

Identity of Social Workers under the Background of Professionalization in China

Huanshuang Di

School of Law, Changchun University of Science and Technology

Changchun 130022, China

E-mail: djhwy@163.com

Received: October 15, 2011

Accepted: November 14, 2011

Published: December 1, 2011

doi:10.5539/ass.v7n12p250

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n12p250>

Abstract

How social workers look upon themselves, others, the surrounding environment and relationship between human beings and relationship between human being and the environment is a fundamental issue that is concerned with professional development of social work. This article attempts to bring the concept of identity into the vision of social work study, come to know about the status quo of identity of social works through an analysis of the literature, analyze content and approach of identity, make full use of a variety of favorable conditions in the current development of social work and, meanwhile, explore reasonable approaches and tactics to facilitate professionalization of social work by taking into consideration of current existing problems.

Keywords: Social workers, Identity, Professionalization, Countermeasures

Identity is to continue to inquire about their own origin and identity by human beings and study on identity helps to inquire about the various behaviors and thoughts among individuals. Study on identity of social workers refers to reasonable explanation and analysis of some social issues and status quo of the society. Cultivation of the sense of identity among social workers is not only conducive for self positioning and self-confidence, but also makes this identity affect other more people, which has important facilitating effect on development of professionalization and specialization of social work, but also proposes some conducive trains of thought for resolving development perplexity and problems in social work profession.

1. Route for Formation of Identity of Social Workers

1.1 Self identity originating from working experiences

The socialization process of each social worker is one which is accompanied by continuously expansion of the scope of self-work and communication, continuously deepening of interpersonal activities and continuous standardization of behaviors. Social status and classification of social status of social workers have their own particularity, a process for selection of identity of different public organizations and change of the degree. As for social workers, how they come to realize correctly the work they are involved in may directly influence their identity. It is discovered through study that devotion to specific working practice itself can strengthen self identity of social workers. Definition of the significance and concept of self social work will intensify the professional identity and further understand and acquire supportive information to give full play to its initiative and creativity.

1.2 Perception of self identity originating from social evaluation

Then, how people look upon social work and upon social workers which are some new concepts? Are they familiar with the connotation of this work? How viewpoints of people under a different context differ from each other? How these concepts of people affect social identity of social workers? From the survey, the author comes to know that there is still a long way to go for identity of social workers that is built upon the extensive identity of the society. Disequilibrium exists between fuzziness of human beings in their understanding of the role of social workers and social workers' identity of the current system.

1.3 Belonging of self identity originating from professional development

In the eyes of common people, social work is an obscure and even fuzzy concept. However, as social workers, they have to come to face up with reality and difficulties, have a correct understanding in social work, devote all their enthusiasm in the work they are involved in and attempt to propagandize social work career with their

earnestness and their working spirit to serve the society. They hold tightly the opportunity in which a pilot project is regarded as social work development and have a belonging of professional identity for development in the future.

2. Problems Existing in Identity of Social Workers

2.1 Service of social work is not combined in an organic way with demand of the market

The major targets of social work are those who have encountered dangers or difficulties in realistic social life, are abnormal in terms of physiology or psychology or have been hurt in some aspects. With approaching of the post-modern society, quite a lot of countries have regarded all members of the society as scope of service or study of social work. Thus, it follows that the market of social work target in its extensive sense is quite broad. The bilateral selection of the market is of particularity, which has also the two possibilities of selection and non-selection for social workers. The reason is that some of these markets have not been opened or have no effective demand. Of course, there is also another possibility that they have formed effective demand, but have no means to obtain service of social work through convenient and effective channels. Besides, the current target markets have been occupied by traditional standard social work in a lot of aspects lacking in absolute demand and appropriate satisfaction of social work. That is to say, the target markets may disappear little by little due to emergence of other forms of service.

2.2 Institutional system has not been formed

So far, China has not set up a perfect series of legal rules and regulations about this newly born subject of social work, and is especially at an exploration stage for social positioning of social work itself and social workers. This brings about certain impediment to identity of social workers, and of course, may lead to rapid establishment of system of talent cultivation and imbalance of identity of social work. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security promulgated "National Occupational Standards for Social Workers" in June 2004, which, without doubt, is an important document in China about identity of social workers and may have positive social effects on confirming social status of social workers, resolving social realistic issues and speeding up step of constructing a harmonious society.

2.3 Deficiency of social identity

In China where the market economy is rapidly developed and under the context of globalization and internet informationization, the social identity of people in the specialization and professionalization is not as high as expected. There are a variety of misunderstandings that social work need not be specially trained or social work can be done through part-time work. And there are even some people who believe that so long as one has knowledge in psychology, he can take the place of social workers to take part in social work service in all walks of life. All these prejudices constrain the progress of China to facilitate specialization and professionalization of social work.

2.4 Students with professional knowledge in social work are unlikely to participate in the occupation of social work

Due to a variety of causes, those graduates who have received professional training in social work rarely take part in a job of the social work profession after graduation. According to the statistics, rate of suitable employment is less than 30% among those students who graduate from the department of social work and there are only less than 10% students who choose corresponding occupations of social work. However, the society has high demand on these professional students. According to an analysis by the subject group of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences in its "Study on countermeasures to professionalization of social work in Shanghai at a new period" in the current situation of grass-root "social work staff" (namely, personnel who are engaged in work similar to social work service in the governmental sections or institutions led by the government), we come to know about the social work team at a grass-root level, namely, the tendency of aging and non-professionalization is quite serious.

2.5 Setting of social work position is ambiguous and occupational system is not perfect

Connotation of professionalization of social work includes the multiple aspects of occupational qualification, technical title system, professional certification, occupational protection and supervision and so on. For the time being, setting of social work position in China is ambiguous and the occupational system is not perfect, which seriously restrain successful progress of the professionalization of social work.

2.6 Cultivation of talents in the profession of social work in universities is not connected with occupational qualification

Although there have been more than 200 institutions of higher learning in the mainland China that are involved in undergraduate education of social work, a large majority of these institutions are just set up for social work

practice and case studies in the classroom, so internship activities for students to devote themselves to the society are rare. According to the target of cultivation of discipline talents, the due time of internship for social work profession is supposed to be 600 to 800 hours. Nevertheless, at present, a large majority of universities are unlikely to attain this requirement and most internship is nothing more than following the practice model of the traditional humanities and social science.

3. Countermeasures for Identity of Social Workers

3.1 *Correct knowledge in the status of the occupation of social work*

Emergence of the occupation of social work ought to be the result of social development and selection. And the concept of social worker is one of the signs for social development and civilization manifestation, so it is necessary to enhance the identity of the society in the profession and occupation of social work. It is necessary to popularize the professional knowledge of social work by the various means of walking towards the community, going down to the grass-root organizations, mobilizing and so on and intensify from the bottom up identity of the party and government offices and the common people in the concept of social work and the occupation of social work. We ought to encourage government at all levels and social organizations to set up the positions of social work, have a correct idea about the particular social meaning of the occupation of social work, strengthen consciousness of social service and enhance service quality.

3.2 *To strengthen vigor of publicity of social work and to enhance cognitive dimension of the society*

By resorting to the news media to have special subject on social work and follow-up reports, we may hold a variety of substantial fellowship activities in universities and communities, set up long-functioning cooperative mechanism, design special column to publicize social work of the communities, hold a discussion within the communities and perform specific social assistance plans, etc., to widely propagandize the occupation of social work and the practitioners in social work in the society and enhance cognitive dimension of all the citizens in identity of social workers. We may acquire identity of social workers in general understanding and participation of the public and in specific practice of social work.

3.3 *To improve the institutional system of the occupation of social work*

In order to facilitate the progress of professionalization of social work in a steady and rapid way and with vigorous support from the governments at all levels, we ought to set up and improve institutional systems of the occupation of social work as soon as possible, such as, occupational qualification confirmation, technical title evaluation, administrative appraisal and so on, carry out corresponding policies and speed up the progress of professionalization of social workers. It is necessary to confirm the occupational system and professional status of social work from the perspective of government system and the perspective of centralized management by specified departments, and offer support in terms of policy for various treatments of social workers. The departments concerned ought to set up the positions of social workers as soon as possible and start from development of the profession of social work itself to enhance the feeling of identity in social work.

3.4 *To speed up pace of localization of practice of social work*

Under the context of globalization, development of foreign social work is just like a raging fire and the occupational status of social work and high identity in social workers is the exact example for China to learn, as this career in China has just been started and has large space for development. However, we have to take into consideration the actual situation of China, make a specific analysis for specific issues and do a practical good job in social work. We ought to attempt to explore a Chinese operating model of social work that suits with the actual situation of China. We have to accelerate the progress of localization of social work in circulation of theory-practice-theory-practice and continue to enhance identity of social work.

References

- Anthony Giddens. (1998). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, translated by Zhao, Xugang & Fang, Wen. Beijing: Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhì Joint Publishing Company, 275.
- David Morley. (2001). *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 61.
- Emile Durkheim. (2000). *De La Division Du Travail Social*, translated by Qu, Dong. Beijing: Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhì Joint Publishing Company, 32.
- Jim McGuigan. (2001). *Cultural Populism*. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 228.
- Meng, Fan. (2001). *Post Modern Identity Politics*. Taipei: Chien Hsing Publishing Co., Ltd, 13.
- Tao, Jiajun. (2004). An Introduction to Identity. *Foreign Literature*, (2).