of Enlightenment*. eds Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe an Albrecht Wellmer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), 88-110.

difficulties, I shall give an outline of the contemporary literature of social work ethics, with special emphasis on the issue of social work values. In *Social Work Value and Ethics*, Frederic Reamer, a prominent scholar on social work ethics, has identified four core ethical issues of social work: first, the value base of the social work profession;[13] second, ethical dilemmas in social work; third, ethical decision-making in social work; and fourth, practitioner malpractice and misconduct.[14] In the above work, Reamer has further pointed out that the last three issues mentioned above are in some way connected to the issue of the value base of the profession.

These connections with the value base of the profession can be stated as follows. First, the value base of the profession stands for the core social work values that define the missions of the profession and set its priorities. When these core values come into conflict in a practice situation, the practitioner experiences ethical dilemmas. Second, in attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas, social workers have to appeal to the principles that justify and prioritize the core social work values. Third,

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[13] Though different authors may have different lists of specific core values, it is observed that there is considerable consistency among these formulations. A commonly sited list of core values may include the following: individual worth and dignity, respect of persons, valuing individuals' capacity for change, client self-determination, providing individuals with opportunity to realize their potential, seeking to meet individuals' common human needs, seeking to provide individuals with adequate resources and services to meet their basic needs, client empowerment, equal opportunity, nondiscrimination, respect for diversity, commitment to social change and social justice, confidentiality and privacy, and willingness to transmit professional knowledge and skills to others. See Frederic Reamer, *Social Work Values and Ethics* (New York: Columbia university Press, 1999), 21.
[14] Frederic Reamer, *Social Work Values and Ethics* (New York: Columbia university Press, 1999).

rising attention to the ethical implications of social workers' interventions alerts the profession of the possibility of malpractice and misconduct. The professional community's sensitivity to the issue of malpractice and misconduct, in this light, is based on an appreciation of the value base of the profession. In fact, one may plausibly claim that the issue of the value base of the profession is fundamental for social work practice.

If the value base of the profession is fundamental for the practice of social work, it seems that an indigenous social work practice requires an indigenous value base to guide its practice. Yet, any attempt to develop an indigenous value base for social work practice cannot avoid re-examining our heritage of social work values.[15] The reason behind such re-examination is that, if the value base of the profession stands for the core social work values that define the missions of the profession and set its priorities, given the differences in cultural understandings and values of the West and the local community, the professional community in Hong Kong may have different

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[15] To facilitate the reader to appreciate what key questions may be involved in a re-examination of our heritage of social work values, I would take the cherished professional principles of self-determination, respect for person, individualization as examples. In developing an indigenous social work ethics, one could not avoid the question whether these principles, which used to be grounded in a Kantian paradigm of human nature and tenets of substantive conceptions of freedom, equality of opportunity and outcome, should still be upheld, or they have to be revised or even discarded. The reason for this critical examination is that the image of an autonomous, rational individual who is a bearer of rights and a rational agent who makes free choices cannot capture the cultural understanding of what counts as a person for the local community. Even if the professional community still upholds these principles after critical examination, we would like to know whether they should be grounded in a different understanding of human nature and social values, or how they should be expressed in the local setting.

understanding of its missions and priorities.[16] The project of an indigenous value base

for social work practice, in this light, is an endeavor to reconstruct the value base of

the profession founded on an acknowledgment of the existence of cultural and moral

diversities.

However, I would argue that a prevalent understanding of the nature of the

foundation of these social work values would not concur with the project of an

indigenous value base for social work practice, nor a re-examination of our heritage of

social work values. In response to the call for an indigenous account, the preceding

conception would argue, whether the core social work values we inherited have

universal applications depend on whether these values are founded on rationally

justified moral principle, not their place of origin. In its proponents' eyes, these core

social work values are based on a philosophically sophisticated justification of

universal moral principle. Would it be the case that acceptance of this account may

turn any voice for an indigenous social work ethics into unwarranted demands?

To appreciate the force of the above account, we have to look into the issue of

justification of social work values. As I have pointed out in the previous pages, the

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[16] I would contend that the issue is much more complex than what I have stated here, but I will turn to that in the coming section.

value base of the profession is one of the most central issues in social work ethics.

Concerning this domain, I would say, apart from stipulating the values and principles

that the social work community endorses, how these lists of values could be justified

should also be a central preoccupation of the profession. Justification is seminal not

only because we have to know whether we have good reasons to uphold any of these

values. It is also our central concern because when we face ethical dilemmas we have

to order these values that are in conflict, deliberate which value/s should take

precedence, so that we may come up with an informed ethical decision. Furthermore,

the deepening of our appreciation of the moral principles that underlies the values we

appeal would enable the professional community to discern whether certain

controversial cases fall into the category of malpractice and misconduct. However, the

profession did take some time before it recognizes the significance and necessity of

inspecting the justification of its core values and principles.

For a time, talks of values of social work usually take the form of a 'list'

approach- the compilation of a list of values and principles. However, the inadequacy

of this approach is increasingly acknowledged among concerned students of social

work ethics.[17] Sarah Banks nicely summarized three major reasons why this approach

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[17] Harold Lewis 'Ethical Assessment,' *Social Casework* 1984, vol. 65, no.4, 203-211; Frederic Reamer, ***Social Work Values and Ethics*** (New York: Columbia university Press, 1999); Margaret Rhodes,

is unsatisfactory.[18] First, such broad general principles can be subjected to various interpretations, and confusions do arise for both within and between writers using the same terminology. Second, there is little indication of the status of different principles. That is, whether certain principles should be seen as practical guidelines or whether they should be seen as normative standards. Third, many writers who adopt the 'list' approach do not rank the principles, nor do they indicate what should be done when principles come into conflict.

The above drawbacks also have ramifications in adopting codes of ethics as guides for ethical decision-making. As codification of the values of the profession, codes of ethics of the profession were seen as helpful guides that practitioners could appeal when they face ethical dilemmas. However, when codes of ethics were adopted as guides to ethical decision-making, they also suffered from the same set of problems that a 'list' approach faces. Their common failure lies in their inability to locate and order the values and principles in a more systematic framework of ethical systems. This challenge to supersede the 'list' approach to social work values is the preoccupation of a number of significant texts in the early eighties.

Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Publisher, 1986).
[18] Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

In a review essay of the historical development of the profession's ethics, Reamer marked the third phase of a century's development as a phrase of the emergence of ethical theory and decision-making: "In addition to discussions about the profession's values, a small group of scholars began to write about ethical issues and challenges while drawing on literature, concepts, theories, and principles from the traditional field of moral philosophy and the newer field of applied and professional ethics… Using somewhat different approaches, each of these books acknowledged explicitly for the first time the relevance of moral philosophy and ethical theory, concepts, and principles in the analysis and resolution of ethical issues in social work."[19]

In this period of development, I would comment, not only do we see the recognition of the relevance of ethical theory to the profession's ethical concerns, it was also the time the profession came to acknowledge the significance and necessity of inspecting the philosophical justification of its core values and principles. Drawing on contemporary discussions of ethical theories, most of these writers attempt to formulate systematic frameworks based on universal moral principles for justification of the value base of the profession and guidance when conflicts of principles arise in practice situation.

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[19] Frederic Reamer, 'Evolution of Social Work Ethics,' *Social Work* 1998, 43, 488-500.

I would point out that these ethical systems share the following characteristics: first, rationally justified moral principles are central to these ethical systems as they serve as the normative yardsticks that evaluate and prioritize different courses of action; second, these principles are general and universal in nature; and third, application of these moral principles in particular circumstances serve as the normative model of ethical decision-making. In a nutshell, these ethical systems are conceived as universal and timeless normative standards, they are not tied to any particular social and political realities. Rather, they serve to evaluate and adjudicate beliefs, actions and institutions from a moral point of view.

As I have anticipated in the previous pages, in response to the call for an indigenous account, this conception of justification of social work values, which is based on universal moral principles that serve as the foundation of ethical systems, would question the need for doing so. To illustrate this point, I have to look into the works of Frederick Reamer again.

Reamer was one of those pioneers who established the link between the ethical concerns of the profession and moral philosophy. His *Ethical Dilemmas in Social*

Service is a classic in the field. He put forward an ethical framework that attempts to draw on the most compelling features of both deontological and teleological-utilitarian principles in a manner that is consistent with widely held social work values. Though Reamer has not directly commented on the prospect of an indigenous value base for social work practice, we may turn to Alan Gewirth-the philosopher that Reamer appealed- for an answer.

Alan Gewirth in an important article 'Is Cultural Pluralism relevant to Moral Knowledge?'[20] unambiguously stated that the fact that divergent cultural practices and moral beliefs exist is not a disproof of universally valid moral knowledge. In the essay, Gewirth draws a distinction between 'positive morality'- principles, rules or percepts that are *in fact* upheld as unconditionally obligatory by a group or community and 'normative morality'- the rules and directives that *ought* to be upheld as categorically obligatory by all.

Recalling our discussions of indigenization of social work practice in the first section, Midgley presses us to ponder whether social work theories and knowledge developed in particular socio-cultural and historical contexts have universal

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[20] Alan Gewirth, 'Is Cultural Pluralism relevant to Moral Knowledge,' in *Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge* Ellen Paul, Fred Miller, Jr. & Jeffrey Paul ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22-43

application. This critical attitude, I would contend, is founded on the following dual insights. First, the recognition of cultural and moral differences between the local community and the Western countries where social work theories and skills originated. Second, the theories and ideas of social sciences along with the intervention models and therapeutic approaches developed in these countries embody and presuppose cultural understandings and values of their respective community, thus, one could not presume they are universally valid.

Yet, in so far as the call for an indigenous value base for social work practice is motivated by the recognition of cultural and moral diversity in the positive sense, Gewirth would argue this does not constitute any challenge to the rationally justified normative principle that we should unconditionally uphold. The reason for this is that the normative moral principle has rational, logical grounds for justification independent of the fact that whether it is accepted by people with different social and cultural backgrounds. For Gewirth, the relevance goes rather in the reverse direction. Since the normative moral principle has independent, rational and logical grounds for justification, it serves to adjudicate which normative beliefs held by people with different social and cultural backgrounds are required and permitted. As Gewirth succinctly stated: "The argument in question consists in showing that there is a

supreme moral principle which is inherently rational, in that self-contradiction is

incurred by any actual or prospective agent who rejects the principle. *The system of*

morality based on this principle is normative, not positive, because even if it is not

actually accepted in words, beliefs, or actions, it logically ought to be accepted as

universally valid. …Because of the connection of reason with knowledge and truth,

the supreme principle in question is truly the valid and universal moral principles; it

can be known to be so, *and all actions and institutions rationally must adhere to it*."

[21]

Given the preceding analysis, it seems that the project of an indigenous value

base for social work practice is a non-starter. If one grants that the line of arguments

as represented by Gewirth is plausible, the idea of 'an indigenous value base for social

work practice ' may be the unfortunate result of a confusion of 'positive morality' and

'normative morality'.[22] One significant implication of Gewirth's arguments is that, the

fact that the local community upheld values that differ from the core social work

values do not imply that we ought to adhere to the former. Rather, if the core social

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[21]Alan Gewirth, 'Is Cultural Pluralism relevant to Moral Knowledge,' in *Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge* Ellen Paul, Fred Miller, Jr. & Jeffrey Paul ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27, italics my emphasis.

[22] In this regard, though Lam Chiu Wan has made a important comparative study of social work values of the local community and that of Britain, the author thinks that he has not pay sufficient attention to this issue. See Lam Chiu Wan, *Where East Meets West : A Comparison of Social Work Values between Britain and Hong Kong*   Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham, 1997).

work values have independent rational justifications, as Reamer and others have tried to argue[23], then these values logically ought to be accepted as universally valid. Seen in the above light, though recognition of the existence of cultural and moral diversity may support critical reception of foreign social work theories and ideas, evidently it does not warrant the development of an indigenous value base for social work practice.

By now, I think the attentive reader would appreciate why I contended that posing an indigenous value base for social work practice faces initial conceptual difficulties at the outset of this essay. After we have a grasp of the preceding conceptual difficulties besetting a project of developing an indigenous value base for social work practice, it is time we turn our attention to how we may interpret this standoff.

Given the preceding discussion, it may be premature to seal the fate of the project of developing an indigenous value base for social work practice. Nonetheless,

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[23] In this regard, Reamer relied on the work of Alan Gewirth, particularly **Reason and Morality**, see Alan Gewirth, **Reason and Morality** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Whereas other sought to other means, take for instance Jim Ife who attempted to appeal to human rights as value base for social work practice, see Jim Ife, **Human Rights and Social Work: Towards Rights-Based Practice** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

the author noted a number of issues that may deserve further elucidation. Firstly, in distinguishing 'positive morality' from 'normative morality', opponents of the idea of developing an indigenous value base for social work practice have asked a forceful and challenging question: May the ambitions of developing 'an indigenous value base for social work practice ' just the unfortunate result of a confusion of 'positive morality' and 'normative morality'? That is to say, even if one granted that recognition of the existence of cultural and moral diversity may support critical reception of foreign social work theories and ideas, *however that remains an issue at the level of social explanation*. Yet critics may point out, solely based on this recognition *hardly justify us to jump to a conclusion at the normative level.* In other words, the fact that the local community upheld values that differ from the core social work values could not comprise a plausible reason to support the *normative* claim that indigenous values should be the normative ground for guiding and regulating local social work practice. Seen in this light, the charge that the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice is the result of a confusion presupposed a sharp distinction of the level of social explanation and that of normative evaluation.

Secondly, in the preceding discussions one observed that local cultural values were pitted against social work values originated from the West. That is, in discussing

the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice, we seem to presume that developing an indigenous value base for social work practice is equal to acknowledging solely the normative force of local values. Hence, in this light, we seem to be compelled to choose from either one of the two. But is this assumption warranted? Might there be a possibility that these two perspectives may be mediated?

In the above passages, we have noted two issues that will guide our subsequent exploration. The first is whether an assumption of the discontinuity of social explanation and normative evaluation is warranted. The second is whether we are justified to accept the bifurcation of local values and social work values. In the chapters that follow, we may consider a number of arguments that may help us to elucidate and reconsider these two issues. Before we move on, I have to outline briefly a methodological rejoinder to some anticipated challenges.

IV

A thoughtful reader may wonder whether empirical research would play any role in the present study. My reply would begin with a critical remark on the status of

'empirically'-based approach of 'value-talk'[24] in social work. In *Values in Social Work*, the lack of conceptual analysis[25] is identified by Michael Horne as one of the tendencies the 'empirically'-based approach have been criticized.[26] Acknowledging similar criticisms of 'empirically'-based approach to 'value-talk' in social work, I would maintain any adequate account of an indigenous value base for social work practice could not avoid meticulous empirical investigation of the moral practice of the profession in the local setting. Yet, I would argue that adopting an 'empirical' approach without rigorous conceptualization is ill-suited to the investigation at hand.

No doubt, careful empirical research is necessary for a full-fledged indigenous value base for social work practice. If we take values as embodied in the practice of social workers, empirical research is required to articulate which values are embodied in local social work practice. However, given the understanding that an indigenous value base for social work practice faces grave conceptual difficulties, we must be wary of the danger of conducting empirical researches in this domain without adequate conceptual analysis. Following the discussions in the previous sections we

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[24] By 'empirically'-based approach of 'value-talk', I mean i, social researches addressed to the attitudes of social workers towards ethical standards listed in the code of ethics or normative literature or ii, researches directed to service practice that incidentally produce profiles of prevalent values of social workers.

[25] By conceptual analysis, I mean the elucidation of the meaning of the concerned concepts and the implications for their interrelationship.

[26] Michael Horne, *Values in Social Work* 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), xiii.

may have a glimpse of the conceptual difficulties we have to tackle before a plausible conceptual framework that paves the way for future empirical researches can be posed.

Some critics might think that the difficulties that we have discussed may be handled by giving an adequate definition of the key terms, for instance, 'indigenization' or 'social work values'. Yet, the author would like to contend that this will not do. The reason for this is that, such definitional exercise presupposed that we have successfully elucidated the key notions, whereas in the present case we are seeking to sort out the conceptual issues that may be relevant to such an elucidation. Suffice it to say, replacing the effort of conceptual exploration with a definitional exercise would only be an evasion to engage the crucial and difficult issues.

Before I propose the research questions, a brief review of the arguments of the preceding analysis seems appropriate. First, "Do we have sufficient grounds for articulating an indigenous value base for social work practice?" is a question that underlies a major portion of the preceding analysis. If the value base of the profession is fundamental for the practice of social work, it seems that an indigenous social work practice requires an indigenous value base to guide its practice. I have further shown

that one central motivation of the call for indigenization is a recognition of cultural and moral diversities. However, recognition of cultural and moral diversities does not justify the call for an indigenous value base for social work practice. In fact, in its opponent's eyes, the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice may be the results of a conceptual confusion of 'positive' morality and 'normative' morality. If we do not accept the verdict that the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice is a mirage, the foregone arguments compel us to reconsider the reasons that justify our insistence on developing an indigenous value base for social work practice.

Before one can find an appropriate method to study one' subject, one should clarify the implicit understanding of the nature of the subject that guides one's study. After the previous brief discussions, I hope the reader will appreciate that we cannot afford to ignore this challenge in searching for an indigenous value base for social work practice. Basing on the above summary, I would propose the central research question for the present study. First, can we pose a plausible account defending the idea of 'an indigenous value base for social work practice' against the charge that it is based on a confusion? To probe further into this complex problem, in what follows, I suggest we have to reopen two issues, namely, the assumption of the discontinuity of social explanation and normative evaluation, and that of the bifurcation of local

values and social work values.

V

Before I turn to the next chapter, I would like to layout the structure of the present thesis. In this first chapter, I have attempted to establish that discussions of an indigenous perspective of social work values are beset by a theoretical dilemma. The author argued the tensions between universal norm and particular cultural understanding constitute a theoretical dilemma that discussions of an indigenous value base of social work practice have to attend.

In the coming chapter, the author would survey the relevant literature of indigenization in social sciences and social work to identify the connections of the prevalent understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' with a positivistic conception of empirical validation and the ideal of value neutrality. At the end of the second chapter, I would pointed out that the prevalent understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' presupposed that the language of social explanation and normative

evaluation is discontinuous.

To pave the way for a re-consideration of this seemingly self-evident assumption, in chapter three and four we would have to articulate the idea of values as constituted by shared social meaning. By placing the understanding of value in the context of modern societies, with the analysis of Macintyre, the author attempt to explicate the thesis that the understanding of the nature of social work values is informed by 'emotivism' in the third chapter.

In chapter four by unearthing and criticizing the philosophical assumptions of 'emotivism', the author sought to expound the thesis that values are constituted by shared social meaning. With the help of Charles Taylor's analysis of 'meaning event' and 'common meaning', the author would attempt to articulate an alternative understanding of shared values building on the analysis in chapter four.

In the fifth chapter I would try to explore the relationship between social work values and local culture values. In order to show that tensions and conflicts exist between social work values and local cultural values, the author would focus the discussions on a representative value of contemporary social work discourses:

empowerment. By examining the relationship of empowerment and the local cultural context, the author would try to show that implications may be drawn from this case that shed light on the broader issue of the relationship between social work values and local culture values. After drawing out the implications of the thesis of the constitutive relationship of values and social meaning developed in chapter four., the author will attempt to give a conceptual analysis of the idea of empowerment. By unearthing the presuppositions of the idea of empowerment, I would try to spell out some of the tacit understanding of the role of emotion, the nature of selfhood and the relationship of self and society.

Contrasting these presuppositions with that of accounts of Chinese self, I will then show that it may be at odds with our understanding of the Chinese self. It is hope that this analysis shall provide ground for further examining the tensions and conflicts between social work values and local cultural values. Given the preceding analysis, the author would pose the issue of how this prima facie tension between empowerment and Chinese self is to be understood. I shall argue that the theoretical framework developed in earlier chapters may shed light on how we understand this issue.

Facing this tension squarely, it seems that we get caught between Scylla and Charybdis. If we interpret this conflict as a dilemma, then it seems that either we have to uphold the idea of empowerment as having universal validity and thus disregard the local cultural understanding, or we may acknowledge the significance of local cultural understanding at the expense of professional values that claim to have universal validity.

Is there no way out of this difficult dilemma? The author would like to argue that the critical-hermeneutical analysis of the Chinese self developed by Yuen Sun Pong and his colleagues may enable us to evade these forced options. The author would argue that Yuen Sun Pong's analysis may help us see that we could not avoid the issue of the mediation of the perspectives of the researcher and that of the subject. In this light, the equally undesirable choices of neglecting local culture values or denying the relevance of social work values are only pseudo-solutions. Thus, by relocating the source of their conflicts as arising from different understandings of selfhood, we may re-interpret the tension of prima facie tension between empowerment and Chinese self. Eventually, in the final chapter I would attempt to articulate what bearings the forgoing analysis may have for understanding the relationship between social work values and local culture values.

Chapter Two

The Positivistic Conception of Empirical Validation,

The Ideal of Value Neutrality and

The Idea of Indigenization of Social Work Practice in Hong Kong

I

In the preceding chapter, the author attempted to establish the contention that

discussions of an indigenous perspective of social work values are beset by

conceptual and theoretical difficulties. In particular the author has focused on a

theoretical dilemma. The author argued that recognizing the existence of tensions

between universal norm and particular cultural understanding may mean that we got

caught in a tragic choice. This would, the author contends, constitute a theoretical

dilemma that discussions of an indigenous value base of social work practice have to

attend. In this chapter, the author would try to unearth some of the central

meta-theoretical assumptions that underpinned the prevalent understanding of the idea

of 'indigenization' in the relevant literature of indigenization in social sciences and

social work. Attention will be given to identify the connections of the prevalent

understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' with a positivistic conception of empirical validation and the idea of value neutrality.

Before we proceed, I would like to outline the argument of this chapter. First, as noted in the review of the social work literature in Hong Kong in the previous chapter, I would recall the point that the call for indigenization of social work consist of two related insights: first, an awareness of the need to critically reflect on the reception of social work theories that are originated in the West; second, a recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of the clientele and/or the significance of related social, cultural and policy context of Hong Kong. In the second section of this chapter, I would argue that the first of these insights may be traced to be further founded on an understanding that social work theories carry cultural values and assumptions of their place of origins.

Yet, the author would contend that the literature of indigenization in social work in Hong Kong, which has seldom touched on meta-theoretical issues, may not have the theoretical resources to elucidate the meaning of indigenization of social work practice. In particular, the author would argue that though discussions of indigenization of social work practice have tended to subscribe to the thesis that social

work theories are cultural products, yet, these discussions have seldom made explicit nor clarified the implications of the preceding thesis regarding the genesis of social work theories on the validity of these theories.[1]

Given the above considerations, the author would argue for the need to appreciate the deeper meta-theoretical issues that indigenization of social work brings forth. In the third section of this chapter the author turns to the works of some social work scholars who recognized that the call for indigenization of social work may require further clarification. These reflections, the author noted, focused on our understanding of the theory and practice link and the nature of social work knowledge.

Scholars have pointed out that the predominant professional education and practice presupposed an 'applied science' or 'engineering' model of professional knowledge and a related theory-practice relationship. According to this 'applied science' model, formal, theoretical knowledge is privileged and seen as the foundation of practice, and theory-practice relationship is conceived as technical application, and

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[1] The term 'validity' used here is associated with the meaning that some explanations are well-grounded and supportable. This is to be distinguished form two other senses identified by Polkinghorne: "The first comes from the context of formal logic, where 'valid' describes a conclusion that follows the rules of logic and is correctly drawn from the premises. The second is used in measurement theory, where 'validity' refers to the relationship between the measurement instrument and the concept it is attempting to measure." See Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and The Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 175.

they find that this model is inadequate in dealing with the issue of indigenization.

Though, these discussions may have brought out the inadequacies of the 'applied science' model, yet, their discussions of alternative models, I would contend, failed to successfully clarify what is meant by indigenization at the theoretical level. This is because to a certain extent they still failed to confront the issue of how the validity of social work theories was to be determined. The major drawback of the discussion, in my view is a neglect of the meta-theoretical issues of value involvement in social inquiry, and the relationship of the perspectives of the researcher and the researchee in social explanation. This neglect may be an expression of their failure to confront the deep-seated positivistic conception of empirical validation that underlies mainstream social sciences.

After exploring the problematic relationship of the genesis and validity of social work theories and skills in sections two and three, we come to see that we have to face squarely the positivistic conception of empirical validation. If we are not satisfied with construing the call of indigenization of social work as no more than a heightening of cultural sensitivity, we have to critically question the positivistic conception of empirical validation. In section four, first, we will try to examine how the idea of value neutrality is intrinsically connected to the idea of empirical

validation of positivism; second, I would pointed out that the prevalent understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' presupposed that the language of social explanation and normative evaluation is discontinuous.

At the end of chapter one, we posed that proponents of the idea of 'an indigenous value base for social work practice' have to defend themselves against the charge that the project is based on a confusion: a confusion of the level of social explanation and that of normative evaluation which is to be sharply distinguished. The author hoped that the analysis of this chapter would show that the prevalent understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' matches with the image portrayed by one who is skeptical of developing 'an indigenous value base for social work practice'. Thus we will appreciate the connection between the need to challenge the positivistic concept of empirical validation that beset prevalent discussions of 'indigenization of social work practice' and the project of defending the idea of 'an indigenous value base for social work practice'.

To pave the way for this examination we turn to the discussions of indigenization of social sciences,[2] particularly the methodological and meta-theoretical discussions

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[2] Here we shall focus on the relevant discussions in Taiwan/ Hong Kong.

pertaining to the nature of indigenization. By looking at the methodological proposal

put forward by Yang Kuo Shu, one of the major proponents of the movement of

indigenization of social sciences in Taiwan, we shall briefly explicate his idea of

indigenous compatibility. By critically examining a number of issues that Yang's

critics raised, we sought to bring out why the issue of the nature of value involvement

in social inquiry is crucial in elucidating the relationship of the perspective of the

social scientist and that of the layperson in the local community in the explanations

offered by social research.

In order to clarify how the idea of value neutrality is intrinsically connected to

the meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism, I would reconstruct the arguments put

forward by Yuen Sun Pong. By explicating part of Yuen Sun Pong's argument

deployed to call into question the positivistic conception of empirical validation, I

would also try to show how this may help us to free ourselves from taking for granted

the meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism.

In what follows, the author would analyze a thesis that serves as one of the major

background assumptions that give sense to the local discussions of indigenization of

social work. But before we proceed, a note of qualification is needed. According to

Yuen Sun Pong, in addressing the issue of indigenization of social sciences, we may distinguish three different levels of discussions, namely, the substantive, the perspectival and the meta-theoretical level.[3] By the substantive level, we mean specific theories providing explanations for certain domain of social phenomenon, like deviance, family organization, social change etc…. By the perspectival level, we mean the grand theories that provide the orienting perspectives for studies at a more substantive level. Classical theories of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim that provide us a general understanding of modern societies are outstanding examples in this regard. As for the meta-theoretical level, we mean theorizing about the nature of social scientific theories. Contrasting with substantive theories that sought to explain specific social phenomenon, meta-theoretical discussions of social science address issues like the nature of scientific explanation, the nature of social reality, the nature of objectivity etc. That is, meta-theoretical discussions sought to articulate and examine the implicit understanding of the preceding issues (for example, what is counted as an adequate scientific explanation, what is meant by objectivity etc.) that substantive theories presupposed.

Given the above clarification, the focus of the discussions that follows would be

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[3]阮新邦，《 批判詮釋與知識重建－哈伯瑪斯視野下的社會研究 》 (北京：社會科學文獻出版社，1999)， 153。

at the meta-theoretical level.[4] The choice of this focus is based on the belief that

present discussions of the issue of indigenization of social work is hindered by a lack

of concern of a series of issues at the meta-theoretical level.[5] Particularly, to what

extent existing discussions of the indigenization of social work has failed to challenge

the account of validity presupposed by positivist thinking. Since the present

discussions attempt to address the meta-theoretical issues in indigenization, detail

discussion of theoretical differences at the substantive level is not our primary

concern. Thus, the author has no intention of providing a comprehensive survey of the

various viewpoints that has been voiced by different social work scholars on the issue

of indigenization.[6] Rather, by seizing on how discussions of indigenization have

tackled the issue of validity, we would attempt to unveil some of the meta-theoretical

issues that accounts of indigenization of social work have to face.

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[4] Here the author echoed Chu Wai Chi's suggestions, see朱偉志， 〈 香港社會工作本土化藍圖再檢視 〉 載於 《 邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢 》 ，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 1999) ，429-433。

[5] To a certain extent, whether the reader is convinced of such a focus depends on the discussions that follow. For a justification of this see阮新邦， 《 批判詮釋與知識重建－哈伯瑪斯視野下的社會研究 》 (北京：社會科學文獻出版社，1999)， 155。

[6] For a review see 葉錦成， 〈 香港社會工作本土化的沈思(一)： 本土化的回顧與前瞻 〉 ， 《 香港社會工作學報 》 8，2001，51-78； 朱偉志， 〈 香港社會工作本土化藍圖再檢視 〉 載於 《 邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢 》 ，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 1999)，414-440；Lam Chiu Wan, 'Indigenization of Social Work Values in Hong Kong: A Brief Review,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 10-21.

II

In reviewing the discussions of indigenization of social work in Hong Kong, Chu Wai Chi made the observation that prevalent discussions of indigenization of social work in Hong Kong seldom goes beyond a mere listing of certain general cultural differences between the East and the West, or drawing inapt or invalid conclusions from piecemeal and selective portraits of Chinese cultural context.[7] He suggested that only a multi-level effort may bring about a breakthrough in the present stalemate. First, we have to free the discussions of indigenization from the spell of cultural relativism; second, we should critically reflect the condition that social work is haunted by positivistic thinking; third, we would develop accounts of cultural context of Hong Kong. Concurring with these suggestions, the following discussions may be seen as an endeavour to examine how the failure to exorcize positivistic thinking contributes to the failure to clarify the meaning of indigenization of social work.

In the introductory chapter, the author stated that for the present study among the various issues that broadly fall under the auspices of 'indigenization' in local social

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[7] 朱偉志， 〈 香港社會工作本土化藍圖再檢視 〉 載於 《 **邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢** 》 ，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 1999)，415。

work literature, we shall focus on the cardinal issue of the role of cultural differences in the application of Western social work ideas and skills to non-Western societies. I have also pointed out that the call for indigenization of social work consist of two related insights: first, an awareness of the need to critically reflect on the reception of social work theories originated in the West; second, a recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of the clientele and/or the significance of related social, cultural and policy context of Hong Kong.[8] In what follows, I would look into the reasons that proponents of the need of indigenization of social work raised to support the former claim.

Reviewing the literature on indigenization, apart from acknowledging the cultural distinctiveness of the clientele and/or the significance of related social, cultural and policy context of Hong Kong, one may also observe a prominent theme articulated in some of these studies.[9] Whether they invoked Peter Hodge, James

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[8] Different scholars have suggested different accounts of these differences, but they are not our central concern here.

[9] See Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 22-30; Lam Chiu Wan, 'Indigenization of Social Work Values in Hong Kong: A Brief Review,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 10-21; Raymond Ngan, 'Cultural Imperialism: Western Social Work Theories for Chinese Practice and the Mission of Social Work in Hong Kong,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1993, vol.28, 2, 47-55; Tsang Nai Ming, 'Examining the Cultural Dimension of Social Work Practice: The Experience of Teaching Students on a Social Work Course in Hong Kong,' *International Social Work* 1997, vol.40, 133-144; 朱偉志, 〈 香港社會工作本土化藍圖再檢視 〉 載於 《 邁向新世紀：社會工作理論與實踐新趨勢 》 ，何潔雲、阮曾媛琪主編，(新澤西： 八方文化企業公司， 1999)，414-440。

Midgley or other distinguish scholars on the subject, they tend to suggest that we need to critically reflect on the reception of social work theories that are originated in the West. The ground for such a suggestion is the belief that social work theories are the products of specific cultural context, and therefore presuppose distinctive cultural assumptions.

As the author understands, this is a thesis concerning the genesis of social work theories and skills. That is to say, it serves to heighten our awareness of social work theories and skills as products of particular cultural context. However, I would argue that the prevalent discussion of indigenization in social work may have failed to clarify the implications of the preceding thesis regarding the genesis of social work theories on the issue of validity. That is to say, while many social work scholars may acknowledge that social work theories are carriers of cultural values and assumptions, however what the implications of such acknowledgement amounts to are seldom argued. Did such acknowledgement imply that the professional community has to acknowledge the need to develop indigenous perspective/s of social work theory and practice? That might be a commonly shared presumption. However, recognizing these insights was far from providing us adequate criteria for evaluating what is meant by 'indigenization of social work'.

One of the central issues is that recognizing that imported social work theories are carriers of foreign cultural values and assumptions tells us nothing about the validity of these theories. That is, given the fact that certain social work theories are imported may not allow us to draw an inference that these theories have no or little explanatory power and/or effectiveness in intervention in the local context. Thus, the failure to spell out how the validity of these theories might be judged, leave us at a loss when we are confronted with the task to specify in what sense and to what extent might adaptations of Western social work theories to the local context be counted as efforts of indigenization. More specifically, I would argue, the preceding failure left the following questions unanswered, that is, first, what bearings such cultural assumptions carried over from foreign contexts may have on the validity of these theories; and second, given that social work theories and skills are carriers of culturally assumptions, how we should understand the nature and scope of the call of indigenization.

Since James Midgley's ***Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World*** serves as one of the central references that local social work scholars invoked when they raise the call for a critical reflection on the reception of social work

theories, in what follows I shall therefore examine the arguments that Midgley put

forward and how he understands what is meant by indigenization. At the outset, I

would briefly review James Midgley's significant work ***Professional Imperialism***.[10]

The central tenet of Midgley's thesis of 'professional imperialism' may be

summarized as follows. According to Midgley, after the Second World War, social

work theories and knowledge produced in the United States were exported to Third

World countries at a time when social work began to get a foothold in these societies.

In the process, these social work theories and knowledge, which were developed in

particular socio-cultural and historical contexts, were transplanted to other societies as

though these theories and knowledge have universal application.

Though Midgley's analysis draws attentions to a number of contextual

differences including the social, economical, political and cultural domains, the

following discussions would only focus on his analysis of the effects of cultural

factors. Midgley's claim that social work theories are transplanted in foreign soil is a

thesis pertaining to the transmissions and genesis of social work theories and skills.

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[10] The work of James Midgley is chosen because it is the most developed account. Peter Hodge made similar observations in the context of Hong Kong, yet he used a different term- 'cultural imperialism' to capture the phenomenon, see Peter Hodge, 'Social Work Education,' in ***Community Problems and Social Work in Southeast Asia: The Hong Kong and Singapore Experience*** ed. Peter Hodge (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1980), 65-69.

Midgley's understanding of this thesis may be nicely captured in the following excerpt: "Social work educators in developing countries have taken little account of these very complex issues. Instead, the image of man and the values which are embodied in western social work are transmitted through social work education to social work practice in the Third World. Schooled in western theories and equipped with the profession's culturally determined methodology, social workers in developing countries are expected to treat their clients as individuals who have the same needs, emotional reactions, attitudes and potential for personality growth as do the recipients of social work in the West; also they are expected to treat them as if they were amenable to becoming self-reliant, independent, rational, insightful, caring and coping individuals."[11]

The central tenet of Midgley revealed in the preceding passage is that, far from being cultural-neutral, social work theories and values embodied specific understanding of human nature.[12] These implicit understanding of human nature and cardinal values of social work that originated in the West is culturally determined. Or putting it in another way, these cultural assumptions infused the theories, techniques

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[11] James Midgley, *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World* (London: Heinemann Publisher, 1981), 98.

[12] It is worth noting that the appropriation of James Midgley in local literature have seldom stress his emphasis of the need to examine the issue of cross-cultural universality of social work values, rather they tend to turn the attention to the issue of theory and practice.

and values of social work. Midgley identified how these theories and skills of social work that were saturated with cultural assumptions got transplanted to the Third World. Through process of incubations of social work educators, Midgley argued, these 'educated' educators serve as the vehicle that culturally specific mode of social work was reproduced in other parts of the world. Besides, Midgley pointed out the danger that social workers in developing countries may understand and treat their clients with the distorting lens of imported theories and techniques.

In Midgley's account, he clearly recognized that social work theories and skills are products of particular cultural context. Yet, he is not clear whether and in what senses these social work theories and skills carrying specific cultural assumptions are relevant or valid for other societies. He seems to suggest that these imported theories since they are saturated with cultural assumptions specific to the West, they might not be relevant to social work education and practice in other cultural context. However, his attitude remain ambivalent on this issue.

On the one hand, Midgley rebut accounts of Third world social work scholars who may have too rashly provide accounts that justified the cross-cultural universality of social work by appealing to the humanitarian foundation of social work that is

shared by the Third world and the West:[13] "Teachers of social work in developing countries have been so anxious to receive recognition and approval from western schools of social work and the international professional fraternity, that they have not realized to what extent they are promoting the diffusion of western values to non-western cultures; nor have they consider its deeper implications. If they had they might have justified their actions on the grounds of inevitability or may have argued that to promote progressive social change and modify traditional culture, the diffusion of western liberal ideas is desirable. Instead, they have claimed that social work is no more than a formalized, modern expression of traditional values."[14]

On the other hand, Midgley's ambiguous treatment of the nature of indigenization leaves open the possibility that western social work theories may be adapted as indigenous counts in so far as they are said to be appropriate to the cultural context. That is to say, if western social work theories can be shown to have explanatory power or therapeutic effectiveness in the indigenous context, these theories will also be valid for indigenous practice. The author would suggest that we may appreciate Midgley's ambivalence if we take into account the dangers that he

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[13] Midgley's account may not have answered the rejoinder in the preceding chapter, but at least he is right in noting that a defender of the cross-cultural universality of social work values may justify his claim by showing that social work values is based on a conception of 'normative morality'- the rules and directives that *ought* to be upheld as categorically obligatory by all.

[14] James Midgley, *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World* (London: Heinemann Publisher, 1981), 104.

perceived.

No doubt, Midgley is clear in alerting us to attend critically to the cultural differences that exist between the West and the rest. Yet he is cautious in drawing the implications of his analysis for the development of social work theories in the Third World. Fully aware of falling into the trap of prescribing for the Third World, Midgley's response as an American scholar is to develop a pragmatic approach: "The enormous cultural, economic, social and political differences between those nations which are referred to collectively as the Third World, *preclude any attempt to prescribe alternative forms of social work which have universal relevance. These differences demand that solutions to the problems of professional imperialism in social work be found locally by local social workers with reference to the needs and circumstances of their own countries*. Because of this, no attempt will be made in this book to identify new forms of social work which may be more relevant to developing countries. To do so would contradict its central argument and invalidate its critique of professional imperialism; instead, the requirements of appropriate social work and the characteristics of appropriate professional roles and training practices will be described in general terms."[15]

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[15] James Midgley, *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World* (London: Heinemann Publisher, 1981), 167-168, italics added.

As the author understands, Midgley's effort to abstain from prescribing alternative forms of social work which have universal relevance as exhibited in the preceding excerpt, apart from avoiding inconsistencies, may also be seen as an expression of Midgley's sensitivity to the dangers of ethnocentricity. This sensitivity also seems to colour how he understands the principle of indigenization.

For Midgley, one of the defining characteristics of pragmatic social work is that it is based on the principle of indigenization. How does Midgley understand the principle of indigenization? Here is Midgley's answer: "Defining properly, indigenization means appropriateness; professional social work roles must be appropriate to the needs of different countries and social work education must be appropriate to the demands of social work practice." [16]

Midgley's answer might seem to be trivial and truistic assertions. Yet, given the preceding discussions, we may take it as a result of his effort to abstain from prescribing in substantive terms. However, this does not mean that his treatment is free from problems. One seminal question that arises is that, in abstaining from prescribing in substantive terms, Midgley seems to have also ducked two issues: first,

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[16] James Midgley, *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World* (London: Heinemann Publisher, 1981), 170.

what is to count as appropriateness and how to determine the validity of these theories, and second, what is the connection between appropriateness and the validity of these theories. Putting it differently, do we mean that when we say that certain social work theories or skills are appropriate to the local cultural context, we consider that these theories and skills are valid for the local cultural context? But for these theories and skills what do we mean by validity then?

As the author understands, Midgley seems to leave these issues to the local social workers. As he put it, the solutions are to be "found locally by local social workers with reference to the needs and circumstances of their own countries."[17] Nonetheless, the author would argue that the preceding treatment is inadequate. The author would suggest that Midgley's solution may be subject to two interpretations which may both be unsatisfactory.

On the first interpretation, we may read Midgley as suggesting that it is for the local social workers to decide. However, this only pushes the issues back one stage further. This is because this has only shifted the burden to answer the issues of what counts as appropriateness and validity to the local social workers, but that does not

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[17] James Midgley, *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World* (London: Heinemann Publisher, 1981), 170.

mean that these questions are solved or become irrelevant. Facing such challenge, one may be tempted to suggest that the local social workers have final authority over the issues. However, if that means that what the local social workers think are appropriate and valid are *to be accepted as appropriate and valid*, one would have committed the 'genetic fallacy'[18].

By the 'genetic fallacy', the author means that one has confused the genesis and the validity of theories. That is, one erroneously infers that the theories under examination are valid because they are originated from certain preferred contexts. In this light, granting final authority to the local social workers may highlight that they should have the right and responsibility to decide what is to be counted as appropriateness and validity. However, that should not be confused with conferring on the judgments of local social workers pertaining to issues of appropriateness and validity a status that could not be challenged. Thus, the question of how to determine what is to count as appropriateness and validity is still unanswered.

If the first interpretation explicated above is unsatisfactory, would an alternative interpretation provides a better way out? On the second interpretation, we may stress

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[18] John Kekes, 'The Context of Justification ,' in *The Heritage of Logical Positivism* Nicholas Rescher ed. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 69.

that what is to count as appropriateness and validity can only be determined with reference to the needs and circumstances of each specific context. If that means the theories to be examined are to be checked for their applicability and effectiveness in each specific context, this may sound to be little different from the emphasis on empirical validation that is shared by mainstream, positivistic researches. That may not sound too bad. Nevertheless, if we recall Midgley's persistent effort of avoiding the dangers of ethnocentricity, it may seem some what paradoxical that the call of indigenization in the last instance means the affirmation of the idea of empirical validation presupposed by mainstream, Western, positivistic researches. What is the point of raising the issue of indigenization, then?

Basing on the above analysis, we see that by leaving open the issue of what defines appropriateness, Midgley is not very helpful in clarifying what is meant by respecting or violating the principle of appropriateness. This may in part be attributed to his failure to elucidate the issue of how to determine what is meant by appropriateness and validity. Midgley's analysis of the transplant of social work knowledge may have alerted us to critically examine the appropriateness of social work theories from the West. However, his analysis has not provided us a clear yardstick to judge whether certain imported theories and skills are appropriate to

certain context or not. Differently put, he has not precluded the possibility that social

work theories imported from the West might be appropriate for the Third world, given

certain fine-tuning or modifications. If that is the case, what is meant by

indigenization? Are we only paying lip service to the call of indigenization? In being

consistent with his spirit to avoid the traps of ethnocentricity, Midgley may have

ducked the issue of the evaluation of the local social workers' accounts. By leaving

open this issue, Midgley has failed to clarify the implications of the thesis of

professional imperialism on the validity of the imported social work theories, thus

allowing a move that may not be welcomed by Midgley.

III

Could it be possible that the professional community, after critical reflection,

reflectively endorse the imported theories, since with minor revisions and fine-tuning,

these theories may still be considered as having validity for universal application. If

that is the case, have such responses paid adequate attention to the cultural dimension

of social work? Might we count these adaptations as efforts of indigenization, or

should we concur with Tsang Nai Ming's remark that examining the cultural

dimension of social work practice should not be equated with adapting western social work theories in different cultures?[19] On what grounds might we say that these responses may just be paying lip service to the call of indigenization? What is meant by indigenization, then? Furthermore, could such efforts of adapt ting social work theories that is sensitive to the local cultural context possibly have the unintended effect that Kwong Wai Man cautioned, that "such effort may have the unintended effect of propagating Western social work even more efficiently since the main thrust is to demonstrate the applicability of practice approaches and therapies imported from the West"?[20] What is wrong with this unintended effect, if the validity of these practice approaches and therapies could be amply demonstrated by showing their applicability and effectiveness in the local context?

To further explore these issues, we need to attend to the issue of validity that is seldom discussed in the prevalent discussions of indigenization in social work. In order to show the significance of attending the issue of validity, the author would turn to Kwong Wai Man's criticisms of the prevalent conception of culturally-sensitive social work. By examining Kwong's view and the responses inspired by positivist

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[19] Tsang Nai Ming , 'Examining the Cultural Dimension of Social Work Practice: The Experience of Teaching Students on a Social Work Course in Hong Kong,' *International Social Work* 1997, vol.40 141.
[20] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 22.

thinking, the author would argue that by attending to the issue of validity, we may see how Kwong might be tempted to commit the 'genetic fallacy'. Besides, one may also see how a positivist may appropriate and deflect Kwong's criticisms by adhering to a positivistic account of validation. The call of indigenization, in the eyes of the positivist, may mean no more than critical attention to the validity of imported theories, and the need to take into account the indigenous concepts of local practitioners as resources for formulating hypothesis that are to be subject to the test of empirical validation. Thus, this discussion may reveal that if we fail to challenge the positivist's account of validation, we could hardly give a more adequate account of indigenization of social work. This may explain why we have to tackle the deeper meta-theoretical issues if we want to clarify the idea of indigenization of social work.

The issue of how to determine what serves as an adequate account of indigenization of social work becomes a burning issue when we take into account of a dispute concerning a pre-dominant view of culturally sensitive social work. According to one incisive comment, the pre-dominant view of culturally sensitive social work practice in Hong Kong conceives local social work practice as a variant of its Western counterpart that modifies or fine-tunes the prescriptions developed in the West for

effective interventions with local clients.[21] However, if we take James Midgley's thesis of 'professional imperialism' seriously, we might conceive the pre-dominant view that Kwong criticized may not be promoting a critical and reflective attitude towards the application of Western theories and skills. But a defender of the pre-dominant view may response that we have jump to our conclusions.

For a defender of the pre-dominant view, the call for cultural sensitivity may alert us to the danger of presupposing the validity of these imported theories. However, the true verdict depends on the validity of these theories, and for a positivist that means the empirical validation that these theories receive. Understood in this light, after critical reflection, the professional community may reflectively endorse the imported theories based on the empirical validation that these theories received. Thus, in the eyes of its defenders, critics of the pre-dominant view like Kwong may be too rash to dismiss the pre-dominant view. The charge of the critics, hence, may not be well grounded because these critics have neglected the possibility that a culturally sensitive professional community, after critical reflection, may reflectively endorse the imported theories.

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[21] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 10-21.

To further examine this dispute, we turn to Kwong Wai Man's significant paper 'Local knowledge, indigenous practice: linking the cultural, the personal, and the professional in social work practice'.[22]   For Kwong the pre-dominant understanding of culturally sensitive practice may be summarized as follows: "In this view, the development of culturally sensitive practice begins with the formal theories of Western social work. It is through successive modifications of these formal theories, guided by empirical testing the effectiveness of such modifications in working with Chinese clients, that a culturally sensitive practice will be attained at the end. It has become a received view, accepted but not examined."[23]

According to Kwong, the received view is connected to an understanding of knowledge, theory and practice Kwong named as 'applied science model'.[24] Since Kwong has not further elaborated what he meant by an 'applied science model', I would supply my explication of how I understand this model. By an 'applied science model' of knowledge, I mean the following understanding of the nature of knowledge, and related conceptions of theory and practice link.[25]   First, only formal and

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[22] Kwong is chosen because he is the only social work scholar that I know of that has attempted to critically examine the epistemological base of culturally sensitive practice.

[23] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 23.

[24] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 24.

[25] The positivistic meta-theoretical presuppositions that underlied the 'applied science model' will be discussed in the final section.

generalizable theories that are empirically validated can claim the status of scientific

knowledge, Second, based on the first claim, formal, theoretical knowledge is seen as

having a higher status in a hierarchy of knowledge, where 'general principles' are at

the top of the hierarchy, and the applied theories that prescribe diagnostic procedures

and problem solutions occupy a lower status than the general theories, and the

concrete practice of practitioner placed at the lowest rank in the hierarchy.[26]

Third, theory and practice do not belong to the same order. They are discretely

separated. Theory refers to a matrix of statements that captures the universal law that

governs the phenomenon concerned. In contrast to theory, practice are the behaviour

of the practitioner that should be guided by the rules and algorithms derived from the

theories. Fourth, in this account, the situation of the practice is known in advance, or

the problem is well defined and circumscribed. The theory states how proper means

are matched to ends pre-determined. Knowledge is certain and closed. That is to say,

theories are insulated to the effects of the social and cultural context. Fifth, practice is

understood as technical application of these theories. Putting it differently, the

application of theory into practice is separated from the moral being of the practitioner.

In other words, such application, though they may demand certain level of cognitive

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[26] Cf. Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York:
Basic Books Inc., 1983), 24.

and physical capacity, has nothing to do with one's subjective value judgments.[27]

The conception of an applied science model of knowledge, theory and practice places heavy emphasis on the vigor of what may be counted as scientific knowledge, and the mundane understanding of practitioners in context have little significance in this regard. Further, by conceiving the theory-practice link as technical application of theories, this model presupposes an agent-neutral account of theory-practice link.[28]

By invoking Schon, Kwong tried to challenge these assumptions by point out that the privilege that general theories were thought to have, may be an misunderstanding that exaggerated the scope of application of these theories, rather these theories though vigorous may not be relevant to the world of practice: "In the classroom, everything about social work has an aura of professionalism. However, once students enter into the field, they plunge into a not-too-familiar world of practice. An often cited passage from Schon's seminal work so describes the world of practice: "In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical

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[27] See 阮新邦，〈 邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(上)：實證主義的迷思與強烈價值介入論 〉 載於 《 詮釋取向的社會工作實踐 》 (新加坡：八方，2004)。
[28] For more see Brian Fay *Social Theory and Political Practice* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), chap. 2 & 3.

solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their

technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society,

while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern." [29]

He also cited a number of empirical researches to support his claim that these

formal theories favoured by the applied science are not useful, or difficult to apply in

practice. If these theories are irrelevant as Kwong claimed, then why they are

irrelevant? Kwong's answer seems to be that they are experience-distant rather than

experience-near, de-contextualized rather than context-specific: "Formal theories are

'experience-distant' since they are de-contextualized knowledge. They will not be

immediately applicable in practice situations where practitioners have to grapple with

a complex array of contextual elements as they deliberate on what to do and why in

the immediate moment. Moreover, formalized knowledge will lose its knowledge

claim when it fails to pass the test of empirical experience."[30]

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[29] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 24.   The author noted that Kwong have omitted a passage preceding this excerpt that may affect how one interprets the excerpt. The aforementioned passage is as follows: "We can readily understand, therefore, not only why uncertainty, uniqueness, instability, and value conflict are so troublesome to the Positivist epistemology of practice, but also why practitioners bound by this epistemology find themselves caught in a dilemma. Their definition of rigorous professional knowledge excludes phenomena they have learned to see as central to their practice. And artistic ways of coping with these phenomena do not qualify, for them, as rigorous professional knowledge. This dilemma of 'rigor or relevance' arises more acutely in some areas of practice than in others…" See Donald Schon, ***The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*** (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1983), 42.
[30] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 25.

In place of these 'experience-distant' and de-contextualized knowledge, Kwong claimed that practitioners utilized a sort of knowledge that he named as 'local knowledge': "However, it does not mean that practitioners do make reference to knowledge, …we find practitioners holding and using a special kind of knowledge which has two prominent features. First, it is knowledge that practitioners pick up from their practice experience, and is therefore tied to the particular practice setting from which it is derived. Second, it is collectively shared among practitioners in the same practice site. This is the knowledge I refer to as 'local knowledge'."[31]   By 'local knowledge', Kwong meant two things. First, this sort of knowledge is 'experience-near' and 'context-relevant' in the sense that they are generalizations derived from the experiences of practitioners in a specific setting; second, this sort of knowledge is 'local' in a geographical sense that they are shared by the practitioners in the same site.[32]

Given the preceding analysis, Kwong criticized the pre-dominant account of cultural-sensitive social work for privileging formal theories at the expense of 'local knowledge' found in everyday practice in diverse settings. Seen in this light, the price

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[31] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 25.
[32] Ibid..

paid for privileging formal theories at the expense of 'local knowledge' is 'the subjugation of the cultural knowledge that practitioners and clients share as members of the same cultural group'[33] when formal theories are seen as the only game in town. For Kwong, 'cultural sensitivity is inhibited as a result'.

Kwong may be right in criticizing the pre-dominant account of cultural-sensitive social work for privileging formal theories at the expense of 'local knowledge' found in everyday practice, however, he may be suspected of committing the 'genetic fallacy' when he is read as privileging the beliefs shared and put into use by practitioners in a specific setting. In other words, Kwong's analysis may give us the impression that he automatically granted validity to the accounts that practitioners shared *because these are their accounts*. Even if we read his analysis in a more sympathetic light, we would find that he owed us an account of how to determine the validity of the accounts that practitioners shared. The problem of leaving open this issue may be brought into sharper focus by considering the following responses to Kwong's analysis.

One may imagine a defender of the received view might make the following two

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[33] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 27.

responses. [34] First, by distinguishing the context of discovery and context of validation, [35] one may limit the influence of cultural assumptions to that of the context of discovery, while arguing that the validity of the theories should be seen as an issue related to the context of validation. By the context of discovery, we mean the context related to concept formation and the formulation of hypothesis, this is to be distinguished from the context of validation, by which we mean the context that these hypothesis are subjected to validation. We can imagine the defender invoking Ernest Nagel in putting forward this point: "…the fact that the social scientist, unlike the student of inanimate nature, is able to project himself by sympathetic imagination into the phenomena he is attempting to understand, is pertinent to questions concerning the *origins* of his explanatory hypotheses but not to questions concerning their validity. His ability to enter into relations of empathy with the human actors in some social process may indeed be heuristically important in his efforts to *invent* suitable hypothesis which will explain the process. Nevertheless, his empathic identification with those individuals does not, by itself, constitute *knowledge*. The fact that he achieves such identification does not annul the need for objective evidence, assessed in accordance with logical principles that are common to all controlled inquires, to

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[34] See Ernst Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* 2d (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987) and Richard Bernstein *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976).
[35] This is a well discussed distinction in the philosophy of social sciences, however the prevalent social work literature still fails to come to terms with this discussion.

support his imputation of subjective states to those human agents."[36]

In other words, we have to separate the psychological, social and cultural processes of acquiring beliefs, and the epistemological task of determining whether these beliefs are true. Seen in this light, one of the reasons why formal theories are irrelevant may only indicate that these formal theories may not have the universality that they are thought to have. Cultural sensitivity may alert us to the danger of presupposing the validity of these imported theories. However, the true verdict depends on the validity of these theories, and for a positivist that means the empirical validation that these theories receive.

Thus, distinguishing the context of discovery and context of validation, one may respond even if we acknowledge that social work theories embodied cultural assumptions, we are not entitled to draw the conclusion that we may presuppose that these theories are invalid. Put it in another way, we may be warranted to question the validity of these theories that are regarded as saturate with cultural assumptions, however, the real test of the validity of these theories is subject to the court of empirical validation.

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[36] Ernst Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* 2d (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 484-485.

In this light, the suggestion of attending to the local understanding of practitioners may be valuable in expanding the scope where plausible hypothesis may be raised, but that has nothing to do with the validity of these hypothesis. In fact, they are subject to the court of empirical validation as any other. So Kwong's conclusions may be accused of having confused the context of discovery and the context of validation. Whether social work theories are imported or derived from the practice experience of frontline practitioners has nothing to do with the validity of these theories. Furthermore, to presume that the understanding of practitioners or so called 'practice wisdom' have attained the vigor and status of scientific knowledge that received ample empirical validation, as Kwong did, is unwarranted at best.[37]

Second, even if one insisted that cultural assumptions subtly got infiltrated into the contents of social work theories by pointing to the fact that descriptions and evaluations usually get entangled. One may defend by arguing that that may be what usually is the case, however, if we believe that we could in principle distinguish description from evaluation, fact from value, the above failure may only show that many a times social scientists fail to live up to those cherished principles. Still the

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[37] Kwong in invoking Schon did allude to a new epistemology of practice, but his account is not substantial enough to clarify in what sense this sort of practice-created knowledge deserve the claim that they are empirically proven. Leaving this issue aside, one may still wonder whether Kwong shares the positivist's conception of empirical validation.

solution is to take serious the empirical validation that the theories receive. Awareness of the above mentioned entanglement of descriptions and evaluations in practice rather heightens our consciousness that we have to be more cautious so that the validity of theories is determined by empirical evidence and not the evaluations and preferences of the social scientist. Besides, that also highlights the significance of repeatability of empirical test, so that the findings of researchers may be counter-checked by fellow researchers.

In sum, a staunch defender of the received view may acknowledge that Kwong may be right in alerting us that we should not take the validity of these imported theories for granted, but as they insisted, the final court of appeal is the empirical validation that the theories received. By distinguishing the context of discovery and context of validation, one may respond even if we acknowledge that social work theories embodied cultural assumptions, the origin of these cultural assumptions remains an issue related to the context of discovery, and that should not be confused with the validity of these theories which is concerned with the context of validation. That is to say, acknowledging that social work theories are originated in the West, does not imply that these theories could not enjoy universal application. Rather, the most important issue is not the origins of theories but their validity which is

determined by the empirical validation they receive.

From the preceding discussions, we may see how someone defending the pre-dominant view may say that their modification and fine-tuning of imported theories and skills have taken adequate considerations of cultural factors and are appropriate to the local cultural context. The true test of the cultural appropriateness of these theories is the effectiveness of such modifications in working with Chinese clients that empirical testing reveals. Facing this rejoinder, without probing into the issue of validity, Kwong may not have an effective reply.[38]

If he fails to challenge the distinction of the context of discovery and the context of validation, and the related claim that the validity of theories is solely determined by empirical validation as if we could restrict the involvement of cultural values in the domain of discovery, I would argue that his alternative account may be effectively appropriated and deflected by the pre-dominant account of cultural sensitive social work that is informed by positivistic thinking. To clarify whether the distinction of the context of discovery and the context of validation, and the positivistic conception of

[38] Kwong might respond that local knowledge already received empirical validation through its continous utilization by the practitioners, however he fail to provide an account of why these local concepts utilized by practitioners may be justified as knowledge. See Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 26.

empirical validation are as convincing as they sound, we have to consider the meta-theoretical issues of the nature of value involvement in social inquiry and the relationship of the perspectives of the researcher and researched in social explanation.

Before we turn to the discussions of the indigenization of social sciences for more inspirations, we have to look at how Kwong's failure to probe into the meta-theoretical issues mentioned above, particularly, the relationship of the perspectives of the researcher and researched in social explanation may shed light on why Kwong's account is beset by another significant issue: the relationship of local and global knowledge.

In criticizing the inadequacies of the received view of culturally-sensitive social work, Kwong proposed the alternative is to tap into the local knowledge embodied in the practice of social workers: "It will be futile to render our practice culturally sensitive by modifying imported theories and approaches since practitioners are not using formalized knowledge in the 'applied science' sense. It is only an academic exercise to produce large abstractions. Even if we succeed in customerizing these abstractions to fit the 'Chinese shoe'- and we are not sure how- what we produce will not be usable knowledge unless and until practitioners have transformed these large

abstractions into 'local knowledge' in and through practice. What is called for is to make an epistemological turn, beginning not with theories but with the empirical intervention experiences of practitioners."[39]

Kwong may be right in alerting us to the inadequacies of the received view of culturally-sensitive social work which is based on the applied science model. However, the challenge is whether his proposal to 'mine local knowledge'[40] provides an adequate answer to the issue of indigenization. In what follows we would examine how his failure to clarify the relationship of local knowledge and global knowledge may have undermined the cogency of his posed alternative. This failure, the author would contend may lead us appreciate the significance of clarifying the issue of the relationship of the researcher and researched.

Though Kwong seemed to acknowledge the role of formal theories or global knowledge, his account gives us an impression that the role of global knowledge is circumscribed and the only local knowledge of practitioners is what should be priced: "Formalized knowledge is still useful but is not usable in a direct, immediate way in practice. To be usable, such knowledge has to be transformed by practitioners in

[39] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice', *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, 1996, vol.30, 1, 27.
[40] 'Mining local knowledge' is a phrase used by Kwong Wai Man, see ibid..

response to the demand of the immediate practice situation. A new epistemology of

practice is called for. Separation between knowledge and practice in the 'applied

science' view is no longer tenable. … Knowledge creation and knowledge use take

place simultaneously in professional action. Practitioners are not just consumers of

institutionalized professional knowledge. They transform it whilst blending it with

their personal and professional experiences, particularly practice wisdom, as they

deliberate on professional action."[41]

To be fair, Kwong did recognize that knowledge and practice, thought and action

were mutually constituting in a dialectical relationship.[42] However, his account of the

relationship of local knowledge and global knowledge are at best ambiguous. Though

he criticized the received view for privileging the role of formal theories at the

expense of local knowledge, he is unclear what the problem such an understanding of

these two types of knowledge laid. Should we take him as urging us to subvert the

hierarchy of formal knowledge and local knowledge, that we should price the latter

rather than the former; or should we read him as criticizing the hierarchical view of

this relationship, that the relationship of these two types of knowledge should not be a

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[41] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 26-27.
[42] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 26.

normative one?

Basing on Kwong's text, we are not sure whether Kwong is aware of the preceding ambiguity, nor could we project what Kwong's answer would be to the above questions. Nevertheless, given the tone of Kwong's account, if the pre-dominant account is said to over-emphasize the role of formal theories, one might be lead to interpret him as fully embracing the local account and at the same time circumscribing the role of global view. Given such an interpretation of Kwong, one may wonder whether Kwong's remedy is a mirror image of the received view in the sense that local knowledge is still pit against global knowledge, and that one of them is subjugated to the other, only that this time we find formal knowledge becoming the inferior partner. To shed light on the problem of Kwong's account, we turn to the scholar that Kwong invoked, that is, Clifford Geertz, to disentangle the issue involved. By explicating Geertz's discussions of concepts of 'experience-near' accounts and 'experience-distant' accounts, we may reveal how Kwong may have neglected the complex connection of both views.

In Kwong's paper he directed our attention to the shortcoming of formalized knowledge as confining to experience-distant accounts, that is, decontextualized and

general abstractions which Kwong claimed as incapable of being directly relevant to the practitioner. However, Kwong has not explored whether it is problematic if we confine our accounts to experience-near accounts, and if so, what the problems would be. In this regard, Clifford Geertz may help us to shed light on this issue.

In one of his famous article, "From the native's point of view: on the nature of anthropological understanding", Geertz drew our attention to the double pitfalls of confining our accounts to either the perspective of the insider or that of the outsider: "Confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon."[43]

To appreciate Geerttz's point, we have to note that he is speaking of how the perspectives of the observer and that of the participant should figure in a social explanation, or in his case an ethnographical account. That should not be confused with the issues of adopting an outsider or insider's role in entering a field site, nor with the issue of whose concepts and languages should researchers employ when they describe and record their data.[44]

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[43] Clifford Geertz, **Local Knowledge** (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 57.
[44] It should be noted that pointing out that these are analytically distinct issues surely does not mean

For Geertz, 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' concepts are both indispensable for social explanation. Besides, as Geertz claimed, the relation of these two types of concept is not a normative one, that is, one should not privilege one over the other. Rather the real issue is to conceptualize the roles that these two sorts of concept should play in a social scientist's account: "To be more exact: How, in each case, ought one to deploy them so as to produce an interpretation of the way of a people lives which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer." [45]

Three points may be drawn from the above discussions. First, Geertz is clear that the social scientist's account should not simply be a replication of what the local said, that is the imperative not to be imprisoned within the mental horizons of the native. Second, his metaphor of an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer that systematically ignores how a witch thinks and how he understand himself, however, tells us that an adequate account of a social phenomenon could not by pass the concepts and self-understanding of the native. Third, in this regard, the critical

that they are unrelated.

[45] Clifford Geertz, **Local Knowledge** (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 57.

distance that experience-distant concepts create is indispensable for an interpretation of a social phenomenon.

Basing on the above discussions, we may come to see that Kwong's account may have escape the confinement to experience-distant accounts, yet it is arguable that he has successfully resisted the temptation to fall into the trap of confining to experience-near concepts. One may question whether he misunderstood the relation of the two types of concept as a normative one. In the eyes of a sympathetic critic, Kwong at least failed to clarify his position on whether he thought of the relationship of these two types of concepts should be seen as normative or not.

Regarding the issue of critical distance, at least Kwong seems to recognize the need for critical distance: "If much of what practitioners know are embodied in what they do, providing a structure for collaborative inquiry among practitioners to reflectively examine their own practice and their deliberation during practice may be one way to unravel their knowledge-in-action. *However, collaborative inquiry of this kind may run the risk of group-think and reinforce 'received knowledge'*" [46] Nevertheless, his inability to clarify the preceding issue of the proper relationship of the two types of concept gives rise to a further issue that how he could account for the

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[46] Kwong Wai Man, 'Local Knowledge, Indigenous Practice: Linking the Cultural, the Personal and the Professional in Social Work Practice,' *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 1996, vol.30, 1, 28.

critical role that formal theories may play in his account.

From the above analysis, we see that Kwong may have failed to give an adequate account of the relationship of local and global knowledge. By invoking Geertz's insights, we come to see that to tackle this difficult relation of local and global knowledge, we have to elucidate the issue of the relationship of the perspectives of the observer and that of the participant in a social explanation. Basing on Geertz's account, we may raise a further issue of how we may acknowledge the participants' accounts without sacrificing the need of critical distance. To unravel this puzzle, the author would suggest that we may turn to critical hermeneutics for insights, which is the focus of the coming chapter.

In these two sections, we have examined the problematic relationship of the genesis and validity of social work theories and skills. Evading the issue of drawing the implications of his analysis of professional imperialism for the validity of Western social work theories and skills adapted by social workers in their specific cultural contexts, Midgley has not provided clear criteria for identifying what may be counted as successful cases of indigenization nor explicated what is meant by "culturally appropriate". Thus, Midgley may have failed to elucidate the issue of how the validity

of imported theories is to be evaluated. As such, Midgley's account is at best indeterminate on the issue of indigenization, and may be subjected to different interpretations.

By critically examining Kwong Wai Man's criticism of received view, we attempt to expose the deeper theoretical issues. From the preceding analysis, we see that proponents of developing indigenous or culturally-sensitive social work have been ambiguous on the implications of the thesis of social work theories and skills as carriers of cultural assumptions. They have not spelled out clearly what the implications for the validity of these theories and skills are. Thus a positivist may welcome Midgley's cautions without conceding any of his commitments to rigorous testing. In fact, he might even prize himself for clarifying the issue of validity which has remained vague and ambiguous in most of the accounts of developing indigenous or culturally-sensitive social work. Here we may observe why the issue of validity is crucial in clarifying the nature of developing indigenous or culturally-sensitive accounts of social work. It may also shed light on why meta-theoretical discussions are significant in this regard. To further clarify the meta-theoretical issues involved in elucidating an idea of indigenization of social work, we turn to the next section.

IV

After exploring the problematic relationship of the genesis and validity of social work theories and skills in the previous sections, we come to see if we are not satisfied with construing the call of indigenization of social work as no more than a heightening of cultural sensitivity, we have to face squarely the positivistic conception of empirical validation.

In the preceding sections we have noted further elucidation of the issue involves meta-theoretical discussions of the nature of value involvement and the relationship of the perspectives of the researcher and the researched in social inquiry. In this section our goal is two-fold. First, we will try to examine how the ideal of value neutrality is intrinsically connected to the idea of empirical validation of positivism. Second, we would try to show that the prevalent understanding of the idea of 'indigenization' presupposed that the language of social explanation and normative evaluation is discontinuous. In the light of the above argument, I would suggest that these discussions may be relevant when we try to clarify the meaning of an indigenous

approach to social work values, and the conceptual and theoretical difficulties that such an endeavour may face. By clarifying whether different sets of issues were involved in discussing the meaning of indigenization in the social sciences and that of social work values, I would contend that we may have to get clear about our understanding of the nature of values, particularly the relationship of values and social meaning, which is the focus of the fourth and fifth chapters.

To pave the way for this examination we turn to the discussions of indigenization of social sciences,[47] particularly the methodological and meta-theoretical discussions pertaining to the nature of indigenization. By looking at the methodological proposal put forward by Yang Kuo Shu, one of the major proponents of the movement of indigenization of social sciences in Taiwan, we shall briefly explicate his idea of indigenous compatibility.

At the outset, I would examine how recent discussions of developing an indigenous social science in Chinese societies may help us to explicate the set of complex issues that are involved. Though the call for developing an indigenous social science can be dated back to the 30's,[48] the robust development of indigenous social

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[47] Here we shall focus on the relevant discussions in Taiwan/ Hong Kong.
[48]阮新邦 ， 〈 ”價值相關性”、”強烈價值介入論”與社會科學中國化的規範基礎 〉 載於 《 **社會**

research in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China could only be observed in the past two decades. As one of the founding fathers of this movement for indigenous social sciences, Yang Kuo Shu reviewed the achievements of these years in his "Towards an Indigenous Chinese Psychology: A Selective Review of Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Accomplishments".

Yang noted that various efforts were made by indigenous-oriented psychologists in advocating the adoption of an indigenous approach in research,[49] and considerable progress in developing an indigenous Chinese psychology has been made.[50] Facing a growing number of researches that claimed to adopt an indigenous approach, the interest of elucidating the methodological issues concerning the promotion and evaluation of indigenized psychological research in Chinese societies has become intense. Given the preceding development, the need of a yardstick that may help us to decide whether a research project is indigenous or not is felt. It is under this context

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科學本土化：多元視角解讀 》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001)， 415-454。

[49] These efforts include the holding of a large-scale interdisciplinary conference on the Sinicization of research in social and behavioural sciences in Chinese societies in 1980, and subsequent promotions including organizing research groups, conducting coordinated studies, holding academic conferences, publishing journals and books, and offering both undergraduate and graduate training programmes. See Yang Kuo Shu , 'Towards an Indigenous Chinese Psychology: A Selective Review of Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Accomplishments,' *Chinese Journal of Psychology* 41, 2, 183.

[50] I do not intend to provide a comprehensive review of indigenization of social sciences, the following discussions just trace the significant methodological dispute around Yang Kuo Shu's idea of 'indigenous compatibility' that may serve to highlight the significance of the issue of value involvement.

that Yang proposed the concept of 'indigenous compatibility'.

According to Yang, the concept of 'indigenous compatibility' is meant to capture the requirement that indigenous research should be congruent with the process, mechanisms and patterns that underlie the native's activities and the context that these activities are embedded.[51] Yang stated that his concept of indigenous compatibility is based on a theory of the formation, stability, and change of a cultural group's common psychological and behavioural characteristics that emphasize the interactions of cultural and ecological environment.

For Yang, a cultural group's psychological and behavioural characteristics (G) are shaped by the interactions of the physiological and psychological mechanisms and behavioural strategies of the group (E) with its subsistence economy (B), social-cultural-historical complex (C), and socialization practices (F).[52] As active agents that interact and transform their environment, a cultural group's ethnic evolution and heredity (D) is said to interact with the ecological environment (A) that the cultural group is situated bi-directionally. The results of these interactions is said to determine the basic physiological and psychological mechanisms and behavioural

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[51] Yang Kuo Shu, 'Towards an Indigenous Chinese Psychology: A Selective Review of Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Accomplishments,' *Chinese Journal of Psychology* 41, 2, 185.
[52] The following explication is based on ibid., 184-188.

strategies of the group (E). (E) interacts with (A) to form certain type of subsistence economy (B) that includes the production mode, production means and demographic characteristics of this cultural group. The results of the interactions of (B) and (E) is said to constitute the social structure, cultural constituents, intellectual traditions, and historical experiences of the group, that is, its social-cultural-historical complex (C). The socialization practices of the group (F) are taken as the results of the second order interaction of (E) with (B) and (C).[53]

As critics observed, one of the purposes of Yang's cultural-ecological, interactionistic theory of the formation, stability, and change of a cultural group's common psychological and behavioural characteristics is to provide initial grounds for developing indigenized social research.[54] If we can model after the success of natural scientist in finding universal laws in our social behaviours and social phenomenon, as mainstream social scientists believed, then the particular cultural ecology developed as a result of the interactions of human and his environment may not be relevant to social research. If that is the case, as Yeh Chi Jeng puts it, the

[53] For a graphical presentation of Yang's scheme see Yang Kuo Shu, 'Towards an Indigenous Chinese Psychology: A Selective Review of Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Accomplishments,' *Chinese Journal of Psychology* 41, 2, 186.

[54]葉啟政，〈 ”本土契合性”的另類思考 〉 ， 《 本土心理學研究 》 8，1997，121-139。I was called to attend this point reading Prof. Yuen Sun Pong's analysis, see阮新邦， 〈 從詮釋論的角度評楊國樞的本土化社會科學觀 〉 載於 《 社會科學本土化：多元視角解讀 》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001)，55。

proposal of indigenizing social researches is both unnecessary and impossible.[55] Thus, we may come to appreciate Yang's effort in elaborating the complex interactions of human and its cultural ecology.

By his analysis, Yang compels us to seriously consider the implications of the complexity and diversity of behavioural pattern developed by different cultural groups for social research. Believing that psychology tends to be defined in a way that reflects the cultural background and value orientations of the psychologist who does the defining, Yang call our attention to two issues, first, the need to critically examine the appropriation of imported psychological concepts, theories, methods, and tools; and second, the need of developing indigenous psychological research.

According to Yang, the degree of indigenousness of the indigenous research activities (J) and the indigenous concepts, methods, tools, findings, and theories that result (K) is said to depend on the compatibility of (J) and (K) with the subject's psychological and behavioural characteristics (H) and that of the researcher's (I) along with (G), (F), (E), (C), and (B).

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[55] 葉啟政 ， 〈 ”本土契合性”的另類思考 〉 ， 《 本土心理學研究 》 8 ， 1997 ， 121。

Based on preceding scheme of the concept of 'indigenous compatibility', Yang further delineated the concept of indigenous compatibility into three types: First, reflective compatibility, that is the compatibility of indigenous research activities (J) and the indigenous concepts, methods, tools, findings, and theories that result (K) with the researcher's psychological and behavioural characteristics (I). [J-I, K-I] Second, focal compatibility, which includes the compatibility of (K) and (J) with subject's psychological and behavioural characteristics (H), the cultural group's psychological and behavioural characteristics (G), and the basic physiological and psychological mechanisms and behavioural strategies of the group (E). [J-H, K-H, J-G, K-G, J-E, K-E]   It should be noted that the relationship of the researcher and the researched belongs to this category, where Yang conceptualize as the relationship of subject's psychological and behavioural characteristics (H) and Researcher's indigenous research accomplishments (K) , that is, K-H and researcher's indigenous research activities (J) and (H), that is J-H. The third sub-category of indigenous compatibility is contextual compatibility. Yang defined contextual compatibility as the compatibility of (K) and (J) with subsistence economy (B), the social structure, cultural constituents, intellectual traditions, and historical experiences of the group, that is, its social-cultural-historical complex (C) and the socialization practices of the group (F).

After explicating Yang's conceptualization of 'indigenous compatibility', we turn to Yang's discussion of 'emic-etic' approaches and their relation with indigenous compatibility.[56] Yang argued that the distinction of 'emic-etic' approaches is faulted with ambiguities. Yang pointed out that this distinction, which was first expounded by Pike, may have covered a number of different issues, and he proposed to further distinguish three issues that may be related but are conceptually distinct so as to give a more lucid account of the problem. The first issue concerns whether the phenomenon investigated is specific to a particular culture or not, that is whether its object is cultural-specific or non-cultural specific. The second issue pertains to whose perspective is adopted by the researcher in observing, analyzing and understanding her researcher object. Is it the observer's perspective or that of the subject's view that is adopted. The third issue relates to questions of research design. It concerns whether the research focus on a single culture or a comparative approach is chosen. In other words, the third issue concerns whether a mono-cultural or cross- cultural research strategy is chosen.

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[56] The following explication is based on楊國樞， 〈 心理學研究的本土契合性及其相關問題 〉 載 於 《 社會科學本土化：多元視角解讀 》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001)，33-39。

Yang developed an elaborate typology of the various sorts of studies based on the preceding three parameters, thus giving a classification of eight different types of studies. [57] He then attempted to assess the relative degree of indigenous compatibility of these different types of studies, arguing that mono-cultural studies of cultural-specific phenomenon adopting subject's point of view has the highest degree of indigenous compatibility, while cross-cultural researches of non-specific phenomenon adopting observer's perspective is the lowest on a scale of indigenous compatibility.

Given Yang's classification, we may not have any disagreement with his conclusions that mono-cultural studies of cultural-specific phenomenon adopting subject's point of view has the highest degree of indigenous compatibility. However, the crucial issue seems to lie elsewhere. As critics noted, Yang may have evaded the issue of clarifying what is meant by adopting an observer's perspective and what it means when we say we adopt the subject's view. [58] In other words, Yang seemed to have presupposed that the meaning of adopting an observer's perspective or that of

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[57] For instance, mono-cultural research of cultural specific phenomenon from the subject's view, mono-cultural research of non-cultural specific phenomenon from the subject's view, cross-cultural research of cultural specific phenomenon from the observer's perspective and cross-cultural research of non-cultural specific phenomenon from the observer's perspective.

[58] 阮新邦，〈 從詮釋論的角度評楊國樞的本土化社會科學觀 〉 載於 《 **社會科學本土化：多元視角解讀** 》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001)，70-71。

the subject's is clear. However, from our discussions of Geertz in the previous chapter, we see that this is a complex issue.[59]

V

To further explore this issue, we turn to another issue raised by Yang's critics. In his response to Yang's seminal article[60], Yeh Chi Jeng raised the question whether Yang has not paid enough attention to the status of the social scientist's interpretation of the meaning of the subject's behaviour as second order interpretations in his discussions of 'indigenous compatibility'. Yeh pointed out that Yang's emphasis of compatibility and congruence may imply the issue of how a researcher can provide an adequate interpretation of the subject's subjective meaning that underlies the latter's psychology and behaviour.[61] In calling our attention to this issue, Yeh raised the question that the social scientist's understanding of his subject is a second order interpretation, and we have to account for the relationship of the social scientist's second order interpretation and the first order interpretation of the subject.

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[59] Here it may be helpful to recall the three points we drawn from the preceding discussions. First, the social scientist's account should not simply be a replication of what the local said. Second, an adequate account of a social phenomenon could not by pass the concepts used by the subject and self-understanding of the subject. Third, critical distance is indispensable for an interpretation of a social phenomenon.

[60] 楊國樞，〈心理學研究的本土契合性及其相關問題〉 載於 《社會科學本土化：多元視角解讀》，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司。 2001)，1-50。

[61] 葉啟政，〈"本土契合性"的另類思考〉，《本土心理學研究》 8，1997，126。

Yang was then criticized that his emphasis of the compatibility of subject's psychological and behavioural characteristics (H) and researcher's indigenous research accomplishments (K) , that is, K-H and researcher's indigenous research activities (J) and (H), that is J-H may be ambiguous.[62] Yeh seems to point out two possible interpretations of Yang's account. First, it may mean that the social scientist's account should attempt to stay close to the first order interpretation of the subject. Second, it may turn into a positivist stance. The emphasis of the compatibility of J-H and K-H may be construed as the requirement to capture the intentions of the actors and the regularity that underlies the actors' behaviours, and realistically explain their behaviours in causal terms.

In responding to Yeh, Yang attempted to circumscribe Yeh's criticism by re-locating the issue of second order interpretation under his framework. After acknowledging Yeh's in-depth analysis, Yang pointed out that Yeh's discussions basically fall under the scope of his concept of focal compatibility, and thus it is not an alternative thinking of 'indigenous compatibility' as Yeh claimed.[63]

[62]葉啟政，〈 "本土契合性"的另類思考 〉 ，《 本土心理學研究 》 8，1997，127。

[63]楊國樞，〈 三論本土契合性：進一步的澄清 〉 ，《 本土心理學研究 》 8，1997， 198-201。

In examining Yang's response, it seems that Yang has down played the significance of the issue that Yeh raised. According to Yuen Sun Pong, the issue of second order interpretation pertains to how we should conceptualize the meaning of the object under scrutiny. If the language of social scientist is the expert language developed by particular scientific community, and the first order interpretation of the subject is constituted by the everyday language of the subject, the issue of second order interpretation may be seen as the relationship of these two languages.[64] That is to say, we have to deal with the question whether we could conceptualize the meaning of social phenomenon solely from the researcher's perspective bypassing the subject's understanding. Or should we recognize that the meaning of social phenomenon is constituted by the everyday language of the subject, that we may face the danger of losing the object of our investigation when we bypass the subject's understanding.

In the light of the preceding discussions, Yang may seem to have overlooked that the social world that social scientist investigates is a pre-interpreted reality, and the second order interpretations of the social scientist are themselves interpretations of the first-order interpretations of everyday common sense. But for Yang this may not be a

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[64]阮新邦，〈 從詮釋論的角度評楊國樞的本土化社會科學觀 〉 載於 《 **社會科學本土化 : 多元 視角解讀** 》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001) , 71。

real issue, if he believes that by adopting a detached theoretical attitude, he may undistortively depict social phenomenon in a value neutral way.

Seen in this light, the real issue is not whether Yang gave sufficient attention to the issue of second order interpretation, but how to account for the complex relationship of the perspectives of the observer and the subject, particularly the value involvement of the social researcher. Here it may be helpful to distinguish two questions. First, could Yang by pass the first order interpretations of the subject in conceptualizing social phenomenon. Second, could Yang adopt a detached value neutral stance in conceptualizing social phenomenon constituted by first order interpretations of the subject. In other words is it theoretically possible and desirable that researcher is free from the value involvement that may bias his description and explanation.

Recalling his rejoinder to Yeh, we saw that Yang may feel that his account could take good care of the first question. The reason that underlies his confidence might be that he is convinced of his affirmative answer to the second question. To further explore this point, we need to examine another criticism of Yang.

Yang's concept of indigenous compatibility was criticized as adopting the standpoint of early logical positivist.[65] As Yang's rejoinder shown it may not do Yang justice in framing his discussion of indigenous compatibility as a direct appropriation of the tenets of logical positivism. Yang particularly emphasize his careful use of the concepts of 'compatible', 'congruent', 'congruous' etc. to avoid giving the reader the impression that he is advocating a simple correspondence, and that it is unfair to put up 'a strawman' of early logical positivist as a label to capture his position.[66] To clarify in what sense Yang may be seen as expressing a positivistic stance, the author find Yuen's distinction of two senses of positivism helpful.

In discussing the preceding dispute, Yuen distinguished two senses of positivism: first, positivism in a narrow sense and second, positivism of a broad sense.[67] By positivist in a narrow sense, Yuen meant the position that strictly accepts the correspondence theory of truth and the other related meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism.[68] For a social scientist who adheres to such a position, the truth and falsity of a social explanation is understood as whether there exists a simple correspondence

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[65] 黃光國，〈 本土契合性：學術研究的方向或學術研究的判準 〉，《 本土心理學研究 》 8，1997， 161。

[66]楊國樞，〈 三論本土契合性：進一步的澄清 〉，《 本土心理學研究 》 8，1997，206-209。

[67]阮新邦，〈 從詮釋論的角度評楊國樞的本土化社會科學觀 〉 載於 《 社會科學本土化：多元視角解讀 》 ，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001)，56-57。

[68] See next section for further discussions.

between the explanation and the social reality the former seeks to explain. In other words, for a positivist in a narrow sense, the validity of a social explanation depends on the empirical validation that it receives. As for positivist in a broader sense, Yuen meant the position that adheres to the principle of value neutrality, and social reality is to be understood monologically. For a positivist in a broad sense, the meaning of the research object is independent of the value framework of the researcher. Besides, presupposing the existence of an objective reality, the researcher understands the external reality in a monological mode. That is, the researcher conceptualizes the research object solely from his perspective in value neutral terms. Finally, researcher should see the provision of causal explanations of the phenomenon under investigation as the highest ideal.

The major difference between the two senses of positivism that Yuen puts forward is a difference in focus.[69] The concern of positivism in a narrow sense is epistemological, that is, the focus is on how positivism answers the question "what is knowledge?" As for the concept of positivism in a broad sense, it helps us to capture the prevalent understanding of value-attitude that informs contemporary social life. Taking for granted the distinction of fact and value, a positivist in a broad sense may

[69]阮新邦，〈 邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(上)：實證主義的迷思與強烈價值介入論 〉 載於 《 詮釋取向的社會工作實踐 》 (新加坡：八方，2004)，16。

not emphasis a simple correspondence between social explanation and the empirical world, yet, he or she would still maintain that the social investigator should adopt a disinterested attitude and conceptualize the explanation of social phenomenon in value-neutral terms. This is because he or she shares the prevalent positivistic understanding of the nature of value and the associated worldview that stresses disengaged reason.[70]

Given such distinctions, we may understand why Yang thinks that to construe his position as that of an early logical positivist is unfair. If we consider Yang's careful coining of terms like 'congruence', 'compatibility', indeed it is hardly accurate to accuse him of adopting a positivist position in a narrow sense. As Yang himself responded, such a move may seem to be no more than erecting a straw man that serve the critic's purpose. Nevertheless, though we may not see Yang as a positivist in a narrow sense, he may be seen as a positivist in a broad sense. The crucial point is that Yang still embraces a value-neutral, disengaged perspective to understand social phenomenon. Differently put, he still adheres to the principle of value-neutrality and monological understanding.

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[70] For further discussions see阮新邦，〈 邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(上)：實證主義的迷思與強烈價值介入論 〉 載於 《 **詮釋取向的社會工作實踐** 》 (新加坡：八方，2004)， 61-86。

After examining a number of criticisms of Yang's concept of indigenous compatibility, we see that Yang may still be haunted by the positivistic conception of empirical validation. Seen in this light, his down playing of the significance of the issue of second order interpretation may also be an expression of his positivist stance. Thus, Yang may not have made an adequate explication of the relationship of the observer's perspective and that of the subject. Given the preceding analysis, we may see that the adequacy of his account of indigenization of social sciences may in part depend on the principle of value-neutrality that underlies his concept of indigenous compatibility. Thus, in the light of the discussions of this section, how one may evaluate the adequacy of the concept of indigenous compatibility may depend on the validity of the principle of value-neutrality. To pave the way for a critical examination of the principle of value-neutrality, we need to unveil the meta-theoretical assumptions that underpin positivism. In this regard, Yuen has done us a great service by summarizing the major tenets of positivism. In the next section we shall explicate his analysis.

VI

In what follows we will examine part of the strategies that Yuen deployed to call into question the positivistic conception of empirical validation. The meta-theoretical presuppositions of positivism are thought to have the status of self-evident truth in our commonsense. This may be one of the major reasons why the positivistic conception of empirical validation is hard to exorcize. So, if we are to dismantle the hold of positivistic thinking on our mind, one crucial task is to unmask the meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism. In this light, part of Yuen's argument is deconstructive in that it attempts to free us from the enchantment of the positivistic conception of empirical validation. To begin this difficult task, Yuen first leads us to consider what the so-called rigourous verification procedures of positivism may mean.[71]

First of all, Yuen alerts us to a common misunderstanding. First, there is a confusion of 'positivism' as a meta-theoretical position with 'empirical research' as a method of social investigation. Second, there is a conflation of the use of survey method and statistical techniques and vigorous empirical researches. Given the distinction of 'positivism', 'empirical research' and 'research methods and techniques', we may make the following notes: First, the sophisticated methods and

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[71] The following reconstruction is based on阮新邦，〈邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(上)：實證主義的迷思與強烈價值介入論〉 載於 《詮釋取向的社會工作實踐》 (新加坡：八方，2004)，11-15。

techniques employed in measurements and surveys are only means employed in empirical researches. Second, the use of these means has no necessary connection with any meta-theoretical position. That is, what methods and techniques a social researcher employs is not a reliable indicator of the researcher's meta-theoretical position.[72]

Distinguishing the sophisticated methods and techniques employed in measurements and surveys from the meta-theoretical assumptions, Yuen lead us see that the so called rigourous verification procedures of positivism presumes the existence of an independent world that investigators may check against. In other words, we should not confuse the idea of the existence of an independent world that investigators may check against with the use of sophisticated methods and techniques. Rather, the existence of an objective reality that is independent of the knower, the tenet of simple realism, is one of the meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism. The other meta-theoretical assumptions are the correspondence theory of truth, and the objectivity or inter-subjectivity of sense perception.[73]

By the correspondence theory of truth, we mean that the truth and falsity of a

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[72] See also Bourdieu's discussion of this issue, see Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 224-235.

[73] Yuen adopted and modified the analysis of Mary Hesse, see 阮新邦，〈 邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(上)：實證主義的迷思與強烈價值介入論 〉 載於 《 詮釋取向的社會工作實踐 》 (新加坡：八方，2004)，注十, 53。

statement is defined by its relationship with an objective reality. That is, if a statement corresponds to the objective reality, then it is true, if not, then it is false. As for the objectivity or inter-subjectivity of sense perception, we mean the objectivity of our observation is grounded on our sense perception. Since we see, hear, feel the same thing with our sense perception, whether our observations are objective may be counter checked by other investigators.

Basing on these assumptions we may further draw a distinction between statement of fact and value judgment. Statement of fact can be true of false, but value judgment cannot be said to be true or false, they may just be the expression of our subjective attitudes. Given this distinction, if the role of the social researcher is to describe and explain the social world as it is, it is clear that the researcher should strive to be free from the distorting influence of values. In other words, social researcher should adopt a value-neutral detached attitude when conducting their scientific investigations.

Unearthing these meta-theoretical assumptions enable us to critically examine these tenets. If these assumptions underlie what we called the vigorous verification procedures of positivism, these procedures are not as solid and vigorous as we used to believe. That is to say, if the positivist idea of empirical validation turns on the

acceptance of these meta-theoretical assumptions, the adequacy of the verification

procedures of positivism may not be stronger than the grounds that these assumptions

have. [74]

Understanding the above point allows us to appreciate an important observation

that Yuen made. He pointed out that these assumptions are considered inadequate and

were discarded by philosophers and social theorists,[75] nevertheless they still haunted

the mind of most mainstream empirical researchers. The reason for this may be that,

this view of knowledge fits our common sense understanding, particular the fact-

value distinction, which still has a strong hold on our mind.[76]

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[74] Yuen's point reminds me of a passage from Being and Time quoted by David Hoy: "If, when one is engaged into a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual interpretation, one likes to appeal to what 'stands there', then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious (*selbstverstandliche*), undiscussed assumption (Vormeinung) of the interpreter, which necessary lies in every interpretive approach as that which has already been 'taken for granted' interpretation as such, that is, as that which is pre-given through the fore-having, for-sight, and the fore-conception." (Heidegger **Being and Time**, 192 quoted in David Couzens Hoy, 'Heidegger and the hermeneutic turn,' in **The Cambridge Companion To Heidegger** Charles Guignon ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 187.)

[75] In 1977 under the title of 'swan song for positivism' Frederick Suppe wrote: "Virtually all of the positivistic treatment of science has come under sustained attack since the 1950s… Gradually the cumulative effect of these challenges has been that these other positivistic analyses are, or are coming to be, widely viewed as inadequate. Thus the last vestiges of positivistic philosophy of science are disappearing from the philosophical landscape…" see Frederick Suppe, **The Structure of Scientific Theories** 2d. (Illini Book, 1977), 619. In the field of social theory, Richard Bernstein's **The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory**, published in 1976, has portrayed the tenets of social scientists that model their disciplines after the natural sciences and three schools that have challenged the position of the former.

[76] Putnam, **Reason, Truth and History**, pointed out that the fact-value dichotomy is a cultural institution, "I mean to suggest that it is an unfortunate fact that the received answer will go on being the received answer for quite some time regardless of what philosophers may say about it, and regardless of whether or not the answer is *right*. Even if I could convince you that the fact-value dichotomy is without rational basis,…still the next time you went out into the street, or to a cocktail party, or had a discussion at some deliberative body of which you happen to be a member, you would find someone saying to you 'Is that supposed to be a statement of fact or a value judgment?' The view that there is no fact of the matter as to whether or not things are good or bad or better or worse, etc. has, in a sense, become *institutionalized*." See Hilary Putnam, **Reason, Truth and History** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 127-128. We shall further discuss this and related issues in the next two chapters.

A perceptive reader may note that even we have unveiled the meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism and called into question their adequacy, we have still not confronted the principle that social researchers should be value-neutral, and the related assumption of a fact-value dichotomy. In the next two chapters the author will try to examine these issues. Since this is a long chapter, the author would now like to give a brief summary of the last three sections.

In sections four and five, through an explication of Yang Kuo Shu's idea of indigenous compatibility and an examination of a number of significant criticisms of his view, the author attempted to demonstrate how efforts of elucidating the meaning of indigenization of social sciences may be constrained by a positivistic conception of empirical validation. In this section, by reconstructing Yuen Sun Pong's arguments we have unearthed the meta-theoretical assumptions of the positivistic conception of empirical validation.

But before we move on, we can anticipate a criticism that we have made an illegitimate move. In this chapter we have identified the relationship of the prevalent understanding of 'indigenization' with a positivistic conception of empirical

validation and the principle of value-neutrality. I would suggest that these discussions may be relevant when we try to clarify the meaning of an indigenous approach to social work values, and the conceptual and theoretical difficulties that such an endeavour may face. However, critics may not concur. These critics will tend to raise the following question: "Even if we grant that your analysis is convincing, that the critique of the positivistic conception of empirical validation may shed light on the issue of indigenization of social work, however, that remains a discussion at the level of social explanation. But when you directly apply that to a discussion of social work values, are you not ignoring a distinction of explanation and prescription, are there not a distinction of fact and value?" Putting it differently, critics may charge that we have made a grave confusion, we have confused the level of explanation and that of prescription, and the implication is that no matter what conclusions we may arrive at the level of explanation, it is irrelevant to our normative discussions. In a nutshell, it is fallacious to jump from the level of explanation to that of prescription.

In the next two chapters I would sought to provide a response. But before we proceed, the author would like to make some preliminary observations on this sort of criticism. Recalling our discussion of the two senses of positivism in the previous section, we noted that the concept of positivism in a broad sense helps us to capture

the prevalent understanding of value-attitude that informs contemporary social life. The author will suggest that we may understand our critics as accepting the prevalent positivistic understanding of the nature of value and the associated worldview that stresses disengaged reason. Taking for granted the distinction of fact and value, our critics conceive our investigation as hopelessly confused. This is because he or she shares the prevalent positivistic understanding of the nature of value. So, to offer an adequate rejoinder to our critics, we have to articulate the philosophical assumptions that inform such understanding of the nature of value. By clarifying the predominant understanding of the nature of values in modern society, the author tries to unearth and critically examine the philosophical assumptions that inform the above challenge in the next chapter. To this we now turn.

Chapter Three

The Nature of Social Work Values in the Context of Modern Societies

I

At the end of chapter two, the author suggested that the prevalent positivistic understanding of the nature of value may underpin a forceful challenge to the present project. Hence, we have to articulate the philosophical assumptions of the preceding understanding of the nature of value in order to offer an adequate defense of our investigation. By now the author would like to suggest that the articulation of the philosophical assumptions of the positivistic understanding of the nature of value may also help us to elucidate the discussions of social work values. So, in this chapter I will turn to an overlooked issue: the nature of social work values. I would argue the prevalent discussions of the justification of social work values failed to attend to the nature of social work values. Basing on the preceding analysis, I would further argue that we may clarify the predominant understanding of the nature of social work values by placing the discourse of social work values in the context of modern societies. By invoking MacIntyre's account of morality in modern societies, I would argue that the

predominant understanding of social work values is 'emotivist' in nature.

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II

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In the introductory chapter we have noted that discussions of the profession's

ethics may be said to undergo a number of phases. For a time, discussions of values of

social work usually take the form of a 'list' approach- the compilation of a list of

values and principles that claim to guide social work practice normatively. The 'Seven

Principles' proposed by Felix Biestek is a particular influential example.[1] The list of

'Individualization', 'Purposeful Expression of Feelings', 'Controlled Emotional

Involvement', 'Acceptance', 'Non-judgmental Attitude', 'User Self-determination'

and 'Confidentiality', as noted by Sarah Banks, is adapted and modified by much of

the literature on the subject.[2] However, the inadequacy of this approach is

increasingly acknowledged among concerned students of social work ethics.[3]

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[1] Felix Biestek, *The Case Work Relationship* (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1957).

[2] Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 25. Though different authors may have different lists of specific core values, it is observed that there is considerable consistency among these formulations. Frederic Reamer's *Social Work Values and Ethics* provided a list of commonly cited core values with fourteen items. Some of Biestek's principles and some others values like client empowerment, equal opportunity, commitment to social change and social justice are included, see Frederic Reamer, *Social Work Values and Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 21.

[3] See for instance the discussions of Harold Lewis, 'Ethical Assessment', *Social Casework* 1984,vol. 65, no.4, 203-211; Frederic Reamer, *Social Work Values and Ethics* (New York: Columbia University

Recognizing the inadequacies of the 'list' approach to social work values poses a challenge to the social work community to supersede this approach and come to a better treatment. In the early eighties, a number of significant texts appeared, all sought to meet the above challenge to give a better account of social work values.[4] A common response of these efforts is to draw on the resources of moral philosophy to provide the philosophical backup that may place the core social work values in an ordered ethical system. The achievements of these efforts were nicely summarized by Frederic Reamer.

According to Frederic Reamer, the third phase of a century's development was characterized as a phrase of the emergence of ethical theory and decision-making.[5] We have also observed that this period of development may also be the time the profession came to acknowledge the significance and necessity of inspecting the philosophical justification of its core values and principles. Drawing on contemporary discussions of ethical theories, a group of prominent writers in the eighties attempt to

Press, 1999); Margaret Rhodes, *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Publisher, 1986); Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

[4] See Frank Loewenberg, *Ethical Decisions for Social Work Practice* (Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1982); Margaret Rhodes, *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Publisher, 1986); Frederic Reamer, **Ethical Dilemmas in Social Service** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

[5] Frederic Reamer, 'Evolution of Social Work Ethics,' *Social Work* 1998, 43, 488-500.

formulate systematic frameworks based on universal moral principles for justifying

the value base of the profession and providing guidance when conflicts of principles

arise in practice situations.

It seems that the achievement of this period may have convinced some social

work scholars that the issue of the justification of social work values was given

adequate treatment. The following excerpt from Reamer's 'The Evolution of Social

Work Ethics' may be a telling example.

After a review of how the ethical concerns of the social work community

developed through an initial stage of moralistic preoccupation with clients' values to a

fourth stage of the maturation of ethical standards and risk management that provide

comprehensive ethical guidelines for practice in a century's time, Reamer concluded

this development in a triumphant tone: "Changes in social workers' understanding of

and approach to ethical issues represent one of the most significant developments in

the profession's century-long history. What began as fairly modest and superficial

concern about moral issues in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries has

evolved into an ambitious attempt to grasp and resolve ethical issues. Social workers'

early preoccupation with their clients' morality is now overshadowed by social

workers' efforts to identify and dissect ethical dilemmas, apply thoughtful decision-making tools, manage ethics-related risks that could lead to litigation, and confront ethical misconduct in the profession. These changes are to be celebrated as social work commemorates its centennial anniversary….As the profession celebrates its 100th anniversary, social workers can be proud of their increasingly mature understanding of the complex ethical issues practitioners face."[6]

In the proceeding review, Reamer seems to have presumed that the vexing problem of the justification of the profession's values is no longer an issue, and so he moved on to celebrate the success of the 'real business' of tackling ethical decision-making, managing ethics-related risks, and confronting ethical misconducts. No doubt, in terms of comprehensiveness and sophistication, the discussions of ethical issues of the social work community have moved a long way in the past three decades. But to what extent the issue of the justification of social work values was given adequate treatment is still a question that remains to be answered. Or at least this is what I would contend.

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[6] Frederic Reamer, 'Evolution of Social Work Ethics,' *Social Work* 1998, 43, 496-497. See also Frederic Reamer, *Ethical Standards In Social Work: A Review of The NASW Code of Ethics* (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 1998).

Apart from the preceding discussion that might seem to paint a rosy picture, there are voices that the discussions of social work values and ethics in the earlier period were too decontextualized. The discussion was criticized as focusing too much on the individual level, hence neglecting the social and political context that social work is situated. Particularly attentions have directed charges to the neglect of the oppressive structures of society and the political dimension of social work practice.[7] In the nineties, the rising waves of marketization and consumer rights have tremendous impact on the social service system, and the fragmentation of social services system brought grave changes to the practice of social work.[8] These social and institutional changes fostered discussions of the relevance of traditional social work values to the new scenario.

The preceding critical questioning was coupled by challenges with more philosophical favour. 'Principlism', the idea that the task of professional ethics was to develop normative principle-based system for guiding ethical practice, was under

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[7] This is based on Richard Hughman and David Smith and Sarah Banks's views, see Richard Hughman and David Smith, 'Ethical Issues in Social Work: An Overview,' in *Ethical Issues in Social Work*, ed. Richard Hughman and David Smith, (London: Routledge, 1995), 1-12, and Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), chaps. 2 and 3.

[8] Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Michael Horne, *Values in Social Work*, **2d.** (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 94-97; John Harris, *The Social Work as Business: The State of Welfare* (London: Routledge, 2003).

ethics) place too much stress on actions (as opposed to the person doing the action), the rational and impartial nature of ethical decision-making and the universality of principles."[9] These remarks plainly drew a stark contrast with that of Reamer's account we read above. Reamer's vision, seen in this light, was based on the assumption that developing principle-based system was helpful. However, Reamer's optimism met criticisms that challenged whether Reamer did successfully justify his account. Margaret Rhodes has pointed out that Reamer had failed to provide compelling reasons for accepting his account that derived from the works of Alan Gewirth rather than tapping resources from some other philosophers.[10]

One of the issues that Banks noted will be pursed further in the following discussions: the universality of principles. Acknowledging that there are several moral/political frameworks to choose from, Margaret Rhodes advocated the need of dialogue when social workers deal with moral issues. This existence of contending frameworks is also noted by Hughman and Smith: "The point is that the contemporary pantheon of ethical principles may be as internally contradictory as any which preceded it. Contention is inbuilt."[11]

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[9] Sarah Banks, *Ethics and Values in Social Work* 2d (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 42.
[10] Margaret Rhodes, *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Publisher, 1986).
[11] Richard Hughman and David Smith, 'Ethical Issues in Social Work: An Overview,' in *Ethical Issues in Social Work* ed. Richard Hughman and David Smith, London: Routledge, 1995), 8.

pantheon of ethical principles may be as internally contradictory as any which preceded it. Contention is inbuilt."[11]

To account for the situation, Hughman and Smith invoked the works of MacIntyre: "The difficulty with attempts to list the ethical principles that ought to inform social work practice- and the difficulty with any such list that we can imagine- can, according to MacIntyre, be traced back to the failure of the philosophers of the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment to provide a rational basis for morality which would command general public assent. The principles of professional social work ethics are necessarily derived from more general ethical propositions, as Butrym made clear. MacIntyre argues that a genuinely shared morality requires a justification in a shared conception of the purpose and meaning of human life. Without such a conception principles of ethics are bound to lack universality, and there will be no way of conclusively resolving competing ethical claims."[12]

So they conclude: "If attempts to state universal ethical principles are bound to fail because they cannot refer to a shared general conception of social and moral good, are we left with the kind of post-modernist relativism which suggests that there is no

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[11] Richard Hughman and David Smith, 'Ethical Issues in Social Work: An Overview,' in *Ethical Issues in Social Work* ed. Richard Hughman and David Smith, London: Routledge, 1995), 8.

[12] Richard Hughman and David Smith, 'Ethical Issues in Social Work: An Overview,' in *Ethical Issues in Social Work*, ed. Richard Hughman and David Smith, (London: Routledge, 1995),

solid ground, no foundation on which we can build, as a basis for establishing ethical preferences?"[13]

Apart from acknowledging that there are contending moral/political frameworks, there was another issue that deserved our attention. As Banks noted Rhodes was one of the few pioneers who saw the relevance of a virtue-based approach for social work ethics.[14] In the direction of developing a virtue-based approach for social work ethics, we observed there were reflections on the popular understanding of social work values as the preferences of the social work community codified in its code of practice.

Banks in an article discussing the future of professional ethics of social work brought out a preliminary account of an alternative understanding of social work values. In citing Edgar's criticism of the BASW and NASW codes for failing to make the relationship of the code and the evolving ethical tradition of social work, Banks put forward the idea that values should be seen as part of a dynamic ethical tradition: 'A profession will be underpinned by its own traditions and it is precisely the ethical tradition to which a code should appeal in order to ground its interpretation and

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[13] Richard Hughman and David Smith, 'Ethical Issues in Social Work: An Overview,' in **Ethical Issues in Social Work**, ed. Richard Hughman and David Smith, (London: Routledge, 1995), 10.

[14] Sarah Banks, **Ethics and Values in Social Work** 2d (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 44.

reinterpretation. The NASW and BASW codes corrupt this relationship by diverting

their grounding to the professional associations.'[15]

If we adopted this understanding we have to face the problem of how to

conceptualize these values embodied in the evolving practice of the profession's

tradition/s.[16] However, one of the serious problems that we have to face is that, this

seemed to contradict our observation that the belief in the universality of principles

has broken down. The reason for this is that, to speak of an ethical tradition to which a

code could appeal seemed to presuppose a shared general conception of social and

moral good that was not in sight. Seen in this light, we may spot some of the

underdeveloped areas in social work ethics. The predominant discussions of social

work values used to focus on normative theorizing with little regard of

meta-theoretical issues.[17] Hence, there were little discussions on the nature of values

and the philosophical assumptions that informed the prevalent discussion. In this

regard, a few scholars who sought to draw insights from a postmodern perspective for

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[15] Andrew Edgar, 'Narrating social Work,' in *Ethics and the Professions* R. Chadwick ed., (Aldershot : Avebury, 1994) quoted in Sarah Banks, 'Professional Ethics in Social Work-What Future?,' *British Journal of Social Work* 1998, vol.28, 228.

[16] Scholars have different interpretations of the ethical traditions that inform social work in Britain and the United States. See Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 69-79. The idea that values should be seen as part of a dynamic ethical tradition has significant bearing on our conceptualization of 'an indigenous value base for social work practice'. This is because it implies that in articulating an indigenous value base for social work practice, we have to spell out the ethical traditions that inform the local practice.

[17] Larry May has made significant contributions by bringing social theoretical perspectives on issues in professional ethics, see Larry May, *The Socially Responsive Self: Social Theory and Professional Ethics* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1996).

social work ethics were noticeable exceptions.[18]

However, if we did not engage with the meta-theoretical issues of understanding the nature of values in the modern context, it is doubtful that we have the theoretical and conceptual resources to clarify the matter at hand. In this regard, the case of Hughman and Smith is revealing. Even though they invoked MacIntyre's analysis of the predicament of contemporary moral discourses, they did not attend to the analysis of the nature of moral judgment that MacIntyre put forward. Yet, according to MacIntyre, it was precisely a certain conception of moral judgment that constituted this predicament. Hence, it is not unreasonable that one may be dubious that whether one could fully appreciate MacIntyre's analysis of the predicament of contemporary moral discourses, without attending to his discussions of meta-theoretical issues that underlied his analysis. In what follows the author would attempt to demonstrate how by attending to this level of analysis may help us to explain the internal tensions of a

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[18] In their essay, 'A Postmodern Perspective on Professional Ethics' Amy Rossiter, Issac Prilleltensky and Richard Walsh-Bowers argued that the predominant conception of professional ethics in social work was based on liberal humanism: "In the case of professional ethics in the human services, the discourses of codes of ethics and models of application clearly construct ethics on the basis of liberal humanism. By liberal humanism, we mean the assumption of a unique essence in human beings that is neither contingent nor historical. Liberal humanism understands knowledge as a product of men's ideas, and consequently that social organization emerges from human nature…Professional ethics is founded on the notion that ethics is guaranteed through the rational consciousness of free-willed individuals who make ethical decisions without reference to history or contingency." Amy Rossiter, Issac Prilleltensky and Richard Walsh-Bowers, 'A Postmodern Perspective on Professional Ethics,' in *Practice and Research in Social Work: Postmodern Feminist Perspectives* ed. Barbara Fawcett, Brid Featherstone, Jan Fook and Amy Rossiter (London: Routledge, 2000) 86-87.

recent work on social work ethics.

III

In his *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice*, Chris Clark attempted to provide a systematic framework for guiding social work in contemporary societies. What is interesting to the author is that, Clark on the one hand saw social work values as mirage, but on the other hand he provided rules and stocks for ethical practice. The author believed that the internal tensions of Clark's account may be explained by a defective understanding of the nature of values. But before one can clarify Clark's implicit understanding of the nature of values, we have to place him in the moral predicament of contemporary societies.

In what follows, the author would attempt to argue that the tensions of Clark's account may be the result of the acceptance of a common belief of modern man, that values in the end are personal, subjective experiences. Since values are just personal, subjective experiences, moral principles are no more than expressions of personal convictions towards life. Everyone may have his own principles, there is no higher

rational authority to adjudicate contending principles when conflict arises. Differently put, justification of universal, impersonal moral principles is seen as impossible. The author would like to point out that Clark's account of social work values presupposed the above understanding of moral discourses in contemporary societies.

Before we turn to analyze the connection of Clark's account of social work values and the condition of moral discourses in contemporary societies, we shall consider the reasons why Clark claimed that social work values are no more than mirage. In *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice*, Chris Clark put forward a distinction of social work values and the values of social workers.[19] The distinction is meant to capture the difference between institutional values and individual's values. By 'social work values', Clark meant the set of institutional norms that govern a body of social practice that constitutes the practice of social work which is supported and expressed through a range of formal and informal organizations. Whereas 'social workers' values' for Clark are the values espoused by individual social worker, that is, 'social workers' values' refers to the opinions and attitudes of individual members of the profession.

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[19] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 32.

After distinguishing the notions of 'social work values' and 'social workers' values', Clark leads us to critically examine the ubiquity of 'social work values' in the social work literature. It is not hard to find the concept of 'social work values' being invoked in the literature, as Clark putted it, 'like love in the song, values are everywhere.'[20] However, when we try to capture 'social work values', Clark claims, we face grave difficulties.

Here Clark draws a vivid metaphor, 'social work values' is like ' a creature of allegory, imagination and myth', when we try to hunt the legendary creature with our traps and snares, we are disappointed that the methods that we used to bring home the game in the forest were of no use. What is Clark's point in drawing this metaphor? Clark points out that after meticulous search in the social work literature, and a review of the scanty direct research on social workers' ethics and values, we could not identify a common understanding of social work values. As he puts it: "Given the existence of apparently different tendencies within social work and the absence of convincing evidence for a unified set of social work values, we shall work on the safer assumption that there is no single reading of social work values."[21]

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[20] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 25.

[21] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd.,

According to Clark, the social work profession accepted the common moral and political values of modern societies in the West, and the debates within social work seldom question these mainstream values, rather, they usually turn out to be disputes on how these values are to be interpreted.[22] Basing on the preceding discussions, Clark raise a crucial issue: whether there are any major interesting differences among social work values, social workers' values and the mainstream values of Western societies. If social work values are conceptually confused, without specific content, and the significance ascribed to professional values in social work is no more than an article of faith, what is the point of keeping on this discourse? Should we stop talking about 'social work values'? Should we ban the usage of this notion which has little analytic power?

Clark's answer to the latter question, somewhat to our surprise, is negative. Clark thought that we may not adopt such radical solution, though he admitted that it has its attractions. Again Clark employed an illustrative metaphor to bring out his point. For

2000), 35.

[22] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 34, see 69-79 for the three moral traditions, i.e., individualism and the ethic of personal service, social reformism and the ethic of justice and the ethic of public accountability, that Clark claims to have informed the practice of social work.

Clark, the phenomenon of social work values is like a mirage. Contrary to the conventional understanding that social work values comprise the basis of sound practice, Clark put forward the view that social work values are distortive and serves poorly as guides to practice: "The best likeness of social work values is to a mirage: a deceptive apparition on the horizon caused by peculiar atmospheric conditions. We can perceive something there, but it is a distorted and misleading representation of reality and a poor guide to practical action (spotting objectives and finding one's way)."[23]

It is worth noting that, after arguing that social work values are best akin to mirage, Clark sought to develop ethical guides for social work practice. Would his move from a skeptical attitude to social work values to a positive construction of ethical guidelines for social work put us in a bewildering situation? If social work values were the deceptive apparition that he allured, we are perplexed by his effort to derive ethical guides for social work practice. If social work values, as Clark claimed, were not different from the mainstream values of Western societies, and he could even appeal to the indispensable moral and political principles shared by the larger society to guide social work practice, did that mean that social work values were not the

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[23] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 44.

mirage that he asserted?

The author believed the key to this puzzle is that Clark seemed to have conflated two contradictory theses: First, the thesis that *social work* values were mirage, that is, to identify *social work* values as a distinct category was a mistake. This is because social work values were basically the values common to modern liberal societies. Second, the thesis that social work *values* were mirage, that is, social work values as shared values of the social work community did not exist.

Here it is worth noting that Clark's discussion of social work values as shared values seemed to be muddled. On the one hand, Clark claimed that if there was not an unified reading of social work values, social work values as the values shared by the social work community did not exist. However, on the other hand, Clark thought hat the social work profession shared the same values with the larger society, and we can appeal to these societal values to guide ethical practice of social work. The problem seems to be that Clark has two understanding of what is meant by shared values. First, he seems to understand values as the expression of individual attitudes, and when we talk about shared values, we mean the members of the community have the same, unified opinions and attitudes. Second, Clark also seemed to understand shared values

as institutional norms. Nevertheless, Clark has failed to elucidate the differences between these two understandings. Besides, he has not further clarified if the members of a community have different attitudes, did that mean that there was no longer any institutional norms.

In my view, the preceding ambiguity that we observed in Clark's account may be related to the value pluralism that he adopted.[24] Clark stated that in the developed countries where social work was situated, there was no longer any common shared understanding of moral and social values. This condition of value plurality was to be cherished. The reason for this is that if no one has the final answer to the question of 'what is good life?', we should then be prepared to accept the challenge to be open to other's voices, and ready to evaluate the reasons behind other's ethical positions. That is to say, Clark presupposed there is no common rational yardstick to assess which interpretation of social work values is more reasonable. It seems that in Clark's view the different interpretations of social work values are just expressions of the proponents of different viewpoints, and we cannot meaningfully state which interpretation is more plausible. If as Clark believed that there is no higher authority to adjudicate the different viewpoints and opinions, one may conclude that, to regard

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[24] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 65-68.

social work values as the shared values of social work community may be ungrounded.

Nevertheless, Clark claimed that there are certain moral and political principles that are indispensable to our moral and political debates: "It will be maintained that several key concepts of ethical and political theory, and of disciplined practical action, have what might be termed the character of *indispensability.* Although not theoretically unchallenged or unchallengeable, these concepts seem to capture principles that are intuitively important that no credible theory can do without them. They mark the limits of the pluralist's elasticity, the best points of reference available for us today….The idea of indispensability requires that we should retain the concept, even if problematic, and find some way of accommodating it with other principles of like magnitude and significance. The relativism to which pluralism is committed means that no absolute defense of the indispensable principles is possible, and the process of balancing principles must be admitted as a fallible guide. The status of indispensable principles is to be understood as dominant until proved otherwise, as necessary until shown to be wrong or redundant."[25]

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[25] Chris Clark, *Social Work Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 67.

Though he admitted that these principles may be challenged, yet he asserted that before the legitimacy of these principles was challenged, we have to appeal to these principles to adjudicate our moral and political conflicts. If conflicts among these principles arise, we have to seek a balance among these principles. In other words, Clark's account seemed to imply that we may consider these indispensable principles as the values base shared by members of modern society.

Taking Clark's views together, we find that on the one hand, given his belief in value pluralism, Clark may have grave difficulties in convincing us that certain moral and political principles were indispensable. On the other hand, as he stated that in developed countries there were not common understanding of moral and political values, would that contradict his claim that there existed indispensable moral and political principles? Furthermore, without these indispensable principles as the common value base, how could he derive ethical guides for social wok practice?

After unveiling some of the internal tensions of Chris Clark's account of social work values, the author believe that to evaluate Clark's view, we need to see that Clark's view was supported by a pluralist understanding of value. Then we have to place this pluralist understanding of value in the context of the moral outlook that dominates modern societies.

Why the value pluralism that Clark adopted seemed to be convincing to us. In my view, this may be explained by the fact that the belief in the plurality of values can be regarded as the belief of modern man. On the one hand, in the eyes of modern man, no social and moral values could claim to have universal validity. Needless to say, not anyone could have the final answer to the question 'What is good life?' This understanding is tied to the freedom of pursuing one's conception of good life in modern societies, and the respect for and openness to other's choices. However, on the other hand, when modern man experiences values conflicts, these values conflicts could seldom be resolved rationally. The reason for this is that there is not any universal social and moral standard that one may appeal to in order to resolve these values conflicts.

The preceding moral predicament experienced by modern man, the author believes, can be explained by considering how modern man conceives the nature of moral judgment. This observation is significant because this is the predicament that underlies Hughman and Smith's outcry that we noted in section two: "If attempts to state universal ethical principles are bound to fail because they cannot refer to a shared general conception of social and moral good, are we left with the kind of

post-modernist relativism which suggests that there is no solid ground, no foundation on which we can build, as a basis for establishing ethical preferences?" To further elucidate the moral predicament of modern societies, I will invoke the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, to give a portrait of the kernel that constitutes the preceding moral predicament.

IV

How does MacIntyre depict the moral predicament of modern societies?[26] First of all, he pointed out that moral disagreements that are interminable (for instance, the controversies about abortion, distributive justice and just war [27]) have three characteristics: First, MacIntyre stated that the arguments of the parties in these disputes are 'conceptually incommensurable'. By 'conceptually incommensurable', MacIntyre means that these arguments are based on incommensurable premises that are at odds with one another. That is, if we examine the arguments of the parties independently, we shall find that their conclusions are drawn logically from their premises. However, if we examine the arguments together, we find that they are based

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[26] The following reconstruction is based on Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* 2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), chap. 1 & 2.

[27] These examples are MacIntyre's examples.

on diverse moral principles, and we have no rational yardstick to adjudicate which principles that the parties appeal are more convincing.

Take the case of abortion as an example. Pro choice group may advocate the primacy of the women's right to control their bodies. Nevertheless, those who oppose abortion may point out forcefully that, according to the principle of universability, we cannot will that our mothers abort and thus deny our right to life. In this light, we could not recognize women have the right to abortion. Here we see the really difficult issue. Could we rationally adjudicate whether the right to autonomous choice or the principle of universability takes precedence? Could we tell which one is the more basic moral principle?

MacIntyre further pointed out that if we have no rational yardstick to adjudicate different moral premises, the problem is not just that we have difficulties in convincing our opponents. If we sincerely reflect on this situation, we may have to admit that our moral stance are in principle arbitrary in nature: "For it is not only in arguments with others that we are reduced so quickly to assertion and counter-assertion; it is also in the arguments that we have within ourselves. …Yet if we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by means of which

we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we can have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there must be some non-rational decision to adopt that position. Corresponding to the interminability of public argument there is at least the appearance of a disquieting private arbitrariness. It is small wonder if we become defensive and therefore shrill."[28].

The second characteristic of modern moral predicament that MacIntyre noted is that in a moral dispute, the arguments of the contending parties are appealing to impersonal standards. He pointed out that one of the characteristics of moral and evaluative statements is that the force of their reason does not depend on the personal context. To explicate this point, MacIntyre differentiates two types of situation that we accept the injunction (for instance, 'Do so-and-so') of another person. In the first type of cases, when we ask the person who issued the injunction to provide grounds to back up his command, the person's response is that this injunction just expressed his wish or want. In this sort of situation, MacIntyre said that, the person has not provided us any reason to do what he commanded or requested unless we have other

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[28] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* 2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 8.

independent reasons to pay regard to his wishes. For instance, I am serving in the army, and the person who issued the injunction is my senior, or I am asking the person for help, or she is the one that I have been looking for, and I want to win her heart. In the above examples, the personal wishes that the person communicate may all be considered as reasons for me to follow the person's command or request.

But what if his response is of a different sort? Imagine when we ask that person for the backing of his injunction, he does not express that it is just his wishes or wants, but rather his command is based on moral reasons. In this case, will it be different from the first type of situations that we just discussed? Take for example, what if he claims that this will benefit most of the citizens that are affected, or this is your duty, or this is your basic right and you should fight for it. What are the basic differences that lie between this sort of reasons and that it is just his wishes or wants?

MacIntyre pointed out that there are two basic differences that lie between these two types of situations. First, if the request of the person is based on moral reasons, the adequacy of the reasons raised does not depend on who give those reasons. In other words, the reason-giving force that the injunction has does not depend on the personal context of the utterance, that is, it is independent of the relationship between

the speaker and the hearer. Second, if the adequacy of the moral reasons given does not depend on the personal context of the utterance, the injunction backed up by moral reasons presupposes the existence of impersonal criteria. Basing on the preceding analysis, MacIntyre claimed that the reason-giving force of moral and evaluative utterances is independent of the personal context of the utterance.

The third characteristic of contemporary moral utterance and argument that MacIntyre explicated is closely connected to the two characteristics we discussed. MacIntyre pointed out that the conceptually incommensurable premises of the rival arguments display the variety and diversity of their historical origins. Take the dispute concerning abortion as an example, MacIntyre brought to our attention that the notion of 'rights' deployed by one side of the dispute descended from the works of John Locke, while the principle of universalizability that the other side appealed undoubtedly has a Kantian favour. MacIntyre further believed that these moral concepts are rooted in their specific contexts, and their proper usage is intimately connected to other related concepts. That is to say, MacIntyre stated that first these moral concepts are at home in a network of theory and practices. Second, in this network, these moral concepts have their proper roles and functions.

Given such an understanding, thus, we may appreciate why MacIntyre thought that the label of 'pluralism' may not be a precise characterization of the modern moral predicament: "The surface rhetoric of our culture is apt to speak complacently of moral pluralism in this connection, but the notion of pluralism is too imprecise. For it may equally well apply to an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints and to an unharmonious mélange of ill-assorted fragments." [29] In other words, given MacIntyre's understanding, moral concepts have to be understood in their proper context, that is, the network of theory and practice where they enjoy a role and function, the notion of pluralism fails to distinguish the case where these moral concepts are situated in their proper context and the other situation where their proper context have been deprived.

MacIntyre also pointed out that if we examine the first two characteristics of contemporary moral utterance and argument together, we will see there is a paradoxical air to contemporary moral disagreement. On the one hand, moral arguments seem to be based on arbitrarily chosen moral premises, hence rivaling arguments may be no more than what MacIntyre aptly described as " a clash of antagonistic wills, each will determined by some sort of arbitrary choices of its

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[29] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* 2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 10.

own."[30] On the other hand, when examining the usage of moral language, there are differences between requests that are based on personal preferences and those that are based on moral reasons. In employing moral language we are not just expressing our likes and dislikes, rather our use of moral concepts "embody what purports to be an appeal to objective standards."[31] Putting this situation in a nutshell, contemporary moral discourse seems to be seen both as an expression of arbitrary personal preference and also as a rational activity that appeals to impersonal criteria.

From the preceding analysis, we may sense that there may be a connection between the paradoxical condition of contemporary moral discourse and how modern man understands the nature of moral judgment. To further explore this nexus, we will follow MacIntyre's expedition. In his famous work, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre imagined someone challenging his account of contemporary moral disagreement: "The way in which you have stated the problem is misleading. Contemporary moral argument is rationally interminable, because *all* moral, indeed all evaluative, argument is and always must be rationally interminable. Contemporary moral disagreements of a certain kind cannot be resolved, because *no* moral disagreements of that kind in any age, past, present or future, can be resolved. What you present as a contingent feature

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[30] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue*   2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 9.

[31] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue*   2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 9.

of our culture, standing in need of some special, perhaps historical explanation, is a necessary feature of all cultures which possess evaluative discourse."[32]

How does MacIntyre defeat the preceding challenge? Before we examine MacIntyre's response, we need to elucidate how MacIntyre understands the issue of 'emotivism'. In MacIntyre's view, 'emotivism' is proposed as a theory which professes to account for the meaning of moral language as such. For MacIntyre, 'emotivism' may be summarized as comprising of the following points: First, 'emotivism' conceives moral judgments as expressions of feelings and attitudes. Second, though some particular judgments may unite the value and the factual elements, the value element and the factual element that comprise these moral judgments are to be sharply distinguished. The factual part can be found to be either true or false, while the value element only expresses our feelings and attitudes, and thus is neither true nor false. With regard to the preceding difference, we see that contending parties may come to an agreement about the factual element by appealing to the relevant facts. However, since the value element only expresses our feelings and attitudes, there is no rational way we can secure agreements in value judgment.

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[32] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* 2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 11.

Let us illustrate the above points with the following judgment about abortion. If one says: "Abortion brings about the expulsion of a fetus from the womb, thus denying the fetus' right to life, and so it is morally wrong." For an emotivist, 'abortion brings about the expulsion of a fetus from the womb' is the factual element of the preceding moral judgment, and we can determine its truth or falsity by considering the relevant facts. While the judgment that 'abortion denies the fetus' right to life is morally wrong' is the value component of the moral judgment. The cry that 'abortion denies the fetus' right to life' is just an expression of our disapproval of abortion. It is an expression of our negative feelings and it is neither true nor false. If someone disagrees with our disapproval of abortion, there is no rational way to resolve the conflict. Whether in the end there is any agreement on this issue depends on whether the contending parties can come to identify with the same set of attitudes.

Thirdly, even though there is no rational way to secure agreement in moral matters, we can achieve moral consensus through non-rational means by persuading others to identify with our attitudes. In this regard, moral utterances not only express our approval or disapproval, they may also be important means to arouse other's moral feelings, and to facilitate the formation of moral consensus. For instance, by expressing our disapproval of abortion, we may persuade others to identify with our

attitudes, thus facilitating the society to come to an agreement in attitude that abortion is unacceptable.

As a theory of the meaning of a certain type of sentence, MacIntyre enumerated a number of ways that 'emotivism' fails. First, MacIntyre noted that 'emotivism' tries to explain the meaning of moral utterances by their expressive function. That is, 'emotivism' attempts to convince us that moral utterances are nothing but our expression of feelings or attitudes. If that is the case, an emotivist owes us an explanation of what sort of feelings and attitudes are expressed by moral utterances. On this issue, MacIntyre claimed, 'emotivism' is either silent or falls into circular reasoning. If we ask an emotivist what sort of feelings and attitudes are expressed by moral utterances (for instance, 'everyone should keep his promises'), the emotivist may initially respond that it expresses a pro-attitude or an attitude of approval. But if we push on, asking the emotivist to clarify what sort of pro-attitude is expressed, MacIntyre noted that the emotivist could either choose to be silent or he may respond that it is supposed to be a moral approval. In the latter case, we note that the emotivist finds himself trapped in reasoning in a circular way. That is to say, 'emotivism' attempts to explain the meaning of moral utterance by the expressive function that moral utterance performs, but when an emotivist is confronted with the question of

what sort of feelings or attitudes are expressed, he could not but fall back on using the category of *moral* feelings to clarify the nature of the feelings expressed. In a way the emotivist has come full circle to his starting point, and he still fails to elucidate the meaning of moral utterance as *moral* utterance.

The second aspect that MacIntyre found 'emotivism' wanting as a theory of meaning of moral utterance was that, 'emotivism' engaged in an impossible mission of conflating two distinct types of expressions into a single category. In the preceding discussions of the three characteristics of contemporary moral discourse, we noted that there is an important difference between expressions that just reveal someone's personal wants or preference and expressions that are backed up by moral reasons. MacIntyre pointed out that 'emotivism' fails because it ignored the grave difference between these two classes of expressions. Blending these two distinct groups of expressions into a single class, 'emotivism' took moral utterances as no different from expressions of personal wants or preference. Or in a nut shell, 'emotivism' failed to distinguish the two classes of expressions. Thus the overarching explanation that 'emotivism' provides could not possibly adequately handle the difference of these two sorts of expressions that we discussed in the previous pages.

MacIntyre noted that the above shortcoming of 'emotivism' was not only a mistake, but a mistake that demanded explanation. To account for this mistake, MacIntyre leaded us to turn our attention to the relationship of the meaning of moral statements and the expressive function of moral statements. In bringing out the third defect of 'emotivism' as a theory of meaning of sentences, MacIntyre noted that the feelings that our expressions expressed did not depend on the content of the expression. Rather, in MacIntyre's words, the expression of feelings was 'a function of their use in particular occasions.' [33]

Consider the following illustration of the preceding point. Imagine when the shopkeeper told you that the item you wanted to buy was much cheaper than you expected, and you exclaimed: "Ten dollars?!" to express you joy and excitement. Obviously, in this illustration the feeling you expressed has nothing to do with the content of your expression. In fact, the same sentence could be used to express utterly different feelings. Imagine again, when you visit the greengrocery, when you ask the shopkeeper for some spring onion, and he charged you for ten dollars. In this case, the expression with the same content may express your fury and rage towards the unreasonable charge. In the above examples, we see that there does not exist any

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[33] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* 2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 13.

necessary connection between the meaning of a statement and the feelings that the statement expressed. That is to say, the necessary connection between the meaning and the expressive function of moral utterances posited by 'emotivism' is unfounded. Thus, the emotivist's attempt to explain the meaning of moral utterances by their expressive function is an unsuccessful endeavour.

It is worth observing that in drawing our attention to the preceding three defects of 'emotivism', MacIntyre was not just exposing the inadequacies of 'emotivism'. MacIntyre also wanted to prepare us to read 'emotivism' in a different way. Differing from the general understanding of 'emotivism' as a theory of the meaning of moral language, MacIntyre proposed that we may interpret 'emotivism' as a theory about the use of moral language.

In what ways does MacIntyre's interpretation of 'emotivism' as a theory of use of moral language differs from the general understanding of 'emotivism'? Succinctly put, the author noted that there are two significant differences. First, contrary to its proponent's claim, MacIntyre emphasized 'emotivism' was not a theory of the meaning of moral language *as such*. In other words, MacIntyre told us to disregard the emotivist's claim that his theory's scope of application covers *all* evaluative statements. An emotivist may believe that she has provided an adequate explanatory

account of the nature and structure of moral language with universal application. Yet, for MacIntyre, what 'emotivism' depicted was only the state of moral language in contemporary society. In the eyes of MacIntyre, 'emotivism' may have captured the key features of moral discourse in a historically specific situation, only that its proponents were unaware of its historicity.

Secondly, MacIntyre did not accept that 'emotivism' as a theory of meaning has adequately explained the meaning of moral statements. For MacIntyre, it is more apt to consider 'emotivism' as a theory of how moral language is used in contemporary societies. As a theory of the use of moral language, 'emotivism' pointed out that modern man tends to see moral judgment as an expression of feelings or attitudes, but paradoxically, modern man also believes that in making a moral judgment he is appealing to independent, impersonal criteria. In a nutshell, 'emotivism', as a theory of how moral language is used, characterized the radical discrepancy between the meaning and the use of moral expressions in contemporary societies.

Basing on the above exposition of MacIntyre's analysis, we come to see that the moral predicament of modern societies is intrinsically connected with how modern man understands the nature of moral judgment and moral discourses. Putting it differently, the proponents of 'emotivism' believed that they have explained the nature

of moral language as such, and their explanation is claimed to be neutral with respect to different value positions. They also claimed that 'emotivism' as a theory of the meaning of moral language has universal application. What the preceding analysis revealed is that 'emotivism' expressed how moral judgments were employed in contemporary moral discourses. The proponents of 'emotivism' were not conscious that the tenets of 'emotivism' may be said to partially constitute the self of modern man. Nor did they aware that 'emotivism' itself is a product that reveals the spirit of its time.[34]

<center>V</center>

MacIntyre has claimed that: " we live in a specifically emotivist culture, and if this is so we ought presumably to discover that a wide variety of our concepts and modes behaviour- and not only our explicitly moral debates and judgments- presuppose the truth of emotivism, if not at the level of self-conscious theorizing, at least in everyday practice."[35] If as MacIntyre argued that 'emotivism' is not only a

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[34] This further point is based on discussions with Prof. Yuen Sun Pong.

[35] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* 2d. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), 22. For further elaboration of this point see *After Virtue*, chap.3.

philosophical theory, but is commonly accepted in our contemporary world, or even constitutes the self of modern man and its related practice, then in what sense may this analysis enable us to elucidate the tensions in Clark's account of social work values?

To answer the above question, let us recall the discussion of the value pluralism brought out by Clark. In the previous passages we have shown that one of the major reasons that may account for the appeal of value pluralism is that, the belief in plurality of values may be said to be one of the cherished beliefs of modern man. For modern man, no social and moral values could claim to have universal validity. Therefore, when modern man experiences value conflicts, these value conflicts could seldom be resolved rationally. The author further noted that we may have deeper insight into the preceding moral predicament that perplexed modern man, when we consider how modern man understands the nature of moral judgment.

By explicating first, the account of the characteristics of contemporary moral discourses, second, the nature and defects of 'emotivism', and third, the alternative interpretation of 'emotivisim' as a theory of the usage of moral language in contemporary societies given by MacIntyre, the author has attempted to bring out the intrinsic link of 'emotivism' and the predicament of contemporary moral discourses.

Basing on MacIntyre's analysis of the internal linkage between 'emotivism' and the predicament of contemporary moral discourses, the author would now like to re-interpret Chris Clark's understanding of social work values. The author would like to argue that Clark's account presupposes the truth of 'emotivism'.

In the preceding discussions the author has made two observations regarding Clark's account of social work values. First, Clark was ambiguous when he discussed social work values as the shared values of the social work community. Second, Clark was self-contradicting when he make the following claims: first, in the modern societies that social work situated, there was no commonly shared values; and second, there are indispensable moral and political principles in modern societies.

By now one may appreciate why we have taken such a long detour into MacIntyre's analysis of intrinsic link of 'emotivism' and the predicament of contemporary moral discourses. Seen in the light of MacIntyre's analysis, Clark's position is little different from the common understanding that moral judgments are just expressions of feelings or attitudes. Though Clark seemed to acknowledge that there existed indispensable moral and political principles in modern societies, he was unclear about the status of these principles. Beset by this 'emotivist' understanding of

moral judgments, Clark still seemed to see these shared principles as expressions of personal preferences and attitudes, and not as independent, impersonal criteria that one may appeal to. Given such explication, we may also understand why Clark failed to elucidate the nature of social work values as institutional norms, and why some moral and political principles were indispensable.

In the light of the above discussions, if we cannot come to an alternative understanding of moral judgment, we may not be able to further clarify the meaning of social work values as the shared values of the social work community. The preceding analysis of Clark may enable us to appreciate the connection between examining the problem of 'emotivism' and rethinking of social work values.

By examining the tensions of Clark's account, we come to appreciate that rethinking social work values touches on the following issue: If we cannot free ourselves of the enchantment of an 'emotivist' understanding of values, does that imply that we cannot meaningfully speak of social work values as the shared, independent, impersonal value standard of the social work community? In the author's view, to tackle this issue in more adequate terms, it seems that we need to probe into the nature of values. Nonetheless, as we have noted in the previous section,

this is a little explored area in social work literature. Besides, in the handful of studies that may touch on this issue, there are a number of issues that leave much to be desired. First, most of these discussions did not directly tackle the issue of the nature of value, rather they tend to place the discussion under the rubric of absolutism and relativism.[36] Furthermore, in these limited discussions of absolutism and relativism, they tend to give a brief summary of the discussions in moral philosophy, without further probing the relevance of these issues to the reflection of the value base of social work practice. In the following chapter, the author will try to put forward a preliminary account of this theoretical issue.

In the author's view, to respond to an 'emotivist' understanding of the nature of values, we need to tackle two issues: First, we have to question and lay bare the understanding of value presupposed by 'emotivism'. Second, we have to outline an alternative conception of shared values. If we could articulate the reasons why even in cases where moral disagreements were apparent, there might still be a deeper consensus that underlies these disagreements, we may have a glimpse of an alternative to the 'emotivist' understanding of value. Such an endeavour might have

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[36] For instance see Frederic Reamer, *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Service* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 55-57 and Frank Loewenberg et al., *Ethical Decisions for Social Work Practice*, 6th ed. (Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 2000), 46-48.

important bearing for rethinking social work values. The author would suggest, if we

can free ourselves of the enchantment of an 'emotivist' understanding of values, we

might find the conceptual resources to articulate the shared value standard of the

social work community.

Chapter Four

Rethinking the Nature of Social Work Values

I

In the previous chapter the author attempted to explore the connection between certain key issues in social work ethics and the moral predicament of contemporary societies. In the preceding discussions of the value base of social work, we find that if we cannot justify that there are impersonal criteria of value, social work values are at most the aggregate of the values upheld by social workers. If that is the case, we have reasons to reexamine whether social work values should have the normative and moral authority that it now enjoys. But one of the disquieting predicaments of contemporary moral and political disputes is that, we have grave difficulties in justifying the existence of public and impersonal moral standards.

By invoking MacIntyre's analysis, we have further examined the connection of the preceding moral predicament and the 'emotivist' understanding of values that constitute the predicament. If we are convinced by the 'emotivist', we will accept that

moral statements are only expressions of personal feelings and attitudes, that these

statements could not be true or false, and there are no rational ways to resolve

fundamental value conflicts; Further, if the analysis that our contemporary moral

disputes presuppose the 'emotivist' account of values is plausible. In this case, given

the above understanding, if we reexamine the issue of the value base of social work, it

is hard to say that social work values are the public, impersonal norms and standards

shared by the social work community. Seen in this light, the internal tensions of

Clark's account might be considered as a telling example of the difficult situation that

we are entrapped. If the 'emotivist' understanding of values which constitutes the

contemporary moral predicament also underpins the difficulties we face in articulating

an account of social work values, then a critical examination of the validity of

'emotivism' may be a necessary condition for us to find a way out of this difficult

situation.

Based on the preceding exposition, the author would like to focus the following

discussions on how to understand social work values as shared values of the social

work community. This is because, the author believes by elucidating this crucial issue,

we may come up with an alternative understanding of the nature of social work values.

Besides, this endeavour is also crucial for us to offer an adequate defense of our

investigation of the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice.

Recalling the author suggested that the prevalent 'emotivist' understanding of the

nature of value may underpin a forceful challenge to the present project at the end of

the second chapter. In this regard, the alternative understanding of the connection of

value and social meaning to be articulated in this chapter is significant. This is

because it will serve as a viable foundation for us to develop a rejoinder to the charge

that our investigation is based on a confusion of explanation and evaluation.

II

Before we directly confront the claims of 'emotivism', we have to unearth some

of its philosophical presuppositions. In my understanding, 'emotivism' presupposed

two theses regarding the nature of values:[1] First, the thesis of atomism, that is, the

individual is taken as primary, and any societies or collectives are only the aggregate

of individuals. Seen in this light, the individual is the source of values, thus shared

values can in principle be reduced to the aggregate of the values of individuals.

Second, the thesis of subjectivism, that is, value is the subjective experience of

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[1] The following analysis is deeply indebted to Charles Taylor's analysis of 'social goods'. See Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 127-145.

individual, and this understanding is further related to the distinctions of fact and value, and subject and object.

These two theses may be said to be commonly accepted by modern man. We believed that the pervasiveness of 'emotivism' is, to a large extent, built on these two theses that were seen as self-evident. In what follows we shall give a more in-depth discussion of these theses. We shall deal with the thesis of 'atomism' first.[2] 'Atomism' is based on what is called 'ontological individualism'. Robert Bellah and his team have provided the following definition of 'ontological individualism': "a belief that the individual has a primary reality whereas society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct."[3]

'Ontological individualism' is based on a simple observation, that is, communities are made up of individuals. In other words, in the eyes of an ontological

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[2] The discussion of atomism is complex, and is related to debates in political theory and the philosophy of social sciences. As Taylor stated, the debate of holist and atomists cut across the divide of explanation and deliberation: "The ontological questions concern what you recognize as the factors you will invoke to account for social life. Or, put in the 'formal mode,' they concern the terms you accept as ultimate in the order of explanation. The big debate in this area, which has been raging now for more than three centuries, divided atomists from holists, as I propose to call them. The former are often referred to as methodological individualists. They believe that in (a), the order of explanation, you can and ought to account for social actions, structures, and conditions, in terms of properties of the constituent individuals; and in (b), the order of deliberation, you can and ought to account for social goods in terms of concatenations of individual goods." In Charles Taylor, 'Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate,' in *Liberalism and the Moral Life* ed Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 159. If we want to have a glimpse of the related discussions, particularly explicating Charles Taylor's works with these issues see Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living Deep Diversity* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), chap. 3 and 5.
[3] Robert N. Bellah et. al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 334.

individualist, all collectives can be decomposed, reduced to their individual members. Individuals exist before their aggregate, that is, the collective. Hence, society or collective is only a derived, second-order construct whose existence depends on the existence of its members. Given the above understanding, when we talk about collective, we are speaking of first, the individuals who constitute this collective, and second, the interactions of these individuals. Therefore, there is not any supra-individual collective entity, nor is there any evasive collective consciousness.

Given the preceding understanding, when we discuss the justification of shared values, no doubt an ontological individualist would not accept that these shared values belongs to supra-individual collective consciousness. Rather, we may tend to conceive shared values as the consensus or aggregate of the values of the individuals that make up the community. Thus, in the end the shared values of the community can be reduced to the values of individuals, and individual values are no more than expressions of one's feelings and attitudes. That is to say, even we admit that the values of individual is under the influence of his socialization, this still has nothing to do with how to verify what his values are.[4]

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[4] The distinction of the formation and justification of values put forward in this passage is based on Prof. Yuen Sun Pong's advice.

Thus, given an ontological individualistic understanding of values, the existence of shared values may indicate that the members of the community have the same attitudes and evaluations. Putting it differently, shared values may exist only when there are no value conflicts between the members of the community. For if there are value conflicts, no consensus could be secured on the issue under dispute, and for an ontological individualist, in this regard there is no sense to said there are values shared by the community on this issue. The author believed that if we could not articulate alternatives to the preceding understanding of shared values, we can hardly justify that social work values are the shared values of the social work community.

After briefly discussing the thesis of 'atomism', we turn our attention to the issue of subjectivism. Subjectivism claimed that values are the expressions of an individual's subjective feelings. This understanding is based on a distinction of the knowing subject and the object that he seeks to acquire knowledge of. Subjectivism presupposed that as knowing subjects, we are independent of the reality that is external to us. Whether the subject's understanding of the world is adequate depends on whether the concepts or conceptual schemes employed by the subject correspond to the external reality.[5] As an illustration, let us take the statement 'There is a book on

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[5] For further elaboration see Christopher Hookway, *Quine: Language, Experience and Reality* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), chap. 1 and 2.

the desk'. Whether this statement is true depends on whether there is a book on the desk.

Here we see that this subject/object distinction is also related to a distinction of fact and value. The subject's understanding of the external world belongs to the domain of facts. Since we can determine whether the subject's beliefs are true or not by looking at how these beliefs match with the external reality, we said that it makes sense to talk of the truth and falsity of these beliefs. Besides, different investigators may check whether beliefs that claimed to be based on facts really correspond to the external world. Therefore, these beliefs may claimed to have objective basis because they are publicly verifiable. Recalling the previous example, if someone disagree that 'there is a book on the desk', they can appeal to an independent third party to examine whether a book was really on the desk.

Contrasting with facts, values are not part of the fabric of the external world. Might we imagine that our preference that a book should be placed on the desk constitute whether there really was a book on the desk? That seems to be impossible. Furthermore, different people may have diverse evaluations of the design of the desk, thus we tend not to believe that these tastes could be publicly verifiable. Seen in this

light, based on the above distinctions of subject and object, or fact and value, values may only be the subjective feelings of individuals. Given this subjectivistic understanding of values, the thesis of atomism seems more forceful and appealing. The reason for this is that it makes little sense to discuss the subjective feelings of a collective consciousness in a rational way.

III

After giving an outline of the theses of atomism and subjectivism, we would start our critical examination of these two theses by looking at some of the common value vocabulary. Take for example, if I said that my friend shows filial piety towards his parent, was I just expressing my positive appraisal of my friend? Could the filial piety that I observed be verified? Let us look more deeply into the above example to articulate how the value vocabulary of 'showing filial piety' is used. Obviously, in the above example, 'showing filial piety' is used *both* as a *description* of this person's attitude and behaviours towards his parents, and *also* as an *appraisal* of his attitude and behaviours. It is worth noting is that in employing the phrase 'showing filial piety', we do not first describe the situation, and then inscribe our evaluation on the

description. Rather, in employing the phrase 'showing filial piety', we are *describing and evaluating at the same time*. As such, value vocabulary like 'showing filial piety' seems to have both descriptive and evaluative functions. But this is at odds with subjectivism.

Should not fact and value be sharply distinguished? If facts and values are to be bifurcated, value vocabulary may only have the evaluative function of expressing the attitudes of the speaker. But value vocabulary could not describe the external world, since values are not part of the fabric of the world. Besides, value vocabulary could not help us to grasp the corresponding features of the external world, so value vocabulary may not have descriptive function.

Nevertheless, when we employ value vocabulary like 'showing filial piety', we are *describing* certain related attitudes and behaviours, thus it seems that fact and value, description and evaluation are not so sharply delineated as the subjectivist would have us believed. So what is the problem? In the view of the author, proponents of subjectivism seem to presuppose the dichotomy of fact and value. However, the crucial issue is whether value vocabulary like 'showing filial piety' could be passed through the fact/value distinction without being distorted. Here we

see that whether subjectivism is sound depends largely on whether there is a sharp

distinction between fact and value. We shall not enter the complicated discussions of

whether facts may be distinguished from values.[6] Rather in what follows we shall

attempt to explicate some of the arguments employed in the seminal works of

Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch to question whether there is a sharp distinction

between facts and values.

According to the preceding discussions, one of the central issues of the

contention is that whether the factual component and the evaluative component of

value vocabulary could in principle be neatly separated as is claimed by the

subjectivist. Regarding this issue, Philippa Foot has provided forceful responses to a

subjectivistic understanding of values in one of her famous papers.[7] She first pointed

out that basing on the contrast of factual statements and evaluative statements,

proponents of the fact/value dichotomy believed that though evaluation may be based

on certain facts, there is no logical connection between evaluation and the factual

statement on which it is based. That is to say, though value vocabulary like 'showing

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[6] For further discussions see Marinus C. Doeser, 'Can the Dichotomy of Fact and Value be
Maintained?' in *Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-Western
Perspectives*, ed. M. C. Doeser and J. N. Kraay (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 1-19; Hilary
Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 127-149,
201-216.
[7] Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs,' in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. Philippa Foot (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1967), 83-100. Foot has mentioned there are two sets of assumptions associated with
the dichotomy of fact and value, here we would only touch on the first set of assumption.

filial piety' seems to have both descriptive and evaluative functions, yet it is employed both as expression of positive appraisal and description of certain type of parent-child relationship. What is worth noting is that, in the subjectivist's eyes, the connection of its descriptive and evaluative components is contingent. In other words, for the subjectivist, there is no logical connection between the evaluation that this expression contains and the features of the world that the expression sought to evaluate. Again take the phrase 'showing filial piety' as an illustration, though in our society it may be hard to imagine that one could use the phrase without a positive connotation, the subjectivist will state that one cannot exclude the possibility that in a society that has a morality drastically different from that of Chinese societies, the same phrase may be used to express a negative appraisal.

If we accepted the subjectivist's portrait of the connection between an evaluation and the factual statement as discussed above, Foot pointed out that we have to content ourselves with the odd and astonishing moral arguments of someone who has an eccentric morality. For instance, he might argue that a good man is one who washes his head three times a day. The reason that our moral eccentric might so argue is that, the word 'good' only expresses the pro-attitude or positive evaluation of the speaker, and the meaning of 'good' has not any intrinsic connection with any piece of

evidences. Thus, our friend may freely use the word 'good' to express his approval or positive evaluation without attending to any facts that may constrain his usage. The reason for this is that, if we accept that the connection of the descriptive and evaluative components of value vocabulary is contingent, the usage of value vocabulary simply is not constrained by any features of the world. Through the preceding analysis, Foot attempts to bring out the absurdity of the implications of accepting the fundament contrast between factual statements and evaluative statements drawn by the subjectivist. Here we should be cautious that Foot's view does not imply that we can make a valid logical inference from factual statements to moral conclusions. Rather, Foot is alerting us that for a statement to qualify as a moral statement, the statement need to fulfill some criteria, for instance, that it concerns certain human needs. Thus, Foot's arguments may compel us to reconsider whether the fact/value dichotomy is as solid as we tend to believe. But where does the problem lie?

Foot pointed out that the key to the problem is how we understand the nexus of the evaluative meaning of value vocabulary and its object of evaluation. Should this connection be understand as an external, contingent relation as our example of moral eccentric demonstrated, or could it be seen as an internal connection? To further

explore this issue, Foot take the example of 'pride' to expound what she meant by that

an intrinsic link exist between the evaluative meaning of an evaluation and the object

of its evaluation.

First, Foot drew our attention to the observation that though one may be

surprised at the suggestion that there are limits to the things one can be proud of, she

suggested that proper application of the concept of 'pride' to describe someone's

attitude and behaviour requires that the object of one's pride to fulfill certain criteria:

"The characteristic object of pride is something seen (a) as in some way a man's own,

and (b) as some sort of achievement or advantage; without this object pride cannot be

described."[8] Hence, without further explanation, if someone claimed that the blue sky

above and the green hills beyond are what he was proud of, things that he took great

pride in, we can rightfully question whether he has used the word 'pride' properly.

The reason for this is that the objects of the above example could not meet the criteria

that a proper object of pride should possess. If the above reasoning is plausible, then

properly usage of the word 'pride' requires its object to satisfy certain criteria. If this

is the case, the idea that the connection between the evaluative meaning of an

evaluation and the object of its evaluation is an external, contingent one requires

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[8] Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs,' in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. Philippa Foot (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1967), 86.

reconsideration.

If the preceding analysis offered by Foot is convincing, then there may be an intrinsic connection between the evaluative and factual component of value vocabulary.[9] This seems to contradict what subjectivism claimed. Seen in this light, defenders of the fact/value distinction should have the responsibility to explain why eccentric examples of moral statement (for instance, 'a good man is one who washes his head three times a day') are *intelligible* examples of moral behaviour.

Evidently, staunch defenders of the fact/value dichotomy may still insist that the preceding argument fails to rebut their view that there is a fundamental distinction between evaluative statements and factual statements. They may admit that the above analysis shows that the proper application of some value vocabulary in a given context is constrained by certain factual criteria. However, this did not imply that we may draw a valid inference from a set of factual premise to an evaluative conclusion.[10]

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[9] As noted above, see p. the proper application of value vocabulary requires certain criteria to be fulfilled, thus, the connection of the evaluative and factual component of value vocabulary could not be contingent.

[10] Defenders of the fact/value distinction may point to the changing meanings of value vocabulary in history to support this point.

'But may this insistence help us to understand the nature of value vocabulary and moral behaviour?' one may ask. To this query, Yuen Sun Pong has made the following insightful remark: "In other words, even if we admit that logically any events or behaviours may be described as 'good' or 'evil', but that does not mean that that is a moral behaviour that could be understood or has a clear meaning. If someone said that swinging one's head three times a day is a good behaviour, then, without further explanation, utterly we could not understand the meaning of this behaviour. In fact, equating the normative meaning of moral concepts with a pro-attitude, but without the need to explain the reason for this pro-attitude, is to see moral behaviour or comportment as similar to condition reflex. In this case, no only will moral judgment lose its clear meaning, it may even dissolve any moral discussions."[11]

If the preceding analysis may help us to reflect whether the fact/value dichotomy is as inevitable and self-evident as we tended to believe, then the argument of Iris Murdoch that follows may reveal the Achilles' heel of the proponents of the fact/value dichotomy. Iris Murdoch once pointed out that, the argument that we could not logically deduce value from fact, that is, what she called the 'anti-naturalistic

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[11] 阮新邦，〈 社會研究的本質 〉，載於 《 當代中國農村研究(上) 》 ，阮新邦及羅沛霖主編 (新澤西：八方文化企業公司，2000)，6。

argument', in fact comprise of two sets of arguments.[12] One of them is a sort of logical analysis, arguing that since factual premise does not contain value premise, thus we cannot reach an evaluative conclusion from factual premises. If someone deduces certain evaluative conclusion from a set of factual premises, there must be some value premise that is suppressed. Let's take a simple example to illustrate this point. If someone derives the conclusion that 'this apple is good' from a factual premise that 'this apple is sweet', rather obviously that this person's reasoning is based on an implicit value premise that 'apples that are sweet are good apples'

The other set of argument that Murdoch noted in the 'anti-naturalistic argument' is a set of moral argument. This argument claims that if value is understood as part of the fabric of the world, this belief itself makes us more vulnerable to the risk of becoming dogmatic, and the danger of becoming more intolerant towards other values that differs from the ones that we upheld. Besides, we may tend to take for granted that our values are justified and reasonable, thus becoming unreflective or ceasing to reflect on our own values. In a nutshell, as Murdoch succinctly expressed, it is 'a fear of moral degeneration through lack of reflexion'[13] that supports the claim that

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[12] Iris Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics,' in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 64-67.
[13] Iris Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics,' in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 66.

morality should not be attached to the substance of the world. That is to say, basing on

a morality that emphasis moral reflection, individual autonomy and the respect of

other's freedom, we should not accept the view that morality as connecting to how the

world is.

In discussing the fact/value dichotomy, it is generally taken as a logical point that

is based on an analysis of our moral language. The belief that this dichotomy is

self-evident or unquestionable may have something to do with the preceding

understanding that this dichotomy is based on rigorous logical analysis. Here we may

see the perceptiveness of Murdoch's analysis. By calling our attention to the moral

argument that comprised the 'anti-naturalistic argument', Murdoch exposed the

common misunderstanding that the viewpoint that 'values are not part of the fabric of

the world' is supported by a value-neutral logical analysis. Murdoch's analysis shows

the force that the 'anti-naturalistic argument' enjoyed may in part depends on our

acceptance of a morality that cherished freedom and individual choice- a morality

shared in contemporary societies.

After dissecting the two components of the 'anti-naturalistic argument', Murdoch

further observed that there is another argument that underlies one's support for the

fact/value dichotomy. According to Murdoch, someone who holds that there is a fundament contrast of fact and value may also presuppose an understanding about the nature of morality. This understanding of the nature of morality, in Murdoch's view, forms a subtle match with the two arguments that we have discussed.

In Murdoch's eyes, the proponent of the fact/value dichotomy conceived the moral domain in a specific way. For proponent of the fact/value dichotomy, the central elements of morality consist of choices, principles, respect for others, autonomy and self-reflection. This understanding of the nature of morality largely matched the common understanding of contemporary societies. As Murdoch put it: "We, in our society, believe in judging a man's principles by his conduct, in reflecting upon our own values and respecting the values of others, in backing up our recommendations by reference to facts, in breaking down intuitive conclusions by arguments, and so on. Our morality, is on the whole, conceptually simple. We approach the world armed with certain general values which we hold *simpliciter* and without the assistance of metaphysics or dogmatic theology- respect for freedom, for truth, and so on. We study the facts, and we make our choices in the light of the facts and our values."[14]

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[14] Iris Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics,' in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 67.

In unearthing the implicit understanding of the nature of morality, Murdoch attempted to show that, contrary to what proponents of the fact/value dichotomy may claim, their picture of morality is not a neutral logical analysis of morality as such. Rather, it is a model of morality based on the proponent's own understanding of morality: "What the modern moral philosopher has done is what metaphysicians in the past have always done. He has produced a model. Only it is not a model of any morality whatsoever. It is a model of his own morality."[15]

Basing on the preceding analysis, Murdoch may now drove home her point that whether fact could be distinguished from value is itself a moral issue. That is, far from a neutral impartial description of the logical structure of moral statements, the endeavour to uphold a rigid distinction of fact and value is itself an expression of a moral outlook. This moral outlook that priced individual choice and freedom is commonly shared in modern liberal societies. Nonetheless, this is not the only moral outlook that exists. Seen in this light, under the cover of neutral logical analysis, the

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[15] Iris Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics,' in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 67. MacIntyre also made similar observations in his paper 'What Morality is not': "For the requirement that everyone shall be judged by the same standard … in the sense that everyone shall judge everyone else by the standard by which he judges himself I so basic to liberal morality that it is converted from a requirement of morality into a requirement of logic. It is not part of the meaning of 'morality' *tout court* that moral valuations are universalizable, but liberals tend to use the word 'morality' in such a way that this is made part of its meaning." , see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 104-105.

making of the dichotomy of fact and value is not an innocent act. Rather, it served to legitimatize a liberal morality by excluding other moral outlooks from articulating their conceptions of morality in moral discourse.

Murdoch may have turned the table against the proponents of fact/value dichotomy. By attending that the logical argument that the 'anti-naturalistic argument' presupposed could not logically imply any evaluative conclusions, Murdoch scrupulously unveil the value premises of the proponents of the fact/value dichotomy. Through her careful analysis, Murdoch called our attention to how the drawing of the fact/value dichotomy itself presupposed a distinctive moral outlook. Thus, Murdoch's analysis undermined some of the major reasons of upholding the fact/value dichotomy. This in turn may enable us to cast doubt on the plausibility of 'subjectivism'.

IV

In the preceding analysis, the author sought to unearth the problematic philosophical assumptions of subjectivism. By critically examining the reasons for up holding the fact/value dichotomy, we may see that 'subjectivism' is not as strong and

self-evident as it sounds. In what follows we would turn our attention to the issue of 'atomism'.

In this section the central issue that we shall discuss is that whether a deeper agreement or consensus may exist in cases where there is a conflict of values. In section two, we have discussed how an ontological individualist may understand 'shared values'. Recalling the preceding discussions, an ontological individualist will tend to conceive shared values as the consensus or aggregate of the values of the individuals that make up the community. Thus, in the end the shared values of the community can be reduced to the values of individuals, and individual values are no more than expressions of one's feelings and attitudes. Seen in this light, the existence of shared values may indicate that the members of the community have the same attitudes and evaluations. Putting it differently, shared values may exist only when there are no value conflicts between the members of the community. For if there are value conflicts, no consensus could be secured on the issue under dispute, and for an ontological individualist, in this regard there is no sense to say that there are values shared by the community on this issue.

If, however, the author may show that even in cases of value conflicts, a deeper

agreement on values is not inconceivable, then, we may have reasons to question the

thesis of 'atomism'. At the outset, let us take a dispute from everyday life as an

illustration. Two friends quarrel over which candidate they should support in the

coming election of the legislature, and their views are disparate; that they find it hard

to convince the other to accept his views. In this case, might there be a deeper level of

consensus that underlies their dispute? Apparently, the answer to this question is

negative. But is that really the case, or should we ponder over this issue, and think

more carefully?

Is there really no agreement in the preceding case? In the author's opinion, their

conflicts presuppose a deeper level of shared understanding. Though these two friends

have different opinions on who should be elected in the coming election, the author

shall claim that they have shared understanding of the social meaning of the

institutional background (for instance, what is counted as voting, legislature and

citizenship etc…) that made their dispute possible. That is to say, they have shared

understanding of the social meaning that constituted the institution of voting, its

related norms, ideals and social practice. Besides, their dispute is conducted in the

context of the webs of meaning constituted by these inter-weaving social meanings.

To further elucidate this point, in what follows the author shall invoke the works of

Charles Taylor to shed further light on the thesis that *social meaning and social reality are mutually constitutive*.

In one of his classic papers, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", Charles Taylor put forward the thesis that social meaning and social reality are mutually constitutive. Taylor conceived the relation of social reality and the description to be so intimate that he found even talk of a relation of mutual dependence seems artificial in this regard: "We can speak of mutual dependence if we like, but really what this points up is the artificiality of the distinction between social reality and the language of the description of that social reality. The language is constitutive of the reality, is essential to its being the kind of reality it is. To separate the two and distinguish them as we quite rightly distinguish the heavens from our theories about them is forever to miss the point."[16]

To further explicate this constitutive relationship of social reality and its description, Taylor invoked John Searle's analysis of rule-governed behaviour. Following Searle, Taylor distinguished two different types of relationship of rules and the behaviours governed by the rules. First, there is a sort of regulative relationship

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[16] Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' in ***Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers*** vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 34.

that the behaviours' existence is independent of the rules that govern them. For instance, the behaviour of the intake of food and the customs and etiquettes that governed this behaviour may be an example expressing a regulative relationship. That is, though it may be rude and impolite not to following certain customs and etiquettes while eating, the behaviour of the intake of food has an independent existence from these rules.

However, this may not be the case when a constitutive relationship existed between the rules and the behaviours that they governed. According to Searle, a constitutive relationship is said to exist, if the meaning of the behaviours concerned is altered, or even we could no longer sensibly say that these behaviours could still be available when there is a suspension or change of the rules that governed these behaviors. In other words, a constitutive relationship between the rules and the behaviours that they governed exists, if the former and the latter may not be neatly separated. For instance, in a chess game, the movements of the different pieces (pawn, rook, bishop, king etc.) are governed by the rules of chess. Without these rules, we could not sensibly talk of whether certain move is legitimate or not. Contrasting with the example of the intake of food, without these rules, a pawn is no longer a pawn but a piece of wood, and the behavior of pushing a wooden piece around on a board is no

longer a move in a chess game.

Building on Searle's analysis, Charles Taylor sought to extend this understanding of constitutive relationship beyond the domain of rule-governed behaviour. Taylor claimed that we could extend this conception of constitutive relationship to areas where no definite rules existed. That is, he suggested that in our social life there are constitutive distinctions that constituted related institutions and social practices: "Even in an area where there are no clearly defined rules, there are distinctions between different sorts of behaviour such that one sort is considered the appropriate form for one action or context, the other for another action or context; for example doing or saying other things amounts to breaking off negotiations, doing or saying other things amounts to making a new offer. But just as there are constitutive rules, that is rules such that the behavior governed could not exist without them, and which are in this sense inseparable from that behavior, so I am suggesting that there are constitutive distinctions, constitutive ranges of language which are similarly inseparable, in that certain practices are not without them."[17]

Taking voting as an example, Taylor observed that what is essential to the

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[17] Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 34-35.

institution and practice of voting is that: "some decision or verdict be delivered (a man elected, a measure passed), through some criterion of preponderance (simple majority, two-thirds majority, or whatever) out of a set of micro-choices (the votes of the citizens, MPs, delegates.)"[18] Taylor further pointed out that, if our choices did not have the social meaning and significance as stated above, no markings on a piece of paper, raising of hands, or other activities that intended to express the intention of the 'voter', may be counted as a case of casting a vote. Hence, the continual existence of the practice of voting depends on a set of related constitutive distinctions.

Besides, these constitutive distinctions should be part of the shared understanding of the public. Differently put, if we observed the practice of 'voting' in another society, and we found that certain constitutive distinctions of our practice of 'voting' were not respected in that society, then we may rightfully claim that though they might call their practice 'voting', but clearly what they understood as 'voting' is totally different from our institution and practice of voting. Take for example, if in their society the winner and the loser of an election could both be elected in an 'election', and valid and invalid votes are not distinguished, and these practices and arrangements have not violated their understanding of what is meant by 'voting' or

[18] Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' in **Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers** vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 35.

'legitimate election', then we have a case that certain constitutive distinctions of our practice of 'voting' were not respected. Surely, we will not count them as engaging in our practice of 'voting.'

Through the case of voting, Taylor has explicated the mutually constitutive relationship of social institution and related constitutive distinctions. Basing on Taylor's analysis, we may say that the existence of social institutions presupposed the existence of a shared understanding of the social meaning of the constitutive distinctions that constituted the institutions. Thus, recalling our example of the dispute of two friends, their dispute is conducted against their implicit shared understanding of the nature of social institutions and practice concerned (like what is counted as 'voting', 'election' and 'legislature'). If they did not have a shared understanding of the social meaning of a set of constitutive distinctions, it is hard to imagine that they could possibly be arguing with the other at all. Seen in this light, not only may there be a deeper level of consensus that underlies value conflicts, one may even made a stronger claim that without a shared background understanding of the social meaning of the set of constitutive distinctions that constituted our social institutions and practice, moral disputes are inconceivable.

But the preceding analysis may not convince a hard-line defender of 'atomism'. Even granted that the preceding analysis is plausible, an atomist may argue that we still have not shown there are *value* consensus that underlies the value conflicts. What we have expound so far is that there need to be a shared background understanding of the social meaning of constitutive distinctions. However, this is far from demonstrating that there are *value* consensus that underlies the value conflicts.

To provide a rejoinder to this challenge, the author needed to point out first that to participate in a dispute of values issues, implied that the participants understood why the issue is *worthy* of dispute. To further explicate this point, we have to turn to our preceding example. In the previous discussion, the author has argued that the dispute between these two friends was conducted against their implicit shared understanding of the nature of social institutions and practice concerned. Here we may further noted that these friends have to agree that their quarrels over which candidate should be supported in the coming election is *worthy of dispute*. That is to say, to make sense of their own quarrels, they have to recognize (though implicitly) that this issue carried *a social significance that it makes sense to argue over*. In other words, they have to agree that this is an important issue, or they may even accept that this is a matter that may affect the development and well-being of the whole

community.

What did the author attempt to explain? The author is trying to point out that the reason that we understand this depute concerning which candidate deserved one's support reveals that we understand the *social meaning/significance* of this issue. On the contrary, if we did not understand why certain debate is worthy of discussion, we failed to understand the debate itself. For instance, if your friends quarrel over whether one should sing aloud in the mass transit railway. Without further explanation, it is hard to imagine what they are quarrelling over. In this case, you may not have difficulty in understanding the literal meaning of their words. You understand that apparently they are quarreling. But you will still be perplexed. This is because you still fail to understand the point of their quarrel. That is to say, you failed to grasp the meaning/significance of this issue that they are quarrelling over. From this we may draw the conclusion that to understand a dispute implied that we have certain (implicit) shared understanding of the meaning/significance of the issue under dispute.

Given the preceding analysis, an uncompromising defender of 'atomism' may still not be convinced. In what follows, the author would attempt to show that understanding the meaning/significance of an issue may be connected to a deeper

level of value judgment.[19] First of all, let us briefly discuss how we understand the meaning of our actions. Taylor stated that we usually characterize our actions by the intention or purpose that we sought, and we explain our actions by the desires, emotions and feelings pertained to these actions.[20] Thus, when we grasp the desire or intention behind the action, we said we understanding the meaning of the action. For example, if you see your friend suddenly turned a somersault in the campus, and you are perplexed by his action. Then all of a sudden you caught the sight of a lady whom your friend adored. At that moment, our puzzle seemed to have resolved, we seem to have understood the motivation behind this peculiar behaviour, and we seemed to grasp the meaning of his actions.

However, the meaning of one's action is not plain to our eyes. We have to interpret the meaning that our actions carried. Recalling the above example, whether our friend wanted to attract the attention of his loved one through his peculiar behaviour is not unambiguously marked, rather we need to interpret his motives and intentions. Not only did understanding the meaning of our action required interpretation, we may further distinguish the motives and intentions of one's action

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[19] The following analysis is base on the concepts of 'strong evaluation' and 'inescapable moral framework' put forward by Charles Taylor, see Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?,' in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15-44; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), chap. 1.

[20] Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23.

by their worth (or the contrastive differences that they made) which determines their place in a hierarchy of values. Concerning this issue, Taylor has provided us some sophisticated analysis. Following Harry Frankfurt, Taylor introduced a distinction of 'first order desires' and 'second and higher order desires'.[21] What are 'second order desires'? 'Second order desires' are desires or evaluation of 'first order desires'. Imagine while waiting for a bus in the heat of a hot summer afternoon, I have a desire to consume an ice cream. This desire to consume an ice cream may be said to be a 'first order desire' that I have at the moment. But in the nearby store when I search for an ice cream I come across my favourite brand of chocolate. Unfortunately, I have not got enough money to satisfy both of my desires. So I have a difficult choice between the desires to have an ice cream and my favourite brand of chocolate. In this case, I have to evaluate these two first order desires, to see whether I desire ice cream or chocolate more. This evaluation is an example of 'second order desire'.

Building on the concept of 'second order desires', Taylor further delineated two sorts of second order desires, that is, what Taylor named 'weak evaluation' and 'strong evaluation' respectively.[22] The example we just considered may be an example of a 'weak evaluation'. In cases of 'weak evaluation', the desires that the

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[21] Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?,' in **Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers** vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15-16.
[22] Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?,' in **Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers** vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16-27.

person evaluated is not based on the *worth and significance* of the desires. Rather, usually they are based on the intensity of desires that one felt. This is because when evaluating weakly, we are evaluating which of the competing desires is the desire that I desire. Or as Taylor puts it: "In weak evaluation, for something to be judged good it is sufficient that it be desired."[23] Consider the above example again. If I have a stronger desire to consume an ice cream at that moment, this did not mean that this desire is *higher*, *more noble or worthier* than the desire to enjoy my favourite brand of chocolate.

Furthermore, in cases of 'weak evaluation', the desires that are in conflict may not be in conflict in other situations. That is, they did not necessarily conflict with one another. Or in Taylor's words, "when in weak evaluation one desired alternative is set aside, it is only on grounds of its *contingent* incompatibility with a more desired alternative."[24] (italics, my emphasis) As in the above example, it just turned out that I did not have enough money to buy both the chocolate and the ice cream. However, if I have enough money, I may satisfy both these desires, without having compelled to make a choice between them.

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[23] Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?,' in ***Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*** vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18.
[24] Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?,' in ***Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*** vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18.-19.

In contrast with cases of 'weak evaluation', cases of 'strong evaluation' did not share these two characteristics. 'Strong evaluations' are evaluations of the worth of our desires and actions in qualitatively contrastive terms. In other words, when we strongly evaluate our desires and actions, first we make a qualitative characterization of these motives and intentions based on their worth or significance. Secondly, in cases of 'strong evaluation' the desire that was set aside necessarily conflict with other desire that was chosen: "For in strong evaluation, where we deploy a language of evaluative distinctions, the rejected desire is not so rejected because of some mere contingent or circumstantial conflict with another goal."[25]

For example, we believe any lifeguard who is on duty has a responsibility to save the swimmers that are sinking, and we believe that this duty is much more important than one's desire to consume an ice cream. (In fact it may constitute a shock for someone that such a trivial desire *might ever be weighted* with a responsibility to save someone sinking.) If a lifeguard choose to satisfy his desire to consume an ice cream at the expense of saving someone who is sinking, not only would he be punished by his superior, he would also receive moral reprimand. The reason for this is that, in undergoing strong evaluation, we employed what Taylor called 'language of

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[25] Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?,' in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21.

qualitative contrast' (for example noble/base, loyal/disloyal, courageous/cowardly) to evaluate the competing desires. In employing 'language of qualitative contrast', we also articulate the *worth and the significance* involved in the evaluation. In the case of the example of the lifeguard, it is apparent that the responsibility to fulfill his duty far outweighed or even be incomparably higher than the desire to consume an ice cream. Besides, in this light, what the lifeguard faced was not a single, contingent choice of two competing desires, he was choosing between being a responsible or irresponsible person. Furthermore, this language of qualitative contrast, as Ruth Abbey noted, is considered by Taylor as a fact of moral life: "…the qualitative distinctions we make between different actions, or feelings, or modes of life, as being in some way morally higher or lower, noble, or base, admirable or contemptible…are central to our moral thinking and ineradicable from it."[26]

Given the preceding analysis, it is time for the author to explain how understanding the meaning/significance of an issue may be connected to a deeper level of value judgment. As previously discussed, when we are making strong evaluations, we employ a 'language of qualitative contrast' to articulate the significance and worth of the competing desires. When we understand the social

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[26] Charles Taylor, 'The Diversity of Goods,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 234 quoted in Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 18.

world, we also have to grasp the sets of qualitative distinctions that constitute social reality. Consider the above example again. We believe that if the lifeguard really chooses to consume an ice cream at the expense of saving someone who is sinking, he deserves to receive moral reprimand for his irresponsibility. But why is this so? This is because in our society, as we said before, we have a shared understanding about the significance and worth of these desires. That a lifeguard has the responsibility to fulfill his duty that far outweigh or even be incomparably higher than the desire to consume an ice cream, is something that we cannot sensibly question without our social world 'breaking down'.

Imagine if we come to a place where these desires are considered as having comparable weight, and the choice of the lifeguard in a similar situation is seen as just a personal choice or preference that one is free to choose what he most desired. It is not hard to imagine that we would find the situation shocking and unintelligible. The reasons for this may be, first, our shared understanding about the significance and worth of these desires is constituted by a set of qualitative distinctions (in our case these may be 'responsible'/'irresponsible', 'responsibility'/'preference', 'trivial'/'important' etc.); and second, these qualitative distinctions that we upheld firmly (though implicitly) is also the framework that enabled us to understand the

social world.

Given the preceding analysis, we may claim that if we could not grasp the qualitative distinctions that constituted the worldview of others, we could hardly understand the norms and reasons that underlie their behaviour. If we consider this point together with our discussions that social meaning and social reality is mutually constitutive, this may imply that if we upheld a set of qualitative distinctions that differs greatly from the society that we sought to understand, we may not understand their social life as in the preceding example of a society that assign comparable weight to fulfill one's duty and satisfying one's craving. That is to say, the fact that we can participate in the social life of a community, implied that to a certain extent we understand their social world. Given the preceding analysis, the fact that we understand their social world implied that we grasp the set of qualitative distinction that makes our understanding possible.

But what has the above analysis to do with the issue of a deep level of value judgment? Let's us recall a number of qualitative distinctions we mentioned before. Are qualitative distinctions like noble/base, loyal/disloyal, courageous/cowardly sets of value judgments. In this light, the framework that enable us to understand the social

world (that is, what Charles Taylor called 'inescapable moral framework), is constituted by a series of qualitatively contrasted value judgments. Hence, to grasp the *worth and the significance* of a value conflict, we have to understand the set of qualitative distinctions that are involved, that is, the series of value judgments that constituted these qualitative distinctions. If we did not grasp these value judgments, our situation may be akin to a child who did not understand the game of soccer, wondering why so many men (women) chase after a round object. Like the child, without grasping the qualitative distinctions that constitute soccer (for instance, foul/legal etc.), we could hardly evaluate which team has a better performance, not to mention that there is no way we might participate in a debate about which team is better.

Given the preceding analysis, we may claim that if we did not to a certain extent shared the qualitative distinctions that constitute the social life of a community, it would not be possible for us to understand and communicate with each other. If that is the case, it is inconceivable that we may even engage in a dispute. On the contrary, in the light of the preceding analysis, the fact that we shared the *worth and the significance* of a value conflict, implied that the parties engaged in the conflict have a shared understanding of the value judgments that constituted the issue under dispute.

That is, there is a deeper level of value consensus that underlies the dispute. If the

above analysis is plausible, it seems that we have reasons to reconsider whether

accepting the thesis of 'atomism' is as inevitable as we may initially believe. In the

next section, we shall further our analysis by invoking two sets of distinctions that

Charles Taylor introduced to help us to articulate an alternative conception of shared

values.

V

In the previous two sections, the author attempted to critically examine the theses

of subjectivism and atomism. In the following sections, the author will now attempt to

work out an alternative conception of shared values in terms of Charles Taylor's

analysis. But before we proceed, in this section we shall first outline how Charles

Taylor diagnosed what the major weakness of 'atomism' was.

For Taylor, a crucial error of the 'atomist' is that, the latter ignored the existence

of 'meaning event', and imagined that everything could be treated as if they were

'plain events'.[27] But what are 'meaning events', and what are 'plain events'?

According to Taylor's formulation, 'plain events' are those events that did not

presuppose any background meaning, whereas 'meaning events' are those events that

are inconceivable without presupposing certain background meaning. In a nutshell,

the crucial difference between these two sorts of events is that the existence of the

latter required certain background meaning, while this is not the case for the former.

The roles that we play in a society, (for instance, as a father, a fireman or a social

worker) are examples of the latter; while picking up a rock, lying on a beach or

appreciating the night sky may be counted as instances of the latter.

To further explicate the concept of 'meaning event', we have to turn to Taylor's

observation of certain distinctive characteristics of human speech.[28] For Taylor,

human beings are not the only species that emit and respond to signals. However, a

distinguishing feature of human language use is that our use of signals is intrinsically

connected to norms and standards that are internal to language. To engage in this level

of language use is to move within what Taylor called the 'semantic dimension'.[29] For

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[27] Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 133.

[28] For those interested in Taylor's discussions of language see Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Part III, Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), chaps. 5, 6 and 9.

[29] See Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 79-99,   and Charles Taylor, "Heidegger, Language, Ecology," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 100-126. On this issue

Taylor, observing that human speech opens up a 'semantic dimension' means that user

of human language is distinguished from other species in that he has to face the

requirements and demands of the 'semantic dimension'. That is, the use of human

language is regulated by norms and standards internal to language itself. Thus, qua

users of human language, we have to account for whether our uses of language meet

these norms and standards. Or putting it simply, we have to account for whether our

use of language is appropriate or right.

Thus, in Taylor's eyes, language has a double structure. On the one hand, every

language community has its own rules and codes of language, that is, its grammar. On

the other hand, every time we use language, whether uttering a sentence, writing a

passage, we have to appeal to these rules and codes.[30] Hence, owing to the

normative/regulative status of these rules and codes, our use of language is not purely

Nicholas Smith has made a lucid exposition that deserved our attention: "By emitting and responding to signals, animals convey information to each other in ways that are beneficial to the survival of the species as a whole. Higher animals (including humans) are also able to bond together into groups by communicative means. In both these cases, Taylor maintains, language serves some nonlinguistically defined purpose. Language, at this level, is intelligible just in terms of biological imperatives; its intelligibility is not dependent on standards that are internal to language itself. But this changes once we move into what Taylor calls "the semantic dimension'. At this level of language use, it becomes possible to talk about the 'rightness' of linguistic expressions. That is to say, a linguistic expression, when operative within the semantic dimension is subject to norms. And it is only when the use of linguistic expressions is governed by norms that the issue of their meaning or significance arises, as distinct from their causal role. 'Success' in the semantic dimension is not a matter of being causally instrumental in bringing about some nonlinguistically defined end, but by being right, of satisfying a standard internal to language, in whatever manner is appropriate." See Nicholas H. Smith, "Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition," in *Charles Taylor* ed. Ruth Abbey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38.

[30] Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 134.

arbitrary; rather we have to attend to the issue of rightness and appropriateness of our use. Besides, there exist a circular and mutually constitutive relationship between each particular act of speech and the rules and codes: Each particular act of speech presupposes related rules and codes, but these rules and codes are reproduced (or transformed) through acts of speech.

"What is the point of this excursus into Taylor's philosophy of language?" one may ask. The author wished the following discussion may answer this query. The point of this excursus is to lay the ground for explicating Taylor's distinction of 'meaning event' and 'plain event'.

In the author's understanding, 'meaning events' are events that happened in the 'semantic dimension'. Situated in the 'semantic dimension', 'meaning events' cannot avoid the set of issues of rightness and appropriateness intrinsically related to the 'background meaning' at issue. What is distinctive about 'meaning events' is that these events could not be understood when we isolated them from the inter-subjective background that gave these events meaning. Besides, we can only grasp these background meanings by appealing to the linguistic rules and codes of the language community concerned. As Georgia Warnke nicely stated: "…the idea of social or

intersubjective meaning follows from that of linguistic meaning. Indeed, the two domains of meaning cannot easily be separated. Words have the meanings they have in a language because of their relations to other words, because of their contrasts and affinities and because of the thick historical and social vocabulary they help to constitute and to which they belong. But they also have the meanings they have because of their relations to contexts of possible action and social practice."[31]

So, given the preceding exposition, we may appreciate why Taylor concisely characterized 'meaning events' as follows: "Meaning events exist in a kind of two-dimensional space. They are particular events, but only in relation to a background of meaning."[32] Again take the social roles we played as an illustration. When we played the role of a student or a son, the fact that we may play these roles depends on the shared understanding and norms of how these roles may be played. Even if in case where we tried to challenge these understanding and norms, (for instance, being a disobedient student or being defiant to one's parents' advice), we might not do so without appealing to these understanding and norms ('children should show filial piety to their parents', 'students should respect their teachers' etc…)that are constitutive of the social roles.

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[31] Georgia Warnke, *Justice and Interpretation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 17.
[32] Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 134.

After explicating the notion of 'meaning event', we may now be prepared to apprehend the role that recognition of the existence of 'meaning events' may play in exposing the major flaws of 'atomism'. According to Taylor, the prolonged debate of 'atomism' and what he called the 'social perspective' is closely connected to whether one acknowledges the 'semantic dimension'. If the 'semantic dimension' is passed into oblivion, that is, when we ignored the existence of 'meaning events', believing that all that is collective may (at least in principle) be decomposed into its individual components seems inevitable. In this case, even the use of language is seen as an affair of the individual. In the light of the construal of the 'atomist', language is understood as how an individual relate what he thinks with the sound that he emits or the symbol that he inscribes. Thus, we may come to appreciate why Taylor place such emphasis on the issue of the recognition of the 'semantic dimension' and 'meaning events'. The reason for this, as Taylor put it, is that: "Acknowledging the independent place of the dimension of langue means accepting something into one's social ontology which can't be decomposed into individual occurrences. This is the crucial step out of atomism."[33]

Hence, given the preceding analysis, we see that the major flaws of 'atomism' is

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[33] Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 135.

its neglect of the role that 'meaning events' played in our social life. Without recognizing 'meaning events' as 'meaning events', 'atomism' fails to acknowledge that 'meaning events' exist in a two dimension space. That is to say, background meanings are presupposed in each particular 'meaning event', and these background meanings are public and inter-subjectively shared. As the preceding example of the role of a son showed, the social roles that we played are 'meaning events'. In this light, we may say that our social life is infiltrated by 'meaning events', or even our social life is constituted by 'meaning events'. Contrary to the atomist, basing on the distinction of 'plain events' and 'meaning events', the author would argue that values may not be seen solely as the expression of individual feelings and attitudes. Rather these feelings and attitudes have to be understood against the shared inter-subjective meaning of a community if these feelings and attitudes are to be intelligible. As our illustration of social roles showed, when we played the role of a social worker, the fact that one may play this role depends on a set of shared inter-subjective understanding of how the role of social worker is to be played properly. Obviously, this shared understanding cannot be conflated with how individual workers understood their roles. Besides how the social work community understood the role of social worker constituted a significant component of the community's shared inter-subjective understanding of the role of social worker.

Having discussed the error of 'atomism', the author would further introduce a distinction put forward by Charles Taylor. The point of this move is to articulate an account of a deeper level of shared values that differs from that of an 'emotivist' understanding. To start with, let's see the difference between 'convergent meaning' and 'common meaning'.[34] Charles Taylor defined 'convergent meaning' as follows: "A convergent matter is one that has the same meaning for many people, but where this is not acknowledged between them or in public space."[35] What is worth noting is that for 'convergent meaning' we may say that the meaning concerned is shared by the group in a minimal sense. That is, for a convergent matter, different people have the same understanding of the situation, however, *this state of sharing certain meaning is not shared*. Take for example, in a hot summer day, a long queue of passengers are sweating under the sun waiting for an overdue bus. Everybody is feeling bad about this situation. Yet, no one utters a word, nor are there any exchanges of looks. Situations such as this may be characterized as examples of situations of 'convergent meaning'. In the scenario, the situation has the same meaning for the passengers, that they all felt bad about it. However, this bad feeling is not something that is publicly acknowledged among these passengers.

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[34] Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 138-139.
[35] Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly Social Goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 139.

Contrasting with situations of 'convergent meaning', in situations of 'common meaning' not only that people involved in these situations have the same understanding of the situation, *this state of sharing certain meaning is itself publicly acknowledged or shared*. Hence, one may say the situation not only has the same meaning for you or me, but that it has the same meaning for *us*. That is to say, you and I did not just turn out to have the same understanding of the situation, the meaning that we shared and acknowledged created a bond between the two of us, bringing us together, making us into a unit, as Taylor put it, "a 'we' who understand together, which is by definition analytically undecomposable."[36]

Take a pair of couple who adored each other as an example. Though they adored each other, as long as they kept this as a secret in their heart, that is, not until they began to openly acknowledge this mutual feeling between the two of them, their relationship may not enter into a new stage, and became a pair of lovers. The crucial issue here is that, the lovers relationship is constituted by 'common meaning'. It is not just that you adored me, or I being madly in love with you, but that *we* mutually acknowledged that *we* love and cherish each other. The fact that this type of relationship can be maintained depends on the renewal of the 'common meaning' that

constituted the relationship. If one day, one of us thinks that our love fades, that is, the 'common meaning' that constituted the relationship breaks down, then *you may still be you, but we no longer are*.

Seen in the above light, the crucial distinction between 'convergent meaning' and 'common meaning' is that the latter is based on publicly acknowledge common understanding. Furthermore, this common understanding is also constitutive of the relationship of those who hold this understanding as in the preceding instance of the pair of lovers showed. But evidently, as a relationship that is stable does not exclude the possibility that there are conflicts and quarrels, so there are 'common meaning' does not mean that there are not disputes. Rather in some cases, that 'common meaning' exists is the reason why the dispute is particularly heated. If we still have a faint memory of the sustained debate within the socialist camp in the past century, we would understand that from the fact that disputes and conflicts are observed, we cannot conclude that there is no common understanding among the contending parties.

VI

Armed with the preceding discussions, it is high time that we spell out an account of shared values that differed from the one that propounded by 'emotivism'. But before we proceed, let's briefly review what we have discussed so far. After outlining the theses of subjectivism and atomism, that is, the two major theses that underlie 'emotivism' in section two, the author has attempted to critically examine the theses of subjectivism and atomism in section three and section four respectively. In the previous section, the author has explicated how Charles Taylor diagnoses the major weakness of 'atomism', and introduced two sets of distinctions, that of 'plain events/meaning events' and 'convergent meaning/common meaning'.

In what follows, the author would argue that introducing the distinction of 'convergent meaning' and 'common meaning' may enable us to articulate a conception of shared values that get covered up when we take for granted the understanding propounded by 'emotivism'. Basing on the distinction of 'convergent meaning' and 'common meaning', we understand that the latter is based on publicly acknowledged common understanding, and this understanding also constituted the relationship of those who hold this understanding.

Attending to the existence and pervasiveness of 'common meaning', we may contrast two conceptions of shared values as follows. For 'emotivism', values are understood solely as the expression of personal feelings and attitudes. Ignoring the existence of 'meaning event' and 'common meaning', an emotivist could only conceive shared values as a convergent matter. Hence, for an emotivist, if conflicts and disputes existed, there could not be any shared values.

However, if we acknowledge the existence of 'meaning event' and 'common meaning', we may have a more complicated picture. First, what the emotivist meant by 'values' cover only a small part of the terrain. This is because the emotivist failed to see the type of values that are expressions of inter-subjective meaning. Second, the expression of personal feelings and attitudes that the emotivist meant by 'values' are subject to a different construal. It is worth noting that acknowledging the existence of 'meaning event' and 'common meaning' does not imply that the author deny that there are personal feelings and attitudes. Rather personal feelings and attitudes are not seen as something that is purely subjective. Recognizing the significance of 'common meaning', we may come to see that expressions of personal feelings and attitudes may only be possible against a (tacitly) shared inter-subjective background meaning.

In contrast to 'emotivism', by attending to the internal relation that may exist between values and shared social meaning, we may conceive two distinct categories of shared values. First, values may be shared in a minimal sense, that is, being shared convergently. In this case, as we have discussed, it just turns out that people hold the same values and attitudes. Second, values may be shared in a stronger sense, or as the author puts it, they are commonly shared. 'Commonly shared values' in this light are values that *their sharing itself are publicly acknowledged by those who shared these values*. As we have discussed the existence of 'common meaning' does not exclude the possibility that there may be conflicts and disputes about these shared meanings. Indeed, in some cases, that the contending parties shared certain 'common meaning' may be the reason why the dispute is particularly interminable and heated. So acknowledging the existence of 'meaning event' and 'common meaning', we may conceive shared values as a convergent matter or a common matter. Hence, if conflicts and disputes existed, this does not imply that the contending parties did not share any values.

Given the preceding account of 'commonly shared values', we can conceive social work values as the shared values of the social work community in a new light. First, as our discussion of 'meaning events' showed, playing the role of a social

worker may be seen as a series of 'meaning events'. The fact that one may play the role of social worker itself depends on a set of shared inter-subjective understanding of how this role is to be played properly. Not only that different individual worker's understandings of their roles cannot be conflated with this shared understanding, rather, these different understandings are to be understood against this shared background meaning. How the social work community understood the role of social worker, in this light, also constituted a significant component of the community's shared inter-subjective understanding of the role of social worker. Second, as our discussion of 'commonly shared values' showed, the existence of value conflicts and disputes might not imply that there are no shared values. Thus, the observation that there are disputes of how to interpret social work values does not imply that the social work community does not shared these values. Third, in our discussion of 'common meaning', we see that common understanding is also constitutive of the relationship of those who hold this understanding. In other words, commonly shared values are constitutive of the bonds of social workers qua social workers. That is, the existence of the social work community and its related practice presupposed a set of commonly shared values. Fourth, seen in the discussion of this chapter, the flaw of Chris Clark's account is that he overlooked the issue of 'commonly shared values'. If that is the case, our endeavour to reflect and reexamine social work values must learn the lesson

to acknowledge the existence of 'meaning events', 'common meaning' and 'commonly shared values'. In this light, our reflections and discussions should be based on an articulation of the 'commonly shared values' of the social work community.

In this chapter, through a critical examination of the philosophical assumptions of 'emotivism', we have exposed the error of these assumptions. In this way, we have to a certain extent questioned the emotivist understanding of shared values that constrain the discussion of social work values as our analysis of Clark's work may demonstrate. Besides, we have given a preliminary account of 'commonly shared values' that may enable us to articulate the shared background understanding of the social work community. An account of the constitutive relationship of values and social meaning has been developed in this chapter. In the next chapter, I would try to explore the relationship between social work values and local culture values by focusing on a representative value of contemporary social work discourses: empowerment.

Chapter Five

A Preliminary Exploration of the Tensions between

Empowerment and Chinese Self

I

In this chapter I would try to explore the relationship between social work values and local cultural values. In order to show that tensions and conflicts exist between social work values and local cultural values, the author would focus the following discussions on a representative value of contemporary social work discourses: empowerment. By examining the relationship of empowerment and the local cultural context, the author would try to show that implications may be drawn from this case that shed light on the broader issue of the relationship between social work values and local cultural values.

But before we proceed, we shall in the first place recapitulate two major themes discussed at the end of Chapter One. In the first chapter, we have posed that the discussions of an indigenous perspective for social work values are prevalently beset

by grave conceptual and theoretical issues. One of the seminal theoretical dilemmas for discussions of an indigenous value base of social work practice, that the author identified, is the tension between universal norm and particular cultural understanding.

In this regard, the author has further identified two crucial issues: First, whether it makes sense to draw a sharp distinction between social explanation and normative evaluation. The author has noted that, in distinguishing 'positive morality' from 'normative morality', opponents of the idea of developing an indigenous value base for social work practice have asked a forceful and challenging question: May the ambition to   develop 'an indigenous value base for social work practice ' be just an unfortunate result of the confusion between 'positive morality' and 'normative morality'? That is to say, even if one grants that recognizing the existence of cultural and moral diversities may support critical reception of foreign social work theories and ideas, *however*, *that remains an issue at the level of social explanation*. Yet, critics may point out, solely based on this recognition *it is hardly justified for us to jump to a conclusion at the normative level.* In other words, the fact that the local community upholds values that differ from the core social work values cannot comprise a plausible reason to support the *normative* claim that indigenous values

should be the normative ground for guiding and regulating local social work practice. Seen in this light, the charge that the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice is the result of a confusion itself presupposes a sharp distinction between social explanation and normative evaluation. However, the crucial issue is "Should we accept such a sharp distinction?" That is the question that we have to pose.

Secondly, we see that local cultural values were pitted against social work values originated from the West in the current discussions. That is, in discussing the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice, we seem to presume that developing an indigenous value base for social work practice is equal to acknowledging *solely* the normative force of local values. Hence, in this light, we seem to be compelled to choose between either one of the two options. But is this assumption warranted? Might there be a possibility that these two perspectives can be mediated with each other?

In the above passages, we have taken note of two issues that guide our exploration. The first concerns the validity of the assumption of the distinction between social explanation and normative evaluation. The second relates with the justification of accepting the bifurcation of local values and social work values. It is

clear that, *if these two presuppositions are accepted as valid, the fate of the project of developing an indigenous value base for social work practice is sealed*. In fact, we could hardly rebut the opponent's charge that the project itself is the regrettable result of a series of confusions: the confusions between a series of distinctions like 'positive morality' and 'normative morality', 'social explanation' and 'normative evaluation', and 'fact' and 'value'. In this chapter, we shall consider a number of arguments that may help us to elucidate and reconsider these two issues.

In what follows, the author will first tackle the issue of presuming the distinction between social explanation and normative evaluation. In the second section, I shall recapitulate the major themes discussed in the previous chapters. This will be followed by an analysis of the implications that we may draw from the thesis of the constitutive relationship of values and social meaning developed in Chapter Four.

In the sections that follow, that is, Section Three to Six, the author will draw attention to the second issue: whether we are justified to accept the bifurcation of local values and social work values. Trying to explore the relationship between social work values and local cultural values, the author would focus the following discussions on a representative value in contemporary social work discourses:

empowerment. By examining the relationship between empowerment and the local cultural context, the author would try to show that implications may be drawn from this case. This may shed light on the broader issue of the relationship between social work values and local cultural values. I shall attempt to give a preliminary conceptual analysis of the idea of empowerment in the third section. By unearthing the presuppositions of the idea of empowerment, in the fourth section I would try to spell out some tacit understanding of the role of emotion in social life, the nature of selfhood and the relationship between self and society in Western societies. In Section Five, the author would articulate the nature of the deep structure of the Chinese self informed by Chinese familism. Contrasting the presuppositions about the nature of selfhood in Western societies discussed in the fourth section with those accounts of selfhood in Chinese societies, I shall then show that the prevalent conception of empowerment may be at odds with our understanding of the Chinese self. It is hoped that this analysis will provide ground for further examination of the tensions and conflicts between social work values and local cultural values in the final section of this chapter.

Given the preceding analysis, the author would pose the issue of how this prima facie tension between empowerment and the Chinese self is to be understood. In the

final section, I shall argue that the theoretical framework developed in earlier chapters may shed light on how we understand this issue. Facing this tension squarely, we seem to get caught between Scylla and Charybdis. If we interpret this conflict as a dilemma, then it seems that we have either to uphold the idea of empowerment as having universal validity and thus disregard the local cultural understanding, or acknowledge the significance of local cultural understanding at the expense of professional values that are claimed to have universal validity.

The author would like to argue that the critical-hermeneutical analysis of the Chinese self developed by Yuen Sun Pong and his colleagues may enable us to evade these forced options. The author would argue that Yuen Sun Pong's analysis may help us see that we could not avoid the issue of the mediation between the perspective of the researcher and that of the subject. In this light, the equally undesirable choices of neglecting local cultural values or denying the relevance of social work values are only pseudo-solutions. Thus, by relocating the source of their conflicts as arising from different understandings of selfhood, we may re-interpret the tension of prima facie tension between empowerment and the Chinese self.

II

We shall in the first place recapitulate some of the grounds we have covered in the preceding chapters. In the first chapter, we have posed that prevalent discussions of an indigenous perspective of social work values are beset by grave conceptual and theoretical issues. One of the crucial theoretical dilemmas for discussions of an indigenous value base of social work practice, that the author identified, is the tensions between universal norm and particular cultural understanding. In the second chapter, the author reviewed a number of relevant works of indigenization in social sciences and social work. Focusing on the issue of the validation of indigenous theories, the author attempted to show that the difficulties of elucidating the idea of indigenization may be related to the positivistic conception of empirical validation and the ideal of value-neutrality that still haunted the prevalent discussions. To search for resources to clarify the aforementioned theoretical issues, we attempted to articulate an idea that values are constituted by shared social meaning. With the help of the analysis of MacIntyre, we tried to contextualize our discussions of social work values in the light of the nature of moral discourse in modern societies. The author also explicated the thesis that the understanding of the nature of social work values is informed by 'emotivism' in the third chapter. In chapter four, by unearthing and

criticizing the philosophical assumptions of 'emotivism', the author expounded the thesis that values are constituted by shared social meaning with the help of Charles Taylor's analysis of 'meaning events' and 'common meaning'.

It is worth noting that the arguments developed in the preceding chapter also shed light on the ideal of value neutrality and the positivistic conception of empirical validation discussed in chapter two. In chapter two, we have briefly reviewed the three major meta-theoretical tenets of positivism: Firstly, the existence of an objective reality that is independent of the knower, the tenet of simple realism; secondly, the correspondence theory of truth; and thirdly, the objectivity or inter-subjectivity of sense perception. We have also pointed out that the belief that verification procedures of positivism are vigorous is founded on the (implicit) acceptance of these meta-theoretical assumptions. If the validity of the positivistic conception of empirical validation depends on the acceptance of these meta-theoretical assumptions, then the adequacy of the verification procedures of positivism may not be stronger than the grounds that these assumptions have.

In explicating a constitutive conception of social reality and constitutive distinctions, we have in a way showed the relationship between the knower and the

social world might not be what positivism would have us believed.[1] If a constitutive

conception of social reality and constitutive distinctions hold, the existence of social

reality could not be totally independent of the knower. Rather, (at least some of) the

concepts the knower, as a member of a linguistic community, employs is partially

constitutive of the social world that the knower seeks to understand. Seen in this light,

we may also question the correspondence theory of truth that presumed that language

is only a neutral tool in representing the external world. This is because there is a

constitutive relationship between the language that we use to describe the social world

and the social world that we seek to describe. As for the objectivity or

inter-subjectivity of sense perception, if we accept a constitutive conception of social

reality and constitutive distinctions, we may still see, hear, feel the same thing, but the

way how this may be accounted for is different. Positivist claimed that

inter-subjectivity of our sense perception is grounded in the impacts on our senses that

originated from the external world. In other words, the sense data are raw and given.

However, in a constitutive view, this inter-subjectivity of our perception of the social

world is not grounded in something that is pre-interpreted. It may just be the result of

an (implicit) interpretative consensus. That is, this is the case because we just turn out

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[1] The contrast that the author articulated here is only a preliminary sketch of the differences between positivism and a constitutive view. For further and more sophisticated discussions see Martin Packer and Richard Addison eds., *Entering The Circle: Hermeneutic Investigation in Psychology* (Albany: Sate University of New York Press, 1989) chap. 1; Frank Richardson, Blaine Fowers, and Charles Guignon, *Re-envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), chap 8 and 9.

to interpret the social world in certain light which is shared by the community.

As for the principle that social researchers should be value-neutral, and the related assumption of a fact-value dichotomy, the author hopes that the critical examination of the fact/value dichotomy in the preceding chapter has shaken one's faith in the credibility of this dichotomy. Besides, we have put forward a conception of shared values as constituted by inter-subjective meaning. If there is an internal relation of values and shared social meaning, then a rigid separation of facts and values may not be maintained.

Yet, the previous discussion is not just deconstructive. Apart from undermining some of the principal philosophical assumptions that underlies the ideal of value neutrality, armed with a constitutive conception of values and shared social meaning, the author has articulated two conceptions of shared values. The first is a conception of shared values as a convergent matter, that is, there is a consensus of values as expression of individual feelings and attitudes. If we may say that the first conception understood as the *sharing* of values in a minimal sense, then the second conception conceives shared values as being shared in a stronger sense. What the author termed 'commonly shared values' are values that *their sharing itself are publicly*

acknowledged by those who shared these values.

For an attentive critic, the ease that we move to and fro between the terrain of social explanation and the domain of evaluation and moral appraisals is worrisome. At the end of chapter two, we have anticipated a criticism that may be directed to our analysis. Critics may charge that we have made a grave confusion. Having confused the level of explanation and that of prescription, our critics may say, we have fallaciously jump from an analysis at the level of explanation to a conclusion which is concerned with prescription. In a nutshell, we are charged of making an illegitimate move. Without denying that we may make a useful distinction between explanation and evaluation, our critics seem to presuppose that the language that we use to explain and evaluate the social world is discontinuous. It is evident that this may be an offshoot of the fact/value distinction and the 'anti-naturalistic arguments'. Presuming the validity of the fact/value dichotomy, critics seem to take for granted that the discontinuity of the language/s that we use to explain and evaluate the social world. Or, in our critics' view, at least the traffic between the two levels is limited. Our critics may admit that some evaluations may contain certain factual component, nevertheless they would deny that there are any necessary connections between the evaluative and factual elements of an evaluation.

The constitutive relationship of social reality and social meaning explicated in the preceding chapter may enable us to reexamine the distinction of explanation and evaluation that our critics relied. Recollecting our discussions of constitutive distinctions in chapter four, by an illuminating example of the case of voting, Taylor has explicated the mutually constitutive relationship of social institution and related constitutive distinctions. Basing on Taylor's analysis, we may say that the existence of social institutions presuppose the existence of a shared understanding of the social meaning of the constitutive distinctions that constitute the institutions. Observing that these constitutive distinctions are also a set of value judgments,[2] we may appreciate why Taylor argue that the language that we use to explain and evaluate the social world is not discontinuous as our critics believed: "For our language of deliberation is continuous with our language of assessment, and this with the languages in which we explain what people do and feel."[3]

To support his claim, Taylor asks us to deliberate that if we could ever by pass the actors' understanding of their social world in explaining their behaviours. In other words, as we have discussed in chapter four, if the distinctions that the actors

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[2] See chapter four section four.
[3] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 57.

employed are constitutive of their social world, could we by pass the actors' understanding of these distinctions and still be able to offer an adequate explanation of their behaviours? Taylor's answer to this issue is negative.

In Taylor's view, attempts to devise a value-neutral (technical/'scientific') language for social explanation, with the aim of 'sterilizing' our language of explanation, so that social explanations will no longer be contaminated by these value-laden distinctions, is pointless and fruitless. The reason for this is that in order to offer an explanation, we have to grasp what the object to be explained is, that is, to identify our *explananda*. However, considering that the meaning of our object of study is constituted by these constitutive distinctions, if we bypass these distinctions in our language of explanation, we will lose the object that is to be explained. That is to say, we fail to offer an explanation of our object when we by pass the constitutive distinctions that constitute our object. This is because we could not even capture what we sought to explain if we fail to attend to the actors' understanding of these distinctions.

In this light, the language of explanation could not be a neutral language that is qualitatively different from the ordinary language of everyday life. The reason for this

is that, the insistence of utilizing a value-neutral language that is discontinuous with everyday language that is saturated with constitutive distinctions only ended up forfeiting the object to be investigated. That is to say, *to explain* one has to identify the object to be explained, and a necessary condition of identifying an object of the social world is to grasp the language that is constitutive of the object's meaning. Given that this language is one which its descriptive and evaluative elements are entangled, a value neutral language that is 'sterilized' and free from these distinctions could not qualify as a candidate for social explanatory discourse.

This is at odds with our common understanding that the explanation offered by a scientific account of society should be value-neutral. Taylor identifies three flaws that a language of constitutive distinctions is thought to have.[4] Taylor's articulation may help to explain why we tend to by pass this language and the agent's understanding that this language of constitutive distinctions embodied. First, a language of constitutive distinctions cannot be subjected to inter-subjective validation as the value-neutral language of natural science does. The reasons for this are: Firstly, since these constitutive distinctions are also a set of value judgments, they are essentially open to interpretative disputes. Furthermore, not everyone is entitled to claim to have

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[4] See Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity,' in **Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers** vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 119-120.

the sensibility and expertise in making and appraising these judgments, and the implication is that the issue of who might be competent to replicate the findings is problematic. As Taylor put it: "Using this kind of concept, one cannot hope for replicable findings on the part of any scientifically competent observer. Or put another way, 'scientific competence' for terms of this kind would have to include certain developments of character and sensibility which themselves are only recognizable as such from the standpoint of those who have acquired them."[5]

Second, this language is inextricably evaluative in the strong sense. Recalling our discussions of 'constitutive distinctions' and 'strong evaluations' in the preceding chapter, when we use constitutive distinctions to characterize actions and situations, we make qualitative characterizations of these actions and situations based on their worth or significance. Thus, in this sense, we may be said to evaluate these actions and situations strongly. However, it is usually thought that scientific discourse should be conducted in value-free terms. So evaluative language- not to mention a language of constitutive distinctions- is seldom seen as a qualified candidate for social scientific discourse.

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[5] See Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 120.

Third, if a language of constitutive distinctions is employed in social research, the aspiration of a universal science of society may be endangered. One of the distinguishing features of a language of constitutive distinctions is its contextual or cultural specificity. As these constitutive distinctions are intimately tied to the institutions and social practices that they in part constituted, it is hardly surprising that most of them are specific to the context/culture they pertained. However, this fact seems to preclude the possibility of developing a cross-cultural analysis. The reason for this is that, different cultures have their own sets of constitutive distinctions, these constitutive distinctions may be incommensurable, that is, they might not be measured on a par, and exact translation of these terms may not be possible.

To these worries, Taylor did not made a direct confrontation with these issues in his essay.[6] Taylor acknowledges that the idea of utilizing language of constitutive distinctions in our social explanation is at odds with our common understanding that the explanation offered by a scientific account of society should be value-neutral. Taylor also understands that we are tempted to by pass these constitutive distinctions, or, to use Taylor's phrase, to finesse the agents' understanding in the 'scientific'

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[6] See Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 121-123. For Taylor's responses to these worries see the other essays in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), part one.

explanations that we offer. Yet, Taylor invites us to reconsider whether the strategy to finesse the agents' understanding might really work in this regard.

To state his case, Taylor considered a functional account of religious practices as an instance of an account that attempted to by pass the agents understanding. To illustrate that this endeavour to finesse the agents understanding in a social explanation is futile, he asks us to ponder *how much* might a functional explanation of religion explain, and *how* we may validate the explanation offered.

Taylor argued that some functional accounts of religious practices sought to explain religious practices in terms of the social integrative function that these religious practices were thought to have. Taylor then contended that, even if we granted that there is some truth in the general claim that religious practices may contribute to the social integration of a society, but what need to be seriously considered is how significant this finding is. The author understands that here Taylor is compelling us to look seriously *how much* such an explanation *explained*. In other words, if what a functional account of religious practices offers is only a general understanding that religions may have social integrative functions, then should we count *that* as an *adequate* explanation of the religious practices pertained?

For Taylor, the test of whether an explanation of religious practices is adequate depends on *how much* and *to what extent* the explanation offered can explain the actual shape of the religious practices of a given society. Seen in this light, posing that religious practices *as such* are thought to have the function of social integration may not comprise an adequate explanation. Rather, we have to explain why that particular rituals, certain hierarchy and form of piety are observed. As Taylor put it forcefully: "The challenge to explain details is essential to the validation of this kind of theory. But it is a challenge which cannot be met, except by acquiring an adequate understanding (in our strong senses) of the actions, theologies, ideals, and so on, which we are trying to explain. There is no way to finesse the requirement of understanding. …But to give a convincing interpretation, one has to show that one has understood what the agent is doing, feeling here. His action/feeling/aspirations/outlook in his terms constitutes our explanandum."[7]

The author understood Taylor's point as compelling us to face the issue whether an explanation that bypasses the agent's understanding may explain the *particular details of the object we seek to explain*. In Taylor's view, the endeavour is futile. This

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[7] Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity,' in **Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers** vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 123.

is because it is a non-starter. The reason for this is that in order to explain a social

phenomenon, we have to *identify* the target of our explanation. However, if we probe

into the details sufficiently, we would find it hard to identify the social phenomenon

to be explained without using the agent's language and concepts.

To further explicate this point, let us consider Taylor's example. In

'Understanding and Ethnocentricity', Taylor took the case of historical materialism as

an illustration of the above point. Taylor states that historical materialism explains the

evolution of political and religious forms in terms of the relations of production. But

the crucial issue is how far can historical materialism explain political and religious

changes in terms of the relations of production. In Taylor's words, "Marxists are thus

challenged to explain precisely the detail of political and religious development: can

one explain the rise of Protestantism, the differential spread of Lutheran and Calvinist

theologies?"[8]

"But why could Marxists not explain the detail of political and religious

development?" one may ask. The author would suggest that the reason for this is that

historical materialism tries to bypass the actor's understanding of their social world.

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[8] Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 123.

However, in finessing the actor's understanding of their social world, historical materialism also fails to capture the details of the social phenomenon that it attempts to explain.

Consider the rise of Protestantism as an illustration. In understanding the details of this development in Christianity, one of the central issues that we may have to understand is the controversies around the Christian sacrament of 'the Eucharist'. Might we believe an explanation that by pass how 'the Eucharist' is understood by Christians (not to mention the controversy round what happens at 'the Eucharist', and the doctrines of 'transubstantiation', 'consubstantiation' and 'memorialism' etc.), could really capture the meaning of 'the Eucharist'? *If to have a sufficient understanding of the rise of Protestantism requires us to attend to this level of details*, we would find it hard to believe that an adequate explanation of the rise of Protestantism could bypasses the language and concepts that Christians understood their religious practices. Succinctly put, i*f an explanation could not even grasp its object of explanation, how could we even count it as a candidate for an adequate explanation of the object concerned*. Hence, we may appreciate why Taylor claimed that it is futile to finesse the participant's understanding in our social explanations.[9]

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[9] The point of explicating Taylor's arguments is not to offer some knock down arguments, rather it is meant to give us a glimpse of some of considerations that may support the thesis that the language of

In this section, we have explicated some of the implications that we may draw from the thesis of the constitutive relationship of values and social meaning developed in chapter four. Building on the thesis of the constitutive relationship of values and social meaning, the author would attempt to draw the methodological implications of this thesis for our examination of the relationship of social work values and the local cultural values in the coming sections. Granted the thesis of the constitutive relationship of values and social meaning, it may be fruitful for the present project to articulate the social meaning/s that constitutes social work values and the local cultural values. In order to probe whether tensions and conflicts exist between social work values and local cultural values, the author need to focus the following discussions on a representative value of contemporary social work discourses. In the next two sections, the author would focus the discussions on 'empowerment': a frequently invoked concept in contemporary social work discourses. The author will unearth some of the major social meanings that underlie the idea of empowerment in the fourth section. To pave the way for an articulation of

explanation might not be discontinuous. The author understands that Taylor's account give rises to issues regarding the validity of interpretations or how to adjudicate a better interpretation among a number of rivals. However, that is beyond the scope of the present discussion. For further discussions see Martin J. Packer and Richard B. Addison, 'Evaluating an Interpretive Account,' in *Entering The Circle: Hermeneutic Investigation in Psychology* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 275-292; David Hiley, James Bohman, and Richard Shusterman eds. *The Interpretative Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), part 2; and Michael Krausz ed. *Is There A Single Right Interpretation?* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

the major social meanings that underpin the value of empowerment, it is time to turn

to a preliminary conceptual analysis of the idea of empowerment.

III

To start with, let the author explains why the concept of empowerment is

selected. Empowerment is filling the literature of social work in recent years. Some

scholars even said that it may be the social work concept par excellence.[10] Besides,

we can see the literature on empowerment growing in the local setting. As such it may

be a fruitful case for us to consider the relationship of social work values and local

cultural values.[11]

Nonetheless, to those who may be doubtful of the appropriateness and relevance

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[10] Stephen Parker, Jan Fook and Bob Pease, 'Empowerment: The Modern Social Work Concept *Par Excellence*,' in Jan Fook & Bob Pease eds., ***Transforming Social Work Practice: Postmodern Critical Perspectives*** (London: Routledge, 1999), 150-157.

[11] The issue whether empowerment serves as a rhetoric in professional discourse or tacted onto practice in a tokenistic way and less in its practice is not our concern here, cf. Leslie Margolin, ***Under the Cover of Kindness***: "social workers may claim Jane Addams as their source of inspiration, but they *do* Mary Richmond… What I show instead is how the various innovations and reforms devoted to empowering clients, to equalizing and personalizing their relations with social workers, represent a continuation and, in some ways, an intensification of earlier patterns…Only by convincing itself and others that social work changed was social work able to stay the same." Leslie Margolin, ***Under the Cover of Kindness: The Invention of Social Work*** (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 9.

of selecting the case of empowerment, they may raise the following issues: first, even if we recognize that empowerment may be a prominent approach or perspective in contemporary social work, but that does not mean that it is a significant value. Second, granted that it is a significant value in contemporary social work, on what grounds is empowerment chosen as a case to consider the relationship of social work values and local cultural values. That is, do we have reasons to speculate that the idea of empowerment may be in tension or even in conflict with local cultural values? In other words, is there any preliminary evidence which shows that unreflective appropriation of the concept may constitute an issue that deserve further examination?

In response to the first issue, the author has two simple responses.[12] First, though it is not traditionally considered a prominent social work value, some considered it as one of the 'radical' values.[13] Furthermore, some claim that empowerment is becoming a significant value since the 1990s, given a number of development of social services in the Anglo-Saxon world that have world-wide

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12 Sarah Banks does not consider the models of empowerment as a value, but that is different from the idea of empowerment. Besides, we may respond that, as Robert Adams noted, empowerment is a value, and not a fact. See Robert Adams, *Social Work and Empowerment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[13] Suzy Braye and Michael Preston-Shoot, *Empowering Practice in Social Care* (Bristol: Open University Press, 1995), chap.2.

impact.[14]   Some also suggest that empowerment is itself an expression, or, we can

say, is derived from traditional social work values like self-determination and social

justice.

Second, as Yuen Sun Pong notes, the practice of 'empowerment' is comprised of

its skills, values and an image of human nature.[15] The insight that we may draw from

this point is that recognizing that empowerment is a prominent approach or

perspective in contemporary social work does not mean excluding the possibility that

it may also be a significant value of social work practice. That is, we need not face an

either-or choice: either 'empowerment' is an approach, or it is a value. Rather we may

say, the practice of 'empowerment' has its own value orientation and image of human

nature. This value orientation and image may be said to be constitutive of the practice

of 'empowerment'.

As for the reason why we choose empowerment as a case to deliberate about the

relationship between social work values and local cultural values. First, there are

observations that the idea of empowerment is the product of Western cultures, as

Phyllida Parsloe reminds us: "empowerment in social work is a western concept,

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[14] Sarah Banks, 'Professional Ethics in Social Work- What Future?,' *British Journal of Social Work*,
1998, vol.28, 213-231.
[15] 阮新邦，〈 邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(下)：社會工作技巧與道德實踐 〉 載於 《 **詮釋
取向的社會工作實踐** 》 (新加坡：八方，2004)，89-91。

which means that it is rooted in Western notions of individualism and self-advancement."[16] However, as Hisashi Hirayama and Kasumi Hirayama note, there is little critical reflection on the cross-cultural application of the concept and practice of empowerment, "as it applies to a culture and a society different from that of the U.S., as most published articles have failed to pay sufficient attention to cultural and political contexts in which empowerment practice occurs."[17]

Second, some local scholars have noted that the concept of empowerment has been adopted by the local social work community without appreciating the "contextual embeddedness" of this new vogue-word.[18] For some critics, there might be tension between a Western tradition of focus on individualism and an Eastern tradition of favouring collectives, such as extended families, communities and regions.[19] However, there are critical comments that rather than developing a convincing case that tensions do exist; the case is only hinted at.[20] Turning to the local context, there is a growing literature that records the introduction of empowerment

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[16] Phyllida Parsloe ed. *Pathways to Empowerment* (Birmingham: Venture Press, 1996).

[17] Hisashi Hirayama and Kasumi Hirayama, 'Cross-cultural application of empowerment practice: A Comparison between American and Japanese Groups,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 249.

[18] Kwong Wai Man, 'Empowerment Practice in Social Work: The Case of Hong Kong,' in *Pathways to Empowerment* Phyllida Parsloe ed. (Birmingham: Venture Press, 1996), 44.

[19] Shulamit Ramon, 'Collective Empowerment: Conceptual and Practice Issues,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999).

[20] Shulamit Ramon, 'Collective Empowerment: Conceptual and Practice Issues,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 43-44.

practice in the local context.[21]

We should note that this issue is not just of academic interest and relevance. In fact, the introduction of empowerment practice in the local cultural context may have significant implications on the reproduction and transformation of our social lives. Take the case of parenting, an example that we have already discussed briefly in the first chapter. From the perspective of empowerment, approaches that prize equality between parent and child and the significance of open communication in successful parenting may be preferable to traditional modes of parenting and parent-child communication. Yet, as we have already noted, these approaches that strive to empower children embody a set of implicit understandings about the nature of family and parent-child relationship that people seldom explore, not to say giving them adequate articulation in the process of transferring and appropriation of social work theories and skills. Based on our discussions in Chapter One, we will notice the

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[21] Cf. Nancy Rhind ed., *Empowering Families: A Collection of Concepts and Methods* (Hong Kong : Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, 1994); 羅致光，〈 社工專業與從政:角色衝突與平衡 〉 載於 《 社聯季刊 》 145，(夏/1998)，15-17 頁。余秀螢，〈 從「第一屆香港弱智人士會議」探索本地自助及充權運動 〉 載於 《 香港青年充權：理論與案例彙編 》　李慶偉等編，(香港：香港中華基督教青年會,2002)； 秦安琪，《「新來港人士的充權與成功移居」研究報告》，(香港：香港家庭福利會，2005)。

emphasis on equality, communication, and democratic spirits. They might not be the family values that the local community shared. Hence, the worry that unreflective application of these concepts in the local context may be founded on a distorted understanding of the nature of parenting in Chinese families. This situation might give rise to further distortions and disruptions of the practice of parenting. Thus, recognizing cultural differences, and the dangers due to neglecting them, we have strong reasons to choose empowerment as a case to deliberate about the relationship between social work values and local cultural values.

Few people have shown in what sense the concept of 'empowerment' is in conflict with local cultural understandings. Adequate analysis that substantiates this claim is badly needed, so that the deeper connotation of this claim may be drawn. Without such analysis, any further suggestion that the concept of empowerment conflicts with local cultural understandings is at best no more than a hint. Considering the case that there is a need for substantive analysis to substantiate the saying that the concept of empowerment is in conflict with local cultural understandings, the author does think that we may have preliminary warrant to probe further on what grounds may we claim that the concept of empowerment is in conflict with the local cultural values.

After warding off some of the initial challenges to our choice of the case of empowerment, we may now turn to a preliminary note of some of the difficulties in elucidating the notion of empowerment in social work. It is commonly recognized that the idea of empowerment has a mixed ancestry. It is associated with the welfare reform of the New Right, and the self-help movement and the civil and human right activities in the 1960s which prices citizen participation. It is said to be a multi-level construct that emphasizes health promotion, self and mutual help and multiple definitions of competence. [22] Operating at personal, interpersonal, group, organizational and community levels, empowerment is said to embrace different domains.[23] Comprising of both individual and collective dimensions, some criticized that most of the current Anglo-Saxon debate of empowerment usually remains at the individual level, overlooking the origins of the concept that emphasize the collective dimension. [24] Empowerment is also said to be effective with various clientele, including oppressed ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants and refugees, nursing home residents, women of colour, homeless women, elderly and older women

[22] Wes Shera and Lilian Wells, 'Introduction,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), x.
[23] Robert Adams, *Social Work and Empowerment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 40-42
[24] Shulamit Ramon, 'Collective Empowerment: Conceptual and Practice Issues,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 38.

etc….[25]

No doubt, empowerment is a new buss word in the social work vocabulary. However, after a brief review of the current literature on empowerment, one cannot fail to note that most scholars on the subject hold the reservation that the concept is ambiguous, vague, problematic, contradictory, paradoxical, subject to diverse interpretations, have different connotations at the individual, group and community level, or even essentially contested.[26] This situation is nicely captured by Mullender and Ward: "Yet the term lacks specificity and glosses over significant differences. Rather as happened with the concept of *community* (the vogue word of the 70s but since shorn of some of its magnetism) *empowerment* is 'splattered around by all' (Fine et. Al., 1985, p.53) and used to justify propositions which, at root, represent varying ideological and political positions."[27]

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[25] Hisashi Hirayama and Kasumi Hirayama, 'Cross-cultural application of empowerment practice: A Comparison between American and Japanese Groups,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 248.

[26] Sarah Banks *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995),114; Robert Adams, *Social Work and Empowerment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4,13, Shulamit Ramon, 'Collective Empowerment: Conceptual and Practice Issues,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto : Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 39; Kenneth Macdonald and Geraldine Macdonald, 'Empowerment: A Critical View,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto : Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 50-51; Hisashi Hirayama and Kasumi Hirayama, 'Cross-cultural application of empowerment practice: A Comparison between American and Japanese Groups,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto : Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 248.

[27] Audrey Mullender and Dave Ward, *Self-Directed Group Work: Users Take Action for Empowerment* (London: Whiting & Birch, 1991).

Thus, it is not surprising that Kenneth Macdonald and Geraldine Macdonald remarked, giving the concept of empowerment a definition "can rapidly degenerate into list making."[28] Given that empowerment is a complex and essentially contested concept,[29] to give a comprehensive conceptual analysis of such a bewildering idea may be a hopeless endeavour. Thus, in what follows the author would restrict our analysis to unearth the presuppositions of the current discussions of empowerment on the nature of selfhood. After the analysis, the author would then be able to examine whether the idea of empowerment is in tension with local cultural values. By contrasting these presuppositions with that of accounts of Chinese self, I will then try to show that it may be at odds with the understanding of the self characterized in Chinese societies. But before we compare these presuppositions, let us turn to the following conceptual analysis of the idea of empowerment.

As noted above, empowerment is a rich and ambiguous concept. Thus, without overlooking the richness and ambiguities of the concept, in what follows the author would attempt to provide an outline of some of the major meanings of empowerment in recent social work literature. In recent literature the concept of empowerment

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[28] Kenneth Macdonald and Geraldine Macdonald, 'Empowerment: A Critical View,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 50.
[29] Robert Adams, *Social Work and Empowerment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

conveys a range of meanings, ranging from models inspired by consumerism that emphasize the clients' right to choose, to perspectives that place more emphasis on citizenship and power sharing, to structural approaches that understand empowerment as an integral element of anti-oppressive practice.[30]

The author would try to argue that, notwithstanding the different conceptions of empowerment, we may trace certain deep presuppositions of selfhood and the relationship of self and social order shared by these disparate accounts. As Wes Shera and Lilian Wells noted, one of the central features of the emerging empowerment paradigm in social work practice is that: clients are treated as subjects rather than objects.[31] In a sense, the following analysis is an endeavour to trace the implicit understanding of what is meant by treating clients as subjects. In other words, the present discussions would focus on articulating the understanding of the nature of the client as a person that informs contemporary accounts of empowerment in social work practice. In fact, the author will locate the primacy of client's choice and preference as a theme that may be common to these different conceptions.

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[30] Bob Mullaly, *Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory, and Practice* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167-170.
[31] Wes Shera and Lilian Wells, 'Introduction,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto : Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), x.

As an initial clarification, we would focus empowerment as a process rather than as outcome or goal.[32] By this we mean that our focus is on empowerment as the series of actions performed to achieve an end-state of getting either personal or political power, and not on empowerment as the end-state reached or desired.

To further illustrate our focus, let's consider Rappaport's statement of what empowerment means. Rappaport says empowerment "suggests both individual determination over one's own life and democratic participation in the life of one's community, often through mediating structures such as schools, neighborhoods, churches, and other voluntary organization. Empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights. It is a multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as to organizations and neighborhoods; it suggests the study of people in context."[33]

Given our focus on empowerment as a process, we would not be interested with the end-state of attaining a psychological sense of personal control or influence nor

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[32] Karla Miley and Brenda Dubois, 'Empowering Processes for Social Work Practice,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 2.

[33] Julian Rappaport, 'Terms of empowerment/exemplar of prevention: Towards a theory for community psychology,' *American Journal of Community Psychology* 15 (2), 121-144.

with a concern with the end-state of having actual social influence, political power, and legal rights. Rather, we will look into the implicit meaning of being a person when an individual is said to be determining one's life or participating in the life of one's community. The following discussion may be seen as exploring how the clients are understood as subjects by looking at the role of emotion and preference in defining the clients' choice.

To further ward off some possible misunderstandings, a note of clarification is needed. The present discussion is not about individualistic versus collective versions of empowerment, nor does the author intend to focus the discussions at the individual level at the expense of the interpersonal, group, organizational and community level.[34] While individualistic versions of empowerment may emphasize developing individual feelings of control and skills, collective models tend to place central significance in affecting the larger social environment or even challenging structural oppression. Despite the differences of these different versions in their understanding of the goal and nature of empowerment, the author, in fact, would like to contend that both individualistic and collective versions of empowerment, and accounts of empowerment at different and multiple levels, presuppose certain understandings of

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[34] See Shulamit Ramon, 'Collective Empowerment: Conceptual and Practice Issues,' in *Empowerment Practice in Social Work: Developing Richer Conceptual Foundations* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999).

what is meant by being a person, or selfhood. What the author attempts to probe is about the understanding of selfhood and the relationship of self and social order presupposed by these versions of empowerment.

For our purpose the details of these different models is not our primary concern, rather we would trace the implicit understanding of personhood presupposed by these accounts. One this issue the work of Sarah Banks may provide us a helpful entry point. By tracing the differences of conceiving the user as a person, a citizen and a consumer, In Ethics and Values in Social Work Sarah Banks help us to see in what sense may dominant approaches of empowerment be seen as development and derivation of the traditional idea of a person as a rational, self-determining being that is prominent in social work.[35]

According to Banks, to conceive the client as a person is to see him or her as one with human dignity, one whose choice we should respect, because he or she is a being who is capable of rational thought and self-determined action, thus having the right to self-determination. Banks also defines 'rational' and 'self-determining' as the ability to give reasons for actions, and acting according to one's own choices and desires and

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[35] Sarah Banks *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 98-104

having the ability to make decisions respectively.[36] In contrast, in conceiving a client

as citizen, Banks argues that the focus has shifted to the status of the clients as fellow

citizen, rather than the client as a person, thus accentuating the role of the client as an

equal member in the political community.[37] In other words, owing to critical

reflection of the employment of professional power, and the observations of the

arbitrary exercise of power by state officials, the emphasis is on the equality between

professionals and the client. Thus, the specific rights of clients such as civil, political

and social rights to the benefits and services of the welfare state (including the client's

rights in accessing information, reviewing personal files and participating in planning

and decision-making) are high lighted.

If there is a narrowing of meaning in shifting from understanding the client as a

person to a citizen, Banks believes that the move to conceive the client as a consumer

is a further narrowing down, or even a move away from the idea of the client as a

rational and self-determining being with universal rights that deserve our respect.[38]

The rights that the client as a consumer enjoys are specific rights related to limited

choices of services and the reception of certain standard of services. The notion of

consumer is to emphasize the notion of choice in a market or 'quasi-market' situation.

[36] Sarah Banks *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 28
[37] Sarah Banks *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 99-102
[38] Sarah Banks *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 102.

The client as a consumer, as idealized in the traditional idea of the market, is said to have power over competing sellers of goods and services, and have the right to exit if they find the services undesirable or dissatisfactory. Though, recent welfare reforms have introduced 'quasi-markets' into key services of the welfare states, Banks has reservations whether treating clients as consumers make senses in all the social work settings, for instance, "users of probation service on a compulsory court order or a parent whose child is suspected of having been abused".[39]

IV

Basing on the preceding discussions, we might appreciate that the major images of the client as citizen and as consumer, presupposed in dominant approaches of empowerment, may be seen as development and derivation of the traditional idea of a person as a rational, self-determining being. To further substantiate the above observation, the author would like to show that the current discussions of empowerment presuppose typical understanding of selfhood and the relationship of self and society that characterize Western societies. Before the author analyses how

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[39] Sarah Banks *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 103.

certain cherished aspects of empowerment reveals its presuppositions about selfhood, one would need a more in-depth portrait of the image of person in the Anglo-Saxon world, or, more specifically presupposed in Western social sciences. In this regard, Yuen Sun Pong and his colleagues have developed and refined Potter and Potter's account of the cultural construction of emotions that is indispensable for our analysis.[40]

In their famous work ***China's Peasants*** Potter and Potter have given a succinct insightful articulation of some characteristic Western assumptions about the meaning of selfhood and the relationship of self and social order by attending to the role that emotion plays in private and social life.

In their discussions of the cultural construction of emotion in China's Peasants, Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter spell out several familiar Western assumptions about the meaning of emotion.[41] First, personal emotion is recognized as a crucial component of experience. That is, the form and meaning of social experience is thought to be directly derived from the emotion of the person having the experience.

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[40] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, ***Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village*** (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004).
[41] Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter, ***China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 180-182.

Second, personal emotion is the basis of social relationships. Potter and Potter take the example of marriage to illustrate that the formation, perpetuation or dissolution of social relationships are based on personal emotions: "For example, the appropriate emotional prerequisite for marriage is love, and a marriage without love is regarded as an impoverished social form. When love no longer exists, it is legitimate to dissolve marriage. So emotional experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action."[42] Third, social relationship are maintained by individual feelings and continuously reproduced by individual enactment. So the expression of emotion played the role of mediation between social order and individual self.

To grasp the significance of Potter and Potter's portrait, a number of clarifications are in order. First, it is not a general thesis that emotions played a significant role in Western societies. The seminal point is that emotional experience is not just in general significant, but that it is taken as a *legitimizing basis* for social action in the West. That is to say, the significance of emotions in the social life of Western societies lies in the fact that *emotions are recognized as one of the legitimate grounds for initiating social action. Besides, emotions are also a crucial warrant for creating, maintaining or breaking up relationships*. To understand this point we turn

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[42] Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter, ***China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990),180.

to Yuen Sun Pong's explication of his 'strong thesis of value involvement' in social understanding.

First, we have to understand that Yuen poses a 'strong thesis of value involvement' in social understanding. He argues that an investigator must involve his or her own value judgment in order to achieve an adequate understanding of the social phenomenon concerned. Yuen's argument is very complicated. But the following quotation may summarize the main point of his argument: "The above analysis shows that an understanding of a sentence or of a human act is closely linked to the argument behind it. To understand a human act, to some extent we must be able to figure out a 'reasonable' argument to support it. We can conclude that one who understands an action accepts that the argument behind it is a 'reasonable argument'. A 'reasonable' argument need not be sound; it need only be such as to enable one to find reasons supporting that action in the known cultural system. A person who makes an assessment as to whether an argument is 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable' is undoubtedly making a value judgment. In this way, we can say that an understanding of social or human phenomena entails a value judgment."[43]

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[43] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 209.

In the author's understanding, Yuen was arguing that in understanding the speech and actions of other people, we need to bring to mind the reasons used by the actor to support these speech and actions. As Yuen noted, these reasons may not be sound. However, as noted immediately above, though these may not be sound reasons but they must be regarded as having the status of 'reason' by the observer. In other words, for an action to make sense for an observer, the observer must understand and take the reasons concerned as some sort of reasons, or, say having the status of reasons. As such the observer in understanding an action, he or she must evaluate whether the reasons behind the action may have the status of reasons or not. That is to say, the observer is also engaged in an assessment of these reasons. That is, we are assessing whether these 'candidates as reasons' may really be counted as reasons in the context concerned. Yet, in deciding the reasonableness of these 'candidates as reasons', we have to make a first-person judgment on whether these candidates may be counted as reasons in the light of the norms of the context concerned. Seen in this light, an assessment of reasons necessarily involves a first person evaluation of the reasonableness of reasons raised. Hence, Yuen can conclude that we can say that an understanding of social or human phenomena entails a value judgment.

To further explicate Yuen's argument, let us consider his thoughtful illustration:[44]

Yuen invited us to imagine a situation where three students were late for an examination. According to the regulations, the teacher has the discretion to grant students who were late a re-examination; given that the student has convincing reasons for his/her lateness. Now student A explained that he was late because he studied until rather late the previous night, preparing for the examination. However, he could not get up in the morning. Whereas student B's reason was that her mother had a stroke in the morning, and she has to accompany her to the hospital. As for student C, he told the teacher that he saw a bird outside his bedroom window that morning.

The reasons that A and B gave were intelligible to us. We may find B's reasons more convincing, and we may tend to grant her a re-examination, whereas that may not be the case for A. However, in the case of C, without further explanation, we may be at a loss of what he was up to. *In fact, we have difficulties in comprehending what he said*. These difficulties have nothing to do with the literal meaning of his words. We have no problem in grasping that he saw a bird outside his bedroom window that morning, yet if student C was serious and sincere, it was hard for us to make sense of

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[44] See阮新邦，〈 邁向詮釋取向的社會工作實踐(上)：實證主義的迷思與強烈價值介入論 〉 載於 《 詮釋取向的社會工作實踐 》 (新加坡：八方，2004)，35-38。

what he said.

The point of the above example was to illustrate the link between understanding someone's speech and action and evaluating the reasons behind his/her speech and action. Seen in the light of this thesis, to understand the utterance of student C, we have to imagine how his statement might constitute a reason in the context of the example. Yet, without further explanation, we could not possibly conceive that seeing a bird outside one's bedroom window might in the morning constitute a reason for explaining that why one was late for an examination. Thus, this case showed that in understanding the speech and action of others, we have to imagine the (potential) reasons that others have for their speech and action. But to understand someone's reasons *as reasons*, we have to evaluate whether these 'candidates as reasons' may be counted as reasons in the relevant context. Thus, there is an intrinsic connection of understanding and evaluation.

In the preceding discussions, we have explicated the thesis that there is an intrinsic connection of understanding and evaluation. In what follows, we have to note that what may be counted as reasons is context dependent. Here we may consult a telling example of MacIntyre to explicate this point: "I am being shown by my

fellow scientists the first and so far the only specimens of a new hybrid fruit developed because of its possible ease of cultivation and food value for people in some particularly barren and starvation-prone part of the world. I snatch them from the hands of the scientist who is preparing to analyze them and gobble them down. When asked, "Why on earth did you do that ?" I reply, "I just feel hungry. I like fruit." It is important to note that this answer renders my behaviour more rather than less unintelligible than it was before."[45]

MacIntyre's example was meant to bring our attention to the thesis that what may be counted as reasons is context dependent. Though we commonly considered the indication of one's preference or desires may *prima facie* constituted the giving of reasons for one's action. In other words, what is counted as reasons may not depend on the context concerned. However, MacIntyre attempted to show that in the light of his example that may not be the case.

First, we should note that as a scientist one is expected to respect the norms of conduct in a laboratory. Given such understanding, the behaviour of the scientist in the example was puzzling. Since the scientist was expected to respect the norms in a

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[45] Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Intelligibility of Action,' in *Rationality, Relativism and the Human Sciences* ed. J. Margolis, M. Krausz, and R. Burian (Dordrecht, 1986,) 73.

laboratory, the snatching of the only specimens of a new hybrid fruit and gobbling the specimens down was, to say the least, odd and unintelligible. Second, it is significant to attend that it is doubtful that the indication of one's preference or desires may constituted the giving of reasons for one's action in MacIntyre's example. The fact that the scientist indicated his or her craving for fruit as a reason to consume the only specimens of a new hybrid fruit, not only will not constitute an acceptable reason in that situation. In fact, as MacIntyre pointed out, "this answer renders one's behaviour more rather than less unintelligible than it was before." The reason for this may be that, given our understanding of the context concerned (i.e. the laboratory in modern science), it is inconceivable that an indication of one's preference or desires might be counted as reasons to explain one's violation of the norms. That is, given the norms of a laboratory, the indication of one's preference or desires could not be counted as reasons for a scientist's conduct in a laboratory. Based on the above example, we may see that not every candidate as reasons may be counted as reasons, even an indication of one's preference or desires will not do. In fact, what may be counted as reasons is closely connected to the context concerned.

Armed with the preceding discussions, we may now explicate the meaning of the claim that emotional experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action in

Western societies. Seen in above light, we may put forward the claim that whether

emotional experience may be taken as a legitimizing basis for social action is context

dependent. That is, though we used to take for granted that emotional experience is

taken as a legitimizing basis for social action, however, that may not be a

cross-cultural and universal phenomenon. Thus, the observation that emotional

experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action in Western societies means

that emotions are considered as one of the legitimate grounds for justifying social

actions.[46] Given the link between understanding someone's speech and action and

evaluating the reasons behind his/her reason speech and action, we may appreciate

why understanding someone's emotions plays a significant role in everyday life and

social investigations in Western societies. This is because, if emotions are considered

as one of the legitimate grounds for justifying social actions in Western societies,

understanding someone's emotions in this light will partially constitute the

understanding of the reasons behind his or her speeches and actions. Thus,

understanding the emotions of others is indispensable for participating in everyday

social interaction in Western societies. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that

understanding someone's emotions plays a significant and indispensable role in

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[46] Why this is so the author suggests might have something to do with the culture of authenticity that is prevalent in the contemporary America. See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London, Routledge: 2004). This may be a sort of moral ideal, that is, to be authentic is to be distinguished from sincere in that it is a moral ideal. See Guignon for the distinction of sincerity and authenticity, ibid., 150-151.

everyday life and social investigations in Western societies.

Given the above understanding of the connection between emotion, the individual and the social order, we may appreciate that how personal feelings and emotions are understood may be a significant vantage point to explicate the distinctive image of selfhood presupposed in the West.. To explore whether prevalent discussions of empowerment presuppose the above-mentioned image of selfhood, we will have to probe whether personal emotion takes on the role and significance that the foregoing image of selfhood entails.

Building on the previous discussions, we may now examine how current literature on empowerment presupposes the aforementioned conception of selfhood. We shall turn to Gutierrez Parsons and Cox's sourcebook of empowerment. In their list of four necessary components for empowerment, two of them may reveal how personal feelings and emotions and their relationship with social relationship are understood. We shall start with the belief regarding self-efficacy. According to Gutierrez Parsons and Cox, one of the necessary components of empowerment is the belief in one's efficacy: "Beliefs regarding self-efficacy- a sense of self that promotes action on one's behalf, a belief in self-worth, and a sense of control- affect the

empowerment process. Psychology views these attitudes as the sole component and primary goal of empowerment. However, empowerment in our sense goes beyond developing feelings of individual control to affecting larger social systems."[47]

Based on the above excerpt, we saw that personal emotion is recognized as a crucial component of experience. That is, the form and meaning of social experience is thought to be directly derived from the emotion of the person having the experience. So we heard Audrey Mullender and Dave Ward saying: "The first step in any programme of change is for groups of service users to find their own voice."[48] To give voice to one's experience, to be in touch with one's feeling is seen as significant in the changing process.

This attention to personal feelings and emotions is not confined to the individual level as the following quotation may show: "In collective experience, the self and others recognize shared experience; i.e., that some of one's perceptions about oneself and the surrounding world are indeed valid and therefore legitimate to voice. This recognition contributes to a collective view that reduces self-blame, increases the

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[47] Lorraine M. Gutiérrez, Ruth J. Parsons, Enid Opal Cox. eds. *Empowerment in Social Work Practice: A Source book* (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1998), 4.
[48] Audrey Mullender and Dave Ward, *Self-Directed Group Work: Users Take Action for Empowerment* (London: Whiting & Birch, 1991), 34.

tendency to look beyond personal failure as the cause of the problem at hand, brings

about a sense of shared fate, and raises consciousness. "[49]

From the preceding review, we may have a glimpse that there is an emphasis on

the role of personal feelings and emotions in prevalent accounts of empowerment. We

may now have some initial evidence that prevalent empowerment models

presupposed a particular understanding of selfhood. This image seemed to match with

the portrait of the Western man captured by Potter and Potter's account. We might

have discerned an understanding of personhood that stresses the legitimating role of

personal emotions, and a society that feelings and emotions provided a necessary

validation of the connections between the individual and society.

V

If we have shown empowerment models presupposed a particular understanding

of selfhood, we need to recognize that we may not simply take for granted that this

particular understanding of selfhood is shared by all cultures, particularly those that

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[49] Lorraine M. Gutiérrez, Ruth J. Parsons, Enid Opal Cox. eds. *Empowerment in Social Work Practice: A Source book* (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1998), 4-5.

differ from the Anglo-Saxon societies. As the eminent American anthropologist Clifford Geertz remarks: "The Western conception of the person as a bound, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures."[50]

We have shown prevalent conceptions of empowerment model on a particular understanding of selfhood. We may now look at how to characterize the Chinese self. Let us make a number of clarifications before we proceed.[51] First, the author would like to discuss the limitation of using a single case from Potter and Potter to draw generalized conclusions regarding some central features of social life in Chinese societies. Regarding this issue, the author would like to make the following points: First, the illustration drawn from Potter and Potter's studies is meant to show *an ideal typical description of the Chinese self as shown among modern Chinese peasants*. In Potter and Potter's eyes, the *deep structure* of Chinese culture has persisted

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[50] Clifford Geertz, **Local Knowledge**, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 59.

[51] The author would like to thank the examiners for alerting the author to clarify his position on utilizing the cases of Potter and Potter in characterizing the nature of Chinese self.

through-out thirty years of revolutionary praxis. This is what they sought to explain.

The cases should not be mistaken as representing major aspects of protean social life

in contemporary Chinese societies. However, it does highlight an important feature of

the Chinese self. This feature persists to some degree in modern Chinese societies, so

it helps us understand a unique aspect of the modern Chinese self.

Second, the point of bringing in Potter and Potter's discussion is to show that the

concept of empowerment, which is informed by the Western conception of selfhood,

may be at odds with our traditional, deep-seated conception of Chinese self. In other

words, what the author seeks to show is that there may be prima facie tension between

the idea of empowerment and traditional Chinese self. The author does not intend to

argue that Potter and Potter is an adequate description of social life in contemporary

Chinese societies. Rather, in putting forward the claim that prima facie tension exists

between the idea of empowerment and Chinese self, the author attempts to draw the

reader's attention to the need of a mediation of different perspectives.

As we have noted at the end of Chapter One, in discussions of 'an indigenous

value base for social work practice', one observed that local cultural values were

pitted against social work values originated from the West. That is, in discussing the

idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice, the predominant discussions seem to presume that to develop an indigenous value base for social work practice is equal to acknowledging *solely* the normative force of local values. Therefore the proposal of developing an indigenous value base for social work practice seems to mean espousing local cultural values at the expense of the social work values originated from the West. That is to say, the choice to indigenize or not is equated with a choice of choosing between either one of the two perspectives. Seen in this light, we seem to face a similar problem when we consider the relationship of the idea of empowerment and traditional Chinese culture.

Based on subsequent analysis in the final section, the author will argue that we may not need to face such a tragic choice. Rather, the way to get out of the dilemma is a challenging task to find an appropriate mediation of both perspectives. If the assumption that we are compelled to choose between local cultural values and social work values originated from the West might not be warranted, as the author argued, we may appreciate the need to hold on to a mediation of both perspectives. That is, if both the perspective of the critical outsider and that of the local people are indispensable, we have to tackle this issue of the mediation of perspectives.

Third, as the author has admitted in the above passage, the illustrations drawn from Potter and Potter does not serve as a description of social life in contemporary Chinese societies, this may raise the issue to what extent the preceding analysis is relevant to enhancing our understanding in the contemporary cultural context.

My responses to this issue are as follows: First, capturing the basic features of social life in contemporary Chinese societies is a grave and complex undertaking, particularly if one is convinced that Western social scientific theories and researches could not be directly applied to the local context without distorting our understanding. Second, we cannot dispute that the social and cultural life of contemporary Chinese societies differs from their traditional way of life. In other words, we believe that conceptions of traditional Chinese way of life cannot adequately account for the social and cultural life of contemporary Chinese societies. Third, in the light of the above remarks, neither perspectives developed by reference to traditional Chinese culture nor the West can adequately capture the complexity and diversity of the social and cultural lives in contemporary Chinese societies. Rather, as the author believes, ideal typical descriptions of modern Western selves and the deep-seated conceptions of Chinese self may serve as reference points for comparison and making contrasts, so that the hybrid nature of contemporary Chinese selves may be seen more vividly.

It is time to discuss how the Chinese self may be characterized. First, let us turn

to what Potter and Potter observed in a Chinese village. "To take one specific example,

the woman who was angry because she was denied a travel permit did not appear to

feel that her behaviour was likely to be remembered and held against her. Brigade

leaders told her that it would not do any good to be angry, and that she should go

home, but they let her sit outside their office and scream. If her anger has been

regarded as intrinsically dangerous, either because it implied a threat to their authority,

or because it was embarrassing them, she could certainly have been quieted or

removed. The inference is that they did not regard her open expression of anger as a

serious matter. Had she violated propriety in some way that is taken seriously, she

would have been stopped."[52]

What the above examples showed is that, as Potter and Potter observed, emotions

seemed not to be playing the same roles in social life as in Western societies. If

someone takes similar action in the West, as Potter and Potter noted, this action may

be regarded as dangerous and/or embarrassing. The reason for this is that, personal

emotions are regarded as comprising the basis of social relationships and social order

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[52] Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter, *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 186.

in the West. Hence, the open expression of anger is in itself a comment on, or even a

challenge to the legitimacy of the way the officials handled the situation. Quite clearly

this is not the case in the observation of the Chinese woman noted above. Her open

expression of anger was not taken as a serious matter, and it seemed that her open

expression of emotions was irrelevant to the legitimacy and authority of the officials'

decision to deny her a travel permit.

The preceding example may reveal some crucial differences between the

predominate understanding of personhood in Western societies and that characterizes

the Chinese people. If the predominate understanding of personhood in Western

societies stressed the legitimating role of personal emotions, and in Western societies

feelings and emotions provided a necessary validation of the connections between the

individual and society, this is hardly the case that Potter and Potter observed in their

fieldwork: "Thus, the important aspects of social continuity are external to the self.

The social order exists independently of any emotion, and emotions are thought of as

lacking the power to create, maintain, injure, or destroy social relationships. Society

does not define the emotions as an aspect of identity with social significance. The

villagers express this lack of significance in their conventional response to questions

about emotional experience, "How I feel doesn't matter." By this they mean that their

feelings are not important for the understanding of those aspects of experience that

they themselves regard as worthy of being understand."[53]

Recalling our discussions in section four, given the link between understanding

someone's speech and action and evaluating the reasons behind his/her speech and

action, understanding someone's emotions plays a significant and indispensable role

in everyday life and social investigations in Western societies. The reason for this is

that, if emotions are considered as one of the legitimate grounds for justifying social

actions in Western societies, understanding someone's emotions will partially

constitute the understanding of the reasons behind his or her speeches and actions,

and thus is indispensable for participating in everyday social interaction in Western

societies.

Seen in the above light, it may not be exaggerating to say that the Chinese people

may be inhabiting a different social universe that differs from the Westerners in

crucial ways. As seen from Potter and Potter's observations, if emotions are

considered as one of the legitimate grounds for justifying social actions in Western

societies, this may not be the case in Chinese societies. As Potter and Potter noted in

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[53] Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter, *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 183.

their fieldwork in China, the important aspects of social life are external to the self. The expression of emotion no longer played the role of mediation between social order and individual self as in Western societies. The social order is said to exist independently of any emotion.

In contrast to the fact that emotions serve as the basis of social relationships in the West, emotions are thought of as lacking the power to create, maintain, or break up social relationships. The major underlying difference between these stark contrasts may be explained by the different roles emotions played in legitimizing social actions in the two cultural contexts. If emotional experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action in the West, this is not the case in Chinese societies. In fact, emotions do not comprise a significant ground for social action in Chinese societies. Thus, in a nutshell, emotions are insignificant, or even in some cases irrelevant in understanding major aspects of the deep structure of social life in Chinese societies.

As an initial clarification, we should be careful that the contrast we observe does not imply that the Chinese people do not have emotions. Only that the emotional experiences of the Chinese people do not serve as a legitimizing basis for social actions as in the West. Hence, we should be cautious that we should not project the

(implicit) understanding that emotional experience *must* play a significant and indispensable role in everyday life and social investigations in understanding Chinese people and their social life.

Besides, the preceding viewpoint is not to be conflated with the view that different cultures may have different emotions. For example, after noticing the internal connection of shared concepts and beliefs, William E. Connolly made the following remarks: "When we see the extent to which shared concepts and beliefs enter into our emotional states and actions, it is immediately clear that other societies could populate the world of action and emotion rather differently than we do. Thus efforts to construct a cross-cultural language capable of capturing within its net the practices of all societies are likely to achieve limited success."[54]

The author is not denying that Chinese may have different emotions that may not have their equivalent counterpart in people of the West. However, the differences and contrasts we observed have nothing to do with this issue. Rather, contrasting with the cases in Western societies, where emotional experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action, the social life of the Chinese peasants that Potter and Potter observed

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[54] William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* 3d. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 38.

exists independently of any emotion, and emotions are thought of as lacking the

power to create, maintain, injure, or destroy social relationships. So they could come

up with the following observation of the different understanding of personhood that

existed in their fieldwork and their homeland: "A Chinese person is a person whose

emotions are understood as irrelevant idiosyncrasies, of no intrinsic importance to the

social order. Such a person is significantly different from a person whose emotions are

culturally defined as a fundamental aspect of the self, giving meaning to social

experience, and providing a necessary validation of the connections between the

individual and society."[55]

To further account for this difference, we have to put it in the context of

discussions of Chinese self.[56] What followed is basically a brief summary of the rich

analysis that Yuen Sun Pong and his colleagues developed.[57] First, we need to

characterize how the concept of 'self' is used in the present discussions. On the issue

"What is meant to have a self?", the author will follow Yuen Sun Pong's view. That

having a self is not like having an organ that one can point to.[58] Rather, it is

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[55] Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter, *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 188.

[56] For a concise review see李晶，《人情社會：人際關係與自我觀的建構》 (新澤西：八方文化企業公司，2002)，第一章。

[57] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), chap 1.

[58] 阮新邦，〈"價值相關性"、"強烈價值介入論"與社會科學中國化的規範基礎〉 載於 《社會

constituted by one's understanding of oneself, or one's self-understanding and self-interpretations.[59]

In understanding Chinese' self, Chinese familism is an indispensable resources for mapping the distinct self-understandings of Chinese. In this regard, we would again invoke Yuen Sun Pong's interpretation: "We will make use of Francis Hsu's concept if the 'father-son dyad' and Fei Hsiaotung's concept of 'differential mode of association' as explanatory tools. Familism or lineage culture outs the 'father-son dyad' at the centre of all other relationships, and extends the blood relationship of paternity outward to other relationships and so constitutes an extension of familism. Within the structure of a lineage, familism- the value system that prescribes behavioural standards- requires that members of the lineage act in accordance with the ultimate goal of continuing and expanding the lineage."[60]

Yuen Sun Pong observed that at a more abstract level the specific behavioural standards espoused by familism may reveal certain general attributes that may be

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《科學本土化：多元視角解讀》，阮新邦、朱偉志主編，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司， 2001)，433。

[59] As Dreyfus put it: "Kierkegaard defines the self as a relation that relates itself to itself. That means that who I am depends on the stand I take on being a self." See Hubert Dreyfus, 'Heidegger on the connection between nihilism, art, technology, and politics,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* Charles Guignon ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 289.

[60] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 6.

indicative of the deep structure of Chinese culture.[61] These attributes may be summed

up in terms of the features of 'father-son dyad' that Francis Hsu expounded.

According to Francis Hsu, the 'father-son dyad' is characterized by the following

attributes: continuity, inclusiveness, authority, and asexuality. For our purpose, it is

significant to note two points. First, the father-son blood relationship, which is seen as

stable and not subject to change under the pressure of internal and external factors,

underpins the emphasis of the continuity of the father-son relationship. Second, the

father-son relationship is seen as paradigmatic, that is, all other relationships, for

example husband and wife, are understood in the light of characteristics of the

father-son relationship. Thus, the continuity of relationships is emphasized.

If, as Yuen noted, relationships are subsumed under the category of the father-son

relationship, thus emphasizing the quality of continuity, it is apparent that Chinese

human relationships are marked by their inclusiveness.[62] If Chinese human

relationships are marked by their inclusiveness, then how do Chinese differentiate

different relationships? In this regard, Yuen thought that Fei's construct of 'differential

mode of association' nicely capture how Chinese define their relationships in terms of

[61] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 7.
[62] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 7.

the ranking of a person's seniority and gender. Here we have to observe that the defined relationship constitute the basis for the distribution of resources and benefits in the relationship network.

Building on the preceding analysis, Yuen brought out two related points of the difference between the Chinese conception of relationships and that of Westerners:[63] The first concerns the basic difference of how relationships are conceived. In this regard, Chinese tend to stress the continuity of relationships, while Westerners tend to see relationship in functional terms. The second concerns the difference in value orientation that underpin these two contrasting conception of human relationships. For Chinese, who emphasize the continuity of relationships, would incline to price conformity to group values. Besides, the closeness and proximity in a network of relationship founded on the 'differential mode of association' served as a basis for making value judgments and distribution of benefits within the group. In contrast, the emphasis on the functionality of relationship will lead one to regard self-interest as the basis for action and value judgment. Also, in this light, justice and fairness become the primary criteria in settling distribution of resources and benefits.

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[63] Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 8.

Basing on the above depiction, the author has attempted to draw the contrasts and differences of the understanding of personhood that underlies Western cultures and Chinese societies. Recalling our discussion of Potter and Potter's observations that contrasting with the cases in Western societies, where emotional experience is taken as a legitimizing basis for social action, the social life of the Chinese peasants exists independently of any emotion, and emotions are thought of as lacking the power to create, maintain, injure, or destroy social relationships. Seen in the light of the preceding analysis, the difference in how emotions is conceived in the social life of Chinese and Westerners may be an expression of two disparate ideal of human relationship and morality. Hence, if prevalent conceptions of empowerment do presuppose the distinctive conception of personhood of the West, simply enumerating these differences may be enough to force us to consider whether the value of empowerment may be at home in a society where the ethos of Chinese familism still predominated.

VI

Given the preceding analysis, *prima facie* tensions may seem to exist between

the value of empowerment and the ideals of a Chinese self. Facing this tension

squarely, it might seem that we get caught between Scylla and Charybdis. If we

interpret these tensions as a dilemma, then it seems that either we have to uphold the

idea of empowerment as having universal validity and thus disregard the local cultural

understanding, or we may acknowledge the significance of local cultural

understanding at the expense of professional values that claim to have universal

validity. Is there no way out of this difficult dilemma?

To answer this question, the author suggested that we have to make a digression.

The author would argue that Yuen Sun Pong's argument regarding the intrinsic link of

understanding and evaluation may shed light on how to conceive the tensions of the

value of empowerment and that of local cultural values brought out in the previous

sections. But first we have to consider the methodological bearings of Yuen Sun

Pong's analysis of the thesis of the intrinsic link of understanding and evaluation.

Before we proceed, let us recall some of our discussions that is related to this

issue. At the end of chapter two, with the help of Yuen's works, we have unveiled the

meta-theoretical assumptions of positivism. In the second section of this chapter we

have also given a brief review of how these assumptions may be challenged basing on

the arguments developed in chapter four. However, a staunch defender of the principle of value neutrality may point out that we still have not called into question the principle that social researchers should be value-neutral. The author would argue that drawing out the methodological bearings of the thesis of the intrinsic link of understanding and evaluation may help us to answer this query.

Though we have indicated how some of the principal philosophical assumptions that support the ideal of value neutrality may be undermined, yet, a staunch defender may still ask whether we can understand the norms and social world that are said to be constituted by values in a disinterested way. That is, we still have to explain why we could not 'bracket' our value involvement in understanding norms and values. As our discussions of two senses of 'positivism' in chapter two shows this is a kernel issue. This may be a significant yardstick to measure whether one is still under the aura of positivism. That is to say, if someone still embraces a value-neutral, disengaged perspective to understand social phenomenon monologically, he is still a positivist, at least, in a broad sense.

If the preceding analysis of the intrinsic link of understanding and evaluation is correct, we see positivist's attempt to confine value involvement in the context of

discovery could not succeed. To argue for this point, we have to explicate the methodological implications that Habermas draws from the thesis of the intrinsic link of understanding and evaluation As Habermas states: "If we conceptually enrich the first-level models of action to the point where interpretation and understanding appear as basic features of social action itself, the question of how the interpretive accomplishments of the social-scientific observer are connected with the natural hermeneutics of the everyday practice of communication, of how communicative experiences can be trimmed down to the size of a technical subproblem in research. In ethnomethodology and philosophical hermeneutics this insight has been revived and is upsetting the conventional self-understanding of sociology determined by the postulate of value-freedom."[64]

In the above excerpt, the author understood that Habermas was making the point that the analysis that understanding and evaluation are intrinsically connected not only being applied at the action level. In fact, it is crucial that we extend this insight to consider how a social investigator could understand and identify his/her objects. Granted the validity of the thesis of the intrinsic link of understanding and evaluation, Habermas noted that social investigators have to adopt the perspective of a (virtual)

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[64] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 120.

participant of the social world that he investigates. *The reason for this is that, there is no other way that the researcher might gain access to the object that he studied. If he by pass the agent's understanding, for him, the object to be studied would be lost.*

In other words, in identifying the phenomenon that served as data for empirical validation, the researcher could not by pass the agent's perspective. In understanding the subject, the social investigator could not but evaluate the subject's reasons and potential grounds for the latter's action as the other participants in the social world. In this sense, the value involvement of the social investigator is unavoidable. Briefly put, to gain access to his/her data, the social investigator has to understand the research subjects' speeches and actions. In order to understand, s/he has to imagine the subjects' reasons and potential grounds for their actions. *To reason that what may be counted as reasons in a given situation, is already an evaluation of the appropriateness and adequacy of the reasons in the light of the norms that govern the situation*. Thus, in so far as the researcher understands the subject, s/he is involved in evaluation. In this sense, value involvement is in principle inescapable for a social investigator to identify his/her object. In this light, this is why we say that the social world that the observer observed is partly constituted by the observer's perspective. Or we may say, understanding is a cooperation of the observer's perspective and the

subject's perspective. If the preceding analysis is convincing, we come to see that both the observer's perspective and the subject's perspective are indispensable in an act of understanding.

Given the preceding explication of the methodological implications of the intrinsic link of understanding and evaluation, we may understand why positivist's attempt to confine value involvement in the context of discovery could not succeed. The reason for this is that, in order to validate his hypothesis, the researcher has to identify the relevant data. However, if as Habermas argued, there is no other way but grasping the agent's understanding, that the researcher might gain access to the object that he studied. *Then the social investigator could not avoid value involvement even in identifying and collecting his data for validation.* Or else, if he by passed the agent's understanding, the investigator would lose the object he studied. That is to say, even in principle the ideal of value neutrality could not be maintained.

In what follows the author would argue that the preceding insights may have significant bearings on how we conceive the tensions between the idea of empowerment and local cultural values. First, we have to recognize that the tension of upholding the idea of empowerment and acknowledging the significance of local

cultural understanding is grounded on a presupposition that we have to make a tragic choice between the two. It seems that either we have to uphold the value of empowerment as having universal validity, which implied that local cultural understanding may not be of relevance on this issue, or, we may acknowledge the significance of local cultural understanding, and try to find ways to circumscribe the claim to universal validity that the value of empowerment seemed to enjoy.

This further assumed that it makes sense to identify with *one* of the two perspectives. Nonetheless, armed with the discussions of this chapter, we may have resources to challenge this assumption. First, let us recall our discussion of the relationship of the language of explanation and that of evaluation in the second section of this chapter. We have pointed out that our language of deliberation is continuous with our language of assessment. The language that we employ in our deliberation and assessment is also continuous with the language in which we explain what people do and feel. If we accept the thesis that our language of deliberation and explanation is continuous, then the understanding that the observer's perspective and the subject's perspective are indispensable may not only hold in an act of understanding, this may also be relevant to how we understand the nature of our evaluation.

In the preceding passages, we have argued that to gain access to his/her data, the social investigator has to understand the research subjects' speeches and actions. In order to understand, s/he could not avoid engaging in *an evaluation of the appropriateness and adequacy of the reasons in the light of the norms that govern the situation*. Thus, in so far as the researcher understands the subject, s/he is involved in evaluation. In this sense, value involvement is in principle inescapable for a social investigator to identify his/her object. Thus, we claim that the social world that the observer observed is partly constituted by the observer's perspective, or, understanding is a cooperation of the observer's perspective and the subject's perspective. If the preceding analysis is convincing, we come to see that both the observer's perspective and the subject's perspective are indispensable in an act of understanding.

Basing on this analysis, and the thesis that our language of deliberation and explanation is continuous, we would like to suggest that both the observer's perspective and the subject's perspective may also be indispensable in an act of evaluation. That is, in our evaluation there is also a need to mediate the perspectives of the critical outsider and the local people.

In other words, we may draw an analogy here. At the explanatory level if we by pass the agent's self-understanding, we miss what we have to explain. In understanding the agent, our perspective is necessarily involved. There seem to be a similar situation when we are engaging in an evaluation of the agent's values. The reason for this is that, in an evaluation as in an act of explanation, *we could not avoid taking into account and evaluating the perspective/s of the actor*.

On the one hand, we must take the actor's perspective/s in to account. If we try to finesse the moment of capturing the meaning of the action from the perspective of the actor, we would lost what we have to understand. Without such understanding, evaluation may not be possible. That is, if we by pass the agent's self-understanding, we miss what we have to evaluate. While on the other hand, in understanding our object of evaluation, our perspective is also necessarily involved. This is because in understanding the object of our evaluation, we also could not avoid engaging in an evaluation of the reasons that constitute our object. Conceived in this light, in conducting an evaluation we have to draw on both the perspectives of the critical outsider and the local people.

So if this argument is plausible, we have reasons to believe that both the perspectives of the critical outsider and the local people are indispensable in our evaluation. Considered in this new light, the preceding dilemma of choosing the value of empowerment or the local cultural values may be dissolved. The reason for this is that, the posing of the dilemma presupposed that it makes sense to do without one of the perspectives in our evaluation. Yet, if our analysis is plausible, then in an evaluation of others' values, the perspectives of both the one who evaluates and that of the one who is being evaluated are indispensable. Seen in this light, the assumption that it makes sense to adopt either one of the perspectives is misplaced. Hence, the dilemma loses its forces because the assumption that give rises to the dilemma could not be upheld. The author would suggest that these preliminary conclusions that we drew on the relationship of empowerment and the Chinese self might be extend to our consideration of the relationship of social work values and local cultural values.

Chapter Six

Towards A Theoretical Framework for An Indigenous Value Base for

Social Work Practice:

Concluding Remarks For A Conceptual Exploration

As the thesis comes to its close, the author realizes that many issues raised during this odyssey are not answered. Nonetheless, at the end of this quest for an indigenous perspective for social work values, the author will put forward a number of theses that may be helpful for developing an adequate theoretical framework. But before we proceed, we shall in the first place recall the two major themes that have guided our exploration. The first is whether an assumption of the discontinuity of social explanation and normative evaluation is warranted. The second is whether we are justified to accept the bifurcation of local values and social work values. In this chapter, by explicating how the present investigation may enable us to reconsider these two issues, we will draw the implications of this thesis for developing an adequate theoretical framework for an indigenous value base for social work practice.

In the previous chapters, we have demonstrated that the presumptions of a sharp distinction of social explanation and normative evaluation, and the bifurcation of local

values and social work values create grave conceptual difficulties for developing an adequate theoretical framework for an indigenous value base for social work practice. Basing on our discussions in Chapter Four and Five, we have reconsidered these assumptions and find them wanting. In what follows, I shall put forward four theses that sum up the findings in the preceding chapters:

1, The thesis that the project of an indigenous value base for social work practice is based on a series of confusions is questioned. Social explanation and normative evaluation cannot be sharply divided from each other. A value-neutral language- 'sterilized' and free from constitutive distinctions that are evaluative in nature- could not qualify as a candidate for social explanatory discourse.

2, The dilemma of choosing between professional values and local cultural understanding is based on unwarranted assumptions. Both the perspective of the critical outsider and that of local people are indispensable for the project of an indigenous value base for social work practice.

3, The issue of the mediation of perspectives arises when we realize the illusion of the seemingly unavoidable dilemma mentioned above. Seen in this light, we have to rethink the idea of 'indigenization'.

4, Insights drawn from philosophical hermeneutics may provide a solution for the issue of the mediation of perspectives. It may further enable us to open up

investigations into the relationship of the contexts of social meaning and substantive values.

In the following remarks, the author will briefly explicate these four theses:

1, **Since social explanation and normative evaluation cannot be sharply divided from each other, the thesis that the project of identifying an indigenous value base for social work practice is based on a series of confusions is questioned.** In the preceding chapter, by appealing to Charles Taylor's arguments, we have shown that the language of explanation could not be a neutral language that is qualitatively different from the ordinary language of everyday life. The reason for this is that, the insistence of utilizing a value-neutral language that is discontinuous with everyday language, which is saturated with constitutive distinctions, only ends up forfeiting the object to be investigated. That is to say, *to offer an explanation*, one has to identify the object to be explained, and a necessary condition for identifying an object of the social world is to grasp the language that is constitutive of the object's meaning. Given that, the constitution of this language is made up of descriptive and evaluative elements that are entangled with each other, a value neutral language that is 'sterilized' and free from these constitutive and evaluative components could not qualify as a candidate for social explanatory discourse.

Seen in the above light, the charge that the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice may be the results of a conceptual confusion of 'positive' morality and 'normative' morality may not be as forceful as it appears. This is because the opponent presumes that social explanation and normative evaluation are discontinuous. We have called into question the validity of this presupposition. Therefore, we have questioned one major conceptual argument that support the verdict that the idea of an indigenous value base for social work practice is a mirage. The foregone arguments enable us to provide reasons for insisting upon the attempt to explore of an indigenous value base for social work practice.

2, **The dilemma of choosing between professional values and local cultural understanding is based on unwarranted assumptions**. The conclusions we drew on the relationship of empowerment and the Chinese self in the last chapter might be extended to help us reconsider the relationship of social work values and local cultural values. The tension of upholding the idea of empowerment and acknowledging the significance of local cultural understanding may be seen as an illustrative case of the tension of the crucial theoretical dilemma that the author identified for discussions of an indigenous value base of social work practice in the first chapter. That is the

tensions between universal norm and particular cultural understanding.

We have argued that if we face this tension squarely, it seems that we are hopelessly trapped in a predicament of choosing between Scylla and Charybdis. It seems that either we have to uphold social work values as having universal validity, denying that local cultural understanding may be of relevance on this issue, and thus rebutting the need for an indigenous perspective for social work values. Or, we may acknowledge the significance of local cultural understanding at the expense of professional values that claim to have universal validity. Is there no way out of this difficult dilemma?

Nonetheless, if as we have argued, that both the perspectives of a critical outsider and that of the local people are indispensable, the preceding dilemma may be dissolved. The reason for this is that the dilemma presupposes that it makes sense to adopt either perspective. Yet, if our analysis is plausible, then in evaluating someone's values we could not do without either the perspective of the one who evaluates nor that of the one who is being evaluated. Seen in this light, the assumption that it makes sense to adopt either perspective is unwarranted. Hence, the dilemma is dissolved because the assumption that constitutes the dilemma is discarded.

3, **The issue of the mediation of perspectives arises when we realize that the idea that the preceding dilemma is unavoidable is itself an illusion**. Dissolving the old problem is not the end of the story. Rather, this gives rise to another difficult issue. After dissolving the presumption that we have to choose between social work values and local cultural values, the issue is no longer the choice of perspectives, but how both of these perspectives might be mediated. That is to say, an issue of how these two perspectives may be accommodated arose. In this regard, Taylor have nicely captured our dilemma as follows: "At least the natural science model can make a claim for neutrality, by looking for a scientific language which is outside all cultures, and thus can hope to be non-culture-relative. But the *verstehen* view, while not allowing for such neutral languages, nevertheless set us the task of challenging and going beyond other people's self-understanding. But if not in their terms, how else can we understand them but in our own? Aren't we unavoidably committed to ethnocentricity?"[1]

That is, to put it in another way, whether one seeks for an adequate explanation or evaluation at a critical distance, one has to grasp the agent's self-understanding.

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[1] Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 125.

But then we have to face the issue of how both of these perspectives might be mediated. On the explanatory level if we by pass the agent's self-understanding, we miss what we have to explain. But if we take it as incorrigible, we fail to provide an explanation; yet if we explain them in our own terms we end up confirming our own projection of the other. There is a similar situation when we are engaging in an evaluation of the agent's values. That is, if we by pass the agent's self-understanding, we miss what we have to evaluate. But if we take it as incorrigible, we fail to maintain a critical distance, and we just accept the agent's evaluation; nonetheless, if we evaluate them in our own terms we could not avoid the 'cardinal sin' of being ethnocentric.

Based on the preceding two points, the author would suggest that we have to reconsider the idea of 'indigenization'. In the light of preceding discussions, if both the perspectives of the critical outsider and that of the local people are indispensable for an adequate social explanation, prevalent discussions of 'indigenization' seemed not to have addressed this issue of mediation of perspectives. Besides, as we have noted at the end of chapter one, in discussions of 'an indigenous value base for social work practice', one observed that local cultural values were pitted against social work values originated from the West. That is, in discussing the idea of an indigenous value

base for social work practice, we seem to presume that developing an indigenous

value base for social work practice is equal to acknowledging solely the normative

force of local values. Thus, we seem to be compelled to choose from either one of the

two. By now we may see that this assumption might not be warranted. Rather, if both

the perspectives of the critical outsider and that of the local people are indispensable,

we have to tackle this issue of mediation of perspectives.

4, **Insights drawn from philosophical hermeneutics may provide a solution**

of the issue of the mediation of perspectives. The author would suggest that insights

drawn from philosophical hermeneutics might provide a solution of the issue of

mediation of the researcher and subject perspective.[2] In this regard, the insights that

Taylor drew from Gadamer's work may be helpful. Taylor have made the following

remarks on how to conceive what might be an adequate language to understand

another society: "In fact, it will almost always be the case that the adequate language

in which we can understand another society is not our language of understanding, or

theirs, but rather what one would call a language of perspicuous contrast. *This would*

be a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as

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[2] See Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity,' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985),116-133; Charles Taylor, 'Comparison, History, Truth,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 146-164; Charles Taylor, 'Understanding the Other: A Gadermarian View on Conceptual Schemes,' in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* ed. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald, and Jens Kertscher (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), 279-297.

alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both."[3]

In resolving the problem of ethnocentricity, Taylor has alerted us to the dangers of by passing the agent's self-understanding and presuming that the agent's view is incorrigible. We may see that Taylor's analysis may be relevant to those who do not want to be victims of professional imperialism. Particularly Taylor brings us to see that taking account of agent's self-understanding does not mean that we have to identify with the latter's view, and so forsaking possibility of critical distance. The effort to develop a 'language of perspicuous contrast' may also shed light on what is meant by indigenization. In this light, the idea of 'a language of perspicuous contrast' that Taylor put forward may deserve further probing.

Taking the idea of empowerment as an example, the author would suggest further investigations and applications of the insights of philosophical hermeneutics may equip us to pose the question of whether novel interpretations of empowerment that take into account the local cultural understanding/s might be conceivable? In other words, if the idea of empowerment is not intrinsically connected to the Anglo-Saxon cultural context and traditions, there is a possibility that empowerment

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[3] Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity' in **Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers** vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 125. Italics my emphasis.

might not necessary be in conflict with the local culture. Hence, the idea of empowerment, subject to modifications, might be re-interpreted in the light of local culture context. Given the considerations of the self characterized by Chinese familism, new interpretations of the nature and significance of empowerment might be brought forth.[4]

Given our understanding of the constitutive relation of values and social meaning, one way to proceed is to conduct studies of this connection of the contexts of social meaning and the substantive values concerned. Therefore, for our purposes, further investigations of first, the ideal and culture of authenticity[5] that informed current discussions of empowerment, and second, the ideals of the Chinese self that are informed by Chinese familism are suggested to be pursed.

Exploring the social meanings that the current discussions of empowerment presupposed, we may be able to articulate the background context that gives sense to

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[4] See the series of work by Yuen Sun Pong and his team, Yuen Sun Pong, Law Pui Lam and Hoi Yuk Ying, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in A Contemporary Chinese Village* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004); 阮新邦及羅沛霖主編，《 當代中國農村研究(上) 》，(新澤西：八方文化企業公司，2000)；阮新邦，《 批判詮釋與知識重建－哈伯瑪斯視野下的社會研究 》 (北京：社會科學文獻出版社，1999)；阮新邦，《 批判理性、社會實踐與香港困境 》 (新澤西：八方文化企業公司，1997)。

[5] See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London, Routledge: 2004).

the prevalent conception of empowerment. This effort of articulation may enable us to show that the current conceptions of empowerment to be 'thick' versions of the idea of empowerment. That is, these conceptions of empowerment are embedded in the Anglo-Saxon cultural context and traditions. We may also see the significance and popularity that the idea of empowerment enjoys draws on certain understanding of the relationship of right and good, which might not be the one that the local community shares.

However, recognizing the embeddedness of current conceptions of empowerment may allow us to interpret the issue of the appropriation of the idea of empowerment in the local context in a different light. Ay we conceive the appropriation of the idea of empowerment in the local context not as a choice between a good and its negation; but as a rivalry of two goods? That is to say, we recognize *both* the value of the ideal that underpinned the idea of empowerment and that of the local cultural understandings. In this light, the issue we face may not be one of a tragic choice, but a challenge to find an appropriate mediation. Thus, for the project of appropriating the idea of empowerment in the local context, the way to proceed might be to search for forms that may accommodate both of these goods.

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