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**ACHIEVING INTEGRITY:  
A STUDY OF THE STORIES OF SIX SOCIAL WORK  
TEACHERS IN MAINLAND CHINA  
ON THEIR IDENTITY FORMATION**

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Ph.D

**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

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**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**  
**Department of Applied Social Sciences**

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FOK Siu Ling

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2015

# CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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\_\_\_\_\_ (Signed)

FOK SIU LING 霍小玲 (Name of student)

# ABSTRACT

The study aims at capturing the stories of a group of Sichuan, China social work teachers' identity formation process in a particular historical and social context from 2008-2014. Narrative inquiry was adopted as the methodology, based on its underpinning conceptions on self and identity, on human goals and action, choice making and on life and self-formation as a whole. The research process was guided by an inquiry framework proposed by Clandinin & Connelly (2007, 2013) who constructed a three-dimensional inquiry space: temporality (the continuity of past, present and future); sociality (the interaction and relationship between inner personal and outer factors) and place (the contextual and physical location) as well as the four directions in the research process. They are inward, (respondents' personal, inner, dispositional factors) outward, (environmental and contextual factors) forward (future anticipation and commitment) and backward (retrospective reviews on experiences and critical events).

The basic assumptions on identity formation and integrity are summarized as followed: The individual's sense of identity is an autobiographical process; it is an interaction between inner and outer, personal and social factors. Identity formation is

both a temporal and developmental process. In the study, it is assumed that participation in CoP (Community of Practice) initiated the process of identification and on-going negotiation. The construction of the social work teacher identity can be conceptualized in the trajectory stages of engagement, imagination and alignment (Wenger, 2000). In the narrative inquiry process, respondents are invited to recollect and reorganize the chronicles from 2008-2014. It is a personal and collective reflexive exercise to understand lived experiences, human action and interpretation. Integrity is achieved through awareness and acceptance of the dynamics between tension and motivational forces, and interplay of different layers of selfhood. Conscious integration and alignment is an on-going process to consolidate identity formation and to achieve further professional integrity and maturity.

In completion of an in-depth analysis of the six stories, it is found out that the transformational changes experienced by the respondents very much assembled the trajectory framework of a hero's journey. They left what is known and comfortable, then encountered novelty, challenges and assistance; finally, they overcome barriers, experienced transformation and returned with a new self. Integrity achieved at personal level where they have to address and balance the struggles and tensions brought forth by the opposite poles of their selves. Seven discoveries about their

experiences in the journey are highlighted. They are (1) A new temporal identity; (2) Fourteen pairs of polarities in the storied selves; (3) Disciplinary background leading to a different path; (4) Practice as the entrance gate leading to a professional inquiry process; (5) “Relatedness” as a core professional experience and ideological concept; (6) Environmental Threats and Opportunities and (7) The triple-role of teacher identity. These findings can be summarized in the three concepts of mutability, multiplicity and hybridity.

The study is ground-breaking work that captures the stories and voices of individual social work teachers in China. The findings confirmed the identity awakening and consolidation that were brought forth by active engagement in community learning and practice. It confirmed also the power and efficacy of collaborative inquiry and collective professional action. Although these findings are captured among a small group of respondents in Sichuan, the observations and general rules identified related with the concepts of mutability, multiplicity and hybridity can be applied to the professional and individual situations in other places in China; and the experiences of the respondents can be transferred as a practice and learning model for other social work teachers and professional leaders.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the six social work teachers in Sichuan, China who committed to be the respondents of this study. They are ‘heroes’ in my mind. They are a group of young fighters who possess a pure heart and act both authentically and courageously. They enabled me to redefine my understanding of the concept of ‘integrity’. We are all ordinary people who chose to carry the responsibility in an extraordinary historical moment. The achievement of integrity is not just a pursuit of professional excellence or reformulation of one’s sense of being. To understand the concept in an ethical sense, it is an honest and humble attitude to know oneself and the environment, and to live out new understandings and responsibilities in a truthful and continual meaning making journey.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my thesis supervisors, Dr Tsang Nai Ming, Professor Yip Kam Shing and Dr Chu Chi Keung. They are role models as social work educators, practitioners, and scholars. I am fortunate to have their full support and guidance. Dr Tsang enlightened my rationality which is an underdeveloped part of my mind. He expressed great patience and acceptance to communicate with a changing mind and a



restless heart. I learned several core strategies in pursuing a Doctorate study from him. He guided me to develop a logical flow; to listen with a researcher's ear; to manage the data without becoming overwhelmed; to exercise my imagination in interpretation and he empowered me to express myself with confidence. Professor Yip provided me with words of comfort in times of my depression and frustration. He encouraged me to identify and locate myself in the 'eye of the wind' and reassured me that I must undergo the process of "dying" and "waiting" which is essential for the transformation of a new form of body and mind. Dr Chu offered endless authentic and supportive guidance. He has the ability to see students' uniqueness and strengths, and supports them with unconditional positive regard. I would like to express a special thanks to Dr Carl Cheng who started a reading group at the early stage of the thesis writing. The readings on narrative theories are useful and inspiring in the formulation of the research framework.

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Thank God of His steadfast guidance and provision!

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To HIM belongs eternal praise.”

Psalm 111:10

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# PROLOGUE

*“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

***Isaiah 40-30-31***

I start with my own story as a social work practice teacher<sup>1</sup>. It is a story about choices, changes and calling. I aim at sketching on the major events I have experienced in the past six years for it is the backdrop of the present study. It is my personal identity formation process. The story reflected my ‘lenses’ in the recollection and interpretation process. I position myself as a social work educator in this study and my understanding on social work teaching is an interactive and integrative process of theoretical imagination and practice. My participation in the post disaster project activities from 2008-2014<sup>2</sup> enabled me to share a professional story with the respondents, a group of social work teachers in Sichuan. They are my co-workers and partners; these trustful relationships are consolidated through commitment in common

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<sup>1</sup> I worked as a university social work practice teacher in Hong Kong for over 20 years.

<sup>2</sup> The project was funded by an external donor and implemented by a team of social work teachers. The project aimed to introduce several related disaster human work training packages in Sichuan in order to support and coach front line social workers, teachers and government officials to develop and execute suitable post disaster human services in schools and communities.

goals and common tasks. It makes possible the following collaborative way of narrative inquiry.

### **The Rebirth and Transformation of an eagle**

The tale about the life of eagles always triggers fascinating and thrilling imagination for me. <sup>3</sup> The living creature has to undergo drastic and transformational changes before they could reach another peak of life. After a long ‘dying’ and painful process of waiting, they gain a new body and a new spirit.

### **My Teaching Ideology**

My professional practice in classes and fieldwork teaching are envisioned with and guided by ideology and disciplinary knowledge of education and social work.

Education is a process of conscientization or critical consciousness as stimulated by the Brazilian educational thinker Paulo Freire (1972). Key concepts such as dialogue and praxis adopted in his critical pedagogy are found useful and relevant in social work education. Learning and teaching is perceived to be a participatory; mutual and co-construction; reflexive and reformative process that lead to a more in-depth

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<sup>3</sup> The tale described eagles by reaching the age of 40, their long and flexible talons can no longer grab prey ,its long and sharp beak becomes bent, its old-aged and heavy wings, become stuck to its chest and make it difficult to fly. Then, the eagle is left with only two options: die or go through a painful process of change which lasts 150 days. The process requires that the eagle fly to a mountaintop . There the eagle knocks its beak against a rock until it plucks it out. After plucking it out, the eagle will wait for a new beak to grow back and then it will pluck out its talons. When its new talons grow back, the eagle starts plucking its old-aged feathers. And after five months, the eagle takes its famous flight of rebirth and lives for 30 more years.

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understanding of the self and the world. It is reflexive and reformatory for the comprehension will further bring about practical judgment on what is good and what sensible action should be taken to actualize one's role and aspiration.

"Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing—of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't" (Freire, 2004, p. 15)

True knowing and understanding will bring about struggles and conflicts. As a result, men and women can learn to break through prevailing societal norms and mythologies.

Furthermore, they are encouraged to exercise their independence, real freedom and responsibility as a change agent to transcend and recreate reality. This information is the essence of social work education. It is a process of engaging students to discover and reaffirm themselves as an independent agent while the educational process facilitates them to seek understanding on purpose, human dignity and social justice.

Learning begins with knowledge and action, shaped by deeper awareness and reflection and leads to further comprehension and action.

## **Pedagogical Concepts and Model adopted by researcher**

The continuous process of self -knowledge and discovery, knowledge of others and society, meaning-making and engagement in creative action is particularly real and essential in social work practice education. I adopt a ‘pedagogical model’ to understand the process. This is a model combining content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge which comprised a teaching framework targeting on procedural (How to do?), propositional (What to do?) and ethical domains (Why doing and Who is doing?). The framework will guide our teaching decision, co-working action and evaluation. This pedagogical model can be applied to different settings and services. For example, to facilitate novice social work students to develop professional practice in a rehabilitation setting require first of all, to prepare them with basic and background knowledge on the clientele and environmental resources and constraints, then to engage them in direct encounter with the service users, the engagement will expose their incapability on the ‘how to do?’ questions and in return rewarded deeper understanding on the clientele and self. Struggles, doubts and anxieties are anticipated in the process of practice learning. Social work students will probably experience difficulties in communication, in assessing the needs of the target, in managing the target population’s emotional and behavioral ‘problems’, etc.

Alongside with these procedural uncertainties, they will encounter greater challenge

at conceptual and theoretical level. It is a learning task to adopt a proper perspective to view 'disabilities' and to review critically the responsibility of individuals, institutions and society to construct and to satisfy the clientele's needs. The perspective is necessary to facilitate a proper choice making of theoretical intervention models or strategies. Ongoing action taking, dialogical reflection and action reshaping is the only way to learn, grow and make meaning.

Learners have to seek not only simple answers and solutions on professional procedural and theoretical issues but also to enquire on ethical and existential aspects, such as to learn to respect and value the dignity of a 'disabled' being; to embrace and accept human helplessness and sufferings with hope; paradoxical understanding on constraints and strengths of these lives; be sensitive to the moral choice and action of family members, service providers and the society, etc. When awareness and discovery thicken the layers of understanding, the students will identity meanings in their action. Then they are empowered to seek and implement better professional choice to work with and serve the clientele.

According to my experience, through participation and being nurtured by the professional environment, most of these students placed in rehabilitation settings will



be able to make a perspective shift after the practicum, they will no longer hold a dichotomous view on “able” and “disable” but instead, they will develop a more embracing, compassionate and humble attitude and are able to adopt a paradoxical view to understand human constraints and potentialities. In addition to that, they may have better self-understanding and enhanced professional confidence; furthermore, they may have acquired a moral sense to care about the deprived and to fight against injustice. With adequate guidance and further engagement in proper opportunities, they are more likely to be willing to position themselves in a committed professional role in future. In most of these cases, the plotline of learning begins with initial comprehension and direct engagement, then painful experiences of doubt and struggles, through deliberate reflection and transformative learning, the learners gained new understanding and lastly, they achieve maturity in both personal and professional domains.

One crucial element to ensure the above positive achievement of the teaching and learning process is, students are guided to reach out their ‘comfort zones’; these included intellectual, emotional, moral and practice comfort zones. The transformative learning processes take place when they are challenged by unfamiliar encounters such as foreign environment and language, unacquainted knowledge and

skill set, etc. These experiences will lead to inescapable disorienting dilemma that they have to work through. With adequate reflective and reflexive exercises, learners gained deeper awareness on not only epistemic and procedural level, but it will trigger also in depth self-reflection and consciousness and as a result, some established personal cognitive schema and beliefs will be shaken , reviewed and transformed. (Mezirow, 1990, 1991).The deconstruction and rebuild process can be considered as an identity searching and formulation journey; it is relevant not only to social work educational process but it explains also adult learning experiences in most critical situations.

The courage to move out of one's 'comfort zone' is particular important for the social work profession as we are working not only for 'sustaining and maintaining good systems' but also for 'better changes' in human lives and society. "Change" embedded moral choices as we target on making differences or to shift and transform, we have to be sensitive and critical enough on asking the moral questions of 'why change?' and "what is a better choice?". This core essence of the profession suggests that we move and perform in a landscape of fluidity where we have to be more open and adaptive, more embracing and flexible, more sensitive and critical. Not to uphold unchangeable principles and norms, not to establish system that are easier to keep

under control, not to develop a soft and structured curriculum, not to facilitate only a supportive and pampering teaching-learning relationship but to encourage an adventurous and risk-taking teaching and learning journey.

Moving out of one's comfort zone' and experienced rebirth and transformation is my ongoing life theme and particularly real in the past six years. It was a strong and inexpressible experience. It reminds me the never ending struggles within me to seek for peace and stability and at the same time, to echo and follow the restlessness of my intuitive self. I recall all the fear and excitement, the tears and laughter, the gains and the loss in these choices.

### **A Hong Kong Social Work Teacher in Mainland China**

In 2004, I was the first time committed to supervising a summer practicum in Mainland China, I had to supervise a group of Mainland educators to practice in a Mental Hospital. I did not have much experience working in Mainland China and neither in a mental health setting. Separation from my family and my familiar environment forced me to rely on myself; I learned to grow with my students in different life situations and in professional maturity. With the support of our academic department, later I was able to further involve in establishing new practicum sites in

Yunnan and Guangzhou, I expanded the scope of service supervision in communities, a training center for autistic children and a treatment center for drug addicts. I supervised students from different disciplinary background like medical, philosophy, economics and front-line practitioners.

As I become more committed to the program, I welcomed and received these challenges with open arms. These experiences are fruitful and rewarding in several ways. First of all, the mixed feeling of fear and excitement kept me in an alert state, I will never consider an experienced social work teacher from Hong Kong is knowledgeable enough to guide my Mainland students, but every time we worked and learned together to resolve environmental barriers and professional uncertainties, it was as if we won a battle. Social work is a newly developed profession in Mainland China, we encountered lots of difficulties but at the same time, we recognized a great number of opportunities.

Starting in 2007, I accepted another big challenge to my professional commitment. No longer based in Hong Kong to host educational activities, our department formed a 'mobile team' composed of three trainers including myself to travel in different cities in Mainland China to deliver short term trainings on social work education and

practice. Within these years, we initiated a new training curriculum and reached out to both our familiar networks and new platforms that come either from local universities or the Ministry of Civil Affairs. We received both positive and negative feedback. We recognized that the development of the profession is moving really fast, participants from different levels, either in academic field, NGOs or in government are hunger for guidance and quick solutions to many educational and practice problems.

Our professional team was submerged in the “disaster relief wave” after the 2008 May 12 earthquake in Sichuan. I headed up a team of four members to work on a project that target on providing professional training and support to front-line practitioners. We initiated three core training packages including the life education training, NGO capacity building and social work teachers’ professional training.

From 2008 to 2013, we built up our local network, learn to adjust to local culture and context, expanded our scope of understanding and commit to serve with a humble and compassionate heart.

Local social work teachers are novice professionals who were enthusiastic to engage and participate in the disaster relief and rehabilitation work. During 2008-2013, there was an immense supply of quality trainings and partnerships offered by local and

overseas professional parties. By engaging in these platforms, social work teachers became members of these CoPs (Community of practice). Most of them received little or no formal disciplinary education in social work. Their stories reflected a personal as well as a collective journey of professional development in the region.

The six years' professional experience is unique, distinctive and atypical. Hong Kong social work teachers moved out of our familiar teaching and practice context and 'submerged' ourselves in the wave of disaster relief and reconstruction. In fact, the concept of 'social work' was not well defined and understood in this professional context. We adopted a broader term "humanitarian service" among multidisciplinary platforms to accommodate the shared values and understandings. We have tried to demonstrate the uniqueness of social workers' roles and functions in several major areas including rehabilitation, children and family and community rebuilding in disaster projects. It was surely the longest practicum I have participated in, and a professional teaching and learning process that went far beyond my familiar context and the traditional social work classroom. In six years' time, I redefined my role and identity as a social work teacher. Interaction and co-working partnership with my colleagues and service target helped me to develop and grow. I explored untraditional means of teaching and coaching; I met diversified target population who knew little or

nothing about social work, they challenged me with different levels of learning needs and understanding; I performed multiple roles as educator, coordinator, developer as well as practitioner. At the beginning, I relied on my past practice knowledge and experiences but they were far insufficient and inadequate. What defined me as a social work teacher become an on-going negotiation process when I engaged in dynamic choice making and action commitment in the midst of uncertainties and struggles. I found that what carried me through are the professional aspirations and sense of purpose that I have developed and formulated through the long years' of practice reflection and consolidation. They are the core of my professional self and being. These purpose driven actions and aspirations supported me to play different roles and perform multiple identities. I learned new skill sets through practice, I loosened the original professional boundaries and become more accommodating, I revised my cognitive schema and strategies to enable new and unknown paradigm shifts, I expanded my knowledge scope and network platform to make possible bigger vision; lastly, I became more aware in deeper levels of the real threats around, and was more prepared for future challenges.

In the present study, my focus is to collect and witness the changes experienced by six social work teachers in Sichuan in their identity formation process. It is a collective

and collaborative reflective and reflexive journey full of wonder and surprising discoveries.



# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts ... the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.”*

**Parker Palmer**

## Purposes of the Study and Research Objectives

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### Action, selfhood and narrative

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The aim of this study is to explore and capture the lived stories of a group of Sichuan social work teachers during the period 2008-2014. It was a period full of opportunities and challenges after the Sichuan 5.12 earthquake. Social work teachers engaged in a professional community who held a legitimate role to participate in post disaster relief and rehabilitation activities during this critical period. The interest in tracing their experiences through narrative discourse is orientated from a professional deliberation on the “use of self” in practical reasoning and acting. Tokayer (1976) in his dissertation asked social workers three questions: “ What is your social work philosophy? How did you develop your social work philosophy? And what is its role in practice?” (in Imre, 1982, p.16) His report indicated clearly that” use of self” is one of the vital parts in professional practice. Knowledge of the self is closely related to the concept of personal identity. Professional identity does not call only for conduct and competence. It is a continuous dialogue between the social environment and inner self with each informing and forming one another. Persons of integrity act like the

ideal persons they are trying to be. The ‘use of self’ is a fundamental matter for professionals. In social work practice and education; the ‘professional self’ can be understood as the professional’s practice knowledge and their practice behavior. It is not a static condition or a set of fixed character traits but a holistic and dynamic process of seeking, knowing and acting. The process embraces dynamic movement in the intellectual, rational, intuitive and affective domains of the person. Papell (1996) succinctly summarized the issue in the following remark:

“Social work learners must perceive the human situation which they confront in their practice and recognize that their perceptions are altered through their own thinking and knowing processes, through their emotions and feeling processes and through the way they themselves integrate and regulate their own doing and behaving. Knowing the self is more than knowing how one feels. It is knowing how one thinks and acts.” (Papell, 1996, P.203).

In this study, professional identity is thus conceptualized not as static or a set of fixed character traits but it is a process of movement that involved formation, negotiation, construction and consolidation. To capture this dynamic movement, teachers’ use of self ‘ or ‘identity formation’ is traced and interpreted in respondents’ lived stories of choices making, action commitment, transformative changes and meaning making interpretation. These narratives reflected their sense of being in professional knowledge acquisition and construction, pedagogical decision and judgment and practice commitment. ” Identity” is a highly intricate concept and there are diversified discussions and incompatible conclusions drawn from philosophical, psychological, anthropological and sociological disciplinary traditions. In order to formulate a conceptual framework for the present study, the author attempts to refer to

stimulations offered by theorists like Anthony Giddens, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur and Jerome Bruner. A brief account on the conception of 'identity' is illustrated below and this served as the underpinning epistemological and methodological considerations.

In the first place, 'identity' is seen as dialectic and dynamic which is reflected on the dual communal and personal dimensions as well as the dynamic qualities of temporality and evolution. According to this understanding, on one hand the self is embedded in historical and social context, one's 'identity' is asserted through adherence to social, political, cultural or professional groups. It is referred as the identity established through identification of membership to these groups. It is the 'public self' or the 'shared identity' of the individual. The other side of the same coin is referred as the 'personal identity' which is the unique dispositional, stabilized, and inner core of the individual. There are certainly overlaps of the two dimensions and the self-definition and formation process take place when individuals look back and anticipate, reflect on what one has done and further engaged in an on-going self-interpreting, negotiation and construction process.

To adopt the methodology of narrative inquiry is based on the assertion that human being possesses reflexive competence on comprehension of action. Human actions are enacted narratives. According to Ricoeur (1992), action is goal-oriented, it reflected the agent's inner motives and demonstrated by conscious effort. The execution process will bring about interaction and negotiation between agent and environment and ultimately, the outcome of action will bring about changes and new imagination. Taylor (Abbey, 2004) further strengthened the ethical consideration in his conceptualization on narrative identity. Adopting a similar view as Ricoeur (1992),

He defined human also as self-interpreting animals; he developed related concepts such as strong evaluation, moral framework and hypergoods which are useful to illustrate how these internal processes play a crucial role in shaping who we are and what we do. Human actions as enacted narratives reveal one's moral sense composed of deeper desires and intention, commitment and purpose. The mission or moral self is one of the dimensions of personhood. The expression of the moral self and self-interpretation in practical reasoning and intelligible action is crucial in order to achieve integrity and unity.

Narrative is understood both as a phenomenon and a methodology (Clandinin and Connelly, 2007, 2013). The respondents are perceived as the primary agents who have engaged in the practical reasoning and acting experiences. They have to struggle between the balance of openness to new input and adherence to traditional mode of knowing and practice. Storytelling and narrative expression will facilitate a self-interpretation process in which understandings on moral values and responses may be deepened, as a result, respondents will be benefited by being empowered and inspired. Actions reflected the choice of values and directions of one's lives.

Narratives reflect the individual's conceptions of the goods and how one chooses towards or away from these goods. Making meanings to these action choices are considered as a movement towards one's life goal and destiny.

## Teacher self- knowledge and identity integrity

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It is a general understanding that social work teachers' have shouldered 'triple' roles including educator, practitioner and researcher. To balance between these roles requires not only a strong commitment to the core professional values and ideologies, the agents themselves have to possess adequate self-consciousness and reflexive ability. Philosopher Bernard Williams (1973, 1981) conceived integrity as an identity-conferring commitment; by adopting this "identity view of integrity", teachers acting with integrity implies performance that accurately reflects one's sense of who you are; how one acts from profound and deeply held motives, interests and commitments. Furthermore, one has to take into account the evolving growth and changes in areas of values, desires, beliefs transformation and to achieve integrity requires also successful self-examination and integration. This view is supported by some educational scholars such as Higgin (2011) who recognized the importance of cultivation of teachers' selfhood and further emphasized the contagious effect in the process of teacher-student interaction.

"...selfhood is contagious. In order to cultivate selfhood in students, teachers must bring to the table their own achieved self-cultivation, their commitment to ongoing growth, and their various practices, styles, and tricks for combating the many forces that deaden the self and distract us from our task of becoming."

(Higgin, 2011 ,p.2)

My personal direct engagement in 5.12 Sichuan post-quake projects<sup>4</sup> from 2008-2014

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I will use the abbreviation when referring to the dates of disaster events. "5.12"

brought me unexpected challenges and transformative understanding on teachers' multiple roles and identities. Walking in the midst of the story, I shared with my respondents the collective memory and the unique individual path of growth and development. The respondents of this study are sampled purposefully in a small number and on a regional and network basis. They have engaged in the social work teaching career at least five years and thus they have experienced also the 'critical turn' from 2008-2014 where social work profession in Mainland China went through a big leap. Their experiences are situated in the social and historical context of the 2008 5.12 Wenchuan earthquake, since the attack of this disaster a large number of social work projects funded either by government or foundations emerged in order to support disaster relief work and post-quake rehabilitation . Many social work teachers are thus exposed to new opportunities and challenges to engage in direct practice. The engagement in cross-disciplinary communication and collaboration and the assertion of their professional ideologies in different situations brought about new challenges and transformation. The rich and fascinating experiences thicken their professional understanding and nurture their professional identity. They are no longer academicians in the classroom but they are key players and leaders in construction of the future development of the profession. To review their experiences and stories for the past six years should be a valuable and necessary exercise. It recorded not only personal stories, it is also a collective memory that reflects a communal professional spirit that evolved in a special social and historical moment.

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meant the earthquake happened in Sichuan on May 12, 2008.

## Research Questions

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As observed and experienced by the researcher, disaster is a catalyst for change.

Direct engagement in disaster project activities brought about transformational changes to social work teachers. Their narratives are assumed to reflect their practical knowledge and their learning in the practice communities. These experiences and group affiliations strengthened and consolidated their sense of professional identity.

The following questions are to be explored in interviews and contacts:

- (1) How did they participate in the collective learning and practice process, and what choices of activities they have engaged in and committed to?
- (2) What is the trajectory, the route of memory and future projection of their identity in the landscape of practice?
- (3) How did the participation affect their identification on their own role and position as a social work teacher?
- (4) What did they gain in terms of professional knowledge, skills and value consolidation?
- (5) What were the struggles and motivational forces they have experienced in the process?
- (6) How did they align and integrate their own personal values with these new inputs?
- (7) What are the future impacts on their professional role and identity?

These questions are explored through a biographical lens, respondents are invited to share their lived experiences of the past six years. Stories are to be collected in multi-contacts and by different means of observation and communication. This will be explained further in the next section.

### Theoretical and methodological boundaries

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The present study adopts a qualitative and interpretative paradigm and narrative case study is employed as the research methodology. By reviewing the major narrative practices and my own research objectives and themes, I confine my study within the following theoretical and methodological boundaries.

The study is situated in the educational research landscape. For the understanding of the relationship between the narrative and the teachers' identities, I was inspired by the scholarly work of educational theorists Clandinin and Connelly (1986,1999,2007, 2013). They have been engaging in narrative inquiry for a long history. They provided insight in studying teachers' practice experiences by creating some useful concepts and frameworks. First of all, according to Clandinin and Connelly(1999), narrative inquiry is a collaborative process. It is an open and genuine communication between respondents and inquirer. Both of them enter a reflective and reflexive process of recollection, reorganization, co-reflection, negotiation, telling and retelling. Meaning making is obtained through emplotment, interpretation and narrative understanding of self and experience. Both of them are knowers; they are knowers of themselves and their environment; their students and their pedagogical concerns. Therefore, the inquiry and interpretation process should address also to the multiple roles and complex layers of voices.



Secondly, Clandinin and Connelly (2007) have created the “three-dimensional inquiry space” as a concept and framework related to study of experience. The three dimensions are temporality (it refers to the time factors, that is, the continuity of past, present and future that should be addressed to in the process of studying experiences); sociality (the interaction and relationship between inner personal and outer factors) and place (the contextual and physical location). Once the three-dimensional inquiry space is established, the inquiry process can be travelled along four directions. They are inward, (respondents’ personal, inner, dispositional factors) outward, (environmental and contextual factors) forward (future anticipation and commitment) and backward (retrospective reviews on experiences and critical events). Each story is unique though they shared similar background, and situated in the same regional and historical context.

#### Data collection and framework of analysis

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##### (i) *Data Collection Procedure*

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The procedure of the study follows the flow initiated in Creswell (2006)'s article "Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry" in doing narrative research.

1. Making Decision on research question and methodology
2. Selection of respondents
3. Data Collection
4. Collaborate with participants by actively involving in the dialogical exchange during the collection process.
5. Analyze the participants’ stories, and then “restory” them into a sensible framework and story plot.

## *(ii) Data Sources of the Study*

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1. Stories and feedback collected through direct participation of respondents: Chronicles recalled and reorganized by respondents on learning and practice experience during 2008-2014, in-depth discussion and exploration on themes identified, respondents' biographical accounts or life story; respondents' feedback and comment on the stories.
2. Researcher's observation, participation, casual conversation, exchanges and mutual sharing with respondents and field note.
3. Other related information provided by respondents such as audio and visual records, written reflection and other related material.

## *(iii) Analytic framework and strategies*

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The study is based on an extensive review on academic discussion on teacher identity formation, integrity and the impact of community learning in role identification.

Drawing upon the theoretical framework and understanding of Korthagen (2004, 2011) on teachers' selfhood; Shulman (2005)'s articulation on teacher reflection and reformative role; Wenger (2000) on Community of Practice (CoP) and identity negotiation; Banks (2010) on commitment and integrity and lastly, narrative theorists on autobiographical lens and narrative knowing, a narrative framework on understanding and analysis is established and will be presented in details in the next chapter. The basic conception and assumption of "identity formation" and "integrity" in the study are summarized as followed :

1. The individual's sense of identity is influenced by interaction with inner and outer forces. These include the inner dispositional, motivational, ideological forces and the outer professional contextual, socio-cultural and socio-political factors and collective grand narratives. Integrity is achieved through awareness of the different layers of selfhood and interplay and conscious integration and alignment of these dimensions.
2. Formation of the identity presupposes both a developmental and temporal essence. Professional identity can be maintained and developed by active participation and identification with community of practice. (CoP)
3. It is assumed that through participation, the members of the CoP will enter into new practice experience, new imagination of one's role and position and followed by mutual construction and alignment of practice perspectives, orientation and actions.
4. Teachers' use of self is demonstrated in knowledge construction, making sensible pedagogical judgment and commitment in professional practice.
5. Identity is an autobiographical process; there is an intrinsic connection between narratives and human experiences. Retrospective organization of 'episodic' events triggered self-discovery and facilitated self-understanding. It is both a reflective and reflexive process.
6. Narrative process will bring about reflexive and reformative outcome as storytelling will consolidate not only personal learning and experiences, but will

reshape collective understanding and choice making in a professional community.

Stories and collected field text will be analyzed according to the above understanding and when the story is constructed, respondents will be invited to feedback on the content. Details of the framework and operational procedure will be discussed in Chapter two and Chapter three.

### The Legend : Rise of the Social work Profession in Mainland China

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#### Social and historical backdrop of the legend

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The ‘Open Reform Policy’ of Mainland China in late 1970s opened the state door for rapid economic growth. People’s lives undergone drastic changes in the following decades. They have to face the ‘dual realities’ of better life and collapse of traditional safety network. On one hand, they can enjoy increased household income and greater individual freedom but at the same time, as the old systems being shaken by new forces, escalation of social conflicts and problems emerged as a result. There are widening gaps between rich and poor, there are concerns of migrated workers, unattended children, mental problems and deprived retired elderly. ( Wang, 2004; Yuen Tsang &Wang ,2008 ; Yip, 2007).

In such a societal and economic context, social work emerged as a ‘revitalized profession’ (Yuan Tsang &Wang, 2008). With the support of new policy initiatives and involvement of social work educators, the profession experiences increasing recognition and promising development. The milestones (Appendix 3) of such a growth can be traced back to several important state decisions and strategic plans.

The ‘spring of social work’ was emerged in October 2006 at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. A party document was published to put special emphasis on building a socialist harmonious society. This is a clear indicator that the PRC government has shifted its policy from emphasizing

economic growth to balancing economic development and social development, a strategic government-led decision was made to strengthen and develop a ‘grand team of social work professionals’, this professional team is regarded as important manpower resource to fulfill the task of promoting social stability and alleviating social problems. (Central Committee of China Communist Party, 2006).

At the same year, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) and the Ministry of Personnel issued two highly provocative and influential documents entitled ‘The Regulations on Evaluation of Social Work Professional Levels’ and the ‘Regulations on the Examination of Professional Standards for the Assistant Social Worker and the Social Worker’. The first examination has been conducted on June 2008. A number of cities in China including Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen were selected and encouraged to develop their own model or system of social work to meet their local demands for better delivery of social services. These political initiatives opened new opportunities for universities and cadre training schools to initiate and develop social work training programs. The direct involvement and intervention of state civil affair officials at the education, welfare and manpower development levels greatly accelerated the process of development including social recognition, registration and the standardization of professional qualification. Surely, this government-led and top down strategy brings new hope but at the same time creates insidious threats. Social Work academics who have been actively involved in the development of the profession have discussed about their concerns and worries. ( Yuan Tsang, 1996, Yuan Tsang & Wang, 2008, Tsang, 2008).

Yuan Tsang (1996) has summarized these threats or challenges of the newly developed profession as follow:

- Lacking of public recognition and understanding toward the social work profession
- Unclear role distinction between the social work professionals and government cadres
- Lack of career prospects for social work graduates
- Direct borrowing of Western concepts
- Lacking of practice experience to facilitate theory-building

These are critical issues related to education, vocationalization, professionalization and indigenous social service development.

In a recent speech delivered by Huang Sheng Wei, director of one of the general offices of the Ministry of Civil Affairs<sup>5</sup>, he traced the development of social work education and estimated that currently, there are more than 70 institutions offering diploma program; 310 institutions offering undergraduate program and 104 institutions offering post-graduate program. There are about 30,000 graduates who are qualified professionals ready to enter the job market every year. Additional information from the Mainland Blue Paper- “Progress Report of Social Work Profession 2011-2012” indicated that up till 2012, there are about 84,126 ‘qualified’ social work officers and assistant social work officers who have passed the vocational examination. It is projected that 500,000 and 1.45 million more social workers are

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<sup>5</sup> Speech delivered by officer of Ministry of Civil Affairs(民政部社会工作司综合处处长黄胜伟) at December 11, 2014. Retrieved from the following link

<http://sw.mca.gov.cn/article/ldjh/201410/20141000721542.shtml>:

required in 2015 and 2020 respectively.

Under the new policy initiatives, a new state-society interaction pattern emerged. In activating the two major innovative governance concepts of “Social Construction” (社会建设) and “Social Management” (社会治理),<sup>6</sup> new opportunities are opened for social work profession to participate. The governance concept “Social Construction” favors community building and local participation. In order to increase the supply of public goods provision, regional governments and social organizations are empowered and supported with more resources to develop localized service models.<sup>7</sup> The role of social work profession is to invest manpower, transmit professional knowledge and skills and to assert professional values that guide the planning and implementation of the services. The profession is expected to have acquired basic knowledge and skills to work and serve in areas of social welfare, charity work, community development, marital and family medication, mental health, rehabilitation, education and counseling, career counseling, narcotics and criminal prevention and rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and reconstruction. Facing the large gap of manpower shortage, it is an urgent task of the central and local government and universities to work on developing and sustaining quality awarded academic programs, training and continuing professional development programs.

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<sup>6</sup> Zhou Yongkang (周永康), member of the 17th Politburo Standing Committee; the Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (Zhengfawei) between 2007 and 2012: “加强和创新社会管理 建立健全中国特色社会主义社会管理体系” (Strengthening and innovating social management by establishing and improving the socialist management system with Chinese characteristics), Seeking Truth (求实), no. 9 ( May 1–15, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Social organizations: there are three categories of social organizations-- (shehui tuanti, 社会团体) are the equivalent of membership associations and include many trade and professional associations; civil non-enterprise institutions (minban fei qiye danwei, 民办非企业) which are the equivalent of nonprofit service providers; and foundations (jijinhui, 基金会).



The support of government policy and engagement of higher education are positive signs in the Mainland social work development. However, one cannot overlook the difficulties and the “underdeveloped” professional work environment in reality.

### The empowered and powerless profession: Social work teachers’ role in professionalization

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The above discussion alerts us a real predicament in the process of professionalization.

The gap between state and central determination and the actual evolvement and development of the profession is great. In an earlier stage, Wang (1995) made the observation that the present ‘social work related’ jobs are mainly managed by a very centralized administrative system, the pool of civil affairs ‘cadres’ came from mainly the Ministry of Civil Affairs and a number of semi-governmental bodies such as the All-China Federation of Women and the All-China Youth Federation, or

Non-Government Organization (NGO) workers who provide semiprofessional social services to the most vulnerable people in society. This implies an urgent need to develop practice-sensitive curriculums, staff development programs, program and service evaluation mechanism as well as service related research studies. By locating oneself in the picture of formation and development of the profession, social work teachers in China should have recognized their ‘legitimate role’ in the whole picture. Wang (1995) also saw the role of scholars and academics to bridge the link of dialogue between central government and front-line service organization and service users.

Social work teachers’ are perceived to be significant in the process of professionalization. There are even warnings and arguments against the over emphasis

on educators' role. Tsang, Sin and Yan, (2008) presented their argument as follow:

“...academics dominate the (re)production of social work knowledge and seek to shape social work discourse in their favor through the legitimization of their role and value and the investment of public resources to promote their interests...”

( Tsang, Sin & Yan, 2008, p.77.)

Nevertheless, in reality, we see that in most of these institutions, the majority of this group of teachers lack sufficient competence and resources to address the professional task requirement. To review the short history of social work education development in Mainland China, we started with the re-establishment of The Department of Sociology in 1987 as the first milestone on the pathway, then the State Education Commission (Now Ministry of Education) formally approved the launching of professional social work courses in the Department of Sociology in Peking University and one year later in Jilin University, Xiaman University and People's University. At the same time, the cadre training school of the Ministry of Civic Affairs began to operate related courses in social work programs. Since then, China has witnessed a drastic expansion of social work education programs in the past decade and the number of schools offering such programs has increased from 20 in 1994 to 200 in 2006 (China Association for Social Work Education, 2007). However, the general public remains uninformed and crucial government partners such as district community office, China Disabled Person Federation, government organized elder homes and orphanages show little or no recognition to the profession. They fail to provide adequate service sites for students and educators to practice in real context. Furthermore, due to unfavorable employment condition such as inadequate professional support, heavy work assignments and underpay, discontent among young

workers and high turnover rate are still unresolved human resources issues of the profession.

There are also critical issues related to deficiencies in the social work education system. First of all, most educators in China have their epistemic background in disciplines such as philosophy, politics, history, sociology or policy management but not a recognized social work training program. They teach social work core subjects such as case and group work, social work values but they do not have adequate actual practice experiences. These teachers are often frustrated by the gap between what they taught and what they really knew and experienced. They are also frustrated by the learners' attitudes who know nothing about the profession; who simply registered in the course by elimination or ignorance. The class lacks motivation and commitment, for they do not see their future as secure and promising. Social work educators have to reclaim their identity through getting down from the ivory tower and to acquire an authentic understanding of the profession through real life experiences and practice.

The 2008 Sichuan 5.12 earthquake struck the province. It was recorded 69,226 deaths, 17,923 people missing and 374,643 injured (State Council, 2008)<sup>8</sup>. In 2013, the 4.20 earthquake shook Sichuan Ya'an caused 193 death, and about 12,211 people injured (Sichuan Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2013).<sup>9</sup> The disasters ruined cities, villages and infrastructures; destroyed homes, lives and caused uncountable damages to local government, families and individuals. At the same time, the disaster brought about transcendent experiences to local residents and foreign partners who are involved in the reconstruction process. The Sichuan door was open to external assistance, resources and intervention. According to Huang and Wong (Huang & Wong, 2013)'s report, most of the front-line participating social workers were young and inexperienced, they faced great challenges related to lacking knowledge and experiences in disaster recovery, inadequacy in self-care under great pressure and rapid changing and unfavorable environment, insufficient supervision and support, uncertainties about the roles of the profession. Despite the challenges and difficulties, the engagement process of social workers and social work educators brought about some positive impacts. Ng's (2012) study estimated that about 1,000 social work educators and their students have participated in frontline relief work in Sichuan. They were able to undertake tasks such as case management, provided outreach visits to disaster victims who are unaware of aid and other services, conduct camps and

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<sup>8</sup> Xinhua News Agency (2008). August 25, 2008. Retrieved on January 9, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Civil Affairs of Sichuan Province. April 21, 2013. Retrieved on December 12, 2013.

other recreational activities for children, offered bereavement counseling, provided crisis counseling, and performed needs assessments of disaster population. The positive impacts followed these engagements including more job opportunities for social work graduates in Sichuan are created, more government purchases of social work services are available and better awareness of the contributions of social work to the society. For a more long term benefit to the profession, the experiences in disaster management practice are to raise the identity consciousness and enable the educators and researchers to shift the focus from disaster response to disaster preparedness concerns such as establishing data base, developing assessment methodology and advocating disaster policy and mining effective indigenous disaster recovery service models.

After the disaster, most of these social work stations were professionally supervised and supported by university teachers. They adopted a two-tier or three-tier supervision and administration model. Take for an example, an oversea university adopted a three-tier supervisory model to operate three school social work stations in Sichuan. The first tier composed of a team of Hong Kong supervisors whose job was to monitor the stations at administrative and professional level. They trained the local supervisors who were the second tiers responsible for day to day operation and supervise the third tier front-line social workers to carry out the administrative and service duties. Another three years project named “Project Hope Social Work” was launched and undertaken by the China Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) aimed at serving the disaster impacted schools. This project engaged social work educators from Mainland universities who led and supervised their graduate students to provide direct services. Other stations adopted similar model providing services on areas of community development, livelihood reconstruction, rehabilitation

service, social school work service and psychological support and treatment. Social work educators engaged in these projects worked as researchers, supervisors, educators, and practitioner. They moved from responsive to proactive concerns and endeavors.

Sichuan becomes a legitimate platform and 'practice laboratory' for educators to actualize their own ideology, to exercise their action plan, to demonstrate their competence and to build up the professional images. Social workers have to demonstrate their uniqueness among different professions such as psychologists, medical practitioners and therapists. Educators who were actively involved in these projects demonstrated their commitment and courage to enter the real world and to face real needs and constraints. They learned and worked together with their teammates and students to locate and define social work in the disaster reconstruction context and to fulfill the mission of the profession. Each piece of their work becomes of a small puzzle which forms a larger picture of professionalization of social work.

## Significance of the Study

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Identity formation and integrity is the focus of the study. The centrality of social work teachers' professional self and their lived stories are considered to be valuable as professional identity (personal and communal) issues are crucial for teacher development and practice and teachers' voice and experience are important sources to understand the identity and integrity issues. The present study will contribute to the following areas:

### A personal and collective reflective exercise

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The present study is going to capture the transformative stories of six social work teachers in Sichuan during the past six years. The concept of 'disaster social work' first emerged and evolved in Sichuan in 2008. The unique complex experiences of social work teachers are valuable assets for understanding and interpretation. The narrative inquiry methodology enabled a process of subjective negotiation, dialogical, temporal and reflexive engagement. Through the narrative mode of organization and interpretation, the personalized authentic voice and transparent accounts of respondents are to be heard and interpreted. This is a meaning making process that supports participants to bring a sense of order to professional life and to gain insight into their own development in praxis and identity formation.

### Professional education and practice: the place and voice of teacher selves

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Teacher identity is closely linked with personal and professional ideology. The exercise and actualization of these ideologies depend on the dynamic interactional forces. Unlike many Western countries, international humanitarian organizations and

religious charities are allowed more freedom to work on local community relief and development work. In China, the development of social work profession is led and structured mainly by the central authorities. The profession has to fit in and balance the expectation of government initiatives and the real social needs, it has to survive in immature infrastructures and institutions also. Rapid economic and social changes trigger historical predicaments that shared by all transitional societies over the world. The top social and economic issues listed in China including vulnerable and low quality economic structure; corruption; failure to nurture and grow a middle class; aging population; increasing rural-urban gap; bureaucratization and profit-incentivisation of educational and scientific research institutions; environmental pollution, moral lapse and collapse of ideologies<sup>10</sup> How to renew and regain the social work ideologies related to human dignity and social justice and connect them with actual practice and education are crucial. These values and principles are supposed to be operated and exercised beyond cultural, physical location and ethnic background. Starting from the reflection of a small group of educators in this study, we wish to assess and understand the struggles and dilemmas in the bigger social, economic and political system through their biographical and narrative lens.

### Emerging research interest on teacher self

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Whether in Hong Kong or in China social work teacher is a silent group. Social work educational researches targeted mainly on knowledge building and pedagogical concerns in the past. In China, research themes focused mainly on professionalization and macro social issues. The individual experience of this significant cluster of elites

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<sup>10</sup> Titled "The Ten Grave Problems Facing China" posted on September 8, 2012 from the source "Chinese Election and Governance" retrieved from the link <http://www.thechinastory.org/2012/09/the-ten-grave-problems-facing-china/> dated 2015 March 20



is a missing puzzle. I remain humble in this ground breaking work on quest of understanding and expect to stimulate more interest and upcoming work on social work teacher development in professional education.

# CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*"A man is always a teller of stories, he is surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it"*

**Sartre**

## Introduction

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In Chapter One, the background, purpose and organization of the study are briefly explained. In this chapter, the conceptual framework will be explicated and a deeper layer of literature references will be reviewed to enrich and support the understanding on the study. There will be three sections in this chapter. The first part is related to a review of role and identity of social work educator. A brief history of social work education development will be outlined; some critical issues and teacher identity crisis facing knowledge construction, pedagogical and moral choices will be discussed. The paradigm shift in knowledge construction and practical reasoning will be reviewed and the importance of nurturing the professional self is justified. The second part provides justification on the choice of using narrative inquiry. The relationship between storytelling and identity awareness and development will be explored; the approach of autobiographical lens in research will be further discussed and explained. Finally, the conceptual framework on professional identity will be illustrated.

Drawing upon the articulations from theorists including Korthagen (2004, 2011) on teachers' layered selfhood ; Shulman (2005) on teachers' personal and communal self; Wenger (2000) on Community of Practice (CoP) and trajectory of identity formation; Banks(2010) on commitment and integrity, the analytical framework of the study is formulated and explained.

## Professional Role and Identity of Social Work Teacher

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### The “Selfhood” of early social work professionals and educators

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To justify and argue why we should study professional identity of social work teacher in the educational process, I would like to recapture what East and Chamber (2007) have reviewed on social work teaching literature. They found out that research interest was centered around understanding and improving teaching strategies, four main categories can be identified: (1) general methods; (2) philosophical perspectives about teaching; (3) specific strategies related to various content areas; and (4) research studies on teaching effectiveness. These studies enriched our understanding and preparation to be a social work teacher more from a student-centered perspective. Good teaching or teaching effectiveness is related closely with adequate organization and presentation, enthusiastic commitment and teacher-student relationship. The two scholars brought up a new perspective in their paper to invite social work educators to refocus on the teacher's “being”. They introduced Palmer Parker's philosophy on education that emphasis the inner landscape of teachers, the reconnection and renewal with the self within paved a path to identity congruence and integrity. Shifting from ‘how’ to teach to ‘who’ is teaching. The paper enlightened social work educators to rethink about good teaching as an art. More recently, Tsang (2011) brought our attention to the socio-economic and technological context of social work education

which is a complex and fast-changing environment. To respond to these outer forces and tension, he proposed a direction back to nurturing a professional identity in educational process. It is a joint creation process of both educators and students to connect with the in-depth meaning and ideology of the profession.

“The existential concern and ontological thrust to find meaning in social work practice remain unchanging tasks within a fast changing world to be co-created by educators and students in a trustful and responsible partnership.” (Tsang, 2011, p.378)

For both a practitioner or an educator, the nurturing process of a professional identity is an inner self cultivation journey as well as a connection with professional community and ideology. While shifting the research interest on the ‘identity’ and ‘being’ of the profession is a new direction, the emphasis on the ‘presence’ of the professional is not new in social work history. When the history of social work education is reviewed, it can be seen that to nurture a professional character is of utmost importance when it comes to professional development. It is a ‘lost art’.

Setting up the first Social Work Program at Columbia University in 1898 marked the beginning of the social work education history. Social work educators have been engaged in about 112 years’ ‘teaching and learning experiences’. But before the establishment of this formal academic program, it is worth mentioning a lot of great names who have engaged in direct practices and set up models in training and education. These people include Octavia Hill, who trained volunteers to conduct “friendly visits” in poor communities, the Barnett couple of the Toynbee Hall in London and Jane Addams of the Hull House in the U.S. These pioneers reminded us

that the emergence of the profession was greatly affected by Christian socialism (Kendall, 2000). Social workers in early days were social reformists and settlement activists. They had 'dual roles' in providing services for the deprived and at the same time, educating the poor and cultivating the public to work for a more independent and liberal community and environment. They called for social justice and mutual support and reciprocity which finally led to social change. Early key figures like Octavia Hill and Jane Addams were models who carried a strong conviction and able to pass on to others their mission and techniques. It was not only their actions but their steadfast mind and spirit that inspired and made impacts on others (Barnertt, 1989). These pioneers of the profession might have employed different strategies to develop the 'helping' or 'friendly' relationship among the poor and middle class and young university students, but they held similar beliefs and orientation. They encouraged 'learning by doing' and they taught with their whole being. This is the "settlement educational philosophy", knowledge and action were inseparable. Knowledge emerged out of thinking and acting; its foundations were cognitive and emotional knowledge.

"Social work is seldom routine and involves working with people all of whom are unique, in situations which are complex, frequently messy and obscure, rarely easy to understand, and almost never amenable to standardized or prescribed responses. The outcomes of professional action are difficult to predict and there is disagreement as to the models of intervention and the relevance of the theories from which they derive."(Yellooly & Henkel, 1995, p.8).

The above quotation outlines the unique feature of the social work profession and reflects the difficulties and dilemma in knowledge construction and pedagogical concerns. Social work education is not simply a "banking" process of filling in

professional content knowledge or to train up skilful practitioners. To be engaged purposefully in an authentic and meaningful relationship with our students, to witness their growth and development personally and professionally, to actualize our ideology in real world practice are some of the most fascinating and exciting experiences in the social work educational process. The connections with our students, with ourselves as teachers and with the profession we are engaging further reinforce and reaffirm what we believe and hope for. It is more than an intellectual and practical endeavour; it is a 'moral project' where the learners and the teachers come together to search for and link up with our inner most ideology and to actualize these wishes in real context.

With reference to the illustration of the EPAS (Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards) of the 1980s and 1990s, Earls, and Korr (2013, p.200) summarized that

“We teach an integrative practice knowledge framework that we label bio-psycho-social that also includes the more recent additions of spiritual or cultural. Additional perspectives have been encompassed in our common knowledge base (e.g., person-in-environment transactions, ecological, and systems; problem solving; attention to diversity; and more recently, empowerment, strengths, and justice-based human rights). Thus, both educators and practitioners are socialized into the profession through identification with and actualization of the core constructs that are outlined in the mission and value statements of our professional organizations.”

They also proposed the characteristics form of social work teaching and learning included modeling, relational connectedness, core practice skills, and values building; to enable these learning outcome, educators should make effort in fostering transformative awareness and nurturing personal and professional growth. These highlight the significance of the 'presence', that is the core being or selfhood of the

educator in both the practice and the educational process.

### Identity crisis of social work educators and practitioners

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The identity crisis of practitioners and educators emerged when social work became the product of modern social organization; the early mission and ideology of the profession was shaken. Social workers' roles were reformed as service providers and service administrators instead of social reformists. They were trained to serve the needs of the poor, elderly, disabled and other deprived group in the society or to operate the social agencies. The 'bureau professionalism' (Parry & Parry, 1979) is considered as a new mode of organization. Social workers left behind their original ideology and captured by procedures and bureaucratized professional environment. Fragmentation and routinization of social work intervention procedures bring about a loss of professional autonomy, creativity and reflexivity.

Anti-experts movement or "de-professionalism" is another big challenge to the profession. Professional knowledge is no longer understood as definite and absolute. As disciplinary boundaries become blurred and indistinct, social work knowledge is more recognized as dynamic, fluid and contested in nature (Shardlow & Doel, 2002). In response to that, practitioners go to the other pole of demonstrating professional abilities in generic and specific levels. Social work educators and practitioners are driven to develop effective intervention strategies and performance criteria.

In view of the above professional trends, the risk of surrendering some important considerations in cultivation of working philosophies and values become an inevitable result. Healy (2004) reminded us to reconsider the 'ethical' dimension of the

profession. Social workers are “social ethics workers” who perform their professional responsibility with rationality and a humanistic approach. Instead of striving for ‘zero defects’, professionals should work for genuine human encounter in the professional helping process.

The above challenges bring about uncertainties and destabilization in social work education. But to view the threat in a positive way, it creates an opportunity for practitioners and educators to rethink their professional position and the way of knowledge creation. There is a greater awareness and conscious respect on tacit knowledge such as practice wisdom and the dynamic process of ‘creating’ and ‘construction’ of knowledge and understanding. (Scott, 1999; Fook, 2002). Other critical educational theorist like Fieire, (1972), Brookfield, (1987) and Mezirow, (1990) suggested that learners should be engaged in creating their own knowledge of the world through being an active participant both in the process of learning, critical reflection and engagement in the change activities. This conception of knowledge is described as ‘pragmatic’ and ‘hermeneutic’ (Yelloly & Henkel, 1995). This trend of thought, though originated from different disciplines, all illuminate the practice of reflection. The ‘knower’ plays a vital role in knowledge creation. Critical Reflection and praxis are the key learning qualities and strategies. Emancipation, conscientization, setting free oneself from the hegemonic assumptions are ultimate learning goals. They believed that the more the individuals are self-authoring and independent, the more they can challenge the existing systems with rational and critical thoughts.



*Personal knowledge and practice wisdom*

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Dominated by contemporary educational theory, pedagogical choices are guided by the two concepts: episteme and techne. "Episteme" is a form of expert propositional knowledge which emphasize on the mastery of the objective and knowable reality while "techne" is a form of craft and technical knowledge. Under this tradition, social work education faces several critical challenges. First of all, it is never easy to promote adequate epistemic curiosity beyond procedural exercises and practice performance. The discussions on underpinning theoretical and philosophical issues are insufficient. Secondly, we are led astray by dominant hegemony and predominant influences of grand theories and duty-based ethical standards and concerns. Furthermore, the over emphasis on competency-based outcomes and technical rationality holds that practitioners are instrumental problem solvers who select technical means best suited to practical purposes. This has led to the marginalisation of the 'self' and further sacrifices the nurturing of the professional self. (Schon, 1987).

In response to the above discussed 'professional identity crisis', alternative epistemological concerns are raised. Hudson (1997) proposed a conceptual model of social work professional knowledge that brings our attention to the 'knower' in the knowledge construction process as follows:



Diagram 1: Model of Social Work Knowledge (Hudson, J.D.,1997)

The above framework draws our attention to the ‘personal’ domain of knowledge construction by putting ‘practice wisdom’ and ‘personal knowledge’ as an integrated whole in the process of knowledge construction and consolidation. Both practitioners and educators are ‘knowers’, they are encouraged to construct their own “personal practice framework”, personal background and experiences are important ‘ingredient’ recognized as part of the knowledge structure. They should be consolidated and integrated into the existing formal theoretical and procedural framework.

To justify the significance of ‘personal’ dimension of knowledge construction, the concept of ‘phronesis’ is used to remind both practitioners and educators the nature of social work education. Carter et al. (1992) summarized Whan’s (1986) argument by pointing out that “phronesis” or prudence is a form of knowledge most appropriate for social work. The concept of “phronesis” can be understood as a Greek word introduced (Greek: Φρόνησις) in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. The original

meaning of the word means the virtue of moral thought. It is translated as "practical wisdom" or "prudence". It refers to the ability to think about how and why we could choose the right choice in order to change things, and especially to change our lives for the better. Aristotle says that phronesis isn't simply a skill, however, as it involves not only the ability to decide how to achieve a certain end, but also the ability to reflect upon and determine that end. To distinguish between technical skill knowledge and phronesis, Grundy (1995) made such an analysis:

“Practical judgement is a disposition towards ‘good’ rather than ‘correct’ action. It possesses an aspect of moral consciousness which the disposition of techne lacks.” (Grundy, 1995. p.62).

To recognize that phronesis is a form of practical reasoning and moral consciousness; we can further made three distinctions between technique and phronesis. Firstly, unlike a technique which is learnable and forgettable; moral consciousness signifies the agent’s selfhood in a situation. Secondly, moral knowledge direct to the ultimate concern of ‘goodness’ instead of a particular end as technical knowledge serves. “Goodness” implied an open attitude for continual and genuine moral inquiry. Finally, moral knowledge means not only self-understanding; it embedded both personal and communal features. Knowing and understanding is both an engagement to self and others.

### *Acquisition of 'phronesis' through reflective and reflexive exercise*

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Although “phronesis” is proposed as an alternative epistemological concept in professional education, it is still widely recognized at conceptual level instead of a pedagogical or operational concept. In this paper, ‘phronesis’ is recognized as the practical understanding and judgement in professional choice making and action commitment. It is closely related with the knower’s personal background and practice experiences. The acquisition of phronesis is not through direct transmission but through the “knower’s” own reflectivity and reflexivity. Reflection and reflexive exercise lead to self-understanding and transformation.

In the following discussion, the concept of ‘reflection’ is to be illustrated and understood in two different levels. First of all, the commonly emphasized reflective practice is the mentality and ability of reflecting on what you are doing, reflection aims at building understanding. It can be considered as an evaluative and problem-solving mental tool. Practitioners or educators look back and review their actions and moves to search for better choice. This has been explored by many investigators (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983; Boud, 1996). The cultivation of the capacity to reflect in action (in the process of doing something) and on action (after you have done it) has become an important feature of professional training programmes in many disciplines like education, nursing and social work.

At the second level, when reflective exercise moves inward to uncover more of the person, it requires critical sensibility. Suggested by Boud, (1993, 1996) reflection is an activity in which people 'recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and

evaluate it'. Schön (1983) differentiated two levels of reflection by introducing the concepts "single-loop" and "double loop" learning. Single-loop learning refers to the evaluative process which brings about correction of mistake or improvement. In double-loop learning, the whole activity is part of a larger cycle, in which the reflection takes place on the fact of engaging in the activity and the assumptions implicit in it. Senge (2000) speculated that our expression of actions and attitudes are shaped by hidden assumptions such as images and stories that we carry in our minds – they are mental models that are often untested and unexamined. The effort to make explicit these assumptions is crucial in the learning process. Haynes (1999) warned that this untested assumptions may become “uncritically accepted distortions” or “unquestioned biases”. These critical approaches further draw our attention to social and political structures that create false consciousness. In order to regain self-authorship, one has to engage not only in identifying and examining the underlying beliefs, this should also be a process of hegemonic ideology critique (Brookfield, 1987) , or in Mezirow’s (2000) concept, a process of transformative learning when individuals are becoming more inclusive, autonomous and free to make choice. By means of adopting a critically reflective approach, practitioners and learners are expected not just to think in action with technical rationality, but they have to prepare to face surprise, puzzlement or confusion and to emphasize more on intuition, artistry and creativity involved in professional practice and the participatory process of knowledge building. (Schon, 1983, 1987; Papell and Skolnik, 1992; Ringel, 2003).

As a summary, this section started with the knowledge model proposed by Hudson (1997). Our attention draws upon the concepts of personal knowledge and practice

wisdom which related closely with the selfhood of the knower. This return to the “knower” in knowledge construction is considered to be an alternative to stand against the over-emphasis on formal knowledge and technical-rationality. The acquisition of ‘phronesis’ (personal practical reasoning and action commitment) through different levels of individual reflective and reflexive activities are introduced. This understanding and argument on knowledge are illustrated in the following description.

“Knowledge is not a neutral entity but has moral, intellectual and personal dimensions and its development requires continuing dialogue within and between communities.’ (Henkel, in Lyons, 2000, p.436)

From knowing to acting, the concept of ‘phronesis’ will be further explained in the context of moral practices in the following section.

### Social work teacher as ‘moral agent’ in educational process

#### *Moral essence of teaching and social work profession*

Teaching and social work can be a career, a vocation that requires a ‘high calling’, that means, professionals engaged themselves in the teaching and social work practices are believed to have genuine passion where they find ultimate fulfillment and meanings in the activities. The professions are moral practices.

“Teaching as an activity can be described as moral, because, in very general terms, it presupposes notions of better and worse, of good and bad. As typically understood, teaching reflects the intentional effort to influence another human being for the good rather than for the bad.” (Hansen, 2001, p. 828)

According to the above understanding, morality constitutes the set of a person's beliefs and understandings which are evaluative in nature and whether consciously or unconsciously, between what is right and wrong, good and bad; more importantly, being a moral agent assumed the moral sensitivity and responsibility for the practices. Teachers and social workers are engaging in ongoing process of making impact, shaping others' lives and well beings. In that case, personal deliberation and reflection is very significant. In the field of teacher education, Van Manen (1991) illustrated the concept of "pedagogical tact" as :“To exercise tact means to see a situation calling for sensitivity, to understand the meaning of what is seen, to sense the significance of this situation, and to actually do something right” (p. 146). Other educational scholars like Higgins (2011) who returned to the concept of human flourishing ("eudaimonia") that articulated in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, and concepts of practice and internal goods proposed by MacIntyre Alasdair (1984). He argued that the purpose of education is to help individuals answer the question, “What sort of person are you going to become?” professional ethics is the extension and application of everyday ethics into the professional's practices. The professional should aim at coherence and congruence in one's moral sense in life and one's ethical orientation to teaching. Campbell (2003) introduced the concept of 'ethical knowledge' in discussing about teachers' moral roles and ethical concerns.

“With thoughtful intent, they express a reflective acknowledgement of the virtues and principles that guide their practice. They are mindful of the good. So, while their daily acts of fairness, kindness, honesty, and respect—as well as the complex subtleties of interacting with students—may still be largely spontaneous and habitual, ...” (Campbell, 2003, p. 39)

### *Ethical practices in classrooms and in communities*

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Social work educators' act as moral agents, their concerns are beyond ethical teaching and practice. Their roles can be summarized in four directions. First of all, they pass on knowledge and skill set, professional ideology and values inherent in the social work professional culture. Secondly, they perform as both an educator and activist to demonstrate how professional knowledge and values can be integrated in real practice. Thirdly, they motivate and emancipate students to become autonomous, independent learners who possess abilities on self-understanding, awareness, critical reflection, risk-taking, experimentation and making sensible choices, and fourthly, they support and nurture the professional critical mass in order to sustain the knowledge capital of the professional culture.

Moral dimension appeared not just in student interactions, in knowledge transmission and construction, in pedagogical methods and choices. Social work teachers have to be fully aware of the complex and ambiguous external contexts and ready to engage in constant struggles and difficult choice making. Sockett (1993) portrayed the teacher as a developing ethical person who is able to address the layered complexities and the epistemological challenges and external forces that influence such development. The external forces include organizational forces and constraints, institutional realities, interpersonal norms, and social dynamics. It is not a matter of application and compliance of professional codes, but the teacher should strive to cultivate a "epistemological presence" in the educational process where the matters of knowledge, truth, belief, commitment, experience, and identity are always in play. To cultivate this presence, self-knowledge is crucial and three key elements including experience, commitment, and identity are described and they are associated with distinct virtues including integrity, courage, and autonomy.



The above theoretical deliberations on moral practices echoed that effective professional engagement and judgment cannot be reduced either to technical rationality or to simple obedience to general occupational procedures or prescriptions. Professional judgment requires the development of a distinctive mode of practical (ethical) reflection or 'wisdom'. The knowledge and expertise of a teacher or a social worker is grounded in phronesis or moral wisdom. It relies very much on one's sensibility, perception and insight. Making sensible choices is a way of self-expression. It is supported by the rising concern on recognizing the practitioner and the social work teacher as a moral agent. This is a counter force to 'call for the self' in current professional ethic discussion.

In social work practice, the Kantian and Utilitarian moralities are consolidated as professional code of ethics. Principles of justice and human dignity are highlighted as professional goals and missions, while in parallel the development of this line, the argument or awareness on the workers' self and identity begun to be evolved.

According to this understanding, Poole (1991, p.59) suggested that

“Individuals will perform the required activities, not just because they think that they will contribute eventually to some end they believe in (though they will think that too), but because performing them is a way of expressing their identity, and is thus a component of their own well-being as individuals.”

Identity formation is a positive sign indicating the growth and maturity of individual professionals. It reflects the holistic “professional self-formation” of an individual who acquires the attitudes, knowledge and skills required by the professional role.

The identity ensured the sensitivity to moral issues and commitment on the pursuit of professional ideals and purposes, without these as basic and fundamental capabilities, the professionals will not be able to adopt sensible judgment and decision in such a complex and incompatible environment. It will not be possible for them to perform the multiple roles in order to introduce constructive changes also.

Other social work scholars like Banks (1995) and Gary (2010) recognized the impact of feminist 'ethic of care' which put emphasis on emotions and relational factors in ethical decision making. Morality is related to making judgments and cultivation of desirable emotions. In addition to that, a numbers of social work scholars began to return to the significance of the ethical self. Professional self as a moral agent began to put on a central place for nurturing and cultivation. ( Hugman, 2005; McBeath & Webb,2002; Clark, 2006 ) In this understanding, "virtue ethic" is the alternative choice for developing ethical practitioners and educators. McBeath and Webb (2002) pointed out that :

"A virtue ethics for social work educators would bring back to the centre of debate the importance of the teacher self, not in terms of his or her role, but in terms of character, human being, of intellect, as an agent able to make subtle discriminations." (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1033)

## Identity Formation—the evolvement of an authentic moral self

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Identity formation can be understood in developmental frameworks or stage models. These models are derived from Erikson's (1982) psychosocial stages, Piaget's (1972) cognitive stages, Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral development. Familiar names in the literature of adult education include also Perry's (1981) nine-stage progression from dualist to relativist epistemologies. In this model, Perry speculated a cognitive path where learners move from viewing truth in absolute terms of "right" and "wrong" to recognizing multiple, conflicting versions of "truth" representing legitimate alternatives. Social worker educators are more familiar with Dreyfus and Dreyfus's model (1980) who outlined five developmental levels from novice, advance beginner, competent, proficient to expert. This model is useful for educators to observe the need of social work students at different stage. For example, at the novice stage, learners are lacking of confidence and have to rely very much on external guidance and reassurance, as the practitioner become more mature, they should be able to have a holistic view of the professional process, they should be able to differentiate different task nature and the application of different techniques and strategies.

The stage models provide us tools to recognize and explore the form but not the content; furthermore, we cannot apply these understandings directly on the development of social work teachers in the Mainland China. They are not front-line practitioners and they are not simply performing the role as a teacher. They are experiencing a more complicated situation in order to integrate the dual roles of educator and practitioners. Therefore, this study employs both narrative perspective and developmental approach to gain understanding on the educators' personal stories. We pay attention to the development of the 'whole person' or the 'being' and the interaction of this 'evolving self' with the outer environment and context.

## Practices of teaching and professional decision making in post-disaster Sichuan

To understand more of the unique situation of the Sichuan social work teachers in post-disaster years, I would like to use two diagrams to illustrate and compare the dynamics of practices of teaching and professional choice making in “normal situation” and in post disaster Sichuan. If “phronesis” is accepted as the central concept and core integrative process of practical reasoning and action commitment, the decision making process should be operated in an ongoing dynamic process that take place by integrating the head (substantive and procedural knowledge), the hand (practice action) and the heart (professional values and preferred goods) of the professional agent. Diagram 2 shows that this is part of the professional manifestation in ‘normal situation’ where professional environmental resources and support are stable.

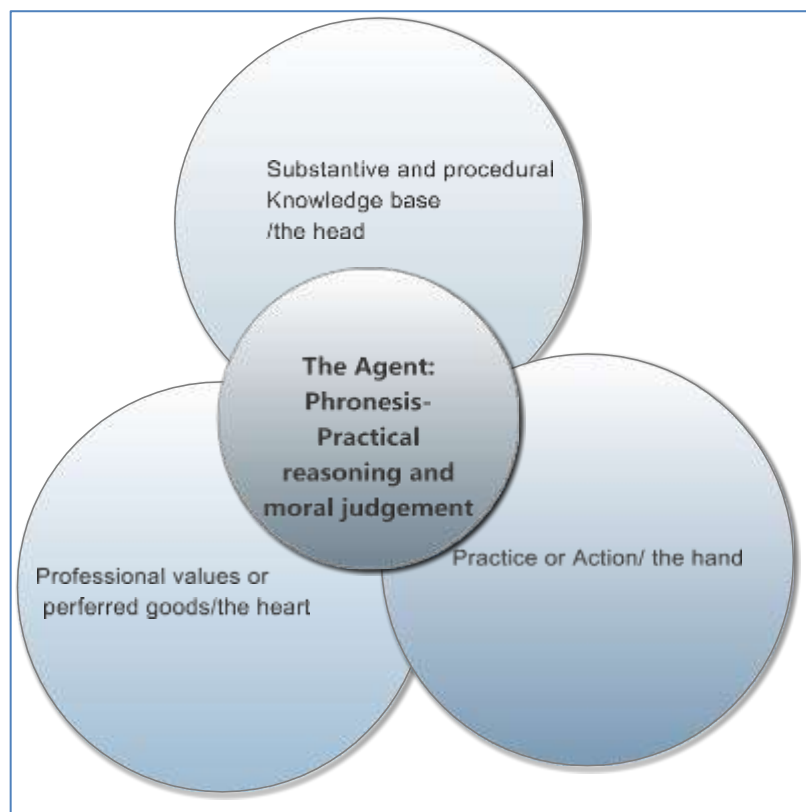


Diagram 2: Practices of teaching and professional decision making in ‘normal

‘situation

However, in the post-disaster intervention process, the situation is different. First of all, the messy environment and drastic disaster condition can be symbolized as a “dark hole”, it draws the effort and attention of people engaged. People’s response are not based on rationality in such a critical period, but more driven by emotional , relational and situational factors. The original framework in Diagram 2 seems to be inadequate as a guiding model to understand the practice situation. During the Sichuan post disaster crisis, the roles and functions of the social work profession were very much overestimated and exaggerated, in Diagram 3, the unique professional situation in Sichuan is illustrated. In response to the immediate needs of disaster relief and a lacking of localized systematic set of knowledge framework in disaster work, the action plan or praxis began to emerge as a collective participation process. In this process, the input of relevant social work and related disciplinary knowledge and models are important, but the application and integration of these models are based on a progressive process of absorption and assimilation. Facing pluralistic sources of professional input, arbitrary and conflicting arrays of goods to be obtained, overloaded missionary goals and tasks, many social work educators are ‘engulfed’ unintentionally or involuntarily in actions to serve and contribute as a part of the whole picture. This is a dynamic process of identification, rectification and negotiation, both individually and collectively.

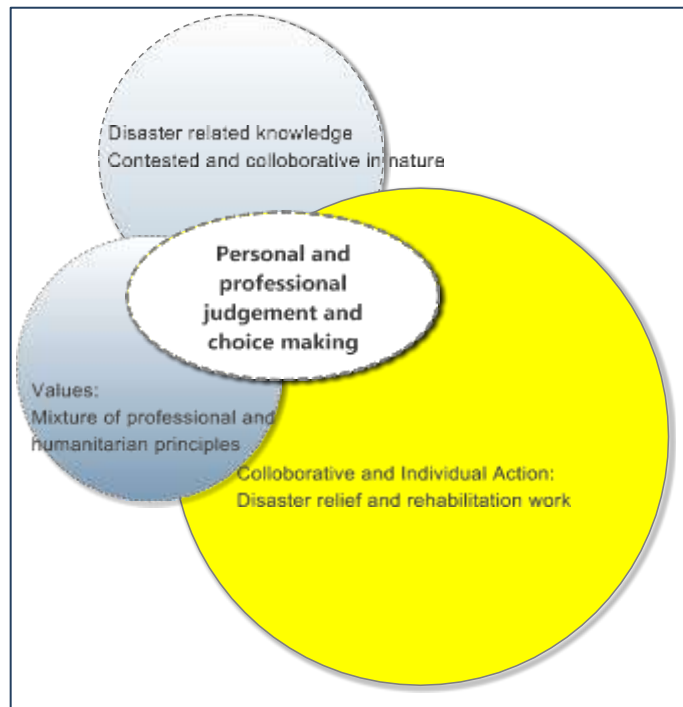


Diagram 3: Practices of teaching and professional decision-making in the unique post

### 5.12 Sichuan context

In view of the disassociation of normative standard and practice, this group of social work teachers is thrown into an evolving journey which is opened, dynamic and adventurous. Local and oversea professional parties provided knowledge and practice models to be adopted. These new input and stimulations mixed up and integrated with the local social work teachers' original set of professional norms and methods. In the midst of these diversities and crisis, social work professional ideology became a unifying force (Levy, 1973). The practice community in Sichuan was bonded by common professional goals and practice directions which were made up of a commitment to service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationship, integrity and competence. It is particularly important when the practice environment is full of diversified needs, challenging tasks and contested knowledge and procedural frameworks. These shared understandings can be regarded

as a choice of ‘hypergoods’ that were proposed by Taylor (Abbey, 2004). These are strongly valued goods and deserved more respect and admiration. Through modelling and direct practice, the respondents of this study learned to assimilate and integrate the social work values and practice models in post disaster relief engagements. To most of the novice social work teachers, it was an acculturation<sup>11</sup> process. To balance the overwhelming effect of acculturation, it is important and necessary to encourage and promote a process of self- differentiation. Critical reflection is an indispensable process to heighten self-awareness and to empower conscious negotiation and integration.

In views of the dynamics of human agency and environmental complexities, Taylor (Abbey, 2004) recognized that to interpret one’s life in narrative terms is useful. When agents try to re-organize and link up the present experiences with the past and their future direction, they can identify and understand changes, struggles and conflicts in a more meaningful and unifying way. To understand the identity formation process of a group of Sichuan social work teachers as an acculturation and a self-differentiation process, a narrative inquiry model is adopted as the methodology of the study.

Narrative is understood both as a methodology and a way of knowing. The respondent is the primary agent who has strived to balance between new and traditional mode of knowing and practice. Understanding through storytelling and autobiographical activities is also considered to be a reflexive and self- formation process.

## Summary and Conclusion

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<sup>11</sup> Acculturation used to refer to changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences (Gibson, 2001). Here I use the word to illustrate the interchange between Mainland social work teachers in Sichuan with external professional cultures during the critical period of 2008-2014.

In this section, the history of social work education is traced and the importance of ‘presence’ of educator and practitioner is reviewed. Social work educators’ identity crisis related to bureau-professionalism; de-professionalism and competency-based education is discussed. In response to these challenges, the re-emphasis on ‘professional self’ is raised. To nurture the competence of practical reasoning is necessary in knowledge construction and ethical practice. The ‘self’ in the knowledge construction and practical reasoning process can be interpreted as a competence related to the concept “phronesis”. It is a virtue of mind and a commitment in practical reasoning, it involves reason, action commitment and the pursuit of goodness and truth. According to Birmingham (2004)’s interpretation, phronesis functions as a unifying concept to illustrate and understand virtuous representation. The unique post disaster environment in Sichuan triggered a disorienting practice context. Individual response as represented in practices of teaching and related professional decision worth deeper exploration and understanding. The proposed narrative lens and framework to capture the experiences of a group of social work teachers in Sichuan will be discussed and justified in the next section.

### Narrative and Identity

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Since the late 1960s, the “narrative turn” has swept across a wide range of disciplines including medical care, history, anthropology, social sciences and communication studies and it is currently understood to be a cross-disciplinary endeavor. In nursing and medical education, storytelling and story reading is regarded also as a pedagogical means. It is referred to as narrative pedagogy, and it combines components of conventional, phenomenologic, critical, and feminist pedagogies which serve to enhance the learning experience. The use of storytelling has been utilized in teaching ethics, values, cultural norms and differences. Storytelling as a teaching and learning



approach is closely related with the shift of epistemological stance that favors holistic and constructive perspectives. Learners' participation in knowledge construction is valued and encouraged. Personal interpretation and enactment in process of storytelling bring about the interconnectedness of cognitive, affective, social, moral/ethical, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. The nature of narrative knowledge demonstrated multi-layered understandings that embedded situational, theoretical, personal, social and experiential features. In the following discussion, the choice of narrative inquiry is explained with its relationship with construction of self.

#### Narrative action and construction of self

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Personal identity is closely related to knowledge of the self. In response to perplexities of 'post-modern age' where we can no longer rely on traditional authoritative system and rules to define selfhood, Giddens (1991) introduced the concept of 'reflexive awareness' in understanding actions and the identity formation process.

“Reflexive awareness in this sense is characteristic of all human action...agents are normally able, if asked, to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and the reasons for, the behavior in which they engage.” (1991, p.35)

Narrative inquiry is based on the assertion that human being possesses a competence on comprehension of action. Choice of action is closely connected with one's sense of self. Polkinghore (1988, p.143) drew on Ricoeur's six notions in explaining this competence. (1) Actions imply the agent's goal to achieve an end. (2) Action can explain one's motives. (3) Actions direct our attention to the question on “Who did it ?” (4) Actions are contextualized and reflected agent's conscious effort to negotiate with

the environment. (5) Actions reflect also different forms of interpersonal interaction such as competition or collaboration. (6) The outcome of actions will bring about changes in feelings and anticipation of the future.

The above understanding supported that choice making and action commitment is closely connected with one's selfhood and identity construction. A holistic way of living and being is reflected on the unity of actions, motivations and dispositions. It is essential for demonstrating moral goodness (p.318). The above argument further pointed to the moral aspects of narrative. This specific function of narrative is proposed by Barthes (1966, quoted by Polkinghorne, 1988) at both individual and cultural level. As at individual level, people construe who they are and what they are, the deliberation process will enable them to attain a higher level of reflection and recollection by making meaning on experiences and locating themselves from here and now to where they are headed. At the cultural level, narratives also serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs, understanding and to transmit values. (Polkinghorne, 1988)

It is worth for us as professionals to review the unique features of the identity formation process of social work teachers in Sichuan. These real life stories demonstrated to us how individuals responded to both internal and external sources in making choice and action commitment and how they interpreted and made meaning of their stories in this unprecedented and exceptional professional historical moment. Apart from that, the collective meaning of these stories rested on the discoveries of shared values and understanding uncovered in their own interpretations.

MacIntyre's (1982) virtue-based theory tried to engage also in dialogue with the

problems of modern and postmodern thought. Modern theories such as behaviorism have attempted to reduce all things to mere necessity; human actions are to be understood as simple and separated components instead of part of a whole and unity. “Life comes to appear as nothing but a series of unconnected episodes” (p.204). This led to what MacIntyre (1984) described a state named as ‘liquidation of the self-characteristics’. He then guided us to a journey of understanding an ‘action’. To differentiate an ‘action’ from ‘a behavior’ in Skinnerian sense, the understanding of a particular action should be located back to a person’s history and setting. Unified selfhood can only be achieved when one starts to become aware of how one’s actions and choices are related to one’s background and history and how the interchange of narratives can bring up new creations.

“We cannot...characterize behavior independently of intentions, and we cannot characterize intentions independently of the settings which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others” (p.206).

This understanding of action and selfhood is also rooted at Aristotle's assertion that virtue and morality are integral parts of a society, an understanding of the telos or the purposes must be social and not individual. All the stories involved the propagator’s action of looking back. The looking back process locates the self in a historical line. Narrative and storytelling direct our questions and inquiries to the ultimate concerns on “Who Am I?” “What I am doing?” and “Why I am here?” The identity has both an inward and outward implication. Inwardly it points to the development and integration of one’s inner self and being and outwardly, it enables the person to make sensible choice of action with a critical mind.

Engaging others in the narrative construction process is to invite the participant to review life events and experiences from an agentic point of view. The personalized process of telling and organizing may lead to further retelling, re-forming, renewing and reviving of lives. It is a process of consciousness raising and the most crucial element in the telling and listening process is 'to be recognized'. People wish to be heard and understood, whether it is their hardship, suffering, failure, success, achievement, or hidden interest and secret. To "recognize" does not equal to providing proper treatment and service, in most of the cases, it is the act of companion that encouraged and supported them to be themselves. The process of communication created a private and safe space for them to retreat, to rethink and to revive. The companionship in the narrative process enabled them to recognize their choice and their strength. Furthermore, the exploration transcended the cognition and affective dimensions, and enters into the moral and aesthetic dimensions. Coles (1989) called it the moral imagination. He argued that stories can become a signpost; a continuing presence in one's life. "...Their plots offer a psychological or moral journey, with impasses and breakthroughs, with decisions made." (Coles, 1989, p.68). The moral dimension encompasses the past, present and future layers of the self. The concepts of historicity, temporality and expectation are important. In story reading, people shift their focus and enter into the realm of meaning. They look back on their history and trace one's origin and the root of some beliefs and perception and behavioral patterns. People 'recognized' their real self through this reflexive process. They are able to give explanation on some of the existing mode of thinking and reacting. They can identify the invisible links and connections in their lives. These understandings 'release' and 'free' one from the blinded cage and enable the benefits of renewed awareness and better self-acceptance. Reaching this point, one may be ready to start to create a new

way of response that integrate the new understanding. It is a new story and a new life script.

Narrative is one of our fundamental structures of comprehension and it shapes the character of our existence in a particular way, similar experiences can be obtained and gained in phronesis and developing narrative schemes in professional identity development .Polkinghorn (1988) postulated that “...narrative is a meaning structure that organizes events and human action into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole.” (Polkinghorn, 1988, p. 18). The “whole” refer to understanding and meaning-making interpretation on human activities with narrative notions like action, agent, goals and motives. The construction and understanding of a plot is an interactive process rely very much on the choices of themes, sequencing of events, serendipity and imagination, meaning-making and the competence of understanding human activity as actions.

Other psychology theorists like Lieblich (1998); Sarbin (1986) and McAdam (2001, 2006, 2013) addressed the role of narrative in personal identity construction.

According to these theorists, the self is a kind of aesthetic construct, to make a complete personal story possible; one has to rely on adequate self-knowledge, self-discovery and effort of recollection and integration. “ Identity consists not simply of a self-narrative that integrates one’s past events into a coherent story, however, it also includes the construction of a future story that continues the ‘I’ of the person. If a person fails to project a hopeful story about the future, he or she undergoes a second kind of unhappiness, a life without hope.” (Polkinghorn, 1988, p.106)

### Theoretical understanding on Narrative and Storytelling

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Narrative is recognized as both a phenomenon and a methodology ( Clandinin & Connelly, 1999,2007,2013). The activity of storytelling and construction of autobiography is considered as a mode of thinking and also an impulse embedded in human mind for teleological change and unity. Meretoja (2014) proposed to perceive narrative in two main categories. First of all, narrative is a mode of thinking or cognitive achievement for imposing meaningful order onto human experience. Secondly, narrative is perceived primarily an epistemological and ontological category that characterizes the human way of being in the world, that is, something constitutive of human existence.

In the following discussion, the theoretical explanation developed by cognitive psychologist Jerome Burner will be introduced in order to lay a background understanding on narrative as a mode of thinking. Burner (2004) contrasted between the ‘paradigmatic’ and the ‘narrative’ mode of thinking and he argued that narrative is a literary genre and another mode of thought other than reasoning and induction. As a mode of thinking, he concerned more about the formal structure of narrative and the historical pre-commitment of the narrators. It is a mode of thinking that leads to life construction.

“The culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives” (Burner, 2004, p.694).

If a person is instructed to list a chronicle on his/her past five years, he/she may find that the events selected and organized are not just according to simple order and calendrical time form, they are selected according to an 'implicit narrative'.

Recounting one's life is narrative achievement. Challenges brought about on several issues. First of all, how to justify the validity of the reflexive nature of the account is problematic when the narrator and the protagonist in the stories are the same person, memories can be distorted and also, the underlying intentional factors invited further critics. Life accounts are highly susceptible to social, cultural and interpersonal and language influences and thus led to instability of expression and interpretation.

Nevertheless, life accounts and stories told are still valuable resources for us to understand lives and culture, as these are unique personal accounts situated among canonical narratives. On the other hand, the story will continually be shaped by personal and community narratives.

To bring autobiography into existence as a literary form, it is necessary to recognize the historically and metaphysical condition. Burner (2004) suggested the importance of studying the common formal structures of self-narratives. By referring to concept from Russian formalists, he tried to distinguish three aspects of stories: *fdbula*, *sjuzet*, and *forma*. *Fdbula* is the timeless mystics which embedded the moral senses while *sjuzet* is the sequenced lives aspects. *Forma* are genre like romance and tragedy. The mixture of these aspects becomes an integral part of a common story structure which composed at least the following six elements: an agent, an action, a goal, a setting, an instrument and trouble. Burner saw the 'agent' of the narrative as the most crucial element to be studied and understood. He believed that the narration reflected the habit of mind of the narrator and how he/she conceptualized the world and

experiences. The plot or story line followed the narrator's own organization and interpretation on his/her perception, responses and reflection on the selected events. It is thus also an empowerment and subjective enrichment process when the agent of the story transcends from 'persons' who are defined by roles and expectation to 'selves' or 'individuals' who can rebel and build new order in the society. In this process, "action" and "consciousness" are the dual landscapes for the stories to be played out.

Other theorists enriched our understanding on various aspects of the narrative process. Personality psychologist McAdams (1997) proposed that "identity" is a life story; storytelling helps to unfold the autobiographical consciousness. This saying is supported also by another psychology scholar Freeman (1993) who stated, "It is only in retrospect, through narrative, that one is in a position to survey the whole that is one's life, and it is only through such a survey that there exists the possibility of obtaining the truth about that life, indefinite and ungraspable though it is." (p. 387). Sociological theorist Frank (1995, 2010) aims at maintaining the integrity of the story and by recognizing the power of stories for sparking imagination and empathetic witnessing, stories are treated as a means to convey values and inspiring collaborative action also.

"The first lesson of thinking with stories is not to move on once the story has been heard, but to continue to live in the story, becoming in it, reflecting on who one is becoming, and gradually modifying the story. The problem is truly to listen to one's own story, just as the problem is truly to listen to others' stories."  
(Frank, 1995, p. 163)

Another perspective adopted by Olney (1972) further linked autobiography expression with the higher cosmic order. His understanding aligned with and supported the



saying that autobiographies are related to the natural impulse of human being. His argument further reinforced the teleological orientation of narrative and storytelling. A man's lifework is his fullest autobiography.

“A man's autobiography is thus like a magnifying lens, focusing and intensifying that same peculiar creative vitality that informs all the volumes of his collected works; it is the symptomatic key to all else that he did and , naturally, to all that he was.” (Olney, 1972, p.4).

Moreover, it is more than a formal or historical matter, as stimulated by ancient Greek Philosopher Heraclitus. Olney (1972) supported that this unique whole of a personal life story is part of a larger whole. He proposed four theoretical concepts related to understanding of autobiographies, they are: the intimate relation of self-knowledge and cosmology; the flux and changes of the entire world; the 'becomingness' of the self and the identity of logos and Logos.

“ .. if we most fully realize the human condition when we live the entire past in a moment pregnant with the future; and if life is a continually evolving and never broken process- then memory,...must be the cohesive power that renders us, ...only through the present moment of recall, when we most fully realize our self, composite of past history and future germens.” (Olney, 1972, p.38)

Combining these theoretical orientations, one may perceive narrative as both a means and an end. It is a means to recollect, reorganize and understand our life events and to share with others in order that we can build the link, make meaning and moving towards the unity whole of our own self and to engage in collaborative understanding. Narrative is not just a personal matter, the process of construction and reconstruction connects individuals and their environment, including others and the Higher Order.

Storytelling is a mode of knowing and a mode of communication. It is a mode of knowing consists in organizing experience with the help of a scheme assuming the intentionality of human action. It is the plot instead of the truth of story elements that determine the power of a story. Personal stories or text of lives assemble an art product. On the surface, the art or the story provides rich experiences of aesthetics through expression in unique composition, tone, and form. On a deeper level, they can provide emotion, create energy, and provide profound meaning for individuals and the collective psyche. It is on this level that artistic images and stories are alive.

Storytelling in education functions also as a social process. At one end, it is story text that serves the purposes of self-representation and performance. At the other end, it is a conversational and dialogical process that connecting individuals to both the immediate social context and broader social and cultural contexts. .

”What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.” (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37).

In this study, narrative is a choice of inquiry as it serves several purposes. First of all, it is a personal way of expression and reflection, “stories are not lived but told”; the retrospective way of organization and reflection can either be private or social. It allows the individual to recall series of events, to create and identify the linkage and sequence, to make meaning in the process. This exercise enables the engaged person looking at one’s experiences from another point of view to experience the process of putting pieces into a temporal whole, while encouraging a more open and dialogical way of accepting one’s past and envisioning one’s future. The ongoing and continual exercise facilitate the individual to move from a temporal understanding to a more ‘advance’ and holistic understanding on one’s existence.

Secondly, it deepens our understanding on the inner self. Storytelling provides us the opportunities to look at some ‘deeper part’ of our inner self like self-esteem, intimate relationships and professional or religious values. Furthermore, by engaging in the review of personal tragic events, dangers and uncertainties like illness, natural and man-made disasters, people can face the threats and endless struggles of ‘existential fear’ (Kleinman, 2006) . In storytelling process, narrators will experience authentic reflections on men’s perplexities and altered our illusions on the modern belief that we are in control of ourselves, of our environment and the social order. More than that, the process of sharing and exchange with others reinforce the “sense of self”.

(Linde ,1993) This sense of self is created in an ongoing dialogical and negotiating way. The repeated and revised accounts of one’s life episodes allow individuals to

identify both the coherent and contradictory parts of one's history, choices, and the multiple motivations behind them. The self is understood as complicated, socially constructed, and a changing and evolving entity.

We respect that we are all unique individuals, have processed a rich and personal internal world that belongs to no other. Our perceptions, understanding and perspectives are a natural byproduct of our existence and subjectivity is part of life. Therefore, narrative inquiry is more like an art process where the artist seeks the truth of a subject's essence through continual seeking and discovery. Great artists have found ways to define these essences through adequate 'artist language' and images. Michelangelo famously stated that he carved the marble until he set an angel free.

Thirdly, we perceive social life is a narrative, it is the most typical form of social life and establishes life as either a comedy, a romance story, a tragedy or an epic (MacIntyre, 1984). By applying this understanding to the narrative process, the story is an enacted narrative consisted of life experiences, actions and interpretation, the sharing and exchange process thicken understanding and communion. As a social work practitioner and social work educator, we used to invite service users and students to participate in this exercise in order to create a space for self-reflection and trigger deeper level self-awareness and self-understanding. In most cases, they are critical experiences or landmark events. These experience episodes are selected, for they are influential and carry personal significance. The process of storytelling thus also serves to define, solidify and reinforce relationships and group identity.

## Summary and Conclusion

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In the above section, I have explained why narrative inquiry is adopted in this study. The methodological concerns will be discussed in the next chapter. The above discussion focused mainly on understanding narrative as a human phenomenon and mode of knowing. Narrative is closely linked with construction of self and identity. These understandings are drawn mainly from perspectives of cognitive and personality psychology, sociology, educational and autobiographic studies. Narrative or storytelling is understood as human natural impulses and its teleological orientation. Human action as an enacted narrative points to the understanding of the agent and the underlying motives. Storytelling is a personal reflexive process that covered exploration on cognitive reasoning, emotional experiences, agentic action and ethical consideration. It enables the agent to link up the present with the past and future. As a result, the narrative project leads to deeper levels of self-knowledge and consciousness, it reinforces one's sense of being and lastly, it facilitates a process of mutual and collaborative understandings.

## Conceptual integration and formulation of research framework

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### Teacher's identity as interplay of personal and environmental factors

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In the following section, a more in-depth exploration and discussion will be explicated on areas of teacher identity and integrity. These discussions are the basis of the formulation of the research framework of the present study. Following the line of argument in this chapter, a social work teacher as a knower and a moral agent is performing a crucial and significant role in the process of knowledge construction and

ethical practices. In this study, an extensive review on literature related to teachers' selfhood confirmed this above argument and further enriched the understanding on teacher as an individual and as a community. This section will aim at explaining teacher's self in interplay between personal and environmental factors; teacher's self in practice community; professional identity and integrity and lastly, the narrative framework formulated to guide the study.

The dimensions of teacher self are enriched by these following theoretical concepts and frameworks:

(1) Biographical and reflexive selves perspective: (Nias, 1989, 1996; MacLure, 1993; Kelchtermans, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; 1996; Beijaard et al. 2004; Hammer et al. 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, eds. 1999; Shulman, 2005; Day, et al. 2006) This perspective attends to the dynamic and interplay between personal and professional selves. The identity of teachers closely link with one's personal lived experience. It reflects one's cognition, emotion and motivation and covers the time span of past, present and future possible self.

Kelchtermans' (1993) study proposed five interrelated parts of the teachers' professional self. They are self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives. He identified two recurring themes of *stability* and *vulnerability* among research respondents that reflect the teachers' need to maintain stable achievement and struggles against the contextual tension related with policy, societal and institutional fragmentation and discontinuity. These theorists addressed the interaction forces among biography, experience

and context. Some of them tended to perceive teacher identity as a stable concept as rooted in their values and professional commitment, others emphasized more on the temporality, changeability, instability of teacher identity (Day , et al. 2006). Teachers' identity formation is considered to be a self-reflexive construction process (Maclure, 1993) and a "becoming" process. "Identity is not something one has, but something that develops during one's whole life" (Beijaard et al. 2004, p. 107).

(2) Practical knowledge framework: This framework refers to teachers' perception of self in mastering subject matter knowledge, didactical relationship with environment and students and pedagogical competence. (Beijaard, et al. 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999)

(3) Learning community: Wenger's (1991) concept of professional identity related closely with one's experience, belongingness, doing and learning, it is an 'identity in practice'. Wenger (1998) asserted that "Identity . . . is an experience and a display of competence" (p. 152). This orientation put high emphasis on teachers' socialization and practice engagement process. In this process, the formation of learning communities is particularly important to facilitate knowledge construction and identity consolidation.

Based upon the above understandings, the following section is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will discuss the dimensions of teacher self; while in the second part, the teacher in a group will be illustrated, and lastly, drawing on these understandings, the narrative framework of this study will be constructed and explained.

To integrate the dimensions of teacher self in the research framework, the “onion model’ proposed by Korthagen (2004, 2011) is adopted as a tool to illustrate and distinguish the interplay between all related forces. It composes of six distinct layers in which teacher learning can take place: (a) environment,(b) behavior, (c) competencies, (d) beliefs, (e) identity, and (f) personal mission (sometimes referred to as the layer of spirituality).

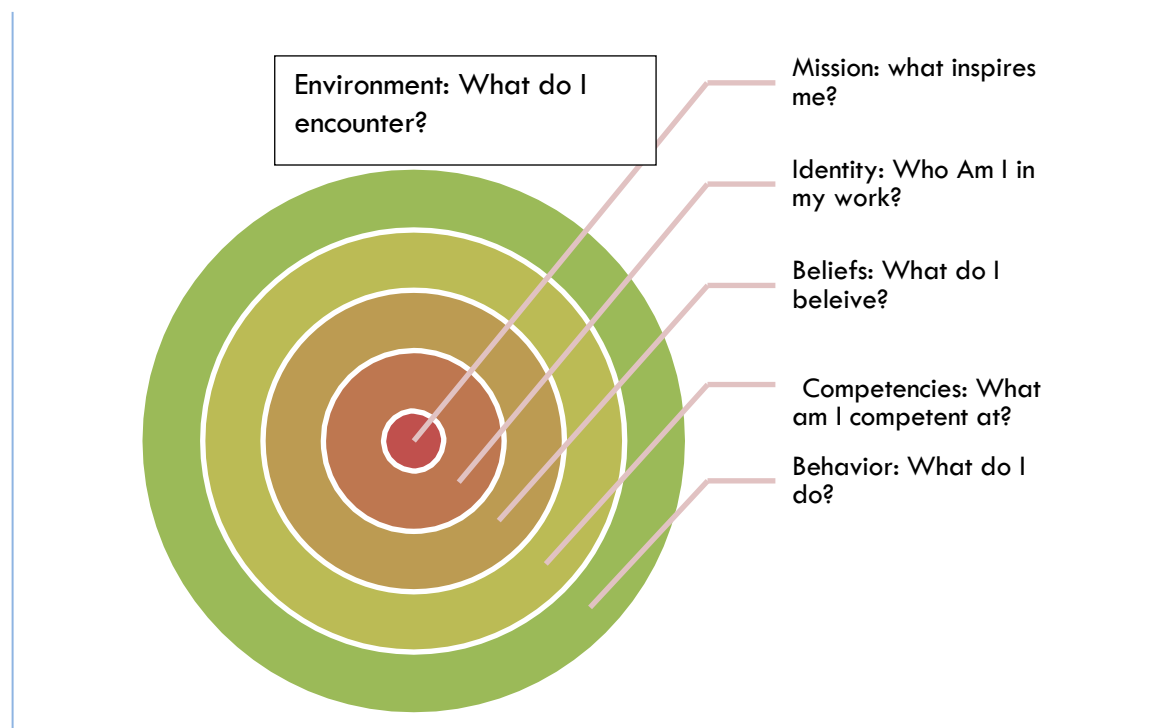


Diagram 4: The Onion Model (Korthagen, 2004)

Diagram 4 is adapted from the Onion model of Teacher development (Korthagen, 2004, 2011) to illustrate the interplay between environment and the selfhood of the teacher. In this diagram, teacher identity is considered to be a dynamic and fluid process of construction. It is closely intertwined with the selfhood which is comprised of different aspects and dimensions of the person: From the innermost self to the outer demonstrated behavior and expression; from past to present to future projection. As proposed by Korthagen (2004, 2011), there are six layers of the teacher selfhood. The



six layers including mission, identity, belief, competence, behavior and environment, these dimensions are the ‘essence of a good teacher’. These six layers are equally important in the original framework. In the present study, the layer of ‘environment’ is singled out and expanded. The expansion is aimed at putting a stronger emphasis on the interplay between the internal/personal dimension and the outer/environmental dimensions.

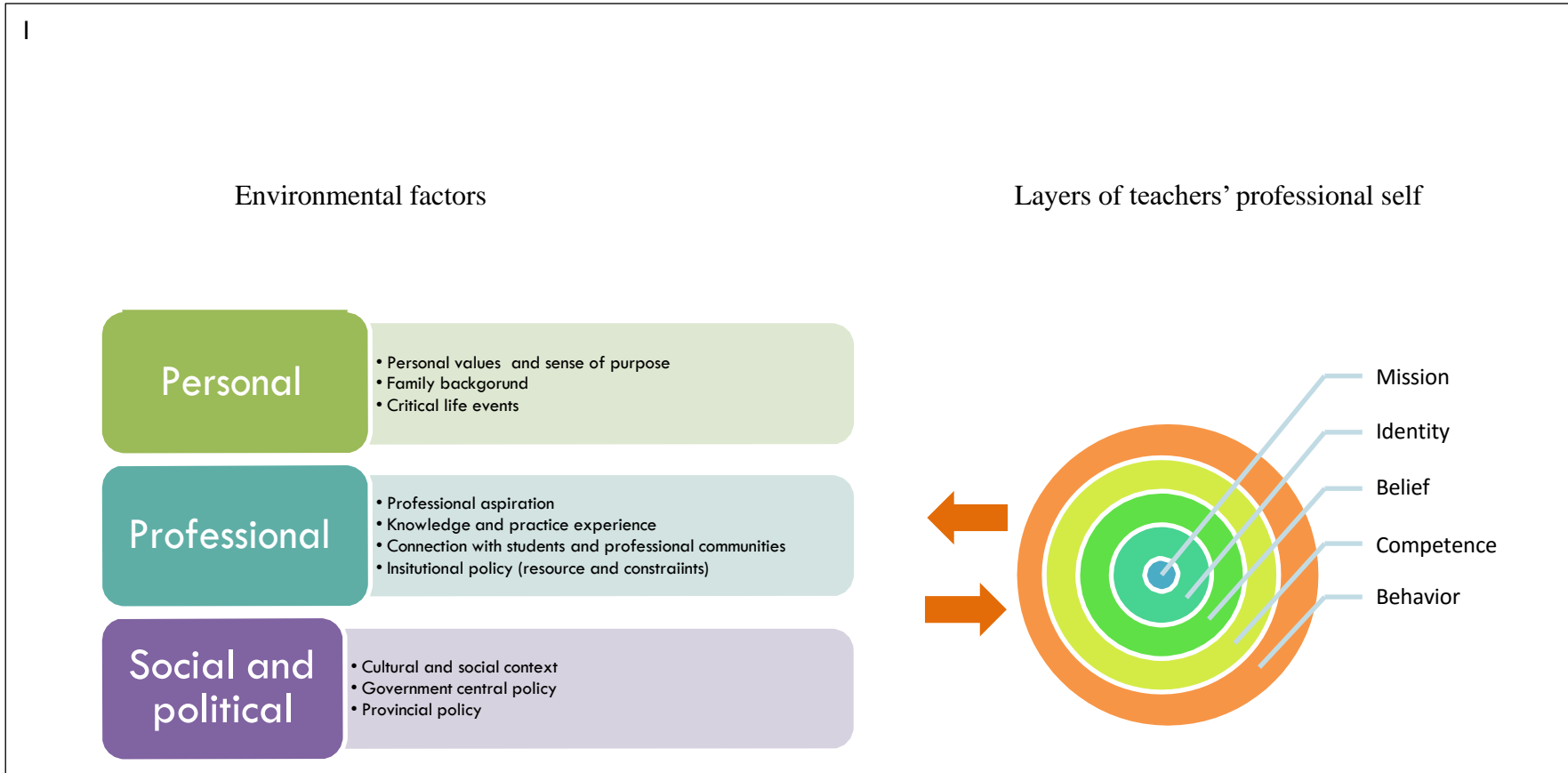


Diagram 5: “The Extended Onion Model” on Teacher Identity

In the modified framework in Diagram 5, the innermost core of a teacher self is still the “mission” and life orientation. It may be referred to as the spiritual core where the self connects with and inspired by a Greater/Higher Self. The second layer is the “identity”, it is the “who” of the self in the workplace, it is the vocational identity designated with role expectation and demands. The third layer is the “belief” which is the professional values and aspirations that support the individual’s performance. The fourth layer is the “competence” which refers to the knowledge, practice experience and other professional resources of the teacher. The fifth layer is the “behavior” which refers to the observable action and professional work taken by the individuals. The outer layer is the “environment” which is originally understood as the professional environment and relationship. Here the concept of ‘environment’ is extended and elaborated to accommodate three domains( Personal, Professional and Socio-political ). As Korthagen (2004, 2011) proposed this as a framework for teacher education and development, all these layers of the professional functioning reminded us to attend to the individual as a whole and to address the interplay between both inner and external forces. The questions of “Who am I as a teacher?” and “ Who do I want to become?” are important concerns for teacher development in parallel with the dominant attention and discourse on external forces. This model is modified to enrich the understanding of the area of external, contextual or environmental forces, where these forces can become resources or threat to the development and actual performance of the social work teacher. In the extended model, these external factors included also the person’s past ,present experience and background; it covers the range from the micro personal context, meso professional environment to the macro societal and political influences. One’s personal context refers to the individual’s family background where his/her personal values and personality nurtured; it comprised also some critical life

events in past or present that affect the professional role. The professional environment is crucial and particularly true for the social work profession. This domain calls our attention to the issue of relatedness. It refers to the connection between the individual teacher with his/her own professional aspirations and significant others like students, peer communities and institutions. The socio-political factors are equally important as in China particular, the central and provincial government policy and community recognition will directly lead to either a positive, supportive or opposing and unfriendly environment. With the understanding that all these factors are in a fluid and changing process, we have to be aware of the different nature of impacts and prepare to adopt a paradoxical lens to embrace both threats and opportunities; obstacles and favor; resources and constraints in all these dynamics.

Korthagen (2011) surely has well aware of the continual tension between human agency and outer environment, in order to achieve autonomy, competence and relatedness which are three significant needs to be satisfied by an individual, one has to seek harmony among the different layers of the teachers' self and furthermore, to tap resources and energy from within, that is, the core mission and life purpose of the individual. These needs are proper indicators for independent and mature social work teacher. It is reflected by the individual teacher's adequate self-knowledge and awareness; courage to teach and make changes (autonomy); be competent to perform and reflect (competence); and have the capabilities to connect and build relationships (relatedness). The innermost layer is the mission of the self, which is also referred to as the spiritual self of the teacher, it is the core part of our being. According to Korthagen (2011), harmony of the personhood is achieved not just by satisfaction at the competence and behavioral layers only. Real harmony is a state of congruence, in

other words, by achieving integrity, being able to actualize one's inner desire and aspirations. He, together with some other teacher educators like Palmer (1998, 2003) are positive in 'tapping' the resources within and to encourage a holistic growth and development model for teachers. They have provided guidance for us to follow particularly in theorizing teacher identity and formation process and the actual practice to encourage a holistic development.

Returning to the identity formation issue of the social work teachers in Mainland China, the above framework on teachers' identity development is useful but not sufficient in the Mainland context. Unlike primary or secondary school teachers, social work teachers in Mainland universities are facing greater challenges to fulfil their roles and identify themselves with the professional community. The first challenge comes from the inadequate self image and esteem, as most of the social work teachers do not possess a related professional degree, they are not confident enough to transmit social work knowledge especially in areas of theory and practice integration; secondly, junior social work teachers have little autonomy in exercising their authority in curriculum design and professional development, they are compelled to follow both institutional norms and government policy. Thirdly, as social work is a newly developed profession, the connection and communication between professional bodies and communities are under-developed in many provincial regions, we cannot expect an understanding, trustful and supportive environment that facilitate professional dialogue. Finally, student enrollment and student employment are still two big challenges in reality that need to be addressed and attended to. The majority of students enrolled have no idea about the profession and some of them wish to be accepted only because of the admission standard of the social work profession is in general lower than other disciplines. Even if enrolled students developed interest and

commitment in the profession, a proper practice learning environment cannot be ensured. Relevant professional vacancies and reasonable employment terms also cannot be guaranteed after graduation.

Facing all these critical challenges in education, little attention has been paid to addressing the needs and the voice of the educators. The present study located itself in a particular historical line and a particular physical region in China. With the understanding that the rapid growth of the profession in the past decades as the backdrop of the study, the social work teachers in Sichuan during 2008 to 2014 experienced a critical period that triggered bigger and deeper changes.

The 2008 earthquake is a great catalyst that brought about drastic and far-reaching transformational changes both in the social and professional environment. The impacts of these environmental changes pulled the social work teachers out of their comfort zones and placed them in extraordinary situations.

To understand this particular situation, the theoretical framework of “Community of Practice” (CoP) proposed by Wenger (2000) is further incorporated in this study. Right after the earthquake, a large number of local and overseas professional bodies, informal networks of practitioners with the competence and the aspirations on area of humanitarian work were formed and participated in disaster relief, reconstruction and mitigation work. These rich knowledge and practice resources on multi-disciplinary levels opened the eyes of the Sichuan young teachers and by participating in these communities of learning; their sense of professional identity is consolidated and established also. After years of practice, the experiences are rectified and documented

as new set of professional knowledge and practice skills on disaster social work.

CoP is understood as a social learning process and a knowledge management tool, it is defined as

“Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)

The concept suggested both a relational and an experiential process of learning and identification. Through active and dynamic participation and taking action together, members are able to accumulate knowledge, learning new sets of skills, build up relationships, solve problems together, generate new practice models, internalize the value of the social groups. Over time, they will further develop a unique perspective on the professional activities and consolidate a sense of identity. It is both a personal and a collective process.

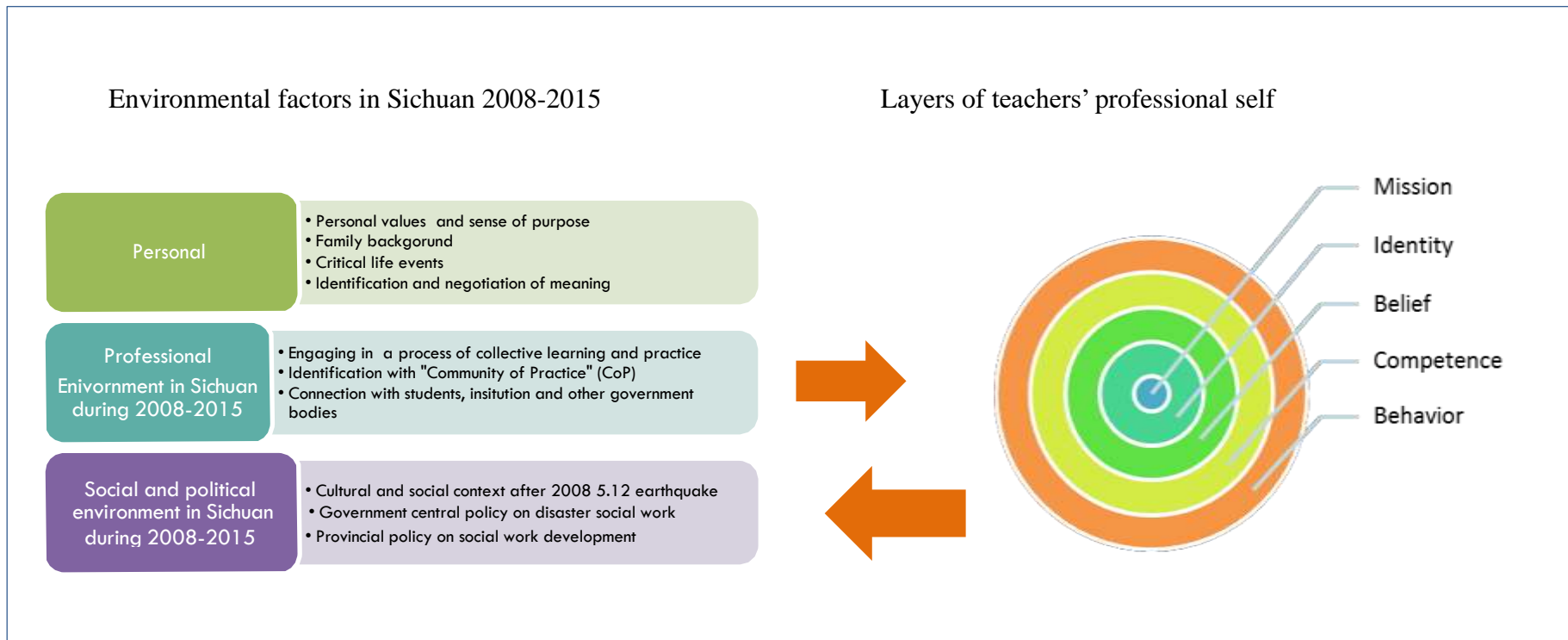


Diagram 6: Unique professional and socio-political context during the period 2008-2015 in Sichuan



## Teacher's identity in practice community

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According to the above understanding on teacher identity and development, we assume that a codified set of knowledge, skills and understanding are insufficient in the educational practice process. Educators should also pay attention to personal ,ethical, motivational, dispositional factors as well as the environmental and contextual factors. In the midst of disaster response challenges, social work teachers did not perform their roles individually, they were engaged in practice communities and the unifying force should be the professional ideology, aspiration and collective responsibility. To illustrate teachers' identity in a learning community, the following discussion will be based on Shulman(2005)'s conception on practice community and reformative role of teaching professionals. According to Shulman (2005), a call to service is considered to be one of the core attributes that shared by all professions. It is the obligation of service to others, an engagement in practice, just like the teaching and social work professionals that embedded with genuine passion where they find ultimate fulfilment and meanings in the activities. These professional engagements are moral practices. Other attributes shared by all professions including a set of scholarly or theoretical understandings; a domain of operational skills and methods; the competence to exercise judgement under conditions of uncertainties ; continual theory –practice dialogue and integration ; and lastly, a learning community to nurture

professional culture and develop sustainable knowledge. To acquire these attributes implies the development and build up of an adequate 'professional character'. A professional should be trained to "understand in order to act, and they must act in order to serve" (Shulman, 2005, p. 53). Professional practitioners acquire not just the knowledge and skills but also to internalize the values and ideologies of the profession and are ready to commit to the roles and responsibilities. It is a holistic framework to cover cognitive, practice, emotive and moral domains in developing a professional. Furthermore, professional educators should have adequate comprehension on the subject matter and content knowledge as well as having the ability and competencies to transmit the knowledge to the learner in a proper pedagogical means (Shulman, 1998). He used the concept "pedagogical content knowledge" (PCK) to highlight the importance of both content and pedagogical knowledge, and he encouraged teachers to seek deep understanding in the learning process and to participate in developing knowledge structures and practice models. In professional educational processes, accomplished teachers should integrate vision, motivation, understanding, and performance in their practice. He went further pointed out the importance of the reformative role of teachers as a community, this is an important way to enable and sustain teacher learning and development.

To enable the sustainable learning support in professional community, Shulman (2004)

has proposed a model that emphasized on teachers' self-reflection and community learning. The model places the 'self' at the center and assumed that the integrative forces originated from adequate self-awareness and continual reflective and reflexive exercises. Through vigorous reflection at an individual level, the teacher's identity is consolidated in several directions, including a deeper understanding on content and pedagogical knowledge, strengthened commitment to professional mission and ideology, empowered engagement in practice and reinforcing a higher motivational intention. The growth and development is not just resting on a personal level, but the interchange and communication in the practice community will further consolidate these resources into shared knowledge, vision and collective commitment.

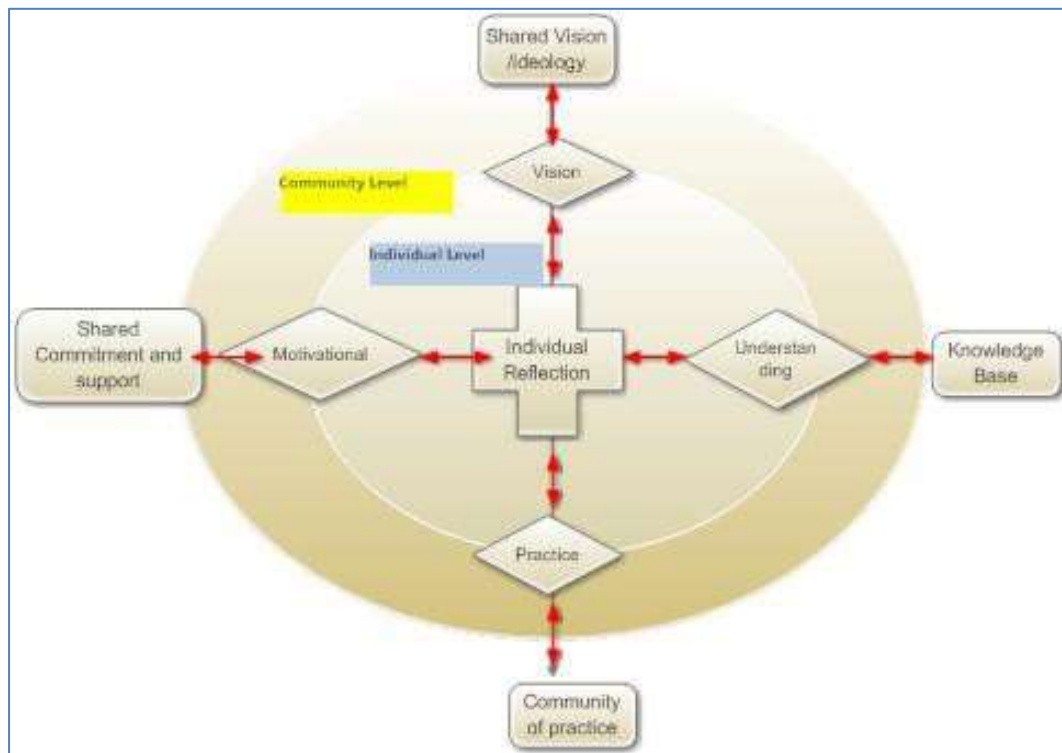


Diagram 7: Teachers' learning and development at individual and community level

(Shulman & Shulman, 2004)

In Diagram 7, professional reflective self is placed at the center of a teacher's learning and development. Professional identity does not call only for conduct and competence.

It is a continuous dialogue between the social environment and reflective self with each informing and forming each other. Persons of integrity act like the ideal persons they are trying to be. It is a holistic way to seek for knowing and acting. The process embraces intellectual, rational, intuitive, affective, and moral domains of the person.

Self-knowledge and integration of the professional self is not only a personal issue.

Shulman (2004) envisioned the development at individual and community levels where teachers' reflective effort may generate a pool of resources and capital and will extend the impact on community and policy level. This implied the reflexive action will lead to reformative outcome in the long run.

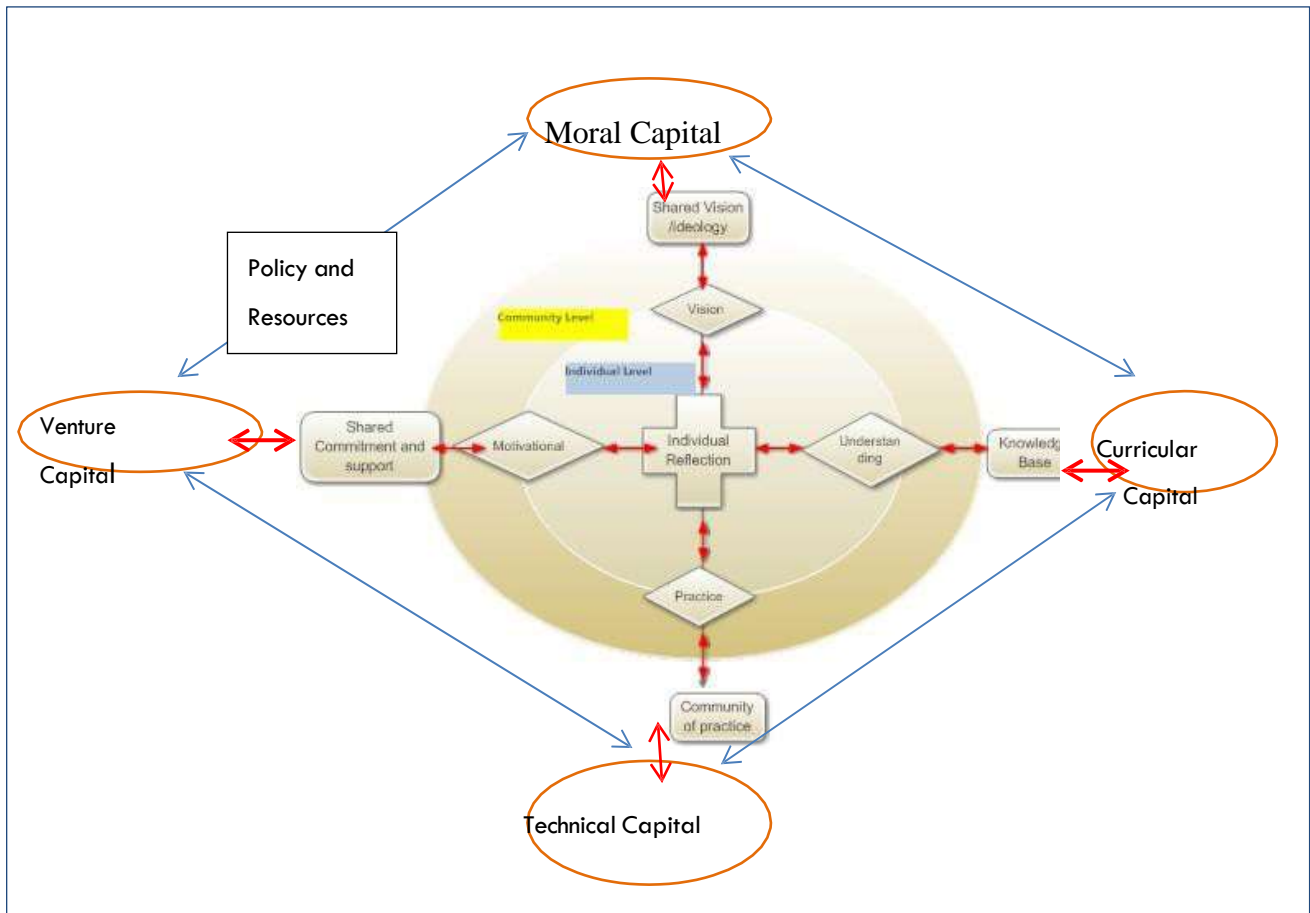


Diagram 8: Teachers' individual and collective reflection leading to impact on policy and capital building (Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

In view of the reflective and reformative nature of teachers' self in practice community, Shulman (2005) further pointed out the importance of commitment and responsibility of the profession.

“...But a true professional does not merely practice: he or she performs with a sense of personal and social responsibility. In the work of a professional, the performances of practice must not only be skilled and theoretically grounded; they must be characterized by integrity, by a commitment to responsible, ethical service.” (Shulman, 2005, p.18)

Here ‘integrity’ is perceived as the ethical aspect of the teachers’ practice community . Putting the attribute of integrity back to the professional context, we may refer to the BASW<sup>12</sup> (2011) definitive document that guided professional practice where “integrity” is highlighted as one significant code of ethics: “Integrity comprises honesty, reliability, openness and impartiality, and is an essential value in the practice of social work”. Social work ethic scholars also supported this aspect of sense of purpose and commitment in manifestation of professional integrity. Banks (2008, 2009, 2010) has reviewed the concept of ‘professional integrity’ in the social work arena. She observed that in social work practice, more concerns were placed on

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<sup>12</sup> BASW stands for British Association of Social Work. The Code of Ethics is a definitive document underpinning social work practice. The quoted code is from the latest 2011 version. Retrieved from the official website <https://www.basw.co.uk/codeofethics/> on October 20, 2013

demand for standard of good practice and thus integrity related more to ‘right professional conduct’. She stated that commitment and moral competence are equally important and should be advocated in social work practice, policy making and education. Banks (2010) conceptualized ‘integrity’ as a commitment to a set of preferred professional values; an awareness of the inter-relatedness of a coherent whole which eventually constitutes the overarching goals or purpose of the profession; a capacity to make sense and integrate personal and professional values; an ability to give a coherent account of beliefs and actions; and lastly, the strength of purposes and ability of implementation. These understandings can be summarized in three core concepts of ‘conduct’ (morally right behavior), ‘capacity’ (competence to act and to reflect upon the outcome) and ‘commitment’ (commit to a set of deeply held values) in demonstration of professional integrity. ‘Integrity’ is thus perceived as more an ‘ideal’ and preferred professional attribute and its manifestation. In the following section, other related discussions on the concept of ‘integrity’ are collected in order to have a more comprehensive understanding on its meaning and application.

The term ‘integrity’ is derived from the Latin ‘integritas’, which means having no part taken away. The concept is understood at both the individual and professional levels.

Baxter’s (2012) developed an operational conceptual framework based on the

philosophical and theoretical work of Frankfurt (1987), McFall (1987), Williams (1973) and Calhoun (1995). The framework is useful for providing a summary on key aspects of integrity at an individual level.

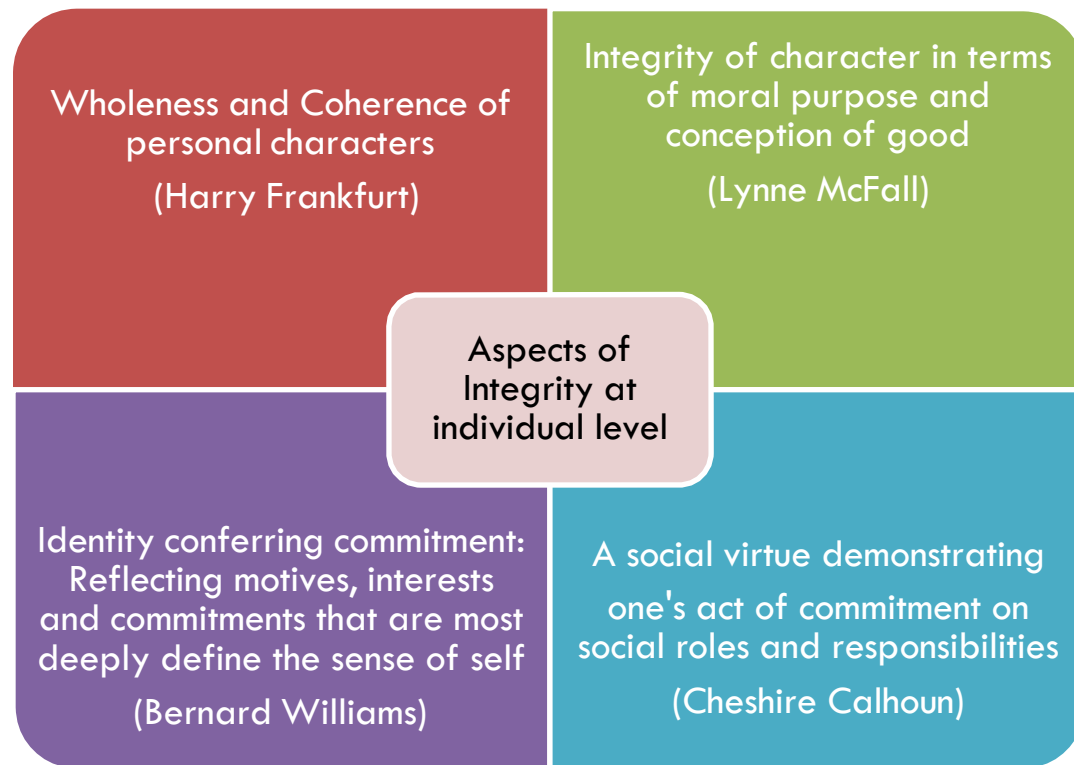


Diagram 9: Aspects of Integrity at individual level (excerpted and modified from Baxter, et al. , 2012)

The first aspect of integrity is the achievement of wholeness and coherence of personal character through effort of self-integration(Frankfurt, 1987). The second aspect is the conscious awareness of the moral purposes and conceptions of goods of the individual (McFall ,1987). The third aspect referred to commitment to social or professional values and ethical principles (Calhoun ,1995) .The final aspect



highlighted the act of standing for one's commitment( Williams ,1973). The framework expands our scope in defining integrity, the four aspects of integrity provide a direction to understand individual choices in a a more holistic and comprehensive way. In this study, 'integrity' is not an virtue or competence to be identified and confirmed in personal stories but through tracing the developmental stories of the respondents, the observation and analysis will be focused on the dynamics of individual struggles and success in achieving awareness of personal and professional values, conscious integration and manifestation of action commitment in the practice process.

#### Research Framework--Tracing the trajectory of respondents' identity formation through a narrative lens

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The current study aims at capturing the experience of a group of young social workers in this social learning process. Having engaged in the drastic disaster and innumerable learning and practice opportunities, they are invited to enter a retrospective process of telling their stories of engagement and identification. The following questions are to be explored in a storytelling process. In other words, it is through a narrative lens where respondents recaptured and reorganized their life events into meaningful episodes and negotiated and created meaning in their experiences.

1. How did they participate in the collective learning and practice process, and what choices of activities they have engaged in and committed to?
2. What is the trajectory, the route of memory and future projection of their identity in the landscape of practice?
3. How did the participation affect their identification on their own role and position as a social work teacher?
4. What did they gain in terms of professional knowledge, skills and value consolidation?
5. What were the struggles and motivational forces they have experienced in the process?
6. How did they align and integrate their own personal values with these new inputs?
7. What are the future impacts on their professional role and identity?

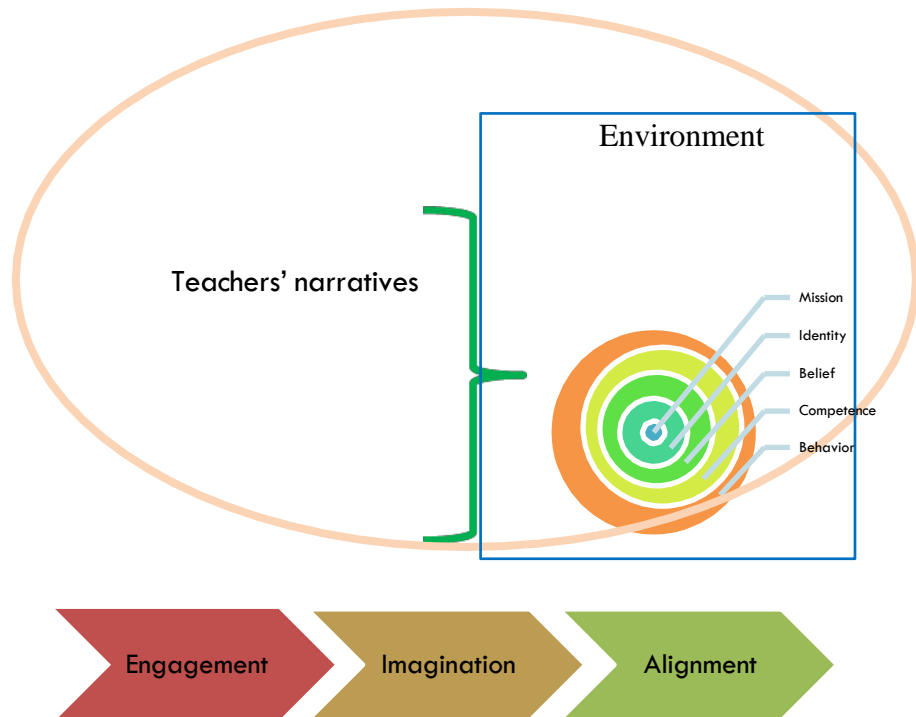


Diagram 10a : Research Framework: Tracing the trajectory of respondents' identity formation from 2008-2014 through a narrative lens

Drawing mainly upon the theoretical framework and understanding of Korthagen's (2004, 2011) model regarding teachers' selfhood; Wenger (2000) on Community of Practice and identity negotiation; Shulman's (2005) articulation on practice community and commitment and lastly, narrative theorists on autobiographical lens and narrative knowing, the basic conception and assumption of "identity formation" and "integrity" in the study are constructed as follows:

1. The individual's sense of identity is influenced by interaction with inner and outer forces. These include the inner dispositional, motivational, ideological forces and the outer professional contextual, socio-cultural and socio-political factors and collective grand narratives. Integrity is achieved through awareness of the different layers of selfhood and interplay and conscious integration and alignment of these dimensions.
2. Formation of the identity presupposes both a developmental and temporal essence. Professional identity can be maintained and developed by active participation and identification with community of practice (CoP).
3. It is assumed that through participation, the members of the CoP will enter into new practice experience, new imagination of one's role and position and mutual construction and alignment of practice perspectives, orientation and actions.

4. Teachers' use of self in knowledge construction and making sensible pedagogical judgement is crucial in professional practice.
5. Identity is an autobiographical process, there is an intrinsic connection between narratives and human experiences. Retrospective organization of 'episodic' events trigger self-discovery and facilitates self-understanding. It is a reflective and reflexive process.
6. Human actions are enacted narratives that reveal one's moral sense that composed of deeper desires and intention, commitment and purpose. The mission or moral self is one of the dimensions of personhood. The awareness of practical reasoning and intelligible action is crucial in order to achieve integrity and unity.
7. Narrative process will bring about reflexive and reformative outcome as storytelling will consolidate not only personal learning and experiences but will reshape collective understanding and choice making in a professional community.

By inviting the respondents to enter a process of recollection of their experiences and interpretation in the past six years, respondents will construct a professional development path which reflected their role changes and identity formation.

These experiences, as the core substances of one's professional identity are

constructed by dynamic forces at work, they are the multi-layers of professional self and the outer environmental factors.

The personal multi-layered 'self' composed the following aspects:

**Mission:** Personal sense of purpose, professional ideology

**Identity:** Vocational roles and duties

**Belief:** Ethical principles , habit of mind and anticipated goals

**Competence and** Engagement and performance, choice of action

**Behavior:**

Whereas the environmental forces at work including all the personal, professional and socio-political contextual factors.

- Personal:** Family background, personal life and critical life events.
- Professional:** Professional engagement and practices, identification with CoP, connection and interaction with students, peers, institutions, communities and government
- Socio-political:** Threats and opportunities related to institutional support and constraints, central and provincial policy on social welfare development

As storytelling facilitated authorship and moral understanding, self-awareness and meaning making on these experiences are essential processes to achieve identity formation and integrity.

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*“People who lean on logic and philosophy and rational exposition end by starving the best part of the mind.”*

**William Butler Yeats**

## Philosophical and theoretical grounding

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The present study adopts a constructive and interpretative orientation in the inquiry work. The choice is justified because we have to recognize the limitations of positivist research in providing us a path of truth seeking particularly in domain of human science. Positivist paradigm is dominant in scientific enquiries. The underpinning theory of knowledge is that there is an objective and unified truth outside where we can investigate and discover through rational means. This paradigm is characterized by predictability, certainty and causality. Based on this belief, scientists develop systematic observation, experimentation, data collection and analysis procedures; give explanation and generalize the empirical evidences into general rules, which eventually build objective and a solid foundation of understanding on our world and us. These understandings enable and empower researchers as an observer to further explore and discover. This is the way how we acquire and shape the scientific and



technological world. This epistemological choice also dominated the social science world before 1970s.

The shift to adopting a social constructivist and interpretive approach is a response to the dissatisfaction on knowing in particular the domain of human lives and experiences. The reason is obvious, human lives and experiences are not simply stable objects; these are multi-layered, dynamic and changing activities in the process of formulation. The emergent new philosophical and epistemological grounding challenge the underpinning modernist subjective –objective dichotomy, naturalization, over reliance on quantification. In substitution, the new epistemological commitment favors partial, historical, and contextual truth. Evolving methods and techniques are introduced to attend to how individuals construct and interpret their experiences. This fosters a participatory approach which alters the relationship between the researcher and subjects. This perspective holds the view that our reality is constructed; it is contextual and socially relative. Identity and meaning-making processes are also forms of social creation, emotion and relationships towards others. They are integral parts of the moral self. The paradigm shift helps to shake the positivist lens and to arouse our consciousness on some missing pieces in studying and understanding reality.

## Narrative inquiry as the research methodology

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In the previous Chapter, the concept of ‘narrative or storytelling’ is discussed as a theoretical concept and its relation to the construction of self and identity. In the following illustration, ‘narrative’ is explicated as a method of inquiry.

## Beyond storytelling- Narrative inquiry as a research genre

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The current research framework adopted a narrative approach to identity development.

Although I use the trajectory of identity formation as a reference to trace the development, it serves more as a theoretical lens than a rigid framework of application.

Narrative methods do not focus on defining a set predictable pattern of development, but rather attends to the ways in which persons make meaning of life events. It is based on the assumption that lives change over time in ways not necessarily predictable and this reality suggests that the study of lives over time should be

concerned with the impact of these unanticipated changes, particularly with the manner in which persons make sense of these changes, and maintain an intelligible narrative over time. As suggested above, this perspective is person-centered in that it foregrounds the experience of individuals rather than the categorization of experience.

In Lieblich’s (1998) earlier narrative study, she pointed out that we should pay

attention to the multiple voices in the process of interpretation. They are the voice of the narrator; the voice of the theoretical framework and a reflexive voice in the process of collection and interpretation. Later, Riessman (2008) guided us to understand narrative and narrative analysis in a practical way with sensible reflections. According to her understanding, stories revealed truths about human experiences and served several important functions including structuring our perceptual experiences, organizing the past memories and purpose-building the life events and mobilizing progressive change. In order to understand these stories and their implications on one's life and identity construction, analysis has to be directed to the 'deep structures' about the nature of life itself in a particular culture. More recently, Frank (2010), as a sociologist and storyteller proposed five commitments for his narrative methodology. They are (i) to sustain tension between dialogue and analysis, researchers should always be reminded that there are multi-voices in the narrative process, they are to speak with the respondent but not speak for them. (ii) to enable and to bring diffuse voices together so that they can hear each other. (iii) to recognize that stories are both subjective and external. (iv) to recognize the 'un-finalized' nature of persons and to respect the participants' capacity for change and further revision of their stories. (v) to aim at opening and expanding new possibilities in the analysis process.

Narrative analysis directed our interest to case stories collected from a person, a group,

an organization, or a nation. Analysis involves interrogation between intention and language, how the sequences of events are assembled and in what way is the language expressed. How and why these stories are constructed are centers of investigation also. Thus, the person, the content, the context, the process of interaction between the researcher who listens, and the respondent who shares are important areas for inquirers to attend to.

### Narrative inquiry in social work and educational researches

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Social workers and social work educators are familiar with narrative and stories in their daily practice and educational activities. The narrative framework honors social work values and ethics related to dialogue, participation, empowerment and self-discovery. There is an expanding body of narrative research on social work practice, research and education (e.g. White & Epston, 1990; Hall, 1997; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Shaw, & Ruckdeschel, 2002; Riessman & Quinney, 2005; Wilks, 2005). Riessman and Quinney (2005) tried to classify narrative related social work journal articles into four broad groups based on purposes: improving practice, educating social work students, reflections on the field, or empirical research. The turn facilitates and encourages educators and practitioners to respect the richness of practice experiences and to recognize the ambiguity, indeterminacy and uncertainty are at the core of social work (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000, p. 44). Taylor & White (2006)

also stresses that 'social work practitioners, educators and academics need to employ a reflexive approach to their knowledge in order to achieve a critical awareness of their own processes and products' ( p. 192). Applicability of narrative approaches is mainly in social work practice and pedagogy. Practitioners and social work students are encouraged to recollect and reflect on their experience so as to make meaning and achieve critical self-awareness. How they establish relationship with the service-users, their professional environment, their personal and profession selves; how they respond to these internal and external factors intellectually and emotionally; how they make the choice and commitment in turns and transitions become crucial storyline through evoking and constructing these memories.

In the educational discipline, the narrative inquiry work has focused mostly on teacher education and teaching practice. The research emphases are mainly on reflective practice and the voice of teachers (Schön, 1983). The current study borrows concepts and methods from Clandinin and Connelly, (1987, 1988, 1993, 2000) who have led the way in adapting narrative inquiry for educational purposes. They have drawn on philosophical treatment on experience proposed by Dewey and tried to establish a framework on understanding teachers' experiences through narratives.

Their interest focused mainly on the personal and practical knowledge of education.

Teacher participants are knowers, they are “knowers of themselves, of their situations, of students, of subject matter, of teaching, of learning” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999, p.1). They see teacher knowledge in terms of narrative life history, as storied life compositions. They used the metaphor of ‘landscape’ to describe the space created. It is both an intellectual and moral space where teachers experience tension, dilemma and disputes. According to their understanding, thinking narratively means first of all, recognizing the temporality of any event, that is, they have a past, a current condition and an implied future. Secondly, all people, at any point of time, are in a process of evolving and changing. Thirdly, an action is understood as a sign, narrative interpretation of the sign is necessary before any meaning can be attached to it. Fourthly, we have to embrace the sense of tentativeness, or a kind of uncertainty about an event’s meaning. Openness to other possible understanding is necessary. Lastly, context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing. In addition to temporality, they asserted also that ‘relational’ and ‘continuity’ are two crucial criterion of experience. By means of ‘relational’, they meant that experience happened and evolved in interactions and interplay between different settings; both physical and social. By means of continuity, they saw that

“...experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum- the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future- each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future.”(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.2)

They collected teachers' stories in a participatory way, and conducted observational visits, conversational-style interviews, self-reflections. They asked open questions to facilitate teachers to reflect on the teaching or curricular experiences. It is worth noting that, researchers and participants are co-participants. The researcher is autobiographically and temporally present in the situations and in the relationship with participants. They reconstruct stories from one's own life and multiple roles. The act of 'walking into the midst of stories' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) enables the researcher to have reflection on their own experiences. Thus, narrative inquiry as a process is educative in and of itself; the process of telling and reconstructing experience can change the people involved.

## Organization of the Study

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### Pilot Study

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Three volunteer social work teachers from Sichuan and other provinces participated in the post-disaster project activities were engaged in one to two interviews with the researcher in 2011 and 2012 to share their experiences. The main focus of the interviews was to recollect how they participated in these activities and what they have experienced. These interviews provided stimulation and background information and allowed the researcher to formulate the research framework and scope of the narrative study.

### Research Questions

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1. How did they participate in the collective learning and practice process, and what choices of activities did they engage in and commit to?
2. What was the trajectory, the route of memory and future projection of their identity in the landscape of practice?
3. How did the participation affect their identification on their own role and position as social work teachers?
4. What did they gain in terms of professional knowledge, skills and value consolidation?



5. What were the struggles and motivational forces they have experienced in the process?
6. How did they align and integrate their own personal values with these new inputs?

### Sampling procedures and respondents

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Respondents are six social work teachers who were actively involved in disaster relief social work in Sichuan. They came from two universities in Sichuan (the HA University located in City H and the ZU University located in City B). Unlike other social work teachers in Sichuan who joined the post disaster activities as an individual choice. The team leaders of these two groups of respondents have engaged the whole teaching team and thus their choices reflected both an individual and a collective decision. Their experiences reflected both a personal and a group story. These participants were purposefully selected according to the following criteria:

1. They have a history with the researcher. They have engaged in post disaster training or project activities and directly worked as a co-learner or co-worker with the researcher. There have been frequent interaction and partnering relationship with the researcher during the six years' post disaster engagement. This background ensured an adequate understanding of the personal background,

context and history of the respondents. Apart from that, basic trust and rapport were ensured in the interactive and collaborative process.

2. They are active in engaging in social work teaching and practice activities.
3. They have been engaged in a teaching post for at least five years.
4. They are willing to participate in the research process.
5. The six respondents come from two different universities. They represented two independent and connected groups. Respondents from the HA University are “non-social work trained” and the other three social work teachers from the ZU University come from a social work training background. These groupings served two purposes. Firstly, the stories are to be enriched, validated and consolidated with both a personal and a communal perspective. Secondly, the stories from two universities can be compared according to their different disciplinary background.

#### Brief profile of the respondents:

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In this narrative analysis, pseudo names of respondents and places are used to protect individual privacy.

The six respondents including four males and two females, age ranging from 32 to 38, four married, one singled and one divorced. The origins of four respondents are from

rural villages, while two of them are city dwellers. Their teaching experiences ranged from eight to eleven years.

Zhang Min, 章岷 Qing Mei 青梅 and Xia Yuan 夏元 are colleagues of the HA University. As team leader, Qing Mei engaged the whole teaching team of ten colleagues to engage in post disaster training and project activities. The three teachers shared similar backgrounds that their origins are of different provinces, they came from rural families but settled in City H and they have completed their Undergraduate and Master degrees unrelated to the social work discipline. City H is a prefecture-level city of Sichuan province in Southwest China. The HA University is an institution training teachers. The social work team has been established for about eleven years. They are the one who witnessed the establishment of the department and committed in building the curriculum structure. Student enrollment in the university is about 30-60 yearly. Their experiences of engaging in post disaster training and project activities can be understood as a process of ‘acculturation’, the three teachers were exposed to a dissimilar professional culture and they have to make up their mind on how to assimilate and integrate the new concepts and tools in their teaching careers.

The ZU University situated in City B, a smaller and remote tourist [prefecture-level](#)

[city](#), located in the western part of [Sichuan](#) province. Social Work is perceived to be a marginal discipline. The city becomes a focus of concern because of the second earthquake happened in City B in 2013, and the ZU university accommodated the only social work teaching team in the city and thus, the three teachers, together with their colleagues, did not have excuses to escape from the ‘engulfment’ of post disaster relief and rehabilitation work in these two big disasters. As a return, they gained more resources and recognition to develop the discipline. Lu Qin 路勤, Han Liang 汉梁 and Yu Yu 宇玉 belonged to the same social work team with Lu Qin as their head and leader. They are graduates from well-known universities in China and received systematic training in social work. Lu Qin and Han Liang got their Master degree in social work from an overseas university. They have distinctive sensitivity to their roles as a social work teacher and they have also acquired a sense of purpose and direction in the engagement process.

<b>Name of Respondent/Sex</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Existing roles and position /Disciplinary background</b>	<b>Major Sichuan projects Engagement</b>
Zhang-min 章岷/M	HA University	Lecturer/ History and sociology	Community Livelihood project
Xia-yuan 夏元/M	HA University	Lecturer/ Sociology	Life Education Project
Qing-mei 青梅/F	HA University	Lecturer/ Head of teaching team/ Philosophy and sociology	Life Education Project
Yu-yu 宇玉/F	ZU University	Lecturer and NGO director/ Social Work and Sociology	Life Education Project
Han-liang 汉梁/M	ZU University	Lecturer and Deputy Head of the teaching team/ Social Work	School social work project/Community Development project
Lu-qin 路勤/M	ZU University	Lecture and Head of teaching team/ Social Work	Community Livelihood and development project

Table 1: Profiles of Respondents

## Process of the Study

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The researcher draws on Clandinin and Connelly's (1985, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2007) conceptions on "narrative inquiry". To recognize that it is a way of recollecting and understanding life experiences of teachers. The study is worked as a recursive and reflexive process of entering the living stories of respondents, active and collaborative effort of researcher and respondents are crucial in telling, listening, and retelling. In response to the complexity, dynamic and changing nature of live experience, the study is guided by three dimensions, temporality, sociality and place in the process of study.

At operational level, the study followed the flow initiated in Creswell's (2006) article "Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry" in doing narrative research.

1. Making decisions on research question and methodology
2. Selection of respondents
3. Data Collection

Data sources directly collected from respondents including their autobiographical writing, chronological review, interview transcription, learning and practice

reports, video-clipping. Other sources including researcher's participatory observation, field note.

Data collection is a collaborative and co-creation process between researcher and respondents. There were continual dialogical exchanges throughout the collection process. It started when respondents confirmed their consent in participation. They have to provide a brief profile on their background including subjects taught, project activities involved after 2008; present professional involvement outside the institution. This record served as basic information for the first interview. The focus of the first interview was mainly a chronological review. Respondents are invited to tell their personal story as a social work teacher in the past six years, they have free choice to select events and develop themes in the process. The researcher would try to clarify, explore, trace, reflect, probe into the content and to ensure a balanced coverage of the inward (personal feeling, motivation, perception and interpretation , outward( behavior and action, environmental factors) and upward (ideological understanding and meaning making) domains.

The purposes of the second interview were twofold. First of all, it was a follow

up section for both the researcher and respondent to work on a deeper level on some selected themes. Secondly, the respondents were invited to review their sharing, to enrich and to re-story some particular content.

4. To actively engaged and collaborate with participants in the collection process.

After these two interviews, the researcher went through the transcriptions and the supplementary background materials and made the initial analysis and organization.

The first draft of the story was then prepared and written in Chinese. These stories were then sent to respondents and they were invited to read their own story and to comment on the draft. The researcher collected feedback through email or skype.

Respondents were encouraged to give feedback on the story. They may agree or disagree with the researcher's understanding and interpretation; they may add in some missing information and illustrations, they may further comment on the content and confirm also the information as valid and coherent. The story was then enriched with multiple layers of exchanges and arrived at deepen understanding and analysis.

5. To further analyze the participants' stories, and then "restory" them into a coherent narrative that makes sense.



The stories were further finalized by the researcher and rewritten in English, and all the materials were reviewed with the analytical strategy that will be explained in the next section. The content will be re-organized as an integrated plot and storyline.

### Analytic Strategic of the Study

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The analysis of data was conducted in the following manner:

All the related materials including respondents' written reflections, oral representation in formal interviews and informal meetings in the past six years were gathered and sorted with the following procedure.

1. The **first round reading** is sorted and marked according to the following

“Respondents’ particular” framework

Internal and personal factors
Family Origin and background

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive nurture and support</li> <li>2. Deprivation and exploitation</li> <li>3. Adaptation and adjustment</li> <li>4. Family relationship</li> <li>5. Others</li> </ol>
Academic background and career path
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Path of pursuit</li> <li>2. Choice of career</li> <li>3. Commitment and plan</li> <li>4. Relationship with students and teammates</li> <li>5. Personal ideology in teaching</li> <li>6. Personal ideology in social work</li> <li>7. Others</li> </ol>
Post 5.12 experience and interpretation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical events</li> <li>2. Positive and negative experiences</li> <li>3. Perception on impact and personal change</li> <li>4. Struggles and conflict</li> </ol>

## External and contextual factors

### Institutional factors

1. Student registration and performance
2. Student employment and condition
3. Faculty recognition
4. Teaching and learning support
5. Professional team spirit and support
6. Others

### Societal factors

1. Challenges and threats
2. Opportunities
3. Others

## New commitment and action

1. Curriculum structure and content development
2. Practicum site development
3. New post and new roles
4. Entrepreneurship-Start to operate social work  
business

5. Others
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Table 2: Framework for first round reading on narrative data

2. After the first reading, an ‘individualized story’ is formulated and interpreted according to the ‘identity formation trajectory’ proposed in Wenger’s (1998) framework. It is chosen for his model aligned with researcher’s understanding on ‘identity’. “Identity” is perceived as a complex and dynamic process that evolved in a participatory and interactive learning journey. Wenger’s proposed trajectory on a process of identity building is used to capture the essential development of individual respondents’ experience in their identity formation process from pre-engagement to the present state. The model assumed the individuals go through engagement, imagination and alignment in identification of membership and negotiation of meanings.

**Engagement:** Activities and tasks including training and project activities involved, outcome , reflection and impact on the individual’s professional growth and consciousness of sense of self

**Imagination:** Understanding and interpreting of these events and experiences and acquisition of a professional vision

**Alignment:** Accommodation and adaption, struggle and conflict, how this new

learning and understanding can be integrated in their own professional and personal role.

Themes and issues related to their practice choice and experiences, learning path, tension and conflicts demonstrated in incompatible voices, and motivational forces will be identified and analyzed. Looking at how the respondents reformulate their own role and identity will be concluded.

The personal story is then organized uniquely and in a chronological and integrative format with six sections:

- (1) Childhood experience and academic background
- (2) Performing the role as a social work teacher
- (3) Present personal and work life
- (4) Post 5.12 experience : Opportunities, Challenges and transformational changes
- (5) Actuality and Potentiality

As a matter of respect, the first draft of the story is written in Chinese and ready

for validation of accuracy check. Respondents are invited to give their comments and feedback on this draft.

3. After confirmation with respondents on the story content, the story will be rewritten in English with organized plot and themes.
  
4. To respect and recognize the temporal nature of storytelling, the “finalized story” of the research is a never ending product. Both respondents and the researcher have to face new choices and new actions taking place in their future lives and professional journeys.

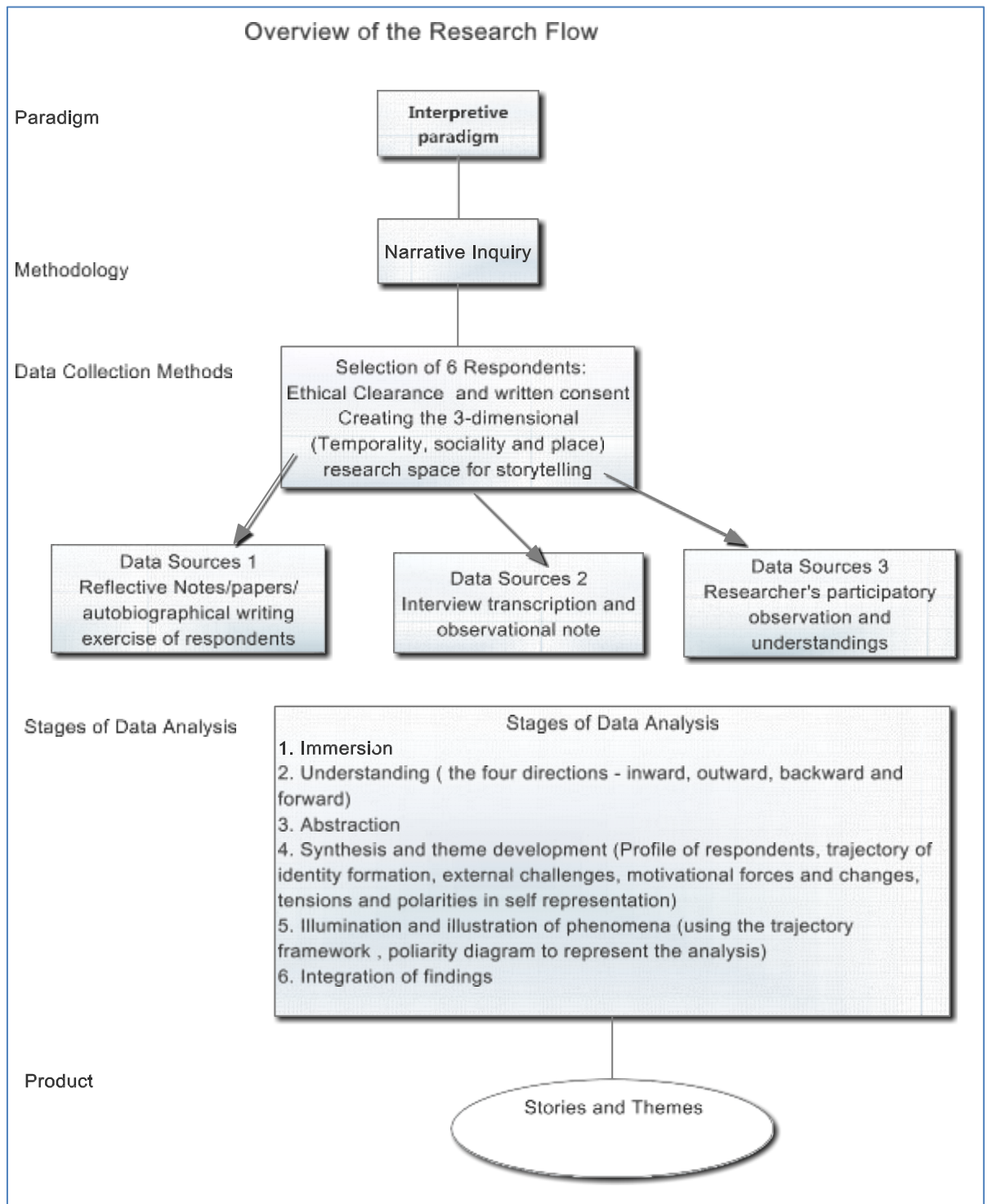


Diagram 10b: Overview of the Research Flow

Peled and Leichtentritt (2002) reminded us of the ethical concerns in qualitative research should include at least the consideration of (i) prevention of harm; (ii) empowerment-related aspects of the research process; (iii) research-related benefits for participants and others; and (iv) researchers' technical competence. They argued that although in the narrative turn, the ethical responsibility relied more on the individual researchers instead of the standard code of research ethics. To conduct qualitative research in the social work discipline, it is advised to have shared assumptions and practice in research ethics. These assumptions ensure the dialogical relationship and the uphold of a respectful and protective attitude to respondents as participants and co-researchers. Their rights and concerns should be taken care of.

In this study, firstly, the nature and process of the study was explained and clarified with the respondents, their consent are crucial and their ongoing engagement and participation are voluntary. Secondly, to ensure the accuracy of information and the autonomy of interpretation, the first draft of the story was written in Chinese and sent back for feedback and comments. This was to invite their participation in validating the data and to enrich and modify according to their further interpretation. Thirdly, as respondents are expected to share some personal and private information in the



process, how far this information can be exposed or shared was considered in a careful and sensible manner. Some sensitive personal information was modified or deleted in order to protect the confidentiality of the individuals. To move one step further, the study brought about deeper level reflection which led to better self-understanding and awareness on one's values and commitment; the collection of these stories reinforced a group identity and communal professional spirit and further seek for common goals of the teaching profession. Finally, as a participating researcher, my own standpoint and views are be always under scrutiny and careful reflection.

# CHAPTER FOUR: STORY PRESENTATIONS AND ANALYSIS

*“I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man’s life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience”*

**Martin Buber**

## Introduction

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The chapter accommodates the stories of six respondents. The first three are teachers who come from the HA University while the following three are teachers from the ZU University. Their stories are structured in a plotline composed of five sections including (1) Childhood experience and academic background (2) Performing the role as a social work teacher; (3) Present personal and work life; (4) Post 5.12 (and 4.20) experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes; and (5) Actuality and potentiality. Each of the stories will be followed by analysis of the roadmap of their formation process, their professional partners and network and multi-voices identified in the storied self.

### Background Information

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Xia Yuan used the term “adherent”(坚守者) to describe his future role. As a teacher, Xia Yuan is obliged to perform as a role model. He seeks for stability and is often worried about the career security and future development of the profession. Having stepped out into the adventurous experiences in post disaster activities, he experienced satisfaction, achievement as well as uncertainties. Xia Yuan recognizes that his role is more than just one-way teaching in classes. He should engage in practice and learning with his students in a collaborative platform. At the same time, he acknowledged and accepted that he is never going to be a groundbreaker, a fighter or an innovator. He wishes to play the role of an adherent who possesses qualities of faithfulness and steadfastness. He is willing to stick to and hold fast the core principles as a teacher, and to support his colleagues to achieve higher aims in the professional arena.

I met Xia Yuan for the first time in 2009 when he was one of the trainees in the Social Work Teachers' Practice Training course<sup>13</sup>. He worked as a social work teacher in the HA University; his team leader engaged the full team of ten teaching members to join the post-disaster professional training. He participated as a learner and a practice teacher from June to August, 2009 to serve in a 'Children Friendly Space' in a temporary shelter area. He is a polite, accommodating and passive gentleman. Despite the fact that most of his team members returned to a normal teaching routine after the two months of intensive engagement, I was surprised to see that he continued to be active in the Life Education Training<sup>14</sup> and in another supervisory course organized by a group of oversea trainers. I learned also that he conducted group sessions and supervised students in communities and school settings. He accepted my invitation to engage in this study and he shared with an open and sincere attitude throughout the way. The data sources of the story include my own observation, formal and informal sharing, autobiographical writing and past reflective note written by Xia Yuan, transcription of three intensive interviews.

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<sup>13</sup> In response to the professional and post disaster community needs, I have organized a two months (2009 June to August) intensive practice training for social work teachers. Social work teachers from Sichuan and Chongqing joined the course and they have to bring students to serve in communities in order to integrate their learning in context.

<sup>14</sup> Life Education is a comprehensive course that composed of four modules lasted for 2 years' time. (2009-2011). Focus and objective of the course are to equip a group of professionals (teachers, social workers, social work teachers' to work with children, to teach them positive values and to consolidate connection and support in their network) Training and practice are more comprehensive, in-depth and professional. Xia Yuan has worked with his team to build two sites in school and community in City H.

The story is organized in the following sections:

1. Childhood experience and academic background
2. Performing the role as a social work teacher
3. Present personal and work life
4. Post 5.12 experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes
5. Actuality and potentiality

The quotations in the story are drawn from these sources:

Code	Content of the sources	Date of Completion
X1	Reflective note on Social Work Teachers' Practice training	2009 Aug 21 by Xia Yuan
X2	Reflective note on Life Education Training	2010 Oct 03 by Xia Yuan
X3	Transcription on Focus Group interview and interview I	2014 Nov 29 by researcher
X4	Transcription on individual interview II	2014 Nov 29 by researcher
X5	Transcription on individual interview III	2015 Jan 25 by researcher
X6	Consent form and autobiographical writing	2014 Nov 15 by Xia Yuan

## Childhood experience and academic background

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Xia Yuan was born in 1978, as the eldest son<sup>15</sup> of a deprived peasant family; he has two elder sisters and one younger brother. To recall his childhood experiences, he mentioned the hardship of the family; bringing up four kids is certainly a big burden, he shared that he might have inadequately been fed and nurtured. Positioned as a middle child in reality, he learned to please the adults in order to gain more attention. According to Xia Yuan, his parents received little education. He expressed conflicting emotions of both fear and respect to his father who was strict and critical, but also a role model to him. He recalled that his father worked as the person in charge of a welfare unit in the village. He served not for money and prestige, but felt obliged to care with mercy. Xia Yuan was active, playful and obedient in school and family. Although he was a top student in primary school, the situation changed when he entered secondary school, as he has difficulties in Math and English. He made several attempts in order to pass the university entrance examination. In university, he had difficulties in majors selection. He eventually chose 'sociology' though he has little knowledge about the discipline. He finished an undergraduate and master program, but without clear direction. He expected a more stable future to stay in academia as teacher. After graduation he was employed by a university in BH province, nevertheless, he found the city too remote and worried about his marriage, so he resigned from work and moved to City H in 2005 to start his new life. He

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<sup>15</sup> Xia Yuan emphasized that he was the 'eldest son' but in fact he has two elder sisters; it reflects how he honors his identity as the first son of his family.

got married in 2009, and divorced in 2014. As a “traditional rural male” who treasured the kinship and family life, and who expected to preserve his dignity and esteem in a marital relationship, the divorce put him in an embarrassing situation and threatened his role as a social work teacher, for he felt shameful to admit the failure before his students.

### Performing the role as a social work teacher

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Xia Yuan entered the HA University in 2005, having no previous background knowledge on social work; he found difficulties in adjusting to his teaching role in early days. As social work is a new program in the school, he has to engage at curriculum development for at least ten subjects, without much disciplinary knowledge and practice experience, he could rely only on translated western books and limited local publications. In fact, up till now, they do not have a consolidated and holistic curriculum for the social work program. He currently committed mainly in teaching three social work subjects, including “group work”, “social work practice” and “family social work”.

Before the post-disaster project engagement, Xia Yuan knew little about social work and got no experience in professional practice.

*“...I have little understanding on the discipline, I read the books again and again, ...but I found that they are merely theories and concepts....”(X4:34)*

*“...I failed to demonstrate the quality of lucidity in my teaching...., though I have completed a course in “social work theories” in my own undergraduate study, but my teacher was not a social worker, he taught according to his common sense understanding only.”(X3:6)*

According to Xia Yuan, the HA University showed a supportive attitude to this newly established discipline. The institution allocated three classrooms for group work practice. Three laboratories including a case interview laboratory, a group activity laboratory and a research interviewing room were established in 2014. Despite of all this institutional support, Xia Yuan does not have much confidence in the future development of the discipline. His worries related to several issues.

First of all, he perceived that student admission is the most crucial factor to secure long term commitment of the institution. He quoted an example to illustrate this situation, they have a class of 51 in the first year admission, but as students can change their choice in the second year, the student number dropped to around 30 in the second year. If the enrollment situation remains unchanged, this will further lead to reduction of admission quota which implied a cutback in resources and support from the institution.

Secondly, he perceived that social work is a challenging and underprivileged job. Xia Yuan considered that students of the HA University can survive due only to the fact that they are tough and accommodating as most of them came from rural villages.



*“ Many of our students come from rural villages, they are more hardworking and tough, not many of them will quit the job...”(X4:55)*

Likewise, he did not have much confidence in the existing work condition. Their graduates sometimes shared about struggles and conflicts in real context and will further discourage new comers on making their choice and commitment.

Thirdly, he considered that gender issue is one of the determining factors also. He perceived that social work is a ‘female profession’; it attracts more female graduates because they are perceived to be more affectionate and caring. It is difficult for males to commit to the profession due to an unstable job nature and unfavorable income.

The existing social work teaching team composed of ten colleagues, there are seldom in-depth communication among them. Colleagues seemed to care only about their own subject teaching, or focus on their prioritized affairs such as pursuing higher qualification. Xia Yuan together with Qing Mei (the team leader), Zhang Min , LY and LC are more active in engaging in post disaster project activities, they shared similar ‘vision’ of developing the profession. They are a ‘sub team’ among the colleagues. Their vision is stimulated and supported by new opportunities emerged after the disaster. Having ‘brainwashed’ by the large number of humanitarian service teams, the communities in Sichuan begins to recognize the profession, though in a superficial way. Most people are still unable to distinguish between a social

worker and a volunteer, but they show an open attitude toward this profession. In response of all these recognitions, the teaching team began to shoulder ‘multiple roles’ apart from teaching in classes. They are invited to supervise projects outside the institutions or deliver training to government officers in communities<sup>16</sup>. They find it easier to liaise and establish partnership with practicum sites. Xia Yuan and this sub team enjoyed success in developing new opportunities and generating new resources in these years. Recently, they are going to explore the possibility of establishing a NGO<sup>17</sup>. Their professional impulses and initiatives reflect a growing confidence and commitment based on new opportunities, positive recognition and respect from external environment. Nevertheless, Xia Yuan held an ambivalent attitude in facing these new invitations and challenges. He can identify positive signs for the future of the social work profession, but he does not have much confidence in advocating and consolidating their professional roles among society members.

### Present personal and work life

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In the two interviews, Xia Yuan initiated to share his choice of divorce. It is a private matter but it is closely related with his teaching life and it affects his self-concept as a social work teacher.

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<sup>16</sup> Here ‘community’社区 refers the basic local administrative unit in China. It is operated by public officials. In the past, they shoulder mainly the management and control roles such as administrating the central policies at local district level, monitoring the social security cases...etc. At present, the central government shows more and more effort in changing the paradigm from management to ‘service’. According to the government policy, this group of officials has to be reeducated so as to equip new knowledge and skill in human services, if they pass the social work vocational examination, an additional RMB 100 will be added in their monthly salary. Xia Yuan and his team members are invited to deliver talks and workshops to introduce to them what is social work. They have the role to define the profession and to convince the learner new methods and ideologies in performing their duties and work with residents in communities.

<sup>17</sup> This is a new trend for university social work teachers to run a NGO by themselves. They have autonomy to develop professional services and share the benefits as it is an independent unit not abided by institutional regulations. They are eligible to bid project funds supported by government or foundations; they can rely on students as human resources to deliver services.

*“Teacher...should be a model to our student or at least an example...”*

*(X4:26)*

Xia Yuan related this concept of ‘role model’ several times with his present marriage status. He was afraid that he might have set a ‘bad example’ to his students, as he is the subject teacher of the course ‘Family Social Work’.

Xia Yuan shared the story of his marriage failure. He explained that he met his ex-wife in a mate searching activity and they confirmed the engagement in a short time. Marriage is a critical concern for young people in China, Age thirty seems to be a deadline and many rush into marital life in order to meet family and societal expectations. For an introvert like Xia Yuan, he felt he had little choice. In fact, this was the first time he tried to establish a close and intimate relationship with the opposite sex. He experienced a lot of frustration in the five years’ marital life. He took care of his wife and the in-law parents like a ‘maid’(保姆). He cooked, did all the cleansing work and followed strictly the rules set by the family. His humble and meek attitude did not earn him acceptance and respect. He concluded that the discrimination resulted from two factors; one related to class and background and the other related to existing social status. Xia Yuan’s wife was more educated and earned a higher income. The in-laws sometimes teased and made fun of him because he ‘came from a rural village’. Xia Yuan finally became intolerant when the relationship threatened his ego as a son and a ‘traditional rural male’. His wife refused to get pregnant and resisted visiting his family. In 2014, the couple mutually

agreed to divorce. It was a difficult decision and he still grieves over his failure in marriage.

*“I strongly oppose the breakup of a marriage union but I do made this decision myself...she (his ex-wife) complained that I showed not enough love towards her, but I do not know what kind of love she is expecting, maybe she longed for parental and protective love instead of companionship in marital life.”(X4:13)*

Xia Yuan hesitated to share this sensitive matter with his students because he felt that it might damage or threaten his ego as a social work teacher. Teacher as a role model was mentioned by Xia Yuan many times. It was particularly crucial as Xia Yuan is the subject teacher of the course “Family Social Work”.

In the two interviews, Xia Yuan reflected on the event and he gained awareness and developed insight to seek meaning from alternative perspectives.

*“ I hesitate to share with my students the decision of divorce...but I think it can be a lesson to teach...I am not ready now for I have not organized well and decide the mode of presentation....”(X4:16)*

In the second interview, Xia Yuan demonstrated a more positive way to review his experience and tried to link it up with the teaching of the “Family Social Work” course. He explained that currently only western

psychological and sociological theories and concepts on family were taught in class. For practice, students were shown simple assessment tools like genogram, family trees etc. As they do not have real case examples, the material was remote and impractical. With reference to his failure in marriage, Xia Yuan suggested that topics such as dating and courtship, communication in intimate relationships and what constitutes a good marriage could be integrated in the course content. This process of gradual change reflected Xia Yuan's understanding of the unique nature of social work subjects. Transmission of substantial knowledge should not be the only means, engage students to digest the knowledge in real life situation is equally important. Divorce is a failure in marriage but it is also a valuable lesson to reflect on self-knowledge and relationship building. Taking this new direction, he released the intense feelings of how to face his students in the future. It can be noted that, Xia Yuan has made considerable effort to overcome the pain of divorce, and he is now engaged in a new relationship and prepared to enter the second marriage soon.

#### Post 5.12 experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes

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Starting from performing the obligatory role as a traditional subject teacher, Xia Yuan began to identify his role as a 'social work teacher' with enriched understanding and enhanced capabilities. The following description and analysis traced his development in the past six years; particularly in areas of his engagement in professional training and project activities.

Xia Yuan's identity as a social work teacher is perceived to have evolved through the stages of Engagement; Imagination and Alignment.

**Engagement:** Activities and tasks including training and project activities involved, outcome, reflection and impact on the individual's professional growth and consciousness of sense of self

**Imagination:** Understanding and interpretation of these events and experiences and acquisition of a professional vision

**Alignment:** Accommodation and adaptation, struggle and conflict, how these new learning concepts and understandings can be integrated in their own professional and personal roles.

### *Engagement*

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Xia Yuan joined three comprehensive professional training sessions on (a) Social work practice and supervision<sup>18</sup> (b) Social work practice models and supervision<sup>19</sup> (c) Life Education<sup>20</sup> organized by a group of overseas trainers. The comprehensive training provided Xia Yuan with a systematic understanding on professional social work, particularly in areas of practice models like casework, group work and supervision.

***“There was plenty of training opportunities after the 512 earthquake,***

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<sup>18</sup> The training lasted for two months. Trainee has to station in a disaster-impacted area together with a team of students, where they learn how to use basic play activities to serve the children and to experience the structure and mode of learning or a practicum.

<sup>19</sup> The training lasted for one year. Trainee has to attend credit-based learning on case work, group work and supervisory theories and techniques. A visit trip to Taiwan was arranged for exchange and learning.

<sup>20</sup> The training lasted for two years. Trainee has to complete four modules of training and to apply the learning by pairing with colleagues to conduct a student group and to establish a practicum site.

*I treasured these opportunities. I am deeply influenced by a teacher from the XX University, I followed the project activity in YX shelter area and life education training, these experiences greatly enhanced my understanding and professional growth. I can see the positive signs of the future development...”(X6:2)*

His conception on ‘practice’ began to develop through direct learning, observation and imitation through the participation in these activities. According to Xia Yuan’s observation and experience, ‘practice’ is a dynamic process of human interaction in classes, participatory methods such as games, group discussion and sharing will result in open engagement, collaborative learning and deeper sharing. He was deeply attracted to these creative teaching and learning strategies and amazed at the learning atmosphere and outcome.

As a project assignment, Xia Yuan has to apply and ‘practice’ what he learned in class in the real context. This pushed him further to shift his role from an observer and learner to a practicing teacher. His engagement further led him to the imitation and consolidation stage. Xia Yuan was lucky to have a supportive team in the process. They created new opportunities in their own institution to implant these strategies in their work environment.

In one of the video clippings documented in 2010, Xia Yuan demonstrated how he conducted a group session about self- understanding. There were about ten female students sitting in a circle. One of his

colleagues acted as assistant and the other documented the whole process. He followed a “standard” program with the flow of warm-up game, core program activities, debriefing and sharing. His main input was the choice of facilitation material. He used a story book called “The Story of Ferdinand”.(爱花的牛)<sup>21</sup> to illustrate the theme of ‘self-love’. He chose this book as the story also reflected his preferred mode of living; a man who longed for a peaceful and self-contained life. In this session, though he was a bit nervous and mechanical in conducting the activities, he demonstrated his preparation by asking thoughtful questions to facilitate the discussion and learning. Here is the reflection he completed in 2010.

*“ I designed the following questions to facilitate their understanding on “ the story of Ferdinand”: What are some distinctive features you can identified from Ferdinand the bull? How is he different from his peers?....This story book deliver a message of self- knowledge , ...I have new understanding on myself also...I used to think more, do less.. I have to ‘do’ more and to build confidence through practice.”(X2:1)*

Xia Yuan did not experience much conflict and struggle in adopting these new means. In fact, the practice experience helped him to build confidence in classes. He fully supports integrating practice in social work teaching and the learning process.

### *Imagination*

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<sup>21</sup> “The story of Ferdinand” by Munro Leaf is originally interpreted as an anti-war classic children story. It is about a bull that preferred to sit quietly under the cork tree and smell flowers rather than fight. Xia Yuan used the story to share the value of self-love, self-understanding and self-acceptance.



The imagination process requires continual rectification, negotiation and integration of meaning. To Xia Yuan, participating as an active learner benefited him with a positive experience and build confidence for his teaching role. He understood also that ‘practice’ does not refer only to game activities and facilitating skills.

He shared how he integrated his new understanding in the daily teaching process. As a social work teacher, he admitted that he may not be able to engage in professional practice as his students. He positioned himself in a different role as to support his students to practice more, to develop better practice proposals, and to gain a deeper insight and reflection in their practice.

To achieve this learning objective, Xia Yuan has first of all to ‘lower’ his teacher position and to view his students as ‘co-learner’ (教学相长), he shows integrity in adopting this position. He is brave enough to make attempts on conducting game activities, to review these videos with his peers and to recognize the strengths of his students. He developed some insights on how to facilitate students learning by positioning himself on nurturing proposal writing instead of skill teaching.

First of all, he sees the importance of integrating theoretical concepts with proposals but he awares also that to build the link in a mechanical way should not be encouraged. Students used to seek advice from him as they do not have much choice in theoretical concepts and practice models. Xia Yuan persuaded them to use a practice portfolio to compile the different versions of their proposals so that they can trace the development of ideas

and reflections. He encouraged them to develop individualized plans instead of focusing on the theories first. The proposal can be refined through reflection on the actual practice. He believed that it was the ‘being’ of the worker that led to professional practice but not the espoused theories and concepts alone. Overemphasizes on theories may impede the creativity of individuals.

Secondly, encouraging and facilitating students to engage in practice can be viewed as the most crucial choice. He used more video as teaching materials and arranged the Year Three students to lead groups for the junior classes. He would demonstrate a session, observe some of the sessions and encourage them to reflect on the process themselves. He found that to learn in an experiential and reflective way is the most effective and sustainable strategy. Xia Yuan enjoyed this way of presentation and teaching. The motivational drive included the competencies and satisfaction that achieved through practicing; the opportunities to co- work and co- learn with his students and lastly, to identify positive changes and personal growth among them as a group.

*Alignment:*

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Xia Yuan indicated his reservation to identify with the “self-denial” and “altruistic love” attitude that demonstrated by the overseas professional team. He did not share the mission and vision of the professional parties on these over-committed approaches, particularly the direct intervention in disasters. He believes in ‘practice’ as the most important core element in the professional training process but he is not prepared to enter the

dangerous and risky professional practice arena. Safety deserved a prime concern and thus he preferred staying behind as supporter and to engage in service development with communities such as projects working with children and students.

Xia Yuan found difficulties in identifying himself with the professional mission shared by the overseas training teams. He commented that they might have boosted the significance and over-estimated the competence of social workers. He recalled several incidents that annoyed and disturbed him in the process.

He was in the class of supervisory training lecture at the date of April 20, 2013<sup>22</sup>. Some of his classmates (members of Sichuan NGO or government officials) rushed to the disaster area in a short time after the announcement of the news and thus, only less than a half of the class remained to attend the lecture. He recalled another incident on a visit to Wenchuan<sup>23</sup>. On the way, they stayed in a nearby city Dujiangyan(都江堰) as the road was blocked by a landslide. Though eventually they arrived the site safely, Xia Yuan could not feel relief from the heavy burden and anxieties of placing his students to serve in that area. Similar feelings aroused when he paid visit to Yushu (玉树)<sup>24</sup>. He could not identify with the ‘mission’ shared by the disaster relief team and his own students. He

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<sup>22</sup> In 2013 April 20, there was an earthquake attack on City B in Sichuan, the damage was not as serious as in 2008 May 12, but based on the experience of the first earthquake, the post disaster response was much efficient from all sectors.

<sup>23</sup> Wenchuan 汶川 is the epicenter of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, though it was rebuilt as a new town, the place is still exposed to danger of landslide in rainy seasons.

<sup>24</sup> Yushu: a Tibetan autonomous prefecture situated in Qinghai at an elevation of 3689m, it was attacked by an earthquake on April 14, 2010.

even found the documentation video threatening instead of encouraging.

*“..Social workers rushed to disaster areas... who are willing to send one’s own children there...facing the danger of earthquake aftershock...it is so fearful and unbearable..”(X5:4)*

*“...If the documentation video was shown to our parents, none of them will support their children to register in this profession.”(X3:1)*

Xia Yuan has to readjust his understanding of the role and function of the profession. From engaging in direct practice immediately after disaster back into a ‘normal’ situation is regarded as another challenging role facing social work teachers. Social workers have to be able to locate themselves in adequate social positions in order to demonstrate their professional significance. As mentioned earlier, they have offered more opportunities to connect with different stakeholders in the community; they played a more legitimate role to introduce to others the core function and unique nature of social work. Nonetheless, Xia Yuan did not enjoy these roles and he reviewed that his “sales” skills were weak and inadequate.

*“ ...I have tried to seek ways to convince others with simple language on the core functions of the social work profession but there are always challenges. Unlike doctors and lawyers, they can explain their roles and functions easier. People would mix our roles with volunteers and I cannot explain the differences in simple words...”(X4:51)*

Xia Yuan failed to take up a promotional and advocate role due not only

to his lacking of confidence or practice experiences. In fact, he has developed some insightful understanding on the nature of the profession and thus made him hesitated to use over-simplified words or means to ‘sell’ and share.

*“(for me), the unique nature of the profession is communication(分享)...this is demonstrated in professional action and process...you may articulate and identify this through your own personal experiences, but it is really difficult for you to explain to others in simple words...”(X4:49)*

From the above sharing, Xia Yuan pointed out that the essence of social work that ‘beyond articulation’ is something related to human connectedness or *relatedness*. He acquired this understanding from his direct encounters with the profession particularly in genuine relationship building with people. This understanding echoed Xia Yuan’s personal aspiration and values and thus he began to show greater interest in the profession and developed a more open attitude. When he moved out from his comfort zone and got engaged in training and practice, the experiences further reinforced this understanding and gradually consolidated a belief in the professional essence as described by him. Now he is able to assimilate this understanding and “lived it out” in a legitimized platform of teaching and practice. His conceptions on ‘relatedness’ and ‘practice’ (实践) are further developed and refined in a continual negotiation process.

*“ Social work teacher should reach out to engage in practice,...I*

*aware that my past understanding is fragmented, just some basic conceptual knowing for satisfying examination requirement, I think I have to engage more in practice, and reflection also, in order to consolidate my experience.”(X1:2)*

Xia Yuan did not encounter great difficulties in the assimilation and integration process. He enjoyed learning and practicing, particularly in areas of conducting games and experiential activities in classes. The encounter with the knowledge and skill input of professional trainers from overseas trainers offered Xia Yuan rich experiences. He attained new understandings of the profession and put prime concerns of practice in his educational process.

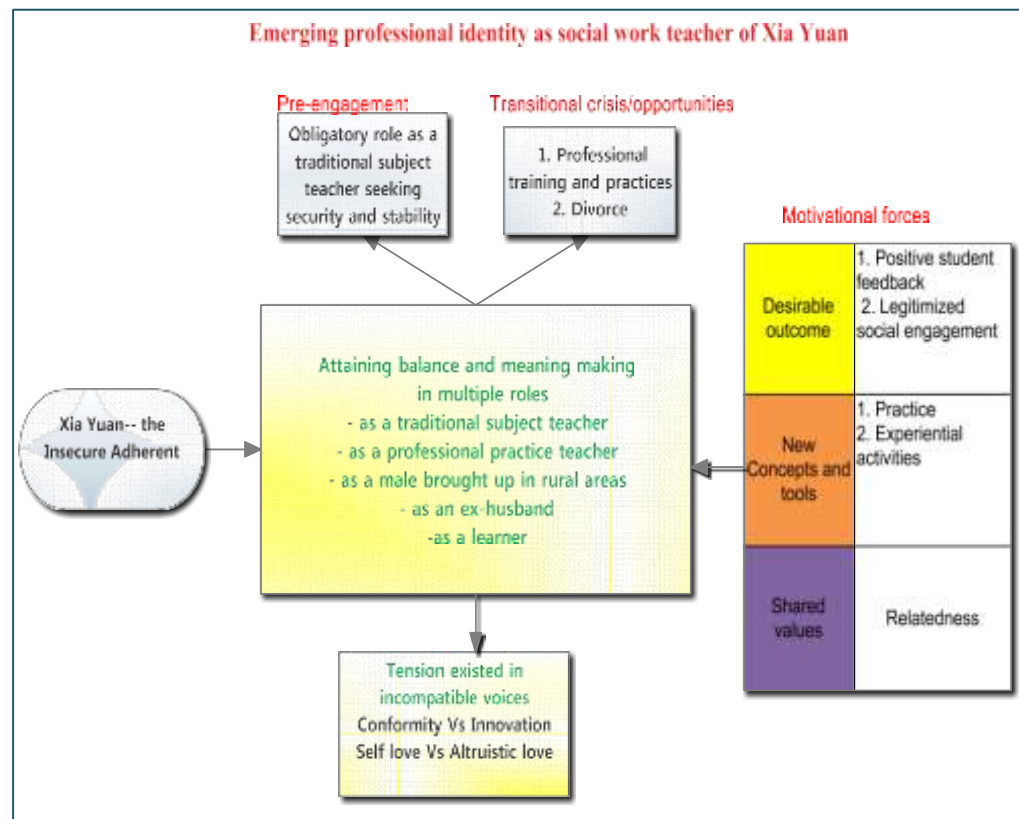


Diagram 11: Emerging professional identity as social work teacher of Xia Yuan

In Diagram 11, a summary on the route of identity formation of Xia Yuan is plotted. Moving from a traditional subject teacher who performs an obligatory role to a more sensitive social work teacher who sees the importance of practice in professional training and who are more willing to engage voluntarily in additional teaching and practicing work. Xia Yuan is still the passive and reserved gentleman who longed for security and safety. The narration process uncovered some of his inner voices, though conflicting but authentic, he is able to admit his failure and deficiency but to show more self-acceptance as a human. At present, he finds a position for himself as an adherent in a team. His new commitment includes: conducting experiential activities as orientation programs for new students; integrating practice assignment in his subjects; restructuring the group work curriculum to enable learners to experience a real group process. Being a relational person, he treasures human connectedness though he is unsociable. He enjoys being a co-worker and a co-learner with his students and colleagues, to explore together in a legitimized platform of professional practice is one of the key motivational factors to sustain his interest and engagement.

### Actuality and potentiality

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Tracing the experiences and development of Xia Yuan in the past six years, I was invited to re-visit some personal and private life events of a young social work teacher and to share his thoughts, emotions and anticipations in the process of recall and reflection. He shared with me his childhood life in villages, his marriage life and difficulties after divorce, his learning in post-disaster training programs, and his gradual changes in perception and choice making on self and the profession, in marital relationship, in adapting a new role as a social work teacher. Being engaged in the narrative inquiry process, Xia Yuan shifted from merely a passive learner to an active agent of recollection and reconstruction. He is the subject and was given the opportunities to organize and formulate a structure to his life experiences. This construction act is a discursive process and the identity



is temporal and the reflection will go on. By revealing his story, we can identify multiple and contradicting voices of the narrator and we see that the core self of this adherent is nurtured and driven by tension and uncertainties. The following interpretation will be focused on two areas: First of all, a review on Xia Yuan's engagement with the professional community and secondly, the identification of two pairs of 'incompatible voices' and discuss how the tension created both forces of withdrawal and commitment.

### *Professional partners and network*

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Diagram 12 is a summary of Xia Yuan's experiences throughout the past six years as a member of the community of practice, and it illustrates the horizons he has reached. He moved from individualized practice to a more open and connected way of learning and practice. The identification with the professional groups is not sustained. Instead, he remains closely connected with only a few team members in the institutions. Facing the external environment, he is still lacking enough resources and support to enact as a 'professional social worker'. Nevertheless, as he remains in close contacts with his team members and students, he can work together with them on knowledge cultivation and collective praxis. In fact, they have already started to restructure their professional curriculum particularly in integrating practice assignment in different professional subjects.

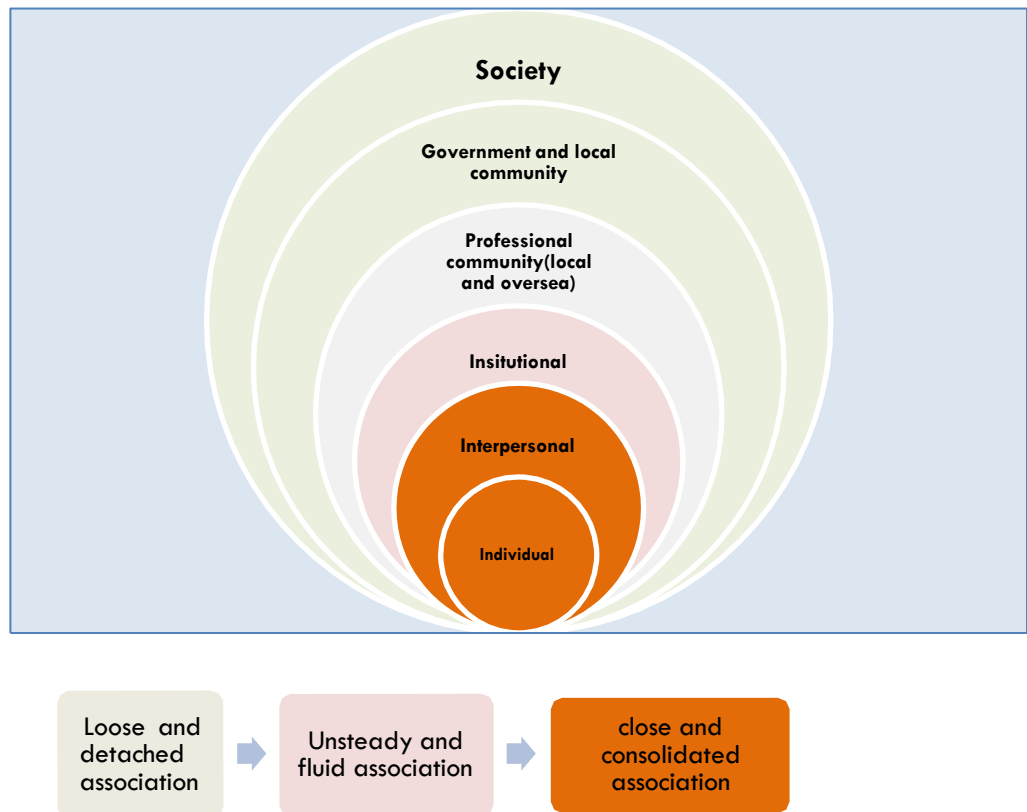


Diagram 12: Xia Yuan's professional partners and network

### *Multi voices in the storied self*

In Xia Yuan's story, we can identify multiple voices demonstrating the tension and possible energies. Xia Yuan used the term "adherent" (坚守者) to describe his future role. The commitment of an adherent is more by *obligation*; but not out of higher *calling*. Below is a story we have discussed in the third interview. It was a story written in Kidd's (1973, p.124) "How Adult Learn" about obligation and calling.

*"The chief minister of the king who approached three stonemasons engaged in work on Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. The questioner asked each man in turn what he was doing.*

*'I am trimming and laying stones.' said the first man.*

*'I am earning wages to care for my wife and family.' said the second.*

*'I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build a great monument to the glory of God.'* said the third.

I asked which person in this story Xia Yuan identified most with if we took this as a metaphorical reference to our work as a social work teacher. He took a moment to think and shared that he found similar features in the first and second stonemasons. He interpreted that the first one was just like an apprentice who followed instruction and worked on assigned task while the second man has a purpose in mind. In performing the role of social work teacher, he considered that he is moving from just modelling and imitating to a more integrative stage. Xia Yuan has to practice more like an apprentice but he was also aware that this commitment is out of a sense of obligation (责任感) instead of a higher calling. (使命感).

***"I think he (the third stonemason) has achieved a higher goal, to build a church is not for one's own sake, he recognizes the needs of others. ...(church is a place) welcome all... so it should be a higher sphere, but for sure we all should pursue this level of sphere also."*(X5:18)**

***"Duty and obligation related more with the vocational expectation. A calling is more an intrinsic drive, like faith in God...one acts with purpose and meaning, you are willing to spend a whole life to commit in one choice."*(X5:27)**

Though Xia Yuan chose to play a safe role as a supporter, he moved out from a strictly obligatory understanding on his career and this is reflected in the dynamics of two pairs of incompatible but integrative voices: Conformity versus Innovation; Self-love versus Altruistic love. A man seeking stability and security is more likely to adopt a submissive attitude to authorities. Traditional, social, political and institutional influences are prime sources of authority. In Xia Yuan's case, without the transitional forces of divorce and exposure to post-disaster training, the multiple voices or selves will not be revealed. In the story, Xia Yuan is both a traditional

teacher as well as a creative group facilitator; he is concerned about his own benefit and safety, but he cares about the welfare of his students and the future development of the profession. Although he is a man who cares about ‘self-image’, he is brave enough to share his divorce experience and turns his failure into a meaningful lesson in classes.

Core shared values and understanding on social work profession is identified through the communication and I will name it as ‘relatedness’ or ‘a sense of human connection’. As a social work teacher, he is no longer playing only a remote, distant and respectful role model in classes; he is more open to relationship building and making affective connection. This relational, inter-dependent inner self is originated from his socio-cultural background who has close bondage with rural village and his kinship. This is considered to be one of the key motivational forces to support him to be a ‘conforming supporter’ to the team member, an enthusiastic learner who is willing to adopt a more open attitude to new challenge and opportunities; and lastly, a newly developed role as a social work teacher who enjoys engaging himself and students in interactive and collaborative learning.

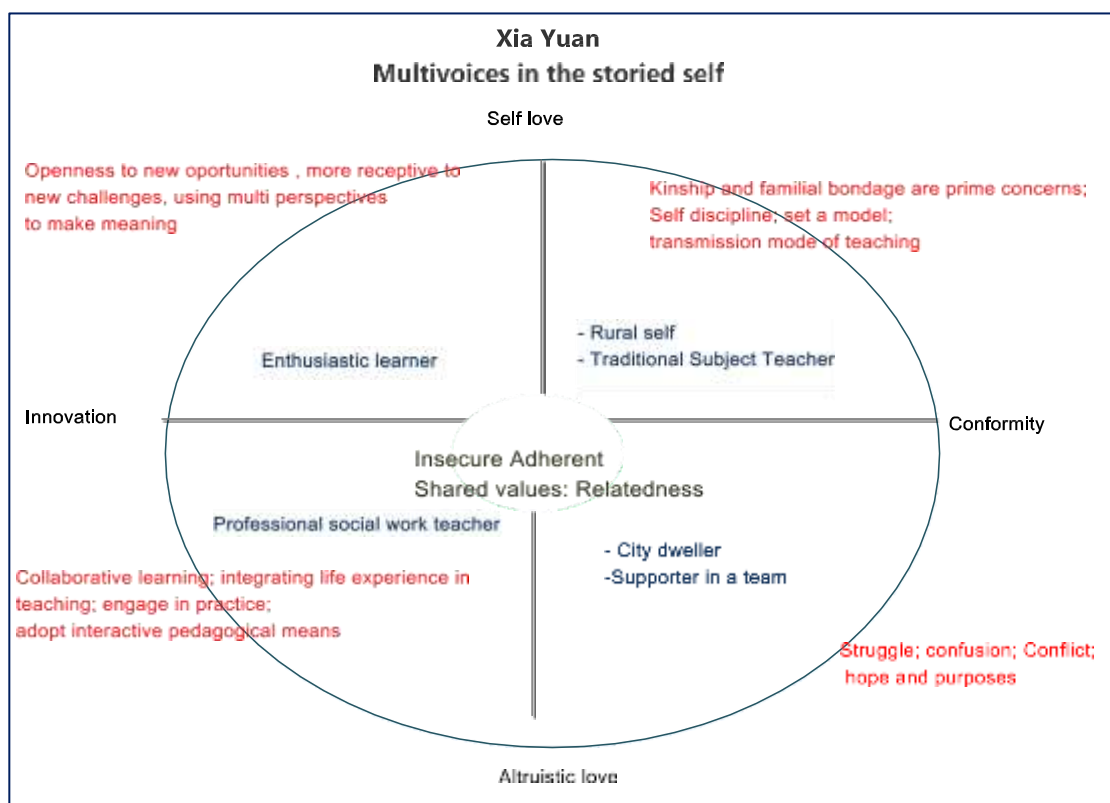


Diagram 13: Xia Yuan-Multi voices in the storied self

### Background Information

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A seeker is someone who makes a search. Qing Mei is the one who possesses a 'restless' mind and is sensitive to her dissatisfaction, both at personal, interpersonal and professional level. In response to the 5.12 disaster, she made a choice to bring the whole teaching team, including herself, out of an enclosed environment and throw them in a journey of unknown. Participation changed her understanding, enhanced her competence and brought her to a deeper level of enquiries. From a reserved and timid traditional subject teacher to a committed leader, she is exhausted and confused at the present moment. The future is still full of unknown. She needs to take a rest and to reconstruct her plan ahead.

Qing Mei is one of the 'faithful' learners who committed to the Life Education training in the three cohorts during 2009-2014. She engaged as a novice learner in the first cohort and as assistant teacher in the later training activities. It was surprising to see that this young lady, timid and reserved, appearing to be puny and fragile physically, can be persistent enough to engage in the project activity for six years. She was able to mobilize her teaching team to become one of the active and proactive forces in her institution.

Her participation began in 2009 when she led nine teachers of her teaching team to join a supervisory training from June to August this year. She was stationed in one of the disaster impacted areas, and led her students to serve the children in sheltered communities. After that, she engaged as a faithful seed teacher in the Life Education Project. After joining the training program, she was required to bring at least one more team member from her institution where they have to apply what they learnt by two intensive assignments. Firstly, they have to run a student group, aiming at building and nurturing a critical mass in their own institution. They have also to liaise with community partners to establish

sustainable collaborative sites for teaching-learning and serving purposes. With all this effort, Qing Mei succeeded in gaining greater recognition from her senior management, the community and their serving partners. She is at a turning point to consider her future commitment and direction. She felt exhausted and confused at the present moment; she has to balance between her role as a team leader, a practitioner and a teacher, and also as a mother and wife. In this puzzling moment, she unfolded her own stories by a process of recollection and meaning seeking. Her story is structured as followed:

1. Childhood experience and academic background
2. Performing the role as a social work teacher
3. Present personal and work life
4. Post 5.12 experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes
5. Actuality and Potentiality

The quotations in the story are drawn from these sources:

Code	Content of the sources	Date of completion
Q1	Reflection on social work supervisory training	2008 Aug 21 by Qing Mei
Q2	Critical Incident Reflection	2998 Aug by Qing Mei
Q3	Reflection on life education training	2010 Sept by Qing Mei
Q4	Evaluation Report on the Life Education Project <sup>25</sup>	2014 Oct by Dr Yuchen Han
Q5	Transcriptions of focus group interview	2014 Nov by researcher
Q6	Transcriptions of Individual Interview I	2014 Nov by researcher
Q7	Transcriptions of Individual Interview II	2014 Jan by researcher
Q8	Consent Form	2014 completed by Qing Mei

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<sup>25</sup> The Report refers to an unpublished project evaluation. The interviews, documentation and analysis were conducted and completed by the project researcher, Dr Han Yu Chen.

## Childhood experience and academic background

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Qing Mei comes from a deprived village but self-sustained home. She has one elder sister. She graduated from a university in GL province and majored at philosophy, and then went on pursue her master's degree in sociology. She moved to Sichuan City H because of her boyfriend, now husband, and has been settled there for over nine years. Qing Mei is currently the leader of the social work disciplinary team though she has never engaged in systematic disciplinary learning and practice. She leads a team of about nine colleagues and only two of them have been awarded with social work undergraduate degree.

She recalled her childhood as peaceful and stable. The only challenge she could recall was related with her separation from home. At age seven, she had to study in a neighborhood village during weekdays; she found difficulties in adjusting to the new environment and felt threatened by unfamiliar companion. She named it as a psychological barrier to inclusion (融入), a similar unpleasant experience happened when she moved to City H and settled in the HA university. She has adjustment problems of being a novice teacher particularly in areas of balancing discipline and relationship building. She used to adopt rigid and inflexible rules to discipline her class until she was reminded by some senior colleagues; she became aware of the distance and learnt to loosen her controlling means. She reviewed that these adaptive means and coping mechanisms may have originated from her character and affected by her disciplinary training. Having achieved an academic background in philosophy and sociology, she shows interest in ontological inquiry and curious about existence and being. She finds herself more drawn to logical and deductive reasoning; she favors detailed planning and respects rules and regulation. However, she is aware that cognitive rigidity and detachment causes distance in human relationship.

*“...I used to adopt a ‘problem and fault finding’ point of view in playing my various roles including being a teacher. I am critical but not encouraging; I am good at pointing out mistake instead of reinforcing positive behavior. I notice that my students used to keep a distance from me, even though I perform as a committed, responsible and caring*

*teacher.” (Q1:6)*

### Performing the role as a social work teacher

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Qing Mei is mainly responsible for teaching theoretical subjects including sociology, social research, cultural anthropology and ethics. She engaged also in some social work related courses including elderly social work and life education in recent years. In 2008, she settled in the HA University for four years and shouldered the team leader's role, but she was not satisfied with her commitment. She fully understands that she is still an alien in the profession.

*“...my academic discipline is unrelated with the (social work) profession, though I have engaged in the subject teaching, I shoulder mainly on teaching elementary level and I find myself in a condition of disassociation and alienation (游离). I walk along at the border and perceive the content properties on the surface; the core attributes of the profession never reached my mind and my heart.”(Q1:8)*

The state of disassociation and alienation, as reviewed by Qing Mei originated from several factors. To begin with, she considered her character to be unsuitable for the profession. She does not possess core qualities such as natural attraction and affinity; she fails to engage easily with people around and is unable to conduct proper assessment procedures and intervention plans. On the other hand, her cognitive rigidity continuously placed her at a distance from her students.

*“I perceive myself as a good teacher as I am responsible, diligent and serious... but I doubt my ability sometimes in recognizing the distance between I and the students. I perceive that my students show respect to me, but they do not enjoy the company with me...” (Q3:2)*

*“I know nothing about the social work profession, I graduated from an unrelated discipline, I have no idea about how to supervise a practicum...”(Q1:4)*



The alienation is rooted at her lacking of real understanding and commitment in the profession. She understood the perplexity and that is why she strived to engage in the training and project activities. She considered that this is an opportunity leading to growth and changes.

### Present personal and work life

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Qing Mei is an active participant in the Life Education Project. She has successfully engaged four other team members to partner with her in the learning and application process. They conducted life education growth groups for university students and established sustainable platforms in primary schools and communities for practicum collaboration. Qing Mei shouldered the leader's role and she is skillful at differentiating individual qualities of her team members. She assigned proper positions for them in the implementation process. She demonstrated her ability to steer and support; to mobilize and sustain. Their accomplishments are recognized by the institution and external partners. Qing Mei was invited as guest speaker in several Life Education conferences to share their teaching and practice model. She was also awarded an 'Outstanding Life Education Teacher' by a national foundation. Through these interactions and connections, she and her team were engaged in a professional network that composed of social workers, social work teachers, life education trainers and academicians, psychologists and counselors.

In City H, Qing Mei and her team members were invited to deliver talks and seminars to introduce social work. Their target populations covered government officials, local community workers, student organizations. They were asked to sit in committees as board of advisor for vetting service tender applications. Apart from this, they were engaged in government service projects and invited as supervisors by some social organizations.

All these positive recognition brings the team satisfaction and sense of achievement. Nevertheless, they are still facing insecure prosperity in school.

The pressure of insufficient student admission quota; the unpredictable rate of registered students; the anxieties about student employment remained as irresolvable stresses and a burden to the team. Qing Mei and some of her closer teammates have started to restructure their curriculum, aiming at designing a more work-related and practice-oriented program integrated with experiential pedagogical means. They encountered many difficulties and barriers in the process and many problems are still unresolved.

Qing Mei experienced some critical changes in her own family also. Her parents have returned to their original home this year due to old age. The caring role of the child left on Qing Mei's shoulder. At the same time, her husband, a bike enthusiast, started his own business in selling bicycles and accessories products. The whole family is engaged in a passionate yet exhausting new adventure. Qing Mei found herself more adaptable in this new role in assisting her husband. However in face of the multiple roles, she feels fatigued.

*“ I feel exhausted, I wonder if I should quit the present position...to be honest, I am unable to establish a coherent team, they are scattered individuals. They follow my suggestion only because of our personal relationship...I fail to provide a clear mission and direction... I may not be competent enough to manage this...it is really difficult, so I think about finding someone to replace my role may be an alternative.” (Q6:47)*

#### Post 5.12 experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes

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The formation of her professional identity is closely linked with internal and external factors. Internally, her own self growth and development in family and in the profession brought about new and positive experiences to consolidate her teaching role. Externally, the opportunities and resources in Sichuan in the past year created a platform of learning, practice and sustainable professional development.

Her active engagement in the life education project team brought her recognitions in new roles and benefitted her with new sets of skill and knowledge. Practice is the means for her to enter into the negotiation process of assimilation and self-differentiation.

### *Engagement*

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Participation is the key to growth and transformation. Qing Mei repeatedly emphasized that she does not have an adequate and solid disciplinary training in social work but her identification with the profession begins with her participation in life education training.

***“For me, I start to identify myself as a social work teacher when I am engaged in the life education project...To engage in life education activities bring me closer to my students, I learned how to communicate with them. The changes happen also in my other life circles including the relationship with my husband and children. These are great changes.”  
(Q7:10)***

Qing Mei’s identification started when she began to model after the pedagogical means in her own classes, particularly the means of storybook reading. She found it an effective and connected means for her to share with her students. She told me that since 2009, she would share a storybook “You’re a Hero, Delay B”<sup>26</sup> and discussed with the first year students. To illustrate the messages of this story related to identity searching, she encouraged her young students to be more open in self-exploration and to consider seriously their future plan. She admitted that her favor on the choice of this book and interpretations may have been related to her philosophical background. The question “Who am I?” that raised in this story is also her own personal enquiry and she is still travelling on a journey of

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<sup>26</sup> The picture book described a rabbit who has faced identity crisis experienced a hilarious woodland adventure. Daley B, the rabbit is full of questions. He doesn't know what sort of animal he is, where he should live, what he should eat or why he has such big feet. Not until one day he faced the attack of the wicked weasel Jazzy D, he used his big feet to kick her away and he earned the applause of all the rabbits in the forest, he gained an identity of a 'hero' by the end of the story.

self-discovery and self-knowledge.

***“ I learn by modelling and imitation. Unlike others who have undergone systematic social work disciplinary training, they will compare and contrast the new experience with their own understanding, they are more critical in this respect. I am more open, I just apply what I have learnt, I consider that they are just one type of pedagogical means” (Q7:3)***

In addition to using this storybook, Qing Mei used many other picture books in her classes. The difference between a traditional class and a class with reading and sharing activities rested upon several key points. First of all, students learned to ‘read themselves’ through substituting in the characters of the story, this further facilitated the communication and group sharing at a deeper level; students learned also to develop an empathetic lens to view themselves and others in the group; the message of hope in each of the stories further brought new strength and a sense of connection.

These experiences nurtured both the students and Qing Mei. She was reinforced by these positive changes and she began to acquire new skill set in moving out of the classroom. She succeeded to liaise with community partners, to design a practicum, to supervise students in service projects. She experienced a new self which was quite different from the old one.

### *Imagination:*

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#### **Value assimilation supported by outcome of real changes**

Qing Mei’s conviction for the profession is built on her observation and experience of ‘changes’. These changes are reflected in the development of quality of relationship; enhanced self-understanding and commitment of students and the behavioral and attitudinal changes of the target population they served. The first layer of changes appeared in her classroom.

*“There are changes in the classes, we are no longer students and teacher but we are ‘co-partners’ who support each other in self-exploration and growth. ... We read the stories and we read our lives also. ...I am once a teacher relied only on good techniques, good pedagogical means but without a ‘heart’,(用心) now I can perceive a different world.” (Q3:3)*

Qing Mei’s perception of “changes” extended to the target population in practicum site, the students from a vocational school who are labeled as low achievers and rebellious demonstrated positive changes after their intervention. This is a new lens, a new perspective, without labels and control. When one learns to put down normative understanding and standards, one is free to express and to communicate.

*“In life education classes, we primarily aimed at turning them from bad to good. But then we find out that they are all potentially ‘good’. Their provoking behavior covered up their kind hearts and sincerity. We learn to listen, and they share on their wishes to be a useful person in the society; .. I begin to perceive them from another perspective; ...” (Q3:4)*

For Qing Mei, she is not satisfied with experiences that merely trigger emotional responses and affectionate connections. She needs to gain deeper understandings. She begins to ask profound and ontological questions which relate to the ethical framework and moral sources of the social work profession and life education.

*“The core values uphold in the life education modules like empathy, respect, social responsibilities, self-reflection...all these are values shared by the social work profession...” (Q7:13)*

*“...We taught social work ethics and values in a transmission mode before...Life education is an alternative way to bring them into the experience, to help them understand and to internalize some core social work values.” (Q7:7)*

Qing Mei is correct and she is sensitive enough to align the learning in life education with her teaching activities.

### To live out the values in daily life

In one of the interviews, we met in a small tea-house. Qing Mei was sick and she brought her daughter along as she was unattended at home. I planned to commit for one hour for the interview, in order to occupy the girl in some activities, I lent her my iPad and showed her that I have stored quite a number of picture books there. She followed my simple instruction and began to scan the material by herself. It was amazing to find her so concentrated and absorbed in those stories. Qing Mei shared with me that since she engaged in Life Education project, she would read picture books to her daughter every night and identified obvious changes in the girl's cognitive and emotive development. When compared with other children, Qing Mei's daughter is more observant, expressive and sensible. Her satisfaction comes not only from her achievement as a teacher, but also in connection and relationship as a mother. In one of the reflective exercise, she recorded that:

*“I am an inexpressive person, my network is small. I fail to identify proper way to express my care and concerns; even in marital relationship... she (an oversea trainer) taught us how to use positive language to convey love. We used to have arguments over trivial matters and suffered from small conflicts but since then, I find that our communication pattern changed. We enjoy a more harmonious and happy marriage. My husband teased me by saying that ‘where has our little hedgehog gone?’” (Q3:5)*

It is hard to imagine Qing Mei as a hedgehog but she did share with me that due to age difference and discrepancies in personality, she is stronger in character when compared with her husband. She tended to be more decisive and dominating in the communication process. When she is willing to communicate with a gentle and soft heart, the positive changes emerged. In assisting her husband to operate their bike shop, Qing Mei also finds herself not so resistant to

new changes. She feels at ease to share with her colleagues and neighbor and in fact, they have formed a bicycle club to engage friends and colleagues in sport activities.

These ‘fruits’ of growth and development were cultivated and nurtured by Qing Mei’s learning and direct application of life education. We may consider that these accomplishments are rooted at an open and receptive attitudes to these ‘good seeds’ of professional aspiration ; apart from that, we should not overlook the healthy and fertile soil as a garden bed that long existed in her heart. By referring to Qing Mei’s reflective record completed early in 2009 when she was first engaged in a supervisory session with her students, we found that she was able to make use of her own personal experiences as a mother in practices. At that time, they were placed in disaster impacted shelter area and she has to support her student to work with several parents. She was alerted and nervous as she got no previous experiences of supervising students in parenting issues. Here below is the record she reflected on the process of how she communicated and gave advice to one of the parents when she was just a novice worker.

*“I follow XX loashi’s suggestion on how to start communication with our service user. ..I find that we have a lot of similarities: we both are teachers, same age and we are parents. I can identify with his feelings and puzzles...I think our mutual acceptance is based on the same identity and similar life experience...” (Q2:2)*

At the end, Qing Mei succeeded to engage this parent and demonstrated her competence in assessment and intervention. This “practice experience” revealed a new ‘professional image’ which was quite different from her previous description. She used to have underscored her sensitivities and abilities and ascribed to the irrelevant disciplinary background and unsociable personality, but this successful attempt in providing parental guidance demonstrated her sensitivity and competence as a ‘mother peer counselor’. In fact, the mother role or the ‘mothering character’ is the fertile soil that best suitable for the cultivation of seeds of life education and social work professional aspirations.

### Life Education or social work education?

The positive and achieving experiences in the life education project reassured Qing Mei that positive values are teachable and conveyable. Proper pedagogical means including experiential activities and practice experiences can deepen the understanding and facilitate self-discovery and internalization of these values such as self-love; respect and purpose seeking. However, Qing Mei began to sense the tension and struggle of merely adopting the life education program material in their professional curriculum. She recognized this tension by her own experiences and she observed also that there were social workers and social work teachers who held a critical stance and they chose to be skeptical and resisted this mode of prescriptive transmission. The following narration showed that Qing Mei understood why these challenges existed as the transmission model violated the educational philosophies of the social work profession. She alerted also that the trustful and respectful attitudes to teacher may reinforce an uncritical and over-dependence culture.

*“The underpinning philosophy of life education is to transmit and impart the prescriptive values to learners; but social work is different, it is more a process of acceptance.(接纳) I tend to use life education as a teaching tool to facilitate self-discovery and growth, it should not be replaced as professional content properties. Our students place too much trust on us as teacher, they will not be able to sense this tension.” (Q7:14)*

### “Practice” as an individual commitment or as a team mission

Thought out the past six years, Qing Mei has tried to engage the whole teaching team in disaster projects and more than five of them are currently active colleagues who showed interest and commitment to support her initiatives. As a result, some of them demonstrated visible positive changes. She quoted the following example about the changes of one of the team members XY, and



recognized these positive developments were brought about by the opportunities of learning and practice.

*“XY Laoshi is a passive person... he used to refuse any additional engagement, particularly in conducting games activities. Now he is quite familiar with interactive mode of learning...students are satisfied and feedback that social work classes are delightful and enjoyable. They are fascinated by this unusual mode of teaching and learning.” (Q6:19)*

Another teammate LY who is a newly recruited member also has actively been engaged in the life education training and practice. LY is different from Qing Mei as she is an expressive, energetic and passionate person; they have started to launch the ‘picture book reading class’ for university students and a special life education curriculum as compulsory subject for all social work students, they planned to extend and open the class to all students of other faculties in the future. Apart from these above development and achievements, Qing Mei recognized also the need to integrate practice in core social work subjects.

*“...I will request students, as a compulsory assignment, to participate in about twenty practice hours, ... they have to record the whole practice process from proposal writing to process recording, reflection and termination report. I will follow through the whole process ....” (Q6:10)*

Qing Mei recognized “practice” as a core element in the professional curriculum, she engaged in practice herself by leading the life education class; she supervised her students to enter practice learning; she encouraged her colleagues to work with her on restructuring the curriculum so as to accommodate the professional need. To go a step further, some of the team members proposed to set up a NGO where they can purchase government service projects, locate their students on more relevant professional tasks. Facing all these new challenges and opportunities, Qing Mei was exhausted and confused.

[Social work is still a vulnerable profession](#)

Facing the group decision on establishing a NGO, Qing Mei showed a supportive attitude.

*“I think if we operate a NGO together...we as teachers will be engaged in practical tasks such as project management, service delivery, liaison with government and community officials... these are good opportunities for learning and growth. The organization can be regarded as a professional practicum site for students; on the other hand, our students can be absorbed as manpower resources of the organization.” (Q6:50)*

Another reason shared by Qing Mei on establishing a NGO is related to the unfair and vulnerable condition of social work teachers in the current social situation. Social work teachers do not have much privilege in participation under the new policy initiatives. They are located in more marginal and vulnerable positions in comparison with NGO officials. They are still under the control of a larger administrative system and have little autonomy and independence to try out innovative and constructive practices. In some cases, they are even victims in political and service purchasing games. She quoted an example of an illegal but unclaimed rule of commission charged by service purchasers (who are regional government offices in most of the cases), the usual practice is about 8-10% of the total approved project budget. This is likely to affect the actual financial allocation on manpower resources and direct service. As a teaching team, they are unable to revolt against these practices.

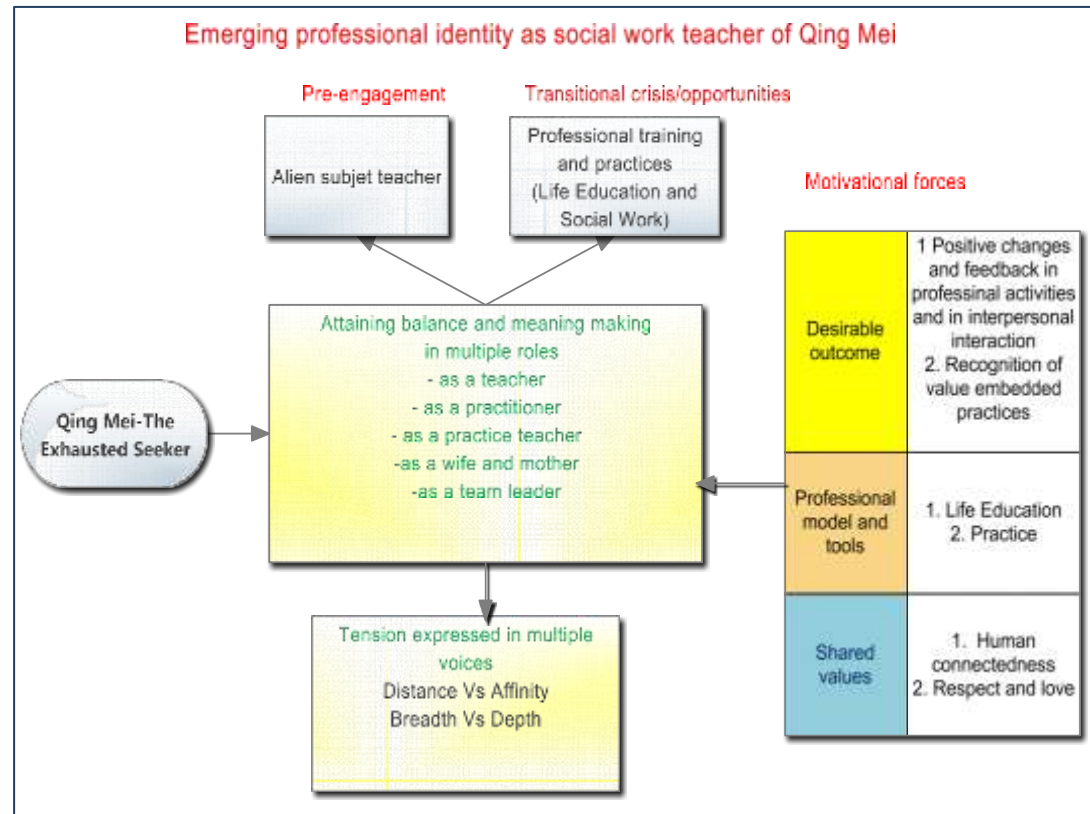


Diagram 14: Emerging professional identity as social work teacher of Qing Mei

Diagram 14 gives a summary on the route of identity formation of Qing Mei. Moving from an ‘alien’ subject teacher who was dissatisfied with her teaching and communication with students, to a “social work teacher” and team leader who is motivated by the positive outcome and achievements and more important, the shared values of human connectedness and beliefs on human potentialities and uniqueness. These discoveries and changes were brought forth through her active participation and experimentation in life education training and project practices. These understandings provided her solid grounds for further exploration. Her commitments have extended to the following areas, including:

- Integrating practice assignment and storybook reading activities in her classes
- Designing and structuring the ‘Life Education’ curriculum in the institution with her colleagues
- Modifying the orientation program by introducing social work through interactive means and life education exercisers.

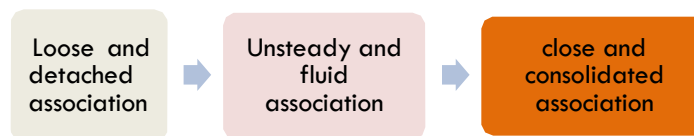
### *Professional network and resources*

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Due to the fact that Qing Mei has acquired new understandings and expectations about professional education, she could no longer make compromises to the pre-engagement mode of teaching. As a leader of her teaching team, Qing Mei succeeded to maintain a core team who shared similar visions and commitment and they are engaged in close partnerships. Diagram 15 shows that the team has earned some currency as their effort and achievements are recognized by the institution. Their commitments will greatly facilitate her to identify new ways of actualization and open new opportunities for development and exploration. The dilemma and tension related mainly on the fact that professional collaborative network and resources are still weak and insufficient; besides, there are both threats and opportunities in external professional environment that required careful and sensible discernment. It is an urgent need for Qing Mei and her team to identify a sustainable professional network as mutual support resources.



Diagram 15: Qing Mei's professional partners and network



*Multi voices in the storied self*

Qing Mei's transformational changes started off with a receptive attitude in engaging in the life education project, through learning and application, modelling and imitation, she gained confidence and acquired competence at both practical and ethical level. She demonstrated her abilities and potentialities of shouldering wide diversities of roles. As a leader and a follower; as a caring mother and a professional teacher; as a thinker and a doer. It is interesting to identify all of these "new roles and identities" which was unknown to her before. Without the opportunities of these intensive engagement, these 'selves' may not be able to emerge and be recognized.

From alienation to connection, Qing Mei recognized her inner needs of human relatedness. She is conscious and highly selective at relationship building, as an introvert and deep thinker, she preferred quality acquaintance so as to engage at deeper but not superficial level where interchange of personal meaning is possible. These experiences further reaffirmed what she considered as ‘good qualities’ in human relationship. Mere affinity is not an ultimate goal. Distance is still required to avoid over engagement and enmeshment.

Another pair of contradicting voices appeared in performing the role of a leader and a professional social work teacher and thinker. The external professional environment put forth high expectation on them. They have to be responsive and proactive and at the same time, be alert and sensitive to ‘professional pitfalls’. Both the breadth and depth of understanding are required. Diagram 16 in the following page illustrates the diversities of roles and contradicting voices reflecting Qing Mei’s condition.

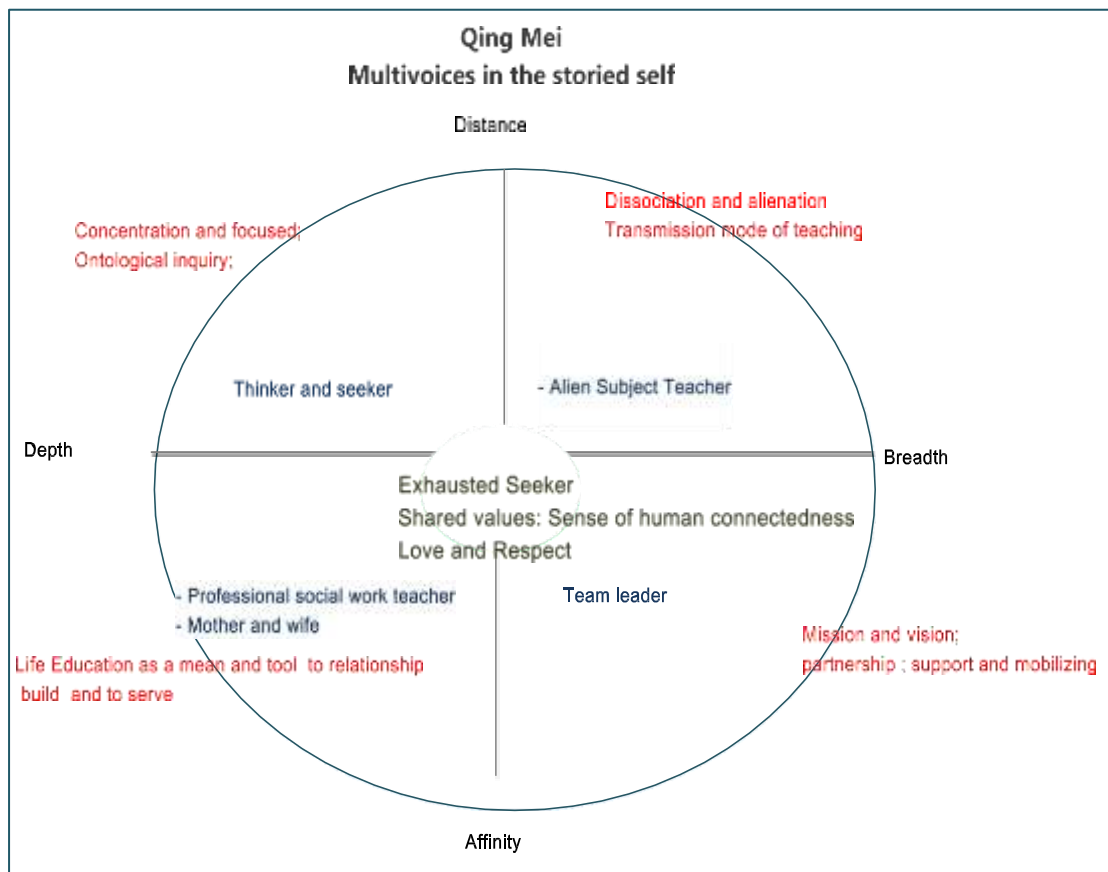


Diagram 16: Qing Mei-Multi voices in the storied self

The above diagram exemplifies two pairs of incompatible voices in Qing Mei's story. As a distant teacher, she longed for affinity. As a seeker who possesses a philosophical mind, she needs the distance to observe and to digest. Distance and affinity are equally important and are complementary in the process of her construction of the self. Affinity that experienced in practice is particularly crucial for it is the 'entrance gate' to the social work profession. She appreciates the profession in a relational and experiential way.

As a team leader, she needs to give direction and create new opportunities; as a seeker and philosopher, she longed for a deeper understanding instead of commitment in visible merits and achievement. The existing professional context pulls her out of her comfort zone and she has to reposition herself in her future as a social work teacher



and as an administrator. Integrating life education values in social work teaching seems to be an important task.

Qing Mei is on her way to further explore, but where is the way out? This is an unfinished story.

*“...I think we got to move further, if not, we will not be able to go deeper...what I meant about ‘deeper’ is something that connected with values and ideology. It is the soul of the social work profession, ...it seems to me that we have to travel further and deeper to a certain level, then we will be able to touch on it and to distinguish, but now, I could not.” (Q6:24)*

### Background Information

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Zhang Min shared with me an emotional story. The young man has suffered from psychological disturbances for several years. In his story, I encountered both depressive and hopeful moods. The mixed and changing emotions reflected both the internal and external forces and conflicts in Zhang Min's present life situation. They are real life struggles and sufferings but the story accounts portrayed also a young man's sense of being and courageous choices. I introduced to him Sisyphus, the protagonist in a Greek myth during the first interview as a feedback on his story. This is a tragic myth related to existential suffering. In the story, Sisyphus was engaged in an impossible task as a punishment and wrath announced by the gods. He has to push a rock from bottom of a mountain to the top, but every day the rock will roll down from the top. Day after day he needs to repeat this endless and meaningless task. When Sisyphus fully became aware of this terrible fate and absurdity of life, he chooses to continue and endure, and he demonstrated a spirit of rivalry by shifting from a passive to an active mode of choice. The Greek myth put forth a message related to human dignity and life destiny; people can activate their free will and courage to master their own choices and actions.

Unlike his colleagues, Zhang Min did not engage himself in many disaster training sessions and practice projects. As a member of the HA university social work team, he has already been active in curriculum construction, bringing innovative ideas in teaching and student work before the disaster. He is always a strong companion, a

motivated and enthusiastic teacher. But at the same time, he suffered from a state of depression for many years. In this narrative process, we have the opportunity to go through some of his critical experiences and reflections in the past six years. His story will be organized in the following five items.

1. Childhood experience and academic background
2. Performing the role as a social work teacher
3. Present personal and work life
4. Post 5.12 experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes
5. Actuality and Potentiality

The quotations in the story drawn from these sources:

Code	Content of the sources	Date of completion
Z1	Reflective note on Social Work Teachers' Practice training	2009 Aug 21 by Zhang Min
Z2	Life Story exercise	2015 Jan by Zhang Min
Z3	Transcription on Focus Group interview and interview I	2014 Nov 29 by researcher
Z4	Transcription on individual interview II	2014 Jan by researcher
Z5	Transcription on individual interview III	2014 Apr by researcher
Z6	Consent form	2014 Nov by Zhang Min
Z7	Academic paper on the topic related to professional development in universities	2013 Oct by Zhang Min

### Childhood experience and academic background

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Zhang Min's origin is a rural village. He studied history and sociology in his undergraduate and master level of academic pursuit. According to his description, he lived as a happy and relaxed child until he entered high school. The transition was not due to environmental changes, but rather to his maturity and awareness. He began to recognize the extremely deprived and oppressive condition of his family as he entered adolescence. By observing the struggle and sufferings of his family members; he began to understand the absurdity of the reality. He told me that his parents were constantly engaged in conflicts due to unstable financial conditions. His father, as described, was a rude and ill-tempered person, and failed to communicate effectively

with family members and others. This was reflected in his continual failure to improve the family's living conditions. Zhang Min recalled an incident when his father experienced a serious conflict with a rural official, it was initially a verbal argument but later turned to physical fighting. His father was arrested and imprisoned for about half a year. Unfortunate circumstances seemed like a regular occurrence for his family. He mentioned also that his mother has travelled alone to GD province to search for job opportunities but was struck by a car and injured. Even as a child, he and his younger sisters suffered from harassment by peers, and whenever he fought back, he was revenged with an even more bitter attack. His parents reminded him repeatedly to be tolerant and submissive. He disagreed with their opinions, but obeyed them because he loved his family members.

He entered university and brought a sign of hope for the whole family. His parents invested all the family income to support him, and expected him to bring them out of poverty. After graduation, Zhang Min settled in the HA university, working for a monthly salary of about RMB 4,000 after eight years' engagement. While his peers in the village who worked as laborers, earned much more and succeeded to upgrade their standard of living. The onset of his emotional disturbances in early years were triggered by unresolved guilt and feeling of helplessness.

*Pedagogical sensitivity*

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According to Zhang Min, there is no difference between a “teacher” and a “social work teacher”. He did not choose to be a social work teacher, he was engaged ‘by chance’ (机缘巧合). Nevertheless, he understands well his responsibility as a teacher and shared the ideology of the profession which was related to core values of justice and fighting for the deprived and oppressed. Though he did not receive any formal and systematic disciplinary training, he is able to position himself as a committed teacher. In early years of his teaching, he found great achievement and satisfaction in the post. He was able to connect well with colleagues and students; he initiated new teaching ideas and sought for new resources to improve the curriculum design. It was a ‘honeymoon’ period where he could find meaning and was able to actualize his ideals.

***“I find my value and meaning in the teaching activities, I was rewarded by the feedback of my students. I am devoted, willing to commit extra time and never complained against being over-loaded or exhausted.” (Z2:2)***

In fact, he demonstrated great sensitivity in pedagogical concerns of the profession. Presently he is engaging in curriculum design and teaching of the following subjects: “Western Social Theories”, “Social Work Theories”, “Casework and Basic Understanding on Community Work”. He saw the importance of integrating practice elements in these curriculums. He has succeeded in convincing the department to

establish a school social work station in the campus, and he practiced case interviews and intervention together with his students and gained positive feedback. In a published academic paper written by him, he expressed clearly his intention to explore 'internal' resources within the institution.

*“We have to identify and establish practice sites within the institution so that they are more manageable. We can make use of the institutional resources such as the psychology laboratory, student counseling unit, student affair office, school social work unit...etc. By successful negotiation, we may be able to establish sustainable partnership and long term collaboration, then it is possible for us to have practice site that support teaching and practicum.”*

**(Z7:3)**

Furthermore, he asserted that bringing actual changes among deprived groups, casework or interventions at micro level have their limitations. He preferred integrating macro theories in intervention as transformation in societal structure is more important than changes at a personal level.

### *Student centeredness*

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The educational role of a teacher is expressed by Zhang Min in the following core belief:

*“I think the most important role adopted by a teacher is to facilitate his students to gain independence in thinking and to actualize the idea in action.”*

**(Z4:36)**

To actualize the above belief, Zhang Min has to perform his role in integrity. He quoted one example on how he chose to respect students' self-determination instead of convincing them to stay in the program. His actions went against departmental policy and direction because most teachers aim to maintain a better student enrollment

record. Zhang Min explains to students the advantages and drawbacks of their choice, particularly unfavorable professional environmental factors which is highlighted and explained.

Offering sustainable support to graduates is another important role performed by Zhang Min. He understands well the difficulties faced by novice social workers and he spares time to listen to their complaints and needs. In return, the graduates become assets of the department and are likely to return to share in an orientation program.

### Present personal and work life

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Zhang Min encountered several critical events that triggered the second onset of his emotional disturbances. He refused to take medication even in the most vulnerable moments. He has the awareness of how serious his condition is, but he promised his family that he will not conduct any self-destructive act.

*" ... I will stop myself to move on in order to avoid a crash...I know I have to adjust my work pace and style...If I insist to move on, I will face the danger of collapse.. "(Z5: 4)*

He shared that he often hears a voice reminding him to stop and take rest in critical situations, and he further explained how these patterns emerged in the past few years. Firstly, one of his respected teachers passed away which had negative implications on him. He expressed that she was his mentor and role model by demonstrating how to live with integrity. She taught with enthusiasm and refused to engage in politics and other unnecessary endeavors. She adopted a withdrawal attitude, but was able to create a space of making meaning. The second incident is related to a trauma that happened to his younger sister. She was seriously hurt in a car accident and failed to receive any compensation. Zhang Min provided details of how he made a desperate



effort to offer assistance by carrying her to hospital and sought legal aid in another city. All these efforts turned out to be useless. He experienced only rejection, deception and oppression. This event caused intense negative emotions and anxieties, self-blame and helplessness. Lastly, he entered into another bitter struggle with his PhD supervisor in the past few years. At first, his success in admission to a PhD program seemed to be a bright opportunity because he was able to take full time study leave , however, he soon discovered that the program was indeed a nightmare. The study process reflected an oppressive reality in academic arena. With little academic input and guidance, he was so disappointed and frustrated to learn that he has to perform just the mechanical role as a research assistant. Day after day, he could not anticipate a positive outcome of his pursuit and investment. Overburdened by all these stresses and unresolved difficulties, he felt trapped in a vicious cycle of self-pity and anger. His colleagues acknowledged his emotional instability, but failed to provide adequate support and counseling. According to Zhang Min, peer relationships are close but not deep enough to share and understand innermost frustrations. To summarize the common element of the above triggering events, Zhang Min pointed to his cognitive structure which led to endless struggles and sufferings.

*"I understand why it ( the depressive cycle) appears as a repeated pattern, it is because of the deep-rooted cognitive structure in my inner self. Every time I want to work against these, I only find myself so powerless and helpless... "*

(Z5: 5)

The 'cognitive structure' is a deep-rooted thinking pattern mixed with disempowered self-talk and demoralizing self-perception. These frames of reference trigger strong and intense negative emotions of helplessness, guilt and anger in his daily interaction with the reality. As a result, he enters into a non-stop self-defeating and self-doubt

cycle. The established structure may have originated from a long history of perceived oppression and exploitation.

Instead of staying with the research team of his PhD supervisor, Zhang Min has moved back to the HA university and resumed some teaching duties, the choice is supported by his PhD supervisor after an open discussion and negotiation. The engagement in regular teaching activities helps to stabilize his mental condition. He expressed also that he has engaged in some spiritual practices in a Buddhist temple in order to gain inner peace and to seek religious guidance.

#### *Post 5.12 experiences: Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes*

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Despite the fact that Zhang Min suffered from endless inner struggles as mentioned above, he still managed to perform adequately as a social work teacher. Moving from a novice teacher who lacked experience in professional practice and understanding in professional ideology, he is able to gain insight from the post-disaster project engagement and he has tried to integrate these new understandings in his teaching role.

#### *Engagement*

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Zhang Min participated in a post-disaster community development project for about three months. The intensive engagement exposed him to professional dialogue and practice. The project team initiated a livelihood project by engaging a group of disabled survivors. They followed a theoretical framework to generate funding, to

launch a microfinance scheme, to support and nurture the group, and to actualize their plans. Zhang Min engaged in direct practices such as paying home visits, conducting case assessment and running self-help group sessions. The three months' practice did not deepen much his conceptual and practical knowing. It did, however, provide the experience of unity and collegiality in the project team, and reminded him the existence of genuine team spirit and potentiality of positive changes. He traced why the experience was so impressive in a reflective exercise completed in 2009. He listed four points related to the working atmosphere, input of professional conceptions and models, network establishment and his observation of the changes of disaster survivors.

*“...it was a journey of mutual support and critical dialogue; we shared same goal, work hard and blended our efforts in a single mind...I was enlightened by the theoretical framework and concepts. .. I got acquainted with a number of partners and they become my good friends, ...I saw the changes of my serving targets...” (Z1:4)*

### **New professional concepts and approaches acquired**

The short encounter with the professional CoP brought new professional insight to Zhang Min. Though he did not engage anymore in project activities, he absorbed and digested the understanding in several ways. Firstly, he acquired new concepts and methods such as “strength-based” and “capacity-building”; microfinance scheme and livelihood self-help group. Secondly, he gained a positive experience in collective work; the commitment of these post-disaster project partners demonstrated sufficient qualities of role models, and this strengthened his confidence in the transformational role of the profession. Finally, he began to identify himself more than just a subject teacher. He saw the potential to work as a social work teacher together with his colleagues and students in order to bring constructive changes and impacts to society.

### **The “we” within the institution**

While Zhang Min was not an active participant in post-disaster training and project activities, he was always a stable and competent partner to his colleagues. He developed more confidence to exert his influences and actualize his ideas within the institution. First of all, he worked with his team leader, Qing Mei, and a few more teachers in integrating new pedagogical considerations and methods after their trainings. Zhang Min supported them to actualize new initiatives and strategies in the following ways. He made use of his networking skills to facilitate the establishment of partnership with communities and NGOs. He

believed there were plenty of opportunities that existed outside the institutions and considered that these external resources can be ‘nurtured’ into professional partners. He performed actively as the ‘sales’ and ‘connector’ in the process. In these years, the team succeeded in building sustainable sites in communities and schools for professional practicums. They developed and sustained positive collaborative relationship and fulfilled what Zhang Min has envisioned. These partners are able to show more understandings to the professional needs of the students and are willing to provide adequate support to facilitate the learning. Secondly, they began to put much more emphasis on ‘practice’ in the professional curriculum, they tried to restructure some of the curriculums to enable students more opportunities to engage in practice. Take Zhang Min as an example, he has added in community observational exercises and practice hours in the curriculum of “community work” and “school social work”. Thirdly, they have redesigned the orientation program so that new students can get to know more about the profession through experiential means. According to Zhang Min, the department is proud enough to share with others their achievements and contributions throughout these years. Through his close connection with the graduates, he brought back new information from the professional environment. All these accomplishments required extra-work, but he is happily committed.

***“I commit on a voluntary basis and there is no material return, but I love to do so...I consider that a teacher should behave in this way.” (Z4:51)***

It is obvious that the team has played an important transformative role in the school. Nevertheless, Zhang Min found social worker is still a deprived or oppressed minority professional group in the society. They encountered a lot of emerging and deep-rooted barriers such as misunderstanding, deception and

injustice. The reason why he proposed the establishment of an independent NGO is related to his intention to protect his students.

*“...our students will experience less exploitation...at least we (as NGO director) can provide them some allowances....” (Z4:52)*

Zhang Min used the word ‘exploitation’ to explain several concepts. First, he referred to the reality that placement students are cheap labour and they are not likely to fulfill any professional tasks. They tend to engage in only meaningless reporting and mechanical program work. Furthermore, they belonged to the lowest rank and have to submit to unreasonable or even unethical instruction. Unlike other colleagues who consider the NGO is a platform to generate professional currency, Zhang Min perceives the need of his students as a pivotal concern; he wishes to create a space where they have autonomy and resources to offer professional learning opportunity and guidance for students. However, the scheme was set aside due to Zhang Min’s unstable psychological condition. Though he is unable to make a promise to take the leading role, his role as a thinker and leader is irreplaceable.

*Alignment:*

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#### *Performing the teacher’s role: a process of “remoralization”*

Deeply submerged in negative emotions of guilt, helplessness, self-blame and anger for a prolonged period of time, Zhang Min was physically and psychologically exhausted. Nevertheless, by engaging in teaching activities, he is recharged with new energy. The prolonged depressive mood shook his intact ego

and weakened his daily functioning skills, but by connecting with his students, he was able to regain a sense of mastery and lived out his preferred values. He shared with me the story of Xiao Yin, one of his students. The story reflects a journey of struggles and victory shared both by the teacher and the student. The story is selected by Zhang Min and supported by the researcher in order to capture a holistic and comprehensive process of teaching and student development which demonstrated how he exercised his teaching ideology with the professional awareness.

Xiao Yin as a first year student did not choose Social Work as her first priority; she enrolled in the program just for anticipating a better chance of entrance to the university. She was then inspired by Zhang Min and the other teachers in the learning process and at the same time began to recognize her own interest in the profession, particularly in areas of charity work. Zhang Min, being her mentor and supervisor engaged in a process of guidance and support. At the initial stage, Zhang Min tried to clarify her intention and motivation, and encouraged her to echo her inner choice. The girl experienced a lot of frustration in placement due to the unfavorable and exploitive professional environment. The struggles about whether or not to persist or to abandon were part of her bitter developmental history. With the support of Zhang Min and other teachers, she managed to endure by actively seeking proper opportunities with her own effort. After graduation, she settled in a few posts in different provincial regions and eventually returned to Sichuan and became employed as a center leader of a newly established agency. She called Zhang Min occasionally to discuss her difficulties and seek advice. These challenges and complaints included situations such as misunderstandings, unrealistic and unreasonable expectations,

overloaded work assignments and unfair treatment. These sufferings reflected the reality of the professional environment, and made apparent that there is a big gap between ideals and reality. Novice workers have to learn to endure and to strive for achieving one's intended goals. Xiao Yin overcame the most difficult stage and settled in her job with more confidence and competence.

Seeing the growth of students led to a healing process of Zhang Min; he resolved some of his inner disturbances through offering guidance and sorting out solution with his student. It is fair to say that Xiao Yin's persistence and improvement gave him positive feedback and reassurance. More importantly, Xiao Yin has actualized part of his vision in a real professional setting through her commitment and integrity.

### Actuality and Potentiality

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After reading the draft of the story, Zhang Min told me that he saw himself in a different light. Despite the environmental constraints being real, he found himself trapped and dominated by his own self-defeating internal language. He recognized that he has been over-indulged in negative comments on himself and the external difficulties. Tracing the development of Zhang Min in the years from 2008-2014, it is evident to see how a young teacher struggles to maintain his integrity among all the adversities. Though he is weak and in emotional pain, he demonstrated authenticity and a stubbornness to uphold his preferred value and moral awareness in teaching. The following Diagram 17 summarizes some critical elements of his transformational journey.



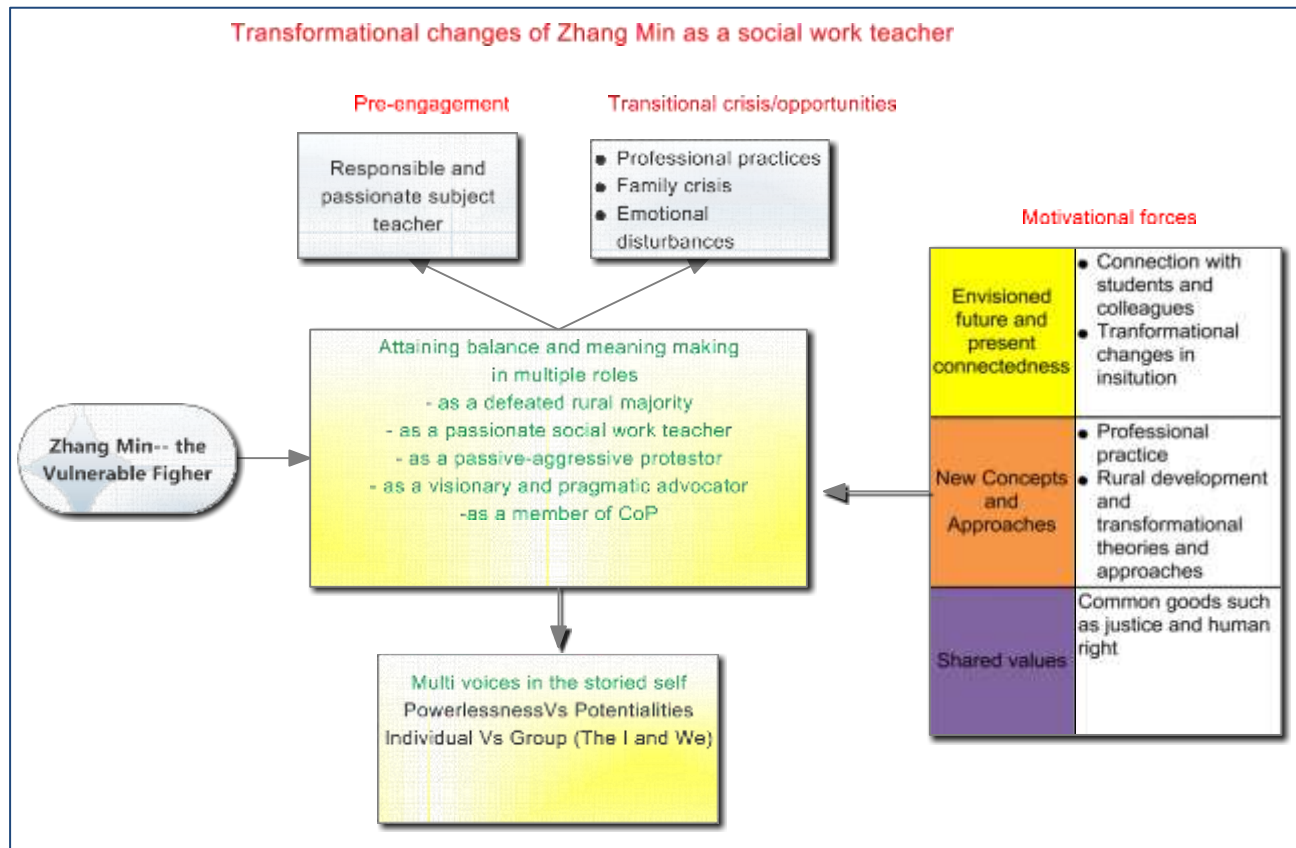


Diagram 17: Transformational changes of Zhang Min as a social work teacher

Zhang Min entered the journey as a responsible subject teacher, having little knowledge about the differences between a social work teacher and a teacher, he performed his role through his understanding of a ‘good teacher’ who should care about his students and nurture them to become independent and autonomous individuals. The short engagement in post-disaster project activities provided him with new perspectives in his role. He began to recognize the vision of a social work teacher is different from a teacher. The commitment to the profession allowed him to strive for a better and fairer society. His understanding and imagination of the teaching role extended to making constructive impacts in the bigger society. These visions introduce new energies as well as new burdens and stresses, and are accompanied by his personal crisis in these years; he suffered as a patient who was trapped by emotional disturbances. He becomes vulnerable and unstable in some critical moments. The greatest motivational forces originated from his passion in teaching, but he is lacking real experiences in professional practices. Instead of aiming high, his understanding about professional concepts and approaches should be grounded in real context and practice experiences. After reading the story, he admitted that he has indulged in negative thinking too much and he should engage in practice action more.

#### *Professional partners and network*

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In view of professional support, Diagram 18 shows that Zhang Min is still lacking sustainable and reliable partners. He is able to build a stable relationship with his colleagues and extend the network to community and society, but these are instrumental ties, he perceived himself as alone without comrades that shared same conceptions and ideologies. This explained why he is constantly frustrated by the loneliness and tiredness on the development path.

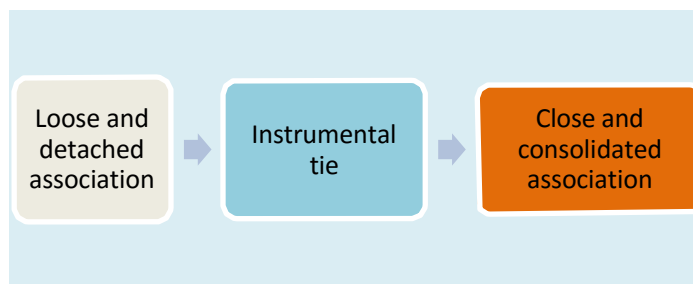


Diagram 18: Zhang Min’s professional partners and network

*Multi voices in the storied self*

The following Diagram 19 further illustrates two pairs of incompatible voices in his story.

Zhang Min as an individual and has identified himself with different social groups in both positive and negative ways. First of all, he identifies himself to a number of vulnerable social groups. The “I” in the story belongs to a powerless rural class as well as an exploited profession. These groups shared same defeated feelings, strong sense of powerlessness and helplessness in an oppressive reality. This ‘we’ feeling reinforced Zhang Min’s negative self-perception and put him in a fragile and despair state. Nevertheless, when he identifies himself as a visionary and pragmatic educator and an ethical change agent, he sees the potentialities of the collective effort and he regains strength and energy. This was



### Background Information

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Han Liang recalled that he used to play the role as a ‘soldier’(兵) in childhood games. As an adult, he described himself as a ‘phoenix man’ (凤凰男) in the urban city. ‘Soldier’ ranked as the lowest member in a team who has just to commit as a loyal follower without possessing the power of making key decisions and giving orders. While ‘phoenix man’ (凤凰男) is a Mainland metaphorical saying to describe males whose origins are from rural areas, but they successfully settled and survived in urban cities through their earnest effort. They are able to upgrade their social status, yet they still trapped by struggles with self-pity and self-doubt. Han Liang aims to relate his self-concept with the historical and cultural self

“Soldier” or “pawn” (兵/卒) is a key player on the ancient Chinese chessboard. They are the weakest and most unimportant among the team in terms of strategic position and military power. They are prepared to sacrifice in times of crisis. Nevertheless, it is interesting to find that the Western rules differed from the Chinese rules in relation to the movement and the promotion of the pawns. Once the ‘western pawn’ cross the chessboard and reached the eighth row of the opposite side, it will be promoted and can be replaced by any other powerful chess choice such as the ‘queen’ or ‘knight’. The ‘reborn rules’ of the pawns symbolized a different value orientation on humanity. In Western society, it is possible for a human to fight for his own right and to achieve transcendent changes in lives.

In this story, Han Liang is no longer the powerless and weakest soldier as in his childhood memory. He recognizes that even the lowest rank in the communities who suffered from oppressive reality will have their own strength and resources, making it possible for them to nurture a spirit of criticality that leads further to

collective conscious effort of making constructive changes to oneself and to the society.

I met Han Liang in a number of situations as co-learner and co-worker in the post disaster trainings and projects. He is a thoughtful and diligent partner who is able to take care of everybody's needs and he engages in multiple tasks with great efficiency and effectiveness. In 2009, he served as a practice student in one of the disaster areas. During 2009-2011, he allied with a social worker teacher from an overseas university to work on a post disaster project based in X village; he took on the role of project assistant, local supervisor and practitioner. In 2013, another earthquake happened in City B where his family and working university were located, His teaching team and students had to be fully engaged in post disaster work in that specific region. These crises brought about new opportunities and resources for development in social work education and social service. Nevertheless, the unpredictable changing needs, complex partnership dynamics, contradicting choices of intervention have created a highly stressful and overburdened working environment. Having committed himself in these challenging tasks over 6 years, he reviewed his transformational journey and sought for a focus for future professional development.

The data sources of the story include my own observation, formal and informal sharing, autobiographical writing, past reflective note written by Han Liang, and lastly, transcription of two intensive interviews. The story is organized in the following sections:

1. Childhood experience and academic background
2. Performing the role as a social work teacher
3. Present personal and work life
4. Post 5.12 and 4.20 experiences : Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes
5. Actuality and Potentiality

The quotations in the story are drawn from these sources:

Code	Content of the sources	Date of completion
H1	Reflective note on practicum learning in WH school ( a disaster impacted school)	2009 September 01 by Han Liang
H2	Consent form and chronological review of his engagement	2015 January by Han Liang
H3	Transcription on individual interview I	2015 January 19 by researcher
H4	Transcription on individual interview II	2015 November 29 by researcher
H5	Autobiographical exercise	2008 November by Han Liang
H6	Interview report on Life Education <sup>27</sup>	2014 by Dr Han YuChen
H7	Reflection note on “Rural life, rural social work”	2014 by Han Liang

### Childhood experience and academic background

Han Liang was born in 1980 and he stayed with an extended kinship in a deprived coal mine village in SX province. During childhood, he lived among a large group of over one hundred kinship members, learning to associate and communicate with a wide variety of people; he adopted a sensitive, easy-going, sociable and caring character trait. He developed survival skills, hobbies for fun, and cultivated open-mindedness through these interactions. However, his overall memory on childhood experience was negative and unpleasant. Living under extremely deprived condition, he was raised up with stern commands and disciplined by physical punishment. Instead of receiving acceptance and respect, the father-son relationship was always full of tension and detachment.

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<sup>27</sup> The Report refers to an unpublished project evaluation. The interviews, documentation and analysis were conducted and completed by the project researcher, Dr Han Yu Chen.

*“ I generated a lot of negative emotions towards my family, I got no sense of security, no trust, only doubt and confusion.” (H5:5)*

*"... I became timid, submissive and get into the habit of looking down upon myself. I care too much about achieving perfection but doubtful of my capabilities, I repressed my true self but demonstrated a split personality in front of my parents and others. "(H5: 8)*

Despite the above disturbances, Han Liang stayed in an intimate relationship with the females of the family. He connected closely with both his grandmother and mother. They nurtured the other side of his character. His grandmother used to share with him old stories and listened to him. Cultural values and wisdom were passed on to him through empathic listening and many connected moments. His mother is an enthusiastic and kind-hearted woman, she set a role model as a sensitive and merciful person who cared for and offered assistance to people in need. During his teenage years, Han Liang was his mother's helper who accompanied her weekly to get water from a distant village. Due to these experiences with his mother, he was able to gain emotional support, and at the same time, learned to express himself through their daily chats.

Han Liang transited from a boy to a man through the accomplishment of a series of life tasks. He graduated from university, got married, fathered a son, settled in City B, and gained employment as a university teacher. All these new roles brought forth new challenges and stresses, but at the same time, Han Liang is mature enough to be entrusted as the 'key' person in both his immediate and in-law families, he has his own voice and is independent to make important decision and to commit in responsibilities.

#### Performing the role as a social work teacher

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Though graduated from a renowned university, professionally trained as a 'social work' teacher, Han Liang did not impart knowledge with great confidence in his early years' of teaching. He was nervous to stand before a



class of undergraduate students with only an undergraduate qualification himself. He photocopied a large amount of translated books from his hometown and spent much time preparing. With a monthly salary of RMB 1,000 in his early years, he still invested quite a large proportion buying references in order to ensure an adequate knowledge reserve. Moreover, his 'asset' as a teacher was not the propositional knowledge he acquired in his undergraduate education, it was in fact his practice research experiences that inspired and guided him to perform the role as a social work teacher. In these research projects, he studied a variety of target populations including medical patients, delinquent youth, children of criminals, and marital abused couples. He recalled that these encounters nurtured his interest and curiosity in this profession. The connection with these targets in the 'lowest rank' of the society implanted the seed of the profession in his heart. Though he was lacking sufficient substantial knowledge on professional values and methodology, he transferred his experiences by bringing his students out of the classroom in field trips and studies. They even won a prize on student summer service learning program. Among a group of non-social work trained colleagues who came from disciplines of ethics, sociology, social security and rural sociology, Han Liang set a different example of teaching social work by engaging students in practice-related learning, in understanding human lives through direct observation and encounters.

A significant turning point to Han Liang's career was his study in a Master Program in an oversea university. Through this professional exposure, Han Liang is able to acquire a more systematic understanding on social work values and social work intervention methods and tools (the casework, group work and community work practice); in addition to that, In Han Liang's practicum, he was engaged in a comprehensive process of service delivery and theory-practice integration. He worked with disaster survivors in Sichuan who suffered from physical handicap and was mentored by a supervisor under an intensive but dialogical teaching learning communication; Han Liang acquired a 'renewed' understanding on social work values, and, in particular, he learned to see the strengths and resources of his serving targets. To serve is a dynamic and mutual process of 'walking with' instead of 'working for'. Han Liang exuded confidence and was ready to integrate these enriched insights in his teaching,

even though he did not know that a more challenging wave of experiences awaited him.

### Present personal and work life

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Han Liang is at present living with his parents, wife and son in City B. He loves his family. It is a great pleasure to share his romance story as Han Liang used to express and perform the plot in an amusing and humorous way. The couple got married in 2008 and their son was born in 2009. It was a difficult period when Han Liang was fully engaged in post-disaster project duties. Feeling burdened and overloaded by multiple roles, he was physically and mentally exhausted. In fact, he observed that some couples divorced or separated during this critical time due to the unbearable tension and emotional distance that the post-disaster work required of them. Han Liang sensed the warning signals appearing in the marital relationship and he began to allocate more time to the family and respond in a more sensitive way to his family members' needs.

In the school, a more consolidated teaching team is formed with two more colleagues engaged with enthusiasm in the post disaster project activities. Han Liang was assigned as the 'deputy head' of the social work team. He has to shoulder not only the teaching and curriculum development work, but also the crisis of marginalization and extinction of their department. The student registration numbers was unstable in the past years, and were fluctuating from 2009 to 2014 as 93, 56, 124, 14, 26 and 32. School policy declared that if enrollment number is less than 15 for two consecutive years, the social work department will have to be closed down. He was under great stresses facing both the internal and external expectations.

The 2013 earthquake in City B brought new opportunities to their school. As the only social work teaching team in the region, the whole team of teachers and students were engaged in a wide variety of activities. Han Liang led a team of students rooted at two disaster communities and started assessment and intervention work there. In addition to that, they have to partner with government, foundations, local communities and social service organizations in

project implementation. Han Liang became a local professional leader in the disaster social work domain. Currently, he is engaged in the professional specialist consortium. As a member, he will be appointed as assessor and adviser on service proposals and program evaluation. Facing all these overburdened duties and responsibilities, he is exhausted and trapped in self-doubt in some moments.

*“I feel really exhausted...I am too busy and occasionally I will miss my class, then I have to reschedule the class... I have to bring my students out to serve in practicum sites, some are related to school curriculum and some are just disaster project activities...In addition to that, if I wear the label as a person with mission and commitment, then I have to live out through actual performance. I have to respond to others expectation...”*  
(H3:31)

Despite of the above complaints, he is still a committed, energetic and enthusiastic teacher. He considers teaching to be his core mission. On one hand, he is a demanding and critical supervisor while at the same time being a caring, supportive and friendly partner to the students. He often schedules karaoke gatherings after intensive workshops and debates; he sings well and fully mixes with his students. He strives to balance between authority and equality; leadership and partnership.

*“ As a social work teacher, one can never put aside the teaching duties...what I meant by teaching duties are not just imparting knowledge in classes, I mean the actual commitment in education and relationship with students...Besides, I think a social work teacher should never depart from front line engagement...they have to commit in the dual roles as a teacher and a practitioner...A social work teacher should also be an independent mind, he should be a reflective agent who commit in conscious action, he should be an advocator, that is, to commit in action leading to constructive changes.”* (H3:35)

*Participation in professional practice*

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In Han Liang's record, he showed me that he has participated in over fifteen project activities in the disaster social work domain from 2008-2014. These activities related mainly to disaster psychological relief, children and family clinical work in disaster communities and post-disaster community development. The project period ranged from several months to several years. At present, he still has to coordinate five projects. Among all these project activities, he participated in direct practice as a teacher-supervisor, a practitioner, a researcher or a coordinator. He played mainly an assistant role to help the chief coordinator or leader to execute the on-site plan. Take for an example, in a disaster community, he has spent over two years there as local supervisor and assistant to an oversea social work teacher. They established a social work station, employed a team of social worker to develop and to deliver professional services in school and community. In his working institution, he stood side by side of the team leader, Lu Qin, to support the direction and to actualize the plan he initiated. In fact, he possessed a lot of positive qualities as an executive, such as faithfulness, inclusive, efficiency; accuracy, committed and steadfast. He is the "hand", following the direction of the "head", playing a functional role of making wistful ideas come true. He reviewed his role after a session of training where he was touched and inspired by the message related to self-understanding and life encounters.

***"Who am I? What social image should I present? What are my strengths and weaknesses; how should I manage my emotion? I found myself engaged mainly in professional and instructional tasks before, I focused only on methods such as casework, group work and community work, but I seldom understand my target population and myself as a 'human'."***

**(H6:6)**

Social work as a 'bottom-up' strategy to bring about constructive changes

Unlike other novice teachers who are not professionally trained, Han Liang bears a higher expectation on himself; he entered into continual reflection and revision of his understanding on social work. The enriched experiences brought him puzzles instead of clarified direction.

***“After these long years of commitment in post-disaster professional activities, I feel confused, doubtful and began to question about the core mission of the profession. What is the meaning of my engagement? What is professional intervention? Is it just running activities? ....” (H6:4)***

Han Liang's understanding of his role and of the profession entered him into another phase of doubt and confusion. He began to admit that the knowledge and practice experiences he acquired in his studies, and the support offered by his teachers, supervisor and colleagues failed to ensure a stable and clear direction. No one can claim to be an expert in the domain of disaster social work; all parties have to redefine their roles and keep exploring in an uncertain professional journey. As he reflected more deeply, he identified more difficulties and perplexities in the internal and external environment.

The first issue was that he saw the negative effect of the over-rapid expansion of social work service. In response to the immerse injection of resources from government and foundation in post-disaster projects, many grass root NGOs lost their focal direction, they follow only the funding policy and expectation of the donors. They were trapped in a cycle of bidding for new funding, recruiting new staff, bidding for more funding and, therefore keep recruiting new members in order to sustain the team.

Secondly, he recognized that social workers become only the tool of project implementation; they have to fulfill the tasks listed in the project agreement instead of conducting valid assessments and to respond to real needs of the

target.

*“ ...they have to balance the expectation of different stakeholders, thus, they lost their independence. Without the independent judgement, they will never be able to develop a sense of criticality (抗争)and to fight for their own right<sup>28</sup>.” (H3:25)*

Han Liang does not favor this ‘mainstream’ development of the social work profession. He prefers to position the profession in a marginalized role.

*“I define social work as a set of intervention methods that led to social action and change. It should be a bottom up movement.” (H3:9)*

*“...Social work profession should keep itself in a marginalized position; it is an improper choice to locate it as central and mainstream of the professional culture.” (H3:17)*

#### Social work education: Ideal and Reality

Returning back to Han Liang’s role as a social work teacher, he found ways to reduce the discrepancies in actualizing his ideology. His classroom teaching and supervision become more substantial and enlightening. He clearly indicated that ‘practice’ is the core element in the professional curriculum. He enriched his teaching with an abundance of case illustrations and his practice recollections. Above all, he was able to make sensible connections and integrations, and thus his presentations project vitality and meaning.

The gap still appeared when he tried to consolidate the core values and direction of the profession and to address the real perplexities in the professional environment. The core values, as expressed by Han Liang, is concerned with showing real acceptance and empathy to the deprived group and the direction is

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<sup>28</sup> Han Liang used the word (抗争) “rivalry” in the original expression. He did not mean the social workers have to take any aggressive and revolting action but he referred ‘fighting or rivalry’ as a process of awakening and the development of a critically reflective mind before they can make sensible choice.

to empower them to identify their own strengths and resources while making changes together with them. But in reality, they perform in an different direction.

***“...we have delivered idealistic message in the school...(but) in real working environment..., they have to deal with complicated and collusive relationship...theories in books are deceptive(假的)...” (H3:15)***

Furthermore, he perceived that social workers are short of awareness to this ‘deceptive’ situation. They accommodated to the unfavorable environment by adopting a passive and receptive attitude and they become part of the deceptive reality.

***“In reality, they (social workers) belong to the lowest rank (底层) in the society, when they uphold high values and claim that they are offering support to others, they do not possess the critical mind in facing their own problem, that is why I consider that the mission is unreal..(假的)” (H3:24)***

Having alerted the gap and the deceptive reality, Han Liang wishes to find a way out, he sees the importance of a dynamic and organic process of reflection and commitment. One should learn to review and reflect spontaneous in the practice process. He names such a practitioner as a ‘change agent who possesses a sense of criticality’ (思想的行动者).

### *Alignment*

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#### *From an ‘agent’ to ‘a change agent who possesses a sense of criticality’*

To understand Han Liang’s conception of a ‘change agent who possesses a sense of criticality’ (思想的行动者) and how does it differ from a person who perform just as a *practitioner*, I have engaged in several sessions of his supervision class and observed his interaction with his students. I derived the

following understanding. One of the teaching strategies Han Liang employed was to raise questions and challenge students' pre-conception instead of giving simple answers or only providing positive feedback. Han Liang recognized that his students were not always positive, and they sought model answers and instructions instead of deeper inquiry. There are strong barriers and resistance in adopting these teaching means.

### The barriers

As a practitioner and executive himself, Han Liang understood well the limitations of the 'practitioner's mindset', it is a mode of thinking that confines the agent only to details and outcomes of procedures. One will be trapped by the parts but lose the vision on the whole. Without the holistic perspective and sensitivity to the dynamics of all variables, one may easily get lost and confused. Han Liang observed that a lot of front-line social workers failed to address the 'goals and objectives' of the program activities, they just followed a structured activity format and they are likely to experience difficulties because they could not find meaning and direction in their commitment.

*"I wish to train my students to adopt a more comprehensive and holistic way of perception, this mode of thinking is useful to guide them to understand more of the choice of their action and the objectives behind."*  
(H4:10)

He saw the barriers originated from an established habit of mind which was a deep-rooted thinking pattern. In the teaching and learning culture, students will not question the authorities of their teachers and they chose to follow instead of to challenge.

*"The students are molded by the society, by their experiences in daily lives and educational process...they tend to be passive and receptive."*(H4:7)

### Motivational forces



*“It is possible for people to adopt new mode of thinking, I think the triggering point should be a disorienting dilemma that out of his control...”*  
(H4:36)

Han Liang himself experienced these dilemmas and turning points in his own learning history. In the past six years, he worked closely with a number of teachers and partners. Among these different co-working relationships, Han Liang has learned to adapt to the different styles and dynamics of interaction which resulted in both pleasant and unpleasant, nurturing and hurting experiences. Han Liang began to distinguish what are positive and constructive partnerships and he discovered also his core self and deeper needs related to these choices.

#### Bottom up model of learning and practice

Han Liang tried to categorize the mode of collaboration into two as “top-down” and “bottom-up” models. These two models applied also in teaching and learning relationships and in practice paradigms. He favored a ‘bottom-up’ mode of collaboration as his co-partners demonstrated respect and humility in working relationships and they are ready to walk along and work with instead of just offering expertise advice. They are real change agent in the eyes of Han Liang.

*“ I can see them as change agents(行动者)...He(one of the co-partner) came and engaged in simple and concrete task, he recognized the dirty environment of the work station and he just started cleansing the place..”*  
(H4:2)

*“She (another teacher) is not just imparting knowledge; she is a life example and she tried to make changes on our lives.... They (these teachers and partners) brought me stimulation and inspiration through these interactions...I begin to see the possibility of knowledge construction from a bottom up direction.”* (H4:3)

The above two partners as mentioned by Han Liang belong to a professional learning community. They have long years of practices in rural villages and they adopt an anthropological and sociological perspective in developing their work strategies. They strongly encouraged a bottom up model by settling in the village, staying with peasant families and immersing in their environment. They act as facilitators and observers and they do not rely on traditional social work practice service models such as casework and group work intervention. By identifying valid needs and resources of the rural targets, they made every effort to analyze the situation to bring forth new perceptions and mobilize community participation with historical, anthropological and critical insights. Combining the macro view and the relational approach, they have successfully established rural community development models. They move to a direction of building a practice learning platform and nurture social work teachers who revealed interest in this domain. They referred to this development as an action-learning and action research cycle of practice and knowledge construction.

#### Self-discovery

Through these learning contacts, Han Liang identified himself with this group of teachers and practitioners. He developed a sense of belongingness for two reasons, one related to his appreciation on their knowledge construction model, and the other related to his sense of being.

*“ I enjoy working with ‘change agents’(行动者), not the conductor or expertise,...it related to my understanding on knowledge construction, I love knowledge that is vivid, affectionate , lively and related to human needs. I find myself less receptive to abstract, generative and distant propositional content.” (H4:2)*

He identified himself with the lowest rank in the society, and began to develop a sense of confidence in seeing the success model of his new partners. He believes in the strength and resources of this ‘marginalized’ group.

*“..May be I am one of them in this marginalized group. I see that many*

*change agents belong to this group... The mainstream refer to dominating voices in academic field and government sector, the marginalized group represent another voice that comes from the change agent..." (H4:15)*

It is possible for this marginalized group to produce another voice because of Han Liang's sense of being. He perceived this from two points of view. One originated from his own background, he recalled himself playing the role as soldier, the lowest rank in a battle, where he named himself as 'phoenix man' that suggested similar understanding on the negative self-perception and low self-esteem of this group of people. Although he has made changes and gained better life conditions in the cities, he considered that his peers in the villages have little chance to break through. All these inequalities are caused by unfair rules and cultural norms, and are related to the societal structure, not just personal motivation or capabilities. Han Liang believes in the possibility that if the "lowest rank" is able to develop a sense of criticality, they can present a different collective voice to expose the other side of reality of this society.

To position himself as a change agent, he can fully make use of the background understanding and awareness as well as the new initiation and resources to induce changes. In order to invite Han Liang to illustrate more on the concept of 'change agent', he was asked to differentiate between a 'thinker' and a 'change agent'. Han Liang pointed out that 'change' should be considered as the core and significant element in the both thinking and acting processes.

*"... a change agent is one who possesses a sense of criticality.... the core element should be 'change'. Changes can either be brought about by action or by critical awareness; whether the agent consider himself as a thinker or an activist, he is a 'change agent' if he aims at bringing about constructive changes." (H4:22)*

*"...he should be strategic, knowing how to employ different tactics to facilitate the change process, either using advocating or allying means" (H4:23)*

In the past seven years, Han Liang engaged in post-disaster activities as a practitioner and a social work teacher. Moving from just a committed and enthusiastic teacher to a reflective practice teacher with deepened understanding on the mission of the profession, he considered that social workers should be engaged in practice and action that lead to constructive changes. As a social work teacher, he understands well that his role is not just imparting substantive knowledge but to nurture his students with a heart to understand lives and a critical mind to perceive the reality. In the following Diagram 20, Han Liang's transformational changes is summarized and illustrated in critical events identified in his learning path. As a reflective social work teacher, he has to take on multiple roles other than just classroom teaching. He has to engage himself in direct practice, in theoretical dialogue and exchanges, in professional activities that aim at facilitating the social service development, and in research and documentation work in order to consolidate the knowledge construction.

These changes were brought about through experiential and reflective means. Han Liang gained insight from direct practice and modelling after professional partners. Knowledge building is thus an experiential and relationship mediated process. Several important concepts triggered his deeper reflection and awareness. This included 'the lowest rank' or the 'oppressed group'; a sense of criticality and making change; and 'bottom-up' knowledge construction and practice paradigm. He consolidated these understandings by creating an image of 'change agent' who possesses a 'sense of criticality'. This concept has become his learning focus and a teaching strategy. This new direction reflected also an insight of self-awareness and a future anticipation on personal growth and societal reformative changes. The understanding is embedded with professional values for seeking justice and human dignity. This new imagination on service development and social work education is reinforced and nurtured by an on-going practice-learning and negotiation process with his professional partners, and is also supported by his decision of turning away from expertise advice and 'top-down' professional strategies. He stated clearly that in facing the external environmental perplexities and human cognitive barriers, it is

important to nurture the sense of criticality and to commit to a sensible choice of action.

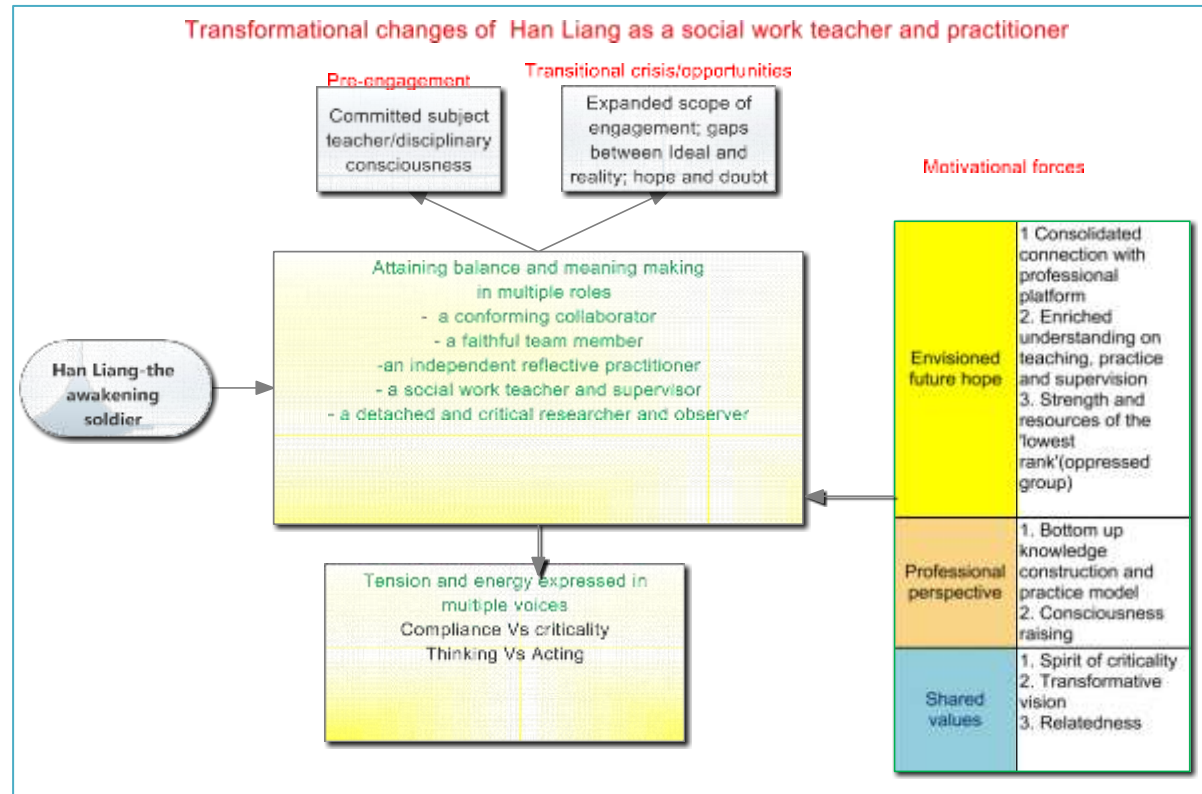


Diagram 20: Transformational changes of Han Liang as a social work teacher and practitioner

### *Professional partners and network*

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For future development, Han Liang has demonstrated a successful case of building close connections and partnerships with professional associations and learning platforms. Diagram 21 shows these platforms in different layers of relationship. They offer professional resources in terms of practice wisdom and opportunities for future collaboration. In Han Liang's eyes, they belong to the 'marginalized' voice that represented the lower rank and oppressed group, they developed other modes of intervention and aimed at making changes at the fundamental level of the society. Han Liang associated with this group of practitioner-scholars and by following their steps and constructing his own practice understanding, he will get more support and reassurance to integrate his personal values with the professional values and actions. Despite of Han Liang's achievement in the professional society, he may have to pay more attention to work with the government or the 'higher level' sectors in society. This should be an on-going tension and is a dynamic choice of how to remain autonomous as a 'marginalized voice' and to exert influences and impact to create constructive changes.

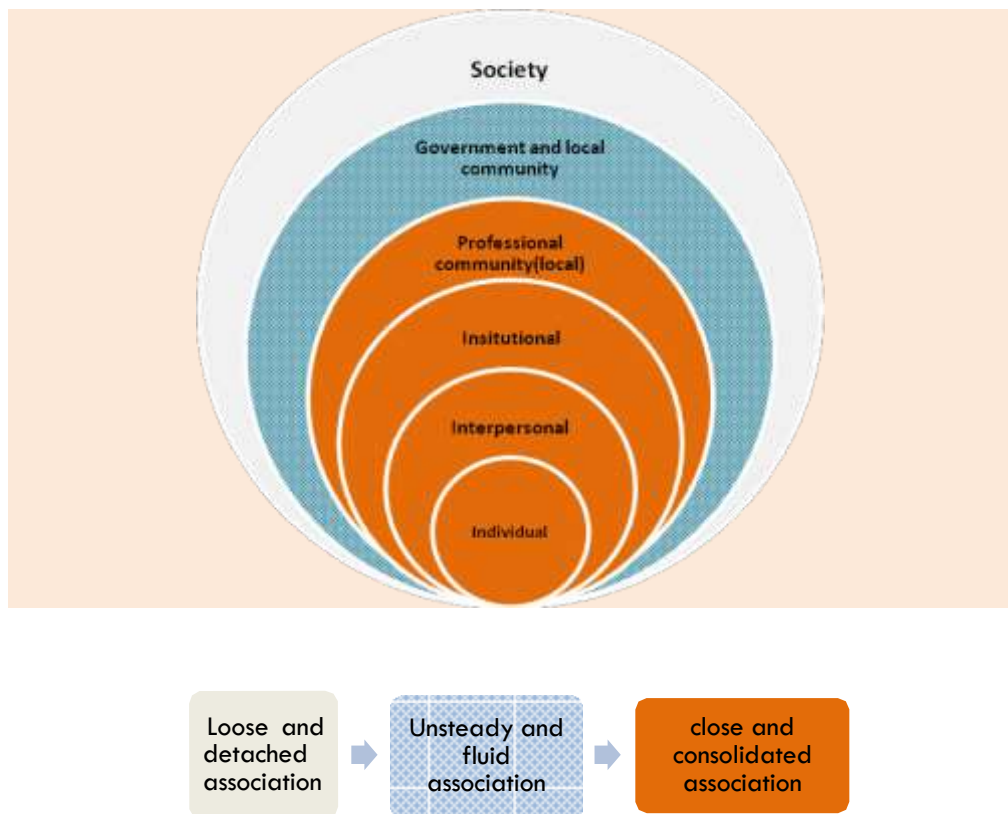


Diagram 21: Han Liang's professional partners and network

*Multi voices in the storied self*

Han Liang has to be aware of cognitive patterns and barriers that exist among his students and himself . The ‘soldier being’ as part of his historical and cultural self who adopts a compliant and passive attitude under authority. This part still exerts significant influences in the cognitve process. The practitioner or the executive mind set is still at work in some of his roles. The awakening process requires a full embrace of this seemingly contradicting but complementary part of himself. Both compliance and criticality; thinking and acting are two sides of his whole being. Nurturing both sides to ensure a balance is important while he learns to play the roles as team member; as practice supervisor; as researcher; as advocator and as partner of government and social service agencies.



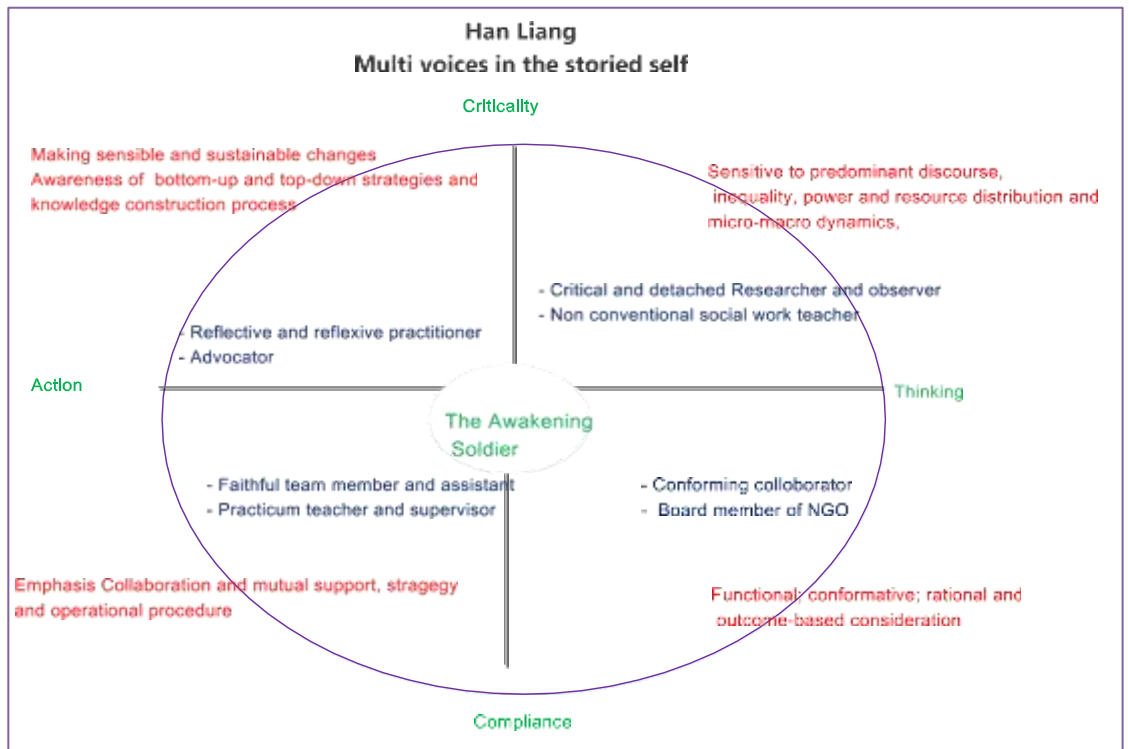


Diagram 22: Han Liang-Multi voices in the storied self

## The Story of Lu Qin(路勤): The “Old” Warrior with a Beginner’s Mind(“懷揣初心的”老”将)

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### Background Information

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I name Lu Qin as ‘old’ warrior not because his age, as he is only thirty-three years old. The name is given to recognize the long and struggling battle he has engaged in during the past years. Currently he is the department head of the social work teaching team in the ZU University. By reviewing his experiences in the past six years, we found that he moved really fast in the professional path. As an urban resident, he was sent to establish a social work station in a disaster impacted rural community, village P, for four years since 2008, the village was attacked by an unexpected landslide in August 13, 2010<sup>29</sup> and their consolidated effort was dissolved gradually. After that, he has to carry a bigger responsibility of implementing a government project in City B after the 2013 4.20 earthquake. Moving from a classroom teacher to a professional leader and administrator, he becomes a sophisticated person who has to be responsible for numerous diversified roles as broker, advocator, coordinator and spokesman. To play these roles on the stage, he has to be adaptive and tactical. Lu Qin’s experiences were reviewed to comprehend how he was able to maintain a pure professional mind among these diversities. He recaptured his ‘beginner’s mind’ in his story. ‘Beginner’s mind’ refers to a fresh, ignorant and innocent conditions like a child, due to the lack of experience; one is free from established opinion and prejudices but returns to an unconditional and creative type of mind. Lu Qin repeatedly recalled the practice experience in village P as his first love. He learnt to be a social work teacher and a rural practitioner there. It was a journey full of imagination, creativity and originality.

The data sources of the story include my own observation, formal and informal sharing, autobiographical writing, past reflective notes written by Lu Qin, and

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<sup>29</sup> 8.13 Event: Due to heavy rain and unstable weather condition, an unexpected landslide happened in 2010 August 13 in Sichuan and affected many mountainous areas. P village was one of the places badly struck. The social work station and most part of the village was deluded and washed out. Lu Qin’s team has been there and experienced the disaster personally.

lastly, transcriptions of two intensive interviews. The story is organized in the following sections:

1. Childhood experience and academic background
2. Performing the role as a social work teacher
3. Present personal and work life
4. Post 5.12 and 4.20 experience : Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes
5. Actuality and Potentiality

The quotations in the story are drawn from these sources:

Code	Content of the sources	Date of completion
L1	Reflective note on practicum learning in P village	2009 September 01 by Lu Qin
L2	Consent form and chronological review of his engagement	2015 January by Lu Qin
L3	Transcription on individual interview I	2015 January 19 by researcher
L4	Transcription on individual interview II	2015 November 29 by researcher
L5	Autobiographical exercise	2008 November by Lu Qin
L6	Project proposal	2013 by Lu Qin

### Childhood experience and academic background

Lu Qin's origin is SZ province. He is an urban settler, brought up and nurtured by a cross-generation family, who provided him with much attention and care. His great grandfather was a military general who fought in civil wars while his grandfather was an educated university graduate. They were two respectful role models to Lu Qin and their legendary and heroic adventures brought him fascination and captivating memories. However, the identity of his grandfather as an educated person did not provide him with prestige, but instead with a life full of frustration and political persecution. The suffering of his grandfather made him aware that if a man risks confronting a changing political environment, then he will face both restless struggles and danger.

Lu Qin is a smart person who possesses a strategic mindset; he is organized, sober-minded, expressive and highly productive. He may have inherited the soldierly manners and spirit of his ancestors, however, according to his description; he does not want to be in the spotlight.

*“...my philosophy is ‘to be the second’, I adopted this attitude since I was in primary school...for it is the most safe position, My eyes chased the ‘No 1’, and then I can create a self-space for further improvement ...this is my character trait when I was young. I would rather be an observer, instead of a participant.” (L4:6)*

Lu Qin graduated from a renowned university in Mainland China, majored in ‘social security’ but not social work and, thus he considered the first two years’ teaching not up to standard. He reclaimed a positive sense of identity when he succeeded to enroll in an overseas Master of Social Work Program. He acquired the opportunity to receive a systematic training of the profession. In addition to that, he participated in two practicums where he learnt how to integrate theories and practice. More important, he has developed a real interest and commitment in the profession. With an unexpected outgrowing of opportunities and resources for professional development in Sichuan, particularly in City B after the 2013 earthquake, Lu Qin was accountable for a leader’s role and began to distant himself from teaching activities. At times he felt fatigued while engaging in these overloaded responsibilities and diplomatic relationships, he complained also that no one really understand him and it is difficult to identify close partners in the process. By engaging in this study, he recollected memories of eleven years’ teaching experiences; he returned to the shocking moment of landslide in 2010. He shared with researcher the post-traumatic stress symptoms he has experienced, his understanding on death and also, his aspiration and anticipation of the future.

## Performing the role as a social work teacher

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Lu Qin started his teaching career in 2004, and he quoted five Chinese ancient poems to illustrate the dynamics of teaching environment and his changing emotions of happiness, anger, grief, joy and desire. As a teacher, he enjoyed the early years of teaching, for he was passionate, devoted, and rewarded by the dynamic learning communication with his students. He recalled the high-spirit he felt in classes after his return from the oversea study.

***“...How to impress your students with appealing teaching content? The only way is you have to be touched by the teaching material first. You should teach what you believed, moved and stirred... this is the happiest period in my teaching life.” (L5:1)***

He became the youngest department head in 2009. Only three colleagues of the team came from the social work discipline, and he has to face the risk of discontinuation of the program due to the fluctuating and reducing registration student numbers. He began to become aware also of the unfairness in the managerial system and dark side of the dehumanizing bureaucracy. He felt there was not a way to escape, so had to learn to accommodate in order to survive. These experiences were shared also by other university teachers in other institutions. The act of teaching is no longer appreciated and recognized; teachers have to shift their roles in seeking research funding and fulfilling a publication quota. Many teachers suffered and failed to survive in such a reality. Lu Qin, though heavily burdened by these dynamics, has successfully engaged in several research projects and gained a considerable amount of prestige for his promotion and recognition. In addition to that, in 2008 he started to engage in post disaster project activities; the disaster social work domain is a much wider horizon outside the institution that provide an alternative environment to nurture him as a social work teacher.

## Present personal and work life

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Lu Qin is presently settled in City B with his own family. He is responsible for subjects including “Theories of Social Security”; “Community Work”; Rural Social Work”; “Social Research Method” and “Disaster Social Work”. Though he is the department head and professional leader of the team, he paid much less attention in curriculum building and direct teaching after 2013. He shifted mainly to administrative and coordinating roles as the ZU University committed in a government post disaster scheme in City B. They undertake the role to train up 1,500 social workers in two years’ time in order to facilitate the social service establishment. The scheme is proposed as a government policy initiative to encourage the participation of local stakeholders in post disaster rehabilitation work. It seems to be good news for there are resources allocated from central particularly for social service development and social work training.

Nevertheless, Lu Qin named it only as a campaign to eliminate professional illiteracy, it is difficult to ensure high quality in these trainings and more difficult to sustain the commitment and development of the trainees. He has to sacrifice the most core elements of the profession such as comprehensive teaching on theory-practice integration and after all, he has to sacrifice also his own commitment in teaching.

***“Since 2013, I have shifted to administrative and coordinating duties, I abandoned the teaching role already...I missed the early passion in classes, but what trigger me most is, I found myself began to accommodate well in these new roles and identities...” (L3:36)***

In fact, Lu Qin has tried his best to perform well in different roles; he has established a sense of belongingness in the ZU University, he expressed that for most Chinese people, ‘belongingness’ (安心) is crucial because it is a secure sense to stabilize one’s heart and mind.

***“Deep inside my mind, I have never considered quitting my job, even in moments of difficulties, helplessness and despair. This is my first job, may***

*not be the last, I built this platform by my own effort, I built it with blood and sweat, it may not be flawless and perfect but I settled here with comfort and peace.(安慰与依托)” (L5:3)*

## Post 5.12 and 4.20 experiences : Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes

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### *Engagement*

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Lu Qin set up a social work station in a disaster impacted rural community in village P from 2008-2011. The village is situated on the mountain where residents were mainly miners before the earthquake. The disaster ruined their home and destroyed the landscape, and they could no longer adopt the original means of livelihood. Being an urban dweller, Lu Qin claimed that he could not even differentiate the food crops and he does not have any knowledge on rural living. He then worked with his team and brought also students from the ZU University to join the project there. He served as local supervisor and practitioner, though the team was led by a group of overseas social work teachers, they have to start from scratch, without any models to follow, they have to ‘un-learn’ the traditional professional methods and ‘re-learn’ new concepts and skills from the villagers. Furthermore, they have to tackle a lot of difficulties like inconsistent disaster policies and strategies adopted by local governments, mobile and unstable social grouping, unfavorable physical environment. Only by returning to core beliefs and ideologies of the profession, were they able to persist in supporting the village to rebuild and rehabilitate. Keeping the focus on asset and capacity building, they initiated several projects to work with the residents, including the light steel housing rebuild scheme; piggery business scheme... where social workers’ roles shifted to be an incubator; business partner; and fundraiser.

*“ We developed progressively several projects (in village P) including the capacity-based steel house scheme; the piggery business and eco-tourist*

*scheme for improving livelihood; the oral history project for cultural reconstruction; the community art and culture program organization as a service scheme...our work played a role in community asset rebuild and rehabilitation.” (L6:1)*

These are their commitment and investment; they established these work step by step through an action cycle of continual engagement and critical reflection.

They learnt to integrate the principles and theoretical framework of asset-building in the indigenous practices.

*“...I engage also in direct practices such as conducting group sessions, I shared with my social work team the knowledge and skill I have absorbed in XX University ( the oversea institute), we are so close that we eat and sleep together...” (L3:20)*

This is how he developed the professional sensibility in rural social work. It is originated from the “comradely fellowship” (同生共長) among the team members and between the team and the rural residents. Lu Qin named his team members as ‘brother eldest’ (老大) and ‘brother second’(老二). The whole team seemed to be his younger brothers and sisters, and they named him ‘brother Lu’ (路哥) since they considered him as the big brother and leader of the team. He was fully nurtured by a mutually supportive, a united and collaborative way of learning and serving. He considered that the comradely fellowship can also be nurtured and extended to the serving relationships, that is, the relationship between the project team and the village residents. The success in inclusion would lead to more promising professional outcomes.

*“ To ensure a positive outcome of an disaster social work project...I consider “comradely fellowship”(同生共長的關係) is the pivot point...” (L3:30)*

In view of that, Lu Qin considered “comradely fellowship” a real experience that



developed among his team members and between the team members and the

local residents. He considered also that the failure of the project in village P was caused mainly by the progressive withdrawal action of the team after the 8.13 landslide. Due to unfavorable physical environment and fearful emotions, most of their work had to be suspended after the event. Some of the workers resigned and left and the replaced workers, though have tried their best to work on the program activities, the outcome was dissatisfactory due to lacking a sound and substantial connection between the workers and the residents. “Comradely fellowship” is the core motivational forces among a team and in professional practice.

### *Imagination*

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Lu Qin entered a journey of professional imagination and reflection in his direct practices in village P. He began to reflect on topics like: What is disaster social work? What is asset-based professional practice? What is professional practice education? What is action research and action learning? He listed out these topics in one of his reflective exercises. Although we did not go deep into these topics in the interviews, listening to his story and observing what he did in his daily practice, one can find that he has consolidated a set of core professional beliefs and operational principles. This tacit knowing may have evolved from the critical experiences in disaster project engagement particularly the 8.13 events. These experiences in the dark hours forged and shaped him into a compassionate and empathetic person. He is able to go beyond the surface and to exercise both an inquiring mind and soft heart in his current professional representation.

#### **A moment of death encounter**

*“...I think the impact of 813 is beyond professional practice, it shaped my life, cognitive structure and something related to personal growth...”*  
(L3:17)

The 8.13 landslide in village P led to the gradual suspension of the project activities and it became Lu Qin’s biggest regret in these years. Despite this, he

considered that the event brought him positive changes. The impact of 8.13 is related to his awareness and understanding of men's vulnerability and transiency of life. Lu Qin shared with me the experiences of 8.13 in a non-stop one and a half hour monologue; his expression was so precise and vigorous. He was able to describe a scene with detailed descriptions of the physical settings and inner movements of individual emotions and responses, dynamic of choices and human interactions. Due to language barrier and his speedy narration, much attentiveness was needed in order to accurately follow him. Then, there came one scenario where a moment of stillness was experienced. It was the time when he mentioned about a 'death experience', a moment when he suspected that his students, together with several teachers from the XX overseas university were buried under the flooded mudslides.

*“I was collapsed...I just sat there and smoked ...I can hear the voice of the police calling ‘is there anybody?’...what should I do? I lost four students, how should I report back? I may have to resign...All are over, the people, the project...the one hour's time was so long and so cold...” (L3:36)*

Lu Qin's team members were lucky enough to have evacuated before the landslide came, so all of them are alive and safe. This shocking experience was a close encounter between Lu Qin and death. After that, he gained a stable and unruffled mind even before large scale challenges and crisis. Nevertheless, he expressed that what hurt him most and brought him the biggest regret was the gradual suspension of their project work.

*“Our project was officially launched in 2009, we have a lot of anticipation, imagination, ideas for exploration and implementation, but after August 13,2010 we have to slow down the activities...we found that we have just repeated the old practices, no more new initiative, it was due to 8.13, the event destroyed everything, it broke our hearts (摧毀人心).” (L3:37)*

### **Hidden grief and fear**

Although the event of 813 was a moment of near death for Lu Qin, he has been engaged in high risk activities since 2008, and the “comradely fellowship”

enabled them to witness the strength and resilience of disaster survivors; but at the same time, they were submerged in intense grief and sorrow of the population without escape. Lu Qin identified that he suffered from PTSD<sup>30</sup> in a psychological test during the ‘peak period’ of disaster relief. The symptoms demonstrated included sleeping disturbances, high anxiety, and over-reactive responses to environmental changes.

*“...up till now, I will be threatened if someone next to me shakes his leg ... I just want to flight and run...” (L3:11)*

He recalled another incident that happened in 2011 which was triggered while on his way home by a movie broadcast on the bus.

*“In 2011, I was on my way home, with my wife...the movie televised on the bus was “Earthquake in Tangshan(唐山大地震)”, I began to cry once broadcast, then cried loudly and howled...not weeping, but howling for the two hours’ journey, all the passengers might have considered me a mad man, then, I felt much released after the crying.” (L3:12)*

The crying was a self-healing act that enabled Lu Qin to recover from the physical symptoms, but the grief and fear he has experienced will become a permanent part of his emotional being.

*“It is a traumatic reaction...I find that I could not manage related services after the 2013 earthquake...I refused to intake cases of death and bereavement...not even disability... I just transferred out these cases...I cannot handle my emotional reaction, not to mention their intense emotions, I am unable to offer counseling or concrete assistance...” (L4:24)*

### **Understanding life in death experiences**

Lu Qin was married in 2011 and his child was born in 2013. After these life changing events took place, he began to develop a different attitude and

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<sup>30</sup> PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) is defined as an anxiety disorder that may develop after exposure to a terrifying event such as natural or unnatural disasters, accidents, or military

combat.

perception towards life and death. He treasured his own life more, and he considered his family members' need to be a priority. He transitioned from the passionate young social work teacher to a mature and rational family man. He recalled how his mother was shocked by a visit to village P after a long travel in the muddy and dangerous mountain route to Lu Qin's work station. She was deeply intimidated and she could not accept Lu Qin's commitment. She exclaimed that it must be a big punishment due to his dreadful sins in his past lives (前世造孽). At the time, Lu Qin failed to understand his mother's sadness and worries; he considered that it was a heroic act to station in disaster areas.

***“...it looks so' cool 'to commit in dangerous tasks, I considered that as one of social workers' attribute to render service where there are needy people, no matter how dangerous and risky...at that time, I would not hesitate to commit, but now I may not ...” (L4:22)***

What he considered now are the concerns of his family members, he would imagine how his wife grieved or how his daughter suffered if they lost him. He contained a vulnerable and soft heart and he became more sensitive to human emotions and relationships.

### *Alignment*

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#### **To represent himself with a beginner's mind**

Returning back to his daily duties, Lu Qin is active in the 'professional community' in City B and Sichuan. He perceived himself as a middle-aged poet listening to the falling rain in a traveler's boat, who experienced the world as a "wide river and low sky"(江闊雲低)<sup>31</sup> which meant in occasions he found himself lost in the diversities and complexities of reality.

***“ In most of the time, I feel tired... really exhausted, physically and***

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<sup>31</sup> The poem 'Listening to the Rain'(听雨) was written by the poet Jiang Jie 蒋捷 in Song Dynasty. The poet captured three moments when he listened to the rain in young age, in middle age and in old age. It was his life story in a metaphorical text form.

*mentally. I committed and I accomplished...but where is the destiny. I love this poem for the poet did not express any anger or retreating attitude. He just contemplated and comprehended in a serene and peaceful mood; and he still chose to commit and adhere (to his core beliefs)...yes, to adhere, without blaming the world and worrying about the outcome, just to commit in some meaningful tasks.” (L5:4 )*

What guided him in the professional path resembles a childlike beginner’s mind that he has acquired through early practice experiences in the disaster area.

*” How can social workers acquire the professional sensibility?(感受力)...according to my understanding, if one can be placed in a rural village, not necessary a long period, less than one year is enough. Just to commit in practice with passion and creativity and you will be rewarded by the positive outcome, then, I am sure the ardor and compelling passion on rural social work will be implanted, even though it is a tough and painful process...” (L3:45)*

The professional sensibility guided him in two areas, both the professional arena and his own team building. In the professional arena, being in advocating and coordinator roles in City B, Lu Qin has to face and work with a diversified and complicated “charity community”. The community is composed of a variety of stakeholders who held different expectations, and some of them may consider the development of social service just as business and profit-making opportunities. It is a challenge to balance and satisfy the differing interests while maintaining positive and constructive progresses. Lu Qin began to loosen the perception on professional boundary. He realized that social work is only a part, and not the whole in the process of social service development. He learnt to respect other partners such as the grass-root NGOs who shared similar ideologies and who demonstrated more mature and indigenous work models.

On the other hand, he treasured the team work in the ZU University, though it is different from the “Comradely fellowship” he experienced in the village P. Lu Qin understands that the friendship and communion of the team is the strongest

supporter to him. From his expression, he is able to respect and recognize the uniqueness of each of his team members, including their strengths and weaknesses. He expected his team members to shoulder their roles independently. Their department has established a NGO in Sichuan and they are eligible to bid funding and implement government projects. To strive for a balance of collegiality and idiosyncrasy seems to be a crucial management objective and direction in the future

### Actuality and Potentiality

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Tracing the eleven years' teaching experiences of Lu Qin, it is a surprise and marvel to see how the external and environmental factors shaped a person's identity and abilities; moving from a subject teacher to a passionate practitioner then to an adaptive and tactical administrator and coordinator. It is necessary to look at the motivational forces and core beliefs that keep him moving with integrity. In his story, it is noticed that disaster and crisis are triggered events that brought about transformational and transcendence development and changes. Lu Qin's compassion, persistence and vision are nurtured by professional practices and reflection and the collegiality he experienced. All these exposures widen his scope of professional anticipation but reminded him the core duties of a social work teacher as;

***“It is just by chance (機緣巧合) that I have to engage in all these administrative work. My understanding on the role of social workers, or social work teachers is: they should be engaged in direct practice, and they should develop their own conception on the profession.” (L3:39)***

Although he cannot engage in direct practice at the present stage, he supports his colleagues to develop the practice curriculum and he joins a rural social work learning community to refresh and update his learning. He also envisions that his participation and investment in the administrative and coordination work will bring a more positive future to the profession. He gave himself five years' time to make the above accomplishment. This is a major source of motivational force that supported him to endure the difficulties he faced. The following Diagram 23



summarized his changes in the past six years and listed the multiple roles he has to shoulder. Tension existed in balancing the core inner values and outer expectation.

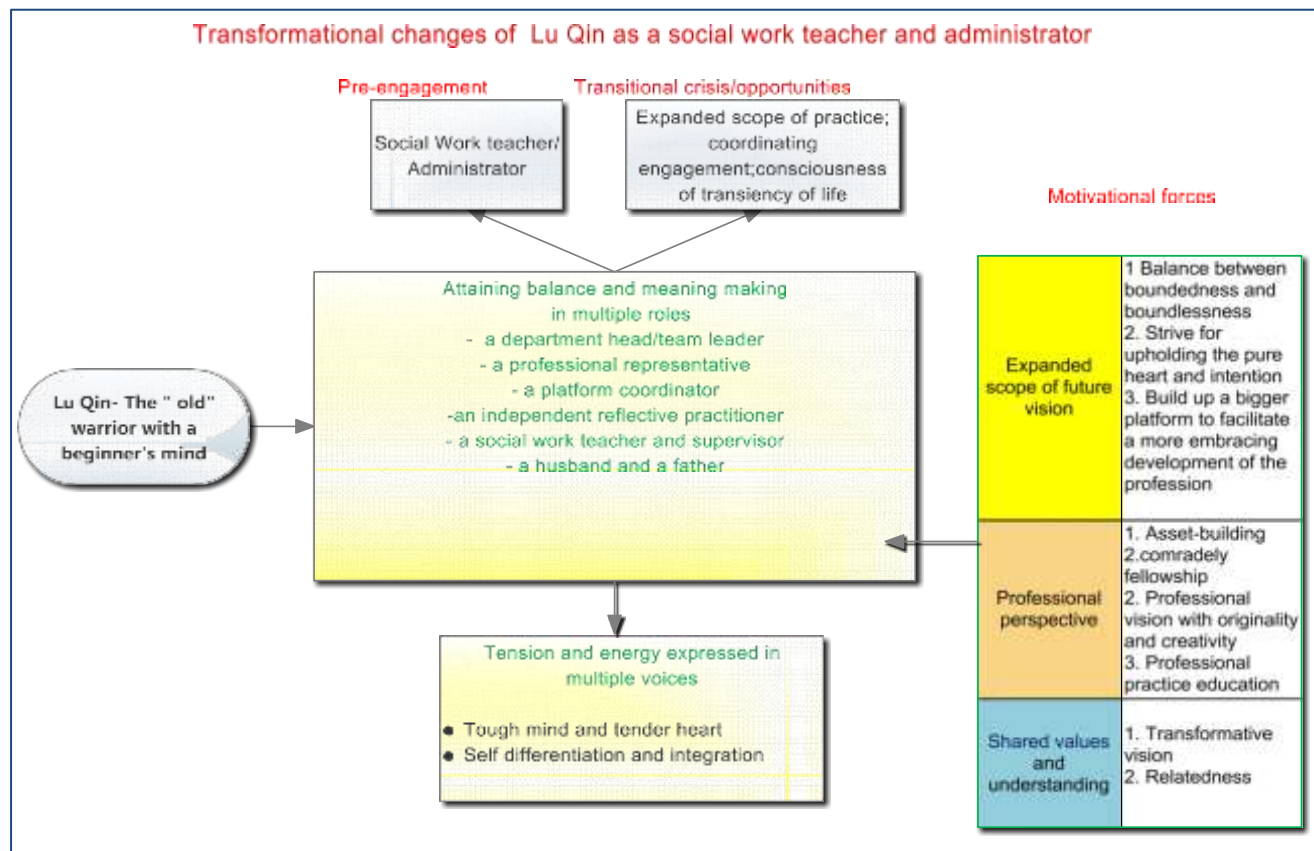


Diagram 23: Transformational changes of Lu Qin as a social work teacher and administrator

*Professional partnership and network*

Among all the respondents, Lu Qin is able to build connection and establish a positive partnership with stakeholders both within and outside the institution. In Diagram 24, we can see he has been an active member in institution and in professional community. He plays a significant role to follow and influence the local community and government and in return, he gains support and resources to nurture the profession.

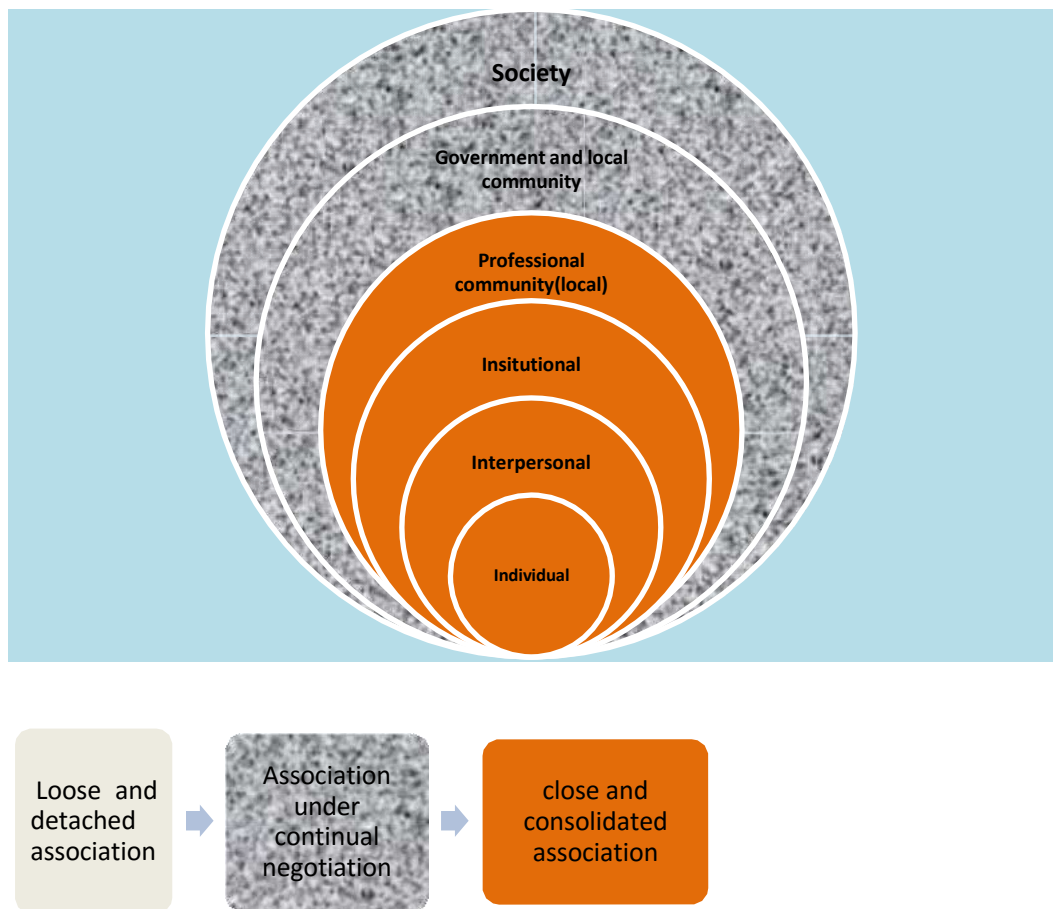


Diagram 24: Lu Qin's professional partners and network

Being a professional leader both in the workplace and in outside platforms, Lu Qin demonstrated his leadership qualities. He acquired a strong sense of purpose and direction, able to make sensible and rational judgments. To exercise his roles as a ‘good leader’, complementary attributes are expected to be developed. Two pairs of polarities were identified in his role performing process. By reading the poems he chose and by sharing his family lives, a soft and gentle personality was coming through. This self representation enables him to exercise a sense of humanity, genuine respect and authenticity in relationship build up and communication. On the other hand, in performing the role as an administrator, a more pragmatic and ‘tough-mind’ image began to appear. These multiple layers of representations are reflected in his articulation and choices of response. The rich and complex self is believed to be nurtured and influenced both by traditional cultural values and western professional ideologies. On one hand, his family and cultural background enriched his sensitivity on diplomatic and hierarchical power issues, and at the same time, reinforced a desire to establish a career that creates positive and constructive social impacts. Nonetheless, he is enlightened by the western social work ideologies which emphasizes on empowering the deprived, being critical and respecting individuality. Further awakened by his practice experiences, he learnt to be humble, compassionate and respectful of the most vulnerable and weakest group. Both lenses create contradictory but complementary sources for his engagement. To perform his role as a professional and departmental leader, he has to face the dilemma of seeking compromise and self-differentiation; he needs to look for inclusive and integrative service and training models with a standardized structure and manageable form. Outside the institution, they have to face the misunderstanding and high demands of the society, he to differentiate himself and his teaching team in a professional boundless environment, they have to uphold the core values and ideology, refuse to seek a quick and easy solution. They also have to be able to stand for their beliefs and to encourage professional manifestations that reflect individuality, creativity, criticality and originality. This should be his role in

empowering and supporting his professional team to move.

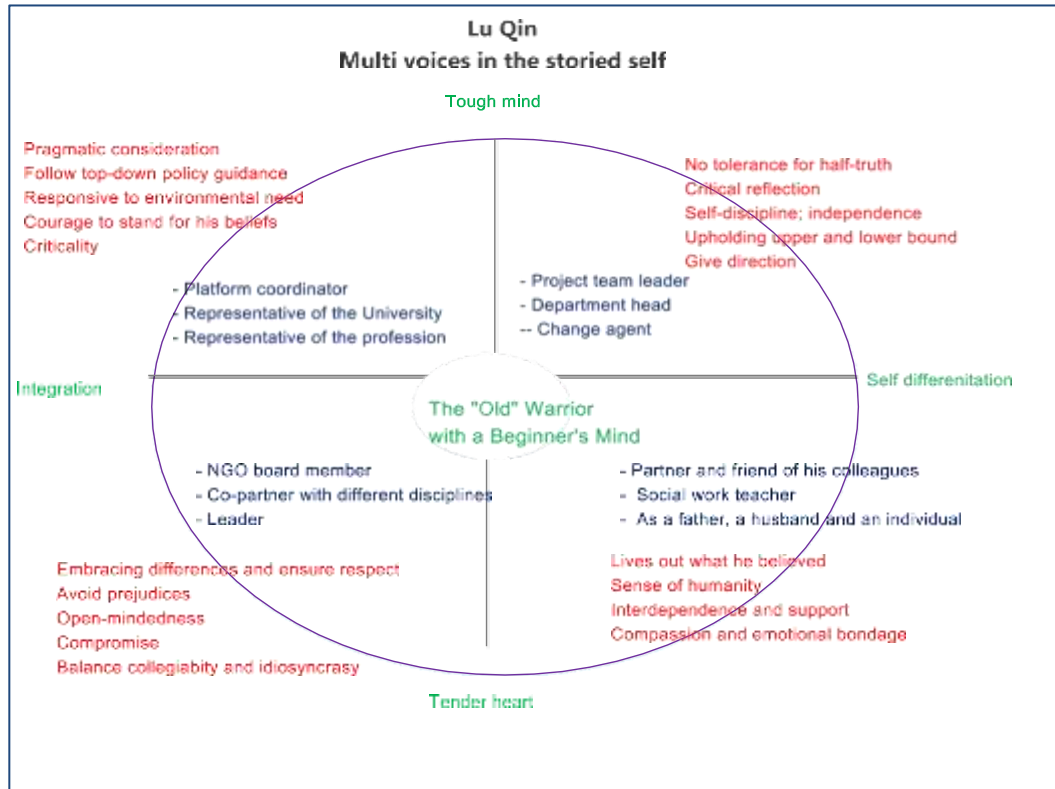


Diagram 25: Lu Qin-Multi voices in the storied self

### Background Information

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In the ZU University, Yu Yu is supposed to be the subordinate to Lu Qin and Han Liang, but she plays an influential role in professional development. She demonstrated feminine traits such as sensitivity, inclusiveness, gentleness and empathy, all the while she showed also a strong sense of initiatives and entrepreneurship. She is at present the Director (总干事) of a newly established NGO under the ZU University social work department. Alongside her teaching assignments in the university, she is accountable for the roles of NGO staff recruitment and management, program and service development, liaison work with communities and government, and finally, she has to mobilize and coordinate the colleagues and students to engage in the development plan. She was an inactive member in the post-disaster engagement period. She was newly wedded and conceived in 2010. She positioned herself as an observer and adopted a passive role in the early years of child rearing. Then she was ‘assigned’ by Lu Qin, the department head, to participate in one of the disaster project activities. Since she made this choice, her life unexpectedly changed. Yu Yu’s story will be centered on several critical choices as a social work teacher and as a wife in these years.

The data sources of the story include my own observation, formal and informal sharing, project presentation prepared by Yu Yu, and lastly, transcriptions of two intensive interviews. The story is organized in the following sections:

1. Childhood experience and academic background
2. Performing the role as a social work teacher
3. Present personal and work life
4. Post 5.12 and 4.20 experiences : Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes
5. Actuality and Potentiality

The quotations in the story are drawn from these sources:

Code	Content of the sources	Date of completion
Y1	Transcription on individual interview I	2015 January 19 by researcher
Y2	Transcription on individual interview II	2015 November 29 by researcher
Y3	Consent Form	2014 January by Yu Yu
Y4	Project Presentation	2015 November 29 by researcher
Y5	Reflection on Life Education Training	2014 compiled by researcher

### Childhood experience and academic background

Yu Yu is a city dweller, and both parents are educated professionals. She is the only child and as a clever and smart girl, she received much attention, recognition and care from the family. She is greatly influenced by her mother who encouraged her to use her sensitivity to explore the external world. As a child, she was given a great deal of autonomy and support to make her own choices. Her mother informed her that if she could develop a career that rooted at her own interest and desires; she will have a splendid and wonderful life. These inspirations and encouragements seemed to be seeds implanted in her heart, waiting for a right season to germinate and grow. Yu Yu completed the social work undergraduate program in a renowned university and went straight on to complete the Master degree in sociology. According to her own description, she acquired little understanding on social work practice but she did develop deep interest and a sense of commitment on the profession. It is an unarticulated anticipation. She shared that she may have possessed “social work DNA” and she did not want to be an ‘undistinguished fellow’.(平庸)

***“ I do not aim at pursuing materialistic life or social status, I wish I could bring positive changes, no matter how small,... to the world,...but I do not know how to achieve, or I am lacking of a proper channel...” (Y1:14)***

Her original plan was to enroll as a PhD student immediately following her

graduation from the Master program, but unfortunately and unexpectedly, she failed the English test and had to face her first critical life decision—whether or not to accept a job position offered in an unfamiliar city .

## Performing her role as social work teacher

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### *The choice to stay in City B*

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Her first career choice was secured by an unexpected interview invitation from the ZU University. In fact, the application on a teaching post was forwarded by her friend without her notice, and she did not have any information about the place and the university. The University is situated in City B, a remote area of Sichuan, far away from her home town. She did attend the interview though she gained an impression from internet information that social work is a marginal discipline in the University. She met Lu Qin, Han Liang and other senior faculty members during the interview. She found a sense of connection with this group of young teachers, and was puzzled about what attracted them to the program, and why they chose to stay. In the interview, she was requested to make a short presentation to which she gained encouragement and support from the panel though she performed unsatisfactorily.

***“It is something pure and simple...I love this feeling...it related to similar ideology that shared among us, nothing out of functional consideration...(in the presentation)I was so nervous and could not continue...Lu Qin used a humorous way to bail me out...I could feel the love of this group, and the beliefs shared among us...” (Y1:12)***

Her job application was successful but the choice of accepting the offer and move to City B was objected by most of her friends and respectful mentor. They tried to convince her to stay home and promised to identify other suitable opportunities for her. In fact, Yu Yu has attended another interview only to find out that the panel focused on instructional matters; no ideological exchanges were initiated. She responded to her ‘gut feeling’ at last and chose to leave



home and settled in the ZU University. Her mother and her boyfriend reassured her decision. They encouraged her to do what she felt was right for her and they promised to support her. She understands well that she has made the decision not out of logical thinking; it was an intuitive and emotional choice.

#### *An innovative but sensitive teacher*

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As a social work teacher, she demonstrated passion, competence and creativity. She enjoyed teaching and was able to build up good relationships with her students. She discovered that social work students enjoyed the practice and their expectation matched her interest and strength. She is in charge of several subjects including “Human growth and development”; “Social work theories” and “Group work”; and she has constructed a practice curriculum for the group work classes. From modeling after her demonstration to direct practice, she has designed a list of comprehensive learning tasks including proposal writing, program implementation and program evaluation. Feedback from students was positive, she gained satisfaction and was proud of the achievement. Outside the classroom, she was also supported and encouraged by her team members.

***“I really enjoy the partnership with my colleagues...it is wonderful to have this group of teachers who shared a social work dream and to stay together, I feel relaxed and comfortable to work with them and anticipate that we can join hand to achieve a credible social work program...”***

***(Y2:8)***

On one hand, Yu Yu is confident in her own teaching style and standard but she is also alerted and sensitive to student feedback and aware of her performance in the eyes of others. She started to run a ‘special’ training group in the department after she received the life education training. She is careful enough to protect herself and to preserve a good image in the work place; she recruited students on a voluntary basis, and scheduled activities outside the normal timetable as it was an experimental project. She did not want to take the risk being assessed and observed as in regular classes.

*“ ...In a regular class, we , both teacher and student are situated in an exposed environment, I will be very alert of my role when I am standing on the stage, I care about my performance and will shift to a self-management mode in a very natural way...” (Y1:5)*

### Present personal and work life

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Being a pragmatic dreamer, Yu Yu enjoyed a rewarding career in these years. She developed a sense of belongingness to the profession and to the institution. She gave birth to a child in 2011 and began to focus and target on dual roles of child rearing and teaching. She was unaware of new challenges and opportunities ahead and this time she would have to face more critical dilemma in the decision making process. Intuition and sensation are not adequate enough to guide her direction but she has to address the tension and balance between her own senses of purposes, environmental constraints and the needs of her significant others

The choice was related to a family decision instead of an individual preference.

Around 2012, her husband has confirmed a better work position in City D , a much more developed city in Sichuan. He accepted the offer and planned to move there with the whole family. In fact, Yu Yu also successfully secured a job in City D. It seemed resigning from the teaching post in ZU University and accepting the move was the best and the most natural decision. Nevertheless, Yu Yu suffered from restlessness and inner struggles. On one hand, she understood that as a wife and a mother, family should be of a priority concern, but deep down she knew that her career aspirations and commitments were attached to her work in City B. If she chose to stay, she would have to face the reality of living apart from her husband. Due to this struggle, she experienced a low period of depression and self-doubt. Not until a turning point she was able to make up her mind on the future choice. The turning point was a two days' in-house life education training. Two related concepts in the training program triggered her to go into deep reflection. One was “be yourself” and the other was “secret

mission<sup>32</sup>”.

*“It was a shocking experience ...at first I was heavily burdened (by the unresolved decision) and could not let go...but then I began to see my own point of view...I formulated my understanding on life purposes, it is related to the way of self-representation, how to be yourself, be a better self...and what is my ‘secret mission’?...slowly and progressively, I find the answer. I love my work, it is more meaningful than the new choice...”*  
(Y2:9)

After the training, she discussed with her husband and made a choice of staying in the ZH University. The decision resulted in separation of the couples in two different cities. As a compromise, Yu Yu will stay in City B with the child while and her husband will settle in City D and reunion on weekends. It is an unusual practice in a traditional Chinese family that the husband offers full support to the wife’s career choice with genuine respect and acceptance. Yu Yu explained that many young couples have to face this dilemma when husbands begin to possess a more liberal and open mind and wives long for self-growth and career development. They have paid special attention to the ‘absent-father’ issue by consciously initiating more quality family activities. At the early stage of adaptation, she felt regretful and guilty when identifying the distance between the father and the daughter. Now, they have well-adjusted to the condition and recognized the positive effects of the choice. Both of them can be fully concentrated and committed to their ‘golden period’ of career pursuit, her husband is a researcher and welcomed the quiet and serene moments of reading and writing; while she was occupied with the new challenges and position in establishing and running a NGO.

#### Post 5.12 and 4.20 experiences : Opportunities, challenges and transformational changes

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<sup>32</sup> “Secret mission” is a concept introduced in the life education program, it means everyone is unique and is assigned a special mission from a higher source. One has to search and confirm the unique designed mission for it should be the best channel of exhibiting one’s talent and strength.

### *Engagement:*

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Yu Yu was assigned to participate in one of the disaster projects after maternity leave in 2011. At that time, Lu Qin, Han Liang, and her team mates were actively engaged in the Life Education Training and project activities. She did not join the training but participated as observers in group sessions. She developed interest in the activities such as picture book reading, and she tried to conduct one to two sessions. As Lu Qin and Han Liang were later occupied by other project activities, she progressively took up the major role in life education teaching and practice supervisory role. She was able to participate in formal training in 2012 and further nurtured by the experiential and reflective means. One of the program sessions on life and death became a turning point of her decision making.

She constructed a ‘roadmap ’as shown in Diagram 26 to illustrate the experiences of growth and development of her team. Starting from the launch of a life education growth group in 2011, they have consolidated several important accomplishments. These are the milestones including the establishment of a team of volunteer students, development of service models in practice sites, active participation in life education formal training, consolidation of the student team by formulating a three- cohorts’ consortium, and active participation in post disaster children service after the 4.20 earthquake. Recently, their team has tried to integrate life education with other service model like ‘resilience and growth’, ‘disaster and environment’ in disaster impacted schools. Yu Yu considered that this is the most rewarding and significant project activity for it connected with her espoused values and inner passion, it is a process of ‘value encounter’(价值碰撞), an adventurous and thrilling experiences to the whole practice team. As a result, the project activities reinforced her convictions and further consolidated the team commitment.

***“I found that they (the student) experienced a value encounter in the project participation and these experiences led to personal growth. I experienced my own personal growth also, it is a mutual reinforcement***

*process, we support each other (相互陪伴) in the developmental path... among all other project engagements, its objectives are most well-defined, initiatives and direction are positive and constructive, it is my dream and my reward...” (Y1:14)*



Diagram 26: Roadmap of Yu Yu’s project development

### *Imagination*

According to Yu Yu, the greatest motivational force came from companionship with her students and team members in the project participation process. She then recognized that the mutual dependence was not only an affectionate and relational benefit, it facilitated a knowledge construction process. In one of her presentations, she recollected how she connected students from four cohorts and built them as a learning community and to engage them in a group practice learning process. They learned through various means including group training, picture book reading, practice and group supervision. They began to expand the scope of service partnership from one site to another. During the 2013 earthquake in City B, the team was able to take up more challenging project assignments such as serving children in disaster impacted communities. She concluded the achievement by reporting that

*“ Out of twenty-six core members (life education class) of two graduated*

*classes, twenty of them choose to stay in the social work profession...many of them engaged in designing and promoting services related to life education, some of them engaged in research work, others established their own life education program, and some are on their way to set up a life education agency...” (Y5:1)*

This is a very encouraging outcome. Yu Yu recalled that among the first cohort, only four graduated students out of forty are willing to remain in the professional employment. The better employment rates reflected positive indicators such as greater commitment of graduates and improving professional environment.

Here are some of Yu Yu's observations. First of all, the central and local social service policy initiatives enable a rapid growth of NGO and thus create more professional posts in the societies. Secondly, more recognitions and understandings are received from the local communities. Service packages like 'life education' become a familiar program label and this greatly supported the further development of social workers if they really possess the value-laden competencies. Finally, it was the earnest effort of the teaching team including Yu Yu herself who have tried to support and nurture their students to commit in the professional field. In fact, with the support of the department and the policy initiatives in post-disaster City B, their teaching team has successfully registered a NGO and started to run the agency as a 'professional business'.

As the Director of this newly established agency, Yu Yu has to shoulder the dual roles of a teacher and an administrator, she understands well that it is necessary and she is willing to work with her colleagues to develop good practice models in the professional field.

*“This is a very important decision (of the department)...because I am a social work teacher, not an ordinary teacher...therefore I wish to see positive changes and progress of our profession...” (Y1:25)*

Yu Yu is optimistic to envision positive changes in the future but at the same time she expressed also her anxieties in seeing the over-rapid growth of social services agencies and the threats of the professional environment. She commented that many agencies did not acquire the basic knowledge and attitude of the profession;

some of them aim only at profit-making. She named it as a “professional crisis” (行业的危机). She considered that social service agencies run by university teachers should be a platform to provide professional service and sustainable support to the graduates. At present, they have recruited six social workers and engaged five colleagues in the agency development process. From a teacher to an administrator, Yu Yu has to face much greater challenges. In the following section, we will see how she responded to the threats and difficulties encountered. These reflected her choice making in daily professional judgments.

### *Alignment*

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In performing her role as the director, Yu Yu shared with me several incidents that reflected the current professional environment and their challenges. One of them related to a ‘moral baseline’ that she intended to uphold. According to Yu Yu, a NGO should not sacrifice its integrity in times of financial difficulties. She explained that in order to survive, many NGO will adopt unreasonable or even unethical means to secure project fund and resources. For example, some of them will employ volunteers to conduct program so as to reduce service expenditure. Yu Yu and her team insisted on training professional social workers in order to ensure the quality of service and thus faced a great deal of financial hardship in the early stage. In order to secure a stable service team, they have to advance the payment on their own.

The second threat is related to the ‘unhealthy ecological environment’ of the local communities. She referred to the relationship between NGO, local communities<sup>33</sup> and government as full of complexities, hidden rules and unforeseeable dynamics. She shared a recent tough decision that faced their

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<sup>33</sup> Here ‘community’社区 refers the basic local administrative unit in China. It is operated by public officials. In the past, they shoulder mainly the management and control roles such as administrating the central policies at local district level, monitoring the social security cases...etc. At present, the central government shows more and more effort in changing the paradigm from management to ‘service’. The new policy concept of “Tripodic partnership”(三社联动), promotes the collaboration between local community(社区), social work profession(社工) and social organization(社会组织).

agency. In one of the ‘community venture philanthropy competitions’ (公益创投)<sup>34</sup>, the first prize ran to a local government service unit, but Yu Yu found out that the winner’s entry proposal was prepared by her professional team. It was a cheating behavior that caused her to be furious and felt betrayed. She revealed that she has been invited to engage in several in-depth discussions with this service unit in response to an early initiative of long term collaboration. Yu Yu then prepared a program proposal with input of her original ideas but after that, no further follow up gesture was expressed by the partner. She expected this as an indication of withdrawal of further collaboration. After the competition and the release of result, Yu Yu was surprised to see that her original proposal was awarded the first prize. She requested a suspension of the award but received only negative feedback. Many partners advised her to accept the reality for it was a hidden rule of the game; she should learn to tolerate these unfair rules and ‘wait’ until her agency is strong enough to bargain with other stakeholders. The underlying assumption is, since NGOs have to rely on external resources and support offered by local communities, the enmeshed relationship existed are understandable and acceptable, these community officials may have considered that they are legitimate to use and share the program idea and it is not a cheating behavior. Yu Yu adopts a different view. According to her understanding, all stakeholders should collaborate and play their own parts based on trust and accountability, NGOs sell their professional knowledge and skills and as a service partner, local communities should honor and acknowledge the originality of their input. Yu Yu refused to accept the result and she persisted to fight for the justice. The case was further reported and discussed in a higher level government office and at last, she received a verbal apology from the community officer. Although the award result remained the same, it is a small step forward, Yu Yu begins to see that it is possible to make changes in the government sector.

Similar unfair rules also appeared in the process of assessment and program

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<sup>34</sup> The original meaning of ‘venture philanthropy’ (VP) described a current trend of engagement of social enterprise to support and nurture the development of social service agencies in terms of financial, intellectual and human capital. The grant making model encouraged new approaches and focus on a mutual assess progress based on measurable result. In Yu Yu’s case, the funding resources come from government. The grantee can be a local community partnered with a NGO.



evaluation. NGOs, as the program delivery party, have to be assessed and monitored. External assessment team may not have adequate professional knowledge to judge and provide advice. The most intolerable condition related to the disrespectful remarks on one hand, and also the rude and discourteous attitude in reviewing agency information, including those confidential files. Yu Yu commented that most of the NGOs accepted these unreasonable requests, but she did not. She made a small move again to categorize the files and labelled some as 'restricted' and confidential information so as to protect the service recipients. Although situated in such an unfavorable environment, Yu Yu still identified hopes.

*“ I observe that there are other NGOs also participating in the process of fighting for justice, that is why though the professional environment is full of challenges, if we uphold and persist (to voice out and to make changes), we can still bring in fresh air to the profession.” (Y1:22)*

Yu Yu's current challenges are to consolidate both her professional team in the NGO and in the workplace. The life education practice group received a new challenge this year, they accepted another donation and work on a research-based model of disaster life education. She, together with Han Liang tried to make new arrangements for the group by allocating a small team to focus on documentation and data analysis. They aim at producing an evidence-based disaster social work activity package. She planned also to build in life education ideology and to nurture a humanitarian agency culture. She has newly employed a graduate who showed great passion in this area, the new worker will be responsible for the designing and implementation of life education program in the community. She envisions that 'life education' will be a brand of their NGO.

### [Actuality and Potentiality](#)

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Engaging in the teaching profession as a capable and visionary social work teacher, Yu Yu wishes to bring positive changes to the world. She went through a process of self-discovery and affirmation. From a little woman who contains a dream, she moved from adopting traditional roles to welcoming new challenges. Unlike her colleagues who have heavily engaged in post-disaster activities and

are burdened by unresolved emotional and existential wounds or confusion, she appeared to be more simple and straightforward. She acts according to her inner callings and motivations, and she was rewarded by positive and constructive changes identified among herself and her students. She successfully built a knowledge construction model by engaging in an action cycle with her students. Even in difficult situations, she is willing to take up the fighter and protestor's role. She demonstrated calmness and stability to respond with courage and wisdom. Her inner strength is largely orientated from family encouragement and support. She gained a healthy and secure self-concept and this becomes the greatest internal resource to help her face the adversities.

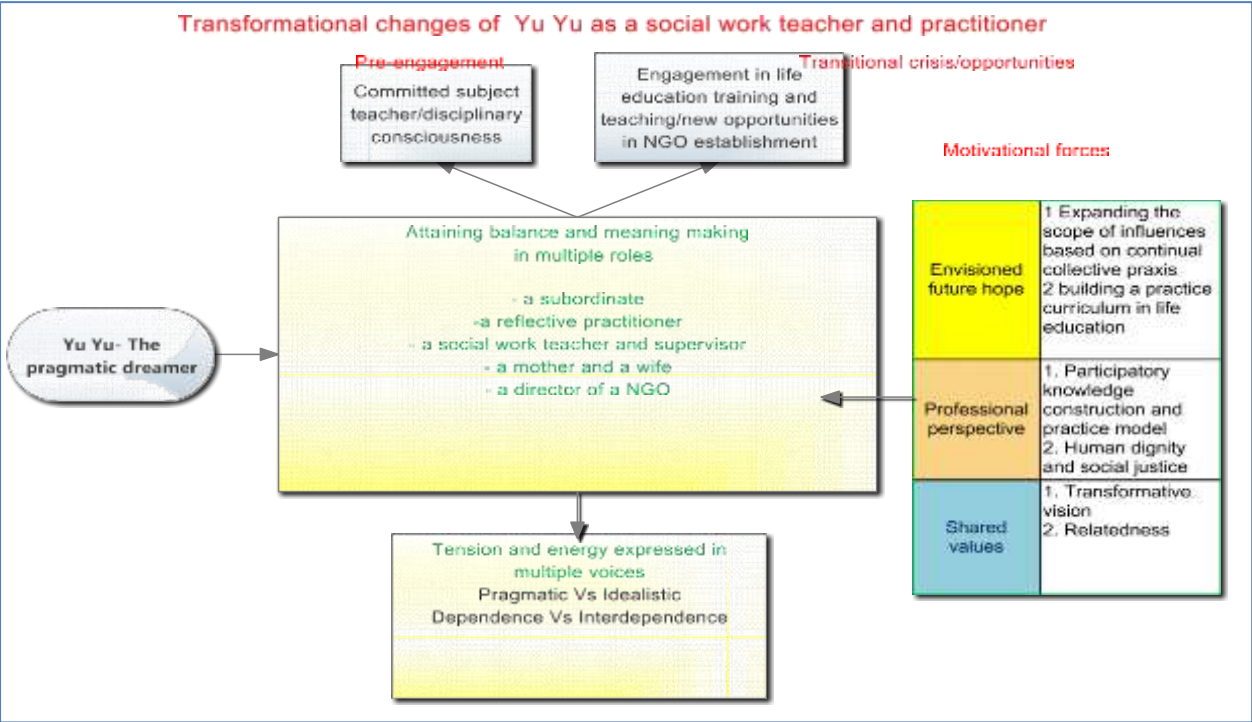


Diagram 27: Transformational changes of Yu Yu as a social work teacher and practitioner

*Professional partners and network*

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Her connections with external environment and resources are demonstrated in Diagram 28. She has established close and stable connections at interpersonal and institutional levels, but outside the workplace, she needs to identify more professional bodies as partners, and more professional dialogues and stimulation are required for sustainable development.

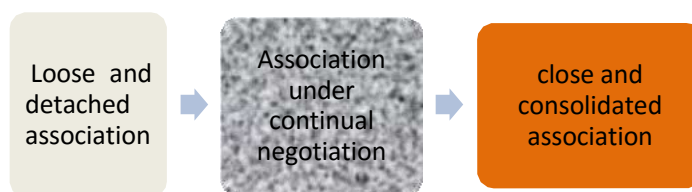
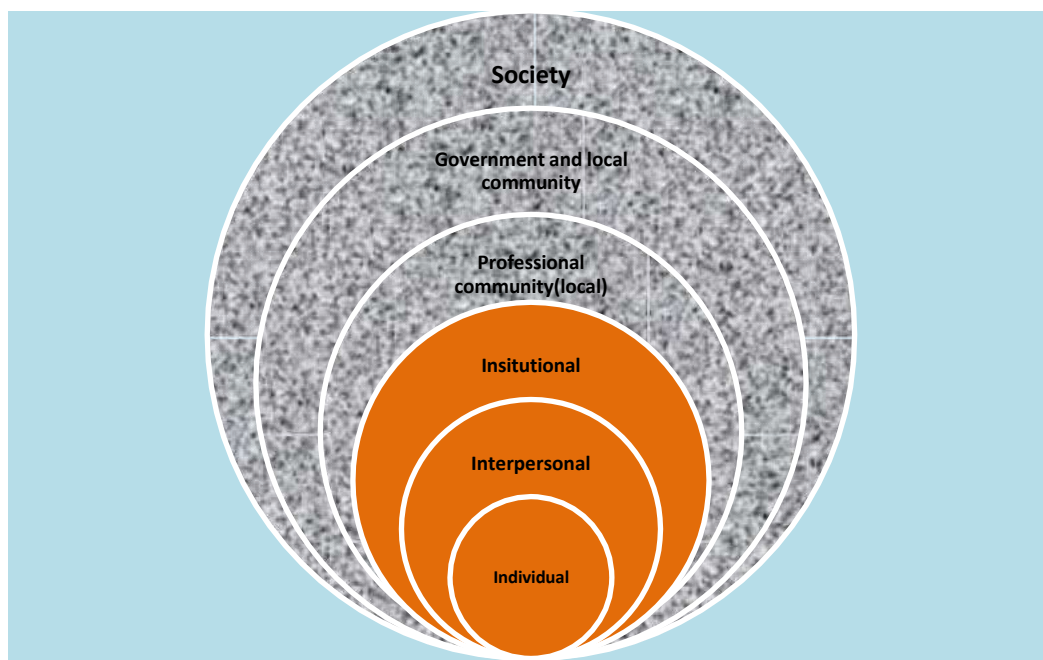


Diagram 28: Yu Yu's professional partners and network

Moving forward, she faces greater challenges when she committed herself in management and service development. Amid all these multiple roles, Yu Yu considered that teaching is still the ‘core’ mission.

***“My mission was never shaken...I am a teacher, students are my top priority. I teach and I bring forth changes, once my students experienced the changes, they are able to elicit changes among different groups, it is always my train of thought.”(Y1:24)***

Two pairs of polarities are identified in her presentation and reflected the multiple layers of her presentation. As a pragmatic dreamer, Yu Yu could not rely only on ideals and a flowery imagination, she has to develop and balance both her intuitive and thinking abilities, imaginative and problem-solving skills. As a wife and mother, she has challenged the female conventional family obligation and succeeded in exploring new horizons in the work environment. Adopting a feminine lens, she can still make use of the gender qualities and continue to play a role of empathetic mediator and soft enabler. To maintain the ‘interdependent’ side will help to strengthen her support network and enables her to be more independent in asserting her voices in her leadership roles.

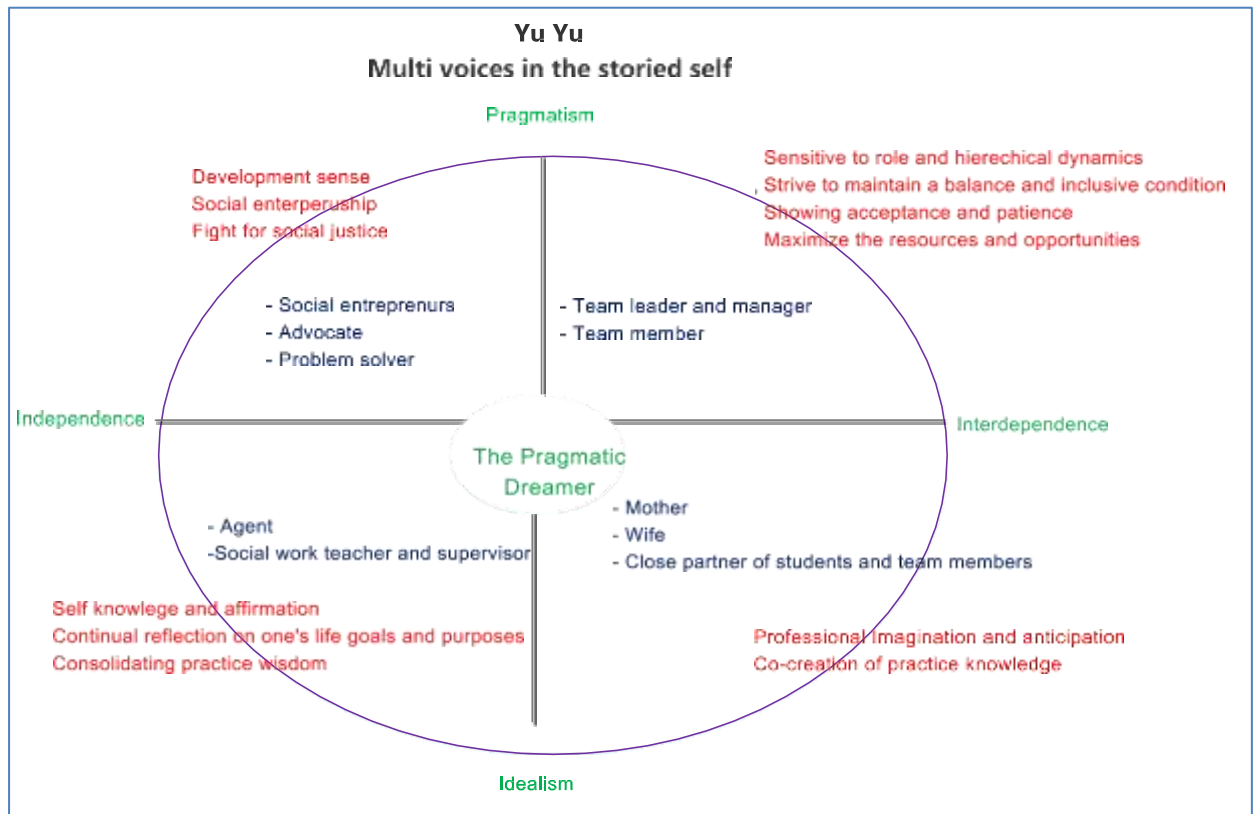


Diagram 29: Yu Yu-Multi voices in the storied self

# CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

*“When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bounds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”*

**Patanjali**

## Findings and Discussion

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### A recapitulation of the concepts in the research framework

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The research framework is illustrated and explicated in Chapter One to Chapter Three. In this chapter I would like to recapture several key concepts adopted in this study. First of all, the research process was guided by the three-dimensional inquiry space: temporality (the continuity of past, present and future); sociality (the interaction and relationship between inner personal and outer factors) and place (the contextual and physical location) and the four directions in the research process. They are inward, (respondents’ personal, inner, dispositional factors) outward, (environmental and contextual factors) forward (future anticipation and commitment) and backward (retrospective reviews on experiences and critical events).

The basic assumptions on identity formation and integrity are summarized as followed: The individual’s sense of identity is an autobiographical process; it is an interaction between inner and outer, personal and social factors. Identity formation is both a temporal and developmental process. In the study, it is

assumed that participation in CoP (Community of Practice) initiated the process of identification and on-going negotiation. The construction of the social work teacher identity can be conceptualized in the trajectory stages of engagement, imagination and alignment (Wenger, 2000). In the narrative inquiry process, respondents are invited to recollect and reorganize the chronicles from 2008-2014. It is a personal and collective reflexive exercise to understand lived experiences, human action and interpretation. Integrity is achieved through awareness and acceptance of the dynamics between tension and motivational forces, and interplay of different layers of selfhood. Conscious integration and alignment is an on-going process to consolidate identity formation and to achieve further professional integrity and maturity.

#### [A call to Adventure: the roadmap of identity formation](#)

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The engagement in the post-disaster activities enabled this group of respondents to come out of their comfort zones. By tracing their development with Wenger's (2000) proposed trajectory framework, they went through engagement, imagination and the alignment process. They were first engaged in training and direct practices and in return, these experiences brought out new imagination on the conception of the profession and their roles. They were motivated by positive outcomes despite encountering bigger challenges and strains. Their continual negotiation and choice of action brought them into a dynamic action cycle. As a result, they integrated these sources as an 'open curricula' which allowed for enrichment beyond the level of propositional and technical knowledge. They brought about transformational changes at personal, institutional and societal level. Their identities as social work teachers further evolved, transformed and consolidated through enhanced competencies, self-knowledge and collaborative praxis with their students and professional partners.

In the following analysis, the stories of the respondents are further conceptualized as 'a hero's journey'. This unique journey is a call to adventure. In the list of literatures like Joseph Campbell (1949)'s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; Gary Belkin (1972)'s article: *Teacher as Hero*; Susan Drake (1992)'s *Journey through Teacher Education: Toward Meaning and Connection*; John



Brown and Cerylle Moffett (1999)'s *The Hero's Journey: How Educators can Transform Schools and Improve Learning*. A teacher is configured as a visionary hero who possesses committed attitudes and inner strengths. In the midst of environmental chaos and complexities, they have to set off in a journey to reclaim their sense of being, and they aim to return with a treasure or token to fight the battle and benefit their world in reality. In this study, the group of respondents did not 'plan' the journey, but it was an unexpected adventure caused by the disaster and the following opportunities. They were thrown into the dynamic of experiences and went through a "journey schemas" as proposed by Brown (1999) which composed of several stages including leaving home, passing through the desert, the road, the battlefield and returning home.

All adventurous journeys are not self-initiated. Heroes are thrown into the environmental crisis or triggers in an unexpected way. The teachers, in these adventurous journeys are not heroes in fairy-tales; they are simply ordinary people. They encountered real danger and risk, experienced dark hours and dying moments, overcame test and barriers, and at the end, seized the treasure by gaining new understandings and resources.

"The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected, unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task... is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed" (Campbell, quoted in Brown, 2006, p. 51).

Duffy and Guiffrida (2014) also supported the 'hero's journey' as a basic and archetypal structure or framework to understand personal growth and transformational changes. To capture the developmental process, three critical stages as conceptual tools are useful for understanding the journey. They are (1) leaving what is known and comfortable (2) experiencing – with the assistance of others—novelty and challenge, (3) a personal transformation of the individual based on the new experiences encountered and the obstacles overcome" (p.145). The conceptualized stages greatly impacted the assembling of the trajectory framework that was adopted in this study. Respondents engaged in practice and learning, gaining new imagination and overcoming challenges, with continual

negotiation and rectification, participated in an ongoing alignment process in professional development

### *Engagement and new imagination*

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To capture and summarize the returning heroes' route of development, Diagram 30 is constructed to illustrate a process from pre-engagement to alignment.

Respondents are differentiated according to their background. The development path of social work trained (Lu Qin, Han Liang & Yu Yu) and non-social work trained (Xia Yuan, Qing Mei & Zhang Min) respondents showed both commonality and difference in the content of their experiences. At the starting point, 'non-trained social work teachers' viewed themselves as alien or detached member of the professional community, they were engaged in the process by chance or based on obligatory concerns. While the 'trained social worker' held a vision on the profession, they shared a set of professional language and either inflamed by the fire of passion in disaster management actions or motivated by own aspiration and longings in the process.

According to Wenger (2000), engagement meant working and learning together in communities which brought forth possible opportunities for the individuals to explore new meaning and construct a new sense of self. In this study, engagement referred to respondents' active and direct participation in post-disaster training, practice and teaching. Active engagement led to new imagination. Imagination referred to an integrative process of action commitment and interpretation. Despite the differences in breadth and depth of participation, there are commonalities shared by this group of young social work teachers. First, they adopted an obligatory and receptive attitude toward their responsibilities and the new knowledge and skills input. In response to the disaster, they showed readiness to commit, to take risks and venture to uncertainties. By engaging in training and related practice activities, they entered into a journey of praxis where they learned by doing and self-reflection. Secondly, in this intensive learning exercise, personal changes and developments emerged in different ways. Respondents were exposed to different professional models and acquired new skills and knowledge; they modeled after and mastered new competencies and gained greater confidence; they perceived changes at their own self and on the

targets they served, either students or the service recipients, They also acquired a new understanding of the profession and identified changes at both cognitive, affective and practice (behavioral) levels. There existed a ‘honeymoon’ period when they began to experience the transformational changes from unknown to knowing. The participants gained self-confidence, identified with the professional ideology, and envisioned a greater hope of bringing constructive changes. They were motivated to further consolidate the practice experiences and explore sustainable models in the workplaces and local communities.

#### *Alignment and continual action cycle*

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‘Alignment’ is a stage where the respondents returned back to normal situation and reclaimed an emerging or a transitional identity as a social work teacher. It is not an end point, but rather a beginning of the continual action cycle. Having travelled through engagement and imagination, respondents at this stage acquired a sense of ‘identification and understanding’; the transformational changes on self-definitions were activated and consolidated by practice and the reflective discoveries of shared values and visions. They have to find their own focus and direction in their workplace. The exploration is an ongoing process of negotiation and rectification. The self-differentiated and ‘individualized’ vision should be consolidated through further commitment and collective action in areas of curriculum building, teaching and practice, NGO operation or other social and professional responsibilities in order to enable a continual action cycle of action and reflection. The dynamics and richnesses of their development path will further be illustrated and discussed in the following section where discoveries of the study are explained and illustrated.

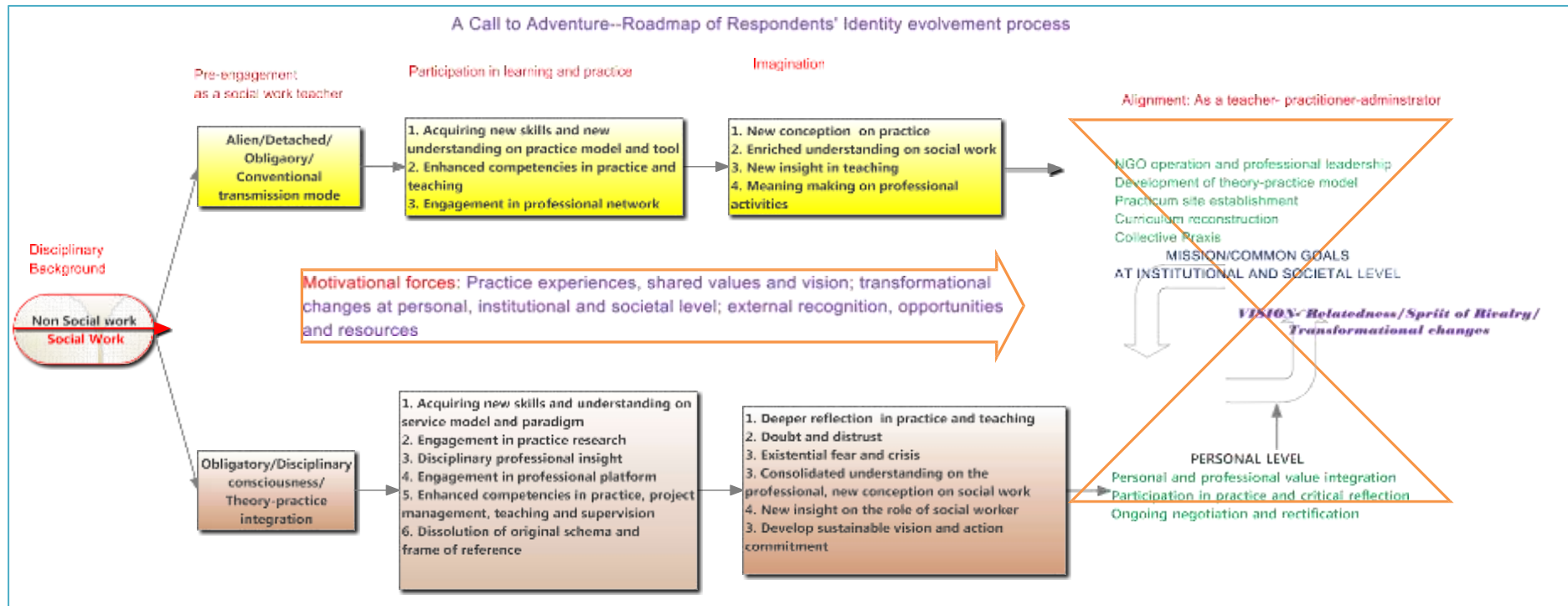


Diagram 30: A Call to Adventure—Roadmap of respondents' identity evolution process

Discovery One: The returning heroes: A new temporal identity

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In this study, the respondents are given a special name as a metaphorical label to capture the current status of their professional identity. These names reflected a thread of personal growth and development which is temporal and paradoxical. It is temporal but not a fixed and established character trait, the evolvement and development are opened and very much depended on further commitment and conscious action taken by each of them. It is paradoxical for the real complexities, multiplicities of human nature are revealed in the storytelling process, to accept the actuality and potentiality of each individual, the paradoxical label reflected both the victory and the vulnerabilities, and it provided them with an imaginary space to further growth. Here is a summary on the descriptions of the six respondents and two pairs of incompatible, but complementary voices that reflected the tensions and struggles they faced and the potential for further integration and maturity.

<b>Respondents- The New Temporal Identity</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Xia Yuan- The Insecure Adherent</b></p> <p>Being a reserved and passive traditional subject teacher, Xia Yuan admitted his longing for security even though he demonstrated the courage to transcend the obligatory role and move to engage in more innovative endeavor. He wishes he could be the backup adherent to his colleagues.</p> <p>Two pairs of incompatible yet complementary voices in the storied self are identified as:</p>

**Self Love Vs Altruistic Love**

**Conformity Vs Innovation**

**Qing Mei-The Exhausted Seeker**

Seeking is always a laborious endeavor. Bearing a philosopher’s mindset and shouldering an administrator’s role. Qing Mei struggled between venturing to breadth and depth, distance and affinity. She is exhausted but she is nurtured and supplied with relational accomplishments and existential understandings.

Two pairs of incompatible but complementary voices in the storied self are identified as

**Distance Versus Affinity**

**Breadth Versus Depth**

**Zhang Min- The Vulnerable Fighter**

Having overtaken by heavy family burdens and critical personal crisis, the teacher has long suffered from emotional disturbances. He is vulnerable but he is strong. By allying himself with the group of deprived and powerless, he sees his position and he defines his worth and purposes in the process of teaching and mentoring students. To fight against the unfairness in society, his team members and students becomes his support and alliance.

Two pairs of incompatible but complementary voices in the storied self are identified as

**Vulnerability Versus Potentialities**

**Individual (the ‘I’) Versus Group (the “We”)**

**Han Liang-The Awakening Soldier**

As a capable practice teacher and project assistant, Han Liang began to aware of the power issues exist in partnership and in process of individual growth. He

belongs to the 'lower rank' but he sees the strength and resilience the group possessed. He has developed a sense of criticality and is willing to examine and break through the hidden established habit of mind. He wishes he could extend this awareness in teaching and in practice.

Two pairs of incompatible but complementary voices in the storied self are identified as

**Compliance Versus Criticality**

**Action Versus Thinking**

### **Lu Qin: The "Old" Warrior with a Beginner's Mind**

Having placed in a disaster community for four years, Lu Qin learnt to be a practitioner, a practice teacher and supervisor. He defined the essence of the profession as a 'comradely fellowship', a close and collaborative relationship and partnership. Although he is moving away from direct teaching but engaged mainly in administrative and coordinator's role, the beginner's mind in him contained the memories of human vulnerability, transiency of life, companionship and vision to support him to move along

Two pairs of incompatible yet complementary voices in the storied self are identified as

**Tough mind Versus Tender heart**

**Integration Versus Self-differentiation**

### **Yu Yu: The Pragmatic Dreamer**

Being triggered by simple faith and committed action, Yu Yu learnt to make choice according to intuitive response; self-definition and collaterally. Wishing to bring positive changes to the world, she started to influence her students, engaged in a knowledge co-construction process and further to extend the impact on society

by steering and operating the strategic plan of a NGO.

Two pairs of incompatible but complementary voices in the storied self are identified as

**Idealism Versus Pragmatism**

**Independence Versus Interdependence**

Table 3: The returning heroes: A new temporal identity

### [Discovery Two: Polarities in the storied selves](#)

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In this section, the two pairs of incompatible, but complementary voices of each of the respondents are organized and compiled as fourteen pairs of polarities; they can be further categorized into personal/interpersonal; cultural/professional; instructional/environmental and existential groupings. The categories of personal/interpersonal and cultural/professional are closely connected, as they reflected the dispositional part of the respondents which are rooted in deep cultural and societal values. For example, one of the tensions experienced is the paradox of ‘individualism and collectivism’. Respondents are brought up in a dominant collectivist culture which relies more on centralized and hierarchical structure of power, favors compliance and conformity, and places emphasis on group goals instead of individual goals. These cultural and societal values are rooted as cognitive schema and framed their habits of the mind; as these frames of reference operated mostly at the unconscious level, people act and react in a highly automatically way without awareness. The result leads to adaptive compliant attitudes and conforming action pattern. When individuals failed to fit in the societal norms and expectation, they will fall back and easily lead to self-blame and disempowered self-definitions. This is reflected as part of the voices in Zhang Min and Han Liang’s stories. Being brought



up in peasant families from rural areas, they are connected with the rural culture. They are sensitive to the oppressive experiences and psychological wounds that were triggered and created by their consciousness on existing inequalities and dominance culture in the reality. Nevertheless, to view this sense of collectivity in another perspective, we can identify some positive elements that have served as nutrients for respondents' growth and development. Loyalty, faithfulness and adherence in collective culture are positive qualities that favored a process of identity building. Through their faithful commitment, they were opened to new experiences and gained the opportunities of being nurtured by a different 'collective culture' of humanity and professional ideology. Through learning, modelling, acting and reflecting, they assimilated new concepts and values and methods such as independence and autonomy; justice and equality in communication and societal changes. Nevertheless, this process of acculturation may not always be a pleasant one. Being placed in such a dissimilar culture, struggles and conflicts are expected. A reflective cycle of assimilation and self-differentiation is necessary to bring this group of respondents closer to their own aspiration and choice of practice. The following diagram captured the pairs of contradictory voices in their stories and these voices reflected a picture of their overall struggles and inner conflicts.

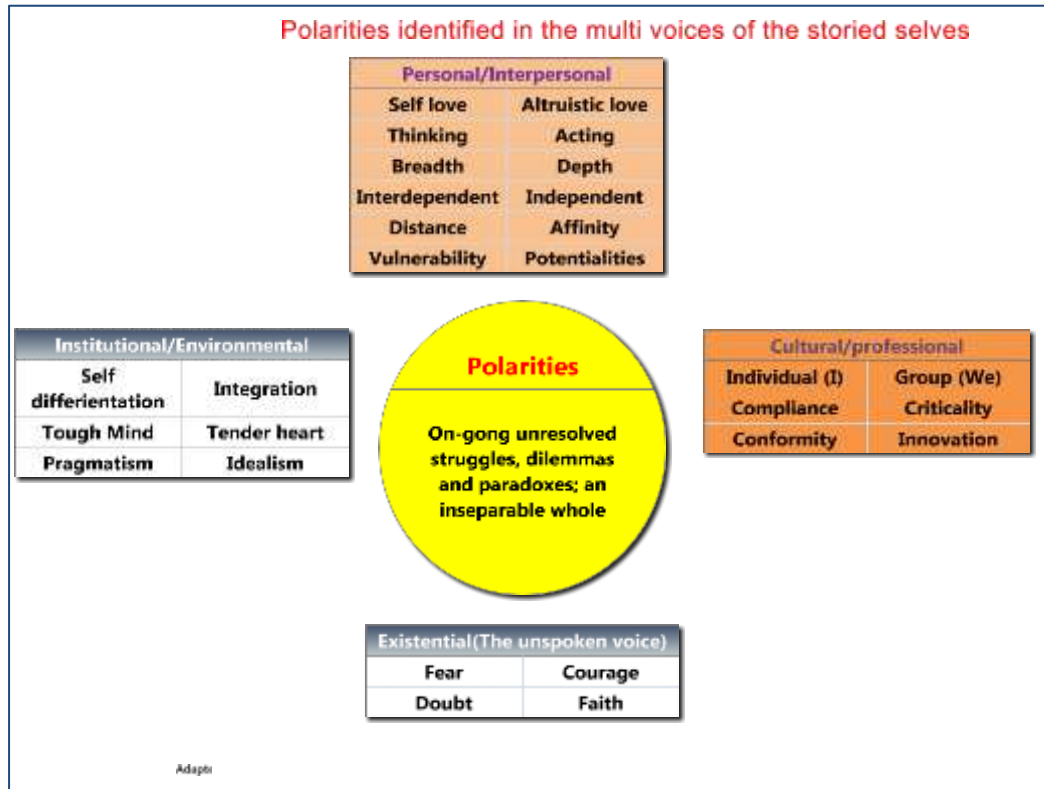


Diagram 31: Polarities identified in the multi voices of the storied selves

The above contradictory or conflicting voices illustrated in Diagram 31 are identified as authentic part of the selves and they reflected the dilemmas and conflicts experienced by respondents. These paired voices are discovered as ‘polarities’ existed in respondents’ thinking or acting process. Polarities are understood as seemingly opposite but yet complementary sides of each of the individual. The differences and diversities will lead to inevitable pulls and pressures in daily functioning on one hand but they do generate new energy and enable the individual to achieve higher purposes and integration if their unique positive values can be recognized and make use of. In fact, ‘polarity management’ is perceived as a strategic thinking tool that best support leaders in transition. (Pascale, 1990; Johnson, 1996; Burns, 1999). The management choices of whether one should be careful or opportunistic; mandatory or discretionary; managerial or transformational;

collegiality or individuality; hard minds or soft hearts, etc.(Pascale, 1990, p.53) are viewed as common dilemma faced by leaders. In order to be strategic and to maximize the positive values of the two choices, leaders should learn to avoid using an ‘either/or’ orientation but to configure these polarities as mutually inclusive, interdependent and as a ‘both/and’ choice. The benefits of both choices should then be studied well and tapped on in order to generate new resources and understanding in an on-going cycle. According to our understanding on ego consciousness, tapping on polarity energy is not easy as human beings tend to take side in order to minimize tensions and conflicts. The neglect or denial of inner voices is caused by conscious or unconscious act of suppression employed in choice making process in order to release irresolvable tension. Fragmented representations are thus followed in daily lives. By engaging in the role of social work teacher, particularly in practice decision making where human encounters and professional choices are complex, dynamic and real, the multiple layers of selves began to emerge and the recognition of different voices is made possible. The narrative process can be considered as an interactive journey that facilitated respondents to listen and accept their own voices in a progressively unfolding process. Expanding the scope of self-understanding is always beneficial for personal growth and maturation. Thus, these polarities are not problems to be resolved; they are mutually inclusive and interdependent dimensions of the inner self. Respondents see the presence of both a preferred and suppressed side and also their own on-going struggles and balances in the storytelling process. They learn to develop dualistic, holistic and paradoxical awareness through the dialogue and exchanges.

The discovery on these inner voices is particularly important not just for individual benefit and growth need. If we take the “virtue ethic approach” as a choice for

professional character building, these findings enabled educators to understand more on the common struggles and dilemmas that faced social work teachers and practitioners. The findings unveiled also respondents' dispositional factors and underlying motives such as their personal desires, emotional reaction, value orientation, perception, desires, expectation and interest etc. They are valuable resources to be integrated in character building and professional choice making.

### Discovery Three: Disciplinary background leading to a different path

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Disciplinary background made a difference in their modes of role identification. It can be considered that those 'non-trained'<sup>35</sup> 'social work teachers experienced an **'emerging mode'** of identity formation while those who acquired social work training background experienced a **"transitional mode"** of identity formation . For the 'non-trained' respondents, the engagement was an 'eye-opening' opportunity. When they (Xia Yuan, Qing Mei & Zhang Min) encountered the social work professional culture, they started to model the culture and considered the assimilation and negotiation of the new concepts and experiences. From alien and detached conventional subject teachers to a social work teacher, the new role emerged and come forth. They experienced positive and transformational changes in self-understanding, in acquiring enriched conception of social work and the pedagogical concerns. They demonstrated a more committed attitude and enthusiasm in teaching and they envisioned a better quality in curriculum development curriculum. All three of them began to become more aware of the significance of 'practice' or the applied nature of the discipline. They moved forward to work for a practice-integrated curriculum in different subjects

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<sup>35</sup> 'Non-trained' is not a degrading remark; it is a general description to categorize the disciplinary background. In fact, the 'non-trained' teachers did not display extreme dissonance to the social work professional culture; they adapted well in assimilation and demonstrated potential for further integration.

and they recognized also the importance of establishing practicum sites to provide learning and serving opportunities for both the students and the teachers.

Those respondents who have received systematic disciplinary professional training (Lu Qin, Han Liang & Yu Yu) seemed to hold a stronger identification in the pre-engagement stage, and thus demonstrated a higher degree of motivation and confidence to go deeper and further. Lu Qin and Han Liang are two typical examples. They are respondents who demonstrated great commitment in professional pursuits and strived for sustainable development. The earlier systematic training provided them with sound conceptual understanding and practice sensitivity. They have better access to sustainable professional platforms and resources, and were able to transit from a social work teacher to a professional leader. They began to engage in multiple roles within and outside the workplace. These included supervisory, practice, administrative and coordinating duties. Furthermore, the positions of respondents will determine the scope of impact they can extend. Lu Qin and Qing Mei, the heads of the teaching team, have to provide direction to the teaching teams in curriculum reconstruction and in establishment of practicum sites with integration of these new understanding. Lu Qin, as the professional leader in City B, has tried to balance and aligned the diversified professional interpretation.

#### [Discovery Four: Practice as the entrance gate leading to a professional inquiry process](#)

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For both the ‘trained’ and ‘non-trained’ respondents group, practice engagement can be understood as an entrance gate, through practice; they entered into a path of professional pursuit and inquiry. Engaging in practice is a situated and constructive learning experience. Respondents were exposed to direct human contacts, inner and

external barriers, success and failures. Through these lively and vigorous encounters, they were able to capture rich, multiple and dynamic professional understandings in relational, emotional, experiential, cognitive and critical domains.(Diagram 32) .

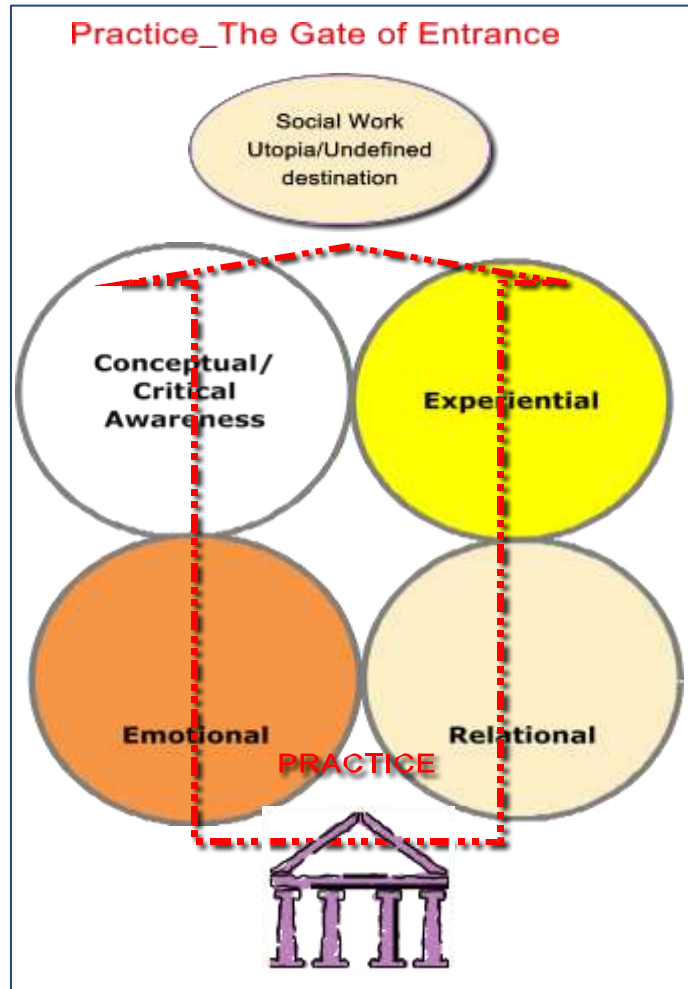


Diagram 32: Practice—the gate of entrance

In the initial stage, what attracted each of the respondents to enter the gate may be different, but when they moved forward, they were able to see the need to be reflective and integrative. For example, Qing Mei entered the gate through learning and practicing life education programs. Human connection and affinity evoked curiosity and appealed to her. This subjective, emotional, relational and personal preference later evolved to a deeper cognitive exploration on value clarification and professional integration. Another respondent, Han Liang, demonstrated his effort to

achieve a more critical and conscious stance that transcended an experiential and relational achievement. He strived to be an agent who possesses critical awareness. The awareness was evolved through a process of uncovering of established habit of mind. It is supported both by self-knowledge and professional dialogues and exchanges in sustainable platforms. Their experiences reflect the truth that entering the gate is a personal choice, but to continue the exploration should be both a personal and communal effort.

The discovery echoed the discussion raised by Earls Larrison (2013). His conception on the best practice of social work education is a training process that enable thinking, acting and the performing with integrity.( Earls Larrison, 2013). Based on these considerations, he then raised a challenge to social work educators to redefine a social work ‘signature pedagogy’. He cared more about how to shape a professional self in the educational process. An ideal pedagogical choice should be a socialization process where novice social workers are exposed and engaged in experiences of relational connectedness, modelling core practice skills, and values; these direct encounters will foster transformative awareness and further nurture and consolidate personal and professional growth.

The respondents in Sichuan have benefitted from this journey of practice. Through direct encounter with service user and co-work with students, they have opened a new space for professional exploration. This space or landscape is out of the classroom, in the real world, with direct human encounters and practice challenges. The process is filled with adversities such as misunderstanding, failure, lack of resources, incorrect direction, and team separation. On the other hand, they are ‘attracted’ to move forward and to search for an undefined professional destination or ‘social work utopia’. In Chapter One, I have mentioned Levy’s (1973) proposed idea on social

work professional ideology as a unifying force. The unifying force is made up of a commitment to service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationship, integrity and competence. It is particularly important when the professional environment is in chaos and full of diversified needs. These shared understandings can be regarded also as a choice of 'hypergoods' proposed by Charles Taylor (Abbey, 2004). These preferred values or goods attracted more respect and admiration and as a result, these values become the common ground for learning and practice in the disaster rehabilitation process. The destination can be conceptualized as a 'social work utopia' or an undefined destination. It is somewhere representing the 'good' that envisioned by each of the respondents. Practice experiences awaken the sense of social work teachers' identity and reinforced, clarified or uncovered something they valued in their mind. Respondents further bring back these understanding in their own educational process. As shared in their stories, all of them are able to see the importance of practice in the social work educational process and they are willing to develop sustainable 'practice-oriented' curriculum and shape 'practice-sensitive' students in this pedagogical process.



## Discovery Five: “Relatedness” as a core professional experience and ideological concept

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“Relatedness” in this study was experienced by respondents as closeness, affinity, communication, respectful and genuine human encounters, comradely fellowship, and inter-dependence. Respondents used different terminologies and interpreted the concept in various ways at different levels, but it did point out that human ‘relatedness’ is a shared experience. It becomes a ‘shared’ language with a shared understanding that connected with professional ideological, manifestation and imagination. It is a shared professional value and constituted a major source of motivational forces.

**Xia Yuan :** He explained his understanding of social work as a way of communication(分享). Although he views himself as an unsociable person, he still sees himself as relatable. ‘Communication’ as a professional manifestation legitimizes his engagement in human contacts. These contacts further reinforced his interest and competencies in teaching and self-expression.

**Qing Mei:** She considered herself to lack valuable qualities in performing the role of a social work teacher, as she is a ‘distant’ person. Conducting life education classes enabled her to experience affinity and connection with her students. She witnessed the changes and the strength of human encounters.

**Zhang Min:** Though he suffered from disturbances, he was able to reclaim his sense of purpose through teaching connection with his students.

**Han Liang:** By describing practice knowledge as “*vivid, affectionate, lively and related to human needs.*” (H4:2). He referred to the experiences of close contacts with the target population and students. He went further to position and identify himself with the oppressed, and sought a bottom-up collective voice and vision.

**Lu Qin:** He used the term “comradely fellowship”(同生共长) to illustrate the

relationship of his professional team in disaster area and also the professional relationship with community residents. He believed that the experience is crucial in triggering professional sensibility and imagination.

**Yu Yu:** She used the term “ mutual interdependence” (相互陪伴) to illustrate the supportive relationship between team members and students. It was this interdependent relationship that brought forth knowledge construction and professional initiatives.

To explain why ‘relatedness’ became a core shared value among this group of respondents, I would try to discuss this with reference to the unique social context and the socio-cultural background of the respondents.

- (i) Human encounters and communication returned to a simple, non-instrumental state in post-disaster period. This was a ‘golden period’ where many people experienced a primitive, selfless and genuine social atmosphere. On one hand, people are more willing to share, to give and serve, while on the other hand, the intense commitment exposed human vulnerability and the need of mutual support and interdependence. In disaster areas, when traditional social work intervention or strategic techniques could not be applied in a straightforward way, respondents and their project team could only return to basic humanity concern, they stayed with the disaster survivors, communicated with a humble, soft and caring heart. In return, they gained genuine respect and friendship.
- (ii) “Relatedness” is a shared professional quality of teaching and social work. Teachers’ moral obligation (师道) is highly recognized by this group of respondents. They regarded ‘teaching’ is a moral profession; they are obliged to take care, to teach and coach. Teacher-student interactions in the social work team are positive and constructive. They could easily collaborate and

become co-workers and co-learners in the process of collective action and knowledge building. This existed between respondents and their students; and respondents and their teachers.

(iii) “Relatedness” is a social norm particularly valued in a rural culture.

Respondents shared their family stories in a natural way. They demonstrated a close bondage with their family members. This bondage extended to other human contacts, we can identify intersection between family life and professional life. Xia Yuan ‘s embarrassment in facing his students due to his divorce; Lu Qin has brought his mother to visit his work station in disaster areas; Qing Mei has tried to integrate life education practices in parental choices in her family; Zhang Min wishes to rival against the inequalities of the society, for he is burdened by the suffering of his family members.

“Relatedness” in this study is experienced at personal, institutional and professional levels. It is demonstrated as a basic common human need. In regard to how the concept of ‘relatedness’ be integrated with professional ideology and imagination, further research efforts are required to capture experiences in educational and practice application.

#### Discovery Six: Environmental threats and opportunities

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Identity is socially constructed and situated. The formation process of the respondents was triggered by critical environmental crisis, and sustained by these environmental changes. The professional environment of the Sichuan region can be illustrated with the concept of ‘hybridity’ because there was a mixture of different dynamics and forces in the social service development arena. The movement is brought about by a top-down policy initiatives mobilizing collaboration between academic institution,

government (central and local) and civil societies (including NGOs, foundations and social enterprise). With the participation of these stakeholders, social work is not the only voices and in most of the time, it is a ‘marginal’ voice. The issue of professional boundedness and boundlessness that appeared in Lu Qin’s story is a real predicament facing the profession. Social work educators have to strive for self-differentiation and integration. The following paragraph highlight some common experiences presented in their stories.

The six teachers come from two institutions. The three teachers from the HA universities shared similar background as a social work teacher without formal disciplinary training. Their development and identity negotiation are demonstrated in several scenarios including transformational changes in practices, expanded conceptual and technical knowledge; enriched awareness of professional essence; struggles and frustrations appeared in balancing between the conflicting role expectation and lastly, an awakened consciousness. The other three teachers from the ZU University entered the career with a passionate heart and obliged to build up a professional team. Despite the different disciplinary background, they faced similar threats and opportunities within the professional environment. The following discussion highlighted two environmental threats and opportunities.

### *Professional market and employment condition*

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In Zhang Min’s story, he described in detail how one of his students entered the job market and what difficulties and frustrations were faced. This is an individual case as well as a general condition. Salary scale is low for novice workers. Due to inadequate social recognition, social workers have to strive to position themselves in proper roles.

In the ‘tripodic (three legged)-partnership’ (三社联动) scheme, though a social

worker is considered to be one of the legs, they have to co-work with social organizations and community officials. In many cases, they have to take on only mechanical work or expected in unreasonable and unethical work. All the teachers expressed their concerns on student employment and a sustainable support to the graduates.

### *Government and local community as professional partner*

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Under the new policy initiatives of ‘social management’ and ‘social construction’, social work profession is ‘benefitted’ by the favoritism of participation in social development. Since the government attempts to shift part of its responsibilities in public services to organizations, they have loosened the registration rules to facilitate more parties to be engaged. Many university teachers plan to start up a NGO by their own effort so that they have the legitimate status to bid service purchase and to establish a professional ‘laboratory’ for service development and student training. Second is the relaxation of registration rules on four types of social organizations. The government attempts to shift part of its functions in public services to organizations and increase procurement of services such as medical care, health, education, culture, and community services from them. Yet, the government is still in firm control. Performance evaluation and service purchase formulate regulatory frameworks allow for significant government intervention and interference.

The teaching team of the HA university planned to start up an NGO, but they faced several difficulties. First, unlike other cities where government supports and social recognition are more direct and developed, for them, there are still extensive barriers to enter. For example, registration procedures are complicated because organizations are required to operate under a system of “dual management” in which they have to

obtain the sponsorship of a “supervising unit” such as a provincial government agency, then seek registration and approval from the Ministry of Civil Affairs and remain under the dual control of both agencies. The startup fund in other cities is about RMB30, 000, but in City H, they have to raise an amount of RMB100, 000. Secondly, there are few professional network resources in City H; only one to two organizations are delivering services closer to professional standard. To operate an organization, they have to stand alone to bid government-funded service projects and to rely mainly on the manpower resources of their students and teaching team.

At the present stage, these organizations have to rely mainly on government support and are lacking sufficient autonomy and resources to develop professional services with distinctive focus and direction. Social recognition is inadequate and their ‘professional’ roles are not easily distinguished from government neighborhood officials (街道干部) who originally take up the management and ‘service’ roles in the grass root unit in communities. Finally, in practice, the project management, particularly in area of finance administration, is still under immature or unfavorable regulatory condition. Qing Mei mentioned the common practice of commission drawn by the purchasing partner, and Yu Yu mentioned also about the ‘hidden rules’ in collaboration.

#### Discovery Seven: The triple-role of teacher identity

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In this study context, respondents as social work teachers take on triple- role of being a “teacher-practitioner-administrator”. All respondents stressed that ‘teaching’ should be their top priority and pivotal concern while ‘practice’ become an indispensable commitment in order to acquire integrative understanding on the profession. The dual roles of ‘teacher-practitioner’ enabled them to be engaged in a

continual ‘learning by doing’ and an ‘action-reflection’ process, with the substantive input of their new understandings, they are able to develop practice-sensitive curriculum to nurture their students. Their stories reflected also a tendency of teachers shouldering the role of administrator or coordinator. As an administrator and coordinator, they have to shoulder duties such as bidding funds; managing finance and project process; designing and implementing strategic plan, acting as advocate and broker etc. These roles reflected the environmental demands as well as their evolved positive professional development. Their enhanced practice sensitivity, confidence and competence; together with growing motivation and readiness made possible these multiple levels’ engagement. Social work teachers no longer impart knowledge in classrooms; they serve in communities and shape public understandings on the professions through acting as key player and professional leaders.

In Diagram 33, the three roles of social work teachers are illustrated in an overlapping three-winged diagram. In the central part, it shows the unifying forces including professional ideology, partnership and practice which are three significant factors that motivated and binded the teacher community to move on. It seems to be an inescapable choice for social work teachers to shoulder multiple roles in the current professional context and there are threats identified in these choices. On one hand, these respondents are suffered from over-loaded work engagement and there are risks of going astray. One underdeveloped or missing concern is the commitment as a “researcher”. Only Han Liang and Lu Qin engaged in direct action cycle and tried to integrate the practice project with research activities. This reflected a lacking of awareness, confidence and resource support which needed to be addressed for sustainable knowledge building and evidence-based practice.

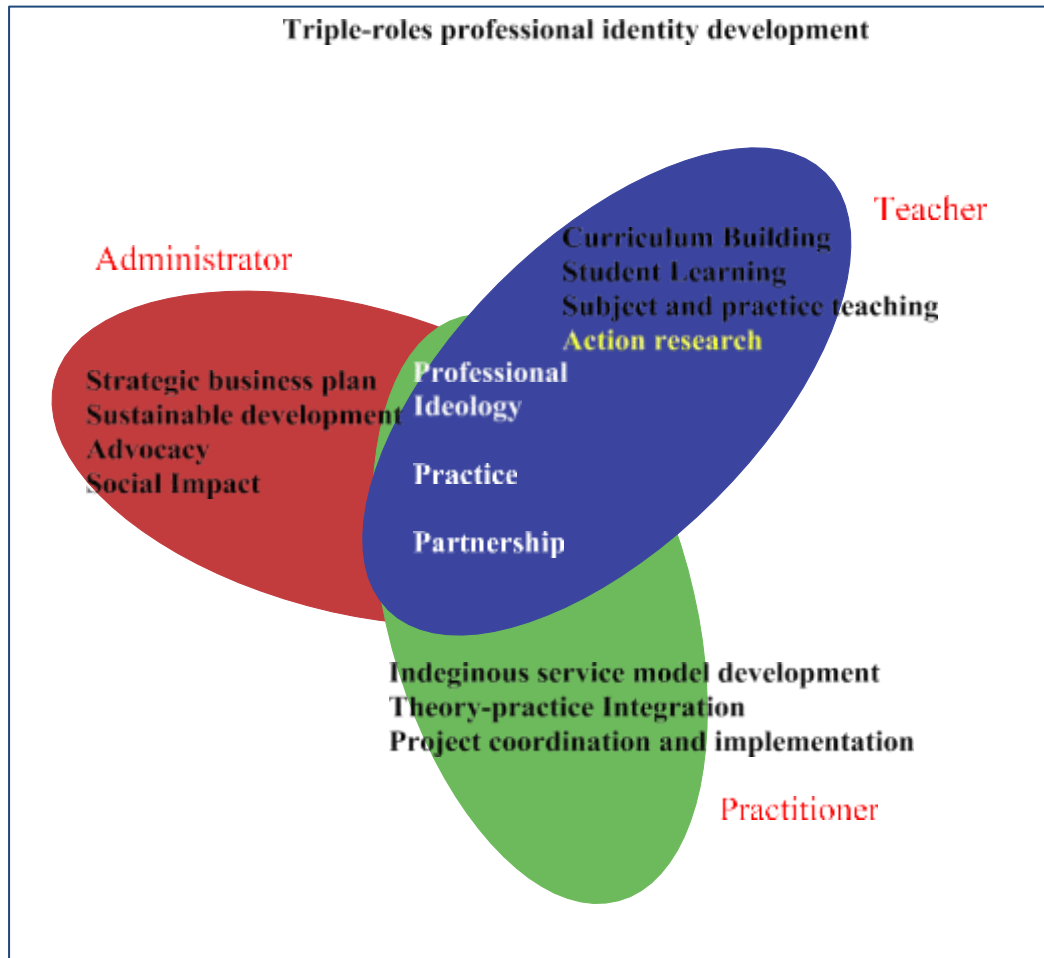


Diagram 33: Triple-roles professional identity development

### Summary of findings

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With reference to the analysis of each individual story, the above section aims at synthesizing the common observations and discoveries and conceptualizing them into a framework for further discussion and exploration. The overall findings of the study can be summarized into three interrelated core concepts: mutability, multiplicity and hybridity. *Mutability* refers to the changes and potential of further development of the respondents. The concept is elaborated as new identity is acquired as well as the transformational changes through practice engagement by the respondents.

*Multiplicity* is illustrated by fourteen pairs of polarities discovered in the storied



selves. The cultural and social dimensions of influences are explored and discussed. Finally, the concept of *hybridity* which refers to the external professional environment is explained in two topics, environmental threats and opportunities; and triple roles of social work teachers. These factors can further be illustrated as interactional forces that mobilize the ongoing identity negotiation of respondents in the future.

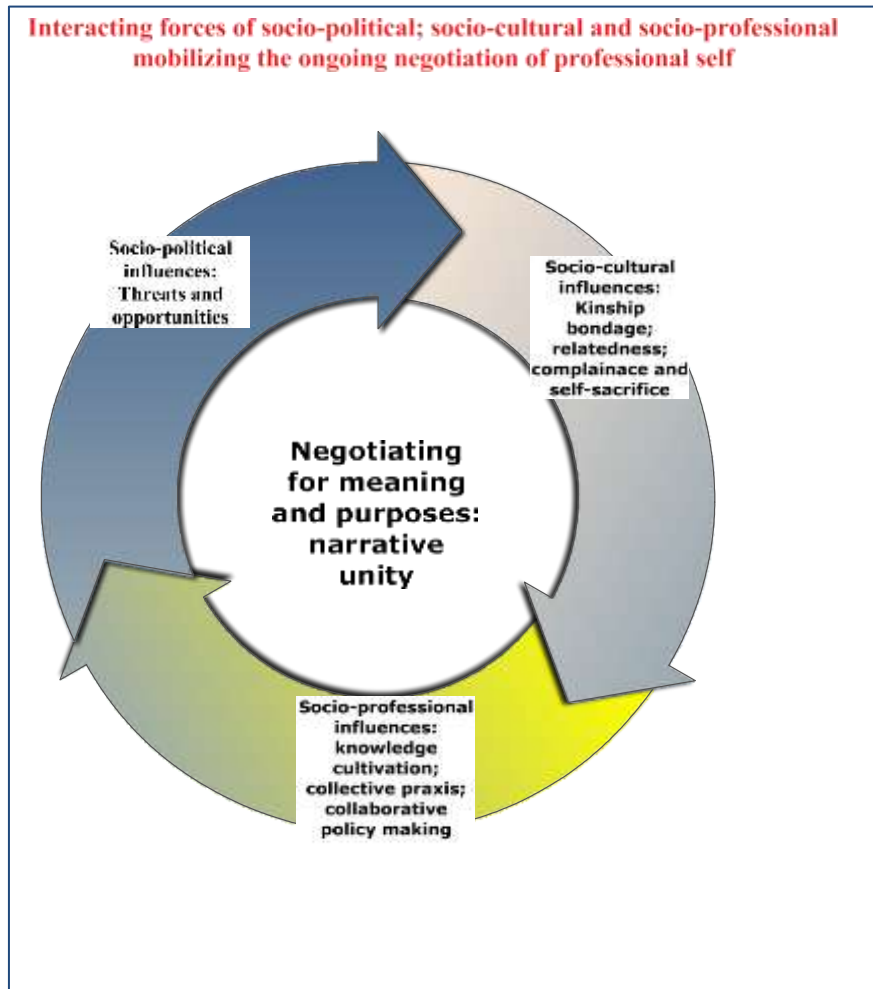


Diagram 34: Interacting forces of socio-political; socio-cultural and socio-professional mobilizing the ongoing negotiation of professional self

### Advantages of the research approach

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Self-portraiture is a powerful means in art therapy. Artist produced self-portraits as a means of self-dialogue and self-discovery. It enables also healing effects by externalizing the innermost emotions and recording the development and progress. Storytelling assembles the production of self-portrait in several ways. It opens a gate leading to deeper awareness and self-knowledge through recollection and reorganization of critical events. Reading the text is like seeing the reflection in a mirror. Respondents told me that they were touched by the stories; it reflected their temporal real self through the eyes of another person. They recognized their changes, strengths, barriers and victory in the story. They gave positive feedback by sharing that the ‘selves’ in the stories are rich in layers and appeared to be more balanced. Zhang Min and Han Liang further expressed that the stories brought about some therapeutic effects on them. Narrative inquiry enables the creation of a space and direction of navigation.

### Challenges

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Narrative approach required the guidance of multiple theoretical perspectives; a more dynamic and interactive respondents-analyst collaborative process, and also the breadth and depth of data probing and organization. In this study, the multiple theoretical perspective refers to formulation of research framework based on psychological (ego consciousness; identity development etc.), educational,(practice and learning community; professional development) sociological, narrative, and

philosophical concepts and frameworks.

Two models including the onion model (Korthagen, 2004) and conceptual framework of teachers' collective reflection (Shulman & Shulman, 2004) are adopted and modified to formulate a more integrative research framework. These models strengthened the research practice by connecting the researcher to existing knowledge and to position the study within a broader context of related frameworks, concepts, models, and theories. The modified frameworks illustrated in Diagram 6 (Unique professional and socio-political context during the period 2008-2015 in Sichuan) and Diagram 10a (Research framework: Tracing the trajectory of respondents' identity formation through a narrative lens) reflected the underpinning understandings and direction of researcher on the dynamics of identity formation and particularly the interplay between inner and outer sources and forces. These sources of knowledge supported the ideas that professional learning is a bottom-up process taking place in the individual student teacher. It starts from personal experiences and leading to fruitful knowledge construction about teaching which in return brings positive impacts on teachers' practices.

Nevertheless, the application of conceptual frameworks in narrative inquiry process raised several challenges that inquirers have to be alerted. First of all, conceptual framework is supposed to be a coherent system of inter-related objectives and fundamentals that leads to consistent and prescriptive standards of understandings, researchers have to face and address limitations such as linearity, rigidity, and cultural bias. Secondly, reality is never and should not be accurately represented in a simplistic way, in order to respect the multi-layered, dynamic, and temporal nature of stories, narrative inquirers always fall into the dilemma of balancing the 'poetic' and 'rational' dimensions of the study. In this regard, I shared with Court (2004)'s

struggles

“I struggled to find the proper tone, wanting to achieve both a data-based objectivity and a sense of the hope and anguish that is the fabric of Israelis' (*respondents*) daily lives. I sought to situate myself authentically within the research without overwhelming the voices of those who so generously spoke with me.” (p.47-48)

In this study, the ‘onion model’ is used as a framework of understanding on respondents’ multi-layered self-hood. The model presumed the teacher self and functions are affected by the most outer layer of environmental influences, teachers’ behavioral responses are triggered by institutional circumstances and other social factors, by moving into more inner layers including the social roles and identities, personal values, mission and vision, etc. teachers can reflect and reclaim a sense of self. This multi-level framework is a valuable tool for organizing our reflective thinking, information gathering, and communication. Despite the limitations of rigidity and unidirectional, the model reinforced the idea that educators who commit in teaching are supported by their major goals and beliefs. Teacher identity, as defined by Korthagen (2004) is “beliefs people have about themselves” (p.81). These defined missions and values are constructions of self that shaped by inner and outer influences such as cultural and social environment, teachers’ past experiences and future anticipation.

The application of the ‘onion model’ in future research or reflective practices particularly in Chinese culture should take into consideration at least two concerns. First of all, individuals in Chinese culture may not have a distinctive professional

personality as described in Western culture. Teachers' beliefs and mission oriented mostly from obligatory and normative standards, their values and anticipated vision connected closely with social and political needs. In another words, there is an enmeshed "I-We" identity at the core of the self which should be listened to in a most sensible way.

Secondly, the layer of 'environment' is far more complicated as described in the original 'onion model'; I will suggest integrating ecological concepts in order to construct a more comprehensive model to understand the reciprocal relationship between environment and person. Bronfenbrenner (2006)'s concepts on ecological system including the microsystem (immediate environment); mesosystem (connections of microsystems); exosystem (indirect environment); macrosystem (social ,cultural and political environment) and chronosystem (transition and changes over time) should be included in the model so as to form the big picture.

Apart from the above considerations, more conscious effort should have been attended to cultural and identity concepts such as ethnic identity; gender identity and cultural identity in order to lay a thicker foundation and comprehensive perspective to prepare for the listening and interpretation of the stories. In addition to that, researchers need to be continuously conscious about the dynamic interplay between research questions, theory, experience, conversation, and reflection.

Storytelling is a process attended by both to depth and breadth. On one hand, without sufficient, adequate and accurate background information, there is the possibility of missing or misinterpreting a number of important messages due to cultural diversity, language differences and ignorance. On the other hand, how to handle the personal accounts of respondents with care, respect, and humility is an ongoing challenge. To

listen with great sensitivity and to write up and present the story in a meaningful and coherent way is the basic attitude of researcher.

## Suggestions on inquiry methodology

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The goal of this paper is to lay groundwork for the use of narrative inquiry in social work teacher education. Learning to listen is more of an art than a science; it is also a time-consuming and emotional laboring process. It is supposed that oral representation is a suitable mode to collect stories particularly those who are more familiar and in touch with their emotional status and reaction. For a group of Chinese social work teachers, it is found that combined textual and oral means may be the better choice. Written text can reduce the problem and mistake of misinterpretation and it allows more time for the narrator to organize and represent in a more personal way.

In this study, I have attempted to pay attention to several aspects as suggested by Slee (2003) in doing narrative researches. These practical guidelines are worthy suggestions for further research and exploration. These included paying attention to the presentation, including the content, tone, color and the language used; being sensitive to tension, paradoxes and transitions as well as the dominant metaphors and images; paying attention also to the silence story and noticing what we have failed to hear due to diversity in culture. I would like to add two more suggestions according to my limited experiences. One is to learn to address the contextual, environmental and cultural factors with critical sense and lastly, be sensitive to the researcher's own voice who engaged as an active participant in the research process. The researcher's disciplinary background, dispositional factors, thinking mode and bias should always be examined in a sensible and critical way.

## Implications and Recommendations

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### Limitations of the Study

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#### *The factor of “time limitation” and “cultural diversity”*

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To recognize that original human experience is multilayered, hermeneutically organized and abundantly meaningful, narrative production of understanding is a ‘temporalizing activity’ of human beings. We started the exploration journey by bringing forth the consciousness of ‘a present about the past’, so that we can have better understanding on ‘a present about the present’ and a ‘present about the future’ (Polkinghorne, 1988). Sufficient time and a safe space for exploration and expression are crucial. Due to time limitations and cultural diversities, I may not be able to provide enough space for both researcher and respondents to recollect and to digest the experiences. Furthermore, despite the fact that a trustful relationship and basic understanding were ensured based on the six years’ collaboration, the researcher has to face issues such as language barriers, cultural gaps, conscious or unconscious cover up of sensitive information. The above mentioned barriers are caused not by mistrust or unwillingness, but more related to unfamiliarity in social background, cultural values, customs, behavior and interpretation. Cultural competence and sensitivity should be further developed in order to ensure a mutually receptive atmosphere and fluent communication and dialogue.

As a researcher, I have tried to deal with the above issues in more a sensitive way. First of all, I have tried to invite respondents’ participation and feedback throughout



the documentation process; secondly, to draft the stories in Chinese is another means to facilitate communication and to ensure accuracy and understanding; finally, to purposefully selected the six respondents from two universities made possible for counter checking the information and enriching the understanding on common institutional and environmental issues.

### *Researcher's bias and insubstantial power issue*

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Researcher's active and in-depth engagement in the post-disaster activities is both an advantage and a barrier in this study. In view that researcher's perspective is necessary in a narrative inquiry approach; the engagement in Sichuan professional activities has richly enhanced the understanding particularly on contextual background and environmental picture. Nevertheless, it narrows the scope of exploration and the direction of the communication process. Respondents' positive feelings of respect towards the researcher further make available favors and privileges that created a subtle shade of dominance. A critical lens is important and open dialogue and collaborative reflection with respondents should be ensured in order to keep a balance . In addition, choices regarding mode of presentation should be explored and expanded. Although direct encounters and oral narratives are necessary, textual communication, personal journals and written reflection on special topics can be encouraged and facilitated in order to allow private space for respondents to do the recollection and interpretation.

### *Purposeful selection of respondents*

In this study, the limited number of respondents is justified for a purposefully regional and relational reason. The six teachers from two universities happened to be positive and responsive to the post disaster engagement experiences. What about other teachers who may have come across dissonance and resistance in their encounters with these trainings and project activities? Are there ‘escape’ stories; ‘failure stories’ or ‘silent stories’? More voices are deserved to be heard and explored.

### Implications of the study

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In this study, by referring to the scholarly works of educational theorists like Korthagan in the Netherlands; Shulman in USA and Connelly & Chandinin in Canada, we have a renewed perspective on social work teacher education. Their understandings and practices in promoting learning communities, nurturing of “professional self” offer us as social work educator a considerable promise for capacity building and professional development for social work teachers, either in mainland china or in Hong Kong. Korthagen (2011) supported the view that in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice in teacher education, we have to put more emphasis on teachers’ experiences and concerns and to encourage them to make conscious, digest and address the complexities and transitional needs through deeper level reflection and theoretical understandings . This on-going reflective and negotiation exercise composed of a series of professional activities as summarized by Shulman (2004), the teachers’ professional development are triggered and supported by experiences including “meaningful activity, metacognitive awareness and processing of those activities, collaboration with others, passion and commitment, and a supportive and nurturing community” (p.1).

The construction of an ‘action-knowledge building’ model in this study is an attempt to integrate the understandings into a more practical framework. By applying this model in teacher training and education, we can aim at empowering and encouraging teacher learners to develop their own pedagogical understanding. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is a concept proposed by Shulman (1987) which implies a transformation of subject-matter knowledge; it is a special form of personal and professional understandings of the teacher so that it can be used effectively and flexibly in the interaction between teachers and learners in the classroom.

The post disaster professional exposure and growth is non-repeatable experiences in Sichuan and the trajectory of identity formation of respondents may not be ‘reproduced’ or ‘copied’ in other areas of Mainland China. However, the author will consider the personal story as a miniature of the collective story of social work teachers in Mainland China. Respondents’ ‘unique’ developmental experiences reflected a ‘general and bigger’ picture of social work educators’ transitional roles and functions. Their struggles and victories demonstrated the needs to address curriculum and pedagogical reform in future social work professional education and training.

By referring to the analysis of the stories, we affirmed that the development of the social work profession in China is at a transitional stage. In addition, social work teachers are key players in this process. Their identification with the profession and their commitment in knowledge building and transfer are crucial factors to sustain the development of the profession. Although the outgrowth of societal recognition of the profession in Sichuan is a result triggered by the earthquake disaster, in fact, the unexpected opportunities and threats that followed also shared by educators and practitioners in other provinces in China. Government initiatives and growing needs

for service goods are two significant factors that drive and promote the future development of the profession. In response to the large and diversified demands, there is the need to shift from supporting practitioners and building service models to addressing the need of curriculum and pedagogical reform. Attention should also be directed toward the educators, since they are key players and leaders in the process of the curriculum development.

Furthermore, the above transitional needs in social work professional education reform are recognized not just as a contextual and regional phenomenon, they are also a global and international concern. This concern is raised in response to the globalization and contemporary challenges in social work practices and education (Dominelli, 2010). Professional challenges faced by Western countries also threatened the Eastern world. Issues such as commodification of goods and services, environmental degradation, children abduction, natural and social disasters created new humanitarian service needs and multi-layered tensions. As a result, the insufficiency and inadequacy of professional core subject content that built the common ground and standard should be acknowledged. There is a need to seek tactics and learn from other possibilities to construct more sustainable and dynamic professional curriculums that aim not on knowledge and skills acquisition but also on identity formation and consolidation.

While capturing the personal stories of these six Sichuan social work teachers, we can learn from their experiences, and particularly their struggles and victories on how they respond to environmental challenges and expectations, and how to commit in a collective practice and learning process. With this background in mind, some insights and recommendations that were brought about by this study, particularly in areas of identity formation of social work teachers and evolving ways of professional

partnership will be discussed in the following section.

#### *From identity construction to identity work*

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In Chapter One I attempted to illustrate the predicaments facing social work teachers in China, I named them as the ‘disempowered’ group. Their struggles and disappointments orientated from a different disciplinary backgrounds and the lack of practice experience. These teachers are always frustrated by the gap between what they taught and what they really knew and experienced. They are also frustrated by the learners who know nothing about the profession, who enrolled in the social work program just by elimination or ignorance. We see the need for social work educators to reclaim their identity by getting down from the ‘ivory tower’ and to acquire authentic understanding of the profession through real life experiences and practice. It is encouraging to identify the growth and transformation of respondents through engagement in direct practice. It confirms the belief of ‘no practice, no good teaching’ for the social work profession. In this study, respondents acquired a ‘new’ identity in the sense that they are awakened by the engagement experiences and began to have better understanding on their role as a social work teacher. The identification empowered them to co-work with their team and co-learn with their students, to ‘re-construct’ their curriculum; to establish practicum sites ; to develop long term strategy of running a NGO by themselves; and furthermore, to stand for their commitment, to balance and negotiate with different stakeholders, and to educate with confidence.

#### *From seeking compromises in spheres to creating vision in space*

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In response to the hybridity of the professional environment, seeking compromises or

common interest is fulfilling just as the basic requirement. Etzkowitz, and Ranga (2008) proposed the concept of “Triple Helix System” to extend our imagination to a common ‘space’ instead of ‘sphere’. The concept is used to illustrate and proposed new mode of collaboration between University-Industry-Government where knowledge, innovation and consensus can be configured through negotiations and adjustment at the interfaces. I assume that the creation of the space required more of a seeking of both shared values and common interests. This means that social work educators should be prepared for self-differentiation in areas of professional ideology and implementation.

## Recommendations

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### *Action-knowledge building: A choice of curriculum model and pedagogical process*

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In this study, the analysis confirmed that a social work teacher is a source of professional knowledge and a facilitator of knowledge in the practice and educational process. To relate the lesson learnt from the study to a broader need of educational development in China, the author would like to recapture and echo the concepts initiated by Wenger (2000, 2009) and Shulman (2005) on practice, learning and community. Both scholars shared the understanding on knowledge building through collective action and practice. Professional identity is affirmed and renewed in the continual participation, negotiation and alignment process. Knowledge becomes shared understandings and common assets of the learning community. According to Shulman and Shulman (2004), these network resources and consolidated knowledge will turn out to be moral, venture, technical and curricular capitals for further development (illustrated in Diagram 8).

In view of the identity development of the Sichuan social work teacher respondents, I would like to propose an ‘action knowledge building process’ in Diagram 35 which is excerpted from the alignment stage illustrated in Diagram 30: “A Call to Adventure—Roadmap of respondents’ identity evolvment process”. The diagram envisioned the return of teachers to their normal working environment where they can integrate their acquired learning and professional resources in further curriculum and service development. This can be considered as an alternative social work curriculum model.

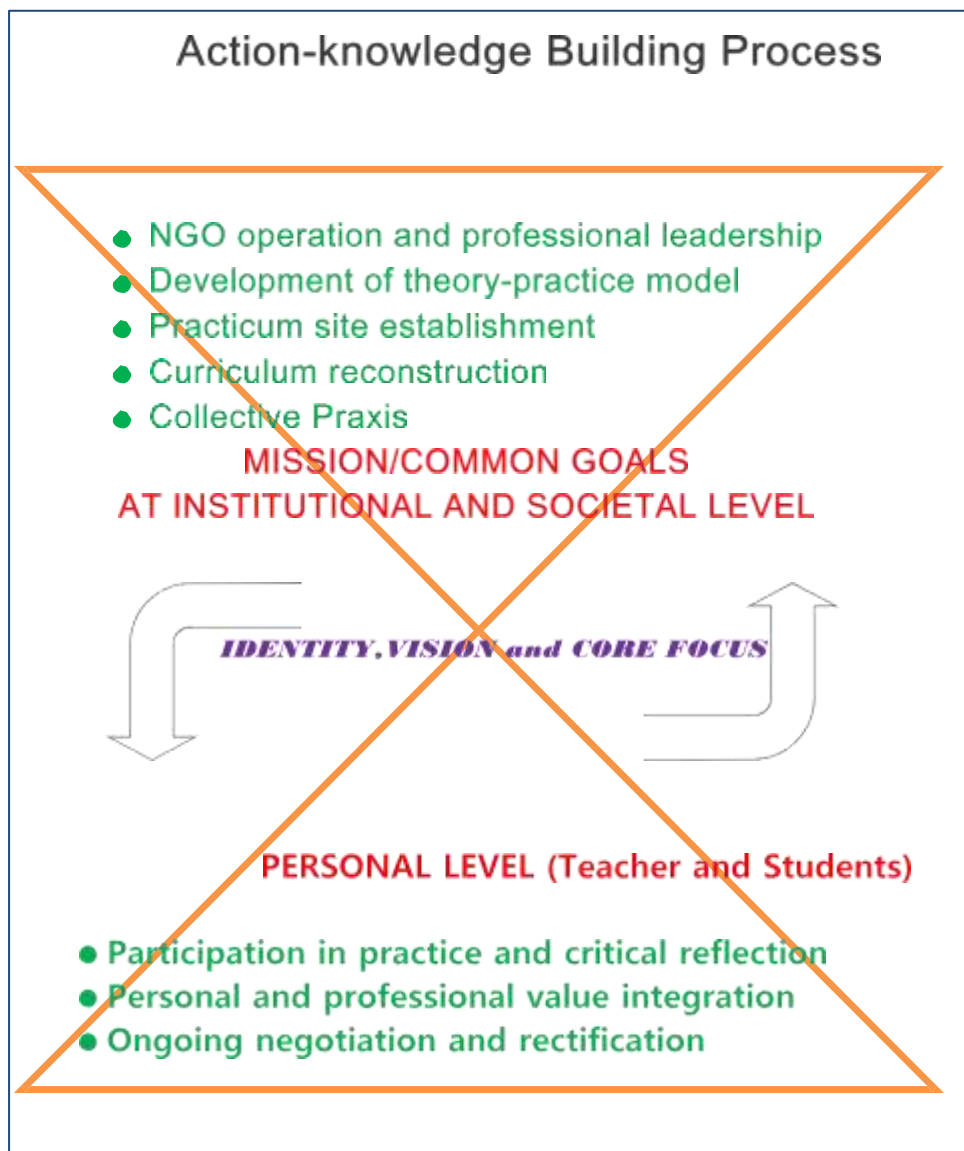


Diagram 35: Action-knowledge Building Process

The above illustration is based on several observations and understandings drawn from the study.

1. Action knowledge is knowledge that spurred and stimulated action whereas the ‘action’ implied more than just practice. It involves various degrees of participation and engagement including reflection, communication and direct



practice in the knowledge building process. These actions are practice-oriented, service specific, community based and collaborative in nature.

2. It is a personal and collective process. The personal engagement process started with the initiation and commitment of individual 'trained' and 'non-trained' social work teachers. They located their positions in the action process as social participants and meaning-making entities (Wenger, 2009) in response to external opportunities and personal initiatives. These participations enabled them to involve their team members and students in multiple strategies such as project administration and development, practicum site establishment, practice learning and supervision. Their relationships are interdependent and collaborative; they consolidated workplace learning communities within academic institutions.
3. Social work teachers' roles and functions are significant for they participated in multiple roles as educators, administrators, practitioners and researchers in the process. As a result, these participating experiences can cause and strengthen identification with the community. It is a long process of identity work. Sense of belongingness and professional identification will enable members to merge their understandings and arrive at consolidated core values and missions.
4. The process is non-linear but a progressive, spiral and holistic journey through an alternate convergent and divergent learning and development cycle. In the converging process, members filtering the experiences, analyzing the solutions and problems, consolidating models, internalizing values and identifying a focal direction that one most valued; after that they turn to divergent strategies where they can use imagination, broadened frameworks and open attitude to prioritize the direction, consolidate the resources to move forward, explore and commit to new choices with external professional partners and stakeholders.

5. It is a self-sustaining and communion process. The knowledge construction process presupposed the profession as an open but not a closed system. Blurred professional boundaries allowed exchanges, negotiation and integration of experiences and knowledge in multi-disciplinary spheres. Curriculum content should be opened to a continual revision, expansion and renewal process. Social work teachers and practitioners should be aware and conscious of how to uphold their core values and mission and to balance the differentiation and inclusion in the partnership relationship.

The above proposed model assumes that teachers play a leadership role in the curriculum development process. It confirms the significance and contribution of their identification with the profession. With an awakened sense of professional being, both 'trained' and 'non-trained' social work teachers can participate in the construction of the professional future in areas of knowledge building and social venture development. On the contrary, we have to admit and prepare for the possibilities of estrangement and the professional closure due to discrepancies in expectation, defense and lacking of sufficient support and understanding.

#### *Further exploration and development in inquiry methods and conceptual tools*

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Identity work is closely linked with collective actions and social movements. More narrative research efforts should be conducted in areas of a teacher's identity construction and negotiation. The study confirmed also the power and efficacy of collective inquiry and reflective process.

The research analysis framework and tools adopted in this study including the

‘extended onion model’ and the ‘polarity mapping diagram’ can be further refined and developed as inquiry tools in story capturing and self-discovery exercises. The on-going personal negotiation and collective action stories are worth our further attention and understanding. The further questions should be extended from “Who am I as a social work teacher?” to “Who we are as social work teachers?”

Furthermore, to illustrate the non-linear, multi-dimensional, dynamic and interactive relationship of narrative identity and collaborative work required more advanced cognitive tools. Polarity map can be one choice. The mentioned “Triple Helix System” used a helical diagram to illustrate a spiral, multi-dimension and progressive movement. It is also relevant for illustrating the dynamic interplay of inherent and inhabited self and other combinations of multiple voices in self-narration.

## Conclusion

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### The seed and the soil

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Storytelling is a social, psychological and ethical activity. It is a social process which begins at the exchange activity of sharing and listening, than writing and reading, and furthermore, when respondents shared the stories with their significant others, they gained understanding and facilitated further dialogue and communication. It is a psychological process as respondents went back to recollect the experiences. They entered into a journey of dialogue with the self in retrieving, reorganizing and meaning making, the process involved affective and cognitive response and reflection. After the data collection stage, the writing and analyzing stages are interwoven with

the researcher's own understanding and affective input. The story is eventually 'reorganized' from detailed, fragmented accounts into a meaningful whole. The analyst's (researcher) own interpretations with both cognitive and affective components are integrated in the text: the story product when presented to the respondents and the reading process triggered a second round of cognitive and emotional response. All of them expressed that they are shocked and deeply touched by the written material, the effect of looking at one's self from another perspective is unexpectedly powerful. The respondents shared that they used to read the story draft over four to five times and some of them shared the text with their significant others and listened to their feedback. The storytelling is an ethical activity for the process uncovered, and it reinforced one's choice commitment. Respondents read their own choice making and development in the stories and at the same time, they gained deeper awareness and understanding of their value orientations and preferences; struggles and barriers. This further affirmed their vision and empowered them to take conscious action in the future.

As a social work teacher for many years, my engagement is mainly on practice teaching, to co-work with students in an experiential learning process. The multi-layered issues we have to address which are related to theory-practice integration, choices of schemas, self-knowledge and transformational changes, cannot be overlooked. Professional ethics and values are one of the major threads that connect the teacher, the student and the context. We move towards a 'problem-solving' direction and assumed that if we hold on some 'core values' in a steadfast way, though we are alert of the uncertainties and contingencies of practice, we can still work towards the direction of reducing uncertainties. As teachers, we aim at equipping learners' with adequate skills and methods to address uncertainties. Assertion of

‘rightness’ rested quietly and firmly beneath our silent intentions. We can survive and make our commitment in a purposeful and willful way. Seeking for solution and remedy is still one of the professional biases that hindered our deeper exploration.

Engagement in others’ stories opened our eyes and awakened our affective sensitivity, when we no longer position ourselves as a healer, counselor, or mentor. We listen with empathetic ears and open hearts, and are free to become the character and allow ourselves to share their emotions and perceptions and understandings. In doing so, the original cage dissolved and we found ourselves closer and more connected with our respondents.

In the past, we paid too much attention on the ‘seed’, that is the espoused social work values and were too confident to say that we have the ‘good seed’. Seldom are we aware of the needs of cultivation and the importance of preparing a seedbed. Telling and listening to stories is a process of cultivation. The primary purpose is to rake and turn over the upper layer the soil and plough over the land in order to get it prepared for sowing and plantation. The aim of this process is to bring fresh nutrients and burying weeds and the remains of previous crops.

### [Do we still need heroes today?](#)

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Brown (1999) pointed out that the ‘hero journey metaphor’ transcends time and space, and provides cultural diversity of civilizations, the metaphor touches individuals and groups at their emotional, moral, and spiritual core. It creates a shared vision and the action plan, it builds commitment and initiates a rapid response to complex problems;

it enables the evolvement of a set of common languages and shared visions which brings about unity and energy. Heroism involves collective vision and action. It is not just an individual trait, but refers to a group of committed fighters who held a moral compass and demonstrated courage in setbacks, chaos and complexities. They live with their values and are willing to face risk and danger. In view of the environmental threats and opportunities of the professional environment in Mainland China, we are expecting more “heroes” to come out as a group who are committed in collaborative inquiry and actualization of professional ideology.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Consent Letter 邀请参与研究同意书

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调研计划名称：

《臻达诚信：中国社会工作教育工作者身份型塑认同的故事》

亲爱的 XXX 您好：

阁下被诚邀参与由香港理工大学应用社会科学系博士生 霍小玲女士负责的

上述调研计划。该计划已正式通过学院研究事务处『人类研究伦理委员会』

(Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee)(HSESC)的审批。批文编号为

(HSEARS20140908001)。

此调研计划目的为深度探讨一群中国社会工作教育工作者的身份型塑认同

的故事。您们的参与及共同建构的过程将丰富了我们对中国社会工作教育工

作者身处的政治·文化·社会及个人背境的认识和理解。从而可以更积极的

回应有关本土社工老师的召命定位及成长需要，进一步反思如何优化专业教与学的质量。本计划采用「**敘事**」质性研究方法，被访者在各自的时间和历史情境中，回顾及述说专业中的生命教事，藉以理解过去六年四川社会工作专业在急速发展中具体的个人经验及诠释。研究历程主要包括三轮的访谈。第一轮的重点在回顾过去六年 2008-2014 年作为社工老师一些重要事件的经历；第二轮访谈目的是针对第一轮的访谈资料再作主题式的深度探讨；基於第一、二轮访谈，研究员将草拟一份阁下的『社工老师的故事』；第三轮的访谈是就这个故事的内容听取阁下的回馈和补充。研究过程中会按需要请阁下提供其他资料如文字记录，图片和其他相关的材料。所有访谈和资料提供是以阁下自愿参与为前提。

本研究的访谈对象是通过有目的地选择，被访者需要符合以下四项条件：(1) 目前作为社会工作老师任教在四川地区高校，直接参与课堂授课或实习督导；(2) 任教时间起码五年 (3) 直接参与在 2008 年 512 汶川地震後的社会工作支援重建的培训实务项目或相关课题 (4) 部门以团队《最少两人一组》而非个人方式参与第(3)点所述的项目



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非常谢谢您的协助！

香港理工大学应用社会学系

博士研究生 霍小玲敬上

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性别：

出生日期：

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任教高校：

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非常感谢您的信任及参与！

引言：

感谢您答应参与这项研究及完成第一轮访谈，为对您的生命故事有更整体的认识。我邀请您花一点时间进行下面的练习。每个人的生命都有许多珍贵的片段可以分享，我们并不是要寻找绝对的答案，我尊重您在这过程中的选择。内容的分析不会公开您的私稳，请您放心。

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请於XXXX年X月XX日发回。

再一次谢谢您的帮忙！

Appendix 3: Milestones of Development of Social Work Education in Mainland China (1949-2011)

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Year	Ministry of Education 教育部	Ministry of Civil Affair 民政部
Since 1949	1949-1980 Social Work Education suspended.	Civil Affair Cadres/workers served in different service work units as semi-professionals
1978	Open Door Policy- Rapid societal changes led to visibility of critical social issues.	
1979	Re-introduction of the “Sociology” in university as 1 <sup>st</sup> class curriculum in the Social Sciences Discipline. Social Work is recognized as a branch of the discipline	
1984		“Civil Affairs Training Center” offered Social Work Course
1987	Beijing University officially in cooperated Social Work program in the Department of Sociology	
1994	Founding of the CASWE (China Association of Social Work Education)	
2000	MSW Program offered jointly by the PolyU and Beijing University	Experimentation of Purchasing Social Service Scheme
2000-2007	211 Social Work Undergraduate Program established  Student no raised from about 1,000 (2000) to 10,000 (2007)	

2004	<p>CASWE published guideline for teaching Social Work and established the curriculum of 10 foundation courses</p> <p>Renmin University of China established the first Graduate Program of Social Work in Mainland China</p>	
	<p>“Regulations on the <i>Social Workers</i> Occupational Standard System” 《社会工作者国家职业标准》 announced. Jointly issued by the Ministry of Personnel</p>	
2006 Spring of Social Work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ‘The Regulations on Evaluation of Social Work Professional Levels’ Jointly drafted by MCA and Ministry of Personnel</li> <li>2. 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 16th Central Committee of the China Communist Party published an important document focusing on building a socialist harmonious society. Development of a powerful group of social work professionals is one of its central tasks in the future</li> </ol>	
2008	<p>5.12 Earthquake happened in Sichuan</p> <p>Opportunities and resources brought in the Western Region</p>	
	<p>First National Social Worker Qualification Examination</p>	
2009	<p>Imbalanced of distribution of Social Work Program. Among 237 programs, only 54 are offered by universities in Western Region</p>	
2010	<p>253 Social Work Undergraduate Program established</p> <p>"The outline of the national medium and long term talent development plan</p>	



	(2010-2020)”国家中长期人才发展规划纲要(2010-2020年) reasserted the significance of the social work profession, plan to recruit 3m social workers in 10 years.	
2011	A total of 58 MSW programs launched in different Mainland Universities	

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